

The Relationships of Workers to Work, Peers, and Others
Crowd work's perspective. **The relationships of workers with their work, with their peers, and with others are complex and not especially well-understood.** While researchers have begun to appreciate the sociality of crowd workers in labor markets, the study of these communities is made enormously more challenging by the limited access of online spaces [4]. Nevertheless, a number of interesting findings have already emerged in the crowd work literature, which we can report here.

While online and distributed communities of workers are harder to find, other features make the study of these groups rewarding in different ways than are available in the study of predominantly offline communities

A number of ethical questions surrounding the increasing complexity of crowd work have arisen in recent years. Silberman, Irani, and Ross bring some of these issues at stake — working for increasing amounts of time on tasks of growing complexity, only to discover that requesters are not willing to pay, for instance — but these and other dangers range an enormous landscape [8, 12, 10, 11].

Some research already looks at research such as investing in workers, and informally, we know that this happens among industry requesters [5, 2]. AMT, meanwhile, offers requesters the ability to create tasks which are not just hidden from unqualified workers by default, but completely. Requesters have taken to using lists of worker IDs which reference workers who have proven their reliability, representing a sort of proto-organization of loosely connected workers.

Piecework's perspective. The rise of labor unions in the 20th century seems to have been precipitated by egregiously unjust conditions imposed on workers in factories and elsewhere [3]. Incidents broadly describing this dynamic can be found in research on AMT [6, 11]. If these are prototypical labor advocacy organizations of contemporary on-demand work, the next question we should look to is if — and indeed *how* — these institutions might face challenges in the future.

For insight on this, we return to 2009's study of labor unions, and identify that “Scholars who evaluate union governance by procedural criteria generally find that oligarchy tends to arise and persist even when democratic procedures are in place” [9]. Indeed, Levi et al. writes about the general perception that labor unions were either This perception already appears to be emerging in digitally mediated peer-governed organizations, as Keegan and Gergle and others have illustratively documented [1, 7]. If these organizations and others are to avoid the same fate that labor unions faced, they should take care to study this phenomenon and attempt to avoid it.

What's different about crowd work.

Implications for crowd work research.

References

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