

PLATFORM CAPITALISM AND PLATFORM LABOR: GENDER, PRECARIETY, AND RESISTANCE

OCTOBER 29, 2021 @ 3 pm - 5 pm (EDT)
<https://bit.ly/platformlabor2>

This virtual event is chaired by Yoonkyung Lee (Sociology, University of Toronto)

Interrogating the Uberization Narrative: Heterogeneity in the Platform Labor Force JULIET SCHOR (BOSTON COLLEGE)

The dominant narrative in the platform literature is Uberization—a large, predatory platform that eliminates competitors, progressively squeezes and exploits workers, and uses technology to enact algorithmic control. In this talk I will interrogate the Uberization narrative. Relying on more than a decade of research across a variety of platforms I will present an account which stresses heterogeneity “up and down the line.” While aspects of the Uberization narrative are undoubtedly correct, the presence of considerable heterogeneity across and within platforms workers suggests the need for a more complex and dynamic theorization. Taking account of heterogeneity reveals diverse worker experiences, continuous changes in apps and platform policies, and ongoing tensions in the dominant social relations that comprise platforms.

Delivering Solidarity: Platform Architecture and Collective Contention in China’s Platform Economy YA-WEN LEI (HARVARD UNIVERSITY)

This study examines how and when labor control and management leads to collective resistance in China’s food-delivery platform economy. I develop the concept of “platform architecture” to examine the technological, legal, and organizational aspects of control and management in the labor process and the variable relationships between them. Analyzing 68 in-depth interviews, ethnographic data, and 87 cases of strikes and protests, I compare the platform architecture of service and gig platforms and examine the relationship between their respective architecture and labor contention. I argue that specific differences in platform architecture diffuse or heighten collective contention. Within the service platform, technological control and management generates work dissatisfaction, but the legal and organizational dimensions contain grievances and reduce the appeal of, and spaces for, collective contention.

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