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Academic year: 2024/2025
Level: M1
Module: English

Precarious Work and the Gig Economy

The **gig economy** represents a significant shift in the nature of work, characterized by short-term, flexible, and freelance employment arrangements. Unlike traditional jobs tied to long-term contracts, gig workers often take on temporary jobs facilitated by digital platforms like Uber, TaskRabbit, or Fiverr. These platforms connect workers with clients, emphasizing flexibility and autonomy but often without the benefits of stable employment.

Sociologically, the gig economy highlights issues of **precarity**, referring to unstable and insecure work conditions. Workers frequently lack access to benefits such as health insurance, paid leave, and pensions, exposing them to economic vulnerability. This type of employment aligns with **informal labor**, where work exists outside the protections of labor law.

Technology plays a central role in reshaping the labor market within the gig economy. Digital platforms mediate relationships between workers and clients while exerting control through algorithms. These platforms set terms such as pricing and task assignment, raising concerns about algorithmic management and its impact on worker autonomy.

The gig economy also reflects shifts in class structure and exacerbates inequality. Many gig workers belong to the precariat, a social class marked by unstable employment and income. Marginalized groups, including women, racial minorities, and migrants, are overrepresented in lower-paying, high-risk gig jobs, deepening existing social divides.

The impact on work-life balance is another significant issue. While gig work is promoted as a way to gain control over one's schedule, many workers face the demands of a hustle culture, often juggling multiple jobs to make ends meet. This dynamic blur the line between professional and personal life, challenging traditional notions of productivity and leisure.

Efforts to address the challenges faced by gig workers have emerged in various forms. In some regions, governments are introducing legislation to redefine the employment status of gig workers, ensuring they receive basic protections like minimum wage, paid leave, and health insurance. For instance, laws like California's Assembly Bill 5 (AB5) aim to classify certain

gig workers as employees rather than independent contractors. Additionally, workers are organizing through **collective action** and forming digital unions to advocate for their rights. Platforms themselves are also being pressured to adopt more transparent policies and offer benefits, such as insurance programs or access to training. These initiatives represent steps toward reducing precarity and promoting greater equity within the gig economy. However, the effectiveness and reach of these efforts remain topics of ongoing debate.