Juggling or Sailing through Everyday Life?: Understanding the Lived Experiences of Filipino Mothers as Online Freelancers and Outsourced Workers

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ABSTACT

As more and more Filipino mothers are going into the online gig economy as informal workers, it is essential to reassess the definition of what a freelancer is and to reignite the resolution to fight for their rights. Transcending international boundaries and blurring national rights, the online freelancing economy may be a place of exploitation and discrimination. For mothers who wish to enter this world in hopes of regaining their self-esteem or gaining economic empowerment, its facilitating factors for or impeding harms on women should be analyzed. This study narrated the lived realities of four Filipino mothers working as online freelancers and outsourced workers using Moser's Triple Roles framework. The intersections of their everyday experiences as mothers, workers, and community organizers were analyzed. The findings suggest that Filipino women found online work relatively better than office work as it provides alternative and flexible working conditions that can help them juggle their role as mothers and workers, but it is still challenging in terms of working conditions for women and safeguarding their rights. The study also unearthed their practical gender needs, such as maternity leaves and social security, access to information and services, and redistribution of care work;, as well as their strategic gender needs such as reinforcement of women workers' rights in the gig economy, control over personal work decision-making, and state recognition of unpaid care and domestic work as everyone's responsibility, which suggests that the gig economy lacks spaces to question power relations and gender injustice.

Keywords: *gig economy, crowdwork platform, online freelance platforms, online outsourced jobs, Filipino mothers, on-demand economy, freelancer rights, women in the informal economy*

Introduction

In a dominantly neoliberal global economy, the on-demand or gig economy—characterized by service providers tapping workers for short-term crowdwork and contract-based gigs—normalized flexible employment relations and an entrepreneuralized form of work solely based on the needs and demands of corporations and international businesses (Gandini et al., 2017). Competitive workers from the global south are sourced out by companies from the global north for their cheap labor (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). Specifically, businesses outsource labor through digital labor platforms (e.g., Onlinejobs.ph, Fiverr, Upwork, etc.) and assign them jobs, such as virtual assistantship, graphic designing, video editing, or customer service, among many others, and these digital labor platforms broker the relationship between freelancers and individual clients or companies (The ASEAN Post, 2019; Kalleburg & Dunn, 2016). Freelancers are viewed

as entrepreneurs who have the flexibility to be hired by companies for designated projects during particular durations. However, in reality, their work falls within the spectrum of employee to entrepreneur—which if not properly monitored or regulated, can easily lead to exploitation (Nawaz et al., 2020).

The on-demand market promises opportunities in an "egalitarian" fashion, wherein anyone can do microtasks regardless of their age, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, among other identities, where flexibility, work-life balance, and autonomy are ideally employed (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). In this framing, it appears that jobs are abundant as employers now come from different parts of the world, however, the question of what type of jobs are available, "whether secure or precarious, economically satisfying or scarcely paid, and especially what kind of 'quality'" (Kalleberg, 2011, as cited in Gandini et al., 2017) is still overlooked. More threateningly, the "employer-employee" relationships are being reshaped to "service providers" and "clients" relationships, where online workers are viewed as mere service providers or contractual freelancers. Companies often hire freelancers or contractors to transfer the "risk (uncertainty) from capital to labour, and increasing capital's share of returns (altering the share of income growth going to labour and profits)" (Peetz, 2019, p. 144). Additionally, there is an individualization of work, which happens through

> "dispersing work and workers, by extending the use of temporary contracts, and by putting workers in different parts of the globe in competition with one another, so that they must readily be on-call to the employer whenever required, regardless of the ramifications in their lives away from paid work." (Webster, 2016, p.58)

This reshaping of dynamics towards "flexibility" is dangerous as it removes the protection of workers' rights (Webster, 2016) and results to a "precaritization" of work. Companies and capitalists attempt to minimize costs, risks, and accountability and centralize all profits by contracting out the services of freelancers (Peetz, 2019). Peetz (2019) also stated that there is a "growth of nonstandard employment, including through casualisation and independent contracting, in which workers become self-employed and take on the risks of the self-employed" (p.142). Since outsourced freelance workers are still within the boundaries of the informal economy, most governments also view them as self-employed individuals responsible for their own taxes and social protection, such as their healthcare or pension (Hong & Pavlou, 2013).

The lack of a contract or of benefits can lead to potential risks for Filipino freelancers, especially women freelancers. Their rights as workers may not be recognized and their welfare—which may be affected by their working environment and conditions—may not be accounted for. The individualization of their work means difficulty for unions to organize and demand for their rights (Peetz, 2019). At times, the definition of their role as either freelancer or employee or service provider becomes blurred, as Filipino freelancers would be hired as contractors or part-time noncasual workers "where the worker has the appearance of being self-employed but is actually dependent upon one organization to provide him or her with work" (Peetz, 2019, p.153). Not having their rights as workers recognized nor their mental and physical health considered can lead to a myriad of problems, such as not being paid on time, no guarantee of financial benefits or salary increase, limited room for working condition-negotiations, and no social protection from the state. The gig economy has firmly placed itself in Southeast Asia as millions of professionals flock to more flexible but temporary jobs. The Philippines was ranked sixth in the list of countries with the greatest number of freelancers (Payoneer, 2019) and according to Paypal (2018), 2% of the

country's population consists of freelancers—meaning to say that the country has an estimated 1.5 million freelancers. Such numbers even prompted the Senate to craft and discuss the Freelancer Bill (Torregoza, 2019) to protect the country's budding freelance economy (Magsino, 2020). The Philippine government even views online work as a better flexible alternative for workers to working overseas (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020). Paypal (2018) stated that around 65% of that overall figure are composed of women and that most reasons for shifting to freelancing or online jobs revolved around being able to dictate when, where, and how they work.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the government's lack of long-term solutions, especially at the time of writing, most people were left at a standstill in terms of being unemployed or underemployed—thus, further pushing people into migrating to freelance jobs as a means to cope with the lack of income and stability (Conde, 2020) —as was apparent with most of the participants in this research. A study conducted by Risi and Pronzato (2022) on the lives of Italian online workers during the pandemic suggests that remote workers felt the need to be "always-on" as their digital and personal spaces converged. Additionally, in most disasters and devastating crises, gender inequalities are exacerbated as women and girls are disproportionately affected compared to men and boys. Women and girls, who mostly handle unpaid care work, are significantly impacted when it comes to handling the crisis during and after it occurs as they take on a major role in the family's safety and health (GBV AoR REGA, CARE Philippines, & UNFPA Philippines, 2020). The literature on Filipino mothers doing freelancing work is mostly limited to news articles (Schnable, 2018; Gotinga, 2020; Martinez, 2020; Magino, 2020) and statistics (Paypal, 2018; Payoneer, 2019), save for an article written by Tiffany Jean Villegas (2019) entitled "Freelancing — Hope for Filipino women" on the platform Medium. She states that freelancing is a great way to empower Filipino women who are just starting with their families and who just want to balance their work and family responsibilities. In addition, she explains that this is one great way for Filipino women to gain economic power and save themselves from abusive relationships.

According to the World Bank (2022), the labor participation rate of women is just over 50% while men's participation in the market is at 80%—with numerous factors such as unpaid care and domestic work, maternity discrimination, lack of educational and training opportunities, and so on affecting women's participation rates. Mothers who work in online freelance platforms often valiantly juggle multiple and simultaneous responsibilities and burdens as they are not just caretakers, but also educators, workers, community organizers, and volunteers working towards the education, safety, and nurturance of their families (Lirio et al., 2022; Bayudan-Dacuycuy & Baje, 2021). In addition, their productive and reproductive labor are often undervalued and overlooked. Even in developed and liberal nations such as Britain, maternity discrimination is deeply felt, as around 54,000 new mothers may be forced out of their jobs (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2015). Negative experiences in their working environment, such as discouragement from attending appointments for their antenatal care due to workload, pressure to hand in resignation letters, and lessened opportunities post-pregnancy, were surfaced. The intersecting identities of their gender, class, age, language, ethnicity, and so on deeply affect their privileges and vulnerabilities, which may be factors that push numerous mothers to enter the online gig economy (Bögenhold & Klinglmair, 2015). In the UK, there are an estimated 287,000 mothers freelancing, accounting for 15% of the country's freelancer population. Similarly in the Philippines, the number is also increasing. FHMoms or Filipina Home-based Moms, an online organization for Filipino mothers doing freelance work, shared that during the pandemic, the organization went through 100-200

new member requests daily[2] —it is also worth noting that they have expanded their membership to women who do not have children, as well. The organization, which primarily operates online, had about 200,000 members within and outside of the Philippines as of this writing (Martinez, 2020).

Bayudan-Dacuycuy and Baje (2021) shared that digital job platforms center around the delivery of services through online means and these platforms may offer clerical work such as microtasks or microwork (e.g., data entry, scheduling social media posts, etc.), and macrowork that require specialized skills (e.g., software development). According to Kalleburg and Dunn (2016), online jobs differ from offline work in terms of "(1) their amount of control over the worker, and hence how much control workers have over their jobs; and (2) their wages and duration" (p. 11). Additionally, there are four major gig platform categories, namely crowdwork platforms, delivery/home task platforms, online freelance platforms, and transportation platforms. Crowdwork platforms entail low control and low wages for freelancers as the work involved is often simple, clerical, and low-paid. These forms of work usually center around set compensation, high oversight, lower participation, and low autonomy. Delivery/home Task Platforms and Transportation Platforms are often characterized by local aspects, such as Lalamove or Grab, and drivers are often core components of these platforms. The former primarily centers around the delivery of goods and items, while the latter focuses on offering ride-sharing services. Both platforms are often managed by set metrics (e.g., type of vehicle used, driver's license, results of background checks, etc.), punitive participation requirements (e.g., punishment for cancelling or turning down orders), and they dictate the rate and wages of the drivers. Lastly, Online Freelance Platforms (e.g., Fiverr, Upwork, OnlineJobs.ph) offer gigs to freelancers with specific skills. These types of platforms may offer spaces for freelancers to "negotiate their own wages, differentiate themselves by their portfolios, take competency tests, and rate their employers" (Kalleburg & Dunn, 2016, p.12). This study emphasizes the freelance work undertaken by Filipino mothers through digital platforms, specifically in crowdwork platforms and online freelance platforms.

This study aims to surface the issues faced by working mothers in online crowdwork platforms and online freelance platforms, as their gendered experiences in the jobs they found through these platforms highly affect their autonomy and wages. In outsourcing microwork and macrowork through these platforms, the transfer of risk from capitalists to women laborers is apparent as their gendered needs and concerns are invisibilized. Crowdwork Platforms can be spaces that further gendered work (e.g., clerical and secretariat tasks) on women, which are often characterized by low pay and low autonomy. On the other hand, it is important to take note of Online Freelance Platforms because, even though they promise high wage and high autonomy for workers, the platform's capacity to regulate negotiations and working conditions between online mother workers and clients is limited—given that these ideal conditions are dependent on the freelancer's confidence, capacities, and skills. This article also seeks to contribute to the developing conversation about the gig economy, providing space for mothers' voices, and highlighting their experiences to inform development work, possible interventions, and policymakers by using Moser's Triple Roles Framework, including identifying their Practical Gender Needs and Strategic Gender Needs.

Specifically, this study asked the following research questions:

1. How do they view the online gig economy? What are the challenges and opportunities that they have experienced while working as outsourced freelancing employees?

[1] Please note that the influx of memberships was during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Currently, the author cannot confirm if the number of membership requests remains the same.

2. How do they handle their roles as mothers, freelancers, and/or community managers?
3. What are their practical gender needs and strategic gender needs in balancing all these roles?

The intersections of their everyday experiences as mothers, crowdwork and online freelance platform workers, and community organizers were detailed and analyzed to emphasize the multiple burdens that they carry and that are (re)perpetuated through the traditional gender division of labor found within their public and private spheres. The study also unearthed their practical gender needs and strategic gender needs, which can help break the perpetuation of their subordinated positions as women informal micro-workers in the online gig economy.

This paper argues that the social positionality of Filipino mothers working in the gig economy leaves them vulnerable to exploitation and marginalization, especially with the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbating said vulnerabilities. Further, gender roles may become further entrenched as freelance work in online spaces may commercialize the gender division of labor. For example, in Milkman et al.'s study (2021), majority of women working gigs in online food delivery platforms are "pickers" or "shoppers" under the grocery section. The study expressed that this type of work further "commodifies the tacit shopping and food preparation skills that many women routinely develop in their households, usually without monetary compensation" (p. 358). The neoliberal ethos of women's unpaid care and domestic work may be perpetuated through such gendered jobs, such as what has been portrayed with women bloggers "sharenting" or sharing their parenting on social media. In a context of post-austerity and precarity, mothers working online are pushed to reconcile their motherhood and careers (Jorge et al., 2022). Women, especially ones burdened with unpaid care and domestic work, find the online gig economy attractive as it provides alternative working conditions where they could practice their autonomy. Compared with other jobs, the on-demand market's remote environment enables them to control their work schedules in order to not impede their caregiving responsibilities (Milkman et al., 2021). Yet, "this type of work arrangement provides a neoliberal solution to work-family conflict, enabling women to perform paid work while still prioritizing family and caregiving" (Milkman et al., 2021, p. 358).

Further, spaces for collective bargaining and negotiations are limited, as Filipino freelancers are mostly involved in microwork or isolated working environments. However, efforts by digital laborers to address such gaps exist. For instance, in a study conducted by Soriano and Cabañes (2020), they interviewed over 31 Filipino freelancers from Cebu, Davao, and Manila to document how they collectivize and organize themselves through social media groups (e.g., Facebook). They explored how Filipino digital laborers practice their agency to form collective solutions to common problems through Facebook groups, and these online groups become their support system. In terms of women-specific online groups, one of the organizations that exist to offer support systems is the FHMoms or Filipina Homebased Moms. FHMoms is an organization and online community for Filipino mothers who are interested in or are currently doing online freelance work, and recognize women's increased carework alongside the difficulties of mothers transitioning into freelance and online jobs. Their efforts can potentially lead to bettering the current situation of freelance workers, yet these "entrepreneurial solidarities…also serve to dampen possibilities to meaningfully challenge the structures of power underlying digital platform labor (Soriano & Cabañes, 2020, p. 9)." Additionally, the question of whether or not they assess the very nature of unpaid carework or the entrenchment of gender stereotypes in the gig economy has yet to be explored.

Numerous studies expressed how problematic the gig economy is (Jorge, 2022; Milkman et al., 2021; Risi & Pronzato, 2021; Ettlinger, 2017; Webster, 2017; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Powell & Craig, 2015), especially for women. Given its flexibility and short-term nature, online gigs commonly do not give predictable salaries, social benefits, or clear career progression paths. These conditions are exacerbated as women most likely work part-time jobs compared with men, and men working in the online gig economy earn more than women (Milkman et al., 2021). Further, time spent on unpaid carework, leisure, and remote work are gendered. Women often choose to work online gigs in order to balance their unpaid care work, such as taking care of their family, with their productive work while men often choose to work remotely to control their paid work and recreational time (Powell & Craig, 2015). Studies have also shown that people working at home tend to work more hours, as this can be attributed to the lack of "workload comparison" with workmates and the lack of other checks and balances. Microworkers often work in isolated conditions and generally interact only with their employer (Powell & Craig, 2015; Nätti et al., 2011; Golden, 2008; Peters & Van der Lippe, 2007). On the other hand, Kalleberg and Dunn (2016) argues that,

> "the reality of the gig economy is more nuanced: the gig economy produces both good and bad jobs. Understanding this variability in the quality of jobs helps to better assess the conflicting benefits and costs associated with the spread of this emerging work arrangement. We argue that jobs in the gig economy differ in their wages and in the degree of control that workers have over their work" (p. 11).

Hence, having "good" jobs in the gig economy entails having higher and more stable pay, and the ability to afford healthcare and other safety nets. Usually, entry to online freelance platforms entails a certain kind of knowledge, such as doing business (e.g., business registration), to acquiring such "good" jobs. These types of knowledge, which are not readily accessible, can help empower the jobseekers to utilize the platforms' powers such as spaces to negotiate wages and rate their employers–although this is still dependent on the freelancers' need for financial stability and their power relations with the client (Burke, 2015). Registration meant they could take on bigger gigs because of the "legitimacy" offered by business registrations (e.g., official receipts). To better understand the situation of Filipino women working in online gigs, it is crucial to nuance the type of jobs they have and the working conditions that they experience. Most of the participants in this study have limited knowledge and access to "good" gigs as they are just starting out and are caught up in "bad" gigs. Critically analyzing their situation as mothers, workers, and community organizers requires understanding how their specific positionality in the gig economy affects their everyday lives. Given that the women taking on these jobs are as diverse as the gigs available in the on-demand economy, "it is unlikely that it offers equal potential for flexibility across groups where it is prevalent including: low skilled workers on low wages; high skilled workers with high levels of agency; and self-employed people" (Powell & Craig, 2015, p. 572).

Theoretical Framework

The study also employed Moser's Triple Roles Framework (TRF) and Strategic Gender Needs and Practical Gender Needs (in March et al., 2005) to analyze the gender situation of Filipino mothers doing online outsourced jobs within and outside of the Philippines. The Moser Framework primarily aims to emancipate women from their subordinated and marginalized position towards equity, equality, and empowerment. Moser poses that low-income women are usually involved in three roles, such as their reproductive, productive, and community management roles, and it

questions "who does what?" to map out the gender division of labor. Reproductive work centers around the care work that involves taking care of the family and household, including child rearing and household chores, among many others. Reproductive work in the community is usually labor-intensive and time-consuming, which explains why women face time constraints and poverty. Productive work revolves around producing goods and services for trading and consumption. These productive activities may be conducted through employment or self-employment. Women and men often experience different functions and responsibilities in these productive activities based on their gender. According to Moser (March et al., 2005), "women's productive work is often less visible and valued than men's" (p. 56). Community work involves the collective activities and organizing towards the community's cultural and spiritual development, which may involve local political activities, ceremonies and celebrations, and local organizing activities. This form of work often involves voluntary time and may not be considered as economic analyses. Amidst both men and women participating in community work, the (re)perpetuation of gender division of labor still exists. The TRF was used to examine the productive, reproductive, and socio-cultural responsibilities and challenges of freelancing mothers and how they handle such roles on a daily basis.

In Moser's gender needs assessment, determining the practical gender needs and strategic gender needs of the community deeply matters. Moser argues that men and women have gender-differentiated needs, which arise not only because of their roles but because of their subordinated and marginalized social positions (March et al., 2005). The practical gender needs are immediate interventions that respond to the current situation of women. These immediate perceived needs are commonly related to lack of access to basic needs and inadequacies in living conditions. It is worth noting that responding to their practical gender needs does not necessarily challenge the existing power relations within the gender division of labor or the social positionality of women. Examples of this category include provision of water, healthcare, housing and basic services, among others. Strategic gender needs center around interventions that can transform social relations and power imbalances between women and men. Additionally, these needs may differ depending on the community's context and they relate to "gender divisions of labour, power, and control, and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages, and women's control over their own bodies" (March et al., 2005, p. 58). For example, these needs may be challenging the distribution of unpaid care and domestic work within the family or the removal of sexist traditional laws that pose as barriers to women's empowerment.

Methodology

Current literature and policies fail to consider the lived realities of Filipino mothers, who often find the gig economy attractive given its flexible nature. Hence, the study was conducted to analyze their everyday lives as mothers, freelancers, and community workers. This research utilizes Feminist Standpoint Epistemology to highlight the social location of Filipino mothers, which is shaped by their everyday experiences as a result of the intersections of their gender identity, sexuality, class, age, (dis)ability, language, ethnicity, and other social identities, and how it can contribute to knowledge production on the gig economy. Their lived realities are crucial to knowledge production in order to build better policy discourses and frameworks targeting employee-employer relationships and workers' rights within the Filipino gig economy. The framework informed the research design and the research questions produced as key informant interviews and a focus group discussion were conducted to delve deeper into the Filipino freelancing mothers' everyday lives.

In this study, the Filipino mothers' needs were extracted from the issues, challenges, and explicit needs expressed in the interviews. To achieve the mentioned objectives, the study has employed qualitative research methods, such as key interviews and a focus group discussion.

Purposive sampling aims to elucidate certain concepts, themes, and phenomena rather than relying on rigid sampling frames (Robinson, 2014). The study chose key informants and focus group discussion participants on-purpose to ensure that the main research question of challenges, opportunities, and triple role struggles would be addressed. The research participants for both the key informant interview and focus group discussion were chosen based on the following criteria:

- They should be a natural-born Filipino;
- They should have one child or more;
- They should be working as an online freelancer for the past six (6) months or more; and
- For the focus group discussion specifically, they must be working within FHMoms to garner a more organizational-level perspective.

Four Filipino mothers working in freelance jobs were chosen as the key informants of the study as they most likely possess the experiences that illustrate the subordinated and gendered positions of women in the Philippine gig economy. Three to four members of FHMoms were also invited to partake in the focus group discussion to validate the insights from the KII, however, only two members were able to join the online FGD. In addition, their specific social positionality surfaces specific gender themes and phenomena experienced within the gig economy and are often invisibilized in common Philippine economic discourse. Since there are various domains existing within the gig economy, no specific industry was chosen. As long as the participants were mothers and they were part of the online gig economy, they were eligible to be interviewed.

KII and FGD participants were invited for an interview in September 2020 and they were interviewed within the span of October to November 2020. During this time, the participants were sent an invitation letter and a list of questions for their review. As soon as they agreed to join the interview, the participants were asked to fill out consent forms via Google Forms to ensure that they know their rights and power within the research process. During the actual data gathering activities, the informed consent form was reiterated and their rights as research participants were highlighted. The interviews and focus group discussion were conducted online via Zoom, Skype, and Google Meet within the months of October and November 2020—due to their varying schedule. The summary of data collection is as follows:

- Gathering of relevant materials and reports to the study;
- Key informant interviews with four (4) Filipino moms working in online freelancing outsourced jobs for the past six months to two years; and
- A focus group discussion with two (2) members from the FHMoms organization, who has over 200,000 members, to validate the data.

The data gathering activities were guided by the basic principles attached to Moser's Triple Role Framework such as analyzing the potential unequal distribution of labor within households and how the freelancing Filipino mothers perceive such work. Recognizing that the framework potentially isolates women from their social relationships, the study has sought to ask the participants how their family members or acquaintances help them in handling their double shifts or multiple burdens.

Feminist Research Ethics

Feminist research requires reflexivity in making sense of other women's experiences, and how ethics and care should be at the center of every research inquiry. Ensuring feminist ethics, care, and reflexivity are practiced is crucial so that critical and meaningful representation ensues. Mechanisms such as informed consent forms, benefits and reciprocity, and privacy and confidentiality (Paredes-Canilao, 2002) were implemented to practice said principles. Additionally, analyzing the "everyday accounts" of Filipino mothers working in the gig economy means understanding their feeling of frustration caused by barriers in the freelancing world, and their proposed solutions into existing theoretical knowledge (Doucet & Mauthner, 2002).

As someone who has worked in the gig economy for the past five years, my experiences have also informed the framing of this study and the conclusions and thematic analyses formed from the gathered data. Working with different clients and on different projects, I have experienced varied forms of freelance work such as transcribing, content writing, proofreading, editing, lay outing, data entry, social media management, website maintenance, and other forms of microwork. Most clients or employers would give me a myriad of microwork, or "fractured form of work in which complex tasks or projects are broken down into extremely small tasks" (Webster, 2016, p. 57). Working arrangements are usually the same: no contracts established between employee and employer or service provider and client; freelancers have a flexible working schedule as their work is often deliverable-based and rarely time-sensitive; freelancers are responsible for their own laptop and internet connection; freelancers are given no social protection (e.g., Philhealth, HMO); holidays and vacation leaves are complicated discussions; and we are rarely given any form of salary increase or bonus. I have been working with one "client" for the past three years now, but they still view me as a freelancer regardless of the regular number of working hours and work that I do. In all the businesses that I worked with, there would always be Filipino mothers. You would either hear an infant crying in the background or mothers excusing themselves to do their reproductive duties. These myriads of experiences have shaped my motivation in conducting this kind of study, as there appeared to be patterned challenges and barriers in their work and home life.

Understandably, my experiences do not represent nor generalize the whole experience of all Filipino women working in the gig economy. My social positionality in the gig economy, vis-a-vis inviting Filipino mother research participants from the businesses that I worked for, ethical considerations may be possibly raised. Hence, questions about positionality, privilege, and epistemology should be answered. Primarily, my own experiences in the freelancing world may affect how I make sense of the lived realities of the research participants. Minimizing this issue entails "participating in an ethical model of responsibility," which was proposed by Margaret Urban Walker (as cited in Birch & Miller, 2002). Throughout the data gathering activities, I ensured that I confirmed my understanding of the shared experiences with the participants themselves. For instance, when making sense of how they viewed the "flexible" nature of freelance work, I confirmed with them how they felt when trying to balance taking care of their newborn baby while working on their freelancing deliverables at the same time, by asking what their usual schedule was and what were its mental and physical implications on their bodies. My social positionality as a freelancer and a researcher may have contributed to the research process as it gave me epistemic privilege to note down in-depth observations of the power relations surrounding the participants' roles as mothers, freelancer workers, and community managers across various social institutions such as the state, market, community, and family. As someone used to the "bulimic" and capitalistic

gig economy, knowledge on cutthroat process has been very helpful in giving me insight to make sense of its harmful systemic patterns on women, in terms of working conditions, and its (re) perpetuation of the gender division of labor. Listening to the stories and lived realities of Filipino mothers doing freelance work allowed me to reflexively think about the roots and depths of the impact of the gig economy on women's subordinated and marginalized position.

Findings and Discussion

This section of the study will first discuss four (4) key informants' everyday accounts and their lives as freelancers, which will highlight their triple roles as mothers, freelancers, and community managers. Recurring themes from these are also surfaced, such as the challenges and opportunities they have found in online freelancing jobs, and the practical gender needs and strategic gender needs that arose from the intertwined adversities they face as freelancing mothers. This is followed by data obtained from the focus group discussion that was used to validate freelance moms' collective struggles and needs and inform some of the analyses. In the following narratives, the real names of the participants were changed to ensure their right to privacy and confidentiality. It is worth noting that aliases were used in presenting the narratives of all the research participants

Participants' Narratives

Tin, 24. At the time of the interview, Tin was currently living in Singapore with her 11-month-old baby, and her Singaporean-Malaysian husband and his parents. Her household consisted of six (6) people: herself, the baby, her husband, her husband's mother, father, and sister. Tin currently was working as a content writer for a content mill website business, which was owned by a Caucasian Canadian man. In this job, she researched assigned topics (e.g., topics such as VPN software, online ticketing services, etc.) and wrote content articles, which were posted on their website. Her content writing job was her first freelancing job and, at the time of writing, she had been working for the business for six (6) months.

Since she had just moved to Singapore a couple weeks prior to the COVID-19 quarantine, she expressed feeling isolated as she barely had enough time to make friends. She mostly stayed at home to take care of the baby, do some household chores, and do some work. Tin summarized that she did about four to five hours of household chores, four to five hours dedicated to the baby, three to five hours of research and writing for her online job daily, and about four to five hours of volunteer work on the weekends.

Tin would start out her day by waking up at 5:00 AM to feed her baby, have some breakfast, and do some daily prayers. Come 8:00 AM, she played with her baby to tire him out and to avoid any tantrums. As the baby was playing, Tin then did the laundry, prepared the baby's food, and bathed the baby. After two hours of tiring the baby out through some playing, she did some work while the baby slept—which she admitted was a "hit or miss" event, as there were times where the baby could not fall asleep. Then she would clean up the baby's toys two hours before lunch and do some "me" time for the next hour or so. Her "me" time comprised of doing a bit of her online work, DIY projects for kids, and other personal tasks. Once the baby would wake up by 11:00 AM or so, the process repeated, Tin entertained him, cleaned up after him, and put him to sleep. This repeated around 3:00, 5:00, and 7:00 PM—a common struggle, she stated, that new mothers face. During those time increments, she usually had no time to do her online work as she entertained and took

care of the baby. As soon as the baby slept at 8:00 PM, she would then go straight to writing and researching articles until 12:00 midnight. Then the cycle would repeat the next day. During the weekends, she dedicated about four to five hours volunteering for church—managing and leading online gatherings. In terms of household chores, Tin said that everyone had their assigned roles, such as her in-laws cleaning the toilet and floor on some days, her mother-in-law doing most of the cooking, her sister-in-law occasionally pitching in the cooking, and her husband vacuuming on rare days. While she was doing some volunteer work, usually her in-laws would take care of the baby.

Tin and her family were also undergoing the brunt of the pandemic's economic standstill. Her husband was forced to take unpaid leaves in the laundry service company he was working for, and her in-laws were already past the working age—meaning to say that they virtually had little to no means of income. Tin took it upon herself to get an online freelancing job to make sure that she could help the family financially because she said that she "felt guilty kasi walang natutulong sa bahay" (I am not able to help with anything in the house). After a week of looking for an online job, she was able to swiftly get a writing and researching gig as a Content Writer. Working before as a university instructor, she explained how an online job had quite a different working environment than her previous job, namely, work flexibility and no more "hellish" commuting. But when it came to the challenges, her first concern was with the compensation. She felt like she was "exploited" because her current rate for writing and researching was incredibly low. Tin added that the company's meticulous and strict standards for research were too much for such a low pay. She stated that she felt like she was "dying with too much research." When asked if she had attempted to negotiate her pay, she explained that she felt like she was still a newbie and did not have the right to ask for such things. Regardless of being an academic researcher and university instructor in her previous job, in this new working environment, she still felt like a novice and even questioned her own "worth." In addition to such financial concerns, she was also worried about the sustainability of the freelancing gig and the lack of insurance—leading to her questioning if the whole writing gig was even worth it, given how tiring it can get. Furthermore, she could not ask anyone about this as she felt like the online work setting tends to isolate employees. Compared to the traditional work setting where you could rely on a colleague, she said that this usual support system was absent in her current working environment.

When asked how she balances being a mother, writer, and a volunteer, she answered that "every day is a struggle." Handling a newborn baby who was then entering the "separation anxiety" stage, she expressed how she was having a hard time trying to balance her job, some of the care work, and volunteering—although the latter she considers her "me time." Her in-laws, most especially her mother-in-law, would do some of the household chores on some days, which would help lessen the burden to a certain extent. But when it came to taking care of the baby, it was her primary responsibility. She said that at this point, "as sad as it sounds, I have come into (sic) terms that I would always be tired"; that as a mother, this was and is the norm. She added that she only ever asked for her husband's help in taking care of the baby whenever she felt extremely overwhelmed. Even if he was unoccupied throughout the quarantine period, she explained that as a "default parent" she still tasked herself to be the "first responder" to her baby's needs. This was also the same reason why she rarely asked for her husband's help and that she was thankful that he was at least "willing" to play with the baby for a short while she took a quick nap. She expressed that it would be nice if he could play with the baby a little bit more instead of just watching TV, but she says that all it takes is a little bit of communication to resolve this issue. It appeared that, although

freelancing has been helpful in earning a bit of income for their family, Tin still found it difficult to balance her role as a new mother, online content writer, and church leader.

Lily, 28. Lily was living with her parents and 11-month-old baby in Metro Manila at the time of the interview. Lily had yet to marry her partner, who also lived in Metro Manila, as they were still saving up for their wedding and their own house. At the time, she was working in the same content writing job as Tin, owned by the same white Canadian man. This content writing job was her first freelance work, and she had been working for them for over seven months.
Similar to Tin's case, Lily's day was mostly filled with taking care of the baby and working—she added that it was hard to work, as her baby would always throw tantrums due separation anxiety. Her day was usually comprised of caring for her baby (i.e., 2:00 to 4:00 AM, 5:30 to 6:00 AM, 10:00 AM to 12:00 NN, 3:00 to 4:00 PM, and 6:00 to 8:00 PM) and working in between up until 11:00 PM. Sometimes her schedule was not as clear cut because having two jobs—her online freelancing job and remote corporate job—meant having multiple meetings in a day. Fortunately, majority of the household chores were done by her parents, so she primarily used 50% of her time taking care of the baby, 40% on work, and 10% on resting. She expressed that she was grateful for her parents taking on some of the housework, but she still carried the load of taking care of her newborn baby while juggling it with two jobs. She shared that since her partner lived separately from her, he rarely took care of their child.

Lily was forced to look for an online job during the first few months of the COVID-19 lockdown. Since she was working in the sales department of her company, quarantine restrictions resulted in loss of clients and declining sales; in effect, her salary was reduced, and she lost her usual financial benefits such as sales commissions and bonuses. In addition, her aunt died due to the virus, and they had to handle some of the costs—she explained that it was an emotionally and mentally challenging time. Upon venturing into the online freelancing world, she explained how difficult it was to look for her first gig as online job platforms were filled with various job postings about different forms of microwork (e.g., audio editing, color grading, answering emails, etc.). Aside from the overwhelming structure of the online platform, she said that it was because most of these job postings required a skill set that she was not familiar with, such as SEO writing or social media management. Luckily, she was able to secure a position as a Content Writer and wrote enough articles to somewhat substitute for the loss of income and additional costs, such as emergency costs and the baby's vaccines (which amounted to about PhP10,000.00). Lily was quite happy with the extra income and new skills learned, but she explained that she felt like she had no time to rest and that the "work was never-ending." As her line of online work comprised of multiple deadlines, she stated that the mental load of having to remember them was mentally and emotionally taxing. But her supervisors were somewhat flexible when it came to the deadlines, as compared to her corporate job. When it came to the work environment, she stated that she had a hard time adjusting because she did not have the usual support system that she could tap into in case shehad any questions about the job—on her end, there seemed to be this barrier when it came to communicating, which left the impression that she had no choice but to accept the company's working conditions. She also added that men freelancers adjusted to the gig economy more effortlessly than women due to how easy it was for them to communicate with employers. She explained that her partner, who was also working as an online freelancer, had this confidence in speaking casually with his employers. When she compared it to her own experience, despite having a master's degree in communications, she explained that it was difficult for her to talk to her employer because she felt like being "a newbie" meant just following instructions and not questioning anything. Another issue she also had with the job was the pay and insurance, she felt like the pay was too low for the work demanded (e.g.,

meticulous research, annotations, etc.) and that it was static (i.e., no pay increases, bonuses, and other financial benefits). This proved to be a challenge on her end as she explained that being on the computer all day could pose some physical challenges as well, such as eye strain and back pains. Although not entirely different from the effects of any other offline or online deskwork, Lily shared that having to do two jobs meant that she spent twice the hours at her desk and computer, which worsened the physical toll on her body.

When asked how she managed to balance all her roles, she replied that she merely accepted the situation and strongly believed in "come what may." To help cope with the mental load, she stated that she would set boundaries and deadlines and sticks to them as much as possible (e.g., not working on the weekends). Since her partner lived in his parents' house, she would usually just ask for her own parents' help in cases where she was overwhelmed. At the time of the interview, Lily and her partner were saving up so they could get their own house. Since she relied on her parents when it came to household chores, she expressed her concern on how she would be able to handle the reproductive work once they become independent. But in the end, she expressed that she would "just have to live with it."

Freya, 34. Freya lived in Metro Manila, with her husband and newborn baby. Her parents and in-laws all lived in Mindanao, so their care support system was quite limited compared with the other interviewees. At that time, Freya was working as a content writer in the same business as Tin and Lily, and for another business, which she did not directly identify. Freya also previously did freelance work for some Philippine development projects and research projects during her pregnancy. In these projects, she still worked with a Philippine team and management. She shared that the working environment was different as the locally based setup offered a more tight-knit community and work culture.

Freya would wake up every day at 7:00 AM to have breakfast and clean up the house. She would spend her mornings taking care of her baby, and her afternoons (roughly around five hours) on doing some consultancy and writing work. By 5:00 PM, she would prepare dinner and waits for her husband to arrive. From 6:00 to 9:00 PM, she spent time working and studying new online freelancing skills, and then at around 10:00 PM, she would sleep. She stated that her baby was then going through the "clingy" phase, so she would try to clean the house as quickly as possible and prepare the things her baby needed (e.g., milk) once she woke up. She explained that, although it was difficult at first, she was able to establish a daily rhythm. She also spent some of her working hours and weekends on volunteer work. She would constantly cook up projects with her former colleagues, such as teaching online tutoring classes for students and fundraising projects for certain communities. She explained that it came so naturally to her because "nasa puso ko ang pagtulong" (helping is at the core of my heart).

Compared to the first two mothers, Freya started working online months before the pandemic. Prior to her online job, right after graduating college, Freya worked in the development sector and was extremely passionate in helping her organization's partner communities—even going as far as working overtime on most nights and on the weekends. Her husband, although supportive of her passion throughout the years (e.g., going back and forth from Bulacan to Manila to adjust to her new working station), expressed that she barely had time for him and their plans to form a family. He added that she was always concerned about the problems of others rather than theirs. They had been married for eight years and just had their first baby in their eighth year. Hearing her

husband's reasoning, she explained that she felt like she was being "unfair" to her family. She added that she needed to balance her priorities as she had already given a good eight years of her life to development work. After months of deciding and praying, she finally decided to resign and say her goodbyes to the community—whom she treated like her own family.

In the first few months of just being at home, Freya was fine as she was still able to talk to the community she worked with every now and then. But after another month or so, she expressed feelings of emptiness and losing her self-worth. She stated that, since she had always been an achiever, she felt like her self-worth was lessening. Simply put, she did not want to be stuck as a housewife her whole life. So, she decided to look for an online gig. There, she stumbled upon a writing job and got the job immediately. She said that through online gigs and freelancing jobs, she was able to find this sense of freedom and self-worth. She eventually had multiple gigs, such as being a freelance writer for two different clients, and a consultant to another NGO. She explained that, although there were multiple benefits to freelancing, such as having extra income for expenses such as utility bills, vaccines, and others, however, it was extremely tiring. She felt like there was no boundary between her work and home life. She expressed that after a while, she realized that there was no difference between working a full-time job with multiple freelancing gigs since she still spent her days working and beating deadlines. So, she decided to take a step back and lessen the work and some of the volunteering jobs she was doing. Admittedly, even after lessening the number of activities she was involved in, she still continued volunteering for the communities she had worked with in the past. The adjustment to freelancing and being a new mother was gradual but also difficult on her end. The hardest part for her was parting with the community she treated like family. In addition to this, she felt like being at home meant losing her "creative juices." She would question herself multiple times about being a stay-at-home mom and wife, "Tama ba ang desisyon ko?" (Did I make the right choice?), and she would always just pray and get her confirmation from her prayers. It appeared that Freya's decision to enter freelance work was largely influened by her motherhood, as she felt like this was the best compromise that she could have with her husband in terms of building their family while still using her "creative juices." The intersections of her identities as a mother and a freelancer showed that the promise of a "gig economy" to offer alternative working conditions merely adheres to the gender division of labor, wherein the wife works at home to continue her reproductive work.

Another adjustment they had was the loss of income. Since she had been making up to 50% of their overall income, it was a huge blow on their finances. She stated that they were still coping with this loss and adjusting their budget. Since the online environment was completely different when it came to communicating, she also had trouble with not being able to face people directly and having no rigid company structure as compared to her past job. She complained that the pay was way below her job description and that it was difficult to budget things as the pay completely depended on the work you put in—she expressed that in freelancing, "walang gawa, walang sahod" (no work, no pay). This proved to be difficult as she had multiple burdens and had no insurance in case she got sick from overworking, nor did she have any financial benefits such as bonuses.

When asked how she was able to cope with all the issues she faced in her job, home, and volunteer work, she answered that it was all about establishing a rhythm. It was important to "establish a pattern" and know one's boundaries. Since her parents and her in-laws were all in Mindanao, they were all alone in Manila, so they only had themselves to rely on. But during the pandemic, they were able to form connections with their neighbors (e.g., sharing food and other supplies) so some

of them would take care of her baby whenever she had a tight deadline. In addition, her husband also knew when she was overwhelmed and would volunteer to take care of the baby's needs. Her husband also took care of the baby on the weekends and would do some of the household chores every now and then, such as doing the laundry. According to her, proper communication with her husband was one of the ways she balanced her multiple burdens, and another way was to check if her potential gigs were "a waste of time or opportunity to be productive."

Ava, 34. Ava was living with her parents, her brother, and eleven-year-old son in the Province of Rizal during the data gathering process. Her husband was working as a seafarer and his routes were mostly outside of the Philippines; she shared that her husband would usually be gone for months on end and would only return for a month or two before being deployed again. Ava worked two freelance jobs, as a virtual assistant for a young Vietnamese man living in Australia and a customer service representative for a Caucasian man living in America. As a virtual assistant, she usually did different forms of microwork such as coordinating meetings, taking notes, responding to emails, and ad-hoc creative tasks such as social media management, graphic designing, and human resource management. As a customer service representative, she essentially worked for a virtual BPO where the freelancers responded to hundreds of customer service concerns and inquiries.

Since her parents handled all the household chores, Ava spent a large chunk of her time working and taking care of her son. When asked to divide her time, she expressed that she probably spent around 70% of her time on working, 10% on her son and his modules, 10% on household chores, and 10% on resting. She stated that she was working as much as she could because she was saving up for a house—her partner, who was working as a seafarer, was also doing the same. She said that although her schedule seemed clear cut, in between her breaks, she would also do some cleaning around the house. She expressed that it bothered her to see the house messy and since she had an eleven-year-old son, she would inevitably keep cleaning after him during her breaks. Prior to the pandemic, on her weekends, she would always do some volunteer work in the church, including organizing outreach programs and managing fundraising projects.

Ava started her freelancing career back in 2016 due to her friends who were already exploring the field as early as 2011. When she first heard about the gig economy, since it was still relatively an unknown field, she decided that it was too much of a gamble. So, she decided to work in a call center company for a couple of years instead. But eventually, she got sick and tired of the commute as living in Rizal and traveling to Manila was too much for her physical and mental health. Thus, she went back to her province. As there were no nearby BPOs in her province, she decided to finally venture into online freelancing jobs. Eventually, she found work as a customer service representative. She stated that it felt like a large burden was lifted off her shoulders when she started working online since she no longer had to spend time commuting; in extension, getting physically and mentally drained from the commute alone. In addition, she felt like she finally had control over her time as compared to a regular 9-to-5 job. Ava admitted that she experienced difficulties in transitioning to online jobs such as lacking the experience stated on common online job boards (e.g., being a virtual assistant or graphic designer). She said that, while analyzing the descriptions on the different job boards (even ones related to customer service), she was 50% to 60% unsure of what they meant. But after getting the hang of it, she managed to find a job after a week or two. The first obstacle she came across was the medium of communication. Since the company's communication system was a bit vague or different compared with the communication systems in the Philippines, she had a difficult time adjusting. She mostly had difficulty with the company structure as it was not clear

whom she could talk with to complete some of her tasks (e.g., answering unique inquiries in the customer service). She did not know who to talk to and when. Moreover, she expressed that she also struggled with the remote working environment. Compared with the traditional job setting, she explained that she had no way to vent out her frustrations because remote work commonly meant limited communication with other employees.

Ava's work as a customer service representative comprised of offering email support to hundreds of customers every single day. She said that, since she was working for a big company, there were 200 of them working in the customer service team—all of whom were women. Her second job consisted of doing multiple roles ranging from customer service to social media management to human resources management. She expressed that, although the pay was relatively less (around PhP12,000.00 for a full-time job) and the job description was more demanding than her other job, she still favored the second job because it was more creatively challenging and fulfilling. She mentioned that this was also beneficial on her end as she was learning new skills common to the online gig economy, at the same time, improving her management skills for both customer service and human resource. But she expressed that these benefits came with a cost, such as the loss of financial stability (since there was no contract signing that took place), the wage gap between her and her white colleagues, and the lack of a friendly working environment. When asked how she managed to balance working and taking care of her son, she answered that it was all about discipline and building a sustainable work culture. She added that it was easier for her compared to other moms because she had her parents take care of most of the household chores.

Life as an Online Freelancer: Challenges, Opportunities, and Strategic and Practical Gender Needs

In this section, representatives from FHMoms were invited for the focus group discussion to validate certain issues and thematic findings in Filipino moms' challenges, opportunities, and strategic and practical gender needs in online freelancing. As mentioned, FHMoms is an organization dedicated to helping Filipina moms land online freelancing jobs and adjust to the work from home environment. The organization first started as a support group on Facebook, until eventually, their membership grew to 200,000; thus, resulting in the formation of their own online platform (e.g., website and Facebook presence) and reputation (e.g., connection with national government agencies and INGOs). They provided multiple programs and projects—some free, and some with a fee—to give support to their members, such as weekly support group meetings, online tutorials on in-demand freelancing skills, rent-to-own laptops, and many more. The following were the common themes found throughout the KII participants' narratives, as discussed with FHMoms' representatives. The themes that were identified were based on both the KIIs and FGD:

1. Sailing through Everyday Life (?): The Opportunities and Advantages Found in Freelancing for Filipino Mothers. In terms of the opportunities and advantages gained through online freelancing, all the KII participants stated that working from home was convenient and practical. They explained how the work from home set-up meant that they no longer had to go through the trouble of traffic, additional costs (e.g., commuting fee, food, etc.), and extra preparation (e.g., doing make-up, choosing their clothes, etc.)—stating that it helped them save time and money. They emphasized that such a set-up can be freeing for women as they now "control their own time" and are free from age-old issues such as the endless traffic in Metro Manila. Moreover, it was more practical than the typical 9-to-5 job as they could use the income for their utility bills

and baby expenses, such as their vaccines, diapers, and milk. Since freelancing gigs mostly focus on one type of job (e.g., writing, video editing, or email marketing) or a series of small and simple tasks (e.g., data entry, note taking, emailing), it was easy to do the online job alongside another job (either another gig or corporate). When concluding the importance of the set-up being convenient and practical, they all shared the sentiment that this made it easier for them to take care of their child and "balance" it with their work life. Since freelancing jobs are somewhat flexible, they could rearrange their schedule anytime they needed to. The representatives from FHMoms agreed and explained that this was the very reason why their organization was created to begin with. One of the focus group discussion participants shared that they used to work as a call center agent and then decided to move into the freelancing world to save time and money.

Consistent with the premises in the article by Milkman (2021), Filipino mothers appear to find ease in the online work set-up as it offers power over their own time. Through an online set-up, they could control their work schedule so as to not interfere with their caregiving responsibilities. Since women often experience time poverty in juggling their multiple roles and burdens, they find the flexible working environment of remote jobs appealing and convenient. In addition, as they are no longer slaves to the exhausting Manila commute and unnecessary strict 9-to-5 arrangements of corporate work, they can better organize their day based on their needs. In the case of most key informants, they could immediately take care of their newborn baby or children as they are in the same vicinity while not being reprimanded by employers. However, the mental load provided by such a flexible time schedule was another issue.

2. Juggling through Everyday life: Challenges, Anxieties, and Fears in Freelance Work. FHMoms explained that Filipino mothers often look for online freelancing jobs due to anxiety regarding their self-worth and confidence. Freya felt this way as she spent a good eight years of her life dedicated to development work and her community. She said that, after deciding to become a full-time housewife, she felt like she was losing her self-worth and creative juices. FHMoms explained that women who were full-time corporate employees felt that being a housewife does not entail the same "creativity" nor "productivity." Across all the interviews, it was apparent that being a first-time mother or a mother in general was one of the major driving factors as to why the participants chose to stay at home, but the pandemic (such as in the case of Lily) and the exhausting working conditions in urban areas (e.g., long commute and added costs) also affected this decision. Soon after, the trigger of losing their "self esteem" and income resulted in them acquiring online gigs to fill in such gaps. And when they did find an online job in the gig economy, they experienced a sense of "enlightenment" and "source of hope." Through their online support groups, they would often encourage new freelancing mothers as they maneuvered through online platforms while balancing their roles as moms.

Upon finding her first online gig, Freya stated that she had this desire to explore the gig economy, thus encouraging her to take up some online classes to develop other skills, such as web designing and social media management. Ava felt the same way, and that was why she was willing to take on a full-time job with a measly pay of PhP12,000.00 to acquire further training on new freelancing skills. Indeed, freelancing work has the potential to provide spaces for women to deepen their knowledge and strengthen their technical skills in new technologies and innovative niche markets. However, the working conditions surrounding their endeavour to learn more may leave them vulnerable to exploitation. Most of the participants shared that they felt like they were being paid way below their job description and experience, and this pay may even be threatened

because of the gig economy's "no work, no pay" set-up and lack of social benefits. Freya added that she feared getting sick because not only did it mean that she had no pay, but she might fall into debt because she had no insurance nor other safety nets. It appeared that to them, these working conditions were a relatively acceptable trade-off as they were able to take care of their children and beat the cost (in time and money) of working in Metro Manila. These circumstances align with Jorge et al.'s (2022) conclusion, that in the context of post-austerity and precarity, Filipino mothers working in the gig economy are pushed to reconcile their motherhood and careers. Further, as expressed by Milkman et al. (2021), "this type of work arrangement provides a neoliberal solution to work-family conflict, enabling women to perform paid work while still prioritizing family and caregiving" (p. 358).

In terms of the specific challenges and hardships with being an online freelancer, three main common themes appeared from the interviews:

a. Struggle with Time: Filipino Mothers' Time Poverty in Balancing their Multiple Roles and Responsibilities. The participants had difficulty in terms of balancing and establishing boundaries between their work life and private life, thus affecting them emotionally and mentally. Further, they lacked the usual communication support system that helps make work smoother. With regard to the first challenge, the participants explained that the flexibility of their working schedule meant difficulties in establishing boundaries between their work and personal space. Lily explained that she felt overwhelmed with her two jobs and her baby, she expressed that "parang walang pahinga sa freelance" (there is no rest in freelancing) because of how the thought of the job stays in her mind even as she rests or sleeps. She added that it was just one deadline after another and it was extremely stressful, especially since she had an 11-month-old baby. All of the participants shared that they felt like they were just moving constantly the whole day as they had to continuously work, take care of their children, and in some cases, fit in their volunteer work. Almost all of them barely shared having their own recreational time. Since the work-from-home environment entails mixing one's work and home space, the participants stated that it was extremely difficult to distinguish their work hours from their child rearing time, let alone their personal time. But eventually, they shared that they had established a certain rhythm to manage the boundaries. The representatives from FHMoms agreed with this problem personally and admitted that this was extremely common, especially for their new members. They highlighted that it was stressful especially for new mothers, but all their members in general still felt the time poverty when it came to balancing their work and all of their family members' needs. They explained that "*'pag flexible yung trabaho…nawawala yung line*" (if the job is flexible, the boundaries disappear) as it was hard to separate your online job when you juggle your tasks throughout the day (e.g., taking care of the baby in the afternoon and doing your gig at night or doing your online gig in between household chores). Online freelancing mothers are constantly hounded by the mental load of their online gig compared to a traditional corporate job where they can leave their work (and thoughts surrounding it) after they clock-out. As stated by Powell & Craig (2015), time spent on unpaid carework, leisure, and remote work are gendered. As in Lily's case, she chose to do online work to control the time involved in her reproductive work (i.e., time to take care of her newborn baby) and productive work, while her husband did online work to control the time involved in his productive work and recreational time (Powell & Craig, 2015).

b. Struggle with Working Conditions and Social Benefits: Filipino Mother's Lack of Financial Security and Work Support Systems. Filipino mothers in the gig economy lack the common financial benefits and social security of a regular job (e.g., reasonable and stable pay, paid leaves, or health insurance). Most of the participants explained that having gigs meant not having the financial stability that regular employment offers. In gig work, since freelancers are mostly hired for short-term projects or given microwork, they are often paid through a "no work, no pay" scheme. This payment arrangement requires that they should submit their deliverables (e.g., research article, video, etc.) before they could get paid. In addition, since freelancers are viewed as "service providers" rather than employees, they are not provided social safety nets such as healthcare. For the participants, regular employment ensures a steady income and social security, such as having paid leaves, healthcare, and support systems. While, in the gig economy, they shared that they needed to work even on sick days or else they would lose one of their main sources of income. Since most of them did not sign any contracts, they needed to show up to work consistently or they could get retrenched any time. In addition to this, it was not clear what their employment really was because, although they were freelancers, their job descriptions were similar to those of full-time employees. For instance, participants working in content writing and customer service shared that they needed to achieve their prescribed quotas (e.g., at least three articles in a week or 100 customer concerns answered in a day). In addition, some were even required to log in at specific times and submit timesheets of the work that they had accomplished. It appeared that the restrictions imposed on so-called "clients" appeared to be quite similar to regular employment. Some of them found the aforementioned problems the main reason they wanted to quit. Given their low pay, they felt like the working conditions were not worth the hassle or risk. Since three out of the four participants were working as writers, they claimed that their pay was below the average payment for writers (e.g., PhP2.00/word).

They also struggled with not having a deeper connection with workmates or colleagues. They expressed that this was challenging for them because they had no one to ask in case they stumbled upon a problem in their job or had grievances with the company's management. Ava added that in a culturally diverse online work environment, it was hard to communicate and collaborate with colleagues for projects—she expressed that it was quite noticeable how her Australian boss was more comfortable and casual with other Australian employees compared with her. Collaboration, Ava shared, was crucial in her line of work as she worked creative tasks such as producing social media content, increasing social media engagement, and drafting marketing materials such as newsletters and online campaigns. Usually, these are tasks that require brainstorming and repetition of previous content, success stories, and client testimonies—all of which can be acquired from other departments in their company. Since there was no contract to begin with and they had trouble interacting with their bosses, it was hard for these freelancers to negotiate their salary or ask for salary increases. As stated in Gandini et al. (2017), collaborative work deeply characterizes the jobs of freelancers as they are usually part of bigger projects which their microwork is part of, and deep connections and collaboration with clients or management can connect them with more or better gigs. For most of the participants, collaboration would enable them to understand their microwork better as sometimes these forms of work require deeper technical knowledge on the subject matter (e.g., audio editing, transcribing, etc.).

c. Struggle with Juggling Life: Filipino Mothers' Coping Mechanisms and the Impact of Unpaid Care and Domestic Work. In terms of coping with their multiple challenges, the emerging theme among the interviewees was that they would usually just go with the flow and establish

a certain rhythm to make sure that they could do all their tasks. They would set certain hours dedicated to each task, although all of them were willing to bend their schedule in case their child needed them. In cases where they felt overwhelmed, they explained that that was the only time they would directly ask help from their husbands or other close family members and friends. It seemed like they viewed asking for help as a last resort and that it was something that they would "rarely do." This may have been because they felt that the responsibility of child rearing is theirs to bear alone, as was very evident in Tin and Freya's cases. FHMoms agreed with this sentiment as even in their own personal lives, they still go through the same struggles and cope through support groups. They agreed with the participants that it was a learning experience; that the challenge of having to balance motherhood along with the flexible and boundary-less nature of online jobs was something that mothers who are freelancers eventually "overcome." In addition, they expressed that being able to adjust to such hardships and said working conditions is what makes Filipinos "good workers." However, this form of working arrangement can, in fact, contribute to the deeper entrenchment of the gender division of labor (Kalleburg & Dunn, 2016), as their triple roles as mothers, workers, and community managers are (re)perpetuated across the social institutions they are involved in. In this scenario, they have no choice but to sink into the neoliberal ethos that aims to exploit their need to reconcile their work and their motherhood (Milkman et al., 2021).

3. Practical and Strategic Gender Needs of Online Freelancing Filipino Mothers. In the following section, the practical gender needs and strategic gender needs that surfaced during the interviews and focus group discussion were identified. As Moser emphasized (March et al., 2005), these gender-differentiated identified needs can help develop interventions to uplift the current situation and transform social relations of online freelancing Filipino mothers towards gender justice and equality.

Table 1. *Practical and Strategic Gender Needs of Online Freelancing Filipino Mothers*

Practical Gender Needs	Strategic Gender Needs
Maternity leave and benefits; Health benefits and insurance (e.g., HMO, SSS, PhilHealth, etc.); Financial benefits (e.g., 13th month pay, severance pay, yearly increase, commissions, etc.); Operational needs and costs (e.g., laptop, WiFi)	Reinforcement of women workers' rights in the gig economy
Access to information and services: knowledge on the gig economy (e.g., difference of freelancer vs contractor vs employee); confidence to directly communicate with their employers about salary or working conditions; training and skill building in relation to the online gig economy	Control over personal work decision-making, such as accessing decent employment and better working conditions
Redistribution of care work	State recognition that care and domestic work should be everybody's responsibilities rather than women's alone

In sorting through their struggles, challenges, and direct statements, I have attempted to identify their practical and strategic gender needs—as presented in Table 1. In terms of their first practical gender need, the rights of women workers were emphasized, such as maternity leave and

benefits; health benefits and insurance (e.g., HMO, SSS, PhilHealth, etc.); financial benefits (e.g., 13th month pay, severance pay, yearly increase, commissions, etc.); and operational needs and costs (e.g., laptop, WiFi). Since they no longer had the same benefits that regular employment offers, they explained that it was hard to maintain the insurance costs on their own. They highlighted that this was important as it ensures their safety and the availability of funds in case of any emergencies—and as mothers, it was critical for them to have financial and health insurance as they now have dependents. The participants also expressed that working mothers need maternity leave and benefits. As most of them had their babies prior to working online, they expressed that they could not imagine giving birth in a hospital while working as a freelancer, because they adamantly shared that the costs of giving birth cannot be sustained by a freelancer's wage. Since freelancers are usually paid by the hour or based on the output they produce, childbirth and post-natal care would mean added costs, no income flow, and potentially loss of their job. FHMoms added that, ideally, employers or clients should be kind enough to be considerate of a freelancer's pregnancy but instead it is the burden of the freelancer to be prepared for such situations. In addition, the immediate need for operational support such as laptops and WiFi is to ensure that the workers can do their work well. Some of the participants shared that their laptops were a bit old and their internet connection was slow, and upgrading one's laptop and internet connection could be quite costly. FHMoms agreed with this view but stated that mothers who plan to enter the freelancing world should prepare to handle their own financial needs and health benefits. FHMoms expressed that freelancers have multiple clients and do not work for each client exclusively—hence, said clients are not obligated to provide such benefits. FHMoms' answer was consistent even when notified about the participants' needed help with operational costs (e.g., laptop upgrades, internet, etc.). They explained that freelancers are merely service providers, and they are expected to have said resources before even rendering their services.

However, FHMoms' answer might have overlooked the fact that, even though some participants are referred to as "freelancers," their jobs are almost akin—if not equivalent—to a full-time job. Blurring the relationships between employer-employee and viewing them as clients and service providers can largely impede the establishment of their rights as women workers. In addition, the absence of contracts means that working conditions and deliverables are non-negotiable—and since there is no room for negotiation, the power asymmetry may be skewed towards the employer's side. The participants shared the same sentiment as they felt like they had no power nor right to negotiate with their employers at all. Since the gig economy is a relatively new field, women freelancers from the global south often take in stride what appears to be the "norm," while employers or "clients" from the global north often exploit this or take advantage of these forms of working conditions. For instance, when asked if they should be able to charge operational costs, Lily answered that, "I think freelancers like me can't really demand gadgets or internet allowance from the employer. Though it would be great, I just feel like if we demand a lot, they might outsource the job to someone else." She explained that, since they were outsourced for the job, it would be improper to ask as she felt that this might threaten her position in the company—which was definitely possible given her contract-less situation. Since she had been working for the company for more than seven months at that time and had a quota to meet, she could be considered as one of their in-house writers—which should have merited a raise of sorts. But with no room for negotiation, Lily could not ask for a raise nor negotiate her quota. Women freelancers may know their proper rate, including all these operational costs, but they still find it difficult to negotiate their pay given the power that their employers have over them.

Admittedly, some freelancers—especially those working as casual employees—enjoy the freedom of having no contracts as they can easily leave the job if needed. However, some of them might not be informed about the consequences of the lack of a legal document protecting their rights (e.g., getting paid on time, negotiating payment or working conditions, asking for leave, etc.). In line with this, reinforcing their rights as women freelancers is vital, especially in the case of blurry employee-employer relationships and responsibilities. It would also be strategic for mothers doing freelancing jobs to be empowered to negotiate and communicate with their employers. Given that most of them are quite new to the online gig world and were probably conditioned to just follow, being informed about their rights and empowering them to expect and demand those rights can help build their confidence whenever negotiating or communicating with clients or employers. The second issue that the interviewees faced was access to information and services. Primarily, their limited knowledge of the kinds of employment (e.g., freelancer vs contractor vs employee) may have contributed to their lack of confidence in negotiating for their rights as workers, aside from the fear of retrenchment or reprimand by their employers. They also found it difficult to maneuver through the gig economy, such as understanding the specific language of online job boards and in-demand skills, and finding good jobs. Since online job boards have different ways to refer to job descriptions (e.g., in digital marketing—use of certain software and key performance indicators like "click through rates" or "conversion rates"), it could be confusing for a beginner to navigate through the world of online jobs and find one that best fits their needs and situation. Additionally, the freelancing moms expressed finding difficulty in accessing training and skills-building resources related to the gig economy. They shared that holistic courses, especially ones that offer the necessary frameworks and networks, are quite pricey. In this scenario, knowledge on the gig economy, contracts, and different types of employment is crucial as this educates freelancers on their entitlements and their rights. Additionally, to prevent getting trapped in exploitative outsourced jobs, it would help if the mothers could understand the language used in online job boards, including the key words or job titles. Since the language or the way certain job descriptions might be phrased differently in the international scene (e.g., "writer" vs. "optimized writer"), new freelancers might have a hard time sorting through risky and reasonable jobs. While scanning through online job boards, some new freelancers might get enticed into a below minimum wage job that combines the jobs of four or five people—basically, comprising a whole team. Control over their personal work decision-making, such as accessing decent employment and better working conditions, is viewed as a strategic gender interest as this can help equalize asymmetrical power and social relations between employer and employee across the gig economy. Capacitating freelance workers with the necessary knowledge to negotiate their rights can bolster their ability to control their personal work decision-making. However, this strategic gender need can only be strengthened if the structures surrounding their ability to demand their rights are supportive. For instance, the Philippine government should fight for the rights of Filipino freelancers in the international community in order to encourage other governments to establish laws in hiring such workers.

Lastly, there is an immediate need to redistribute the care work that Filipino freelancing mothers carry. The interviewees expressed multiple times how they were mostly the ones responsible for taking care of their children and doing household chores. The constant state of "feeling tired" and "not having enough time" was consistent across all their responses, as they had to address not just their own needs but also those of all of their family members. In describing their schedules throughout the day, the constant back and forth between working and taking care of their children or housework was apparent. Even FHMoms recognized this reality as they, too, face the same difficulties in balancing their reproductive and productive roles. Attached to this reality is the never-

ending mental load accompanying each role and the tasks needed to be done. Redistributing care work to family members within the same household or to their husbands could help lessen these mothers' mental load. It was apparent that most of the participants' husbands would only help out in specific household tasks (e.g., washing the dishes, doing the laundry), and occasionally take care of the baby or child when the wife was tired. Aligned with the analyses in the articles by Jorge et al. (2022) and Milkman et al. (2021), freelance work appeared to just widen the unequal social relations of women and men in reproductive and productive work. The online gig working arrangements align with the neoliberal ethos maintaining the gender division of labor. Therefore, redistributing care work and, most importantly, stressing that care work is everybody's responsibility rather than the woman's alone can contribute to transforming these power asymmetries.

Conclusion

For both clients and freelancers, it is quite easy to get lost in the "flexible" advantage that online gig work offers. However, the ever-expanding definition of the "freelancer" label can lead to exploitation and marginalization of Filipino mothers. Although framed as a beneficial alternative for unemployed and underemployed Filipinos, it is worth noting that based on the experiences of Filipino mothers, contingent pay schemes only work effectively when employees have the power to influence negotiations or directly influence their wage and working conditions. In neoliberal crowdwork and online freelance platforms, it is apparent that companies are merely transferring the market's risk and costs to workers without any accountability (Peetz, 2019). As more and more Filipinos, especially mothers, are going into the online gig economy, it is mandatory to reassess the definition of what a freelancer is and to reignite the resolution to fight for their rights and for governments and businesses to answer their gender-differentiated needs. Continuing with the current direction of policy discourses and development of the gig economy, the gender division of labor will deepen and the influx of precarious, scarcely paid jobs in the global south will increase (Gandini et al,. 2017; Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). The individualization of such work also results in dispersing not only tasks, but workers as well—which means that spaces to collectivize and unionize are scarce and inaccessible (Webster, 2016). In all the narratives shared in the interviews and the FGD, it was apparent that Filipino mothers in the gig economy are pushed to apply this neoliberal solution as the freelancing working arrangement allows them to reconcile their motherhood and work, and answer the work-family conflict. In return, insidious forms of unequal relations among women and men, and in their forms of labor, continue.

The freelancing world seems to be boxed into this simple image of a client and service provider relationship, but the reality appears to be more complicated than that. There are freelancers who are rigid with their rates and demand for their rights; there are those who are willing to bend their rates and working conditions to get the gig; there are those who are not aware that the work that they offer is way beyond their pay; and there are those who are well-aware of their rights but have no way to fight. In identifying the social positionality of Filipino mothers in the gig economy, understanding the intersections of their triple roles as mothers, workers, and community managers was crucial (March et al., 2005). As they struggle to juggle all these roles, it is apparent that the cost of time poverty, lack of social security, and exploitative working conditions outweigh the "benefit" of earning while staying at home.

Transcending international boundaries and blurring national rights, the online freelancing economy may become a place of exploitation and discrimination. For mothers who wish to enter

this world in hopes of regaining their self-esteem or gaining a bit of income, this poses an added challenge. Freelancing for mothers can be materially enabling on the one hand while being mentally and physically crippling on the other. In maneuvering through the double shift or their triple roles, freelancing finds its spot by blurring the lines and adding another burden to the mental load or physical toll of being a mother, wife, daughter, worker, or volunteer. And as freelancers seek to expand themselves as workers, they find that negotiating and communicating in such a new world and economy proves to be difficult. With the fear of losing their means of income or with viewing "freelancing" as synonymous to "dispensable," stability, sustainability, and safety for mothers doing freelancing or outsourced jobs are yet to be secured.

In the current discussion of gender and development, the plights and realities of Filipino mothers freelancing in the gig economy should be given attention. Their practical gender needs and strategic gender needs (March et al., 2005) should be responded to. Their need for maternity leave and benefits, social security, and funds for operational costs should be answered by governments and businesses in the gig economy. In short, to solve the root cause of this issue is to reinforce women workers' rights in the gig economy. To establish sustainable pathways to easily access information and services (e.g., knowledge on the gig economy, job boards, communication, negotiations), capacity and knowledge building initiatives should be prioritized. The participants emphasized how they felt like they were just going through the motions without really understanding what was happening. Thus, gaining knowledge on the developing on-demand economy would mean better access to and safeguarding of their rights. In essence, they should have control over their personal work decisions such as accessing decent employment and better working conditions. Redistributing care work is also equally important as this practical gender need can help lessen the mental load and physical burden that freelancing mothers carry in their everyday lives. However, it is only through recognition by the state and society that care and domestic work is everybody's responsibility that women can truly feel uplifted. In this fast-developing technological world, the gender digital gap involves not only technical knowledge and access to the internet, but extends into the large and invisibilized spaces of online work in which Filipino mothers are now involved. The false promise of online work to "perfectly balance" motherhood and productive work poses grave dangers through the deeper entrenchment of the gender division of labor, as well as unequal power relations between women and men, and between the global north and the global south.

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