Femininity at work: Female platforms workers and Etsy.com

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Abstract

A key component to the structuring effects of neoliberalism is its impact on the subjectivity of citizens (Brown, 2003). Individuals are increasingly induced to act as self-disciplining, self-transforming entrepreneurial citizens, fully responsible for their own successes and failures (Harvey, 2005). Viewed in tandem with the changing landscape of employment under post-Fordism, women have come to be positioned as ideal neoliberal citizens and workers (Adkins, 1999, Gill and Scharff, 2011, Harris, 2006, Morini, 2010). Women possess a cultural legacy of self- transformation and self-discipline, and their 'natural' feminine characteristics align with expectations of contemporary affective and emotional labour. Within this context, a narrative abounds that women can make-over work, to better suit their passions and interests. Etsy.com is the largest digital craft-selling platform worldwide and promises its largely female workforce a means towards pleasurable, self-actualising business ownership.

Through an analysis of twenty-one semi-structured interviews, this thesis explores the lived realities of women's experiences of such freelance employment, via the Etsy.com platform. I will argue that women engaged in Etsy-based work must reconcile a complex web of competing cultural, economic, and social demands, which centre on contradictory notions of ideal femininity. Moreover, Etsy.com itself operates as a structuring force, that iterates contradictory gendered ideals of 'successful' femininity. How such contradictions are navigated is dependent not only on individual women's entrepreneurial capacities but access to, and capacity to utilise, wider forms of capital.

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SEO – Search engine optimisation

PDE – Platform dependent entrepreneurs

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Author's declaration

(I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this thesis is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.)

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Chapter 1. Introduction

This thesis is a feminist exploration of UK women's experiences of online micro- entrepreneurship, via the e-commerce platform, Etsy.com. Through empirical, qualitative research, I will explore the forms of labour required of women to manage the dual and sometimes contradictory demands of contemporary femininity. These experiences are contextualised in reference to the structuring effects of neoliberalism and demands of post-Fordist labour styles.

A key demanding feature of neoliberalism is the mandate for subjects to operate as entrepreneurial citizens (Harvey, 2005). This mandate is gendered, as women are culturally positioned as ideal neoliberal subjects, 'naturally' possessing skills required in a post-Fordist labour market. Etsy.com presents itself as providing women a route towards 'female friendly,' and 'democratic' modes of entrepreneurialism (Etsy, 2016, 2019). Moreover, it purports to offer women a means towards meaningful, self-actualising employment, wherein women can create micro-businesses from pre-existing passionate interests (ibid). These are promises which I will examine in relationship to the post-Fordist work ethic (Weeks, 2011).

This has emerged in the context of the post-Fordist economy, which blurs former boundaries of life/work and requires workers to instrumentalise all aspects of self. Most crucially, the expectations of the post-Fordist work ethic demand that subjects *love* their work, and experience labour as the ultimate form of self- actualisation (Farrugia, 2019, McRobbie, 2016). Neoliberal rhetoric peddles the notion that entrepreneurialism forms the ultimate expression of democratic freedom, through which women are responsible for their own successes and failures. As an expression of the individualisation thesis, class and gender are now supposedly zombified (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002, McRobbie, 2016). These are experiences further impacted by Etsy.com's features as a digital platform, dependent on a workforce of freelance, predominantly female shop owners.

In essence, I will make the argument that women engaged in Etsy-based work

are reconciling a complex web of competing cultural, economic, and social demands, which centre on fluctuating notions of normative femininity. How this web is navigated is dependent not only on individual women's entrepreneurial capacities- as dictated under neoliberalism and required within Etsy work - but women's access to, and capacity to utilise, wider forms of capital.

1.1. Research context

1.1.1. Etsy.com

Etsy.com is a digital marketplace, where consumers can buy handcrafted, artisanal, and vintage items produced and sold by independent shop-owners. Through the platform, buyers can access items categorised as 'Art and Collectibles,' 'Jewellery and Accessories,' 'Home and Living,' and 'Gifts.' As a 'peer-to-peer' marketplace, Etsy.com operates as a third party that connects sellers and buyers and provides tools for sellers to create and run digital shop fronts. The websites 2022 'About' page states that Etsy's mission is 'to keep human connection at the heart of commerce' and that it operates as a 'community... powered by people' (Etsy, 2022a). In this respect Etsy's unique selling points are its one-of-a-kind products, which derive from real people and their micro-businesses.

In 2021, the platform contained 4.4 million active online sellers, who use the site to connect their businesses with potential customers (Pasquali, 2022). The platform consists of digital shop fronts, which can be navigated through Etsy.com's internal search engine. A search for 'gold earrings,' for example, yields 1,391,861 results, which can be filtered by various categories such as price, seller location and item material. Clicking on an item leads the customer to its seller's webpage, wherein they can view product reviews, item information and the seller's delivery and returns policy. Etsy.com processes payments for items and provides buyers with purchase protection and mediates any seller/buyer disputes.

As a seller, it is free to join the platform and to set up a virtual shop. The Etsy.com platform mediates the process of creating a shop front. Potential

sellers need only register an Etsy.com account and click on the drop-down menu to 'Sell on Etsy,' to do so. Once the shop is created, sellers can list items, provide item information, and customise their shop.

Once created, sellers have some limited control over the aesthetics of their shop, primarily through its logo, shop banner and personal profile. They can also provide more detailed information regarding their shop, such as business origin stories and information about the design and production of their items. Sellers are also responsible for their own self-branding, item packaging and shipping, although these aspects can also be outsourced.

Although the site is free to join, Etsy.com monetises various stages of the item selling process. Sellers incur a fee of 20 cents per listing. Listings expire after four months, and sellers must also pay to re-list their items. Once an item is sold, Etsy's transaction fee is 6.5% of the price of the item. Moreover, Etsy.com encourages sellers to pay for extra services. For example, through its Etsy Payments tool, which provides buyers with a greater variety of payment options, such as PayPal and Klarna (Etsy, 2022b). This adds an extra 4% to the seller's transaction fee and in the UK, Etsy.com takes another 4% as a payment processing fee. If sellers also use Etsy's packaging services, this forms another fee. Extra charges can also be incurred for off-site and on-site advertising, and the Etsy Subscription Package which provides seller perks such as greater shop customisation. In this manner, Etsy.com generates revenue through a variety of streams. Indeed, in recent years the pursuit of profit has formed a crucial instigating force in the development of Etsy.com.

However, this has not always been the case. The company has formerly expounded an anti-mass market, and pro-small business philosophy (Davis, 2013, Pace et al, 2013). To provide further context for my research I shall now provide a brief overview of Etsy.com's development as a platform and company.

1.1.2. Etsy Inc.

In 2005, Etsy Inc. became the first company to transpose in person craft-markets, to an online context. This was achieved via Etsy.com, a site which described itself as 'an online marketplace for buying & selling all things handmade' (Etsy, 2008 in

Abrahams, 2008). When it was founded in 2005, the Etsy brand was built around the slogan, 'business unusual.'

From its inception, the business has presented itself as offering an 'alternative' model of commerce, one which sprang from the pre-existing DIY/crafter scenes of the late '90s and early '00s (Tiffany, 2019). With the ethos of these alternative subcultural groups, Etsy.com has historically presented itself as offering a more 'ethical' and 'community orientated' platform, which benefits both sellers and buyers alike (Abrahams, 2007). Indeed, in 2010 the former Etsy CEO Rob Kalin stated that via Etsy, it was possible to resist the interference of the economy into communities and instead 'empower communities to influence the behaviour of economies' (Evans, 2010). However, whatever the ideological position of its CEO, Etsy has always operated as a for-profit enterprise. Moreover, it has always been subject to the effects of the primary economy (Wallace, 2014).

Since 2005, Etsy has undergone a great deal of changes. This is both in terms of the structure of the company and the lived experiences for people selling and buying items via its platform (Gelles, 2017). Most particularly, Etsy Inc. became a publicly funded company in 2015, a development which resulted in new expectations regarding the company's spending, growth, and overall profit. This change meant Etsy Inc. incurred pressures from shareholders to increase their levels of growth and profits. Indeed, in 2017 a core investor 'black-and-white Capital LP' publicly shared a letter directed at the Etsy Inc. board members (Agafonow, and Perez, 2021). This letter detailed their unhappiness with the company's 'stagnating' rate of sales, lack of marketing and 'bloated' general and administrative expenses. The impact of this pressure catalysed deep re-structuring of Etsy's aims, towards more traditional aspirations of commerce. This has occurred in several ways.

Key changes have included the loosening of many of Etsy.com's formerly punitively enforced codes of conduct, including how many people can operate a business. Whereas formerly, businesses could not include more than three workers and there was an expectation that sellers made items 'in house', now Etsy allows outsourcing of various tasks via production assistants and partners. Furthermore, Etsy.com now states that handmade is a 'spectrum,' with various

valid interpretations of the term (Etsy 2019). Etsy.com has seen a steep increase of sellers over the last few years from 1.5 million in 2015 to 2.1 million in 2018 (Pasquali, 2021). Although Etsy.com does state that all shops must be transparent regarding their production assistants, some online sources interpret this influx as the result of the ease by which sellers can now cheaply sell mass produced items (Finley, 2015, Hessinger, 2013). Indeed, in 2022 Etsy.com became the subject of a BBC watchdog investigation, due to accusations of misleading consumers about the hand-made status of their products (Steiner, 2022).

In addition to these changes, in 2015 Amazon launched 'Amazon Handmade', placing further pressure on Etsy.com to adopt a more competitive, profit orientated corporate style (Lecher, 2015). This is a pressure which Etsy.com has passed on to its sellers. In 2019, Etsy Inc. CEO Josh Silverman announced that Etsy.com would now prioritise sellers who provide buyers in the US free shipping (Silverman, 2019). This perhaps has a minor impact if one is selling paperware but has a massive impact on those who are selling bulky items such as furniture, or for those shipping to the US from overseas. If buyers do not comply with this heavy 'encouragement', they face being de-prioritised by the website's competitive algorithms.

Etsy's official announcement regarding the implementation of free-shipping states that sellers should calculate the cost of shipping into the overall cost of the item (Tiffany, 2019). This is in addition to any profit made from the item that may form a salary for the seller. In this manner, Etsy can off-load the responsibility for managing free shipping on to its sellers, while covertly stating that inability to provide free shipping is down to mismanagement of the seller's shop, rather than anything to do with Etsy's policies. In this way, it is becoming increasingly unclear how Etsy sellers can achieve the promised goals of self-directed, creatively fulfilling work while also generating enough profit to cover their overheads. I shall now explore how Etsy.com operates as an example of the digital economy and platform capitalism. This will provide further contextual information regarding my participants' experiences of selling via the platform.

1.1.3. Etsy.com and platform capitalism

Although 'the digital economy' is a term often used to describe various forms of online activity, it is not easily pinned to a single definition (Valenduc and Vendramin, 2016). However, it is generally understood as involving the emergence of new forms of digital technology, and a corresponding stratum of workers (Barbrook's, 1997 in Terranova, 2000:7). The digital economy does not currently employ a large percentage of workers - in the US, it employs around 2.5% of the working population (Srnicek, 2017:4). However, small as it may be, the digital economy is widely cited as forming a blueprint for the future of UK working practices (Srnicek, 2017, Valenduc and Vendramin, 2016, Wosskow, 2014).

Furthermore, the digital economy is held by governmental bodies and certain think tanks as an important source of innovation, containing the potential to galvanise the wider economy, and overtake traditional industries (Allen and Berg, 2014, Wosskow, 2014). Indeed, Wosskow's (ibid) governmental report states the government is committed to ensuring the UK leads the way in fostering digital economies and is developing policies to allow for a greater proliferation of online platforms. The digital economy is largely hailed as the saviour of a stagnant economy, and a viable option for a post-recession work force to re-shape work in a manner that is fulfilling and profitable (Srnick, 2017).

Srnick (ibid) states that it is specifically the pervasive power of newly formed online platforms, which are truly shaping the digital economy – and potentially re- structuring our entire economic infrastructure. Although relatively new to the digital table, online platforms are rapidly re-shaping our understanding of both the digital and analogue world. Indeed, platform economies are quickly becoming 'the most dynamic sector of the contemporary economy' and a 'leading light in an otherwise stagnant economic context' (Ibid:5). With such observations in mind, I shall now provide a brief explanation of online platforms' distinguishing features, in relation to Etsy.com.

Online platforms are digital arenas, which utilise forms of communication technology to virtually facilitate online interactions between producers and consumers (Oxera, 2015). They operate as 'matchmakers,' linking 'unlike parties for economic exchange' (Partin, 2020:6). Etsy.com achieves this by operating as an intermediary between potential buyers and shop owners. To

gain the greatest possible profit, platforms are dependent on attracting and retaining vast swathes of users (Srnick, 2017). Users are attracted to popular platforms precisely because of their size – Facebook.com's continuing domination of social media, derives in part from its capacity to facilitate social links across numerous users (ibid). Large-scale digital platforms therefore seek to dominate their respective fields (Moore and Tambini, 2018, Srnick (2017). They are typified by a 'winner takes all' approach to competition, wherein monopolisation is in their 'DNA' (Eisenmann et al. 2011, Srnick, ibid).

Etsy.com is one of the most successful craft-orientated e-commerce websites in the world. In 2020, Etsy Inc. published that it has forty-three million active sellers operating online shops via its site (Etsy Inc., 2020). Within these statistics, the UK has the largest proportion of Etsy sellers outside of the US (Chevalier, 2020). Crucially, Etsy.com's growing monopolisation of the digital craft-selling market is not an arbitrary result of the platform's success. Rather, it is foundational to Etsy's expanding profits and, therefore, crucial to the company's success.

Within this model of monopolisation, how dynamics of power and control occur between the triad of platform worker, platform, and consumer, remains under- investigated (Vallas and Schor, 2020, Schor et al., 2020). In consideration of the growing precaritisation of platform workers, questions regarding such dynamics of power are increasingly pertinent (Duffy, 2018). Much managerial literature presents platforms as neutral intermediaries between consumers and workers, casting workers as fully agentic (Partin, 2020). However, as Cutalo and Kenney (2020) argue, the experiences of platform workers are inextricably bound to the actions to the platform owners, making workers 'platform dependent entrepreneurs.'

Platforms exacerbate this dependency through various 'lock-in' features, which seek to ensure loyalty to their platform (Moore and Tambini, 2018). These include positive features such as technological accessibility and ease of use, but also financial penalties that accompany switching platforms (Feld, 2019). Such penalties include not only the cost of using a new platform but 'the need to learn a new operating system, losing access to friends who remain on the prior platform, the difficulty in transferring any of the user's own content from one platform to another, and other non-monetary hardships

that make switching platforms that much harder' (ibid:22). Indeed Partin (ibid) argues that digital platforms attract and exploit economically vulnerable workers seeking alternative revenue.

Pre-existing experiences of financial precarity can further compound issues of platform dependency, as platform users do not possess the funds necessary to start-over on a new platform. Digital platform's tendencies towards domination of their respective fields further exacerbates this dependency, as alternative options for platform workers are reduced (Cutalo and Kenney 2021). It is therefore possible to see how unequal power distributions between platform workers and platform owners, are 'baked in' to platform eco-systems by 'virtue of the dependencies they instill' (Partin, 2020:8). Such observations point to the necessity for investigation of the lived experiences of workers who operate as such 'platform dependent entrepreneurs.' I will explore the implications of dependency upon digital platforms for online sellers in greater detail throughout my data analysis chapters.

1.1.4. Platform capitalism and women

It is also important to note that craft makers form a highly gendered labour force. The most recent demographic survey produced by Etsy was in 2015 – a survey which revealed that in US, 86% of its current sellers were woman (Etsy, 2015). Wallace (2014) makes the case that Etsy's emphasise on providing an 'alternative economy,' has a gendered dimension. This is predicated firstly on the notion that for women, selling via Etsy forms a flexible and rewarding alternative to restrictive, mainstream modes of work.

Indeed, the 2015 Etsy report explicitly outlines how Etsy 'helps women create businesses that not only enable them to earn income, but also offer flexibility and an outlet for their creative passions' (2015:4). Secondly, she argues that the 'alternative economy' narrative is centred on 'feminine' values. Drawing on the work of Larner and Malloy (2009) Wallace (2014) states that female entrepreneurs are conceptualised as softer, more altruistic, and less 'cutthroat' than their male counterparts. These feminised values are evoked in the 'alternative economy' narrative, which situates women as both better suited to Etsy's community centred approach to commerce, and best served by it.

Etsy.com has published reports and press releases which its empowerment of women, stating that ‘Etsy has enabled many... aspiring female entrepreneurs to start and manage independent, creative businesses’ (Etsy, 2013). The low cost and risks of setting up an online business via Etsy.com, has formed part of its success with women. Women on average have less start-up capital than men when it comes to starting a business and are more likely to be denied a loan (Walker et al, 2008). It is for these reasons that Etsy has constructed a strong 'female-friendly' narrative regarding its platform.

Online platforms often present themselves providing entrepreneurial opportunities to those who have previously been 'locked out' from mainstream entrepreneurialism (Dellot, 2014). This is due to the belief that it contains ‘the potential to turn the UK public into a nation of micro-entrepreneurs – making money through the assets and skills that they already have’ (Wosskow, 2014:4). Reports presented by liberal think-tanks such as the Institute for Public Affairs, present online platforms as a means to make profitable people's 'idle' skills, time and assets (Allen and Berg, 2014). UK governmental reports share this claim, with the prevailing view that platforms can 'unlock' under-utilised pools of talent within the population (Wosskow, 2014).

Digital platforms have also been presented as particularly 'liberating' for women, as they entail 'flexible' labour, which can be performed from home (Gill, 2002:10). There is a growing proportion of women becoming entrepreneurs, particularly because it affords levels of flexibility not found within mainstream work (Walker et al., 2008). The flexibility afforded by the digital economy is largely presented as a common-sense solution to women's need to juggle paid employment with caring duties (Gregg, 2011). The image of a young woman happily balancing a baby on one hip and a laptop on the other, is born from the pervasive view that women are more naturally flexible – innate multi-taskers (Gill 2002). They are therefore well suited to the pursuit of home-based entrepreneurialism, as such work is rooted in essential feminine traits.

The need to examine the experiences of female Etsy.com sellers, is therefore born from the reasons discussed. Digital economies form a quickly emerging source of employment for female workers yet remains an area under

investigated. The implications of their monopolistic tendencies and propensity to create platform dependent entrepreneurs also demand attention. Moreover, a great deal of pre- existing research regarding Etsy.com, particularly research regarding its status as an extension of the makers movement (Norton, 2014) or as a site of resistance to the demands of the mainstream economy, (Althizer, 2017) is now historical.
Contemporary research is required, which addresses the impacts of the current incarnation of Etsy.com and the implications for this change on its service users. This is particularly important for the women who make up the majority of Etsy sellers, as structural, gendered inequalities form a key factor to women's employment experiences.

1.2. Questioning choice

I chose to undertake empirical research for several reasons. The UK has a high rate of small-scale creative enterprises such as those found on Etsy.com, yet there has been little empirical investigation of this trend (Anderson, 2015, The House of Commons, 2016:3). Moreover, within dominant culture, Etsy based work has been uncritically aligned with perceived benefits of entrepreneurialism (Dawkins, 2011, Oakley, 2006). Moreover, there is a particularly pervasive view that freelance, entrepreneurial work is ideally suited to female workers, as it harnesses their 'natural' predilections towards multi-tasking and flexibility (Morini and Fumagelli, 2010). However, it has also been argued that these forms of employment are potentially retrogressive, and exasperating gendered demarcations of power (McRobbie, 2016, Adkins, 1999). It therefore appeared appropriate to undertake new and original research in this area, and to contribute to the growing body of literature which seeks to interrogate the impact of neo-liberalism and post- Fordism on the lives of female workers.

As feminist sociologists Cross (2018:69) has stated, 'precarious and creative labour represents a highly feminised space of work, yet there has been barely any recognition of the different experiences of women.' Moreover, as further expressed by Duffy and Hund, (2015:444), within contemporary academic literature regarding the changing nature of work, there remains, 'a glaring

omission of gender,' particularly regarding 'the similarities between affective labour and traditional women's work.' In this respect, my thesis seeks to answer the call for research regarding the forms of labour required of women engaged in non-traditional modes of work. Particularly, how the forms of work entailed in Etsy selling re-inscribe historical and cultural notions of feminine activity, which naturalises activities undertaken by women as being somehow 'non work.' My ambition then, is to contribute to a wider body of work regarding the relationship between women's emancipation, and the demands of contemporary modes of recognised and unrecognised forms of labour.

1.3. Research aims and questions.

In consideration of my area of research, my research aims are to explore women Etsy sellers' experience of labour. More specifically:

Research Aims:

- To identify and understand the factors which impact on women's experiences of selling via Etsy.com.
- To explore how women Etsy sellers experience labour.
- To explore how selling via Etsy impacts women Etsy seller's wider lives.

Research Questions:

- Under what conditions do women Etsy sellers work?
- What forms of labour do women Etsy sellers engage in?
    - How are these forms of labour experienced?
- Does the status of being a woman impact on female Etsy sellers' experiences? In what way(s)?

This thesis was informed by empirical research, undertaken through a qualitative paradigm. I undertook 21 semi-structured with women employed in Etsy.com based work and the data was analysed via thematic analysis.

1.4. Thesis outline

This thesis is structured via an introductory chapter, a literature chapter, a methods and methodology chapter, four data and analysis chapters, and a concluding chapter. The thesis structure and chapters are outlined below.

Chapter 1. Introduction

The current chapter, *Chapter 1.* introduces the thesis and provides contextual information regarding Etsy.com as a platform and company. It also provides a brief synopsis of each chapter.

Chapter 2. Individualisation, neoliberalism and femininity

This literature review chapter provides contextual information regarding the experiences of contemporary women. This is achieved through critical analysis of the individualisation thesis, which is aligned with wider neoliberal ideals towards flexible, entrepreneurial citizenship. Crucially, I shall further align the ideological tenets of neoliberalism with cultural ideals regarding contemporary femininity and postfeminism. By examining these concepts in relation to the rise in post-Fordist working styles, I shall indicate how women have become situated as 'ideal' neoliberal subjects and workers. These are ideals which collide with pre-existing normative ideals of legible femininity, a collision that women must negotiate individually, in relation to their access to wider forms of capital.

Chapter 3. Methodology and Methods

This chapter describes the processes of empirical research I undertook for this PhD thesis. This includes descriptions of my chosen research methods and justifications for my feminist methodology. It also includes a breakdown of the characteristics of the sample under study, along with a brief description of each of the interviewees. I also provide fieldwork reflections, which centre on issues of reciprocity, friendship, and participant/researcher hierarchies.

Chapter 4. 'What does "better" even mean?'

Chapters four through six present the findings of the research. I intersperse the narratives of my participants with comparators from the literature described in previous chapters. This data chapter introduces my participants and outlines my participant subcategories. It further indicates how women's prior employment experiences, family backgrounds and life course positions, inform their views of Etsy-based success.

Chapter 5. Authenticity, relationality, and visibility

This chapter engages with expectations of authentic self-presentation, genuine relationship buildings and visibility, demanded of female Etsy sellers. Moreover, it draws out the contradictory demands placed on women, to operate as both normatively feminine and entrepreneurial subjects. Crucially it outlines how individual women meet such demands, in relation to their access to forms of cultural and economic capital.

Chapter 6. 'All your eggs in one basket'

The final data chapter addresses women Etsy sellers' experiences in reference to the operating features of the Etsy.com platform and the wider aims of the Etsy Inc. company. It links these features to issues of risk and precarity associated with Etsy-based selling and highlights the necessary forms of capital required to navigate these risks.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

This provides an overview of the thesis data chapters. It outlines the key arguments and supporting illustrations that I have made throughout the thesis. By doing so, it demonstrates the contribution to knowledge that this thesis has made and indicates areas for future research.

Chapter 2. Individualisation, neoliberalism, and femininity

In this chapter, I will explore women's experiences as freely acting agents and address the argument that women's lives are no longer impacted by former constraints of class and patriarchy (Gill and Scharff, 2011). To achieve this aim, the chapter is divided into two sections. I firstly will address the individualisation thesis and its impact on sociological thought, as presented in the works of Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1992, 2002) Giddens (1991,1999) and Bauman (2001, 2012). This thesis crucially argues that within the late modern era, agency has become

'freed or unleashed from structure' (Adkins, 2003:22). Individuals are imagined as disembedded from the stratifying effects of former social categories, forced instead to become their own micro-social structures. There are valid critiques to be made of the thesis, particularly regarding the empirical existence of citizens unbound from former social categories of class and gender. This appears particularly pertinent in the context of our current epoch of 'disaster neoliberalism,' typified by ecological disasters, vast social inequalities and economic recessions (Davidson, 2016). However, I will argue that individualisation continues to form a relevant framework towards understanding women's lives. This is because the expectations of individualisation are deeply connected to the ideological tenets of neoliberalism. Through reference to Skeggs (2003) and Lazzarato (2009) I will make the argument that individualisation has proliferated as a regulatory neoliberal ideal, via governmental action such as welfare and family policies. In this respect, I argue that individualisation theory is not apolitical but 'neoliberalism in action' (Lazzarato, 2009).

The second section of this chapter continues the investigation of women's encounters with structure and agency through addressing the concept of neoliberalism. Taking inspiration from Davidson (2016) Davies, (2014), Harvey (2005) and Peck and Tickall (2007) I, therefore, cement my analysis in critical analysis of three phases of neoliberalism. In doing so, I shall indicate how the state has formed the essential force behind the continued implementation of neoliberalism. In exploration of neoliberal subjectivities, I will demonstrate that women have become ideal 'ideal' subjects of neoliberalism. As a political and economic project, neoliberalism has sought to shape women as both entrepreneurial and legibly feminine subjects. Within the lived realities of individualisation, this is an experience that must be navigated by individual women, in reference to the wider structuring effect of class.

2.1. Individualisation

> *The most commonly encountered meaning sees individualization as an increased or great autonomy of the individual, resulting in (very) weak relationships between the individual's tastes, convictions and practices on*

> *the one hand, his collective identifiers on the other. Phrased differently: the tastes, convictions, and practices of individuals are idiosyncratic, and can no longer, to any significant extent, be predicted on the basis of the standard sociological variables (such as class, level of education, gender.* (Elchardus, 2009:148)

In consideration of the lives of female Etsy sellers, questions emerge regarding the degrees of agency and control women experience in contemporary social life. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) posit that under contemporary global capitalism, citizens must increasingly operate as atomised individuals. Autonomy, and autonomous decision-making, form the crux of modern life, as the former structures of family, community and shared backgrounds have been 'dissolved in an acid bath of competition' (ibid:35). Within this discourse, they argue, social ties are now a matter of 'choice,' dependent on individual reflexivity. With a degree of optimism, they argue that citizens no longer follow pre-determined social scripts but can instead create their own 'Do It Yourself' biographies.

Within this view of late modernity, a new value is placed on the ambitions of individualism, wherein 'living for oneself' is linked to greater personal freedoms and an invigorated democracy. In comparison, old structures of class, gender, and race limp on, but in 'zombified' forms, no longer possessing their former impact (ibid: 214). Late modernity is therefore further understood as subject to processes of 'de-traditionalisation,' wherein individuals have become disembedded from traditional institutions. Rather, it is the task of individuals to construct and manage their own self-identities.

Beck, (2002, 2007,) further argues that collective human action can now be re-imagined along new lines of reflexive choice-making. Within the landscape of late modernity, new spaces have emerged for individuals to choose how they relate with each other (ibid). Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) do somewhat acknowledge that experiences of 'choice biographies,' are not entirely self-determined. Rather, they are dependent on individual's access to 'human rights, education and the welfare state' (ibid:47).

With reference to the continuing disassembly of the welfare state, admission is made that not all citizens possess access to the same freely made choices.

Indeed, they argue that individualisation is not simply a matter of freely chosen individuality, but rather, a condemnation placed upon us via 'institutional demand' (ibid:4). Institutions, such as those of the welfare state, have contributed to processes of individualisation, by primarily interacting with citizens as individuals.

However, such experiences are not stratified along lines of class. Rather, Beck argues that a subject's reflexive capacities are structured by 'phases' of their life (1997 in Atkinson, 2007:354). Life positions are not inherited, as he perceives in the former structures of class. During one person's life, they may experience various employment situations, income etc. Therefore, an individual's life situation cannot be viewed as static, bound to a single class. They are instead, transitory, changeable, and unstable. In this manner, Beck (2002, 2007) attempts to acknowledge differences of life experience, without the need for class.

Perceptions of risk form another key thread to this analysis. Giddens (1999) argues that harm and danger have always formed a fundamental aspect of human experience, yet risk and risk management are perceptibly modern concepts. Importantly, our understandings of risk centre on modern understandings of the future, particularly that future dangers can be pre-empted and therefore managed.

The view that we can engage in forms of risk management makes sense, only if viewed in relationship to Beck's conception of agentic individuals. As Elliot (2002: 298) expresses, 'if risks are an attempt to make the incalculable calculable, then risk-monitoring presupposes agency, choice, calculation and responsibility.' The implication further being that life failures are the consequences of an individual's poor risk-management, rather than wider, structural failings or indeed, random matters of fate. This thread will be reviewed in greater detail, later in this chapter.

The forces of the labour market play a further role in the individualisation process. These now provide social and geographical mobility that propels individuals away from traditional social ties, towards a 'personal destiny' (Beck and Beck- Gernsheim, 2002:56). The status of contemporary women is favoured by the processes of individualisation, as women are supposedly now freed from the constraints of family and domestic life. Entry into the paid workforce is

particularly lauded as the galvanising force away from the 'status fate' of 'compulsory housework' (ibid:213). As a zombie concept, family and therein, reproductive labour, is believed to no longer control the fates of women.

Indeed, the demands of contemporary labour 'implies a society without families and children,' as adults must function as unhindered, mobile, and perpetually work-ready individuals (Beck, 1992:116). This is viewed with buoyancy, as Beck (ibid) argues that men and women can now choose their destinies, beyond the former structures of masculinity and femininity (Banks and Milestone, 2011). I shall argue the legitimacy of such arguments in due course.

Notions of choice find further purchase in Giddens work (1991). Similarly, to Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1992), Giddens (ibid) argues that a key defining feature of late modernity is the necessity for individuals to reflexively construct their own life biographies (ibid:14). Forces of globalisation have unbound individuals from traditional structures and therefore, individuals must instead engage in continual day-to-day decisions regarding how to live (ibid). Moreover, both theorists argue that we increasingly share potential risks, due to the impacts of globalisation. Large scale risks, such as nuclear war and climate change, threaten all individuals in a near unilateral manner (Beck, 2013, Giddens, 1999).

The effects of this have resulted in an increased homogenisation of perceived risks, increasingly undifferentiated across lines of class, gender, etc. This has further eroded traditional social structures, indeed, Beck states that such events 'fall outside of this frame of reference... in principle and as a result place it in question' (2013:64). Giddens (1991) further states that 'high modernity' is typified by a necessary trust in the expertise of others, as knowledge has become increasingly specialised. Giddens (ibid) therefore presents the 'high modern' individual as sifting through a plethora of information, producing constant forms of risk assessment and management (ibid:5). Such forms of risk awareness, contribute to the construction of the high-modern self, as:

> *The more tradition loses its hold, and the more daily life is reconstituted in terms of the dialectical interplay of the local and the global, the more individuals are forced to negotiate lifestyle choices among a diversity of*

options. (ibid)

In this manner, individuals experience the self as an ongoing project, wherein 'we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (ibid:75). Crucially then for Giddens, (1991) the processes of individualisation are generated via processes of de- traditionalization, which are in turn born from the effects of globalisation (Legget, 2005). In Giddens (1991) view, such events have created new opportunities for citizens to unbound themselves from traditional social structures, and to give meaning to their own lives.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002, 2007) and Giddens' (1991) work regarding individualisation share several key features. Notably, both theorists centre their ideas on perceived forces of de-traditionalisation, which have resulted in an untethering of individuals from traditional social structures. Both link the results of this to an increased necessity for individuals to make reflexive choices regarding their life trajectories.

Beck and Beck and Gernsheim place particular significance on the improved status of women, and Giddens (1991), also possesses an optimistic view of the outcomes of individualisation. Most particularly, his work aligns reflexivity with improvements in the conditions of contemporary life, regardless of one's economic position or social status (Kolarz, 2011).

Bauman (2001, 2012) is the final scholar of individualisation whose work I shall address. Similarly, to Beck and Giddens, Bauman identifies processes of de-traditionalisation as central to the era of late modernity, or 'liquid modernity' (2012). Further drawing from Beck, he argues that individuals are now 'disembedded' from former structures, and compelled towards individual choice- making (Rasbourg, 2019:77). Beck does concede to the bounded qualities of individual choice-making, particular in reference to the rolling back of the welfare state. However, Bauman's account is more critical of these processes. This is discernible in the following quote, wherein he (2007:124) describes individualisation as:

> *Transforming human 'identity' from a 'given' into a 'task' and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task. In other words, it consists in the establishment of a de jure autonomy (whether or not the de facto autonomy has been established*).

To rephrase, he argues that the loss of a pre-given fate, as witnessed in the dissolvement of traditional structures, does not in itself provide individual's greater power over their lives. Rather, we are instead bound by the necessity to form, and re-form, individual alternatives, in an increasingly unstable landscape of social identities.

This landscape has been further shaped by the changing relationship between capital and labour within post-Fordist capitalism[1] (Bauman, 2007). Unlike the Fordist era, employers no longer depend upon a consistent workforce, resulting in a proliferation of short-term, casualised, 'flexible' forms of employment. For workers, this has catalysed increased sensations of uncertainty, precarity and individualised suffering (ibid:24). Individuals are perpetual 'travellers,' attempting to traverse pathways that may appear or disappear at any moment, searching unceasingly for points of 're-embeddedness' (ibid). As he (ibid:50) describes it, 'individualization brings to an ever-growing number of men and woman an unprecedented freedom to experiment – but it also brings an unprecedented task of coping with its consequences.' Change and instability have therefore become standard conditions of liquid modernity.

Refuting Beck and Giddens' arguments that modernity universalises experiences, Bauman, therefore, acknowledges social stratification within the wider thesis of individualisation (Dawson, 2013:24). Indeed, in the wider task of constructing one's identity, Bauman argues that some individuals are better equipped to deal with the task than others, dependent on their possession of 'material and mental' resources (ibid:23). Within the landscape of liquid modernity such resources are subject to rapid obsoletion, and quickly slip through our fingers (ibid). In this manner, Bauman's account provides greater space for critical assessment of the impacts of liquid modernity and individualisation than found in the work of Beck, and most particularly Giddens. However, there are wider appraisals regarding interactions of gender and power embedded within the individualisation thesis, that I shall make.

2.1.2. Feminist appraisals of individualisation

I have thus far provided an overview of some of the key arguments which make

up the individualisation thesis, as pertains to my own research. In this section, I will provide a critical, feminist response to its key tenets. In doing so, I will indicate the limitations this thesis has in capturing women's historical and contemporary encounters with structural forms of power.

Mulinari and Sandell (2009) have critiqued the normative, 'common-sense' qualities of Beck's individualisation thesis, in relation to gender, class and labour. They refute his argument that prior to the late modern era, women were categorically resigned to the private and domestic realm. They highlight the middle-class, patriarchal assumptions that inform this argument, which fail to recognise the highly stratified historical experiences of women.

The assumption that women spent the 18th and 19th century as cloistered 'angels of the home,' rather than engaged in forms of reproductive and productive labour, is rooted in patriarchal ideology. Middle-class homes of this era were dependent on the paid labour of working-class female servants. Women's engagement in paid labour is not a new experience, but rather, a classed one. Conversely, middle-class femininity has been constructed around essentialist notions of women's 'natural' capabilities towards child-rearing and homemaking. A lack of acknowledgement of these differences in experiences further reveals the implicit assumptions that have informed the construction of the individualisation thesis.

Furthermore, the delineation of gendered spheres, has produced the cultural view that men undertake legitimate modes of work in the public realm. Within this paradigm, productive and reproductive labour undertaken by women has been culturally devalued. Feminist scholars have fought to show the interdependency of the economic and domestic spheres, and to legitimise the various forms of unrecognised labour performed by women (Davidoff and Hall, 2019, Flanders, 2014, Hareven, 1991).

Indeed, such scholarly works are not just historical, contemporary iterations can be seen in literature about global care chains (Hochschild, 2014). Therein, the belief that women's entry into paid work can forms a panacea for gender inequality, is dislocated from feminist scholarship. Moreover, the alignment of paid work and increased reflexivity lacks persuasiveness when separated from the structuring forces of class. In this manner, women's experiences must be

understood as structured across intersecting lines of power, which include gender and class.

In consideration of these critiques, the individualisation thesis presents a misguided appraisal of women's historical experiences, particularly regarding matters of class and labour. This is a flaw which destabilises the individualisation thesis and compromises its use-value in the examination of female Etsy seller's experiences. However, Adkins (1995,1999) and Banks and Milestone (2010) work, provides a means to view the individualisation thesis in a manner that does not disavow the impacting effect of pre-modern social structures.

2.1.3. Detraditionalisation or retraditionalisation?

Adkins (1995, 1999) and Banks and Milestone (2010) are further concerned with providing a feminist interrogation of the individualisation thesis. Their work provides a means to analyse the usefulness of Banks and Giddens theory of 'de-traditionalisation,' particularly in reference to the 'zombie categories' of gender and class. Banks and Milestone's (2010) empirical research also offers insight into the empirical validity of the individualisation thesis, as it pertains to gendered experiences. Crucially, Adkins (1999) reveals that experiences of tradition and what is understood as traditional are not static, nor relegated to the recesses of the past.

As outlined, Beck and Giddens have argued that late modernity has freed women from the ties of traditional domestic femininity. Formal employment via the public sphere is the source of women's emancipation. Through empirical research regarding women and 'new media' work, Banks and Milestone (2010) iterate that creative and cultural industries are particularly lauded as 'egalitarian'. Emerging spheres of labour such as media marketing appear to fulfil Becks and Beck-Gernsheim's stipulations for emancipatory forms of work and for forming reflexive workers. Workers in such fields are invariably engaged in forms of flexible, reflexive self-led 'portfolio work,' unbound from a single employer or workplace. It, therefore, appears, that they are enabled to engage in reflexive, self-led modes of labour.

However, Banks and Milestone's (2010) research indicates that within this

context, female workers are not simply ‘freed’ from traditional expectations of gender. Conversely, it is the supposed emancipatory qualities associated with such forms of work, which form gendered barriers for women. I have established via the work of Mulinari and Sandell (2009) that the economic and domestic spheres have always interacted, via women's paid and unpaid labour.

The large-scale entry of women into paid labour, has not eliminated women’s reproductive and domestic labour. Indeed, the necessity for women to engage in traditional forms of femininised labour, impacts the flexibility and freedom of female workers. The family, and its dependency on traditional expectations of femininity, continue to shape women’s life experiences. The retreat of the state has contributed further to women’s burdens of domestic, reproductive, and paid labour, a point outlined in greater depth later in this chapter. Women then, cannot be viewed as freely unbounded from patriarchal structures of power, as suggested within the individualisation thesis; even as paid work has become the social norm. Moreover, their research indicates the value of empirical investigation, regarding the lived realities of the individualisation thesis and worker reflexivity[1].

Adkins (1999) and McRobbie (2016) counter that modern work is contributing to a form of 're-traditionalisation' of patriarchal power structures, which disallows many women from achieving the forms of success promised through post-Fordist, neo- liberal capitalism. Indeed, as Adkins (1999, 2003, 2008), McRobbie (2016), and Harris (2004) further stipulate, the 'zombie' categories of class, gender and race continue to deeply shape our encounters with contemporary work. As Adkins (1999, 2003, 2008) presents, it is possible that the 'individualising' forces of contemporary society are further entrenching pre-modern dynamics of societal power.

The works of Banks and Milestone (2010) and of Adkins (1999, 2003) and Adkins and Jokinen (2008) provide a critical lens to view the interactions of pre-modern and modern social categories. Modernity does not simply destroy categories of the past, and such categories in turn, do not simply threaten structures of modernity. Rather, pre-modern categories and structures of modernity exist in a dynamic relationship, their interactions (re)produce the social landscape of contemporary life (ibid).

As Banks and Milestone (2010:74) further explain, ‘tradition... does not die in

individualized modernity but regroups, reconvenes, and is reapplied.' It is therefore necessary to examine how tradition continues to interact with and structure, via contemporary experiences of Beck's 'zombie categories.' Through doing so, a more robust account of women's encounters with structure and agency can be achieved.

2.1.4. Individualisation as 'neoliberalism in action'

Skegg's (2004) scholarship regarding class, identity and culture, provides further political interrogation of the individualisation thesis and an alternative theoretical framework. She (ibid) emphasises the homogenising effect of the individualisation thesis, which she perceives as favouring a male, middle-class perspective.

Crucially, she rebuts the claim that individuals have become disembedded from former social structures of class and gender. Giddens and Beck's (1992) assume the creation of life biographies to be a neutral process, undertaken by individuals outside of the effects of social structures. Indeed, the reflexive subject can select how to engage with such structures, in a manner which suggests a society of agentic individuals. Skeggs (2004) utilises the work of Savage (2000), to show that the construction of selfhood, is necessarily undertaken in relation to others.

Within this process, ascertainment of potential risks requires subjects to further consider their situation in relation to others, and the ability to interpret and react to risks requires access to social resources. Access to such resources is dependent on one's pre-existing capital, particularly cultural capital (Dawson, 2014). The construction of individual life biographies is therefore stratified, as individualisation is a 'process of positioning, cultural differentiation, and resource access, that *by necessity involves the making of social distinction'* (Skeggs, 2004:52-53). Acknowledgement of these points, complicates Beck and Beck-Gernsheim's (2002) claim that the social categories of class and gender, are now 'zombified.' Moreover, she (2004) argues that individuals are not intrinsically classed, sexed and racialised; these are processes which occur *relationally* through social structures of power.

Levelling a further attack, she states the individualisation thesis serves the

class interests of those who have perpetuated it. The capacity to freely engender one's life biography is not neutral; it requires possession of pre-existing structural advantages. In the context of neoliberal capitalism, we must question who can become the reflexive, self-reliant individuals of Beck and Giddens theorising. Indeed, Lazaratto (2009) and Skeggs (2004) both characterise the individualisation thesis as essentially serving a wider neoliberal agenda.

As a political and economic ideology and mode of governance, neoliberalism has unleashed the logic of free-market competition across all spheres of life (Davies, 2014). In doing so, it compels citizens and institutions to operate as competitive, individualised entrepreneurs. However, this is regardless of the social and economic barriers that structure citizens' lived realities, such as class and gender. Indeed, Beck's (1992, 2002) argument that we now all operate as freely acting, reflexive agents echo such neoliberal rhetoric. Viewed in relationship to Giddens's influence on the neoliberal policies of the 1994 Labour party, this critique has further legitimacy.

Atkinson (2007, 2010), Brannen and Nielsen (2005), Savage (2010) and Skeggs (2004), further argue that individualisation theory lacks empirical basis. Atkinson (2007:355) argues that Beck's work is 'data free,' empirically devoid and without any firm mooring in the social world.' Brannen and Nielsen (2005) present a similar critique, stating that the individualisation thesis is too broad, grand, and non-specific to be useful to empirical researchers. In her overview of empirical research regarding the tenets of individualisation, Middlemiss (2014) argues that there is a key differentiation between individualisation as a cultural idea and as a lived reality.

Crucially, our culture proliferates the expectation that individuals *should* act reflexively, exerting autonomous decision making through consumerist choice. In this regard, individualisation can acts as a regulatory ideal, embedded in political rhetoric and legislation. For example, policies which relate to families appeal to citizens primarily as individuals and as individual workers (Middlemiss, 2014). This in turn, directs citizens to act primarily as individuals disembedded from wider kin networks, communities or family ties and obligations. Therein, individualised citizens who perceive the world and their actions through the lens of self-responsibility and individualism, are

interpellated.

Crucially, through neoliberal government legislation citizens are disciplined towards modes of self-management and self-responsibility. However, within this experience, the social categories of class, gender, etc continue to inform individual's choices. As I will address in more detail further in this chapter, such policies structure the choices available to citizens, who must make bounded decisions informed by expectations of individualisation. As Dawson (2012:313) states 'the theory of embedded individualization suggests that late modern societies are categorized by increased individual responsibility... yet the opportunity to exercise this is not universally available.' This forms the crux of such empirical interrogations of the individualisation thesis. As an ethic, it has become a normative ideal of contemporary life. Yet, the way individuals can engage with this thesis, and how it materially informs their lives, is stratified and heterogenous.

As Lazarrato (2009) further argues, through neoliberal social policies the state has enacted a strategy of individualisation. This has been enacted to engender a social landscape where individuals, rather than the state, must shoulder risks. Therein, individualisation can be viewed as a neoliberal ideal, constructed and enforced via mechanisms of the state.

In consideration of these critiques, neoliberalism emerges not as a backdrop to individualisation, but as an alternative paradigm through which to understand gendered experiences of agency. I will now explore neoliberalism as a mode of state enforced governance and as a structuring force in the construction of individual subjectivity. Through doing so, I will further investigate the crucial informing social force which contribute to women's capacities to act as freely acting, emancipated agents.

2.2. The crisis of Fordism

Harvey, (2005) argues that UK neoliberalism was born in response to rapid, large scale economic, social and cultural shifts, witnessed throughout the 1960's and 70's. Until the late 1960's, Fordist methods of accumulation informed the structure of Western economies. This was a model bolstered by Keynesian welfare policies and the Bretton Woods system. Fordism formed a

crucial aspect to the development of industrial capitalism. From the 1920's onwards, labour configurations and modes of productions began to prioritise intensive rather than extensive accumulation (Heffernen, 2000:25). Although wage labour was not new, this era of intensive accumulation centred on a relative rather than absolute increases of surplus value (ibid). Rather than utilising antagonistic approaches to increase surplus value or depending on the presence of a reserve army of workers, employers instead focused on increasing worker productivity. As Jessop (1992:136) describes:

> *Fordism involves a virtuous circle of growth based on mass production, rising productivity based on economies of scale, rising incomes linked to productivity, increased mass demand due to rising wages, increased profits based on full utilisation of capacity, and increased investment in improved mass production equipment and techniques.*

Therein, Fordism refers to the to the organisation of labour found within Henry Ford's car manufacturing factories. In the pursuit of higher degrees of productivity, Fordist labour regimes were highly organised, systematic, and geared to produce standardised, mass-produced products (Jessop, 1992). This model of wage labour required a stable workforce 'cemented' in factories and disciplined by employers (Bauman 2001:21). The ideal Fordist worker was engaged in regulated and standardised modes of labour, for a set wage.

Within this dynamic, the worker sold his labour in exchange for wage compensation and access to commercial commodities, required to participate in an increasingly commodified society. Further rewards included potential for improved social status and social advancement (Jessop, 1992). Weeks (2011) identifies the links between Fordism and the Weberian protestant work ethic. In previous historical epochs, the dominant Protestant narratives positioned labour as moral duty, which promised rewards in the next life. More widely, the Fordist eras emphasise upon mass production informed the proliferation of mass consumption of goods. For citizens to engage in such necessary consumptive practices, wages needed to remain stable. This was a pursuit further supported through the rise of the Keynesian welfare state. Therein, through Fordist working practices and subsequent material and promised rewards, the bourgeois disciplined the working class towards compliant labour relations.

However, the 1970's was typified by financial downturns and economic crises (Heffernan, 2000, Jessop, 1992, Vidal, 2018). This was an era where economic growth stalled, real wages fell, and mass unemployment appeared inevitable (Heffernan, 2000). Tauss (2012) indicates a lack of consensus regarding the catalyst for such crises, however they are attributed in part to the global growth of developed economies and intensified global market competition. This occurred in tandem with societal tensions regarding Fordist working styles, including workers and union resistance to expanding Taylorist factory production (Jessop, 1992).

Within the prior epoch of Fordist labour styles, renumerated labour was performed chiefly within bound geographical spaces – such as factories. However, in a bid to curtail the power of labour unions, capital owners moved towards casualisation and dispersed production to non-unionised locations (Ross, 2012). Therein, Hardt and Negri (2000) argue that within post-Fordism, labour is no longer contained within a specific sphere but is now 'disseminated across society as a whole' (in Gill and Pratt, 2008:6). I shall explore the repercussions of this further in this chapter.

Hickson (2010) argues that such changes fostered fearfulness regarding economic insecurity and wage stagnation. Alongside wider shifts towards cultural liberalism, a backlash occurred against the perceived moral degradation of UK civil life, and a loss of traditional societal structures. As Tauss (2012:60) argues, 'the overall context for the ascendency of neoliberalism was provided by the crisis of Fordism.' It is through such wider economic and societal crises, that neoliberalism emerged as the dominant political and economic paradigm.

2.3. Combative neoliberalism: The first phase

Within the context of a growing neo-Conservative political outlook, PM Margaret Thatcher, and her US counterpart President Ronald Reagan, 'plucked from the shadows of relative obscurity a particular doctrine that went under the name of "neoliberalism" and transformed it into the central guiding principle of economic thought and management' (Harvey, 2005:2). Thatcher's adoption of this obscure doctrine, centred in part on the 'Chicago School,' most

particularly, the ideas of liberal economist Fredrich von Hayek.

Hayek (1976) aligned the rise in European fascism and the economic stagnation of Keynesianism, with the 'irrational,' subjective, plurality of modern politics. In his view, the free market operates as a self-regulating, politically neutral force steered only by the 'natural' energy of competition (Davies, 2014). Hayek proposed that the free market, as an 'impersonal and anonymous mechanism' offered an alternative means to organise society, outside of the corruptibility of human politics (Hoerber, 2019:192). Indeed, he argued that state intervention via politics violated the natural freedoms of individuals, causing more social evils than remedying them (ibid).

Translated into Thatcherite discourse, the Conservative government purported;

> *State intervention does not work, alternatives to the market are flawed, government failure is more common than market failure, and individual citizens' rights are... violated by anything other than the most minimal of forms of state intervention* (Hay and Farral, 2014:7).

Therefore, the cure to Britain's perceived decline, was to roll back the interfering powers of the state and reinvigorate citizens towards self-sufficiency (Hickson, 2010:139). Thatcher's government hailed this approach as the 'only way to "modernise" the economy, state, and civil society' (Jessop, 2003:139). As Harvey (2005) argues, deployment of this doctrine required the 'constructed consent' of a growing middle-class populace (Harvey, 2005:48). To achieve this task, Thatcher utilised a rhetoric of returning to 'Victorian' conservative values of self-sufficiency and self-responsibility, newly re-framed as entrepreneurial individualism. Within this discourse, the welfare state was demonised as the harbinger of moral decline and free-market economics hailed as its saviour (Hickson, 2010:139). Thatcherite neoliberalism therefore saw the systematic deconstruction of the Keynesian welfare state.

Jessop (1992, 2000) has further argued that the radical Thatcherite project of reordering the state prepared the UK economy for post-Fordism. Crucially, forms of state intervention which were normalised throughout 50's and 60's Keynesianism, were reduced. Indeed, post-Fordism promised an alternative route towards economic growth and accumulation (Stoker, 1989). Rather than depending on the in-house labour of workers mass producing commodities, the

economy became ‘service-based with buyer-driven, internationalized commodity chains, intensified, wage-driven competition... and a neoliberal state’ (Vidal, 2013:458). This was achieved through several strategies.

Evocation of neoconservative ideals were a key thread to the neoliberal strategy. Governmental rhetoric evoked notions of 'traditional’ family structures, and ‘emphasis was laid... on the family as the central institution in an individualistic and competitive society' (Dabrowski, 2020a:34). The role of women formed a crucial thread to the evocation of the traditional I.e., patriarchal family. A common-sense view of womanhood was reinvigorated, positioning individual female activity as the natural answer to social welfare. Thatcher’s government therefore cast its austerity measures as reinstating a natural social order, which included the roles of men and women.

However, Evans (2016) establishes that women’s roles within Thatcherite neoliberal discourse was not a mere reinvigoration of ‘angels in the home.’ Specific to this era, women were increasingly evoked as both emancipated career women and thrifty housewives. Crucially, both constructions of femininity centred on the necessity for women to be self-responsible and agentic, in a manner aligned with traditional femininity (ibid). In this manner, neo-conservative values of traditional womanhood and femininity, convened with neoliberal imaginings of independent, entrepreneurial citizenship. However, how to reconcile such diverging expectations, was left to individual women to manage.

Thatcherite policies and law demonstrate the neoliberal project towards constructing post-Fordist, entrepreneurial citizens. State policies regarding housing for families favoured traditional two-parent households over single parents. The Child Support Act and the Children Act were both asserted to reduce public expenditures on welfare provisions and to encourage men to act as traditional breadwinners (Pascall, 1997). Women were encouraged towards employment, but state nursery provisions were reduced, and the government resisted calls to solidify the rights of working parents in law (ibid). In this manner, Thatcherite policies forced citizens to become entrepreneurial and self-sufficient, without the support of the state.

However, in tandem to policies and laws aimed at re-asserting the primacy of traditional family structures and gender roles, Thatcherite economic policies

resulted in job losses, economic precarity, and housing insecurity for many citizens – acts which destabilised the security of traditional family structures (ibid). As Pascall (ibid:295) states, 'the family agenda has been secondary to the market agenda and where the two have been in conflict the family has been sacrificed.' Indeed, this era signaled the decline in dependable wages and long-term employment by single employers, which had typified Fordist labour relations. Rather, it signaled an era of new models of accumulation based on financialisation, debt and flexible wage determination (Bengtsson and Ryner, 2014). As explored further in this chapter, these are modes of neoliberal governance and post-Fordist labour relations which have since proliferated.

Within a culture of intensifying individualism, social 'failures' were constructed as personal, rather than structural. Employment policies of the era further enforced such perspectives. Jessop (2000) identifies the Thatcherite movement away from a Keynesian welfare state, towards a Schumpeterian workfare state. Within this, the state uses economic policies and legislation to primarily promote competitiveness and innovation, thus becoming 'Schumpterian'. Whilst the Keynesian welfare state was occupied with citizenship, the Thatcherite workfare state re-shaped welfare services to prioritise the needs of businesses above individuals (ibid). Citizens were increasingly individualised and 'expected to serve as partners in the innovative, knowledge-driven, entrepreneurial, flexible economy and its accompanying self-reliant, autonomous, empowered workfare regime' (ibid:10).Workfare legislation of the time illustrate these ambitions.

The Social Security Act, 1989 sought to 'force' non-compliant unemployed citizens towards work, regardless of the quality of employment offered. The 1981 'Enterprise Allowance Scheme' encouraged unemployed citizens toward self-employment. This was achieved via state provision of supplementary welfare payments and a weekly £40 subsidy for the first year of business ownership (Rieger, 2021:117). The government framed this scheme as reducing the need for 'hand-outs' from the state and as motivating individuals towards self-sufficiency and entrepreneurship. This approach to welfare was further legitimised by the narrative that newly acquired wealth would supposedly 'trickle down' to poorer members of society (Peck and Tickall,

2007:28).

However, as Rieger notes, (2021:120) rather than becoming self-empowered entrepreneurs, 'the majority of those out of work, were turned into disempowered market participants.' Standing (2011) further identifies this period as the birth of the contemporary 'precariat' class, wherein citizens were funneled towards increasingly unstable, informal modes of precarious employment.

Within Thatcherite discourse, entrepreneurial citizens who engaged in financial risk-taking would be rewarded by increased wealth, whereas the 'work-shy' would be disciplined into self-sufficiency (Hickson, 2010). In the context of a wider crises of Fordism, neoliberal governance sought to discipline citizens into becoming a flexible, self-sufficient workforce able to compete in a global market. This therein required a 'flexible' labour market, wherein employers would be able to exert greater control over the employer/employee relationship. For example, by granting employers the power to regulate employment levels, adjust wages and reduce job security (Standing, 2011:6).

Thatcher's bid towards labour market flexibility demanded the curtailing of organised labour movements and trade unions, which was achieved via various political and judicial strategies (Peck and Tickell, 2006). This forced wages to stagnate and decline and encouraged new levels of working-class debt (Davidson, 2016). The safety net provided to the most vulnerable via the institutions of the welfare state was decimated. Unemployment was utilised as a disciplining force, to foster fearfulness regarding the consequences of labour action (Davidson et al., 2016).

Rather than emancipatory, for many citizens Thatcher's neoliberal agenda was deeply punitive. It targeted the most vulnerable, and 'heaped the burden of economic adjustment on the working class, the unwaged (and) the social state' (Peck and Tickall, 2007:30). In this manner, the Conservative government utilised punitive methods of the state to enforce the conditions of neoliberal society.

The outcome of the Conservative mission to mould a neoliberal economy and society has been vast inequality between the UK's richest and poorest

citizens. Indeed, under the Conservative government the number of citizens living in poverty increased from 5 million in 1979, to 14.1 million in 1992 (Evans, 2013:156). Growth in inequalities was purported to be a 'good thing,' indicative of a return to the natural order of social life, produced via the neutrality of the free market (Hickson, 2009).

Moreover, although Thatcherite discourse asserted the need to 'roll back' the frontiers of the state, it was the state that enforced the neoliberal economic and social policies. Far from allowing the 'natural' energies of the market to lead human progress, neoliberalism is, and always has been, dependent on the sovereign power of the state to legitimise and enact its policies (Davies, 2014).The state did not passively de-regulate the market, but rather, actively 're-regulated' it, via the action of making and enforcing political policies and laws, as discussed.

In this respect, it is possible to see why Davies (2017) and Davidson (2016) have described Thatcherite neoliberal strategies as 'combative neoliberalism' and 'vanguard neoliberalism'. Thatcher's neoliberal moulding of UK society required active, direct, and combative state action. It spearheaded a project of reforming institutions and individuals, as competitive, entrepreneurial, and individualised.

The state achieved this via the breaking of labour unions, evocation of traditionalist, patriarchal values, and re-structuring of the welfare state. The role of women was crucial to this agenda, as they evoked traditional notions of femininity alongside neoliberal imaginings of self-sufficient citizens. This further entrenched women's experiences of social and economic inequalities.

2.4. Social neoliberalism: The second phase

The second phase of neoliberalism within the UK occurred under the New Labour 1997 government, led by Tony Blair. Indeed, Thatcher has stated her 'most important legacy was Blair' (Jessop, 2007:288). The New Labour governmental policies fundamentally transformed the UK's economic, political, and social spheres. Influenced by economist and individualisation theorist Anthony Giddens, New Labour strove to form a 'third way,' 'between traditional social democracy and neoliberalism' (Giddens, 1998 in Davidson, 2016:262). As outlined, Beck and Giddens had argued that individuals were no

longer embedded in former structures of class, instead becoming reflexive agents of choice. Influenced by such ideas, New Labour sort to disentangle itself from traditionally left-wing conceptions of class antagonism. They instead framed the relationship between worker and employer as mutually beneficial and therefore, as negating the need for collective industrial action (Dicken and Hall, 2010).

The party purported to be more socially conscious than its neo-Conservative predecessor (Davidson, 2016). 2001 New Labour policy statement outlined, 'fairness and social justice, liberty and equal opportunity, solidarity and responsibility... these qualities are timeless' (Blair and Schroeder in Ferguson, 2004:3). New Labour re-imagined aspirations of equality and liberty as a-political, common-sense, and disembedded from structures of class. This extended the Thatcherite mission of naturalising neoliberal policies as expressions of 'true' human nature. Moreover, the 'third way' professed to exist outside of political ideologies, instead interested in 'what works,' a narrative which mobilised a common-sense view of neoliberal governance (Ferguson, 2004). This period of UK government has therefore been described as neoliberalism with a 'human' or 'socialist' face (Davidson, 2016:622, Jessop, 2003:283). New Labour obscured the political motivations of neoliberalism and instead asserted it as a natural, inevitable, and fair mode of governance.

This provided New Labour the means to perpetuate the previously Thatcherite project of 'liberalization, deregulation, privatization, re-commodification, internationalization, and reduced direct taxes' (Jessop, 2003:140). However, under the guise of socially conscious politics, principles of free-market competition were increasingly unbound from state-run institutions. Indeed, Davidson, (2016), Peck and Tickall (2002) and Jessop (2003) argue that, if Thatcher's neoliberalism is typified by a 'rolling back' of state institutions, Blair's consists of a gradual 'rolling forward' of newly constructed institutions 'specifically constructed on neoliberal principles' (Davidson, 2016:622). Crucially, previously non-market institutions, such as schools, hospitals, and universities, were managed and run under the guiding principles of free-market competition. In this way, the guiding principles of neoliberalism became embedded across new arenas of political, social, and cultural life.

To achieve these aims, institutions needed to be ranked and their value measured. Indeed, as Davies, (2016:128) explains, ‘normative questions of fairness, reward and recognition become channeled into economic tests of efficiency and comparisons of ‘excellence.’ Therefore, he (ibid) argues that this era is further typified by the introduction of auditing methods, to produce quantifiable measures of institutions' productivity. Such forms of auditing legitimized through New Labour’s insistence on the meritocracy of free market principles (ibid).

This is perceptible in the belief that free-market competition operates as a non- biased mechanism. Therefore, New Labour’s neoliberal understanding of fairness was centred not on the equality of outcomes, but supposed equalities of opportunity (Bloodworth, 2016). Provided New Labour at least appeared to be providing a fair contest, then the organisation of individuals and institutions into ‘winners’ and ‘losers,’ was legitimate (Davies, 2016:127). Furthering the project of neoliberalism established under Thatcher, New Labour evoked the spirit of entrepreneurialism to justify the successes and failures of state-run institutions. The state encouraged such institutions to compete against each other for resources.

Perpetuation of ‘flexible labour markets’ remained key to Blair’s neoliberal government agenda, a mission given new precedence in an increasingly globalised labour market (Jessop, 2003). Throughout the 90’s and early 00’s, the UK experienced a boom in arts and cultural industries, and in 2003 Jessop wrote that ‘the UK has become the world’s second-biggest services exporter after the USA – overtaking Germany and France’ (Jessop, 2003:9) Indeed, he argues that New Labour benefited Thatcher’s flexibilisation of the UK’s labour market. It utilized this groundwork to develop a ‘knowledge-driven or knowledge-based economy based on... intensive business services, high tech innovation (especially big pharma), and the cultural and creative industries' (Jessop, 2007:286). This aligns with wider changes that occurred within the UK labour market during this period, which indicate the UK’s movement towards a post-Fordist economy.

However, New Labour has been identified as perpetuating an expansion of precarious modes of employment. In 2003, Whitton (ibid:15) identified that the UK had ‘the highest level of part-time employment – whether permanent

or temporary contracts – of all the European countries.' Moreover, unlike other European nations of the time, part-time and temporary contracts were normalised as a permanent feature of the UK labour market, rather than a stepping-stone towards full-time employment (Whitton, 2003:15). However, New Labour subsumed such changes beneath a rhetoric of freedom, choice, and individualised entrepreneurialism.

In continuation of the Thatcherite lionisation of entrepreneurialism, (2011) links New Labour policies to the construction of the 'entrepreneurial self.' He (2011:714) identifies that a crucial thread to New Labour's incarnation of neoliberalism, was its moralistic use of 'social discipline and personal responsibility,' as means of individualising responsibility for social welfare. Citizens were increasingly encouraged to 'invest in themselves,' and view their lives as projects of self-management (Peters, 2001). In doing so, life success became a morally wrought, individualised endeavour, rather than a matter of state responsibility.

This is witnessed in New Labour welfare policies, which operated as an extension of Thatcher's workfare programme. Indeed, the government stated that 'the appropriate response to unemployment should no longer be short-term job creation... but, rather, policies to force the unemployed into work' (ibid:143). New Labour transformed the previous Unemployment Benefit into its current iteration, Job Seekers Allowance. To gain access to Job Seekers Allowance, potential recipients were required to fulfil various forms of work experience programmes and training, to prove their 'work readiness' (Jessop, 2003:145). This entrenched the relationship between applicants' self-work and access to employment benefits (ibid). Employment success was, and continues to be, framed as dependent on individuals work ethic, rather than jobs shortages.

More widely, Skeggs (2009:38) notes that the state increasingly understood and treated working class cultures as 'both deficit and pathological.' In response, the state sought to discipline working class citizens, via an increasingly punitive approach, witnessed in the proliferation of civil orders such as Antisocial Behaviour Orders, Parental Orders (POs), Individual Behaviour Orders (ISOs). Such policies and orders, centred notions of self-responsibility and self-discipline, as key informing factors to citizens

employment experiences. Failure to inhabit such qualities could result in penal and judicial responses from the state.

Expectations of self-management and self-improvement were gendered as well as classed. Previous eras have centred legible middle-class femininity on idealised figures of motherhood. However, the New Labour woman, was also morally required to engage in forms of paid labour. Crucially, the neoliberal female subject was self-enterprising, as well as domestic (Dabrowski, 2021a). Moreover, as Rafferty (2015) details, households became increasingly dependent on a dual wage income, which further incentivised women's entry into paid work. However, women of this period still tended to undertake the lion's share of domestic and reproductive labour, regardless of paid employment. Childcare infrastructures grew but remained expensive and inaccessible for many women, particularly working-class women. In this manner, the ability to fulfil the requirements of successful neoliberal womanhood was stratified along lines of class.

Skeggs (2002) has argued that working class women are discursively positioned in contrast to middle-class, respectable femininity. Moreover, the UK state has a historical lineage of blaming working-class women for social ills and seeking ways to discipline such women into bourgeois femininity (Hey and Bradford, 2006). An examples of this, is New Labour's Sure Start initiative, which aimed to shape women into becoming 'good' i.e., middle-class mothers, via educational programmes (Hey and Bradford, 2006:57). Failure to attend or fulfil the stipulations of such programmes, could result in harsh punishments. The state responsibilised parenting through the judicial system more widely, using fines and incarceration to threaten and punish parents of children considered to be problematic (Gillies, 2013). In this manner the state further obfuscated structural inequalities and emphasised self-responsibility, and self–work as tools for individual social mobility. Moreover, within such narratives of self-improvement, the state marshalled classed notions of respectable, middle-class femininity.

Bröckling (2015) further highlights that in the face of becoming a helpless subject of free-market forces, becoming an entrepreneur of one's own destiny is far more attractive. However, it is crucial to reflect that via state-enforced legislation and policies, 'the new regime of capital accumulation beats

subjectivity into being' (ibid:27). Under the Blairite, New Labour regime of neoliberalism, the demands of capital and business continued to dominate social policy decisions. As a model of work and employment, post-Fordist labour styles further developed under New Labour, and became linked to the development of information technologies and knowledge- based economies. This further required the interpellation of flexible, entrepreneurial, and self-regulating institutions and citizens, able to compete in a globalised labour market. This was enforced via laws, policies and public orders.

Traditional understandings of respectable femininity were not destroyed through such policies, but instead found new iterations within a neoliberal context. Such iterations reinscribed classed and gendered inequalities; legitimised through a language of self-improvement. Welfare changes such as Job Seekers Allowance, encouraged individuals to reframe structural problems as personal issues that required internal work. Therein, it is also possible to discern the growth of neoliberalism as structuring forms of subjectivity. In this manner, the 'human face' of New Labour, belied the enforced regimes of neoliberalism, on both individuals and institutions. As I shall now discuss, the Blairite programme of neoliberal governance, particularly its aim to prolife neoliberal logic across all corners of life, continues to profoundly shape our life experiences.

2.5. Disaster neoliberalism: The third phase

Duncan (2022) recognises that in recent years, there have been various edicts announcing the end of neoliberalism. These have grown in consideration of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, wherein the state enacted emergency policies to quell an exploding economic and health disaster (Šumonja, 2020). The so called 'return' of the state, has been presented by media outlets such as The Financial Times and Forbes magazine, as a supposed death knoll to free-market capitalism and neoliberal principles of governance (ibid:216).

Indeed, as Davies (2007) recognises, this is not the first time the end of neoliberalism has been predicted, as the 2007-09 financial crash was perceived as signaling its decline. However, the state's intervention into the actions of the free market during periods of crisis can only be understood as anomalous, or indeed socialist, if the state and the market are seen as binary

opposites (ibid). As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the actions of the state have always been crucial in the construction and maintenance of neoliberalism. In the face of ecological, economic, and health catastrophes, the neoliberal project now concentrates on maintaining its hegemonic position, via increasingly coercive state authoritarianism (Davies, 2007, Davidson, 2016).

Davies (2007) argues there has been a 'rupture' of the shared social reality which formerly stabilised the neoliberal rhetoric of competitiveness. The moral basis to market style competitiveness, namely that it is beneficial to the majority, is unravelling before our eyes. Indeed, Davidson (2016) notes that contemporary neoliberal regimes barely serve the traditional middle-classes, and instead increasingly only benefit the hyper-elite. Atkinson et al., (2012) highlights that increased privatisation, deregulation and self-responsibilisation now nakedly privileges the UK's aristocratic political class.

Davidson (2016) and Davies (2014) argue that the state extends its neoliberal, economic agenda now only to sustain the political status quo. It possesses no moral or ethical justification for its existence. Rather, neoliberalism is now dependent on the coercive, violent powers of the state to ensure its own subsistence. As Davidson (ibid: 617) explains, crisis neoliberalism is 'an attempt to preserve the now decaying order through ever more generalized attacks on the subaltern classes – not as 'occasional' incursions... but as permanent aspects of the political regime.' Under 'crisis neoliberalism,' it is citizens who are the subjects of this punitive regime, as coercion has come to replace former modes of consensus (Davidson, 2016).

The punitive actions of the state can be materially witnessed in the UK state's austerity measures, enforced from 2009 onwards in response to the financial crash. The UK Coalition government attempted to keep major financial institutions afloat, via state investments. However, the June 2010 budget outlined the government's public response to be an 'increase in indirect taxes, a public sector pay freeze, and welfare benefits cuts' (McKay et al., 2013:109). The effects of which, catalysed a variety of societal miseries, including increased homelessness (O'Hara, 2015), health inequalities (Stuckler et al., 2017), food poverty (O'Connel and Hamilton, 2017), fuel poverty, (Middlemiss, 2016) and increased unemployment (Oxfam, 2013).

The government espoused rhetoric of 'fairness,' whilst gutting public institutions aimed at reducing societal and economic inequalities (Atkinson, et al., 2012:5). Under the guise of 'big society,' David Cameron emphasised the role of volunteerism and charities as solutions to societal problems (ibid). It was up to 'the British public to fill the void created by a now retreating state, rather than on the state to develop new policies in response to the emergence of new social risks' (MacLeavy, 2011:359). This allowed the government to further recount responsibility for social welfare, which instead fell to individuals, families, and communities.

The state further bolstered such actions, through endorsed rhetoric regarding a growing swathe of benefit 'scroungers,' 'shirking' work by exploiting the UK's welfare system (Romano, 2015). The division of citizens into categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, contributed to what Standing (2011:23) described as an 'erosion of empathy.' Citizens were galvanised to blame each other, or indeed themselves, for Britain's inequalities, rather than critically address the actions of the state.

Women have been distinctly impacted by the UK's austerity measures. From 2008- 2009, the recession was labelled by some social commentators as a 'he-cession' due to its impact on male job sectors such as manufacturing (Rafferty 2014, Rubery and Rafferty, 2013). However, from 2010 onwards, austerity measures began to impact public sector jobs, which disproportionately employ women. The UK's austerity measures attack on public welfare services, also disproportionally effected women, who faced increased experiences of job losses and unemployment.

Moreover, welfare cuts had gendered and classed outcomes, as women are on average more likely to receive state benefits than men, particularly childcare benefits (MacLeavy, 2011). This constituted what Tepe-Belfrage (2015, para. 9) described as austerity's 'dual impact,' upon women, wherein 'by virtue of being disproportionally in caring roles, they tend to be more likely to depend on the public provision of social services such as childcare services or care provision.' The recession further established gendered and classed expectations of good neoliberal citizenship. Dabrowski (2021b:92) details that, the female 'striver:'

> *Not only withstands the consequences of the recession by being resilient*

and thrifty, but, at the same time, she helps to reinvigorate the economy and society by governing herself and her children in the 'right' ways.

As formerly outlined, the 'right ways' are implicitly coded as middle-class, and the female striver is further, legibly middle-class. Traditionally classed feminine qualities of restraint, frugality and modesty have been reiterated in response to the UK's austerity measures and more recently, the COVID-19 pandemic (Martin, 2020). In contrast, through an investigation of popular reality television shows such as 'Benefits Street,' Skeggs (2005) details how popular media serves to vilify working-class women as feckless, unruly, unhealthy, and immoral.

Indeed, Dabrowski (2021b) argues that middle-class femininity requires the construction of an imagined 'other,' against which it defines itself. Through popular media, working-class women are penalised for their lack of middle-class femininity and become useful figures of blame for society's wider ills (Skeggs, 2005). Through populist rhetoric, the UK state has exploited pre-existing notions of classed femininities, to excuse punitive welfare reforms (ibid). The UK state has utilised pre-existing social categories of class and gender to bolster a neoliberal agenda, to the detriment of working-class women. The ideal feminine figure aligns traditional and conservative notions of middle-class femininity with contemporary ideals of employment and career success.

Post-Fordism further shapes experiences of work and employment within this stage of neoliberalism. As previously outlined, the rise of neoliberalism has been linked in part to the 'crisis of Fordism' that occurred throughout the late 1960's and 1970's. In the second and third phases of neoliberalism, various governments have continued the Thatcherite mission to generate a flexible labour market, able to rise to the challenges of a globalised economy and changing consumerist demands.

The cultural de-valuing of mass-produced commodities and middle-class preference for artisan products, has further contributed to the transformation of UK manufacturing (Vallas, 1999). Specialised manufacturing technologies and the normalisation of flexible specialisation has emerged to meet such demands, hailing the demise of UK mass production. Alongside the normalisation of flexible working practices, these changes have allowed

smaller manufacturers to become profitable by selling small-batch items (Amin, 2003). The growth of information technologies, such as selling platforms like Etsy.com, has further propelled the small-scale production of items. As Vidal (2013:596) illustrates, in 1955 the top twenty-five US employers were all large-scale manufacturers. However, in 2011, this same list was dominated by global merchandisers and restaurant groups and contained only two manufacturers. The UK employment field has transformed towards small-scale manufacturing, and large-scale cultural, creative, intellectual, and service industries.

However, the development of such fields of employment have also rendered stark employment disparities, invariably felt across lines of class, gender and ethnicity. These are changes which have contributed to wide-scale de-regulation and normalisation of zero-hour employment contracts (Grady, 2017:275).

Within the ‘Brave new world of work', Beck (2000) argues, that processes of individualisation will centre on the proliferation of insecure, short-term employment. Disembedded from former social structures, this will demand individuals to become what he describes as ‘Me and Co.’ compelled to treat all aspects of themselves as commodities within a wider marketplace. As Weeks (2011:70) argues, within the context of post-Fordist labour relations, workers may not be exploited in factories but 'are expected to be the architects of their own better exploitation.' The normalisation of such experiences of contemporary work are crucial to recognise, as such ‘states of exception’ have become naturalised within crisis neoliberalism (Davidson, 2016)

Viewed in a wider historical context, vanguard neoliberalism’s two-pronged attack on the welfare state and labour unions, have contributed to the normalisation of precarious employment, stagnating wages, and large-scale inequality (Standing, 2011). This has occurred in conjunction with wider economic shifts towards post-Fordist configurations of labour. The demands of such modes of labour alongside state enforced regimes of punishment and individualised blame, have furthered the self-responsibilisation of poverty.

This section has provided a historical context for the proliferation of

neoliberalism, as a regime of political governance. By outlining three discernible phases of neoliberalism, I have indicated how this regime has become embedded across all areas of economic, political and cultural life. The role of the state is crucial to my analysis; I have demonstrated how via policies, laws, orders and political rhetoric, the state has shaped individuals and institutions to become agents of the free market. Under the wider mission to 'roll back' the frontiers of the state, the UK state now exists primarily to enforce neoliberal modes of governance. However, as also illustrated, this has been a project wrought with violence, particularly against societies' most vulnerable members. Indeed, my analysis has shown that neoliberalism serves the interests of capital above labour and has been a force for solidifying inequality within the UK. Although the state has wrought inequality across a variety of social lines, I have taken a particular focus on gendered and classed experiences of neoliberalism. Most pertinently to my analysis, I have demonstrated the interlinks between state action, class, and gender. In the final part of this section, I shall outline how neoliberalism has come to structure our experiences of subjectivity.

2.6. Becoming neoliberal citizens

In the preceding section, I have detailed how various mechanisms of the state exert neoliberalism as a regime of governance. Within my analysis I have outlined how the state has actively drawn 'the boundaries and tenor of citizenship through its market- conforming policies' (Wacquant, 2012:71). This section further addresses how the logics of neoliberalism shape contemporary experiences of citizenship.

Foucault argues that our experiences of subjectivity are always bound and formed in relation to the limitations of our historical moment in time (1982). Moreover, there is no a priori 'self' embedded within subjects, but rather, subjectivity is formed in reference to forces of power. Indeed, he (ibid: 782) states that 'the mechanisms of subjection cannot be studied outside their relation to the mechanisms of exploitation and domination.' Our interior selves are formed in reference to wider social structures of power. Viewed in reference to this argument, neoliberalism has become a dominant framework through which we experience subjectivity (Gill and Scharff, 2011).

Within his 1978-79 college lectures 'The Birth of Biopolitics,' Foucault (Foucault et al., 2008) outlined neoliberalism's primary aim as the construction of economic human subjects. Similarly, to classic liberalism's '*Homo economicus,'* subjects of neoliberalism reflect upon their own self-interests, and make agentic choices based upon these calculations. Within neoliberalism, Homo economicus has absorbed market principles, which he then exerts through rational judgements and calculations *(*Hamann, 2009). Unlike classic liberalism, Foucault's homo economicus is not defined by the values of market exchange, but rather, he has absorbed the principles of the free market as a sensibility.

Indeed, the homo economicus is 'an entrepreneur of himself…being for himself his producer, being for himself his own capital, being for himself the source of [his] earnings' (Foucault et al., 2008:226). The masculine figure of the entrepreneur is one of risk-taking, agency, self-responsibility, and self-reliance (Ashman et al., 2018). These are the qualities which form the model of Foucault's neoliberal homo economicus (Foucault, et al., 2008). Foucault further asserts that to become 'entrepreneurs of themselves,' neoliberal subjects must amass degrees of 'human capital' *(*Hamann, 2009:36). For the neoliberal homo economicus, any investment in self that can result in greater life success, such as the acquisition of professional skills or choices in romantic partners, becomes a form of human capital (Read, 2009). The economic imperative to acquire capital is therefore normalised and naturalised across all spheres of life (ibid).

Competition forms a further crucial thread to the construction of neoliberal subjectivity. The neoliberal state has harnessed competition as a key principle to reshape state-owned and public institutions (Lazzarato, 2009:110). These are effects I have outlined in reference to the political agendas and policies of various recent UK governments. Foucault (et al., 2008) argue that the spirit of competition is also a governing principle of individual subjectivity. Individuals are induced to compete against each other, within a supposed social meritocracy. In this manner, it is also possible to see the clear conceptual links between neoliberal subjectivity and the individualisation thesis. Most particularly, the expectation that citizens should operate as self-sufficient, competitive individuals, disconnected from former social structures.

As I have outlined, neoliberal meritocracy depends not on 'equality of result,'

but ‘equality of opportunity’ (Littler, 2017:400). Through this belief, success becomes dependent on one’s willingness to invest in oneself, whereas failure is reduced to a matter of ill-made choices (Hamann, 2009). The myth of meritocracy allows neoliberalism to operate under a modicum of fairness, and excuses inequalities (Littler, 2017). Indeed, Littler (ibid) details that the neoliberal myth of meritocracy obscures sources of social inequalities, which are instead interpreted as individual failings. This further echoes the individualisation thesis, which purports that individuals are now unbounded from former social categories of class and gender.

The myth of meritocracy requires subjects access to freedoms necessary to make agentic decisions and choices. The consumer forms the blueprint for citizenship and freedom is reduced to individual’s capacities to make choices. Indeed, subjects are required to make individual life choices; but have little influence upon the choices on offer (Hamann, 2009:51). Freedoms are produced, bound, organised and limited by neoliberal governance. In this way, Foucault argues, neoliberalism is paradoxically a matter of both freedom, and control (2008).

The construction of neoliberal subjectivity is veiled beneath cultural notions of ‘human nature’ (Read, 2009:2). As Harvey (2005:3) states, neoliberalism has effects ‘on ways of thought, to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in and understand the world.’ The notion that free-market competition is a manifestation of ‘natural’ competition, forms a pervasive perspective, which further structures our life experiences.

As Harvey (2005) and Read (2009) both argue, neoliberalism’s pervasive qualities make its effects difficult to identify, and by and part, further difficult to resist. However, Foucault makes it clear that the homo economicus is not a ‘natural’ state of being. Rather, he states that ‘the rationality of neoliberalism consists of values and principles that must be actively instituted, maintained, reassessed and, if need be, reinserted at all levels of society’ (Hamann, 2009:42). As I have previously outlined, the actions of the state artificially constructs and maintains the mechanisms of the free market. Lazzarato (2009) argues that similarly, the compulsion for neoliberal subjects to embody competitive, free- market principles is not

‘natural,’ but produced and maintained through state mechanisms.

Watts (2021) argues that an issue which arises in consideration of Foucault’s work, is that homo economicus exists as a *theoretical* subject of neoliberalism. It is a conceptual leap, to argue that the principles of neoliberalism have become primary to most people’s experiences of subjectivity (ibid). Therein, it is important to explore neoliberal subjectivity through empirical, as well as theoretical, scholarship (Houghton, 2019). Empirical literature can provide insight into how the demands of neoliberal subjectivity are experienced, navigated and potentially resisted, in real world contexts.

Scharff’s (2016) empirical research regarding the psychic life of young female musicians, provides insight into processes of neoliberal subjectivity and subjectification. Her work seeks to ‘explore entrepreneurial subjectivity from the ground up,’ which she achieves via qualitative interviews with 60 female participants. Her research indicates that the conditions of working as freelance musicians, demand that women operate as entrepreneurial subjects. Success within this field appeared predicated on participants capacities to absorb and exhibit entrepreneurial principles of the homo economicus.

The women interviewed, referred to their experiences through values defined within entrepreneurial neoliberalism, for example, by referring to themselves as ‘businesses.’ Their conduct was further informed by such values, with women emphasising the importance of resilience, self-responsibility, and unceasing productivity. However, some women indicated a distaste towards competitiveness, instead drawing on an artistic discourse regarding the ‘uncreative’ nature of competition (Scharff, 2016:117). Therein, neoliberal entrepreneurialism was not the only discourse that structured her participant's experiences of subjectivity, as has Foucault’s work suggests. The female musicians also navigated subjectivity in reference to values associated with creativity.

However, she argues that the structuring effects of competition were not dissolved through the existence of this alternative mode of subjectivity. Rather, they were re-asserted as competition with oneself, as her participants expressed a need for continual self-improvement. Her research therefore

indicates that principles of neoliberalism can interact with other structuring forces, to contribute to individuals' experiences of subjectivity.

It can also find new expressions, in response to these interactions. The potential for women's subjectivity to be structured in response to multiple discourses, and the ways in which these may interact, will prove to be a crucial thread of analysis in my own research. More specifically, the interactions of traditional notions of femininity and neoliberal entrepreneurialism will be explored in greater depth later in this thesis.

2.7. Female neoliberal subjects

I have thus far outlined the key phases of neoliberalism as an economic, social, and cultural phenomenon. I have furthermore indicated how neoliberalism operates as a structuring force in experiences of subjectivity. I will now address the argument that women and girls are increasingly interpellated as *ideal* neoliberal subjects (Scharff, 2016).

Brown (2003:42) argues that 'neoliberalism normatively constructs and interpellates individuals as entrepreneurial actors in every sphere of life.' This occurs through technologies of the state, which actively produce institutions and individuals that fit the requirements of neoliberalism (Wacquant, 2012). To be entrepreneurial requires citizens to be self-responsible, rational, calculating, and individualistic in behaviour and mindset.

The argument that women are the ideal subjects of neoliberalism, at first appears to run counter to cultural notions of entrepreneurial citizenship. Entrepreneurship has long been viewed as inherently masculine pursuit, centred on 'male' attributes such as risk-taking, competitiveness, and career ambition (Itani, 2021). The homo economicus schema as redrawn by Foucault (2008) is composed of masculinised qualities. Such qualities do not align with essentialist attributes of femininity, such as other-centredness, docility, and modesty (Hanappi-Egger, 2014).

However, as I have established, traditional social categories do not necessarily cease to exist across eras but can find new articulations. Empirical investigation of the interactions between neoliberalism and individuals indicates that neoliberal subjectivity is formed through its interactions with

other structuring forces, such as class, gender, and ethnicity (Scharff, 2016). As witnessed through the various phases of neoliberalism, state mechanisms towards individualisation have aligned with new gendered ideals of entrepreneurial citizenship.

Indeed, several feminist researchers, contend that essentialised characteristics of western, bourgeois femininity, have been socially re-imagined as ideally neoliberal (Gill, 2007, 2017, Gill and Scharff, 2011, Harris, 2003, McRobbie, 2009, 2015, 2016, Ringrose and Walkerdine, 2008). As Gill (2007) argues, there are pre-existing social expectations regarding women's need to engage in forms of self-management and self-transformation. She (ibid:164) argues that:

> *To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, to regulate every aspect of their conduct, and to present all their actions as freely chosen.*

These are expectations that have found new expression, through forms of popular media which centralise 'make-overs' and bodily self-regulation, as tools of female success. Neoliberalism and individualisation are both identified as centering consumptive practices as the defining feature of citizenship. Democratic processes are reduced to choice-making between bounded options. Gill (2007) and Banet- Weiser and Arzumanova (2012) highlight that practices of consumption are historically and culturally coded as feminine activities, contrasting with male modes of productivity.

Neoliberal consumerism aligns with pre-existing expectations of masculine and feminine competencies. Harris (2003) similarly argues that middle-class women and girls are culturally positioned as the 'success stories' of recent years. Through government rhetoric and popular cultural discourse, girls are constituted as possessing naturally occurring qualities of resilience, tenacity, and self-discipline necessary to succeed across all spheres of life (ibid). Similarly, Ringrose and Walkerdine's (2008) investigation of British make-over reality television programmes, indicates that women and girls are particularly appealed to as flexible and autonomous subjects, able to navigate an increasingly uncertain social landscape. Such assumptions regarding the status of femininity, further supports the positioning of women as *natural* subjects of neoliberal entrepreneurialism. In this manner, feminist scholarship, indicates

a variety of avenues through which neoliberalism and gender intersects and interacts to produce feminised neoliberal subjectivity and citizenship.

2.8. 'Can-do' girls and 'at risk' girls

However, women's capacities to operate as ideal subjects of neoliberalism, is inherently classed. The capacity to become feminine neoliberal subjects is dependent on women's access to social, cultural, and economic capital (Skeggs, 2002, 2005, 2009). However, within a neoliberal framework, structural effects are obscured beneath a rhetoric of meritocracy and women's individual ability to make 'good' choices (Harris, 2003).

I have formerly indicated that the unleashing of entrepreneurial competition across all spheres of life, has been legitimised, through the existence of supposed social meritocracy. Within the context of meritocracy, career and personal success are positioned as options available to all women and girls, dependent on their choice-making. As McRobbie (2016:76) states 'neoliberals tend to present idea that we are now free from any barriers and can progress as we like.' Harris' (2003) work provides a route to understanding how expectations of feminine neoliberal subjectivity are implicitly classed.

Crucially, Harris (ibid) differentiates between girls categorised as 'can-do' girls, and those categorised as 'at-risk' girls. Can-do girls are positioned as ambitious, self-reliant, and self-disciplined, engaged in modes of training, studying and working that will secure them successful futures. As superior neo-liberal subjects, Harris (2003) documents how these 'can-do girls' have become emblematic of the necessary collection of attributes and qualities required for women to succeed in today's labour market.

She further identifies that the notion of 'choice' forms a strong component to this narrative of young women's life experiences and movement towards success. McRobbie (2009:19) iterates this further, stating that girls today, 'must have a life-plan.' Neoliberal thought predicates that we all now operate as freely operating, entrepreneurial citizens. The success of girls and women is therefore determined by their capacity to make 'good' choices. As Harris (2003:40) states, women are now supposedly able to 'pick through' a 'catalogue of choices' to create individual biographies of success.

At the locus of this narrative is the belief that success and failure both spring

from the quality of women's personal choices. Neoliberal rhetoric of the 'can-do girl,' treats women as a homogenous group, as questions regarding different women's access to reflexive choice-making is erased. Indeed, class experiences form an intrinsic component to the 'choices' available to women and girls (Harris, 2003). She states, 'the can-dos are constructed as a mainstream cohort, but in fact they constitute a class elite' (ibid:44). This is apparent in the expectation that women must pursue costly university educations and non-paid internships as a means of gaining the level of training necessary to access the self-actualising and well-renumerated careers neoliberalism promises. Working class girls are offered the same societal expectations as to what constitutes feminine success. However, they are simultaneously denied access to the opportunities necessary to achieve them.

When they inevitably fail to achieve the classed expectations of feminine success, they are cast as 'at risk girls' (ibid). These are girls who have, supposedly, freely made 'poor' life choices such as falling pregnant at a young age, due to a lack of self-control, self-discipline, and self-denial. Within this narrative of agentic choices, working-class girls are framed as fully responsible for their own perceived failures. In this manner, class emerges as a latent, but entirely potent structuring force in the lives of women under neoliberalism.

As highlighted earlier in this thesis, working class women and girls are subject to moral scrutiny and cultural hysterias. They are made cultural dumping grounds for wider social ills, their behaviour criminalised, pathologised and ridiculed. As Reay (2005) details, classed inequalities have not depleted, however, class has lost its purchase as a cultural tool for understanding inequalities. Within neoliberalism, perceived failures are cruelly cast as intrinsic personal failings, rather than the outcomes of structural inequalities. As Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008:230) summarise:

> *The feminine is caught up in the production of neo-liberal subjectivity (as subject and object of consumption) in specific ways that recenter girls and women as sites of crisis, desire, anxiety, and possibility of success in living out neo-liberal subjectivity.*

As Skeggs (2002) has detailed, legible femininity is middle-class, inscribed and reinscribed by women through specific, classed parameters. Middle-class

women may find themselves the chosen cohort of 'can-do girls,' but as McRobbie (2004, 2015) details, the expectations of modern female success contribute to an iteration of female oppression. Detailing the disciplinary agenda of '00s make-over shows such as 'What not to wear,' McRobbie (2004), argues that class antagonisms now hinge on modes of cultural capital. Popular media chastises women not merely for their economic position, but bodily comportment, parenting styles, and aesthetic tastes. The punitive approach taken by such programmes, seek to cajole and shame women into acceptable and legible forms of middle-class femininity.

Such programmes indicate a wider emphasis placed on women, to internalise the strict parameters of feminine success and enact forms of unrelenting self-scrutiny upon themselves. It is within this context, that McRobbie argues that the perfect has emerged as a regulatory ideal, through which women and girls should measure their successes and define themselves. As I shall now discuss, this dispositif has gained purchase within mainstream postfeminism, as the supposed route towards female empowerment.

2.9. Postfeminism and the dispositif of the perfect

With its emphasis on female subjecthood, postfeminism has been widely linked to the self-governing mechanisms of neoliberalism (Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, 2012, McRobbie, 2008). To be legibly feminine, women are expected to engage in various forms of self-management and self-discipline, which centre particularly on managing how we are perceived by others (Gill, 2007). McRobbie (2015) describes this as the 'dispositif of the perfect'. This dispositif enfolds traditional ideals of femininity, relating to heteronormative expectations of marriage and family life, with newer values of middle-class career success. Popular media and cultural thought compels women to measure their worth by their attainment of heteronormative markers of success, such as a husband, home, and career. In addition, women's bodies have become a key location of neoliberal self-governance and self-discipline, and maintenance of thinness is crucial to personal and public success. This is normatively understood as the question of 'having it all.' Continuing the neoliberal agenda of value through scrutiny and measurement, women must engage in constant self-auditing, asking themselves:

> *How well did I do today? Did I manage to eat fewer calories? Did I eat more healthily? Did I get to the gym? Did I achieve what I aimed to achieve at work? Did I look after the children with the right kind of attention? Did I cook well after the days' work? Did I ensure that my family returned from school and work to a well- appointed and well-regulated home? Did I maintain my good looks and my sexually attractive and well-groomed body?*
>
> *(McRobbie, 2015:9)*

Through mechanisms of self-management and self-discipline, the dispositif promises women sensations of control; over themselves, their lives, and their destinies. By engaging in unrelenting self-management, this dispositif dangles the carrot of future rewards. Only through such actions, can women ensure their own legible subjectivity and reap the supposed economic and social rewards this provides. In this manner, McRobbie (ibid) reveals the pseudo empowering dimensions of the dispositif of the perfect. She (ibid) argues that this is a version of empowerment which has become seamlessly incorporated into mainstream, post-feminism (ibid). The feminist ambition for women to gain success and power in the public realm has become warped - transfigured into a feminised expectation of lived and embodied perfection.

Indeed, rather than composing a route towards empowerment, she (ibid) identifies the dispositif as deeply oppressive. Such forms of oppression spring from the regulatory ideals of neo-liberalism. Most pertinently, these ideals compel citizens to engage in constant forms of individualised competition with themselves and others. The absorption of competitiveness as a regulatory ideal demand citizens to engage in relentless, micro-level forms of self-regulation and self-scrutiny. As a gendered endeavour, the dispositif of the perfect is two-pronged. It normalises competition between women as an expression of feminism, alongside competition with the self via relentless self-surveillance, self-regulation, and self-flagellation. Crucially, McRobbie (ibid) argues, mainstream feminism's absorption of such regulatory neoliberal ideals only serves to reiterate pre-existing gendered and classed forms of inequality.

Much like Harris' (2006) can-do girl, the ideals McRobbie (ibid) ascribes to the

dispositif of the perfect 'modulate and flow' across demographics of women, taking on new shapes and forms across class positions (ibid:4). However, the neoliberal denial of class as a structuring force, disallows women to view their encounters with the dispositif of the perfect as rooted in access to forms of economic and social capital. Rather, success is reconstituted as an entirely individualised endeavour, dependent on women's capacity to act as both normatively feminine subjects and competitive neoliberal citizens (ibid). Within the disciplining mechanisms of postfeminism, structural forms of inequality are reduced to women's individual actions and choices. The resulting effects for those women who 'fail' to live up to the dispositif of the perfect are further individualised, experienced as forms of self-blame and self-flagellation.

Indeed, this dispositif undeniably privileges women who possess the right forms of cultural, social, and economic capital. Postfeminism's espousal of traditional modes of femininity necessarily privileges middle-class women. Our shared cultural understandings of legible femininity are, by their nature, based on the othering of working-class women (Skeggs, 1997, 2009). As I have previously outlined, notions of feminine 'goodness;' modesty, decorum, and other-centredness have historically been culturally attributed to middle-class women. This has been achieved, by contrast positioning working-class women as deviant 'other.' As Skeggs's work illuminates, contemporary iterations centre on the pathologising and ridiculing of working-class women, who are blamed for a plethora of social ills (2009). In this manner, working-class women are structurally disadvantaged within the dispositifs field of gendered competition. In this manner, McRobbie identifies that it is predicated upon exclusionary middle-class femininity. It forms a regulatory ideal, which necessarily disadvantages working-class women.

However, as McRobbie (2015) demonstrates, predicating feminine success on notions of perfection harms all women, as perfection forms an unattainable ideal. As outlined, the individualising narrative of entrepreneurial citizenship enforces the view that failures must be internalised. The resulting impacts can be experiences of self-blame and low self-worth, as women are encouraged to view successes and failures as outcomes of freely made choices.

However, as Gill (2007) details, popular reality television also invites judgement of 'career women,' painted as poor mothers and wives. In this way, expectations of neoliberal femininity are contradictory, springing from normative and essentialist ideals of bourgeois womanhood, and entrepreneurial values of neoliberalism.

These are intersecting but also diverging ideals of femininity, that within the context of individualisation and neoliberalism, are individually wrought.

2.10. The digital housewife and feminisation of work

The field of employment forms a crucial component to women's positioning as ideal neoliberal citizens. I have previously outlined the forms of affective and immaterial labour which have proliferated through post-Fordist neoliberalism. Moreover, that women have culturally been positioned as 'ideal' neoliberal citizens, as women are already understood as being adapt at self-management and self-transformation (Gill and Scharff, 2011). I shall now explore how spheres of contemporary labour draw on the cultural 'baggage' of female encounters with paid/unpaid work, in relation to Morini's (2007) argument regarding the feminisation of work, and Jarret's (2015) thesis of the digital housewife.

As previously outlined, through post-Fordism we have witnessed a weakened relationship between capital and labour, which has encouraged companies to seek out new pools of cheap, flexible labour – who have invariably been women (Banks and Milestone, 2011, Bauman, 2001). To this mix we can also add a diminished welfare state, the demise of the family wage and seeming exponential growth of communication technology (Gill and Pratt, 2008). Theorists such as Gregson and Lowe (1994), and Morini (2007) state that the increase of women entering the paid workforce, and the changing nature of post-industrial labour form a 'feminisation of labour'.

As indicated in the work of Rafferty (2015) from the 1980's onwards, the UK economy has become dependent on dual income households, and the necessity for large-scale female employment. Whereas previous generations of women were penalised for pursuing work outside the home, now women and girls are expected- and largely required to enter the labour market. As Morini (2007:41) states, 'in the USA in 1950, 15 per cent of women with children under the age

of six had a job. Today, this figure has risen to 65 per cent and, overall, 72 per cent of American women have a job'. This statistic clearly illustrates the massive increase in women's formal employment across the last 60 plus years.

A further pull factor to women to entering the workforce is the ideological impact of second-wave feminism, which emphasised emancipation via the public sphere (Weeks, 2011). Harris (2004) argues further, neoliberal rhetoric abounds that feminism has produced 'ambitious and flexible subjects' able to respond appropriately to swiftly changing market conditions (Harris, 2004:37). In this manner, women and girls are uniquely positioned as the citizens' best suited to adapt and change according to the demands and conditions of modern life, including work. Therein, it is possible to see how girls and women have gained the status as ideally suited for the demands of contemporary work.

Morini (2007) argues that this positioning of women, has emerged due to women's historical encounters with work. Through post-Fordism, these have become a cultural blueprint, which dictates wider configurations of labour (Morini, 2007). This claim is two-fold, relating to both the structure and content of post-industrial, post-Fordist work.

In terms of structure, she (2007:43) argues that with its emphasis on flexibility, insecurity, and feast/famine work patterns, post-Fordist work draws on a cultural 'baggage' of female experience. This is witnessed in the proliferation of insecure employment, informal contracts, part time/short-term work and piecework, normalised within post-Fordist neoliberalism. In prior epochs of work, these patterns of labour have been associated with female workers. Indeed, Adkins (1999:126) identifies that in lieu of formal structures found within Fordist models of work, many contemporary structures of work are dependent on 'pre-modern modes of organization such as networks, reciprocity, informality... all forms of sociality historically linked to women.' These types of interaction have previously been characterised by their position in the domestic and private realms - historically, the domain of women. However, they are now increasingly informing the economic and public spheres. This forms a further example of the close links perceptible between historical understandings of femininity and contemporary patterns of work.

These links are witnessed in the growing proliferation of post-industrial and post-Fordist professions, such as service work and care-work (Morini, 2007).

Morini (2007) states that post-Fordist economies are dependent on workers adeptness at historically feminised skillsets, such as relationality, emotional intelligence and caring. Within the context of paid work, such experiences are illuminated further through Hochschild's (2012) argument regarding 'emotional labour'.

The concept of emotional labour is rooted in her (ibid) qualitative research regarding the experiences of air stewardesses. She (ibid) argues that in contemporary forms of work, our emotions are both sites of labour and commodities. She expands upon Mills (1951 in Hochschild, 2012:13) earlier observation that modern workers were increasingly encouraged to 'sell their personalities' by stating that 'just like physical labour – entail conscious effort and work' (Hochschild, 2012:13, Bolton and Boyd, 2003:291). She identified that feelings of care, attention and social connection were latent, but essential, products within the context of a flight. These were gained through the immaterial labour of air-stewardesses, for example by verbally easing customer's anxieties.

Such modes of work may contain material elements, such as providing an extra pillow, but are undertaken to achieve immaterial effects, such as a sense of ease. Crucially, the emotional components of this work formed an implicit element to the air stewardess's work. The 'taken for granted' elements of emotional labour are rooted in its historical connections to female activities. Most particularly, the cultural notion that women's immaterial activities do not constitute labour, but natural expressions of their sex (Jarret, 2015). Therein, Hochschild's provides a useful analysis of the specific characteristics of emotional immaterial work and its links to feminised forms of work/non-work, within the context of post-Fordist labour.

There are key correlations between Hochschild's (2012) thesis and arguments regarding affective labour, as presented by Hardt (1999) and Hardt and Negri (2000). Hardt (1999) argues that the post-Fordist epoch is typified by increased 'informationalisation.' In the Fordist epoch, workers were compelled to think and function as machines, but in the post-Fordist era workers 'increasingly think like computers... the interactive model of communication technologies becomes more and more central to our laboring activities' (Hardt, 1999: 94-95). Digital technologies are not just fundamental to contemporary labour

practices, they inform the types of labour workers must undertake. Productive labour has always required worker's intellectual capacities (Jarret, 2015). However, the key difference discerned by Hardt (1999), is that post-Fordist, immaterial labour centres not on material products, but upon workers 'creation and manipulation of affects' (Hardt, 1999:95). Or, as Weeks (2011:69) describes it, post-Fordist work is 'not just the labour of the hand, but the labour of the head and heart.' This is both in relationship to the growth of immaterial labour and subsequent blurring of life/work boundaries within the social factory.

As Gregg (2013:87) highlights, the unrelenting presence of communication technologies accentuates the blurring of life/work activities. Such technologies actively contribute to the increasing 'bleed' of work into all corners of life. As Turkle (2011) further argues, the enmeshing of information technology into worker's lives is contributing to dissolving demarcations between public and private spheres. When workers carry the office in their mobile phone, they are required to not only multi-task but 'multi-life' (Turkle, 2011:106). Gregg (2013) and Turkle (2011) both argue the consequences include increased workloads and higher degrees of stress and pressure for workers.

Ross (2012) argues further that the erasure of life/work boundaries through dispersed digital workplaces allows owners of capital to extract higher degrees of profit from the labour of workers (Ross, 2012). Indeed, he (2012) argues that the contemporary landscape of digital labour should be understood in reference to wider precaritisation of work. Most particularly, with the argument that precarity has been re-packaged as an exciting element to living a passionate, wired existence, wherein work and leisure are pleasurably fused. Andrejevic (2012) details the complexity in pinpointing labour exploitation and alienation, within activities that individuals experience as pleasurable – or indeed, as leisure activities. This is particularly pertinent in reference to digital media, wherein activities such as updating webpages, leaving reviews and participating in discussions are often unremunerated and experienced as pleasurable. Critically, Andrejevic (2012) highlights that pleasure does not nullify exploitatation, stating 'the critique of exploitation does not devalue individual pleasure any more than such pleasures nullify exploitative social relations.' Exploitation and alienation do not cease to exist when work is fused

with life/leisure activities, but instead becomes more challenging to disentangle.

Capital is increasingly dependent upon non-material commodities - such as digital codes, data, knowledge – the production of which demands workers engage in various forms of cognitive and emotional immaterial labour (Jarret, 2015:30). Although many contemporary spheres of work involve various degrees of both forms of immaterial labour, Hardt (1999) argues they are not held in equal esteem. Employers often devalue forms of affective and emotional labour – or indeed, fail to recognise such activities as work (ibid). Echoing the work of Hochschild (2015) he (1999) argues this is in part due its close association with 'women's work,' and the invisible labour of the domestic realm.

Moreover, as Gill and Pratt (2008:9) observe, there are clear hierarchies in the forms of immaterial labour available to different workers. There is a world of difference found in the experiences of 'the fast-food operative with a digital headset or electronic till in their minimum wage McJob, and the highly educated, well-paid cultural analyst.' Indeed, as Maliszewski (2003) argues, intellectual and creative workers engaged in immaterial modes of employment, form an elite strand of contemporary workers. They are dependent upon a wider pool of precariously employed service and care workers, who are invariably female. As Perron (2009:5) via governmental statistics argues, the 'the 5 C's: cashiering, caring, clerical, cleaning and catering' are still the most common spheres of female employment. Gender and class coalesce as key informing factors within contemporary employment experiences.

In her research 'Feminism, Labour and Digital Media: The Digital Housewife,' Jarret (2015) illuminates the conceptual proximity of women's traditional life/work duties, and the blurring of leisure/labour activities online. She highlights that women invariably shoulder the immaterial responsibilities of the domestic realm – such as planning, organising, co-ordinating, etc. Indeed, the physical domestic labour undertaken by women, such as taking care of children, are invariably done to achieve immaterial affects – such as sensations of care and love. Such modes of feminised work, she argues, closely resemble paid/unpaid activities propagated by owners of capital within digital media industries.

Examples are witnessed in the multitude of online activities engaged in by

online users of social media sites. These include housekeeping activities undertaken for free by users, such as moderating webpages and contributing to forum discussions as well content creation such as uploading and sharing images and videos. Ross's (2012) research regarding post-Fordist labour styles adds further weight to this argument.

He (ibid) addresses user activity of the social media platform Facebook. Facebook user's experience engagement as a pleasurable activity, largely unaware that interactions such as viewing adverts or giving up personal information generate revenue for the site (ibid:18). In this respect, the immaterial activities required of users of the platform blur expectations of work/leisure and defy clear categorisation as productive or consumptive (Jarret, 2010). Indeed, autonomist Lazaratto (1996) argued that immaterial labour is typified by its ambiguousness, centred on activities that blur work/life boundaries. In this respect, the complexity of differentiating between life/work activities forms a clear thread within discussions of affective and immaterial labour.

Jarret (2015:2) draws further parallels between women's experiences of domestic labour and the structure and content of contemporary work. More specifically, the blurred dimensions of leisure/labour found within digital media work. Women's activities in the private realm – such as domestic labour, childcare and other care work - has historically been conceptualised not as work, but an expression of essential femininity (ibid). The entangling of labour/life activities are made further complex for women, who invariably undertake such work out of love, care, and duty, rather than monetary renumeration. In this respect, women's activities have culturally been positioned as being non-work; private and non-productive. She argues that such experiences of leisure/labour form a critical framework for understanding immaterial labour in digital contexts.

She (2015) argues that a critical examination of digital work/non-work activities, can be achieved by evoking Marxist feminist discourse regarding women's social reproductive labour. Within such feminist discourse, the housewife's domestic labour is undertaken out of love and duty but also ensures the reproduction of the proletariat class. In this manner, although sequestered in the private realm, the housewife's work ensures the circuit of

production in the public sphere. Indeed, the unpaid and unrecognised labour of the housewife is essential to the subsistence of the proletariat class and therefore forms a critical mechanism of capitalism (ibid). In this regard, she argues, the housewife and her accompanying duties form a useful metaphor through which to understand the leisure/labour of digital work/engagement (ibid:2).

Domestic, reproductive labour may be essential for capitalism's existence; however, it is also a source of love and care, qualities which enrich the lives of individuals and have little value to the mechanisms of capitalism. Indeed, as she states, such activities can form the basis for solidarity and community building, necessary for workers to resist the exploitative effects of capitalism. A parallel can be drawn with the activities site users undertake within digital platforms.

Acts such as contributing to a site forum or moderating a webpage can provide users opportunities for meaningful social connections, community building and social solidarity. Additionally, as I have addressed in my introduction, platforms must attract high numbers of users to ensure they monopolies their respective fields. Therein, such activities are also essential in attracting and retaining platform users, making them essential to a platform's overall success (ibid). Indeed, platform user's activities can also become commodified data. In this respect, platform user's activities merge productive and consumptive practices. Evocation of the digital housewife provides a means towards understanding the relationship to capital experienced by such digital 'prosumers' (ibid:77).

As she argues further, 'knowing more about the mechanisms by which domestic labour enters into exploitative economic circuits, but still retains so much of its social potency, can tell us much about the contradictory dynamics of exploitation and agency associated with digital media capitalism' (ibid:3). The digital housewife therefore forms a critical tool. It highlights the similarities between women's traditional experiences of labour and contemporary post-Fordist, immaterial work in digital contexts. But moreover, it provides a means towards understanding the complex, pleasurable and exploitative qualities of online activities, which can simultaneously exist as both consumptive and productive. In doing so, a more nuanced understanding of immaterial, digital labour practices can emerge.

There are further, complex arguments regarding the implications of affective

and immaterial labour for women. As Jarret (2015) argues, the digital housewife is a metaphor which draws upon women's historical encounters with domestic work to illuminate contemporary digital labour/leisure. Although the digital housewife is a feminised figure, she encapsulates experiences of digital work/non-work which cut across genders. Further debates have emerged regarding women's specific experiences of such encounters. Indeed, feminist theorists Ilouz (1997) Lovell (2000) and Morini (2007) have argued that the economic turn towards modes of immaterial labour has the potential to benefit women. The contemporary reliance on feminised skill sets, and positioning of women as ideal workers, they argue, contains the potential to raise women's status and power within society.

Drawing on the work of Bourdieu, Illouz (1997) states that through the post-Industrial service economy, women now possess newly desirable forms of cultural capital. The skills and qualities of femininity possess a particular value on the economic market, which is proving advantageous to female workers (in Adkins, 2003:31). This is echoed in the work of Lovell who suggests that the economics advantages of femininity contain the potential to disrupt patriarchal configurations of power (Lovell 2000 in Adkins, 2003:31).

Indeed, there is a utopian thread to some visions of feminised work, that it 'promises less rigid and conventional gender roles… and disrupts fixed gender division of labour' (Veijola and Jokinen, 2008:169). Such visions are born from the large-scale entry of women into formerly male dominated professions, and the shifting structures and content of many contemporary professions. Morini (2007:44), proclaims that such events could result in 'the *degendering* of work.' In her view, women's mass entry into the labour market and works reliance upon feminised characteristics contains the potential to end gendered divisions of labour (ibid).

As I previously identified, Adkins (2003) argues that proclamations towards 'the end of gendered work', forms part of a wider argument regarding the 'de-traditionalisation' of work and culture. The processes of neoliberalism may have forced individuals to carry what has previously been the responsibility of wider structures, to become their own 'micro-structures' (Giddens, 1991). However, the claim made that we are now free individuals, able to freely choose our own biographies without barriers, is arguably a fantasy (Banks and

Milestone, 2010). Pre-modern notions of gender continue to structure paid and unpaid encounters with work.

Post-Fordist labour styles require both male and female workers to engage in work dependent on feminised 'soft skills.' Such forms of labour draw on the cultural 'baggage' (Morini, 2007:43) of women's historical experiences of work, as underpaid, undervalued and precarious working styles are increasingly normalised across the sexes. However, as Adkins (1995) indicates, the experiences of men and women engaged in the same forms of work are structured by pre-existing gendered power relations. She (1995:147) highlights this point in her empirical research regarding the employment of male hospitality workers and the supporting labour of their wives. Within contexts of pubs and hotels, 'men and women were constituted as different kind of workers within these workplaces *even when they were located in the same jobs*.' Within the context of pub work, wives undertook forms of aesthetic, emotional and sexual labour that were essential to business success but largely unrecognised.

Within professional roles more widely, Adkins (ibid) argues women are assumed responsible for forms of unpaid, and oft unrecognised, modes of emotional and caring work. Moreover, women continue to undertake the lion's share of domestic work alongside paid employment, an experience which hinders women's capacities towards professional success in all sectors. Therein, pre-existing, unequal gender relations further structure their experiences of labour.

Moreover, in both Banks and Milestone (2010) and Adkin's (1995) research, women invariably contributed disproportionately to the building of informal social networks, which enabled *men* to become reflexive workers. Such modes of labour were essentialised as 'natural' characteristics of women rather than legitimate, recognisable forms of labour. Therefore, women received little reward or recognition for their engagement with retraditionalised networking building. Furthermore, they often found themselves locked out from such networks. In this manner, historical conceptions of femininity and normative ideals of womanhood continue to impact women's life experiences. As Adkins (1995, 1999) crucially highlights, cultural conceptions of femininity, impact women's capacities to become agentic and reflexive subjects in a manner that

is specific to their gender. As McRobbie (2016:30) states, 'this can mean a return to more rigid gender roles for women. For example, being excluded from the network because of children, or finding it difficult to avoid reproducing traditional patriarchal family forms.' Claims towards the de-gendering of work occurring through women's positioning as ideal neoliberal workers are therefore revealed as limited.

In this respect, Jarret's (2015) application of the 'housewife' as a conceptual tool has further relevancy. As she states, Marxist feminist's such as Federici (2006) and Weeks (2011) have fought to legitimise feminised activities such as domestic work and caregiving as being *work*. Rather than forming natural expressions of women's intrinsic femininity, labour of the domestic realm both demands specific skill sets and are intrinsic to economic productivity. However, as she further argues, such activities also cannot be reduced to only being productive, or indeed, only viewed as exploitative. Forms of care-work, undertaken in the home or the forum pages of a website, also foster bonds of care, friendship, love, and solidarity – with the potentials to resists forms of exploitation. In this respect, it is useful to recognise the co-existence of seemingly contradictory elements of women's historical encounters with work, as structuring contemporary spheres of digital leisure and labour. As Adkins (1995, 1999) work has further highlighted, however, structures of the past do not cease to exist in new epochs, and the post-Fordist, digitalised era is no exception. The feminisation of post-Fordist labour, has arguably engendered new expressions of pre-modern gendered inequalities, as I shall now address in further depth.

2.10. Femininity and passionate labour

Contemporary work may draw inspiration from women's cultural baggage, but its structure and form create serious barriers to women's professional success. The neoliberal processes of individualisation 'implies a society without families and children. Everyone must be independent, free for the demands of the market in order to guarantee his/her economic existence' (Beck, 1992 in Banks and Milestone, 2010:75-76). As McRobbie (2016:29) states, such expectations of work form a 'club culture,' which demands a youthful individuality, a freedom from familial/personal responsibilities which allows workers to exist

in perpetual work- readiness. This is an expectation of labour which disproportionately impacts women, particularly working-class women engaged in caring work.

As McRobbie further states, contemporary work has become demanding and all encompassing - 'akin to a romantic relationship' - or perhaps an abusive relationship (2016:3). She identifies that 'capitalism makes a seductive offer to young women... while at the same time this work is nowadays bound to be precarious and insecure and lacking the protection of conventional employment' (McRobbie, 2016:105). The pressure to remain youthfully unattached, able to move unhindered from personal responsibilities is a site of great anxiety for many women, and one that becomes more difficult to navigate as they become older. Life course position emerges as a further structuring force in women's encounters with post-Fordist work.

Furthermore, there is a pervasive view that the changing structures of work – which have seen a growing numbers of individual working from home abd setting up micro-entrepreneurships, are perfect for women due to this works 'flexibility.' This is a view predicated on the cultural trope that women possess a natural propensity towards multi-tasking and irregular working hours - the cliche being 'mothers expertly balancing a baby and a computer' (Gill, 2002:9). However, such 'flexible' forms of labour constitute what Morini (2007:48) terms 'inflexible flexibility.'

The reality is that workers do not direct the 'flexibility' experienced under modern forms of labour but rather, it is demanded by clients and/or employers. Workers possess little autonomy in how their working time is managed. Such inflexible forms of flexibility exist in contradiction to the demands of child-care work. The notion that work and children can be neatly combined via 'flexible' working hours or forms of home-based entrepreneurialism ignores the fact that child-rearing requires more than the physical presence of an adult. It is a process which requires attentive, ongoing engagement, which hardly fits with the all-encompassing demands of contemporary labour (Luckman, 2015).

McRobbie (2016) argues that the young creatives of neoliberal capitalism must engage in a relentless mosaic of paid and unpaid activities, wherein work and non-work become increasingly difficult to disentangle. In consideration of the demise of Fordist working styles and the propagation of neo-liberal thought,

McRobbie (2016:19) explores how for a growing proportion of young people, work is being re-conceptualised as a site of self-fulfillment, self-actualisation and passionate attachment. This is a phenomenon that she terms, 'passionate labour.'

She argues that with a sense of utopian idealism, the notion abounds that young people can 'makeover' work to better suit their passions and interests (McRobbie, 2016:22). 'Passionate labour' has close conceptual ties to the modern work 'mantra' that we should 'do what we love,' a sentiment rooted in the understanding that ‘labour is not something one does for compensation, but an act of self-love’ (Tokumitsu, 2014). In this manner, the passionate labour ethos further indicates an increased cultural blurring of ‘work’ and ‘life’ as separate and/or divisible spheres.

Within this narrative of passionate labour, the demise of reliable, full-time employment is re-cast as an opportunity, wherein young people weave together a variety of paid and unpaid activities, to become 'cultural entrepreneurs' (McRobbie 2016). In this manner, neoliberal thought ideologically positions young people as having the 'freedom' to shape and direct their own working lives and to pursue activities which suit their individual passions and interests. McRobbie (2016) identifies that this notion derives not only from a sense of misplaced idealism, but from large-scale de-regulation of working practices and consequent proliferation of precarious forms of employment found under contemporary neoliberalism. Young people have decreasing opportunities to enter forms of regular, dependable, and well-renumerated work, and instead must navigate experiences of precarious employment (McRobbie, 2016:13). However, rather than resisting the loss of intelligible working lives, contemporary culture encourages young people to re-frame experiences of precarity as opportunities for self-directed, entrepreneurial modes of living. However, within such a narrative, failures are individualised – born not from structural inequalities but a lack of personal passion.

She (ibid) also takes care to emphasise, precarity is hardly a new experience for working class young people, particularly working-class women. Similarly, Ross (2012:26) highlights that paid, formalised work is not the social norm it may appear. Indeed, ‘the vast majority of human labour, historically and to this day, is wageless’ (Ross, 2012:27). However, precarious employment now

forms a template for work more widely (ibid:11). Cultural understandings as to what constitutes middle-class 'success' no longer demand full-time, dependable, or even well-paid careers. Instead, work predicated on passionate attachment increasingly informs cultural understandings of middle-class status.

It is pleasure and love of one's work which forms the basis of this new middle-class status, as Sandoval (2018:115) states 'the experience of pleasure is not merely a welcome addition to, but a pre-condition for success at work.' In this manner, McRobbie (2016) documents a boom in young women pursuing professions in the creative industries, which centre on short term, contract based 'gigs,' rather than traditional career structures. Most crucially within this narrative, success is re- conceptualised not as the achievement of high salaries or regular, stable employment, but rather the potential to express one's true and 'creative' self.

Farrugia's (2019) empirical research regarding conceptions of success amongst young people, adds further credence to this thesis. He utilises Weeks' (2011) argument, regarding the formation of a post-Fordist work ethic. As previously outlined, prominent worth ethics of each economic era have contributed to classed experiences of labour. For example, the Protestant and Fordist work ethics. She (2011) argues rather than promising spiritual rewards in the next life, or material rewards in this, the post-Fordist work ethic proffers opportunities for '*self-realisation*'.

This ethic has coalesced with the neoliberal imperative, for citizens to be self-managing, flexible and value-accruing subjects (Skeggs, 2011). Farrugia (2019) empirical research, details how these are refracted through the structuring effects of class, resulting in what he terms '*subjects of achievemen*t' and '*subjects of passions.'* Subjects of achievement, navigate contemporary expectations of work and selfhood through a working-class subjectivity. Subjects of achievement connected self-realising, meaningful modes of labour with the development of their personal competencies and possession of markers of achievement. They further linked social mobility to the successful acquisition of markers such as qualifications, certificates, and promotions,. Such aspirations towards social mobility, both reflected and contributed to, their sense of becoming valuable, successful and self-realising individuals.

Middle-class participants, however, did not attribute the same value to gaining specific markers of achievement and did not link success to specific competencies. Labelled the ‘subjects of passion,’ these participants overwhelmingly cited ‘passion’ and being ‘passionate’ as key characteristics to achieving self-realisation. Crucially, these participants also tended to blur boundaries between life and labour, citing instead the necessity to create coherent, passionate subjectivies across all realms of life.

The subjects of passion also ascribed moral worth, to ‘acting passionately,’ in a manner that superseded the ambitions of material rewards or achievements. Indeed, they distanced themselves from discussions of renumeration for labour, instead emphasising personal growth and self-actualisation as appropriate outcomes. As Farrugia (2019) details, the capacity to conceive of labour as primarily a site for self-realisation, rather than a means of economic survival, is a deeply privileged position. The post-Fordist work ethic induces middle-class youths to construct passionate subjectivities, wherein the satisfactions of labour are linked to experiences of self-affirmation and realisation, rather than tangible achievements or rewards. Farrugia’s scholarship indicates that young people experience the post-Fordist work ethic heterogeneously, generating subjectivities informed by the wider structuring effects of class position.

Gender proves another crucial stratifying force in citizens capacities to engage with the post-Fordist work ethic. As previously outlined, neo-liberal narratives of choice present women as homogenous, equally able to create personal success. However, 'while the discourse of girl's success suggests that now they all have the opportunity to... be winners, in fact it is necessary for many to fail' (Harris, 2003:60). To enable the successful assimilation of women into high status professions, post-Fordist capitalism requires other women to take up low paid, low status domestic work, care work and service work.

Indeed, Gregg (2008:292) states that most successful small businesses, home-working situations are dependent on decent childcare arrangements (Gregg, 2008:287). Moreover, alongside the view that middle-class women should be engaged in unceasing forms of labour, reside questions regarding the responsibilities of the domestic realm. As Gregg (2008) states, middle-class women have largely been enabled to reach professional success on the back of

veiled labour, undertaken by working class women and/or women of colour. This is further iterated by Adkins and Jokinen (2008:146), who state that ‘for women with the right credentials there are new opportunities to enter this space but for those who do not their fate is low-status ‘McJobs’. Indeed, they go on to claim that 'growing divisions across women’s careers are forming ‘a new class-specific model of gender inequality’ (ibid). Recognition of the intersecting effects of class and gender therefore appear highly pertinent in understanding contemporary formations of work and life.

Rather than enabling women to gain professional and personal successes, the changing expectation of neoliberal, post-Fordist work has instead deepened divisions and created new forms of inequality. These are expressed along intersecting lines of class and gender. As McRobbie’s (2016) and Farrugia’s work further indicates, the compulsion to love one’s work forms another emerging strand to feminised modes of post-Fordist labour, which can lead to issues of self- exploitation.

2.11. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an investigation of key sociological arguments regarding women’s contemporary status within society, particularly as ideal neoliberal subjects and workers. Neoliberalism has proven a critical structural force, that shapes women’s experiences of agency. Experiences of womanhood occur within a neoliberal framework of governance, which intersect with the demands of a post- Fordist market. Through this context, expectations of female subjectivity have come to reflect the individualisation thesis, particularly demands towards atomised individualism. However, due to ongoing essentialist notions of feminised labour activities, women are ultimately limited in their experiences of becoming reflexive individuals. Women must find individual routes towards marrying normative expectations of femininity with neoliberal ideals of entrepreneurial citizenship. Crucially, I have further indicated how normative ideals of femininity are fundamentally middle-class, proving a further stratifying force in contemporary experiences of womanhood. Cruelly, neoliberal meritocracy frames success as equally achievable for all women, yet the stratifying effects of gender and class remain crucial to women’s life chances. These are conceptual arguments

which I shall investigate further, through my own empirical research outlined in chapters 4, 5, and 6. The next chapter provides information regarding my research methods and methodology, which informed my analysis chapters.

Chapter 3. Methods and methodology

3.1. Research aims and justifications

This research project aimed to investigate the experiences of women engaged in freelance work via the digital selling platform, Etsy.com. I approached this through a qualitative paradigm, rooted in a feminist methodological approach. The content of this research project derived from twenty-one in-depth, semi-structured with women primarily located in the UK. My research sort to investigate the micro-level, lived experiences of women Etsy sellers. This ambition informed my research aims and questions, which are as follows:

Research Aims:

- To identify and understand the factors which impact on women's experiences of selling via Etsy.com.
- To explore how women Etsy sellers experience labour.
- To explore how selling via Etsy impacts women Etsy seller's wider lives.

Research Questions:

- Under what conditions do women Etsy sellers work?
- What forms of labour do women Etsy sellers engage in?
    - How are these forms of labour experienced?
- Does the status of being a woman impact on female Etsy sellers' experiences? In what way(s)?

Within dominant culture, Etsy.com has been aligned with the perceived benefits of entrepreneurialism. Etsy Inc. has contributed to the pervasive view that it provides a 'democratic' model of entrepreneurialism (Etsy, 2016). Such views coalesce with pre-existing assumptions regarding women's natural' capacities towards flexible labour. To interrogate the validity of these ideas, I believed it imperative to position the voices of women Etsy sellers at the heart of my research.

Moreover, as outlined in my literature review, neoliberalism and post-Fordism are not merely abstract concepts but are structuring forces that interact with

and shape the lives of women. How such individual women navigate and negotiate such demands, requires further investigation. In consideration of these aims, I concluded that a qualitative paradigm was best suited to my research project, as this approach is particularly well suited to generating rich, detailed, and substantive data.

This chapter aims to illuminate my research process and provide the reader information regarding the robustness of my methods and methodology. I will achieve this by outlining the basis for my feminist research methodology and by indicating how feminist ambitions informed my research process.

I will highlight the key stages of my research process, indicating their connection to my feminist methodology. I will firstly outline how I gained access to the field, the processes of participant recruitment and my sampling choices. I will also reflect upon why my group interviews via WhatsApp were unsuccessful and explain why they were disused as a research method. I shall then focus my attention on the twenty-one semi-structured interviews which informed this thesis and introduce my research participants. I shall continue by outlining some of the challenges and successes I experienced by employing a feminist methodology. I will focus my attention on power dynamics within my interview and matters of ethical considerations, providing examples from my fieldwork.

Finally, I will describe my data analysis. I will provide justifications for my analysis approach and details regarding challenges to the analysis process. I shall also explain my decision to categorise participants within subgroups and outline the informing logic for this decision.

3.2. Feminist perspectives

My research is predicated on the understanding that gender forms a crucial, socially stratifying characteristic of contemporary life, which demands ongoing sociological investigation. My work is therefore fundamentally informed by feminist scholarship. Feminism necessarily encompasses a variety of outlooks and visions, composed as it is of a wide spectrum of human experiences (Hesse-Biber, 2012).

Moreover, ‘feminism’ refers to a variety of social and political movements, as

well as scholarly theories, outlooks and practices (Chafetz, 1997). However, as a sociological researcher, I would describe my feminist position to be informed by the view that,

(a) "gender comprises a central focus or subject matter of the theory";

(b) "gender relations are viewed as a problem . . . [F]eminist theory seeks to understand how gender is related to social inequities, strains, and contradictions";

(c) "gender relations are not viewed as . . . immutable"; and

(d) feminist theory "can be used . . . to challenge, counteract, or change a status quo that disadvantages or devalues women

(Chafetz, 1988:5).

Moreover, I align myself with the view that research practices should work towards resisting and, where possible, countering gendered oppression (Stanley and Wise, 1993:61). Letherby (2007) states that crucially, feminist research should mean something to women. Its chosen area of investigation should be concerned with the conditions of women's lives, and the research itself should contribute in some manner to how we understand gendered dynamics of social power (Ramazanoglu, 1989 in Letherby, 2004:73). As a multinational and multi-billion company, Etsy Inc. has large-scale mechanisms in place to perpetuate its own narratives. These are witnessed across its various social media outputs, press releases, advertising and web platforms. Therein, I believe that providing an alternative account of women Etsy sellers experiences to be an imperative, feminist task. The realities of these ambitions form the basis for this chapter.

3.3. Feminist research

To establish how I utilised a feminist research methodology, I must firstly outline the ambitions of feminist research practices. Smith (1978) stipulates that women's experiences and knowledge have culturally been de-legitimised, and women have historically been excluded from sites of cultural thought making and influence. She (ibid:281) describes this process as an 'eclipsing' of women from western culture, wherein patriarchal social structures excluded

women from ‘producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered’. Within the social sciences, patriarchal assumptions have historically dominated the discipline, and a male academic perspective has constructed knowledge (Letherby, 2003, Stacey, 1981). Indeed, Letherby (2003) argues that sociologists have been guilty of unexamined, normative assumptions regarding gender roles, and of undervaluing women’s life experiences.

In this manner, women have been disallowed not only from formal education and the knowledge this imparts, but from participating in the construction of legitimised cultural knowledge. This has resulted in a ‘conceptual straight jacket of understanding within which attempts to understand the total society are severely constrained’ (Stacey, 1981:189). It is such constraints of understanding, which feminist researchers have sought to engage with and where possible, resist. I shall next address how feminist researchers have approached this task.

A crucial feminist response to the erasure of women’s experiences from the social sciences, has been feminist standpoint theory. Although there is no singular definition of this theory, Letherby et al., (2006:43) state that ‘standpoint epistemologies start with a political focus on experience’. She asserts that lived experience is a crucial foundation of social knowledge and a means to illuminate social hierarchies of power (ibid). Smith (1992) argues that a sociology of women must originate from the exploration of women’s experiences and their activities of everyday life. As Brooks (2007:56) further states, to undertake research which tackles the systematic exclusion of women's lives from social research, we must ‘begin from women’s lives, as they themselves experience them.’ Furthermore, it is imperative to not only position women and women's lives at the heart of research, but to place a primacy on how women understand and give meaning to their own lives. By doing so, researchers can make steps towards addressing sociology’s gendered imbalance of knowledge-making (Letherby, 2003:45). In this regard I considered it vital to conduct research which centred upon women’s lived experiences and foregrounded women’s interpretations of their own life events.

Hesse-Biber (2012) stresses that there exists no essentially feminist research

method or methodology. However, as Smith (1992) argues, a sociology of women must originate from an exploration of the experiences and activities of everyday life. Qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews, provide an opportunity for research to be centred on the lives of women, as they themselves choose to describe them. These ambitions I have attempted to centre in my own research, and are reflected in my qualitative research methodology, and my employment of semi-structured interviews with women Etsy sellers.

3.3. Recruitment: Interviews

Recruiting participants formed one of the main challenges to the research process. In view of the digital nature of Etsy.com selling, it seemed logical to undertake participant recruitment online. This approach included several strands. I utilised the social media websites Reddit.com and Facebook, contacting page administrators of craft and Etsy.com orientated site pages. As gatekeepers, I required the administrator's permission to share recruitment posts on their webpages. I have included a copy of the messages uploaded via social media in the thesis appendix. After gaining permission, I then made direct posts to these pages, outlining the aims of the project and the stipulations for participants, namely that I was seeking to interview UK based women engaged in Etsy.com work. I found two participants through these social media posts.

I also created an easily ‘shareable’ digital flyer, which provided the same information and could be posted on visual social media sites such as Instagram. The flyer stated, ‘Etsy Seller’s Wanted,’ and then provided basic information regarding the project, a link to my research website and my contact details. I have included a copy of this flyer in the thesis appendix. Although feedback towards the project was positive and several people commented on my posts indicating interest, these initial approaches did not garner many participants. I will address this point in greater detail, in the next section of this chapter.

Alongside the digital recruitment posts I made through Reddit pages and social media; I made physical flyers. With permission gained from venue proprietors, I left my flyers at various venues throughout Glasgow. These were primarily in

cafes, arts venues, galleries, and bars. I also attended the annual Glasgow Etsy craft market, 'Etsy Made Local' and made efforts to chat with Etsy sellers and distribute my flyers. Through this experience, I met the participant, Anita, who acted as one of the gatekeepers. Through her interview, I was put in touch with the leader of the Etsy Glasgow Meet-Up group. This consists of a group of Etsy.com sellers, who meet to discuss their business ventures, share knowledge, and socialise. I was invited to one of the meet-up sessions, through which I was able to introduce myself and found two interview participants. In this respect, the recruitment of participants included some snowball-sampling.

In addition, I also created a research webpage. The central pages of this site included the content of the plain language statement I created for participants. I also included a photo of myself, some basic information about who I was and my contact details. For my own safety and for ease, I also created a separate email account, specific for the project which I included on the website. I found the webpage to be an accessible, easily sharable means for potential participants to gain information about the research project. The webpage can be viewed through this link:
https://etsyresearch.wordpress.com/

The website also garnered some interesting data, within itself. After the official interview had ended, Amelia told me that she had accepted my invitation to be interviewed partly because she had visited my website. As she put it, she could '*see that I had put a lot of time and care into the website*' and the project. She compared this to when she picked up items at a craft fair and could see the love and attention the maker had put into crafting that item. I felt that Amelia's perception of my website as a manifestation of care instigated some sense of comradery for her – a sense of shared values and experiences. Indeed, I had not considered that by putting care and attention into the website, I would show to my participants that I too was something of a passionate worker, albeit labouring for a PhD. Amelia's positive reflections on this made sense in reference to the values she expressed regarding her Etsy based work, particularly passionate attachment to her labour. In this regard, I gained an insight into the potential insider status I had generated with Amelia. Her comments further emphasised the value she perceived in demonstrating

care and love for one's work, in my case through my project website.

The most successful recruitment technique was through the Etsy.com platform. Etsy.com includes a variety of community pages, which operate as forums for sellers to communicate. This includes a 'Glasgow Etsy Team' forum. As I possess a defunct Etsy.com shop, I was able to email the forum administrator's directly, explaining the ambitions of my project and outlining my search for participants. The administrators accepted my request to join the forum. One administrator made an introductory post on my behalf, outlining the project and linking to my project WordPress webpages.

After I had gained permission from the administrators, I was able to make posts directly to the group forum pages. I was also able to view members of the forum group, and message forum members directly. Directly messaging group members proved the most successful recruitment approach. This is potentially because it was a more personal, rather than blanket, approach. It also allowed participants to enter a direct dialogue with me about the project and to raise questions early on about the interview process. This proved a useful means to generate interest and provide clarity about the interviews.

In addition to the deliberate recruitment strategies outlined, I gained participants through word of mouth. A PhD student friend introduced me to a colleague engaged in Etsy.com work and my partner introduced me to an acquaintance.

3.4. Data sample

I initially used handcrafting as a further determining factors for my sample – with the aspiration to interview women engaged in handcrafting. However, I quickly realised that Etsy based work includes a wide variety of activities which do not necessarily fit traditional notions of handcrafting. Indeed, Etsy.com itself describes handcrafting as a 'spectrum' of activity (Etsy, 2019c). For example, one of my participants produces digital designs for wedding invitations and cards, which are downloaded and then printed by customers. I did not want to restrict my understanding of what it meant to be an Etsy seller before entering into the field, but to be open to the variety of activities involved in Etsy selling.

Official data regarding Etsy.com sellers, as provided by Etsy Inc further informed my sample. The company has stated that more than a third of its sellers (37%) are under the age of thirty-five and the median age is thirty-nine (Etsy, 2015). This is an intriguing statistic, as it points to a wide spectrum of ages engaged in Etsy-based work. I, therefore, did not restrict my sample size by age but decided to be responsive to the field and to the demographics of women I encountered when in the process of recruitment.

In practice, I gained participants of various age groups, the youngest woman being 24 at the point of recruitment and the oldest being 57. In the process of analysing my interview data I ultimately created participant subcategories, which were informed in part by their life course position. I will explore these categories and their significance in greater detail, in the analysis portion of this chapter.

Asides from Christie, the participant sample were all located in the UK at the time of being interviewed, although the sample consisted of women of various nationalities. Participants also differed in terms of their educational levels, employment experiences, family backgrounds and class positions. Most defining information was explicitly given by participants; however, class was largely not explicitly referred to by participants.

During the research process, I realised the importance of class as a defining category which impacted and shaped the life experience of participants. However, as I have outlined in my literature review chapter, class is also a culturally obscured determinant of life experiences. Its veiled status is explained in part through the neoliberal political and economic project wherein the state has utilised narratives of meritocratic 'fairness,' to legitimise class inequalities. For women, femininity is inextricably bound to hallmarks of middle-class status, whereas working-class femininity is ridiculed and pathologised (Skeggs, 1997). For these reasons, class was a complex and 'sticky' category through which to place my participants. In consideration of this, I found Skeggs (1997) utilisation of Bourdieu's theories of capital to be useful.

Crucially through 'Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming respectable,' Skeggs (ibid) sought to demonstrate the real-life consequences of capital ownership for women, an ambition I have tried to follow. As she outlines,

Bourdieu's arguments regarding cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital provide means to understand how class is socially reified and reproduced. The benefit of this framework is that class is understood to be stratified across several intersecting lines, producing a variety of outcomes.

To gain insight into the classed experiences of my participants, I applied these categories in reference to the information they provided. For example, participants such as Anita and Phoebe, both entered Etsy based selling from previously well- paying careers. Both women discussed what they perceived to be, the democratic nature of Etsy selling where 'working hard' would reap rewards. In contrast, sellers who had entered selling from less well-paid jobs, such as Celeste and Katie, discussed the financial difficulties associated with Etsy-based selling. In this regard, I argue that the women's perspectives are linked to their access to forms of capital.

Table 1. Participant General Information

Name:	**Age:**	**Etsy products**	**Etsy work status:**
'Anita'	44	Self-designed and made bath and body items	Part-time
'Amelia'	29	Self-designed printed yoga mats	Part-time
'Betsy'	45	Self-designed digital print downloads	Full-time
'Christie'	42	N/A	N/A
'Cissy'	24	Self-designed and made paintings	Part-time

'Celeste'	28	Self-designed and made weavings/textile art	Part-time
'Eliza'	30	Self-designed and made knitted items	Part-time
‘Flora’	34	Self-designed and handmade cake toppers	Part-time
'Gertrude'	26	Self-designed art prints	Part-time
‘Harriet’	27	Self-designed and made pottery	Part-time
‘Jacqueline’	33	Self-designed and made jewellery	Part-time
‘Jamie’	32	Self-designed and made photographs/prints/ greeting cards	Part-time
‘Joanna’	44	Self-designed and made cleaning products	Part-time
'Katie'	28	Self-designed ceramics	Full-time
‘Louise’	36	Self-designed and made lingerie and sleepwear	Full-time

‘Margot’	57	Self-designed and made sleep masks	Full-time

‘Noelle’	30	Graphic design prints	Part-time
‘Phoebe’	52	Self-designed and made art prints, cards, illustrations	Full-time
‘Rebecca’	35	Self-designed and made drawings and paintings	Part-time
‘Rosie’	30	Self-designed and made greeting cards.	Full-time
‘Tara’	48	Self-designed prints for textile homewares	Part-time

3.5. Group interviews: A recruitment dead end

My initial research plan was to undertake a mixed methods approach, integrating data gained from asynchronous digital group interviews and in-person interviews. Although I did gain interest from some potential participants for group interviews, ultimately this aspect of the project was not fruitful, and no group interviews were conducted. I have included reflections of this aspect of my research in the next section of this chapter.

When making digital recruitment posts for my project, I indicated to potential participants that they could choose whether they wished to join a WhatsApp group interview, or an in-person interview. I gained interest from several women through this approach, both for in-person interviews and group interviews. However, the problem I encountered, was the lapses of time which occurred between women contacting me regarding the WhatsApp groups.

When I did manage to find three women interested in creating a group interview, several weeks had passed and the first initial participant was no longer responding to my messages. I then had to wait until another woman

responded to my recruitment post, before attempting to reignite interest for the process again amongst my potential participants. The trickle effect of finding WhatsApp group participants, meant that the interest and commitment of women who had indicated interest, waned. In discussion of this issue with my supervisors, we decided to supersede this method, and focus instead on the in-person interviews.

3.5.1. Group interviews: reflections

My initial motives for running WhatsApp groups were informed by my perceptions of what would be convenient, time-efficient, and accessible to participants.Pertinent to my research project, asynchronous messages can occur in non-real time (James and Busher, 2011). This appeared particularly useful for my Etsy.com seller participants, whom I was aware, often engaged in paid and unpaid labour that cut across traditional working hours. Therefore, participants could engage with the group messages, as and when it suited their individual schedules. Moreover, asynchronistic messaging has in recent years become the social norm for online interactions, particularly via social media apps (Mehner, 2022). Therefore, I considered this interaction model to be accessible and familiar to my sample population (James and Busher, 2011).

In reality, in-person interviews were far more popular. In discussion of the two options, one potential participant told me via email that she ‘didn’t have time’ for the ‘ongoing commitment of a group chat’ and would therefore prefer an in-person interview. This comment made me reflect that although I outlined that I did not expect the group discussions to last longer than an hour, this was perhaps a naïve assertion on my part. Zheng and Ling (2021) detail a growing communication fatigue associated with social media, wherein individuals feel overwhelmed by the presence and demands of social media use. Indeed, WhatsApp groups have been described as ‘tyrannous,’ demanding unceasing engagement with a plethora of messages (Wilder, 2019). It seems possible that some participants viewed a research WhatsApp group as another digital demand on their time and energy, and therein, something to be avoided.

Furthermore, once the face-to-face interviews commenced, I also realised that some of their appeal was that participants could step out of their

everyday routines. Barbara and Phoebe both explained after the interview that they intended to make the most of our meet-up location in town and do some shopping. Louise explained that she lived outside of the city and enjoyed having a reason to visit. In this manner, I gained the impression that there was an appeal associated with meeting me in person, along with the excuse to get a coffee and piece of cake, which WhatsApp did not hold.

The appeal of in-person interviews also raises questions of friendship and reciprocity, which I shall discuss in detail later in this chapter. Ultimately, my expectation that participants would prefer to use WhatsApp groups as they were familiar, and often an already integrated aspects of their working day, proved limited. Instead, some participants indicated that in-person interviews were less of an imposition upon their time and energy, than WhatsApp groups.

I thought that group interviews could enable women to make connections and forge solidarities with other women, beyond the sphere of the Etsy.com platform (Montell, 1999). This was an idea further informed by Finch's (1984) group interviews with wives of clergy ministers, who expressed value in the support gained from other women in the groups. In this manner, Montell (1999) identifies group interviews as containing the potential to contribute to feminist consciousness raising, social action and female empowerment. Indeed, Johnson (1996) has argued that group interviews can provide means to explore collective identities and highlight shared experiences of structural power. In adoption of this method, it was my hope to generate scenarios, wherein such experiences could potentially emerge.

However, a theme that emerged from interviews was a desire shared by participants towards gaining control over their personal and professional lives. Indeed, some participants, such as Joanna and Margot, described their transition into Etsy.com based work as partly motivated by their desire to 'take control' of their 'destiny' (Joanna) and a preference for lone-working styles. Barbara, Phoebe and Louise also explained that part of the appeal of their Etsy work was that they could schedule their own time and choose when to socialise with others.

Moreover, several participants also self-described themselves as 'introverted' or in Margot's case 'INFP' personality type. Some participants, such as Anita, were involved in Etsy.com meet-up groups and discussed the value they perceived in

friendships with other sellers. However, others such as Barbara, Celeste, Joanna, and Katie stated that they were not interested in connecting with other sellers, Barbara describing herself as a 'lone wolf.'

In this respect, I realised that my belief that a group interview would be a positive experience for participants was informed by my own assumptions regarding the lives of Etsy.com sellers. Byrne's (2005:188) reflection that, 'if you are finding it difficult to find interviewees this may *add* to your understanding of what you are trying to research,' is relevant in this regard. Through this process, I came to realise that one-on-one interviews were not only perceived as less time-consuming and involved but were also potentially seen by some participants as less socially demanding than group interviews.

3.6. Interviews

As previously outlined, semi-structured interviews can provide a flexible, iterative method towards data generation. I tried to treat my interviews as individual phenomena, and my approach to them was largely led by the content and flow of each interview. One interview was nearly entirely based on a conversation that sprung from one initial question in my guide. Two interviews, which I found challenging at the time, were more rigidly adherent to the guide. However, in general, I tended to follow the guide as a template, but allowed responses and questions to evolve and develop through the interviewing process. The length of the interviews also varied, the shortest lasting around 45 minutes, and the longest being closer to three hours. However, most interviews lasted around an hour.

Prior to the interviews, I provided participants the options to meet online or face to face. With an eye toward my participant's comfort, I also encouraged them to choose the location of the interviews. Most interviews took place in cafes, but some were also undertaken in participants' homes and workplaces. I conducted two interviews remotely through the video call application Skype. To ensure my own safety, I made sure to share my location with two people prior to meeting participants and to then notify these people when the interviews had concluded.

Remote videoing applications such as Skype and Zoom, are increasingly

normalised qualitative research tools (Iacono et al., 2016). Some of the benefits of using such applications include their financial affordability, convenience, and potential to access wider sample populations (ibid). In my own experience, interviewing through Skype allowed me to meet and speak with women outside of Scotland, which widened the diversity of my participant group. In Rebecca's case, a Skype interview was particularly convenient as she had recently given birth and was engaged in full-time childcare. Therefore, the interview could be easily run from her home.

However, I found limitations to the depth of data generated through the online interviews. Prior to most of my in-person interviews, there was 'chit-chat,' wherein we introduced ourselves and familiarised ourselves with our environment. Moreover, most in-person interviews also ended with some concluding remarks or brief discussions. Some of these post-script discussions offered valuable insights into my participants' experiences and perspectives. Margot, for example, only mentioned after the interview that her husband's full-time job had provided them with financial stability in the early stages of her Etsy.com shop.

In this manner, such pre- and post-script interactions also provided further insights into the thoughts and feelings of participants. The context of online interviews made such informal interactions challenging and I felt this impeded the development of rapport. Moreover, the quality of the video call also affected the naturally occurring pacing and timing of our speech patterns, which Salmons (2012) identifies as being important non-verbal aspects of communication. This also dampened my capacity to grasp some of the subtler aspects of my participant's responses. For these reasons, in-person interviews yielded richer, more in- depth data than those conducted online.

3.7. Fieldwork reflections

3.7.1. Flexibility and control

Research interviews can take a variety of forms, but I chose to undertake semi-structured, in-depth interviews. The semi-structured, in-depth interview is largely typified by its combination of structure and flexibility – it requires some pre- planning, but also a capacity to respond spontaneously to the demands of

the field (Bryman, 2012). A benefit to this method is that semi-structured interviews allow the researcher control regarding the topics covered and how/when they are discussed, whilst also allowing space for the exploration of new or unconsidered topics (Legard et al, 2006).

The flexibility they provide means researchers can respond spontaneously to participants explicit and implicit responses, therefore allowing a greater depth of data to emerge. Indeed, due to their use of open-ended questions, Byrne (2005) identifies semi-structured interviews as allowing deeper, more considered responses than closed ended interviewing techniques. This forms a particularly effective method when seeking to generate data regarding participant's opinions, emotional responses, interpretation of events and experiences (ibid, 2005). Finding a balance between structure and flexibility was a learning curve throughout my fieldwork, which yielded several reflections.

In terms of my own pre-planning, I made use of a topic guide. The guide initially contained questions written out in full and sub questions and prompts included beneath each question. Adams (2015) and Rubin and Rubin (2012) both advise that interview guides should be reviewed and adapted, in response to the field. Once I began my fieldwork, it quickly became clear that my questions were too detailed and too numerous. Indeed, including sub questions and prompts, my guide contained nearly 70 questions, which was completely unwieldy. For this reason, I made edits to the guide throughout the process of undertaking my fieldwork, in response to participant's engagement with the questions and my own development as a researcher. I realised that my former plethora of questions was a research safety blanket for my own benefit. Less questions, written as prompts, proved less overwhelming for me and yielded more in-depth responses from participants.

Rubin and Rubin (2012) identify that interview questions should not be overly theoretical or conceptual, but centre on actual lived experiences. I therefore endeavoured to create questions which were clear, unequivocal and accessible to my research participants (ibid).

However, after the third interview, I realised that some questions such as 'can

tell me about your Etsy shop?' were overly broad and others, such as 'do you see yourself in your brand?' were too vague. In incidents where there was confusion regarding these questions, I realised the value in discussing with participants information that other Etsy sellers had shared with me.

For example, in reference to approaches to branding and marketing, I explained some sellers used aspects of their personal story such as being a mother or pet owner. I found that drawing on clear examples helped clarify the topics I was discussing. Also, indicating the actions of other sellers also sometimes provided a less personal route to discussing aspects of my participants' selling experiences. This was useful with participants such as Margot and Tara, who were more reserved regarding their own direct experiences and seemed to find it more comfortable to talk abstractly.

In devising the guide, I also tried to consider its structure in relation to the interview process. I placed questions which were more personal or potentially sensitive, such as those pertaining to money, in the mid-section of the interview. This was led by the view that participants would have warmed up to the interview process by this point and may therefore feel more receptive to discussing such matters (Adams, 2015). The forethought regarding when to approach topics, and the links between topics, was largely fruitful. In some instances, I only roughly referred to the specifics of the topic guide but found referring to the broader topic outline to be useful. This was further assisted by colour coding my interview guide. However, I sometimes found it challenging to balance the layout of questions in the guide and follow topics as they emerged throughout the interview.

For example, in my interview with Margot, she raised the matter of financing her business quite early on. Wishing to follow this thread as it emerged, I skipped forward across my guide to prompts regarding financial considerations. However, I felt that doing this somewhat impeded my flow as the interviewer. I had to decide as the interview continued, where and when to discuss the other interview topics. This disrupted the links between topics that I had tried to carefully create through the guide. Moreover, as the matter of money can be sensitive, I felt that greater degrees of trust needed to be established between

Margot and I, before it was brought up. Ultimately, I felt that not following the layout of topics outlined in my guide and deciding to follow Margot's introduction of financial considerations, created limitations to the data generated in the interview. This example demonstrates some of the challenges associated with trying to act responsively in the field but also points to matters of hierarchy and power in the interview dynamic, which I shall discuss further in the next section.

There were also instances where this interviewing technique also allowed themes to emerge that I had not considered prior to entering the field. Most notably, discussions regarding women's relationships with Etsy.com as a platform economy. For example, in my interview with Betsy, we entered a discussion regarding issues with VATMOS fees associated with selling her digital prints through Etsy.com.

As I had not prepared any questions regarding this experience of Etsy selling, I asked her spontaneously 'did you have to research how to do this?' From this question, she revealed the limitations she felt in the choices of selling platforms available, and her anxieties associated with her business being reliant on the fortunes and practices of an external company. Indeed, this topic proved to be important not only for Betsy but for several other participants and ultimately formed an important theme in my later analysis.

In this manner, utilising semi-structured interviews also allowed me to give space to participants to discuss topics and experiences which were important to them, but did not necessarily factor into my topic guide. This allowed me to generate data with depth and complexity, which reflected the aspects of Etsy.com selling which participants themselves considered important.

These experiences spurred me to consider the complexities of flexibility and rigidity when undertaking semi-structured interviews. Namely, how to know when to be spontaneous and responsive in the field and when to follow my pre- organised interview guide. These are matters of interviewer experience, which I hope to develop further through future research projects.

3.7.2. Reflexivity and objectivity

Harding (1992:438) contends that ‘objective’ sociological research is too weak and un-rigorous to be of use. The weakness of objective research methodologies is that they obscure, rather than nullify, the implicit values and perspectives of the researcher (ibid). She (2004:93) argues that conversely, feminist epistemologies seek to avoid the ‘God trick,’ wherein the researcher perceives 'true’ knowledge as deriving from neutral, impartial observations of a subject (ibid). This is a position supported by Stanley and Wise (1993:189) who argue that the researcher 'is also a subject in her research and that her personal history is part of the process through which 'understanding' and 'conclusions' are reached'. Such approaches form part of the necessary feminist endeavours of critical evaluation and reflexivity (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002:118). Feminist research, therefore, demands reflexive self-reflection on the part of the researcher, in consideration of their generative role within the research process (Hesse-Biber 2007:129).

My choice of research topic and choice of methodology are all led by my life experiences. The basis of this research originates from my identification as a feminist, and a feminist who believes the subjugation of women is closely entwined with the structures of capitalism. This necessarily structures my interpretation of the research process, and my participant’s experiences. In this regard, I make no claim towards presenting an unfiltered or pure account of my participants' life experiences. Rather, I am aware that my perspectives form an inevitable strand to the meanings and interpretations I have ascribed to the content of my participants' interviews.

I was led to this area of investigation due to my own previous experiences of freelance, home-based work, and the many friends I have known engaged in forms of freelance creative labour. As over-educated, under-employed millennials, our conversations circled around work-based frustrations – such as precariousness, isolation, and economic insecurity. These conversations, and the reflections they provoked, formed the early springboard for this research project. Indeed, it is the element of struggle which has formed a core component to my critical perspective regarding Etsy.com work.

As a perspective, my experiences of employment cannot be extracted from the analyses presented within this thesis. Like many other women in my age

bracket, my route through work has included a variety of roles and tapestry of paid and unpaid activities. As I shall reflect upon further in this section, this life experience as determined by generational cohort, proved a point of similarity with several participants.

Within my research, I felt I was perceived in a variety of ways by participants, and these perceptions impacted the way the interviews were conducted and the data they generated. It also gave me cause to reflect upon aspects of my biography and my outward appearance and comportment, in relation to the data generated through this thesis. This is a topic which related in parts to points of sameness and difference between my participants and I, which I shall now address.

3.7.3. Sameness and difference: hierarchies of power

Feminist research is fundamentally interested in dynamics of power. It therefore demands that researchers reflect upon power dynamics, within their own research processes. Although it is not possible to nullify all forms of researcher/participant hierarchies, feminist researchers should strive to engage and reflect upon power dynamics within their research (Oakley, 1981). They should seek to ensure that relationships with participants are as 'non-hierarchical, non-authoritarian, nonexploitative and non-manipulative' as possible (Wambui, 2013). Moreover, such hierarchies of power must be considered in reference to the modes of similarity and difference which occur between researcher and participant.

In my research, I possessed some degree of insider status. Although I make no claims towards being a professional creative, I draw and paint recreationally and have some arts training. which formed a point of connection with some participants (a point addressed in more detail, further in this chapter).

3.8. Ethical considerations

Bulmer (1982:3) describes ethics as 'a matter of principled sensitivity to the rights of others.' Within research, this requires the researcher to prioritise the emotional, psychological, and physical well-being of participants (Bulmer,

1982).

Blaxter et al., (2010) identify that qualitative researchers should be particularly cogniscient of ethical issues, due to the closeness of researcher and participants. Ethical considerations are relevant at all stages of the research process and must be considered both prior to and during fieldwork (Paolletti et al., 2014). Before entering the field, I, therefore, submitted an ethical approval form to the University of Glasgow, Social Sciences and Politics ethics board. This outlined the aims and ambitions of the project and presented any potential risks or challenges associated with it. I submitted this, alongside a plain language statement and informed consent form. I have included copies of these documents within the thesis appendix. After some amendments to my original form, the ethics form was accepted.

I was aware that some of my participants engaged in the same crafting events and/or attended the same meet-up groups. Therefore, confidentiality and anonymity of participants was essential (O'Reilly, 2005). To ensure the anonymity of participants, I made use of pseudonyms and obscured references to institutions, organisations and places. I provided participants the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms and if they expressed no preference, I chose their pseudonyms.

Research ethics extend beyond institutional stipulations and form a crucial ambition to feminist research practices. I will now outline my reflections regarding ethical issues of rapport and 'friendship' within my fieldwork.

3.8.1. Rapport, reciprocity and ethical interviews

Considerations of rapport and reciprocity are crucial to feminist researchers, as they pertain to issues of power, participant/researcher hierarchies and research ethics (Oakley, 1981, Reinharz and Chase, 2003). Oakley (1981) argued that traditionally 'objective' interviews, which emphasised neutrality and non- reciprocity, treated women as objects rather than subjects of research. In response, she argued that feminist researchers have a responsibility to build genuine connections of intimacy, connection and even friendship with participants (ibid). This can be achieved by disclosing information about oneself, responding to interactions in an authentic manner

and appealing to shared experiences of womanhood (ibid). I considered it important within my research, to respond honestly and openly to participants questions regarding my research, but also my own experiences of freelance work, artmaking, and feminism. However, matters of rapport building and reciprocity also provoked ethical considerations, which I shall address in due course.

Throughout all my interviews, I worked under the assumption that a mutually comfortable interaction between interviewer and participant would be informal and 'chatty.' This was reflected in my style of interviewing (which did not adhere strictly to an interview guide) as well as my casual demeanour, appearance, use of language and moments of self-disclosure. As outlined, most interviews took place in casual settings, and I wore 'normal' day-to-day clothing. Ravitch and Carl (2021:200) determine that in the process of relationship building, researchers should cultivate an 'authentic' and 'honest' representation of themselves. This informality felt comfortable and authentic to me, and I assumed it would be experienced similarly by participants.

Moreover, I endeavoured to interact in a manner which further felt real and honest, rather than emotionally removed, sterile and overly professional (Oakley, 1981). However, throughout my fieldwork, I was confronted with the reality that this approach generated its own challenges, ethical considerations, and participant responses. Moreover, I reflected that my conception of what constituted a comfortable interview and interviewing style, was not necessarily experienced similarly by my participants. These reflections contributed further to the development of my thematic analysis, as I shall also discuss.

I noted that my approach, resonated with particular subgroups of my participant sample, invariably women in their 20's and 30's. The participants Cissy, Gertrude, and Harriet, for example, were in their 20's at the time of being interviewed. As largely constituting the sub-group of 'passionate workers,' several of these women expressed dislike for behaviours and attributes associated with 'professionalism.'

Moreover, this group of women were less likely to possess formal employment experience within role that demanded high levels of formality. My informal style of interviewing, casual demeanour, appearance, and use of language appeared to align with the value placed on authenticity, found amongst this

group. This is well illustrated within a moment with the participant Jacqueline, who stated that she's '*not a very professional sort of person*,' to which I jokingly responded, '*oh... professionalism is overrated!*' In this respect, I also participated in a specific understanding of what constituted a good interview, informed by a shared belief in the value of authenticity.

Moreover, as a woman in her early 30's with my own interests and experience in art making practices, I felt I possessed some degree of insider status with these participants. This is illustrated in my interview with Gertrude, who was also engaged in Ph.D. at the point of being interviewed and was engaged in feminist research. When interviewing her, we met at her home, and she conducted the interview in her pyjamas, having only just woken from a nap. We chatted about our Ph.D. experiences, flat-sharing, and our pets. Oakley (1981) notes that shared statuses between participants and researchers can enable greater degrees of empathy and insight into participant's experiences.

In this regard, I felt my approach to the interview, with its sense of casual comportment and shared interests and experiences, contributed to the rapport generated in the interview. Moreover, it reflected our shared values of 'authenticity', gained in part through our similar educational backgrounds, generational cohort position and arts backgrounds. A further example also occurred in my interview with Cissy, wherein we spoke at length about our shared interest in making art, and our complex personal histories with art education. Although these were enjoyable aspects of the research process, they also led me to reflect upon the friendship-like dynamics that can occur within fieldwork, and some of their implications for both participants and researcher.

Indeed, I believe that questions of sameness and difference highlight implicit power dynamics which can occur within the interview context. This is represented in the interview I had with Rosie. Rosie explained during the interview that she had initially been hesitant to attend the interview because she was intimidated by the title of the project. She explained that although she found the description of the project understandable, the actual title included words - post-Fordism, neo-liberalism – which she was unsure of[1].

[1] An earlier, wordier title for this thesis project was '*Scottish women, creative labour and 'Etsy': An examination of freelance 'passionate' work under neo-liberal and post-Fordist capitalism'*

This had given her a sense of unease about my expectations of her in the interview, and what the interview might entail. However, speaking to a friend who was a PhD student had helped ease her worries on this matter and I also re-assured Rosie that she was not expected to engage with these concepts or speak in an 'academic-y' way. From this point I also found myself emphasising aspects of my personality, which centred on my status as a fellow young-ish woman her early 30s, rather than a lofty academic researcher.

I related to Rosie some of my own experiences of feeling intimidated by academic language and some of the challenges I found in talking about academic research in day-to-day conversations. I also found myself referring to myself as a student, rather than a researcher. In this way, I felt a sense of reciprocity, regarding vulnerabilities from my own life and professional experiences. This allowed a space of shared or common experience to emerge. Moreover, I emphasised aspects of my status which were more familiar and less intimidating to a person who was not involved in academia.

This approach certainly contributed to the development of our rapport. After this initial interaction, Rosie and I found further common ground relating to our prior retail experiences and upcoming bridesmaid duties. These were points of connection which felt rooted in our shared statuses as similarly aged women, rather than as researcher and participant. Although the rapport this created generated some rich and in-depth data, it also throws up some ethical considerations. As Dumcombe and Jessop (2012:110) ask:

> *If interviewees are persuaded to participate in the interview by the researcher's show of empathy and the rapport achieved in conversation, how far can they be said to have given their 'informed consent' to make the disclosures that emerge during the interview?*

Indeed, I considered this question in relation to a moment in my interview with Rosie when I paused the recorder to take a quick break. Rosie then stated that she had become so absorbed in what we were speaking about, she had forgotten it was in the context of an interview. As Bourgois asks in relation to ethnographic research, 'is rapport building a covert way of saying 'encourage people to forget that you are constantly observing them?' (2012:327). Similarly, I reflected that my desire for participants to be at ease

in the interview context was not only because I wanted them to have a pleasant experience. It was also because I felt that more in-depth, rich data would be generated through such a dynamic. In some cases, my choice to emphasise aspects of my 'human' self I shared with participants contributed to this. However, this can also be viewed as instrumentalising aspects of myself, to gain access to information that participants may not have otherwise shared. This stimulates questions regarding the appropriate use of rapport within interview contexts.

My interview with Amelia further illustrates the complex outcomes which can occur when researchers utilise feelings of friendship in the interviewing process. When I interviewed Amelia, we met at a café and talked together for several hours. The interview moved naturally into conversation, and we had areas of mutual experience to discuss. Moreover, Amelia was fairly new to Glasgow, and I sensed that she was in the process of making new friends. After the interview, I realised that my voice recorder had malfunctioned, and I had lost the interview recording. I made extensive post-interview notes to capture the lost data and through doing so, realised that I had neglected to ask Amelia about the process of making her items. I organised another meet-up with her and was invited to her home.

As most interviews were one off events, this second meet-up more closely resembled a meeting of friends. Indeed, she stated that she was happy to re-do the interview in part, because she wanted to see me again and catch up. The act of inviting me to her home furthered this sense of burgeoning friendship. The interview largely mirrored our prior meeting; however, I asked her about the process of making her items. This was a point which led to discomfort and embarrassment on her part, as she explained they were made in a foreign factory by unknown workers:

> *Amelia: So, I have family in xxx so actually they've kind of like. helped me along with it all... so basically yeah, they get it done in a factory and pass it along. I don't like that... if I had money... like 10 grand, I'd be like, right, I'm buying a machine, putting it in a studio and printing it myself. Because then I'd know everything... that kind of... -sigh- bit I really don't like. I would like to print my own. But it's just going to have to do for now.*

A: What is it about it you don't like?

Amelia: just that I don't know, I know my family's over there, but I don't actually know what's going on... Like... you know what I mean?

A: Right so because you're not able to control it?

Amelia: Yeah, yeah

Unfortunately, at the time, I did not fully grasp the implications of her comments and misunderstood her meaning. I therefore continued to probe Amelia on this matter, before realising her discomfort regarding the subject.

The interview finished fairly soon after this point was raised, and we walked together to the train station. When saying goodbye, I felt unsure how Amelia felt about the interview and if she wanted us to meet again. Ultimately, we did not. In reflection upon the encounter, I felt that my status as a 'could be' friend, particularly as a woman newly moved to the city, was disarming for Amelia. This was a situation further stoked by my own approach to the interviewing process, wherein I had fostered feelings of genuine connection. I then felt I had negatively impacted this growing trust, by probing Amelia regarding an aspect of her work she was uncomfortable with. This encounter led me to question the ethical implications and responsibility I held, regarding the types of rapport building I engendered with participants, based on my desire to be 'authentic.'

Duncombe and Jessop (2012) indicate that rapport building can amount to the commodification of friendship, which can result in experiences of participant exploitation. Finch's (1984) reflections upon her shared status with her female participant's indicates results of possessing insider status. As Glesne (1989) writes, when researchers imitate the hallmarks of friendship in the name of rapport-building, this can lead to participants feeling confused and misled by the researcher's intentions. In this regard, affinity between researcher and participant can result in a participant's increased vulnerability to the researcher/participant power hierarchy.

In Cotteril's (1992) research regarding the affinal relationships of women, she indicates that rapport building can also impact the researcher. She recounts her own disappointment when experiences of apparent mutual disclosure and trust did not develop into more meaningful relationships. In this respect,

interviewers can also be vulnerable to feelings of rejection and emotional ambivalence, through processes of rapport building.

In this regard, I realised that my own experiences as a lone-working PhD student, speaking to other women about their experiences of home-based, lone working, coloured my actions throughout some interviews. Undertaking a Ph.D. is notoriously lonely as an endeavour and I believe that my eagerness to affirm shared experiences was also born in part by my own loneliness at the time. I think this could at times prove confusing regarding follow-up meetings or the development of friendships. Moreover, it also rubbed up against some participant's expectations of the interview process, and of being an interview participant, as I shall now address. These experiences, further speak to the ethical challenges associated with interviewing women who closely match the researcher, challenges which can be felt on both sides.

3.8.2. When rapport 'goes wrong'

In consideration of the comportment of interviewer and interviewee, Rubin and Rubin (2004:84) state, 'people relate to one another through culturally understood roles in which obligations and responsibilities are known to both parties.' Cotterill (1992) indicates that in the face of unknown and unfamiliar scenarios, people will show their 'best face.' In the context of the interview, participants 'impression management' can provide a means to navigate an unknown situation. Therein, a familiar and understood role can be utilised by participants to feel comfortable within the interview process (ibid). In the context of my interviews, I became aware that professional self-comportment formed a means for some participants to navigate the interviews.

This is illustrated in the context of café-based interviews, by the expectations surrounding whose responsibility it was to buy the coffees. A LinkedIn article regarding etiquette for professionals attending 'coffee meetings,' advises that whoever has requested the meeting, pays for the coffee (Carey, 2017). In my interviews with Margot and Tara, both women accepted my responsibility to buy the coffee (or Kombucha, in Margot's case). As 'post-careerist's;' both women had extensive career experiences in professional roles. In reflection, I perceived that the choice to allow me to buy the drinks possibly resonated with their own prior professional experiences regarding business meetings. I

found this was further exerted, through the women's attitudes and comportments both prior to and during the interviews. This provoked reflections regarding dynamics of power, interviewer/participant hierarchies and the complexities of rapport building, as I shall now detail.

Not all participants reciprocated my efforts towards building feelings of emotional connection. Before meeting with me, Tara and I discussed the interview process via email. She disclosed some reservations regarding this, particularly about the questions. She also asked if she should prepare some answers in advance or bring along shop data or selling statistics. To re-assure her, I emphasised the casual nature of the interviews and the informality of the questions. I further stated that I was primarily interested in her thoughts and feelings, so she did not need to bring any specific information with her.

This decision was informed by my assumptions, regarding a comfortable, accessible, and non-demanding interview. Namely, that it would mirror the conventions of an informal meeting with a 'friend,' and would develop through informal rapport building and moments of mutual self-disclosure. However, Tara did not appear to want to engage in the interview in such a manner. Indeed, I later reflected that my efforts to reassure her on this matter were based on my own perceptions of a comfortable interview experience.

In the interview, Tara largely comported herself in a way that suggested she was participating in a workplace meeting. Her answers tended to be short, and often centred on activities she undertook, rather than her thoughts and feelings regarding them. Indeed, some of my efforts to encourage Tara towards greater degrees of disclosure were rebuffed with polite, but firm, yes or no responses. This is reflected in the following excerpt, where I attempted to probe her reasons for engaging in paid work outside of her Etsy.com business:

> *Anna: I know that's something other people have spoken to me about, is that it can be quite isolating...*
> *Tara: Yeah.*
> *Anna: Especially if you work from home as well and do really have any reason to ever see anyone else-*
> *Tara: Yeah. I don't have a studio or anything, I work from home.*
> *Anna: That (mixing freelance work with paid external work) sounds like it's*

maybe more healthy?

Tara: Yeah.

As demonstrated, my efforts to probe further into any potential emotional reasons for maintaining a part-time job alongside her Etsy.com shop were unsuccessful. In other interviews, the introduction of a subject area was often enough to elicit a response and develop a discussion regarding it. However, this was not the case with Tara. In this respect, I felt held at arm's length throughout the interview, and unsure about the best way to comport myself throughout the process. Moreover, I felt that participants such as Tara and Margot were far more comfortable discussing the clearly business orientated aspects of their Etsy.com work, rather than its interactions with their personal lives. This potentially is also linked to their life experiences, wherein life and work have had clear boundaries. I therefore felt that the interviews were not as 'successful' as others, wherein higher levels of disclosure were achieved.

Nairn et al., (2005) argue that reflections upon a 'failed' interview, can provoke unique insights into the research process, knowledge making and power dynamics of participant/researcher. As I have indicated, expectations towards emotional rapport building and participant disclosure can potentially increase the vulnerability of participants. In reflection of my interview with Tara, I came to realise that her that business-like approach lent her a degree of power within an unknown situation. Tara, and Margot, both utilised their professional employment experience, to navigate the interview process via their professional selves.

At the time, I found this response challenging, as I do not have the same degrees of professional experience and lack the necessary knowledge to conduct interviews in such a manner. I therefore felt that my approach was at odds with their expectations of the interview process and moreover, that I had not lived up to their expectations of a competent researcher. However, in reflection of this experience, Finch's (1984:80) comment that 'I have... emerged from interviews with the feeling that my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me,' is useful here. Finch's participants were housewives, who did not have access to a professional persona through which to conceptualise the interview experience, and

interviewer. Indeed, she writes that her status as a fellow clergyman's wife, formed the main lens through which she was perceived, and responded to, by her participants. In consideration of some of my participants, utilisation of their professional selves and professional comportment, lent them the capacity to 'protect themselves from people like me.' However, aspirations towards authentic, informal interactions and working styles do not demand the same type of professional comportment.

In this manner, the capacity to draw upon a professional persona provided some participants a means to assert agency and control within the interview setting. Rather than viewing these interviews as 'failures' because they did not generate the types of data I was looking for, they form a further means to examine the power hierarchies of researchers and participants within the field. Moreover, they indicate further the complexity of approaching research relationships as though they were friendships, and unexamined expectations of generating intimacy with participants.

These examples have highlighted considerations within my own research, regarding the ethical challenges of undertaking feminist research. Matching my participants, particularly regarding shared life course position and generational experiences, yielded feelings of rapport and experiences of reciprocity. However, as Oakley (1981:55) notes, 'ethical dilemmas are greatest where there is the least social distance between the interviewer and interviewee.' Particularly, this relates to the limitations of connection and friendship that are really proffered through the interview process and their outcomes. The switch between perceived roles, as probing researcher, or empathetic would-be friend, can be complex and confusing for both researcher and participant, as outlined in my experience with Amelia. It also indicates ethical ambiguities associated with the aim of rapport building, namely for participants to lessen their awareness of the interviewer's status as a researcher and therefore divulge more in-depth information, as I found in my interview with Rosie.

My discussion of these ethical dilemmas does not yield clear answers, however in doing so, I am led by the view that transparency forms a crucial component to conducting ethical research. Moreover, as McCormick (2012:31) states, 'by sharing their dilemmas and the ways in which they negotiate them, feminist

researchers... support one another in the ethically murky field of doing feminist research.' Through highlighting some of the 'murkiness' found within own fieldwork; I hope to contribute to wider discussions regarding the ethical challenges of conducting feminist research. Particularly, the dual aims to treat participants as subjects rather than objects of research, but to also resist commodifying and exploiting feelings of connection and friendship.

3.9. Data management

Data management and storage forms a crucial aspect of ethical research practices (Ravitch and Carl, 2021). In consideration of this, I followed the University of Glasgow's guidelines regarding the treatment of my interview data. The interviews were all recorded by me, through a Dictaphone and my phone as back up, in case there were issues with the main recorder. Once recorded, I uploaded and stored the interviews on my University of Glasgow Webmail Cloud account, which is password protected. I saved the interviews under the pseudonyms given and also transcribed them using the pseudonyms. I utilised professional transcribing for one interview but found that transcribing the interviews myself formed an important part of the data analysis process. I therefore transcribed all other interviews myself. I also saved and stored the written transcripts through a password protected account. All physical copies of the interview transcripts were printed using the participant pseudonyms and were stored in my home. In consideration of my aims to make my research accessible and meaningful for my participants, I will also provide a summary document of my key findings with them.

3.10. Analysis

Low (2019:135) argues that within qualitative research, 'there simply is no end point to analysis where nothing new emerges.' Indeed, Nelson (2016:556) argues that saturation is an 'unfortunate metaphor;' it can instill a false sense of completeness to a research project and instigate researchers to make overly grand claims from their data. I was led by the desire to reach 'conceptual density,' wherein I felt I had reached sufficient depth of understanding of my participant's experiences, to make conceptual links with

wider theories (ibid). To achieve this, I made fieldwork notes throughout my research, which included extensive conceptual mind-maps. Through this approach, I was able to perceive emerging themes from my interview data, and their connections to wider theoretical perspectives.

Fusch and Ness (2015) argue validity within qualitative research is not associated with the number of participants, but the depth and breadth of the data generated. For this reason, qualitative samples tend to be small (Ritchie et al., 2006). My final data sample of twenty-one participants may be considered a small sample. However, I found that many of my participants wished to speak at length and in depth about their experiences and most interviews generated rich, complex data.

Furthermore, it was not my ambition to produce representative or generalisable data through this thesis, but to explore the experiences of a specific group of women. Moreover, within qualitative research a large dataset can impede the generation of in-depth data analysis. In this regard, I concluded that a large sample size was not necessary, or indeed, desirable.

Analysis did not form a discreet portion of the research process but was an ongoing endeavour throughout the fieldwork. My fieldnotes formed the first stage of the analysis process. I wrote extensive, detailed notes regarding the interview experiences, usually directly after the interview had concluded. In the instance of losing recorded data due to a technical malfunction of my Dictaphone, the corresponding fieldnotes were essential parts of the analysis. Through my fieldnotes, I reflected upon various aspects of the interviews, including emerging themes, reflections, and interview quotes. The process of transcriptions formed a further crucial aspect of the analysis process. I continued to review and expand upon my notes, as I transcribed my interviews. Transcription was a time-consuming yet rewarding experience which furthered my perception of re-occurring themes across the data set. After the completion of my transcriptions, I read and re-read the transcripts, making further notes in response to their content. I also submitted to my supervisors two papers which detailed the emerging themes within two interviews. This exercise further developed my coding framework, as the process of analysis helped me to perceive shared thematic categories across interviews.

Potentially due to my learning disability, I struggled to immerse myself in the data via digital means. Attempts to code the data through digital programmes, made me feel overly removed from the content of the interviews and I felt, de- contextualised the data. I therefore utilised printed copies of the texts, which I could physically manipulate and annotate. I initially attempted to physically cut up and move sections of the interviews into thematic 'piles,' but this made the interviews feel overly fragmented. Ultimately my coding was achieved through a process of colour coding, as I assigned colours to broad themes, such as 'ideas of success' and 'work history.' Practically, I coded large sections of the transcripts along such themes, reviewing the transcripts in relation to each other as I went and taking extensive physical notes. I reviewed each transcript several times, also highlighting sub themes, which allowed greater depth of analysis to emerge. I also began to consider the content of my interviews in relationship to the theoretical perspectives and I had I recorded these themes in Word documents and physical notebooks.

Throughout my fieldwork, I began to perceive participant typologies emerging. A typology is a discrete category, which combines two or more dimensions (Ritchie et al., 2003:244). The construction of typologies involves 'finding links or connections across two or more phenomena... maybe in the form of linkages between one or more sets of phenomena, or attachments to subgroups' (ibid:248). I was initially struck by what appeared to be experiences and views led by participants' position within generational cohorts. Moreover, positions within their life course. For example, participants aged 21-35 seemed to place considerable significance on their work being creatively fulfilling, rather than highly renumerated. The development of participant typologies is a highly iterative process, and I amended and changed the participant categories I used several times (ibid).

Indications of the typologies emerged from latent themes I generated through the data, and some explicit indicators based on participants comments. Discussions regarding work experiences, prior employment histories and future ambitions were crucial to the development of typologies. In consideration of these experiences, I found Farrugia's (2019) and McRobbie's (2016) scholarship regarding class, youth, and passionate labour to be particularly useful.

Table 2: Participant Typologies

The post-careerists	The Etsy achievers	The conflicted careerists	The passionate workers
Christie	Anita	Celeste	Cissy
Phoebe	Betsy	Louise	Gertrude
Margot		Jamie	Noelle

Rebecca		Katie	Eliza
Harriet			Flora
Tara			Jacqueline
			Amelia
			Rosie

In conjunction with the development of my participant typologies, I also began to write brief sections of analysis for some of the transcripts which I considered to contain particularly rich data. My fieldnotes also proved an invaluable source of analysis, which I referred to throughout the process of data coding and data analysis. This provided contextual information for my interviews and provoked avenues of thought.

The challenge of this approach was the levels of document organisation needed to keep track of the physical transcriptions and notes. I utilised an alphabetical filing system and kept all my documents in my home office. I also utilised the wall of my home office as a space to blue-tac documents and visually represent categories and themes, using mind maps.

Although my approach to data analysis was time-consuming, and somewhat unconventional, it allowed me to immerse myself in the content of my interviews and to consider the depth and richness of my participants' experiences. It has been my ambition to portray the experiences of participants in a truthful, credible manner. However, the analysis of my data is inextricably linked to my own perceptions and viewpoints and links I have perceived to wider sociological concepts and theories. This has necessarily also impacted my approach to all aspects of this research project, including the thematic categories assigned to my participants' comments, and my subsequent analysis of their meaning.

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the informing logic which informed my choices in

methodological approach and method. I have recounted my experiences of undertaking feminist research and some of the challenges associated with this. As outlined, these most particularly related to issues of power, reciprocity, and friendship. In a bid towards transparency within my research, I have also detailed some of the 'murky' realities of my research process, including its failures. Reflexive consideration of these matters provided insight into my research journey and the complexities of research/participant dynamics. My assumptions regarding the shape and content of comfortable and non-hierarchical relationships were also challenged. The next chapter will introduce my participants in greater detail and provide further information regarding my participant subcategories.

Chapter 4. ‘What does “better” even mean?’

4.1. Introduction

As outlined in the previous chapter, this thesis identified four ideal Etsy seller types, which are categorised as ‘Post-careerists,’ ‘Etsy-achievers,’ ‘Conflicted- careerists’ and ‘Passionate Workers.’ These subcategories do not provide an exhaustive explanation for women’s encounters with Etsy based selling. Rather, I devised these typologies to illuminate key shared and differentiating factors across my participant sample. A key cluster of themes that emerged through my data analysis regarded my participant's prior work experiences and their current ambitions for their Etsy-based shops. These were themes that indicated the interplay of wider structural forces, relating to formations of work, gender, age and class, relevant to my participant’s experiences as female Etsy based sellers. This chapter also serves as an introduction to my participants. Through doing so, I will also indicate some of key informing concepts which underpin this thesis, and their relationship to specific ideal Etsy-seller types.

4.2. The ‘Post-careerists’

Participants placed in this category had successfully gained what Farrugia has termed ‘markers’ of career achievement (2019:1094). These are markers that demonstrate ‘progression in terms of clear milestones that realise concrete ambitions, or identifiable achievements that designate a clear personal progression’ (ibid). Examples he identifies include salary rates, qualifications, and promotions. Indeed, women within this category had gained notable positions in the areas of graphic design, I.T. consultancy and arts programme management, which were discussed in terms of high-salaries, career-stability, and employee benefits.

However, having achieved such markers participants within this subcategory demonstrated a desire to transform themselves from subjects of achievement to subjects of passion. The subjects of passion ‘understand the working self in

terms of passionate investments that lead to personal development and personal growth without reference to specific material outcomes' (ibid:1080). He (ibid) argues that encounters with the post-Fordist work are stratified across lines of class. Class formed a key theme shared by participants in this group, as several women indicated that they came from working-class family backgrounds. This was a critical factor, which shaped participants' previous career ambitions. In this section I will therefore also discuss how my participants navigate this changing view of success, in relation to networks of support available to them.

4.2.1. Family values

Farrugia's (ibid) research indicates that young people from working-class backgrounds were more likely to centre ideals of success on clear career milestones, such as achieving qualifications, promotions, and 'good' salaries. Several women within this category, discussed their career history and future ambitions in relationship with their family members perceptions of career success, as relating to markers of achievement.

Thirty-year-old Harriet has started her part-time Etsy shop, after previously holding a programme manager role in an arts institution. She is now interspersing her Etsy work with a part-time position as an Arts Event Manager. Prior to this, she had also had a career in professional dance. Harriet described her parents as being '*work orientated*' people and her father had been '*dedicated*' to their family business, In the following excerpt, she explains her family's perceptions of her career change towards Etsy-based work:

> *I think from leaving my full-time job, the thing I struggled with the most was my parents being on board with it... I got offered Programme Manager at Big Arts Institution, and my parents were a bit like, what are you doing?? This job is well paid, full time – you could say secure, it probably wasn't– why are you giving this up to go and do something that's not going to make you any money? My Dad turned around one day and was like, 'do you really think you're going to make money out of selling teapots and plant pots???'*

and I was like, 'yeah actually, I am.' I think that from a family perspective I was really one of the only people in the whole family who went to university, and I've got two other sisters, and this going to sound awful but I'm only really the one who's started a career and worked her way up... so I think they were really like what are you doing, you're just completely taking that away from yourself.

Harriet's experiences were informed by her family's view of what constituted bettering herself. She indicated these as being tangible markers of career progression and achievement, linked to a job being 'well-paid' and 'secure.' These were expectations towards achievement, she also aligns with her unique academic success within her family. As the only child to go to university and start a 'career,' she experienced an expectation to maintain what her parents viewed as markers of success.' However, much like Margot, Harriet instead aspired to re-frame 'success' as an experience she could define on her own terms.

Her descriptions are echoed in comments made by Margot regarding the progression of her former career. After working in a Halloween costume shop in her early 20s, Margot described the expectation that she '*should get a proper job'* and after completing a postgraduate diploma in Clothing Technologies she felt she was '*channelled*' by the institution into a managerial career in manufacturing. Margot was keen to discuss with me the effect of her experiences of feeling she should follow what her parents had deemed to be a 'successful' career:

As I said, I never even thought about the fact that I'd gone full circle, back to sewing and I do remember... since I worked in the Halloween store, I do remember when I went into my 20s I got this idea that I needed to come back and a get a 'proper job,' and it's like... because I'd done well at school and my parents were of that generation who... they hadn't gone to university, and they were very much working class and they aspired for me to do something better... and it's like well... what does 'better' even mean?
I think there was this channelling and lack of imagination and a default that I went to, and it's really interesting that... I've ended up back there…

In this excerpt, she links her prior career progression as informed by her working- class parents, and wider societal views, of what achieving '*something better*' looked like. However, having achieved these prescribed, markers of achievement, she had found herself asking the question, '*what does better even mean*?' indicating disillusionment with such aspirations. Participants therefore sometimes directly recognised these markers of 'success,' but they were also described as originating from other people in the participant's lives. The role of family and close loved ones was crucial in such discussions.

Similarly, to Harriet, Margot also recalled that her family had struggled to understand her decision to leave positions that had clear 'conventional' markers of '*worth*,' such as having '*a company car or whether I do a lot of travel... things like that*.' These were views that persisted, even when she explained that she was 'happier' working as a full-time Etsy seller earning less money. Rebecca's description of the benefits associated with her primary status as a stay-at home parent co-existed with the values she perceived in undertaking paid work. Rebecca explained to me that:

> *I was raised very much with the mindset of having a good work ethic, so it's about doing something good. It's good to work in itself, and I guess if I'm potentially going down the stay-at-home mum route, I feel like I have to try to just do more than that. It's about endeavour I guess and achievement...*

This comment indicates the coalescing impacts of Rebecca's value system, informed by her upbringing, and the demands and expectations of remaining a legibly successful woman. In terms of the values Rebecca expresses, she indicates the moral importance of labour, wherein 'it's good to work in itself.' In the face of not needing to work to produce a wage, this remains an important and motivating perspective in her life. As Week's (2011:11) literature regarding the post-Fordist work ethic contends, in the context of neoliberalism 'work is not just defended on grounds of economic necessity and social duty; it is widely understood as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation.' In this respect, Rebecca's comments can also be understood as the desire to fulfil the expectations of being a 'good' worker whilst seeking out a pathway to the 'good life.'

In this regard, Rebecca's comments can also be viewed as informed by her desire to remain legibly successful, by endeavouring and gaining achievements, whilst engaged as a full-time stay at home parent. Moreover, her experiences also pertain to Luckman's (2016: 94) observation that in the context of contemporary work, having children is no longer a reason or excuse for taking a career break. In the context of a highly competitive, global labour market it forms 'a pivotal moment of life-revaluation to be embraced.' This is essential for individual women's relevancy in an ever-increasingly competitive and globalised labour market.

In this respect, participants within this category described a process of reckoning with familial expectations regarding markers of achievement. I felt that participants within this category were caught in a web of contradictory expectations regarding 'good' work. Although several women in this category described their career progressions in relation to their working-class family backgrounds and aspirations, they now largely rejected such markers as indicative of a career success. They instead emphasised aspirations which can be perceived as middle-class, such as the desire to 'take control' of their own lives and to define success on their own terms.

4.2.2. Taking control

Several post-careerist participants discussed their movement away from mainstream employment towards Etsy-based work, as spurred by the desire for greater control over their working hours and wider lifestyle's. Indeed, Etsy-based work was invariably conceived as a way to gain greater personal and professional freedom, an impetus further linked to a wish to take '*control*' over one's own '*destiny*' (Joanna). How such participants wished to re-frame success varied, and including, but was not limited to, a desire for pleasurable, self-actualising and/or more creative forms of labour, and/or, to undertake work that better suited their personal beliefs and values.

Joanna has worked for several years as a professional freelance cleaner. Through her allergies to commercial cleaning products, she came to develop cleaning products made from organic ingredients, which she described as better for people's health and the environment than mainstream products.

She makes and sells these via Etsy.com, whilst continuing her cleaning business. Prior to this role, she held a managerial role within a busy call-centre. Echoing formerly mentioned feelings of not possessing control over one's life and career, Joanna explained that she ended up leaving the role as she felt she had been '*pushed*' into a team leader role. Providing further details, she stated that:

> *On paper it looked like more money, but it didn't quite work out like that. Where on paper again you're a manager but the reality is that the protocols are so strict, there's very little leeway with what you can do... you don't set their rotas, there's a central division that does that... and it's the rotas that everybody is unhappy about... yeah so it was time for me to move on from that.*

Joanna's choice of the verb '*push*' indicates an experience of not feeling fully in control of her prior work experiences. Moreover, her comments indicate a contrast in the perception she had initially of her former role and the realities associated with it. Crucially, she felt restricted in the actual levels of power she held in the position to influence work rotas and make independent decisions and. These were sentiments I also perceived in Rebecca's description of having been '*fast-tracked*' into her public sector role, through a post-graduate programme. 30-year-old Harriet stated that she had '*become a programming manager, kind of unintentionally'* and had *'fallen into'* the role. Indeed, Harriet described her pathway into a conventionally successful career as being an unexamined process of progression. She '*kept the ball rolling*' for several years and '*just thought this was the way to go*.' Such comments show Harriet's feelings of not being fully in control of her career, of following a path which met the expectations of her family and education but was not ultimately experienced as rewarding.

In discussion of her movement into Etsy-based work, Harriet explained that she was motivated partly by a desire not to *'answer to anyone else'* and to '*rely on myself.'* Rebecca also described herself as *'self-reliant'* and that *'I don't go to other people for help.'* In such a manner, her comments further show a wish to escape the pressures of a high responsibility career, alongside the desire to exert greater control over her working life. In this respect, a key experience described was feeling powerless in their former roles, and a

desire towards agency and control over their working lives.

For sellers such as Margot, Etsy based work is positioned as a desirable escape from the pressures formerly experienced within conventionally successful careers.

However, in addition to this, descriptions of this escape indicate feelings of gaining power and control over their career paths, through engaging in Etsy based work. In this manner, such examples indicate the close interconnection between participants' feelings of freedom and feelings of control.

4.2.3. Work stress and anxiety

A further feeling associated with their prior work experiences was one of stress. For some participants, this was a stress linked to levels of responsibility and workloads. In Harriet's experience, she explained that '*I got to a programme manager role, and the stress and the anxiety and the responsibility – I just felt this responsibility for other people, towards other people, that didn't sit well with me.'* In this regard, the relief of Etsy-based work that she experienced was associated with her lone working style where she only felt responsible for herself. Similarly, Rebecca contrasted her former feelings of pressure with her current expectations as a new Mum and part-time Etsy worker. She described her former role by saying it was:

> *The type of work where you're dealing with some quite difficult situations, it's very high pressure... and this is still kind of high pressure as well, but I just feel like ever since the baby was born, I just look at things completely differently and I look at everything from her point of view now... it would be fair to say that I was getting a little bit burnt out before.*

In this way, Rebecca identified her perspective of her former work as informed by her current status as a mother. Implied in her comments is the desire to prioritise the needs of her child over the demands of her former work. There are similarities in this sentiment, found in comments made by Margot.

When discussing the benefits she perceived in Etsy-based working, former IT

professional Margot stated that:

> *One of the things I like about Etsy is that... there isn't really any... there isn't a feeling of a corporate pushing saying, 'oh you haven't done enough', it feels quite laid back in that respect… and… there's not a pressure to sell things.*

Margot's comments indicated that her previous professional positions, were associated with external pressures of performance, to do 'enough.' However, through her current Etsy based work she was able to set her own expectations, rather than meeting the demands of an external employer. In this regard, Etsy based work was aligned with achieving personal goals rather than wider expectations exerted by employers. Moreover, the desire to exert forms of choice and decision making regarding their work content and working styles.

4.2.4. Success on your own terms

Aged 57, Margot was the oldest participants represented in my sample. Margot had '*dropped out*' of an undergraduate degree but was able to '*blag*' her way onto a postgraduate course in Clothing Technologies at a prestigious university. This experience led to her first assistant manager role with a UK clothing manufacturer, a position that later allowed her to enter the burgeoning IT sector. Margot had held high level roles within IT prior to starting her Etsy shop business. Margot's prior work experiences informed her expectations regarding her Etsy shop business and her views of success. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

> *Anna: I wonder... can you picture in your mind and describe to me, it could be a real person, or it could be an imagined person, someone who is a successful Etsy seller?*
>
> *Margot: I suppose it depends on what you mean by successful. Because people use Etsy for all sorts of things, and it could be a small part of what they do in life generally, they might be happy because they sell something once or twice a month or even year and that might be what they want from it... it's very open to... there's not a pressure to sell things... So, it's really hard to say... what is... it's really broad... and their ideas of success are so personal, I wouldn't want to judge somebody else...*

This interaction reveals a sense of resistance Margot showed, in response to my question regarding success. Her answer can be viewed in relation to the previous comment I have highlighted regarding her prior work experience, wherein she experienced corporate pressure to 'achieve enough.' I felt that Margot perceived in my question a didactic view of what constituted success, which she aligned with corporate expectations of meeting sales targets and achieving revenue goals. These can be viewed further as constituting markers of achievement. In contrast, her response reflects her perspective that success should be individually ascribed and understood, an understanding that more closely resembles the aspirations of 'subjects of passion' (Farrugia, 2019).

In this regard, it is possible to view her perspective as indicative of an internalisation of the passionate labour ethos, wherein individuals are compelled to view work as a site of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment. Indeed, Margot's comments indicate that success can be re-imagined as an individually wrought descriptor of work activity, divorced from markers such as income or status. To do so would constitute a form of judgement, a term which further indicates the negative associations she perceives in ascribing to unliteral descriptors of career and life success.

Indeed, the desire to re-frame career success, to better suit their own life goals and interests, was a clear thread throughout these discussions. For participants Joanna and Harriet, this was considered in relationship to wider paradigm which informed their sense of good and worthwhile work. Harriet used the term 'organic' several times throughout the interview, a word which indicated to me, a sense of growing a career which felt more 'naturally' in line with her personality, values, and understandings as to what constituted a good, meaningful life. This is indicated further by her description of her Etsy based work, described as being a '*more organic caree*r,' rather than an outcome of her graduate studies. In discussion of the varied and sometimes unpredictable hours of work required within her Etsy shop, Joanna explained that:

> *I'm not worried about it no, uhuh, not that I'm rolling in money... I clean, I make an honest living and... my husband works in... not very glamorous... he works for a record label and there's not a huge amount*

of work there... or money there... so we're stable, I don't buy a lot, I'm not constantly consuming because... I think when you look about and I think... I've never been one to buy things for the sake of it, I buy from charity shops. So, I'm very modest... so I'm kind of Zen... it's like I'm at this point in my life where I don't need that much or want that much. Quite happy pootling about. It's quite nice. Yesterday I got home early and sat in the garden! and I was happy. So, it's just simple pleasures. So, I think if you can find happiness in the simplest pleasures that's the best thing. That's the best you can hope for in life.

Joanna's comments again indicate an active 're-framing' of success. Most importantly for her, success is revealed to be connected to her self-perception as a person with modest and restrained consumptive practices. This is reflected in her comments regarding her shopping habits, where she chooses charity shop items and does not '*want or need that much*.' In this regard, Joanna describes her capacity to independently manage the outcomes of earning a small income, by making the 'right' life decisions.

As indicated in my literature review, cultural narratives regarding respectable femininity have coalesced with entrepreneurial values of self-management and self-responsibility. The figure of the thrifty, self-sufficient housewife has a long cultural legacy, which in recent years of crisis neoliberalism has been reinvigorated (Martin 2020). Through an examination of the portrayal of celebrity motherhood Allen et al., (2015:912) argue that in the age of austerity 'fiscal prudence has become a moral project.' Rather than meeting economic crises through mechanisms of the state, fiscal responsibilities are instead offloaded to individuals. Moreover, fiscal prudence is an attribute of the ideal, middle-class woman, capable of making clever consumptive choices alongside forms of self- sacrifice and frugality. In this regard, although Joanna's comments may appear to counter the capitalist aspirations of profit-making, they are imbued with a neoliberal sensibility. The value she places on thriftiness and humility is arguably informed by wider cultural values regarding appropriate feminine behaviour and neoliberal citizenship.

Such self-descriptions of her experiences further indicate the pronounced belief that via engaging in alternative modes of work - in Joanna's example, a

mixture of self-employed cleaning and an Etsy shop business - it is possible to shift one's internal understandings of 'success.' In a manner which is suggestive of McRobbie's (2016) passionate labour ethos, women within this category exhibited dedication to the idea that success could be made over, to reflect individual women's outlooks, behaviours, lifestyles, and values. However, this is an experience of work which is deeply informed by participant's prior employment experiences and access to wider forms of cultural and economic capital.

For my post-careerist participants, aspirations towards Etsy based work were interlaced with family perceptions of career success. As indicated, these appeared for some to be further rooted in the values associated with bettering oneself via markers of achievement. However, participants framed their experiences as led by the desire to re-frame their notions of success, to become subjects of passion rather than achievement. These are experiences which intersect further, with wider cultural norms and expectations regarding femininity and productivity. As revealed within this section, participants' intimate relationships also proved a crucial component to their capacity to re-imagine career success along individualised lines.

4.3. The 'Etsy achievers'

The women categorised within the 'Etsy Achievers' group formed the smallest subcategory within my research, with only two participants. They are represented by Anita, aged 44, and Betsy, aged 45. In a similar manner to the 'post-Careerists,' the women in this category had formerly achieved normative markers of career success, such as high salaries and managerial titles. They also shared many of the reservations and misgivings regarding mainstream employment as shared by women within the 'post-careerists' category.

However, the 'Etsy achievers,' did not express full rejection of markers of achievement. These women described their motivations as both rooted in a desire towards agentic, autonomous working styles, and a wish to achieve specific markers of achievement. They describe Etsy-based work as an alternative means to gain recognisable markers of success, such as a high-salary and career stability. The two women were further united by their choice of language regarding their Etsy shop enterprises. Unlike participants

described in the 'Conflicted Careerist' and 'Passionate Worker' groups, the Etsy Achiever primarily conceptualised their Etsy shops as businesses. Rather than framing their Etsy shop businesses as lines of flight away from conventional markers of career success, 'Etsy-careerists' instead tended to express a desire to utilise their Etsy shops as a means *towards* such markers.

4.3.1. Achievements and challenges

Both women described a complex work history, achieving markers of success, but also encountering employment challenges. Betsy explained that she had gained a degree in Graphic Design from an Arts University in the 1990's. However, when she attempted to forge career in graphic design, she found the process of making contacts '*hard for me*,' and the experience '*didn't pan out*.' Because of this, she began working at an arts venue '*just to make ends meet*,' and over several years managed to rise to marketing manager within a prestigious arts organisation. She described this experience in the following manner:

> *Betsy: So, I worked at places like Arts Place and Arts Centre and gradually worked my way up to being marketing manager at Big Arts Centre.*
>
> *Anna: Oh wow*
>
> *Betsy: So, I actually had quite good jobs, responsible jobs with decent budgets, lots of stress, arts marketing and managing is not best paid of fields, for the amount of hours and stress and responsibility that you have, and I basically just didn't enjoy it. I found it really stressful, it really... I had this kind of guilt that I've got this great job and hating every minute of it... I'm just not enjoying the commute and being at the desk and feeling kind of penned into an office so when I was at Big Arts Centre, I quit my job.*

Betsy's comments show the lived realities of attaining a '*great job,*' which for her included long working hours, elevated levels of stress and poor renumeration. In this regard, it is possible to see that although Betsy had attained a high-status role, the rewards this provided were ultimately

negligible. In a similar manner to post-careerist participants Harriet and Margot, her comments also suggested a sense of falling into a career which did not provide freedom or control over her working styles. Moreover, she mentions that although she worked for a prestigious arts institution and held a high degree of responsibility, it is not '*the best paid field.*' In this way, her comment points to a wider sense of what her work life 'should' look like, based upon achieving measurable degrees of career status.

It was these feelings of dissatisfaction which had spurred her to quit this role in 2008, to set up her own wedding stationary business. However, this business venture was, due to a variety of reasons, '*not a success*,' which had forced Betsy to return to work within an arts institution, in a less well-paid box-office role.

Betsy faced further employment challenges as due to the 2008 financial recession, she was made redundant from this position. She pieced together employment through freelance proof-reading, before taking on a part-time role working making wedding invitations for a small stationery company. This was a position she continued whilst she set up her Etsy shop business in 2015. She now works as a full- time Etsy seller. Betsy stated that she created her businesses with very little start- up capital '*literally nothing, just my laptop.*' At the point I interviewed her, she was fully financially dependent on her businesses. She runs two Etsy based businesses through which she sells digital, downloadable prints for wedding invitations and other events, which she designs.

Anita had held a civilian role within the police-force for nearly 19 years, working what she described as a *'variety of roles,*' largely related to the field of IT. However, due to internal re-structuring her role was '*changed into a more IT support side*,' which she was dissatisfied with. After taking a 6-month break to travel, she moved into a similar role within a different institution, explaining that '*the money was really, really good... but that was all...*' This role provided enough flexibility for Anita to initiate her first Etsy based shop, which she funded through savings she gained from this role. However, this institution also went through a process of re-structuring, which resulted in Anita quitting to pursue her Etsy shop enterprises full-time. At the time of being interviewed, Anita ran three Etsy based shops. These are based on

home-made body-care, beauty, and homeware items which she hand-crafts from her home. In this manner, both women had gained markers of achievement, normatively associated with career success. However, they had also encountered challenges associated with redundancy, workplace restructuring and work dissatisfaction, which motivated them towards Etsy based work.

4.3.2. Practical decisions

Anita and Betsy discussed their movement into Etsy based work, in predominantly pragmatic terms. Although both women also discussed the creative satisfaction they gained through their Etsy base work, it was clear they perceived their shops as primarily being businesses, which existed to make a profit. This juxtaposition is illustrated in the following quote, where Anita describes her decision to start a third Etsy shop business, she initiated just before leaving her formal IT role:

> *The more I worked in IT, the more I realised it just wasn't for me. Because I am creative and my businesses were doing really quite well, and I thought and first well maybe it's a silly idea to start with... maybe I could do that full time? I knew it was my macramé shop that was making the most money. But I knew that… it wasn't making enough to support me, and even if I put workshops on, if I looked at different revenue streams with it, I knew I wouldn't be able to do it, so more I thought about that, the more a reality it (creating a third business) became.*

This quote shows the value Anita places on her status as a 'creative' person, however, the decisions she outlines are firmly linked to the financial outcomes of her shops, rather than their merits as modes of artistic or self-expression. Indeed, this quote suggests a measured, deliberate and highly considered approach to her Etsy shop enterprises as modes of revenue through which she could support herself. In the following quote, Betsy provided the following response to a question about her workload, which indicates the degrees of labour she undertakes to remain profitable:

It can be really overwhelming and sometimes I get that slightly 'rabbit in the headlight's' thing where... option paralysis it's like, I don't know what to do! Because there's everything to do, and I think that when you're a

creative person, having the ideas is not the problem it's the time and the... implementation. I have to kind of reign myself in a lot of the time and force myself to focus.
A: It sounds like it involves a lot of like self-motivation and self-awareness...
B: Yes completely... and that's not always... easy... especially if I design something today, then I won't know for a month or so if it's going to make me money, it might, it might now, most things sell eventually... but I've got very little idea if what I've just designed is going to be something that's going to make a 100 quid or ten grand.

This comment provides useful insight into the demands Betsy navigates, to ensure her business remains financially viable. Primarily, the requirement to remain focused on creating and developing downloadable designs which will generate profit. Her comment indicates further that this aspiration can sometimes come into conflict with her impulses as a *'creative person,'* and her comments suggest something of an internal tension to reconcile these desires. For Betsy, this formed a source of labour within itself. However as further shown in this comment, making money is the primary motivating force which underpins her Etsy shop activities. Although both women described themselves as being creative, this was an element of self that was secondary to the practical, financial decisions of their Etsy shop businesses.

Both women presented growth in revenue as indicators of career success. For Betsy, this was an aspiration that was clearly linked to her complex work history and prior experiences of financial precarity:

Betsy: I feel like if I've been this successful doing what I'm doing, if I push that a bit harder, I should be very successful
A: Right to meet that next level... so it sounds like growth is quite

important to you.

Betsy: Definitely, definitely, because erm... my working life has been erm a bit all over the place. You know working in the arts was not particularly well paid, erm you know I don't have huge amounts of savings or pension or anything like that and I feel like I've got this opportunity, and it's almost like my last chance to make a lot of money, basically.

The value Anita perceived in the profitability of her Etsy shops is clearly illustrated in the following interview excerpt:

Anna: Well in terms of everything like, you know do you need start-up capital, or how do you plan financially, that kind of thing?

Anita: Well with my macrame shop, that was really... the materials involved in that are not very expensive, so I was kind of spoiled, and that made me a lot of money, and I always had a separate bank account where I kept my earnings from that, and squirreled them away, and then when my soap shop started, I had to spend sooo much money

Anna: Oh really

Anita: Yeah, I think... I was down £5,000 and then that was my turning point. I never went below that. Then it was around about Christmas time that it started to go into the plus...

Anna: Ah ok, so did you have savings from your previous job or...

Anita: From my previous Etsy shop, from the macrame. That's all. So, Etsy... it yeah started off probably just a few pounds for materials, and then that... always just gone into the same account, that's always been my Etsy money and I've managed to get new windows for the house, and I've bought a lot of things from it, I've put it to my mortgage... so yeah. I've made quite a lot of money from it, and it has funded this new business... I had my own savings as well as a comfort blanket when I gave up my work and I thought, you know that's my safety net, and when I left work it was that round figure and I've gladly never dropped below that and I'm starting now to go up. So, I'm now... I haven't done my accounting for a couple of months, but I think I'm probably now making more than I

was at work.

This excerpt provides a rich insight into Anita's perspectives and attitudes towards her Etsy based business. Her descriptions of creating savings and 'squirreling' away money indicate her dedication towards self-sufficiency, and in building a business purely from her own labour. In this respect, her businesses capacities to make large degrees of profit, also forms a source of pride and self-worth. This is demonstrated in the clear, tangible markers of success she outlines, such as being able to renovate her home, fund new businesses and buy items. In this respect, her comments speak to her alignment with viewing success through the lens of attaining markers of achievement. The ultimate achievement which she was proud to share, being that she now made more money in her current role than she did at work. This appeared to legitimise the decisions she had made towards freelance creative work via Etsy.com, and evidently formed a source of positive self-worth.

4.3.3. Intimate relationships

Both Anita and Betsy were married at the point of being interviewed, and their relationships were key to their self-described motivations and aspirations for their Etsy shops. Anita explained that her partner was currently *'between jobs'* because of his depression. The implication being that she was acting as the main breadwinner. Similarly, Betsy explained that a large motivation towards growing her business and increasing her profits, was due to her partner's highly physical job. She explained that 'my big goal is to make enough money so that he can quit his job,' which she wanted to make happen 'in the next three years.'

In this respect, familial responsibilities also formed another key thread, which informed these women's motivations towards Etsy based work and expectations success. This was further cemented, through discussions regarding family perspectives of their Etsy shops. Barbara explained that her partner was initially 'baffled' by her Etsy shop, but 'as soon as he could see that I was making money, he was all for it.' She explained these perspectives further, in relationship to being able to take her parents out to celebrate her career successes.

> *You know when I hit various targets... like I remember when I started out, I was like when I make £500 a month, I'm going to take my parents out for lunch, when I make a £1,000, I'm going to take my husband out for dinner... these wee little markers. That was lovely for me having come from a place of really not making much money at all... and I think it was reassuring to my family and to my husband that they could see that I was starting to... it was becoming a success so...*

As indicated in this quote, the attainment of clear, self-imposed markers of success formed a crucial motivator for participants such as Betsy. Moreover, such notions of success were further legitimised by the capacity to 'give back' to her loved ones. She achieved this by offering tangible gifts to her parents and husband, which indicated degrees of wealth and status. Betsy explained throughout the interview that she was motivated towards business success in part because of her previous career challenges. These affirmative actions, such as taking her parents and partners out for dinner, provided her with a means to secure her perceived status as being successful. This makes further sense in reference to Farrugia's (2019) conceptual framework regarding working class expressions of post-Fordist subjectivity, which centre on gaining markers of achievement.

Anita and Betsy both indicated that their notions of success were rooted in the acquisition of markers and milestones of achievement. These were aspirations which were made legible in reference to their intimate relationships, which provided clear motivation towards building financially well-remunerated businesses. Moreover, the necessity for financial renumeration to form the key focus of their Etsy based shops, makes further sense in reference to their career backgrounds. Both women had experienced degrees of employment precarity, which bolstered their resolve to create their own viable businesses. In this regard, this subcategory most clearly aligned with Farrugia's 'subjects of achievement,' found expression through the Etsy.com platform.

4.4. The conflicted careerists

Participants I categorised as 'conflicted careerists,' had experienced a range of prior employment roles prior to their Etsy shop businesses. However, these were largely typified as being low-paid and precarious, such as care work and

hospitality work. For example, Celeste and Rosie had both previously been employed as retail sales assistants, and Katie worked dealing with customer complaints in a call centre. However, members of this subcategory were also largely united in their possession of undergraduate degrees. In discussion of the ambitions for their Etsy shop ventures, these participants expressed the wish to attain some markers of career achievement.

The desire to run Etsy shop ventures which could be self-sufficient and necessarily generate a profit was crucial for several participants. However, they were also largely united by a passionate attachment to their Etsy-based labour, including a close, personal relationship with their Etsy shop items. Moreover, they expressed the value they perceived in using their Etsy-based work, as a means of artistic self- expression. In this manner, the 'conflicted careerists' were also typified by an aspiration to align the attainment of conventional markers of success, via forms creatively satisfying, self-actualising and 'passionate' forms of labour. This was achieved with variable levels of success and indeed, was a point of ambivalence and tension for several participants. Participants categorised in this sub-group were Celeste, Jamie, Louise, and Katie.

The ambivalences indicated by such participants interviews, are situated on their aspiration to achieve personal forms of 'success,' linked to feelings of self- expression, passionate attachment to work, self-actualising work, alongside achieving a well-renumerated career. As Jamie explained:

> *There's a line between pushing so hard that you create exactly what you want... so what's the point if no-one buys it... but then do you want to just sell tote bags with motivational quotes on them? Because everyone does that.*

Such ambitions are experienced as a point of conflict for these participants, who must find ways to align these sometimes-diverging expectations of career success. Crucially, women categorised within this group must find means to navigate high levels of career insecurity and financial uncertainty, without the 'cushion' of formerly well-renumerated career.

4.4.1. Passion and authenticity

With a background in fashion design, Louise makes and sells her own lingerie and nightwear, an endeavour that involves designing items, sourcing materials and time-consuming hand and machine stitching. Louise was keen to impress that fashion and fashion design were her deepest passions, describing, for example, that she had been designing and making clothes since she was a child and that once, a clothing collection from Alexander McQueen had moved her to tears.

Louise had been selling her items on Etsy for over five years, and her current business was the second shop she had set up via Etsy. Her first business 'Bettylou's Boutique' she set up in her 20's and for several years she had designed, made and sold 'Rockabilly' style clothing through this shop. However, she was currently winding this side of her Etsy business down. This was not because it was not successful, but because she felt it was no longer representative of who she was as an individual or as a designer, as she explains here:

> *Louise: I think I've just outgrown it. I'm not that obsessed in that world and in that culture anymore... I mean I never really was; I think I told you last time it was like a gradual progression from emo to pinup girl. So, at the time it was just the style that I was in to... and the people who are in that world they like... live that life, and they're completely obsessed with it, and they go to all these... like... rockabilly weekends and things, and they're into the music, and I don't mind the music... but it's not my life... I'm not obsessed... and I always felt like a bit of a... fraud?*
>
> *Anna: Did you feel like... for that to be successful you had to really... be like a Rockabilly person?*
>
> *Louise: I think so... I think so... because I think people could probably tell because I wasn't sharing... so much of me and my life... that maybe I wasn't that into it...*

This quote demonstrates the importance Louise places on her shop and its items forming an 'authentic' representation of who she feels she is. That she was never 'obsessed' with Rockabilly culture has led to her feeling a 'fraud' for continuing to make and sell such items. The use of the term 'fraud' is also

interesting, partly because it is an antonym of ‘authentic,’ but also as she goes on to describe, because she could not ‘fake’ the necessary lifestyle that accompanied selling these items.

As she implies, many Etsy sellers describe the necessity to provide media representations of their ‘real lives,’ in a manner that cements a relationship between their products and their personal tastes, interests, and lifestyles. Louise does not vocalise critique of this expectation, but instead an acknowledgement that to achieve the goal of being truly authentic she needed to create an Etsy shop business that she felt represented who she is. Rather than focusing on a ‘trend,’ Louise expressed that her shop and her items needed to feel as though they formed a seamless extension of her identity as a person and designer:

> *When I started 'The Sprite Garden’ (her second shop) I was very... focused on the look and the aesthetic of everything and I knew exactly... how I wanted it to be, and how I wanted the photography to be like, everything. So, I was like... really on point.*
>
> *Anna: What was the vision you had?*
>
> *Louise: I just wanted it to be a bit more representative of me... I think... and the things that really do inspire me... Because even though I like the pin-up style of clothing... it was just a style, just a trend... it wasn't... it's never inspired my work.*

She had closed her initial business not because it was failing to turn a profit, but because she did not think its focus on Rockabilly subcultural fashion was an authentic representation of who she was as a person and designer. Her second shop, which she described as ‘macabre fairy-tale,’ sat closer to her own personal aesthetic. I probed Louise further regarding the importance she placed on her shop being representative of who she was:

> *Anna: So... Why do you think it was important to you that you felt like you were representing yourself in some way? It's a bit of a tricky question...!*
>
> *Louise: It is! I... I don't know. I think because it just feels like an extension of myself... what I do... because I'm really passionate about what I do... and... I don’t know... it's been my identity for so long...*

maybe as well, because since I've been a little kid, I knew that I was going to do it, I was 100% focused... I think I was seven when I told my parents that I was going to be a fashion designer and they were like... ok? -laugh- thinking it was just a phase, but no

there I was at 17, doing... art and fashion textiles at college so... I think it's important and I've always felt it was important...

In this quote it is clear to see that Louise's feelings towards her Etsy shop and her handmade products are deeply enmeshed with her sense of her own positive self- identity. In addition to her self-made products forming an extension of herself, 'being passionate about what I do' is also a value she esteems highly.

Celeste makes a variety of hand-woven art pieces, many of which are wall-hangings or can otherwise be displayed as home-décor. Many of these pieces, particularly the larger ones, are physically intensive to make and can take many hours of work to produce.

When I asked Celeste how she had come to decide that she would make fabric art pieces, she was keen to emphasise that for her, the process of deciding to make and sell fabric art was an organic process that sprang from her pre-existing creative interests. She had started to make fabric art pieces out of a love of crafting and art. It was only when friends and family members showed an interest in her items that she considered the possibility that they could be sold to others.

Indeed, her rendition of the origin of her Etsy business further stated her view of her business as springing out from some essential qualities that she saw within herself, as she stated that:

I started just for fun because I've always been creative, I've always been creating things anyway. I have to make up something. So, it started like that, just for fun, but then...People were enjoying it. They were visiting our home and my friends were saying 'oh you need to sell that' or 'Oh my other friends I know they would like that,' so it just... started like that.

What is further noteworthy in Celeste's comments regarding her Etsy shop and her items, is that she does not present her origin story in terms of the inception of a business, but rather a natural progression in her pre-existing qualities as a creative person, engaged in making art pieces. Indeed, her story

shows that she views the process of coming to sell her items as born from an interest shown by other people and from encouragement to share her work, rather than any explicit desire to commodify her work or start a business. These examples show the importance women within this category placed on their passionate attachment to their work.

4.4.3. Staying passionate and making money

However, both women had also endeavoured to create Etsy businesses which were financially viable. At the time of being interviewed, Celeste had set aside her initial ambition to run her Etsy shop as a full-time business, due to its low financial remuneration. In a comparable manner to Louise, Celeste discussed the struggle she had experienced in making a profit from selling her items, whilst also retaining her sense of artistic integrity. Louise explained that she had previously experienced a period where she had been making '*more money than I knew what to do with.'* At the time of being interviewed however, she was struggling to keep her shop financially afloat and indicated her frustrations that she could not sell her pieces at a higher price, which reflected the time and skill she had exerted in making the items.

> *Anna: Right and also pricing yourself so that it reflects like the amount of time and energy that goes into it as well...*
> *Louise: Yeah, because I can't charge enough really. because people just won't pay for it. And I don't know if that's because they think oh, it's on Etsy, it's not worth it. I don't know if I was working with suppliers or manufacturers, and if I had other outlets, then I would be able to justify pricing my work at a higher price point. But yeah, it's kind of frustrating that people just don't realise...*

This comment signals another critical differentiator I identified within this subgroup. Women such as Louise indicated that although they wished to make a profit from their items, this was an ambition they primarily related to the value they perceived in their products and time. Celeste's similarly conflicted feelings regarding the ambitions of profit-making are illustrated in the following quote. At this point in the interview, Celeste had explained to me that an issue she perceived in the Etsy-market was its over-saturation by cheap

items. In discussion of the selling practices of other sellers who make similar items to her she stated that:

> *What helps people sell is that they sell it... but so, so cheap compared to the amount of hours... and me, I'm not going to do that. So yes, most of my stuff is expensive. When I see some (other seller's) pieces... and because I create, I know what it takes and when I see some pieces and for how much they sell them... I'm like... Oh my God... how are they making any money from it? If it's just selling for selling, and if you had 1,000 sales but at the end, you're not in profit, or very little, to me that's... there's no point. I can guess that some people... want to do that because it shows that they sell a lot, and people will trust it... but me... I prefer to show that what I do is... unique, it takes time but it's quality and that's what you pay for. It's a choice, I guess.*

This quote shows the clear frustration Celeste experiences, in the misalignment she perceives between the levels of work and labour which are required to make a hand-craft item and the profit this item can garner. By contrasting the selling practices of other sellers with her own, she indicates that the reasons for her products being 'expensive,' is because she recognises the intrinsic value of her items and her time. This value she emphasises in being financially well- renumerated is due to the symbolic meaning she attributes to such renumeration; that her items express essential qualities about herself and her passion for her art form. However, simultaneously, women in this category also indicated the material necessity for making a profit. Celeste, for example, had recently been forced to take on a part-time role in the care sector to finance her shop and Jamie indicated her ambition to leave her full-time IT role. In this manner, participants within this subcategory exhibited conflicted ambitions regarding their Etsy shop businesses, without clear pathways available towards resolving these points of conflict.

4.5. The Passionate workers

The final category of participants most closely resembles McRobbie's (2016) 'passionate workers' and Farrugia (2019) 'subjects of passion.' McRobbie describes this as young women encouraged to 'bypass mainstream careers,'

and to instead encouraged to embrace 'flexible,' 'creative,' 'portfolio careers,' that emphasise the rewards of self-actualisation, self-fulfilment, and self-expression, over career security (McRobbie, 2016:11). Indeed, this was the most youthful subcategory amongst my participants, with most women aged in their mid-20's to early 30's. Farrugia (2019:1087) states that 'subjects of passion tend to be from middle-class backgrounds and understand the working self in terms of passionate investments that lead to personal development and personal growth *without reference to specific material outcomes*.' The women I grouped within this category, also indicated that they primarily wanted their work to reflect their personal interests and values, forming individual pathways towards rewarding and fulfilling work.

Moreover, these women did not aspire to centre their work around their Etsy-shop enterprises. Instead, their Etsy shops invariably formed one thread of activity, enmeshed with various other forms of paid and unpaid labour. Crucially, as indicated in Farrugia's research, women categorised within this group perceived the primary ambitions of their Etsy based labour to be ones of personal development, growth, and self-expression, rather than 'material outcomes' (ibid). This particularly centred on an explicit rejection of the importance placed on high levels of financial remuneration, as Noelle stated, '*the reality is, I'm much happier earning less money and spending more time doing my prints*.'

Unlike the 'post-careerist' group, this category of participants had variable degrees of former career success. Two participants had, thus far in their careers, 'only' been students. I further identified that participants within this subcategory were highly educated, many women possessing undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Indeed, both Gertrude and Noelle both possessed two MA degrees and Gertrude was undertaking a PhD degree at the time of being interviewed. Those who engaged in their Etsy selling part-time, such as Flora, described this work as a way to '*pay the bills*,' whilst remaining committed primarily to their creative ventures. This is also highlighted in the work of McRobbie (2016) who describes a current glut in highly educated young women, unable to secure traditionally recognised 'middle-class' professions and instead being channelled towards forms of self-entrepreneurialism.

The desire towards creative, self-actualising, and pleasurable thread was a strong thread across these interviews. Noelle had gained prior employment experience as

a freelance graphic-designer but used Etsy to undertake her '*passion projects*.' Aged 30 at the time of being interviewed, Eliza was a part-time Etsy seller and recent Social Sciences MA graduate. She makes and sells knitted items via the platform. She did not discuss her Etsy.com shop in terms of being a career, explaining '*I haven't been thinking of it (Etsy shop) as a job, I think it's fun*.' Her Etsy shop was therefore not expressed in terms of being a business venture, or even a means to make money, but to make and share '*funny*' and '*cute*' knitted items with others.

Cissy is a part-time teacher and runs her Etsy.com shop on a part-time basis to sell her paintings. In a comparable manner to Eliza, Cissy explained that she did not conceptualise making and selling her pieces as work, but rather, as a '*hobby*.' The value she perceived in her items derived from her efforts to make each one '*unique*' and '*special,'* explaining, '*I don't want to give someone something that I just did for money... it's just not what I'm about*.' She expressed throughout the interview that the main reason she had started selling her items was to '*connec*t' with other people and to '*share'* her artwork with others. Indeed, the denigration of selling items to purely make a profit was a further theme which united this subcategory of participants. Rather, the participants indicated a close personal relationship to their shop items and passionate attachment to their labour.

4.5.1. The value of Etsy work

Gertrude, aged 26, is a full-time PhD student in an arts related field. She uses Etsy.com part-time to sell art prints based on her interest in feminism. She described her Etsy shop as:

> *Something to do for fun on the side... a little bit of extra money is nice. It also... like... it's almost like a portfolio as well that I can show to other activists. That is the most exciting reason for doing it, making a name for yourself as an artist, as an illustrator, within the feminist community that I'm in.*

As indicated in this quote, Gertrude's main interests in running her Etsy shop

derived from her pre-existing passion for feminist activism and printing. Moreover,

in gaining recognition for this identity amongst other feminists. This was held in contrast to profit-making, as indicated in the following quote:

> *When you're selling to amazing feminist activists, they're like oh no... sisterhood price...! but at the same time... I'm not broke and penniless so... but to me the validation is more important and just getting these prints out there and being made is more important... than the price.*

For Gertrude, the art pieces that she makes have a close personal connection to her status as a feminist. This formed a crucial defining theme for this participant subcategory, for whom Etsy-based work invariably formed an expression of elements of self, which participants perceived as valuable and/or important.

Therein, sharing the items was presented as more significant than gaining a profit from their sale. Similarly, Cissy, who makes and sells acrylic paintings, stated that she had chosen to set up her Etsy shop because:

> *It would be really sad, a sad world if music artists decided to only make music in their home... and... like not share that with everyone else...*

This statement emphasised the value she perceived in her Etsy shop items as being art pieces over the status as commodities. Furthermore, both women's comments also speak to the moral dimension of creating artwork rather than products, which operate as both modes of self-expression and means towards bettering the world.

As further indicated, Gertrude chose to describe her shop primarily as a 'portfolio.' This forms another critical point of shared experience within this typology. Passionate workers tended to often frame their Etsy based activities as related to their status as artists and craft-women, rather than as business owners. Rosie for example, described the difference she perceived in her status as an artist rather than a designer:

> *I was chatting to one of the guys that I worked with, and he was like 'tell me what you do,' and I was like 'I'm a designer' so he was like 'so you want to look for a design job?' and I was like 'yeah but I don't know if I really*

*want to design **for** people, I think I want to design my own stuff' and he was like 'well you're an artist then, you're not a designer...' and I was like 'ahh that's a good point,' and it kind of made me see it all differently. Because I was like... if I really create the things I want, design the things I like, then I can't really be a designer because that's designing for other people.*

This interview excerpt reveals the valued status Rosie attributes to being an artist, above that of being a designer. This is primarily because as she perceives it, artists experience self-actualisation and self-expression through their endeavours, rather than merely meeting the design demands of customers. In this respect, passionate work can be understood as a 'manifestation of the post-Fordist work ethic in which passionate investments in labour – and the ongoing realisation of the passionate self – offer a mode of self-realisation, class distinction and value accrual through work' (Farrugia, 2019:1098). In my research, this is a youthful cohort of women, who possess high degrees of cultural, if not economic capital.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has provided an introductory overview of my participants, as delineated across four subcategories. Through a selection of interview quotes and excerpts, I have illustrated the crucial links between participants prior educational and work backgrounds and their current perceptions of Etsy based success. Aspirations towards individualised modes of self-expression and self-actualisation were a clear through line across subcategories. Farrugia's (2019) work regarding subjects of passion and subjects of achievement, provides a useful framework through which these experiences can be conceptualised. As I have indicated, encounters with the post-Fordist work ethic forms another connecting thread across these categories, which is being met and navigated in relation to women's access to wider forms of capital. Moreover, I have explored how my participant's actions towards individually wrought models of success, are constructed in relationship to wider familial expectations and duties. Indeed, in this respect, participant's capacities to operate as reflexive, individualised citizens is bounded by pre-existing structures of class and gender. These are themes which I shall explore in greater depth across the

following two data chapters, particularly in relationship to the mechanisms of the Etsy.com platform. The next chapter explores the demands experienced by participants to be ‘authentic’ Etsy sellers, engaged in genuine modes of relationship building.

Chapter 5: Authenticity, relationality, and visibility

5.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore the expectation for women to utilise aspects of their 'real' selves and lives within their Etsy-based work. I will examine the effects of a perceived necessity to act in a manner deemed authentic. This requires participants to negotiate sharing aspects of their selves and lives with others, both in person and online. I will demonstrate the existence of a pervasive binaristic understanding of authenticity and commerce, which

complicates participant's experiences of running online businesses. I will explore how participants navigate such demands, which are further enmeshed with long-standing notions of decorous, modest, and implicitly 'middle-class' femininity (Skeggs, 2012). I will show that success is not merely dependent on participant's ability to be authentic, and create meaningful connections, but on their possession of specific forms of cultural, social, and economic capital. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that women Etsy sellers must individually find ways to navigate the requirement towards using their 'authentic' selves and lives as an aspect of their Etsy shop. Moreover, such a mandate requires sellers to individually reconcile divergent and at points contradictory, notions of successful femininity.

5.2 Authenticity and morality

Authenticity is not a stable, or uncontested concept. Rather, its meaning is dependent on culturally ascribed parameters, which are subject to change (Vannini and Williams, 2009). However, there are some key cultural understandings of authenticity that I have found relevant to my research. Firstly, authenticity as an ideal has a historical connection to European notions of ethical virtue. The 17th century enlightenment period birthed the idea that a virtuous life stemmed from recognising, and acting upon, one's essential characteristics as a 'Cartesian subject,' rather than as 'placeholders in systems of social relations' (Cobb, 2014, Varga et al., 2020). Within Rousseau's view, 'the measure of one's actions is whether they spring from and express essential aspects of one's identity' (ibid). As implied within this quote, the notion of an authentic identity necessarily requires the presumed existence of an essential, inner self. In their research regarding 'authenticity' and reality television, Allen and Mendick (2012) argue that within the context of neoliberalism, this presumption still holds purchase.

Moreover, they argue that understanding and expressing one's 'real self' forms a central thread to the wider neoliberal project of 'compulsory individuality, choice, self-responsibility and self-reinvention' (ibid:461). However, unlike the existence of one's inner-self, authenticity is not a presumed a-priori state, but rather, an ongoing project which requires concerted effort. In this

manner, the authentic neoliberal self is the result of an individual's ongoing labour. It is possible then, to view the historical through-line between the moral virtue assigned to authenticity within early liberalism, and the labour required to 'be oneself' under neoliberalism.

5.3. Postfeminist authenticity

As my research pertains to the lives of women, it is important to consider how such notions of authenticity are structured and experienced via gender. Banet-Weiser (2012) argues that within the normative ideals of postfeminism, women and girls are increasingly also understood as 'interactive subjects.' The interactive female subject is not only required to find her 'true' self and engage in authenticity as an ongoing project of selfhood, but 'broadcast that self, through... spaces that authorize and encourage user activity' such as digital platforms (Banet-Weiser, 2012:57).

As suggested in the term, this version of the authentic self is dependent on interaction with others and therefore, self-disclosure and transparency are positioned as crucial. As an operation of authenticity, self-broadcasting via social media site and other digital platforms therefore also become positioned as moral endeavours (ibid). This allows women to discover and express their 'true selves,' via interaction with an audience. However, as suggested in the contradictory qualities associated with postfeminism, women must engage in such modes of self- disclosure, whilst navigating conservative ideals of modesty and decorum (Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017).

Such expectations of ideal femininity, complicate how authenticity can utilised by female Etsy sellers. Furthermore, as Reade (2020) identifies in her research regarding Instagram influencers, successful digital renderings of authenticity by social media users are dependent on adept, skillful performances. These performances are further dependent on the ability to utilise appropriate aspects of their self and life, in a manner that is experienced by audiences as both relatable and aspirational in quality (Kanai, 2019).

The performance of authenticity is therefore also strategic, as social media users are compelled to 'brand' their identities for imagined audiences. In their

research regarding political blogging, Gaden and Dumitrica (2014) further state 'authenticity' forms an important form of capital, as it increases bloggers credibility, reach and visibility. Those who do not successfully perform authenticity, can therefore also be penalised and in the context of micro-entrepreneurship, experience material repercussions.

5.4. 'They don't want to buy from a big place where everything's mass produced'

As I have established, the perception that authenticity possesses a moral value, has a long lineage, and is associated with neoliberal and postfeminist thought. However, there is another vein of thought relevant to this discussion, namely, that we collectively long for authenticity, due to a 'malaise of modernity' (Taylor, 1991). Taylor argues that modern life is typified by a cultural 'malaise,' centred on imaginings of a pre-modern world. Similarly, Banet-Weiser (2012) asserts that in response to the perceived commodification of all aspects of contemporary life, there exists a public 'lament about the loss of morals, ethics, community, and meaning in the lives of individuals' (ibid:145). This lamentation has spurred a desire for 'virtuous' alternatives.

Businesses such as Etsy Inc. have centred their brand on notions of virtuous commerce - such as authenticity - perceived as lacking in contemporary culture. Conceived as a digital craft-selling market, Etsy.com has historically proclaimed itself to be building an 'alternative' economy (Etsy, 2015). Despite some radical re-structuring in recent years, Etsy's 'About' page, currently professes the company 'keeps commerce human,' and is 'powered by people' (Etsy, 2021).

Similarly, the perceived value of undertaking Etsy work was constructed by some participants, through reference to the perceived inhumanity of 'big businesses.' This sentiment can be perceived in Phoebe's following comment:

> *Well, I think that when people buy from like a small business, and especially from a marketplace like Etsy, I think... they kind of go in there because they want that human connection. They don't want to buy from a big you know, big place where everything's mass produced...*

Phoebe identified the potential for a '*small business*' to create a '*human connection*' between the seller and customer, as an important aspect to

selling via Etsy.com. This sits in contrast to the perceived sterility of big businesses '*where everything is mass produced*' and lacks 'authentic' human connection. Crucially, this sense of authenticity assigned to Etsy based work, was also a moral value assigned by some participants to acting and behaving in a manner that was viewed as 'authentic;' contrasting to the profit-orientated behaviour's of '*big businesses*.'

Banet-Weiser (ibid:10) makes the further observation that, 'what is understood (and experienced) as authentic is considered such precisely because it is perceived as *not* commercial.' Indeed, many of my participants chose to explain the value of their Etsy based labour by contrasting it with a view of mainstream modes of commerce. In discussion of her shop, Conflicted Careerist Jamie expressed the following view:

> *Jamie: you're not just like a faceless company... trying to sell...*
>
> *Anna: Right, do you think that's important to your customers or in general on Etsy?*
>
> *Jamie: I think in general yeah... I think the whole point of people buying on Etsy is that that whole... handmade thing... where people can support people who are artists, not supporting big businesses... so yeah, I think that's important to people.*

Similarly, to Phoebe's comments, Jamie evokes an implicit understanding that 'authenticity' - to '*not just be like a faceless compan*y,'- has a moral value, and is therefore '*important to people*.' As she further stated, it offers a '*human connection*,' deemed preferable to the actions of a '*faceless*' and implicitly, less 'human,' profit-hungry big business. This is an authenticity derived not just from the items themselves, but the experience of buying the items from the sellers.

Moreover, the '*whole point*,' of people using Etsy.com is that it allows customers to '*support*' artists. Her comment further speaks to the perceived losses associated with modern life, such as community and human connection (Banet-Weiser, 2012). In this manner, the value some participants assigned to their Etsy-based work was clearly linked to its perceived status as being more 'authentic' than other forms of mainstream commerce.

5.5. ‘That would be contrary to what art is’

The contrast Jamie makes between Etsy.com sellers and commercial businesses are further emphasised by description of Etsy.com sellers as ‘artists.’ I categorized Jamie as a ‘conflicted careerist,’ which reflects the complex feelings she has towards her Etsy-based work. A crucial element of this is that Jamie’s ambitions centred on the desire to both use her Etsy.com shop as a source of income, and to express her passion for gothic photography.

Similarly, fellow conflicted careerist Celeste, expressed that making her Etsy.com shop items purely for commercial reasons, would be *‘contrary to what art is.’* This comment spoke to her perceived status as an artist and craftswoman, but also alludes to her ideological belief that art and commerce are opposed. The virtuous status of art and the artist, held in contrast to the perceived profanity of commercialism, has a long-standing cultural legacy.

In her examination of the 1800’s Arts and Crafts movement, Thomas (2020) explains anxieties regarding industrialisation and modernism. This motivated artists to ‘position their work in terms *honesty*, *simplicity*, and *the nature of material*’ (Elliot, 2016:19). Such aspirations were positioned as counter to the increasing mass-production of items found within this period. Artist C.R. Ashbee described the movement as ‘serious and … sacred,’ which aimed to ‘discredit, undermine and over-throw' the ‘commercial system’ (Thomas, 2020:157). In this regard, it is also possible to see the through-lines between contemporary notions of craft and craft-making, and anti-commercialism.[1]

However, as Krugh (2014) states, although Willaim Morris aspired to create art accessible to all people, the prohibitive cost of producing arts and crafts pieces meant they were mostly enjoyed as leisure items by a small elite. Moreover, he quotes artist Robert Edwards (in Krugh, 2014:288) critique that the movement's main anti-commercialist legacy, was the degradation of craft-making as a profession. In this respect, the ideological locating of craft-making and commercialism as diametrically opposed, also has a complex lineage.

Harriet stated that she had started freelancing and making her ‘business,’ but then corrected herself stating ‘*well it's not officially a business...’* When I probed further, she explained that she ‘*wasn’t sure*’ why she did not perceive

it as a business, but 'at the moment *I feel like I'm just making stuff and selling it to people...*' These were actions she connected with her desire to '*make things that people would love, that would make people happy,'* rather than prioritising financial gain. These comments illuminate the complex view Harriet has of her own Etsy based activities. Her description that she was '*just making stuff and selling it to people*,' presents her actions in an organic manner, as though the act of selling, flowed naturally from her artistic activities.

This downplays any deliberate instrumentalising of her activities, and therein allows Harriet to avoid framing them as the actions of a business. Her comments can be viewed via a culturally 'feminised' version of entrepreneurialism. Duffy and Hund (2015) argue that women engaged in new media work tend to frame their activities through a language of pre-determination, or 'destiny.' The 'seemingly destined nature' of women's professional success 'deflates the notion of masculine self-enterprise,' and allows female workers to retain their statuses as normatively feminine (ibid:4).

Finally, she explained that when people asked her about her job, she described herself as a '*potter.'* This choice of language further cements her status as an artist, rather than a business owner. Viewed through the lens of virtuous authenticity, Harriet's choice of words further differentiates her work from the actions of commercial enterprises, which can also be viewed as culturally masculine. In this manner, I came to perceive that some sellers placed a moral value on engaging in Etsy activities to fulfil personal creative ambitions and to make other people '*happy.*' Moreover, sellers gave further meaning to these aspirations by contrasting them with commercial ambitions.

5.5.1 'The artistic side of me is like, it shouldn't be like that'

Several other participants also discussed their status in reference to being artists and craft-makers, sometimes contrasting this status with that of being a business owner. Cissy primarily makes and sells paintings of highland cows, which she stated is because she knows they are popular with her audiences.

However, she also explained that *'I probably would never hang a highland*

coo in my house...' as that *'would be so out of place'* and *'too unoriginal'* for her. She expressed this with some guilt regarding her integrity as an artist, as she explained, '*sadly... It's something I purely create just because other people seem to enjoy it... Which... probably the artistic side of me is like... it shouldn't be like that'*. Making and selling items that are popular is a reasonable business decision. However, she avoided framing her actions in this way, instead emphasising again the other-centredness of her actions, stating '*other people seem to enjoy it*.' Such a comment speaks to a culturally 'feminised' version of entrepreneurial activity, which seeks to centre relationship building and making people 'happy' above nakedly pursuing profit (Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017).

Moreover, this also forms a source of anxiety, as she states her '*artistic side*' appears troubled that her items do not form 'true' representation of herself, and her tastes. Moulard et al., (2014:578) research regarding perceptions of authenticity in art is useful here. They state that the perceived authenticity of the artist forms a crucial thread to the value assigned to art pieces by audience. Such forms of authenticity centre on the perception that the artist's work forms a faithful conduit of their 'true' inner selves. Incongruity between the artist and the art they produce can produce feelings of inauthenticity in the viewer, particularly if the artist is seen as 'selling out' (ibid).

Cissy's comments communicate an awareness that her actions could be perceived as inauthentic, as her art does not necessarily represent her 'true' self. The tension she communicated regarding wanting to make other people happy but also, to meet the expectations of her 'artistic side,' also appears influenced by implicit gendered expectations. Miller (2016) makes the relevant observation that '*ideologies* associated with artists are symbolically aligned with masculinity.' Battersby's (1989) text 'Gender and Genius: Towards a Feminist Aesthetics' outlines the genealogy of 'genius,' as a word and concept associated with male fertility and patriarchal lineage. This influenced nineteenth-century romanticism, an artistic and intellectual era that, she argues, continues to shape contemporary notions of art and genius. Within this era, great artists were the 'feminine male', that is, to men able to express qualities such as sensitivity, expressiveness and emotionality through artistic endeavours. The capacity to express such qualities did not compromise the

man's masculine status but deepened and enriched it.
Conversely, the 'masculine woman' was derided, as women can only ever imitate male genius, but not truly possess its features (ibid).

In this regard, women engaged in creative endeavours, must traverse pre-existing gendered assumptions regarding creative excellence. This is coloured not only be pre-existing gendered assumptions regarding self-expression and emotionality, but the negative repercussions of being 'too' masculine. In this manner, Cissy's experiences of making herself legibly authentic, are further complicated by gendered expectations of artmaking and artists.

5.5.2 Authentic artists

Several participants discussed the complexities associated with utilising one's identity in an authentic manner. In further a further description of her Etsy.com shop, Cissy explained that her Etsy.com shop biography described her as '*an American living in Scotland.'* When I asked her further about this, she explained that she had added this information on the advice of her artist father-in- law. He had explained:

> *Because you're American people might be like... why are you painting highland cows, that doesn't make sense? Are you just doing it for the money? Whereas if you tie it in with... like hey... I'm actually Scottish as well and this is kind of my heritage too...*

In this comment, Cissy highlights her efforts to ground her artwork in an acceptable Scottish identity, which would be legibly authentic to her audience. In this way, she could avoid accusations of 'just doing it for money,' and instead impress the view that she, and therefore her artwork, were authentic. Business scholars Gilmore and Pine (2007) highlight how large scale brands leverage certain cultural identities, such as 'Irishness,' to induce feelings of authenticity in consumers.

However, she avoided using terms such as 'marketing' when describing her decisions, a choice which indicated discomfort with instrumentalising her perceived Scottish identity. When I replied to Cissy's comment by stating *'right so like... "this is me connecting with my heritage?"'* she responded by joking *'right - laugh- "Ohhh I feel so Scottish when I paint highland cows!" -*

laugh-.' I found this comment to be further revealing. Cissy's comments indicate her belief that her art, with its focus on Scottish subjects, needs to make sense to an audience, in relationship to who she is. However, this is not how things 'really' happened – she did not start painting highland cows because of some internal Scottish impulse, as she jokes.

The reason appeared arbitrary; she made the paintings, people liked them and bought them, so she made more. This reveals a tension regarding how participants such as Cissy can retain their perceived status as being authentic artists, whilst making artwork that people also want to buy. Moreover, her comments highlight the importance placed by some participants in their status as authentic artists, being recognised by their Etsy.com audiences. I shall now explore further the forms of labour which women engage in to ensure a status of legible authenticity.

5.6. Sharing your 'real self' with others

A key aspect to understanding the 'authenticity mandate,' as witnessed amongst my participants, is in reference to the expectations regarding social media. Via the company's 'Seller Handbook,' Etsy states that 'social media is one of your most effective, low-cost, promotional tools as a small business owner' (2019b). Indeed, a recent Etsy 'announcement' post, further states that sellers should aim to 'leverage' social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter to promote and display their work and engage with buyers (Etsy, 2019b).

Indeed, across my interviews, the importance of social media use as a means of engaging audiences and driving traffic towards their Etsy pages, we a re-occurring theme. As Rebecca iterated, '90% of the job is self-promotion, marketing and SEO,' with social media forming a key element to this.

One of the social media sites most widely used by my participants is Instagram. Founded in 2010 and owned by Facebook, Instagram has rapidly become one of the world's most popular social media platforms (Musonera, 2018). Primarily operating as a photo and video sharing content site, the platform includes a variety of features, including a constantly updated 'feed' of visual content, a 15-second 'story reel' feature, direct messaging options, and accessible photo editing software and filters (Antonelli, 2020).

Recent marketing research shows that although Instagram is a popular tool for users to share personal content and stay connected with friends, 81% of users reported using the platform to research products and 90% of users follow at least one brand online (Gotter, 2021). Indeed, the convenience and accessibility of the platform means it has become a way for businesses to 'connect' in a more 'authentic' manner with audiences- most particularly younger consumers.

Social media influencers, 'normal people' who gain popularity and followers online, have become a particularly important 'intermediary between advertisers and consumers,' as they lend 'authenticity' to brands (van Driel and Dumitrica, 2021:66). Furthermore, the app 'allows users to gather followers, connect with varied brands and entities, and facilitate social interactions among consumers' (Blight et al., 2017). Indeed, as outlined Duffy's (2017) research regarding gender and social media, the app is particularly popular amongst women entrepreneurs, as a means of promoting their brands and forming 'genuine' connections with customers.

However, although possessing a social media presence and engaging with social media was widely identified as important amongst my participants, it was a topic of some contention. A particular disdain was expressed by some participants towards the perceived 'fakeness' of social media content, particularly regarding Instagram content. As Amelia put it in reference to Instagram, *'it's just so fake! - laugh- it's sooo fake, isn't it? You see like 10% of what's actually happening.*' For some participants, the value of social media content was widely discussed in reference to its potential to be 'real' and provide genuine insights into participant's selves and lives (Celeste). This sentiment is illustrated in the following exchange with the participant Celeste:

> *Celeste: Because I love décor, I will try to put the pieces in action in my flat.*
>
> *Anna: Yeah, because what I've noticed that this is actually your life as well in terms of the photos...*
>
> *Celeste: Yeah, that's the thing, because I like so much for things to be natural and real, so to pretend... anything... it's impossible. I'm not gonna*

make one corner in a particular way just for this, no. That's my life.

This view and experience of Instagram was also a theme found across my sample. Anita described the potential for creating a sense of intimacy and connection with her customers via her social media platforms, as forming a unique advantage to her status as a single seller. She explicitly identifies that her position as a single seller differentiates her from larger businesses:

Because to start off with I thought 'right, I'm going to think about Urban Outfitters, and I'm going to follow their lead on like their branding,' and I didn't really share anything really personal. But then... I thought wait a minute... that's actually a plus point that I'm an individual making the stuff and I think that's something that people really like, so I then I started doing it more often like 'we're doing this,' kind of thing.

For Anita, this has meant incorporating images and videos of the processes of making her items, which largely occur at home in her kitchen.

Anita runs several Etsy based shops. Her first Etsy shop centres on macrame, a skill she had learnt when travelling through India. Anita explicitly described the 'branding' of her first shop as 'boho,' something which 'kind of came naturally' to her. However, while running her first Etsy shop business, Anita had come to realise that Etsy was becoming saturated with similar macrame products. In response and with an ambition to increase the profitability of her Etsy businesses, she devised a second shop selling soaps, centred on a male market. The following two excerpts provide further insight into this:

I tried to target it more at the male market, because there's so many soap companies out there for middle-aged females, so I wanted to try to do something a bit different.

What I was trying to think was what can I actually... I was thinking about photography. I thought right, I don't want to be going and buying a whole load of props and things, I want to be able to use kind of what I've got in the house and keep the budget down, so it was a mix of what I had...

The two excerpts provide insight into Anita's motivations towards diversifying her client base, which she approached by devising two separate brands. However, in discussion of this, it became clear that running two separate Etsy

shop businesses was challenging for Anita, partly because it contradicted the authenticity mandate. Anita explained that *'if the person doesn't match the branding, then... it can be a bit of a conflict that puts people off,'* and, *'I do find it really difficult having the two different brands. To try and remind myself what the difference is.'* In this respect, Anita was aware that customers have expectations regarding the authentic links between the Etsy shop owners, and the brand and image their shops project. As I previously outlined, cultural expectations demand congruity between an artist and their work. This is an expectation that contributes to the authenticity mandate. However, for Etsy achievers such as Anita, who were approaching their Etsy shop businesses with the explicit aim of generating revenue, this was challenging. These challenges were referred to in greater depth in the following excerpt, where Anita discussed whether she saw herself in her brands:

> *I think you have to have a little bit of that element, otherwise it's really difficult to be convincing and also to be... consistent when you're doing your social media. So, when I do markets, I wear like my Adidas hoodie, yeah like a funky dress... there is that side but then if I was going to do macrame at a fair, I would maybe wear something a little bit more... like second-hand clothes.*

This quote further illustrates the labour Anita undertakes, to reconcile the dual expectations she experiences to meet the demands of her business and act authentically. Running two separate Etsy shops means that she must utilise distinct aspects of herself, which she expresses through her clothing styles. As she indicates, her choice of attire is deliberate, made to align with her brand image(s) and products. She also explained that:

> *My friend was helping me over Christmas at the Etsy fair, and I was like 'I hope you're going to dress to the brand!' I was only joking obviously, I'm not that bossy! But I do think about that. I do think about it if I am putting photographs of myself on Esty or social media... I sometimes do get changed -laugh- because it doesn't fit with the brand...*

In this respect, Anita's relationship with being authentic is shaped by her explicit view of branding. This aligns with her wider approach to Etsy based work, as an Etsy achiever. For Anita, her Etsy based shops are primarily

businesses, which she relies upon for revenue. Therein, her comments indicate the labour she undertakes to ensure her image aligns with her brands. This runs counter to the authenticity mandate as outlined by other participants such as Celeste, who described moral impetus to be 'real' online. However, Anita expressed her psychological reconciliation with these divergent expectations. She explained that wearing different outfits was 'part of my personality' and that she had different 'sides' that she expressed through style choices. In this way, Anita seemed to find her own way to engage in the authenticity mandate.

In this manner, I have shown how participants are compelled to engage in forms of self-promotion and marketing whilst retaining the status of being 'authentic.' As Joanna's comments demonstrate, women perceived as being overly concerned with self-promotion can be labelled fake and/or disingenuous. These are perspectives interlaced with the ethical dimensions of the authenticity mandate. Indeed, this section highlights a key contradictory demand placed upon Etsy sellers. Namely, the requirement to engage in forms of business management such as online promotion, in a manner which achieves the status of being both strategic and authentic. Anita's comments highlight further the complex demands of the authenticity mandate, particularly when sellers must run multiple shops for financial reasons. Indeed, the requirement to remain authentic forms a further challenge for women who use their Etsy.com shops to generating revenue, as I shall discuss later in this chapter.

5.6. 'Authentic connections' vs 'self-promotion'

Elements of self-promotion, particularly via social media platforms, was largely discussed by participants as a key element of Etsy based work. This section continues my discussion of participants' experiences of aligning financial and creative aspirations of Etsy shop ownership, particularly in relationship to gendered ideals of self-presentation. I found that discussions regarding appropriate and inappropriate forms of self-promotion formed a key theme across several interviews. When discussing her shop, I asked passionate worker Gertrude:

Anna: In terms of being connected to your feminism... is it that it's like

a showcase for the people that you want to see your work?

Gertrude: Yes, definitely like a portfolio. Like one example... this feminist lawyer who I really admire, she was asking, 'are there any feminist illustrators out there?' and I just sent my Etsy shop, and she asked me to do a few custom
things, and I'm like, 'oh my god I'm doing a drawing for her', and it's establishing a line of communication and a line of trust... and... for me... the whole aspect of community is really important and... worthwhile...

Anna: Right and having quite a personal connection to the person who you're... it's not just... I don't know an anonymous 'someone,' it's a very specific person who you're sending it to... Is that important to you?

Gertrude: I mean it makes it way more meaningful. If I recognise a name of whoever orders it, then it's a lot more exciting.

In discussion of the use of Twitter, Marwick and Boyd (2010) state that social media users make continual choices regarding their self-presentation online, dependent on their imagined audiences. As indicated here, the perceived value of her shop centres on its capacity to establish '*a line of communication*' and a '*line of trust*' with other feminists. Indeed, Gertrude explicitly states that sharing her work via her Etsy shop, allows her to participate in a wider '*community*' of other feminists, an endeavour '*worthwhile*' for her as a shop owner. This makes sense in relationship to her status as a passionate worker; she primarily treats her shop as a means of expressing a pre-existing passion for feminism, rather than as a business enterprise. Indeed, McRobbie (216:108) indicates that the passionate work ethic encourages women and girls to disregard 'matters of a monthly salary in favour of a bohemian anti-economy.' The passionate work ethic promises a romanticised, feminine alternative to 'merely' working for financial renumeration. Occurring within a wider context of neoliberal postfeminism, labouring to achieve one's passion (rather than a regular wage) is imbued with a moral virtuousity, which further fits with pre-existing cultural ideals of legible femininity.

Interestingly, Gertrude's description of using her artwork to connect with a '*feminist lawyer*' that she admired, could, within more traditional notions of

business ownership, be viewed as a form of networking (Harris and Rae, 2009). However, this is not presented by Gertrude as networking in the sense of promoting her business, but rather her status as a feminist academic and activist. I believe this speaks further to importance of her actions being genuine and authentic, rather than aligned with the '*mercenary*' (Flora) actions of 'big business.' Authenticity in this instance, finds purchase within her status as a passionate worker, forming a further indicator of the moral value of her work. The act of sharing her 'genuine' self and interests with others through her Etsy is further explored in the following quote regarding social media:

> *I remember posting... one of my illustrations on Facebook and it was right after the Ford testimony, and so I posted that with like a little news story about what was happening, and people liked it and then I asked my roommate what she thought about my illustration, and she goes... 'oh! You did that? I thought you were just re-posting someone else's and then I was like, oh no...' because it's just not if people like it, they like it, if they wanna buy it, they'll buy it, and that for me it's more meaningful than pushing ... pushing it... to me, that's just so awful... to try and validate what you're doing by pushing it on people. To me, it's just, especially with social media, I think it has to happen organically to an extent. I think that's like the most meaningful way that interactions happen, and so... yeah... if I really like an illustration, then I'll post it to my friends... but I won't ever like, be like, 'shop update!' you know, 'latest stock update' you know?*

Through this quote, Gertrude clearly foregrounds the moral value she perceives in running her social media in an '*organic*' manner. She explains that the social media posts she has made that relate to her Etsy shop activity and items derive from her passions and interests as a social activist. This is important to her, partly because the prints that she makes form an authentic representation of her own political beliefs, but also because '*for me it's more meaningful than pushing ... pushing it... to me that's just so awful... to try and validate what you're doing by pushing it on people.*' Her comments further indicate the anxiety expressed by some participants regarding '*pushing*' their items onto others, actions which could potentially devalue the authenticity of their

actions. A fearfulness regarding audiences perceiving their actions as pushy, also further speaks to long-standing, gendered expectation of female comportment.

In their research regarding women's experiences of self-promotion, Smith and Huntoon (2014) argue that women must contend with cultural 'modesty norms.' Such norms centre on gendered expectations of appropriate levels of self-promotion, wherein women (unlike men) are expected to advocate for others above themselves (ibid). Moreover, deviating from such norms can result in material repercussions for women, such a workplace discrimination (ibid). In this manner, Gertrude's fearfulness regarding 'pushiness' can be read within a wider spectrum of gendered expectations of female behaviour, particularly in the context of waged labour.

Her comments are strikingly like those shared by Harriet, also in discussion of social media. Harriet is categorised as a post-careerist. As explored within the previous chapter, her Etsy based work is closely entangled with her wider desires to makeover work to better suit her personal passions and interests. She explained to me that a friend had been encouraging her to 'sell herself' more on her social media accounts, treating them in a more 'business like' manner. This included suggestions such as researching trending hashtags and using more targeted language with her posts. She explained that:

> *Harriet: I would feel a bit like a machine if I did that.*
>
> *Anna: OK, why would you feel that way?*
>
> *Harriet: I don't I just... at this stage I'm just sharing what I do, and people seem to like it. So, if people like it I'll keep doing it, if they don't like it, I won't do it. I think that's where the word organic comes from, so I'm kind of just testing the water and seeing what's popular at the moment.*

Her comments again highlight the moral value she places on approaching her Etsy shop in an '*organic*' manner, which doesn't involve nakedly '*selling herself*' to others online. Indeed, her comments that this would make her '*feel like a machine*' speaks to a view that mainstream approaches to marketing and selling lack 'humanity'. In a comparable manner to Gertrude, Harriet instead conveys her behaviour as springing 'naturally' from her

creative endeavours - she is '*just sharing what I do.*' This statement can be further viewed in reference to gendered modesty norms, namely that women must present their actions as being other-centred, rather than self-promotional. The verb 'sharing' particularly communicates this feminised version of soft self-promotion, which is orientated towards a communal good, rather than naked self-ambition.

As Duffy and Hund (2016) highlight, attributes of masculinsed self-entrepreneurialism contrast with feminine values of virtuousness and modesty. The discourse of 'destiny' instead emphasises normative feminine ideals; following one's heart, listening to one's inner voice, etc. This is shown in Harriet's explanation that she was approaching her Etsy based work without a business plan, but instead an instinctive sense of what was '*popular*.' The 'work as destiny' thread found within passionate labour discourses offers women an alternative framework through which to understand and articulate personal ambitions. Her comments also speak to her hopes regarding 'authentic' forms of commerce. Namely, the wish to create her own pathway towards meaningful labour, in a manner that feels '*human.*' As a postfeminist framework, passionate labour also emphasises the pleasures of individual self-work and self-reflection; through individual action, women can reconstitute work to suit their lives and selves (McRobbie, 2016). However, as I shall now further explore, the lived realities of engaging in entrepreneurial self-promotion whilst remaining legibly feminine, is challenging for many women.

5.6.1. Challenges of authentic self-promotion

As outlined, many of my sellers stressed the necessity to create digital content which did not come across as promotional, but instead achieved some sort of 'real' connection with their audience. When I asked conflicted careerist Jamie about why she thinks it's important to share content that offers insights into her daily life she replied that:

> *I think it's just to make you more like a person... more relatable... you're not just like a faceless company... trying to sell... not just spamming people with like 'oh I made this, buy this, buy it, buy it.*

Such comments highlight the tensions inherent in such forms of selling, which

demands women engage in entrepreneurial self-promotion online in a manner which does not compromise their femininity (Duffy and Pruchniewska, 2017). The tension inherent in this demand results in specific pressures for women Etsy sellers. As Anita stated regarding her social media posts:

> *Sometimes I really struggle, because I might have lots of like... product pictures to put on, but I don't just want to be doing like a constant sell. So, I try to... I sometimes struggle with what to say...*

As regards this comment, Etsy achiever Anita describes the difficulty she sometimes finds in consistently producing content that can be read as real and authentic by her social media followers and does not appear as naked self-promotion. The capacity to consistently and regularly produce content that elicits an emotional response in its audience members therein forms another source of veiled and unrecognised labour, predicated on cultural constructs of femininity. Namely, finding ways to frame the visual content shared in a manner that achieved the aim of being promotional, without being a '*constant sell.*'

In the following quote, Jamie describes some of the penalties she has encountered when attempting to 'market' herself via Facebook:

> *I tried like Facebook marketplace and things like that... and it just did not work at all... I use it mostly for self-promotion, which people say you shouldn't do because you should be... offering like a variety of things, like life-style things and promoting other people and liking related stuff. So... talking about horror films or other things audiences I think would be responding to... but most of the time it's just... 'here's a new listing, here's a new listing'... it seems a bit same-y, and I feel like I just overwhelm people.*

As I have previously outlined, the alternative to such 'hard-sell' approaches via social media, requires women to instrumentalise their private and personal lives. However, this privileges women who possess a certain constellation of traits and attributes, which far from springing from an 'authentic' self, require high levels of cultural, economic, and social capital. Moreover, they also require the enactment of labour, which is naturalised as inherently feminine, which further obscures from the view the high levels of

skilled labour such forms of work entail.

5.7. 'Anti-marketing' marketing

Several participants espoused an approach to marketing, premised on authentic self-presentation and genuine interactions. During our interview, it was clear that Joanna felt passionately about the products she creates, which she linked to her self-described status as an '*honest*' and '*real*' person, where '*what you see is what you get*.' Within this discussion, Joanna distanced herself from techniques of business ownership which she perceived as dishonest, such as media marketing. Indeed, she described her approach to selling as a form of '*anti-marketing*,' wherein:

> *The blurb is just truthful... I could update the picture and make it more 'twee'; I could probably have put gingham around the products and sold 5 times more... but that's not me... I'm not things in love hearts... I'm not that kind of person. If people want... An honest product then great, but if not, go buy something that's wrapped in gingham, and lies to you.*

In this comment, it is clear Joanna highly values her close connection to both her products, and how they are packaged and displayed. It was important that they formed a close representation of her own values, a sentiment seen in her comment that a '*twee*' approach was '*not me*.'

Joanna went on to disparagingly contrast her approach, with a high-profile '*glamorous*' social media '*cleanfluencer*' who '*manipulates*' people into buying '*pernicious products*.' She also stated that she had briefly gone to a group meet-up for entrepreneurs but left because she felt her approach to running her shop was at odds with the other members who were '*all in love with themselves and their own ideas.*' In this manner, she discussed her business by drawing comparisons between herself, and her values, and those of other sellers she viewed as disingenuous and/or egoistic.

In reflection of both women's comments, it seems that value is given to being 'authentic' within their Etsy shop activities. Regarding Gertrude's social media usage, this is expressed through posting and sharing content that does not 'push' her items. Rather, she contrasts such a commercially orientated approach to '*organically*' sharing aspects of her genuine self and life with others.

Furthermore, these women present their actions in a manner that foregrounds their ‘natural’ qualities- as deriving from aspects of themselves, their interests and passions. They frame their Etsy shop activities, particularly those relating to social media, through language and phrasing which emphasises its ‘genuineness’ and authenticity.

Moreover, importance was emphasised in my interview with both women, in their shops operating as a means to forge ‘real’ relationships with others, an aspiration held in contrast to the aims of mainstream, large-scale commerce or other sellers. Such comments can be further analysed through a gendered lens, speaking to a long-standing structural positioning of women as caregivers and relationship- builders. It is also important to state that their desire to centre their values and beliefs at the heart of their Etsy shops speaks further to the perceived problems of mainstream work, as experienced and expressed by many of my participants.

However, it is also possible to discern a contradictory aspect to the gendered requirements of Etsy sellers, as expressed by Gertrude and Harriet. Gertrude expressed the understanding that ‘pushing’ oneself and business onto others, by posting content such as ‘*'shop update!' You know, 'latest stock update’* is distasteful. Such comments speak to gendered expectations regarding appropriately feminine decorum and modesty.

Her comments speak to a complex interlacing of contemporary notions of entrepreneurial female activity, where women must share elements and aspects of their ‘real’ self-online, without compromising their respectable femininity. This is a difficult dynamic to achieve, demanding high levels of skill. Indeed, as explored further in this chapter, how this balance is achieved does not merely spring from women’s natural capacities towards self-expression and genuine relationship building, but is dependent clearly on forms of social, economic, and cultural capital. Moreover, participants' dedication to such values must also be viewed in reference to their financial dependence on their Etsy shops, a point that will also be further explored in this chapter.

5.8. Being ‘organic’ and making money

The equating of good Etsy shop practices, with the seller's capacity to

prioritise ‘authenticity’ above profit-making, has clear financial implications for women sellers. It is important to reflect that Gertrude and Harriet - who both described a strong ideological alignment with this approach to their Etsy shops - were not financially dependent on their Etsy shop businesses. It is therefore useful to consider the experiences of two example Etsy sellers who prioritise profit- making within their businesses, the Etsy achievers Anita and Betsy.

In contrast to Harriet and Gertrude, Anita, and Betsy both framed their activities through a clear ‘business’ lens. In the following quote, Anita and I discussed some of the activities she thought were necessary to create a ‘successful’ Etsy shop business:

> *So first and foremost, the products. So, you have to have the products there. Photography - that's one of the main things. The... having a decent amount of listings in your shop as well, and knowing how to write the listing itself and the keywords... Well... in order to have a successful Etsy shop, you really need to put the hours in. So, you need to ‘gen up’ on everything, and to know what makes a successful listing, what's going to draw people to your shop, what's going to make them keep coming back...*

In reflection of Anita’s comments, it clear that she perceives her Etsy related activities as centred on conscious business choices, such as ‘*genning up*’ on what makes a listing successful, knowing how to write listings and the right keywords to list with shop items. Betsy shared the following information:

> *It (my shop) started out making me maybe a couple hundred quid a month, after about 6 months I really studied the market and figured out what style was selling, and once I implemented that I went over 6 months from taking a 100-200 quid a month to 300 then 500 then 1,000 then 2,000 it became a significant income quite quickly once I'd figured it out. but yes, it's a HUGE market... There's people making 6 figures doing this.*

As the preceding quote indicates, Betsy presented the financial decisions involved in running her Etsy shop as significant. Interestingly, this was information she volunteered whilst discussing her shop products and shop history without probing on my part. This contrasted with interviews with some

other participants, who appeared more reticent or less interested in discussing the financial implications of their Etsy shop businesses. Betsy's choice to foreground the financial successes of her shop contrasted strongly with other participants' apparent belief that acting in a business orientated manner compromised the authenticity and therefore value of their shop.

Indeed, Betsy and Anita both spoke clearly about developing and adopting business techniques, such as monitoring the actions of their competitors, to increase their sales. The blatant aspiration to design and create a business which prioritised profit-making was clearly illustrated in my interview with Betsy, who with a background in marketing, had direct experience of working within a corporate landscape. Betsy described her feelings towards her shop in the following manner:

> *I mean, I'm able to... it's not like designing wedding stationery is like my vocation or anything, but... I'm really proud that I've created this little business from nothing. I mean I had no money when I started and I needed to be able to start a business that didn't need any stock or materials, because I had nowhere to store anything.*

Betsy's comments speak to a pragmatism born of necessity. As she iterates, designing wedding stationery is not a '*vocation*,' but has provided her with the means to run a financially viable, independent business. As she further comments, the choices she has made regarding her shop are closely linked to her financial status – she did not have start-up capital and her primary concern was to run a business that could be profitable.

Her comments can be compared to those shared with conflicted careerist, Louise. Similarly, Louise began her Etsy shop business '*with nothing. I got a... grant from the Prince's trust, which was £250 so I could buy fabric to start off with. But I had nothing else.'* However, Louise indicated that her business formed a faithful conduit of her 'true' self and interests. When I probed her further regarding this, she told me that:

> *It just feels like an extension of myself... what I do... because I'm really passionate about what I do... and... I don't know... it's been my identity for so long... maybe as well, because since I've been a little kid, I knew that I was going to do it, I was 100% focused... I think I was seven when I told my parents that I was going to be a fashion designer.*

As shown, Louise's comments indicate a strong, ideological commitment to the authenticity mandate, wherein her work forms an '*extension of myself*.' In sharp contrast to Betsy's comments, Louise indicated to me that her fashion design business was experienced as vocational. However, at the point of being interviewed, Louise was struggling financially to maintain her shop and was considering taking up a second job to cover her rent. Indeed, at the point of being interviewed Louise stated that she was not sure if she '*still had a business*' as she currently could not afford to buy more material to make her garments.

At the end of our interview together and in discussion of the challenges of running an Etsy business and I mentioned that some participants I had interviewed approached their shops in a traditionally business minded manner, with the primary focus of making a profit. Louise shared her frustration with this approach and that people like her were trying to express their genuine passion, whilst some people came in *'just to make a load of money,'* undercutting the real value of Etsy related activities.

It is not my intention to suggest that Louise's passionate commitment to fashion design and garment making was the source of her financial concerns, as this is a complex matter beyond the scope of this thesis. Rather, I wish to highlight the contrasting mindsets communicated by participants regarding the importance of their businesses being 'authentic.' Moreover, the complexities experienced in attempting to run financially viable businesses, whilst remaining 'authentic.'

As Harris (2003) has detailed, contemporary middle-class femininity is aligned with the notion that women and girls possess 'natural' capacities towards entrepreneurialism, such as tenacity, resilience, and flexibility. The 'can-do girl' mandate dictates that women are naturally adept at thriving in an increasingly precarious world of middle-class employment, creating their own pathways to successful careers (Harris, 2003, McRobbie, 2016).

However, as detailed in the work of Duffy and Pruchniewska (2017), women employed in entrepreneurial activity must also not compromise expectations of traditionally prescribed femininity, such as modesty, emotional availability, and selflessness. They argue that women engaged in emerging fields of creative and digital labour encounter a 'digital double bind;'

required to align normative ideas of femininity, with the expectations of masculine coded entrepreneurialism.

5.9. Building ‘genuine’ connections

A further critical thread which emerged through my interviews, related to my participant’s aspirations towards forging connections with their social media audiences and Etsy shop visitors.

Baym (2015) argues that contemporary interactions via communication technologies are forming new terrains for affective labour to be enacted, particularly feminised relational labour. Her (ibid) work regarding relational labour is useful here. She (Ibid:16) identifies 'relational labour,' as a form of affective labour undertaken by cultural workers. Her qualitative research specifically regards the types of ongoing relational labour musicians must perform with digital audiences in order to enhance their musical careers. Rather than adhering to more traditionally 'masculine' approaches of self-promotion, musicians are now expected to form and maintain relationships with audience members.

Baym (2015:4) differentiates relational labour from Hochschild's (2012) theory of emotional labour, as relational labour requires regular interactions with audience members - via social media updates, blogging and in person interactions - to form and maintain 'connections' (Baym, 2015:16). Crucially, such forms of labour are expressed in a manner more usually expected within personal relationships but are performed fundamentally for financial aims.

Such forms of labour were described by participants across my subgroups. Anita crafts posts to elicit interactions with her audience, as well as to share more personal content. One method she uses, is to pose questions to her Instagram viewers:

> *Anna: OK, so you ask questions like... what kind of questions do you ask?*
>
> *Anita: So, like... so I had a sale last week and so I did a sort of collage of all the soaps, and I was like ok so you've got your 20% discount, which soaps would you choose? Or ask just generally what they're up to... yeah.*
> *Anna: Right just trying to have some connection I guess...*
>
> *Anita: Yeah we're nearly plastic free as well, so sometimes asking them*

what kind of small changes they've made to reduce their plastic use, that was actually one of the really big ones at the start... the response I got to that was really good, so that made us go down the route of going plastic free... because we got such positive feedback on the Instagram about it, we went down that road.

Posing questions to her Instagram followers and responding to their feedback helped Anita create a sense of connection with her audience, further realised through her choice to make the business plastic-free. The ongoing, interactive qualities to social media interactions involve not one-off emotionally derived encounters, but the creation and maintenance of 'ongoing connections' (Baym, ibid). In Anita's example, this connection has directly shaped her wider business decisions. However, the impacts of such modes of labour were not straightforward, as I shall now examine in more depth.

5.9.1. Interactive intimacy

Some participants expressed a commitment to performing relational labour with actual and potential customers. Harriet described a high level of engagement with her customers, both online and offline. In the following interview excerpt, she describes the value she finds in feeling that customers can talk to her directly about producing items and respond to customer enquiries:

Harriet: I think that's one of the things I like about Etsy, that people can see pieces that you have had and have sold, and as all my work is one off and everyone is different, people can message me and go – someone messaged me last week and said can you make a few more of this because we want to buy them, which is really nice as well that people feel that they can do that. I think it's good because I'm at this stage where I can talk back with people.

Anna: Do you have a lot of communication with your customers?

Harriet: Yes, yes absolutely. I'd almost hate to get to that point where I don't have time to. Particularly in Loggerford where I run sort of like a delivery service... yeah and I love to meet people who buy my stuff, I think particularly because everyone is so different and at fairs as well because they get to see the face behind the stuff and some people so

when I sell something on Etsy I'll message them directly and just say, thank you so much, this is when I posting it.. because I'm not physically at that stage where I have too much stuff to do. Some people love it and really respond to it, and we have a bit of a chat, some people you'll hear nothing from, which is fine, but at least I've reached out.

Harriet's comments illuminate some of the complex affective and emotional labour involved in such forms of Etsy work. As she states, she takes great care and pride in offering a 'human' interaction with her customer, via online and offline interactions. Her comments speak to a further alignment of relationship building with customers and the moral worth of authenticity. She clearly perceives the value of her business as springing from its small status, something that allows her to dedicate time and energy to communicating with her customers.

She makes the further revealing comment that *'I'd almost hate to get to that point where I don't have time to.'* Within the interview, Harriet described a dual desire to act in an authentic manner, to form genuine connections with her customers, but to also make her shop a full-time enterprise. However, this was an ambition filled with ambivalence, as she also communicated a view that the aspirations required of a business could compromise the values she ascribes to her work. The complexity of aligning such aspirations is latent within her comment that she would '*almost*' hate to reach the point where communicating with her customers would no longer be possible.

Online, Harriet provides experiences of intimacy via her availability to enquiries and questions and willingness to create personalised items, as well as her follow up messages of gratitude. These experiences are described as rewarding for her, as well as her customers; the sense of reward couched in the language of relationship building and mutual connection. In this manner, her work fulfils an example of relational labour (Baym, 2015). I would argue further however that her approach also forms an example of the specifically gendered labour required of female workers.

As outlined in the work of Duffy and Pruchniewska (2017), interaction between female sellers and customers are shaped by pre-existing notions of femininity, which prescribe appropriate forms of interaction. Such interactions are led by an expectation that women's relationships hinge on dynamics of intimacy.

Harriet finds it necessary to express gratitude to her buyers for purchasing her items, an action which arguably fulfils notions of feminine decorum; it emphasises both her humility as a seller and the value she places on relationship building.

Furthermore, she does not describe her actions as led by any economic intent and indeed, her choice of words '*a bit of a chat*,' and '*I've reached out*,' both phrases reiterating her 'soft' approach to selling, which is structured on patterns of friendship and connection. As Mayer (2013) argues, that the forms of labour women undertake becomes designated as 'chat,' forms an example of how 'feminised labour... is characterised as a natural extension of one's body and natural capacities.' However, the naturalised status of such interactive intimacies obscures the forms of labour which these interactions require. In the following quote, Harriet offers further insight regarding the characteristics of the interactive labour she performs in person:

> *Anna: And then you are delivering your pieces around Loggerford to people directly?*
>
> *Harriet: Yes, or they come and collect them from me.*
>
> *Anna: Ok so you do have like a bit of a chat then or...*
>
> *Harriet: Yeah, which is really nice, and obviously I don't go around with an evaluation form, but I think that has given me that thing where a customer will buy from you twice, or three times. That's happened to me about 3 or 4 times now particularly around Loggerford someone has bought something from me and then we form a bit of a friendship and then they'll buy from me again like a month or two months later which is really nice that people come back...*

This exchange reveals further some of the complex dynamics at play in Harriet's Etsy selling, which entail not only digital relational labour, but face to face intimacy work. She presents her actions in terms of 'friendship.' Her choice of words can be further understood in relationship to Kanai's (2019) research regarding the forms of interactive intimacy required of workers within digital contexts. More directly, what Kanai (2019) terms to be a 'stretching' of our understanding of friendship, so that it becomes porous enough to include a variety of dynamics and relationships. Knowing how to instrumentalise friendships and friendship-like relationships was highlighted by

several women as a complex element to Etsy based work, as I shall now examine further.

5.9.2. Friendships and 'friendship-like'

The necessity to engage in forms of relational labour formed a key thread across my interviews. The status of these relationships was not always clearly delineated. Kanai (2019:127) argues that in digital contexts, 'friendship' has become unbounded and 'promiscuous' in quality. The meaning of digital friendships 'eludes traditional public/private boundaries... intimacy is 'stitched' to the rhythms of the market, expanding and stretching friendship into a form that is optimally productive of economic value' (ibid). This observation can be considered in relationship to Jamie's experiences. Jamie discussed her online interactions with social media followers in terms of 'friendship,' stating that:

> *Anna: Do you feel like your customers... feel like they know you in some way?*
>
> *Jamie: I think maybe some of them. I think if I do get repeat customers... especially if they're on social media as well... then I do get... so because I hadn't posted a lot during my pregnancy, one of my like top fans if you like was like 'oh I haven't seen you for ages, how are you, how are you doing?' that kind of thing, so that was nice... and some people did comment like... religiously on every post, which is nice.*
>
> *Anna: Right and these are people you just know online?*
>
> *Jamie: Yes, it's just... it's not someone I know... they live down south or something... yeah, it's nice to get that kind of... people watching your Instagram or your social media, or Etsy, waiting for a new thing and then they'll go and buy now and again, but they know that... even if they're not able to give you money, they can still support you in other ways. I think that's really crucial to businesses because you don't really do that for like Marks and Spencer's or cafes you wouldn't necessarily be like a loyal follower or anything or talk with them like their friends... It's not really the same.*

Jamie emphasises here not only the unique dimensions of her relationships with online followers, but the value she perceives from generating real

dynamics of intimacy. Such connections allow her to '*talk to them like their friends*.' However, the status of these dynamics is not fully clear, and there is perhaps significance in Jamie's choice of words - the interaction is 'like' friends, rather than merely friends. Chun (2016:103) makes the case that online friendships are a 'leaky technology' which has stretched the notion of friendship to a point of monstrous distortion. The imperative to 'friend' other people on social media platforms does not open out the potential for genuine connection, but rather flattens human interactions to a point of banal 'authentic-like' interaction (Ibid:104). Based on my interaction with Jamie, some ambiguity surrounding the status of the relationships she has developed through her Etsy based work and the purpose of such relationships, emerged.

In the prior exchange, Jamie stated that such exchanges online are '*really crucial to business*,' but it seems apparent that these 'like friendships' are also pleasurable and contain meaning beyond the transactional. It is reductive to present Jamie's experiences as either a mere simulacrum of 'real' friendship, or as expressions of genuine intimacy. Instead, it is more fruitful to consider how such forms of online interactive intimacy contribute to a wider blurring of the private and public self, with all the tensions and pleasures this affords. Moreover, the complexities which arise from attempts to operate as authentic Etsy sellers.

The potential for their Etsy related work to form sensations of connection and intimacy was experienced as emotionally rewarding by other participants. Phoebe explained that:

> *I think... they want that connection, and also, I want to give that. Because I kind of think... that's the reason I'm doing this.*

The genuine quality of pleasure derived from this work is important to emphasise, as it highlights the complex fusion between labour/leisure, public/private which can occur through such forms of work. Furthermore, I am led by Duffy's (2017) salient advice that scholars 'do not have to understand relationships in labour as inherently genuine or alienating, empowering or oppressive... they are all these and more, often at the same time.' To reduce my participant's experiences to one dimension would do be a disservice. However, the experiences of participants such as Jamie, indicate the complex realities of engaging in relational labour, which complicates normative

expectations of ‘real’ friendship.

5.9.3. ‘If I don't see them in my real life, I can't call it a friend.’

The requirement to create feelings of intimacy and connection with actual and potential customers by utilising aspects of their authentic selves and lives were also points of ambivalence for many participants.

The imperative to make oneself accessible online and to foster ‘genuine’ intimacy via social media, was not met with pleasure by all my participants. Celeste, who until recently was a full-time Etsy maker, spoke with frustration regarding this aspect of her work, specifically regarding relatability and friendship. The notion that she should share things that would allow followers to ‘*connect with her*’ was described in the following manner:

> *Celeste: I just can't... and sometimes I'm frustrated because I'm just... sometimes I think right I'm going to share something with them so they can connect with me... but then I'm like... 'well what?' I just don't know. So... I just give up.*
>
> *Anna: I guess as well it's like... Oh I'm just drinking a cup of tea, is that interesting enough?*
>
> *Celeste: Yeah, or they share something about their personal life... OK, I can write, I have some things that could make them relate to me straight away, honestly, and... I could even get... people would even be like 'oh my God, this poor girl,' you know? and they'll be like, OK, I'm going to buy from her, she has her own life or whatever, but then at the end I'm thinking... what is the bloody point? These people, I will never be friends with them in real life, and to me, I don’t see the point of sharing parts of your life... whether where you had lunch or things a bit more personal... when at the end... well maybe I don't see things in the right way, I don't know. But... My point is not to make fake friends or for nothing. I want my friends to be real, I like to be social on Instagram, it's fun, you have people who you speak to from time to time, but you're not going to create a real relationship from them, not in my opinion. So, what's the point to share a few things here and there?'*

In this quote, Celeste speaks in response to the expectation that Etsy sellers should provide an experience akin to friendship, which she frames as being

‘fake.’ Celeste appears to take issue with the expectation that intimacy should centre on personal disclosure, and she resists the pressure to instrumentalise her personal and private emotions and experiences.

For Celeste *‘real’* friendship cannot be replicated via digital encounters on social media sites, so she therefore cannot find the purpose of sharing her private life online. Her experiences also highlight the one-sided nature of such online interactions, in which disclosure is performed by only one party, for an imagined and intangible audience (Farci et al, 2017). The notion that social media users should speak about intimate matters to an unknown audience, ‘*who will never be friends in real life*,’ sits uncomfortably with Celeste, who aligns her ideas of connection with ‘authentic’ dynamics, of perceived ‘*real’* friendships. Celeste’s resistance to using her personal self and life online as part of her marketing, speaks to her wider dedication to the notion of ‘authenticity.’

In this respect, it can also be viewed in relationship to her status as a conflicted careerist; her Etsy ambitions cleave creative self-fulfilment and material achievements. In this instance, the conflict appeared to arise from Celeste’s desire to engage in genuine intimacies, whilst meeting the expectations of interactive intimacy demanded via Etsy based work. In this exchange, her discomfort with aligning these apparently diverging aspirations resulted in moments of defiance ‘*what is the bloody point?’* but also self-blame ‘*maybe I don't see things in the right way, I don't know.’* Indeed, from our discussion, it appeared that Celeste was struggling to find a solution to meet such demands, a situation that had contributed towards her decision to return to formal employment. This example further highlights the complexity of fulfilling the authenticity mandate, particularly for women attempting to profit from their Etsy based endeavours.

5.10. Compulsory visibility

In close proximity to interactive intimacy, is the expectation for online sellers to make elements of their themselves and lives visible to online audiences. This was also an area of Etsy based work Celeste found problematic. Indeed, in a similar vein to our talk regarding online friendships, she expressed feelings of inadequacy regarding what she could post regarding

her life. Most particularly, whether it was interesting or compelling enough to catch her audience's interest:

> *Anna: Is there a reason why you wouldn't want to put a picture of you and your partner or…*
>
> *Celeste: Because I don't know how to do that. I don't know the caption that would go with it, and again… I always think oh well people don't care, but no, they do care because it's what they want to see. But… I just have this big thing, where I feel it's never good enough sooo... I would think yeah... even if I... I wouldn't know what to post, that's the thing. I… wasn't interested to just show them me (sitting) outside? No. I can't.*

Celeste's comments reveal a further dimension to the compulsion to make yourself/life visible and consumable for digital audiences – your life needs to not only be relatable but aspirational in quality. Celeste's sensations that '*I feel it's never good enough*,' are led in part by her perception that people see her on the '*boring side*,' and without '*funk*.'

Her comments reveal that she does not believe that photos which candidly portray her life will be of much worth or interest to her social media followers. The need to curate an authentic projection of self is discussed by Ashton and Patel (2018:162) in their research regarding entrepreneurial vlogging, which shows that vloggers must produce content which signals authenticity and relatability, whilst also portraying a glamourous and aspirational lifestyle. They (ibid) state that 'authenticity is welcomed in relation to ordinary lives, but a detailed account of lives... are not entertained.' The knowledge and insight required to successfully walk the line between curated and 'authentic' content, which achieves the right mix of both factors, is nuanced and highly skilled. This is also revealed in Celeste's comments that she 'wouldn't know what to post.' In this manner, the provocation that Etsy sellers should instrumentalise their intimate selves and lives proves to be complex.

Duffy (2016) and Kanai (2019) also write about the necessary attributes required from women to produce and brand themselves online. As they state, narratives regarding 'authenticity' obscure from view the cluster of privileged attributes which are required for digital workers to successfully instrumentalise their intimate selves. Most notably, these privileges include

forms of cultural, social and economic capital (Duffy, 2016). I shall now address some of the tensions associated with this.

5.10.1. 'Another creative outlet' or 'another thing that takes up time'

The necessity to share one's life online was a point shared by several participants. This was an impetus described in varying terms, across the participant subcategories.

Conflicted careerist Jamie was an interesting woman to talk to in my research, as unlike many of my other participants she did not possess an undergraduate degree. The differences in her life experience to some of my other participants arguably impacted on the level of cultural and economic capital she had access to. In the following quote, she described to me some of the struggles she had found in her own attempts to share more about her life with social media followers, after receiving advice from an Etsy success course:

> *Well, it's something that I've been advised to do actually as part of this course... one of the things was to say more about your kind of daily life, like if you were out and if I was in like Forbidden Planet, or something, something that kind of fit my niche... I'd be like... oh I've just seen this, or... bought this... or reading this horror book... or... something that's related. I try to take videos when I'm out on shoots as well to be like... this is where I am... I think... it's difficult... to get that content as well. It's like another thing you have to do... you know you have to either create the content or you have to go out and... find something that's related... so I started looking at blogs, and to like... re-blog blog posts... or... re-post like goth gift ideas, that kind of thing... (limited in time) especially for Christmas coming up... yeah... it's just... another thing that takes up time... add it to the list!*

In this quote, she explains the difficulty she finds creating and making content which she can regularly post to her social media pages. The requirement to constantly produce content about one's life inherently privileges a certain lifestyle, where one's everyday life can easily form the 'right' kind of intimate content.

It is worthwhile to compare Jamie's experiences of struggling to find the right kind of content from her life, with that of Phoebe, who had entered her Etsy business from a pre-existing professional background in graphic design and was married to a successful graphic designer:

> *Anna: So, do you have like...a separate personal Instagram and*
>
> *Phoebe: I do, I do but having said that... it's personal but it's still public... and it's... it's still quite curated in the way that, I don't show my work on there, but I do like taking photographs so... If I'm going for a walk in the woods, the hills or the beach, I take loads of photos and I always think 'oh yeah, I'll put this on my other Instagram,' and I crop it, so it has a nice little white border -laugh- so it is... in a way...*
>
> *Anna: Right so still curated?*
>
> *Phoebe: It is, it's still... I see it as another creative outlet, but just a different avenue. I'll never be a photographer, but I do like... capturing those kinds of images. And I'll put a link to it in my work page, because I think, well, people can see where I live, they can see how nice it is and where I get my inspiration from.*

In contrast to Jamie, Phoebe's intimate and everyday life more easily transmits the 'right' kind of authentic life. Furthermore, her comments reveal how the pre-existing knowledge of her education and professional life have equipped her to know how to present and edit her everyday life, so that it communicates a certain aesthetic appeal.

These forms of cultural capital, combined with the nature of her everyday life, allow Phoebe to perform effective relational labour with her audiences online. These differences of experience have very real consequences for sellers. Phoebe referred to her experiences of social media use in pleasurable terms, to '*show off a bit*.' Pointing further to the necessity for women to manage pre- existing, gendered expectations of appropriate behaviour, she joked that she was '*glad the interview was anonymous*.' This was because she enjoyed being able to show off her talents and successes, but as her comment indicates, this was something she would not usually be able to state about herself.

In comparison to the pleasures Phoebe described in producing social media

content, Jamie's comments indicate the labour it involves. For her, it formed another difficult and time-consuming task in her already enormously busy day, a point indicated in her comment - '*just add it to the list'*. The expectation that Etsy sellers should merely transmit to audiences the content of their lives, belies the requirement to have a lifestyle that people want to see. This privileges women whose day-to-day lives can be viewed as aspirational, relatable and in alignment with their Etsy shop brand. Moreover, as Phoebe further indicates, the presentation of such images requires further labour, dependent on a skill set not available to all women. The authenticity mandate obscures the complex intersections of cultural and economic capital required of women to successfully share their 'real' selves and lives online.

5.10.2. The 'right' personality

I was curious to know if participants felt that sellers had to look a certain way or have a particular appearance online. Interestingly, most participants denied this was the case. However, discussions regarding the 'right' personality type and behaviour did arise, as shown in the following exchange with Rebecca:

> *Anna: Do you ever feel like you have to present yourself in a certain way? Like, in terms of appearance or personality?*
>
> *Rebecca: Not in terms of my physical appearance.,. because... You know it's a completely online enterprise and I'm covered in baby vomit anyway! but online you do have to come across with a certain type of personality, and you've got to be very friendly, very upbeat... a little bit American if you know what I mean...it's all... oh thank you so much! you know... very overly polite, American customer service... if you know what I mean...'*

Interestingly, Rebecca felt she could fulfil some of these requirements, by changing her behaviour to fit the expectations of her buyers. However, a crucial fact to note is that Rebecca does not, as of yet, post photos of herself online in relation to her Etsy shop. Indeed, she described her social media use as generally minimal. Rebecca's experiences can be further illuminated by her status as a post- careerist participant, who was not reliant on her Etsy shop as a source of revenue. This can be compared with conflicted careerist Celeste's experiences.

Celeste presented her issues with social media in terms of aligning her personality and lifestyle with what she perceives to be the desirable dispositions of successful Etsy sellers. She describes this experience in the following manner:

> *Anna: I was just wondering; do you think there is a certain type of personality that does well at this?*
>
> *Celeste: Oh yes, absolutely*
>
> *Anna: How would you describe that?*
>
> *Celeste: If you are very... open... if you're funny, if you're extroverted... first of all, it's easy to market yourself. Because... I'm not saying they're confident, but it's just not a chore for you, to show yourself, to talk about yourself, that's how people like that are. If you're like me, and I'm not shy but I'm reserved... I'm not going to shout out 'look I've done this! It's for sale! Go on the website!' I can't do that. I know it's not very logical. From time to time, of course I would say like 'oh it's on Etsy, you can find it there...' But, if you're open, really open people then it's... definitely easier for them. And then definitely, even me, I enjoy following someone who is friendly, laughing all the time and all of that. I can definitely see that people see me on the boring side. I could see how, by being quiet, I know I'm a calm person. So, there's no... funk... you know?*

In this quote, she describes experiences as a '*reserved*' person selling online and its incompatibility with the need to be '*extroverted*' and '*friendly... laughing all the time.*' She reaffirms her perception of the authenticity mandate, by emphasising the privileges associated with *naturally* possessing the right personality. The value attributed to being genuine, means that women such as Celeste who perceive themselves as having the wrong personality type have no available recourse. The dominance of the authenticity mandate disallows alternative conceptual frameworks through which to understand such experiences. In Celeste's example, this has resulted in feelings of helplessness and self-blame.

Celeste refers to a culture of projected exuberance and positivity amongst

online seller, described by Katie as forming a '*cult of personality*.' This can be further addressed as a feminised experience. Banet Weiser and Arzumanova (2013:171) state that the prescriptions of post-feminist discourse disallow any critique of patriarchy, an 'eschewing of criticism' which has contributed to 'a marked revival of a traditional, compliant, and determinedly pleasant form of feminine performance.' Their research regarding young female vloggers highlights the cultural pressure placed on women and girls to be unwaveringly 'nice.' For female micro-celebrities, this is strategic as it helps 'maximize their visibility and avoid any kind of critical language' (ibid). Crucially, such modes of self-presentation align with pre-existing cultural expectations of appropriate feminine decorum.

Therein lies the rub for female sellers on social media, they must make themselves visible, sharing intimate information and inviting audiences into the private corners of their lives. However, this must be achieved without compromising their status as 'nice' girls, who do not act immodestly nor nakedly pursue profit. The requirement for women to come across as appropriately modest, is also referred to in Duffy and Pruchniewska's (2017) research regarding women sellers and the necessity to adopt a 'soft sell' approach. They observe that for female sellers, digital marketing must be legible as appropriately 'feminine.'

This argument is also supported by Scharff's (2015) research regarding female musicians; her argument being that for women self-promotion violates culturally prescribed norms of female 'modesty.' Furthermore, self-promotion violates the feminine imperative to be unwaveringly altruistic and orientated towards the needs of others (Taylor, 2015). This sense of discomfort with blatant self- promotion on social media platforms was described by several participants, and is illustrated nicely in Katie's following comment:

> *It's very kind of 'look at me', talking about your narrative kind of thing all the time like narrating it to everyone... it just doesn't come... intuitively to me.*

Katie chooses to describe her distaste for blatant self-promotion in terms of her natural personality – it isn't 'intuitive' to her. This is an outlook shared by Celeste, who states that she cannot *'shout out... look I've done this! It's for sale! Go on the website!'* As previously outlined, she attributes this to the

fact that she is naturally more ‘reserved’ than some other sellers she sees online. In this regard, perceived requirements towards the ‘right’ female personality are further complicated. Celeste’s comments outline the necessity to be outgoing, gregarious and fun, indicate specific parameters of the ‘right’ female personality online.

Within the framework of authenticity, this is perceived by participants as only possible if one naturally possesses these attributes. Deviating from such set parameters can result in being labelled overly performative, attention-seeking, and money-orientated. Therein, the need for women to make themselves visible online has complex requirements and potential pitfalls.

5.10.3 ‘When you've had your privacy violated'

There are further penalties that women can experience through the failing to meet the feminised expectations of online visibility.

This is illustrated in Louise’s experiences of social media use. As outlined in the previous chapter, Louise described herself as having a deeply emotional and passionate attachment to her Etsy shop and her fashion items. The choices she had made regarding her Etsy shop business, from the types of items she sold, to their status as hand sewn and hand-crafted, to the name of her shop, all closely aligned with her tastes and interests as a fashion designer. Indeed, she had ceased trading under her former business name and had changed her Etsy shop items, because they no longer felt to be an authentic expression of who she was; illustrating the importance she placed on ‘authentic’ self-representation online.

However, Louise has also cultivated and tries to maintain strong boundaries between her personal self/life and her Etsy based labour. This is pronounced in her online marketing strategies and her use of social media. Louise has no personal social media accounts, and her social media use is entirely for professional purposes. She shares very few images of herself online and she stated that unlike some other Etsy based fashion sellers, she did not use photos of herself modelling her items, choosing to instead employ semi-professional models.

This was in part due to Louise’s self-described status as a private person, who

did not think other people would be interested in the minutia of her life, but it also originated from previous negative experiences of online harassment. Louise did not divulge a great deal about her experiences, other than that she was stalked and harassed by an ex-boyfriend via her social media accounts. This understandably means that she is now wary regarding what she shares about herself, her home, and her family online. She explains this in greater depth in the following quote:

> *I think that (the harassment) is probably the main reason. It's just... when you've had your privacy violated like that you just go... you know what... I can't... you don't want to give anyone the excuse to kind of start bothering you or harassing you...*

Ensuring the harassment did not occur again was expressed as something she must be vigilant against through her behaviour online, specifically by controlling what she posted about herself online. This internalised responsibility is illustrated in her quote that, '*you don't want to give anyone the excuse to kind of start bothering you or harassing you,'* indicating that her behaviour online could contribute to potential future harassment and must therefore be correctly 'managed.'

For Louise, this means a '*strict*' control over her online content, with little regarding her personal life. Rather than share content that offered insight into her private life, Louise instead chose to share content centred on her tastes and interests as a designer, *'more like my inspirations and that kind of thing... I'll share my photography and just things like quotes and illustrations that I love and other designers who I love.'* In this manner, Louise aspired to provide digital content that aligned with her desire to share her 'authentic' self-online, whilst enforcing boundaries between her public/private self and life.

Louise was not alone in having felt vulnerable via an online encounter, nor in responding by controlling her social media output. The youngest participant within the interview sample, Cissy makes and sells paintings via Etsy.com and uses Instagram to promote her work.

When discussing why she thought people might buy her work, she divulged that early on in her Etsy shop business, a buyer had used the process of buying

her piece as an opportunity to '*hit on*' her. After a back-and-forth exchange via email, the buyer insisted that she meet him at a café to give him the work in person:

> *Cissy: I was like... well... you can just pick it up... outside my house after I'm done at work or whatever... He was like ohhh let's just go to a cafe... and I'm like, ok, sure that's ok, so I went, and I brought the painting... and... he was like sitting around for ages and being super chatty... and I was like... OK... alright... and then he messaged me when I got home, and he was like... oh, thank you so much again for the painting, it's hanging in my room and whenever I look at it, I'll think of you...*
>
> *Anna: Ewww*
>
> *Cissy: yeah like... Please don't!!! Yeah, it's like... Thanks I guess??? -laugh- it was so weird.*

Although Cissy presented this incident with humour, it was clear that the encounter had made her uncomfortable, and that it impacted how she felt she should present herself and her work online. Cissy has separate personal and art related social media accounts, as she does not feel comfortable with '*random people*' following her personal social media pages. As we discussed soon after this point, she highlighted that although she does sometimes include images of herself in her social media outputs, she is careful about how she appears in these images:

> *Anna: So, do you use like social media, and do you put like pictures of yourself? Or?*
> *Cissy: Sometimes..... I was kind of against it at first just because I know a lot of... you know..... popular Instagram artists and it seem like people just click on it, purely because there's a person in the picture, especially if it's a woman... that is, like oh hot girl with a painting, got to tap that, DM her... or something and I was like I'm not about that, you know, this is for the art. But then as I started there were people I was becoming almost like friends with? On Instagram, like other artists that I know... and they post themselves like working on their pictures...*
>
> *Anna: Right like painting?*

Cissy: Yeah, so then I started... I did like a couple of videos, it wasn't really of my face it was more like... an aerial, and it was just showing how I worked on a picture, and that seemed kinda popular because some people are being like... oh wow that's her technique. This is how she does this or whatever... and so, then I did a couple where I was holding a piece, especially if it was bigger, to show the size of it... which didn't bother me and again... I mean this is probably the lowest shirt I ever had in my life (points to shirt) like I'm not that kind of person generally... so it's not really...

Anna: Right so is that something you think about, how you're going to present yourself... if you put yourself in those pictures, how you're going to present yourself...

Cissy: Yeah, I mean I try to let people know that it is really about the artwork. I'm happy to be like... this is my face, this is the person who does the artwork, nice to meet you, but I mean even in my clothing choices so jeans and a T-shirt of some kind... I just like people to focus on me as a person generally... and so... especially when I'm selling art, I don't want to sell an image of myself online.

As this excerpt illustrates, Cissy did not want others to perceive her as a young woman using her sexuality to sell her artwork and was conscious that men might go on to her page just '*to tap that*.' However, she had also become aware that fellow artists offered information and images of themselves online via social media, which she felt she should also do.

Her response was therefore to make and share images that clearly showed her artwork as being central to her social media photographs but did not emphasise her status as a young woman. Indeed, Cissy refers to aspirations of normative femininity in her description of images of herself such as a desire to appear modest in her appearance, wearing '*jeans and t-shirts*' that were not revealing or eye- catching. Her actions illustrated a dual intention; to guard against sexualisation by online viewers and a wish to be perceived as a 'serious' artist.

To achieve this, her social media outputs had to be highly managed and curated, with content that provided some insight into who she was as an artist

but remained appropriately ‘modest.’ Cissy’s experiences can be further aligned with Louise’s experience of online harassment. Although Cissy’s experiences were not framed as harassment, it is clear she was not comfortable with the encounter. In both incidents, the participants responded by attempting to form and enforce boundaries regarding how their personal life and self were portrayed online.

Cissy and Louise’s experiences illustrate the complex demands placed on women when engaging with social media, particularly when utilised as an entrepreneurial tool of self-promotion. The misogyny inherent to these experiences is clear- women must navigate the demands of self-promotion in a manner that is highly gendered - informed by longstanding expectations of respectable femininity, such as modesty and decorum. If these requirements are not fulfilled, the women can face profound consequences, such as a compromised reputation as a ‘real’ artist, or even harassment and stalking. It is therefore up to individual women to know how to best represent themselves online, in a manner that achieves the demands of entrepreneurial self-promotion and normative femininity.

5.11. Conclusion

In this chapter I have indicated the forms of relational and interactive labour Etsy sellers must engage in, to ensure that their Etsy shops are visible, relatable, and interactive with real and imagined audiences. This demands they utilise aspects of themselves and engage in considered modes of self-presentation and interactions with audiences. These are experiences mediated through the Etsy.com platform, but also require engagement with external social media platforms, most notably Instagram. Ideals of authenticity and ‘realness’ form a key thread across my participants’ discussions of their experiences of such modes of labour.

Moreover, this chapter shows that participants attribute moral value to the status of being authentic. I have outlined how this perspective of virtuous authenticity impacts forms of personal and professional conduct. Furthermore, this authenticity mandate appears intertwined with pre-existing cultural perspectives regarding ‘real' art, creativity, and legible femininity. I have shown this, throughh the value participants attributed to ‘real' forms of art

and craft making and their valorisation of modesty and decorum. Such expectations of art and femininity have a long cultural legacy; however, this chapter indicates their further interactions with ideals of neoliberal femininity and post-feminist notions of female empowerment. This therefore forms a particularly feminised experience. Crucially, such expectations conflict with the economic realities of running a profitable business via the Etsy.com platform. Women must individually navigate the dominant perspective that profit-making, and authenticity are diametrically opposed. Within this experience, I have further shown that access to modes of economic and cultural capital are intrinsic.

Failure to sufficiently reconcile such demands has consequences. This chapter has shown how it can result in feelings of inadequacy and self-blame. Moreover, women can be further penalised for being visible and approachable in the 'wrong' ways, through experiences of online harassment. However, within the context of individualisation such diverging demands is left to individual women to reconcile. Within the next chapter, I shall build upon these themes, by examining women's experiences as Etsy based entrepreneurs. More specifically, considering the impact of Etsy.com's features as a digital platform, upon women's experiences of entrepreneurialism.

Chapter 6. 'All your eggs in one basket'

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I will explore how the forms of labour demanded of Etsy sellers are rooted in the business model of Etsy.com as a digital platform. I will therefore address Etsy.com as a digital e-commerce platform, integrated within 'platform capitalism' (Srnick, 2017). Etsy Inc. presents a narrative that the platform offers an alternative route to 'female-friendly' entrepreneurialism, which bypasses gendered barriers found within mainstream business ownership (Etsy, 2015, 2016). Moreover, the company expresses that via their platform, Etsy.com sellers can approach business ownership on their own terms, without having to meet the expectations, or fulfil the requirements, of traditional business ownership. However, this chapter argues that Etsy.com is dependent on generating platform dependent entrepreneurs. The platform's monopolisation of digital craft-selling opportunities has further allowed Etsy.com to lock in sellers to their platform. Through eliminating alternatives to its selling platform and engendering dependency to its platform, Etsy Inc. fosters experiences of precarity and instability for many women. These are experiences particularly connected to women's wider lack of options towards digital modes of entrepreneurialism. Moreover, this chapter indicates how such platform features are interacting with and potentially exploiting feminised expectations of self-actualising, authentic modes of work.

6.2. 'Things seemed to fall into place': Following an Etsy 'destiny'

In discussion of creating her Etsy.com business, several participants stated that they '*couldn't remembe*r' when they had first created their shop, nor the processes this involved (Gertrude). This suggested to me the accessibility experienced by participants in the creation of their Etsy based shops; presumably if the set-up had been arduous, then participants would have been more likely to remember the process. Etsy's perceived accessibility,

ease of use and affordability all contributed to many of my participants' decisions to sell via Etsy.com.

One key element of this was that creating an Etsy based shop did not require sellers to produce a '*grand plan*' for their business (Tara). For some participants, I connected this to participants not needing, or wanting to, treat their Etsy shop as a traditional business venture. Rather, some wished to create and run a shop 'organically' without the necessity for a 'plan.' Passionate workers such as Joanna, Jacqueline, Amelia, and Gertrude, discussed being able to fluidly respond to the process of building a shop, as it occurred. I identified that several of these participants had also discussed their movement into Etsy based selling as a 'natural' process, which sprang from their pre-existing passions and interests. As I shall discuss, this was an attitude to Etsy based selling, facilitated by the Etsy.com platform.

Joanna placed primary importance on being a person and seller, where *'what you see is what you get.'* She tended to contrast her sense of personal authenticity with the fakeness she perceived in actions undertaken by other businesses, such as marketing. This sentiment is represented in how she described the formation of her Etsy shop business:

> *I didn't even know Etsy existed until I was launching a platform to sell things on... Things seemed to fall into place... rather than trying to seek it out... I wasn't going 'well this is where I want to be?' It was just kind of like, 'well at this point time what do I want...?' Doo-be-doo, no great big plan.*

Joanna's description of things '*falling into place*,' rather than occurring due to her '*seeking it out*,' can be read as an extension of her moral viewpoint regarding Etsy.com selling. Her Etsy based activity sprang seemingly organically from her behaviour, and did not need to be 'sought out.' Similarly, passionate worker Amelia also discussed the origin of her Etsy shop as the result of her pre-existing passion for yoga.

At the time of speaking, Amelia was enrolled as a part-time student at a higher education college, whilst undertaking her Etsy based work. In discussion of her choice to set up her shop via Etsy.com, Amelia asked herself, '*how did I fall into that? I can't remember now!*' In both interview excerpts, the women refer to an act of 'falling;' Joanna expressed that '*things seemed*

to fall into place,' Amelia asked herself how she had 'fallen' into using Etsy.com. The use of this verb 'fall,' indicates a sense of fatalism, or a 'meant to be' quality of their experiences.

Moreover, a focus on what felt right to them now, rather than an eye to future ambitions. As Joanna states, '*there was no great big plan.*' Such comments are pertinent in reference to the participants' wider outlooks regarding their Etsy shops. As passionate workers, their Etsy related activities were linked closely to their own personal values and passionate attachment to their shop items, rather than traditional entrepreneurial aims, such as business growth or profit.

I categorized Eliza as a passionate worker. When I asked her about the 'nuts and bolts' of setting up her Etsy shop, she replied:

> *Well, it's very easy, I can understand why so many people use it*, t*he only really tricky part is when you're setting up to find a name that isn't already being used. Yeah, so you just set it up online, as soon you get it approved.*

As a response to my question about the 'nuts and bolts' of creating her shop, I found this response revealing. Unlike several of my other participants, Eliza does not emphasise the planning involved in creating her shop. Rather, she explicitly states that she thinks that the Etsy.com platform, makes the process '*easy*.' The 'tricky part' did not centre on areas of technological or business knowledge or expertise, but on finding a unique shop name. Indeed, her comments that you '*just set it up online*' further emphasises how easy Etsy.com makes the technical process of creating an Etsy shop, a point I will address later in this chapter.

She further stated that when she created her shop:

> *I didn't have high expectations I just felt really happy that I got like a nice picture, and I was like omg I get to play shop! -laugh- sort of like when you're little...*

Eliza's comment that she '*got to play sho*p' like '*when you were little*,' frames her experiences in a girlish, playful manner. The parallel she makes between creating her shop and being a child also suggests that the Etsy.com platform fulfils the role of an adult or parent, taking responsibility for what is

perceived as difficult or technical aspects of her shop's creation.

Indeed, Eliza's comments suggest that creating her shop was not laborious, but a form of 'play.' Such comments also align with her wider view of her Etsy.com shop as a source of pleasure and recreation, rather than a traditional business venture. Her comments suggest that the usability of the Etsy.com platform provides women a means to playfully experiment with business ownership, without burdens of responsibility. In this regard, her perspective can also be viewed in reference to Hardt and Negri's (2000) arguments regarding the blurring of labour/leisure activities, typifying contemporary forms of affective labour, particularly within the context of digital media. As Andrejevic (2012) further argues, traditional Marxist understandings of exploitation are dependent on clearly defined spheres of life/labour. Within the autonomist social factory, determining clear delineations between life/work is increasingly difficult – particularly when activities such as creating a shop are experienced as a quasi-leisure activity and undertaken for free. However, as I shall explore further in due course, the Etsy.com platform is dependent on enticing users to engage in such unpaid activities, to generate user traffic and profit. Therein, the complex status of Etsy based activities are further emphasised within Eliza's comments.

Discussions wherein Etsy.com based activities were framed as being a form of 'destiny,' occurred within several participant interviews. Farrugia (2019:1099) notes in his research regarding classed expectations of success, for middle-class workers, 'passions are experienced as almost autonomous forces, shaping the destiny of the working subject.' Amelia, Eliza, and Joanna presented their Etsy.com activities not as deliberate or calculated entrepreneurial decisions, but manifestations of 'destiny' born from pre-existing passions. Interestingly, in discussion of her reasons for starting her Etsy.com business, Joanna explained that she was motivated by a desire to 'take control' of her 'destiny.' Such a comment indicates the complexity of participant's experiences and ambitions, which sometimes encompassed varied and even contradictory views.

Women business owners are more likely to encounter barriers in establishing traditional entrepreneurial ventures, such as gaining approval for business

plans (Walker, et al., 2008). Entrepreneurship is culturally coded as a masculine sphere of interest (Itani, 2021). Women business owners are tasked with retaining their status as feminine. I argue that the experiences of participants such as Amelia, Eliza, and Joanna, speak to a *femininised* version of entrepreneurialism.

As Duffy and Hund (2015) argue via their research regarding female fashion bloggers, the downplaying of deliberate entrepreneurial activity can be viewed as fulfilling 'the post-feminist ideal of individual success obtained through inner self- discovery' (ibid:4). If the naked ambition of traditional entrepreneurialism is culturally coded as masculine, 'inner self-discovery' forms a more palatable, feminine approach to business ownership. This is witnessed in some of my participant's wider adherence to the 'passionate labour' ethos, wherein these women framed their Etsy activity as springing 'authentically' from aspects of themselves (ibid).

In the case of Joanna, this is further witnessed in her critique of 'glamorous' Instagram sellers, who she perceives as pushing harmful products for the sake of making money. Female subjects gain entrepreneurial success by harnessing their pre-existing passions and allowing their passions to organically lead them to success. This narrative is not dependent on the acquisition or application of new skills (regardless of realities) but the development of self as an ongoing, post- feminist and neoliberal subject (ibid). Etsy Inc. claims that the accessibility of its platform means that sellers can 'bypass traditional barriers of entry' and that sellers spurn 'conventional business tools or measures of success' (Etsy, 2013:6). The company has particularly lauded itself as empowering women towards entrepreneurship (Etsy, 2019a).

However, as established, attracting users to the platform is modus operandi for large-scale digital platforms, such as Etsy.com. Its apparent low-level need for participants to fulfil traditional requirements for business ownership, such as creating business plans, may provide some women opportunities, but also requires scrutiny.

6.3. Technological accessibility of Etsy.com

It is important to note that creating an Etsy shop requires little technical knowledge on the part of sellers. Indeed, the RSA (2014:20) states that 'minimal resources and technical skills are necessary when setting up a shop,' making it a 'low risk' option for sellers, who do not need to invest in creating their own websites. In consideration of the gendered nature of information technology and the high proportion of female Etsy sellers, it could be argued that Etsy.com provides a viable means for women to create digital shops, without necessitating high technological skills. Kenny and Donnelly (2020:327) describe IT as one of the most 'male-skewed, white-collar occupations in the country.' In the UK, only one in six IT professionals are women (Kenny and Donnelly, ibid).

This phenomenon is rooted in a 'gendering' of technological expertise, wherein the contemporary IT expert is socially coded as inherently male and masculine (ibid). The predominant view that IT skills are essentially masculine, disadvantages women engaged in IT work and forms a barrier to women's IT knowledge and expertise more generally.[3] In this manner, pre-existing gendered notions of technological professions impact what forms of work are made available to women. Furthermore, it affects how such forms of labour come to be encoded as essentially masculine or feminine, dependent on their associated traits. Such views of gendered technological knowledge and expertise also impact how my participants felt about the Etsy.com platform, as I shall now explore.

Harriet had previously explained that making money was not a priority for her, as she was more concerned with expressing herself creatively via her pottery pieces. She largely described her experiences of selling on Etsy.com in positive terms. For example, describing how '*nice*' it is that:

> *Etsy has made it easy... for people to just go on the website and be like I kind of want a great pot... and mine will pop up.*

The 'off the peg' style of her Etsy.com shop, means that it's '*convenient – it's accessible.'*

However, in further discussion of her reasons for focusing on selling via Etsy.com, Harriet also stated that she did not perceive herself as '*technologically minded*' enough to make or run her own website. As she further stated, creating an independent website is also challenging because it

is '*hard to make it look nice.'* In this way, Harriet's comments speak of both the 'pull' factors towards using the Etsy.com platform, but also some of the 'push' factors. The convenience and accessibility of the Etsy.com platform converges with her own perceived lack of technological knowledge necessary to create her own website. In this manner, wider-gendered experiences of information technology are shown to play a role in some participants' decisions towards creating Etsy.com based shops.

6.4. 'You're not... forced to think about it... or have a plan'

Margot is a 'post-careerist' participant, who has spent many years working in high level professional roles in a variety of industries. In consideration of the repercussions of the accessibility of Etsy.com, I found her comments to be perceptive:

> *If you're selling online via an established channel like Etsy... it's made quite easy just to do it. You're not really forced to think about it very much or have a plan and I think that's what most people, they just go OK well I'll just do this, because it's quite easy. But... in the traditional world of starting a business you would be forced to go through hoops and have a plan, to justify what you're doing... Some of the traditional business requirements are probably still there, but you're not forced to do them. I think that's why a lot of people don't actually sell very much on Etsy.*

Margot's business acumen and experience is particularly present in this comment, as she again highlights the (dis)similarities between Etsy.com businesses and traditional modes of entrepreneurialism. She emphasises that the accessibility of Etsy.com is not straightforwardly beneficial to shop owners. Rather, she explains how it can form a potential limitation to the financial successes available to sellers using the site. Margot argues that the accessibility of Etsy.com, can in fact, result in sellers creating businesses without full knowledge or preparation as to what this will entail.[2] Eliza views Etsy.com as a form of 'play,' but this is intrinsic on the fact that she does not run her Etsy.com shop to make money. When I asked Margot if she had created a business plan for her Etsy shop, she answered:

No. I didn't necessarily say, "Oh I've got to sell this much" or, if you don't have a bank loan or a huge pressure of having to achieve something financially... so I was able to say ok well I'll just be driven by what the channel wants.

In this quote, she highlights the crucial importance her pre-existing financial successes have played in the development of her Etsy shop. This both regards her experiences of selling via other platforms, but also, the capital and savings she had acquired via her former employment experiences. This is alluded to in her comment '*if you don't have... a huge pressure of having to achieve something financially.'* This position allows Margot to adapt to '*what the channel wants*,' which communicates her capacity to choose to adapt a *'looser'* selling style, which she understands as free from the pressures of traditional entrepreneurialism.

Her comment suggests that her Etsy based activities form a type of 'destiny,' wherein Margot can remain responsive and adaptable to demands as they emerge (Duffy and Hund, 2015). Crucially, Margot's Etsy.com activities are informed by her business skills, knowledge, and possession of various forms of capital. In this regard, Margot's comments further contribute to my argument, that the 'accessibility' of the Etsy.com platform, is not unilaterally advantageous to all Etsy sellers. The low need to generate a profit, and/or high adherence to the 'passionate labour' and authenticity mandates, play a crucial role in this experience. Moreover, the ability to view your Etsy.com activities through the lens of destiny is made more accessible when participants have access to other forms of revenue, outside of their Etsy.com shops.

6.5. 'Now I have more expectations and more disappointment'

As I have outlined, Amelia expressed passionate attachment to her Etsy.com business. Like Joanna, she also placed moral value on being 'authentic' in her Etsy.com business activities. Similarly, to Eliza, she referred to the accessibility of the Etsy.com platform, stating how '*nice*' it was that Etsy '*laid it all out for you.*' She explained that she initially had few expectations of Etsy.com shop, through which she sold *'bits and*

bobs'. However, at the time of being interviewed, Amelia's shop was in flux. Her future plan was to '*live off*' her shop, and in a bid to achieve this, she had recently applied for, and won, 6 months of private mentoring with a business coach. She explained that she was struggling to manage the various demands in her life and had recently '*had a breakdown*' because of the stress. In response, her mentor '*was like... right, that's fine... we're going to sort you out, get you a timetable*' and had encouraged Amelia to develop a planned approach to some of her activities, such as planning her social media updates in advance.

However, although Amelia said the coach was '*really good*' she also expressed complex emotions regarding the necessity to plan her Etsy shop activities. For example, she stated it was '*sad*' to treat her Etsy shop social media updates '*as a job*' because for her, planning such activities felt *'fake*.' Such comments indicated to me, a tension regarding Amelia's decision to adopt a more classically 'business' orientated approach to her Etsy shop. This was internalised as compromising the moral virtues of her Etsy activities, particularly her sense of authenticity.

When I asked Amelia if she had expectation of her Etsy.com business before she started, she stated '*no. Now I have more expectations and more disappointments!'* Clarifying this, she explained that she had applied for, and been denied, a selling spot at an Etsy craft fair. She connected this to her lack of prior knowledge for the necessity to socialise with other Etsy sellers to gain coveted spots at fairs. Such comments further spoke to Amelia's changing expectations of her Etsy shop. She initially approached the shop in a manner aligned with her virtuous view of authenticity, which contrasted with activities associated with acting as a 'business.' However, at the point of being interviewed, the expectations of her shop had changed. Although she had found the site to be accessible, she had gone on to discover hidden forms of labour involved in her business ownership.

As she stated, this includes labour such as social networking, which she did not feel comfortable with. Moreover, the necessity to change her approach to her business had led to her gaining advice from a business coach, who was further encouraging her to adopt a more traditionally entrepreneurial approach to organising her business. Again, Amelia experienced this with mixed emotions.

Her experiences further illuminate the repercussions of Etsy.com's usability for some sellers. In Amelia's case, these were outcomes born from her changing expectations of her shop, specifically its need to generate revenue. Although she had initially begun her shop following the passionate labour ethos and discussed many of her actions as organic rather than planned, her changing needs meant she was having to adapt her approach to her Etsy.com business.

'Conflicted careerists' Jamie and Louise both voiced challenges they had encountered in attempting to build profitable ventures via Etsy.com. Despite the various issues they had encountered, neither woman presented explicit critiques of the platform. Some of Celeste's frustrations appeared to be directed more widely, toward modern technology, social media, and the demands of marketing. However, even in these instances, she tended to present these frustrations as a matter of misalignment between her 'personality,' particularly her desires towards being an authentic person, and the demands of Etsy based work. She disparagingly compared herself with other sellers she perceived as having more 'outgoing' personalities and linked business-orientated approaches to running Etsy.com shops, to differences in other people's personalities.

Similarly, Jamie also compared herself to a seller she perceived as more successful, describing her as '*amazing... she's always coming up with new designs and she's in shops and she's online,'* In discussion of why this person was so successful, Jamie stated '*she's alternative... and very outgoing... I think that's definitely something I've struggled with...'* Jamie also described herself as a 'goth' and yet unlike her described seller, she felt that her gothic style was at odds with Etsy.com aesthetic. Moreover, she was not 'outgoing' enough, an attribute which she connected to the success of the other seller. In reference to their success, both women emphasised the importance they placed on the essential characteristics perceived in their own, and other sellers' personalities and personal attributes. Duffy and Hund (2015) argue that fulfilment of post-feminist ideals of entrepreneurship, casts success as matters of 'destiny.' Women should turn inwards, to discover aspects of self that can be utilised entrepreneurially (ibid).

In the case of Celeste and Jamie, both women had approached their Etsy.com

businesses with a desire to use their passions as a source of employment. In the face of 'failure,' the women continued to frame their experiences as springing from aspects of what they perceived to be their essential selves. Such comments indicate the repercussions of framing success as rooted in individual's 'essential' characteristics, and as matters of passionate destiny. For Celeste and Jamie, this was experienced in high levels of self-blame, for what were perceived to be failures not only in their Etsy.com based activities but in themselves.

In response to the challenges she had faced selling via Etsy.com, Celeste stated that she wanted to '*just try to do better*. However, she also indicated that she felt she could not undertake tasks that '*don't feel natural*,' as this ran so counter to her personality. Indeed, she had recently decided to start a part-time job, in addition to her Etsy.com shop, which would offer her more financial security.

Jamie explained she needed to become *'more focused'* with '*real business plans*' and '*do the research, try to find what people actually want rather than just what I want to make.'* In a bid to achieve this, Jamie engages in various forms of self- learning, such as watching YouTube video tutorials. However, she also expressed that she felt 'confused' about how much she should follow her own passionate interests, and how much she should follow business advice provided by others.

Jamie's comments suggested to me a struggle to reconcile herself to the lived reality of the 'passion as destiny' ethos. This rests on the belief that individuals should 'tap into' their passion(s), which operate as 'a unique and personal affective force, that operates semi-autonomously in a way that is not goal directed' (Farrugia, 2019:1087). However, as Jamie and Celeste seem to have discovered, a belief that 'passion' can operate as the galvanising force towards financial success, is not true for all women. Indeed, such notions 'obscures the labour, discipline, and capital necessary to emulate these standards' (Duffy and Hund, 2019:2). Moreover, the 'passion as destiny' ethos, firmly places responsibility for perceived failures on the shoulders of individual women, who simply fail because they are not 'passionate enough' (Duffy and Hund, 2019:5).

The Etsy.com platform allows sellers to easily create and run digital

businesses, without having to '*jump*' through the usual '*hoops*' associated with business ownership, such as devising business plans (Margot). Such accessibility may be advantageous to some sellers, but this is dependent on their Etsy shop ambitions and access to wider sources of income. Challenges can arise when passionate workers seek to monetise their Etsy.com businesses, a challenge that highlights the incongruity of the 'passionate labour as destiny' rhetoric, and the demands of profit-making. This necessarily disadvantages sellers who ascribe to the passionate labour ethos, which Etsy Inc. itself perpetuates.

6.6. 'You don't need a massive amount of money to get started on there'

In this section, I will examine participants' experiences of Etsy's claims towards financially accessible and low risk entrepreneurialism. Within scholarship of female entrepreneurialism, it widely acknowledged that women tend not to utilise formal financial loans. The reasons attributed to this are mixed. Some scholars ascribe this gender disparity to women's behaviour, for example, with the view that women will not seek out financial loans to support new businesses as they are 'less risk propensive' than men (Powell and Ansic, 1997:622). Brindley (2005) argues that it is women's lack of 'self-confidence' which forms the main barrier to women's risk-taking and therein, entrepreneurialism. Other managerial scholars, such as Scott and Roper (2009), state it is many women's misguided belief in institutional financial discrimination, which forms the main barrier to their entrepreneurial success. Such research indicates how uncertainty and risk-taking are culturally positioned as essential, but also implicitly *masculine* attributes of entrepreneurialism. In this manner, scholarly narratives abound that women's experiences of entrepreneurialism are rooted in their femininity. Women are characterised as possessing a feminine disinclination towards entrepreneurial behaviour, such as risk-taking.

However, there is also evidence that women experience gendered barriers to becoming business owners. Brush et al., (2001) argue that women face material barriers to accessing the financial capital necessary to start entrepreneurial businesses. Mijid (2015) argues that banks are cautious to provide loans to female entrepreneurs, as they are perceived as less likely to pay them back than their male counterparts. Male entrepreneurs are also

more likely to know other entrepreneurs, and able to provide aid and advice to fledgling business owners (Rose, 2019: 10). Kwong et. Al's (2011:75) research regarding the barriers experienced by female entrepreneurs found that 'a greater proportion of women are solely constrained by financial barriers than their male counterparts.' Therein, it appears there are cultural and material factors which are impacting women's routes towards entrepreneurialism.

In response to such issues regarding female entrepreneurialism, Etsy has positioned itself as 'empowering' women towards small business ownership. A central force to this claim is that Etsy-selling is uniquely accessible (Etsy, 2015, 2019, RSA, 2016). One strand of this accessibility is that women sellers do not need start-up capital or formal financial investment to set up shops via their platform (Etsy, 2015, RSA, 2016).

This contributes to the company's further claims regarding the 'low risks' associated with Etsy-based work. Indeed, Etsy Inc. states the site 'makes entrepreneurship lower-risk and accessible for these populations (women).' Etsy.com supposedly allows women to 'dip a toe' into the world of entrepreneurial selling, crucially without incurring the usual risks associated with business ownership (RSA, 2014). Etsy, 2015:3). Indeed, the low costs of setting up and running an Etsy shop was widely cited by participants as an attractive element to selling via the platform. As Louise explained:

> *It is easy to do it... which is why I think so many people go on it as well, because it's not as expensive as like getting your own website and because you are only paying only to list items and then you pay fees when you sell. It is quite easy to do it, you don't need a massive amount of money to get started there.*

In this comment, Louise states that it does not require '*a massive amount of money to get started on there*,' a comment which highlights the *initial* financial accessibility of the platform. Louise herself had started her business with very little financial investment, an experience shared by several participants.

Indeed, most of my participants had not gained formal investments or loans to set up their Etsy shop businesses. Instead, many relied on personal savings, loans from family members and romantic partners and/or money gained via

other professional roles or ventures. However, as I shall explore further, the financial accessibility of the Etsy.com platform does not necessarily translate beyond the initial stages of creating an Etsy based shop. Moreover, participants prior employment appeared to form a crucial factor in their experiences of running an Etsy based business.

6.7. Crossing over from former careers

Mirchandani (1999) saliently points out that gendered experiences of work, prior to engaging in entrepreneurialism, has a long-standing effect on women. Workplace discrimination, issues of fair pay and continuing expectations of unpaid caring labour, 'results in them (women) being less likely to amass sufficient personal funds to start new ventures' (Kwong et al., 2011). Moreover, Luckman (2016) states, successful Etsy workers have invariably 'crossed over' from already successful careers, which have allowed them to gain certain degrees of economic and cultural capital, necessary for a successful online business. Such views further align with Partin's (2020) argument that platforms can 'lock-in' economically dis- advantaged workers, who cannot afford to leave their chosen platform. Rather than being unilaterally 'democratic,' the Etsy platform benefits users who have already experienced conventionally understood successes. This can be examined in reflection of the experiences of Phoebe, Margot, Rosie and Flora.

Phoebe and Margot are categorised as post-careerists and as 'returners.' Both women had moved from conventionally successful, well-renumerated careers, into Etsy-based selling. Both women were able to pursue training opportunities, whilst employed within secure roles, described by Margot as '*well-paid jobs*.' They also both began their Etsy based shops whilst employed, Phoebe full-time and Margot on a 4-day contract. Whilst working for an IT consultancy, Margot went to the '*top director*' of the company and explained:

> *I'm not really happy doing 5 days a week, I want to do some other things. I would like to work 4 days a week and... He just said, 'I can make that work', so I did that, and that was really great, because then I did other things. And that's how I was able to train...*

Implicit within Margot's comments, is that financially, she was secure enough to reduce her working hours to four days a week. Moreover, Margot's comments speak to the influence and power afforded to her within her former role. That she was in a position where she was able to discuss her wishes with the company director, and moreover, negotiate fewer working hours, further indicates the power she held within her role. Moreover, this financial cushion allowed her time to invest in training and qualifications.

Whilst still formally employed, Margot gained a teaching ESOL qualification. This acted as a further tool towards financial independence outside of her former career, as for a while, she supplemented her income with freelance English language tutoring. In consideration of gaining a 4-day working week, Margot explained that '*by the time your value is recognised, you're in a position to negotiate.'* The relationship between her recognised 'value' and position to negotiate, allowed Margot a means to navigate the financial risks associated with starting a new entrepreneurial venture. As she hints at in this quote however, time, and specifically time spent in employment, forms a crucial ingredient to gaining this kind of leverage power. This is not a power afforded to all participants, particularly those who have not experienced such forms of employment, and therefore, accrued such forms of 'value'.

6.7.1. 'I went to Uni, but that means nothing anymore'

In reflection of Margot and Phoebe's experiences, it is useful to reflect on the experiences of some of my other participants. Rosie is a passionate worker, aged 30 when interviewed and working as a full-time Etsy seller, designing and making greeting cards. She explained that she had worked in retail positions from the age of 16 and had also gained a degree in interactive media design. However, after she graduated, she struggled to find employment in her field, explaining that:

> *I tried a lot to apply for design jobs, and a lot of it was 'you don't have any design experience' and I was like... I went to Uni... but that means nothing anymore...*

Rosie's comments are comparable to those made by fellow passionate worker Flora, who was also in her early 30's at the time of being interviewed. Flora had gained an undergraduate degree in Spatial Design with an initial desire to

be an animator. However, she explained that model-making animation was a '*dying art*,' and that after finishing her degree, she struggled to find work in her field. She explained, '*I worked for a while at a model maker's, but it didn't really lead to anything, I was mostly doing admin work, just to pay the bills'*. At the time of being interviewed, Flora worked part-time in a receptionist role to ensure she had some fixed income, which she intermixed with her Etsy based business. Trying to move forward after University, Rosie moved to London with a friend and found a retail job for a popular IT company, where she worked for several years. It was during this time that Rosie started making and selling greeting cards via Etsy.com.

Similarly, to Margot, Rosie also reduced her working schedule to four days a week. However, she explained that she continued to work around 30 hours a week, via both her Etsy shop and retail work, an experience further necessitated by the high price of living in London. This led to her decision to transfer to a different shop within the same company in Glasgow. However, Rosie found it increasingly difficult to manage the demands of her retail position and her growing Etsy shop business. Her employers were initially '*supportive of my business*' but after a while '*it was turning into that they weren't that supportive anymore*,' as her Etsy shop activities impacted the hours, she was available for her retail position.

This led to Rosie deciding to leave her full-time job before she had become financially secure via her Etsy.com shop. Explaining her current situation, she stated 'so far, it's going alright. *The thing is… you never know though, that's the scary thing. You never know how it's going to go*. Rosie's experiences of 'support' towards her business by her former employers, is radically different from those described by participant Margot. Although Rosie's employers may have wanted to present themselves as supportive of her external ventures, there was little material support in terms of workplace flexibility. Her experiences are illuminated by Perrons (1999) 'flexible discourse of flexibility,' wherein the 'flexibility' supposedly enjoyed by modern workers, is dependent on the demands of employers - rather than employees.

As a 'millennial' female worker, Rosie was particularly vulnerable to the outcomes of such precarious forms of service work (Worth, 2015). This further meant that, unlike Phoebe and Margot, Rosie was not able to establish herself

within her role as a freelance worker prior to leaving her full-time job. Instead, her need for greater flexibility meant she left her position '*earlier than planned,*' a comment which further indicates feelings of lack of control. Although she states that 'it's going alright,' she also indicates that there is a precarity to her situation that is a source of unease, as 'you never know how it's going to go.' This is again comparable to a participant such as Margot, who indicated that she felt relatively confident in her financial status.

Moreover, Rosie made no indication that she was able to accrue savings to invest in her Etsy shop business via her former role. Rather, she financially supported herself through her retail job whilst setting up her Etsy shop business. However, once she left her retail job, she has experienced increasing pressure to generate greater revenue through her Etsy shop business. Rosie indicated to me throughout our interview, that she felt a passionate attachment to her Etsy based work and was particularly dedicated to her self-identity as a creative and artistic person, referring to herself numerous times throughout our interviews as a 'creative' and 'artist'.

In reference to leaving her retail job, she stated that it was more important for her to be 'happy,' rather than securely employed in a job she did not enjoy, and which was increasingly inflexible regarding her external ventures. Margot similarly communicated to me throughout her interview, that she placed little value on working for high financial renumeration, instead placing value on the opportunity to work for herself.

However, as established, Margot's Etsy.com experiences were marked by her pre- existing experiences of employment stability, which had afforded her a 'cushion' necessary to move into Etsy based work. In contrast, Rosie's interview was marked by explicit and implicit statements regarding the financial precariousness of her Etsy based work, and the material needed to make money. This is indicated in her final comment that although her Etsy shop was going 'okay,' '*the thing is… you never know though, that's the scary thing. You never know how it's going to go*.' This is important to highlight in consideration of Margot's former comment that '*by the time your value is recognised, you're in a position to negotiate.'*

At the time of being interviewed, Rosie had accrued many years of experience working within the retail field. Yet unlike Margot, Rosie's time invested in this

field of work had not led to recognition of her value as an employee and therein, a capacity to negotiate flexible working hours with her employer. This situation forced Rosie to leave her former role earlier than she intended, putting her under financial stress. In consideration of these participants, it is possible to see how experiences of security and precarity can be perpetuated, rather than circumvented, via the adoption of Etsy based work.

Such experiences run counter to the claims made by Etsy Inc. regarding its platforms capacities to 'democratise' entrepreneurship. Rather, as demonstrated in the examples of Rosie and Margot, prior work experience can have a considerable impact on Etsy based employment, particularly when sellers depend on their shops as a source of revenue.

6.7.2. Pre-existing capital and generational cohorts

In further reflection of the importance of pre-existing forms of capital and security prior to undertaking Etsy based work, I went on to ask Margot if having savings and owning her home had been helpful when running her Etsy business:

> *Oh yes absolutely, I would say that was very important. What I would say to anybody who starts on Etsy - it's slow to build. I did some online learning courses about running your own business, and... The majority of people say their businesses fail because they stop doing what they're doing too early. And often that's because they can't afford to continue to invest time without payback... and I think that's definitely been true for me. I still don't earn very much money, but I earn an awful lot more than I did in year 1, and I'm now in year 3 so... I think that's... if I hadn't had savings, that would have been quite scary for me to do.*

This excerpt indicates the value Margot perceives in her involvement in online courses and speaking to peers about setting up a business. This endeavour highlights Margot's outlook regarding her Etsy shop as a business, as well as her capacity to invest in formal training. She had gained knowledge and expertise regarding small business ownership, which impacted her perspective as to what these involved. Rather than differentiating Etsy.com businesses from 'normal' businesses, she explains how, they require the owner '*to invest time without payback,*' a reality which she identifies as forming a barrier for

many sellers.

Rather than ascribing to the view that starting an Etsy business was safer than a 'normal' business venture, she instead states that if she '*hadn't had savings, that would have been quite scary for me to do.'* This comment echoes the actual fearfulness experienced by Rosie, regarding the financial insecurity of her Etsy shop business. Through the tools she has gained via formal training, Margot perceives financial security to be a substantial consideration for most sellers, with a financial cushion of some kind being necessary when starting an Etsy business.

This was a situation that was directly informed by her previous conventional success in her former career, which allowed her to negotiate time off to pursue such training.

In this respect, the quote further highlights the forms of cultural capital regarding business-ownership which can prove crucial to Etsy business owners. In this example, Margot's acquisition of this knowledge is inextricably bound to her former career successes and therein, capacity to negotiate necessary time-off for training. Furthermore, her comments indicate her perspective of the financial risks involved in establishing an Etsy based business, which she interprets through her pre-existing lens as a business professional. This must also be considered in relationship to the years of former employment Margot has experienced within managerial roles, which forms another source of cultural capital that benefits her business enterprise.

In this regard, experiences of participants such as Flora and Rosie, must also be viewed in reference to their generational cohort and prior work experiences. As McRobbie (2016:2) pertinently observes, young people are increasingly attracted to entrepreneurial ventures 'because, when weighing up their options, this emerges as a hope for a more productive and... exciting future.' This must be viewed in reference to the fact that generations in their 20's and 30's are particularly impacted by higher experiences of workplace risk and insecurity. For such reasons, they have been termed the 'precarious generation' (Bourdieu, 1999 in Gill and Pratt, 2008:11).

Therein, young women's movements toward micro-enterprises cannot be simply viewed as a freely made choice, but as bound by wider degradation of employment options. As McRobbie (2016:11) further illuminates, this is an

issue felt acutely amongst young people who have gained degrees and qualifications in the humanities and arts. The ‘expansion’ of higher education has led to a 'swollen class of young creatives,’ seeking employment in an increasingly casualised, precarious, and competitive sphere of work (ibid). In response, young people particularly must stitch together a mosaic of paid and unpaid forms of employment, as witnessed in the activities of Flora and Rosie.

Phoebe and Margot also both graduated with degrees in the creative fields, but unlike Flora and Rosie, were able to secure employment in their chosen professions. This allowed them to both gain forms of financial security and assets, alongside valuable forms of cultural capital. In reference to the later financial risks, they incurred whilst establishing their Etsy shop businesses, experiences determined by generational cohort position have played a pivotal role in the experiences of some participants.

Notably, younger generations of women are impacted by the precariatisation of creative industries, an experience that has formed barriers to securing financial capital (Connor et al., 2015). This, in turn, affects the experience of absorbing entrepreneurial risk, when creating and running Etsy shop businesses. These experiences intersect with the power dynamics found between sellers and platform owners. The experiences of Etsy shop sellers can therefore not be homogenised or indeed viewed entirely through a lens of individual experience. In the examples of my participants, the effects of wider societal and cultural forces, such as the increasing precariatisation of formerly ‘middle-class’ creative professions, has a profound effect on women Etsy seller’s experiences of the platform. As highlighted in this chapter, the view that Etsy.com provides a widespread ‘risk free’ version of entrepreneurialism to all women, must be viewed in reference to the specific landscapes of different women’s lives.

6.8. ‘He is basically still the breadwinner’

As previously outlined, women can experience various barriers towards securing financial capital towards their businesses. Indeed, in their empirical research regarding female entrepreneurship in the US, Chinta et al., (2017) discovered that access to personal wealth was key to women’s entrepreneurial success. This in turn affects the size of female-owned businesses, which tend to be smaller and experience lower rates of growth

than male-owned businesses. Etsy Inc. states further states that its sellers are often ‘proud’ of their capacity to self-finance their own businesses and develop ‘steady, low-risk growth,’ stating further that 83% of sellers choose to run and finance their businesses ‘without help’ (Etsy, 2019a:7, Etsy, 2013:2). However, Eddleston and Powell’s empirical research discovered that female entrepreneurs largely cited forms of family support as essential to the health of their business ventures.

In discussion of the financial pressures and insecurities associated with running an Etsy.com business, several participants cited the importance of their intimate partners and/or families in managing this risk. When it came to building her Etsy shop business, Margot distinctly identifies the crucial nature her savings and financial assets had played in her ability to ‘wait out’ the lean period associated with starting a business. Moreover, just before the interview ended, Margot also indicated that the financial security of her partner's job was an important insulator to the perceived insecurities associated with running an Etsy based business. She explained that:

> *My husband works in IT, and he has a regular salary, so at the beginning, he was providing some security for me*, and also, *for example, I had a sudden bereavement last year and I had to close the shop for a month. In those circumstances, I don’t have to worry about the money. If I was depending on that, it would be extremely stressful, and also untenable, so I've got a lot of privilege that lets me do this. it's a bit like... you know... if you're taking a risk, what's your exposure, and for me it's not as much as for other people...*

Margot’s comment highlights the awareness she has, that the financial status of her partner forms a crucial form of ‘privilege.’ It affords her financial security, that provides the means to respond to sudden changes to her circumstance, such as a bereavement. It is also possible to see Margot’s knowledge and expertise as a businesswoman in this comment, as she frames her privileged position as reducing her ‘risk’ and ‘exposure.’ Via these terms, there is a suggestion that the financial security she gains from her personal relationship has value as a business decision. Her comments further suggest the need for participants to calculate the risk of their entrepreneurial endeavours, in consideration of their personal relationships.

Rebecca also discussed her movement into Etsy-based selling, as linked to the financial security provided by her husband's career. At the time of being interviewed, she had recently given birth to a daughter and was setting up her Etsy shop business whilst away from work on maternity leave. She explained at the start of our interview, that starting her Etsy based shop:

> *It was also... not so much about earning money, because my partner does earn good money... so, we would have money either way, whatever happened.*

Creating and running her Etsy shop, was not a financial endeavour but instead, connected to her need to feel '*useful*,' and to retain her '*sanity*.' This was a situation she identified as stemming from her husband's employment. Her comments suggested that her vision of career and life satisfaction, which for her centred on being able to prioritise her new baby, was dependent on her husband's employment.

In Phoebe's case, her husband has played an important role in her decision to continue her Etsy based work:

> *When it came to the crunch... I was ready to back out, but he was like, no look you can make it work, you can do it. He is basically still the breadwinner, we could manage on my income, but it would be a struggle, there wouldn't be many holidays and meals out. But yeah, he's always really positive.*

In this example, Phoebe indicates the critical emotional and financial support provided through her husband. These are modes of support shown to be closely aligned, as her husband was able to provide Phoebe with feelings of security due in part to his status as the '*breadwinner*'. In this manner, he can provide material, as well as psychological security net to her Etsy.com based activities.

In this manner, several women discussed the psychological and material benefits which they experienced through their partner's employment. This formed a vital source of security, which allowed them to engage in the risk-taking associated with developing an Etsy-based business. As Margot stated, the risk exposure was lessened for these women, because of their intimate relationships. In this regard, I perceived that the employment status of

women's intimate partners formed a crucial source of capital for several participants. This can be contrasted with the experiences of participants Betsy and Anita. As outlined in chapter 4, these women needed to operate as financial breadwinners, a situation which had a variety of outcomes including the necessity to absorb financial risk.

As further shown through these examples, actual and potential material support formed only one form of help women experienced from their intimate partners and other loved ones. Several participants also described activities which their intimate partners and families undertook, to assist in the various aspects of running their Etsy shops. In the following excerpt, passionate worker Eliza discussed the labour her boyfriend undertakes, to assist with her business:

Anna: I was really curious what you were saying before about your boyfriend helping you, can you tell me some more about that?

Eliza: Yeah so, I have a little um box? Like a stool/chair thing that opens? So, all my Etsy stuff is in there, that's my space

Anna: and this is in his flat?

Eliza: Yeah, in his living room -laugh- so that's all my knitting stuff and (…) envelopes

Anna: So, all of the stuff that you need to like send

it? Eliza: Yes

Anna: So, what happens, tell me

Eliza: So, I'll get an order, and then I'll forward on the shipping details, and he'll put it all together, and I'll send him the postage money

Anna: Ok, and so er how did that come about?

Eliza: It was more because I went back to XXX in June to do my data collection, for MA dissertation... that was like 6 weeks I was gone, so then he was like, 'I can post anything if it needs to be done.'

Anna: Ohhh ok, so he offered?

Eliza: Yes, he offered, and then it just continued, and that was fine

Anna: And do you actually make the items at his house?

Eliza: Err yes sometimes I bring my knitting with me everywhere so
Anna: OK and if I was going to ask him his view on it what do you think he would say?

Eliza: -laughs- I don't know! -laughs- I hope he would say something nice!

Anna: Yeah right, but the way he's part of the shop, what does he think about that?

Eliza: I don't know if he thinks he's part of the shop?

Anna: Ah ok, do you think he's part of it?

Eliza: No not really… But he is! Oh god I should give him a present!

Anna: Ah ok, so can you tell me some more about that? So, you feel like that shop is yours?

Eliza: Yeah, yeah although I think you're right because he's part of it. I just haven't seen him in that way in my mind, because I make them!

Anna: Yeah sure. He's fulfilling that role... I don't know what the role would be called in like a more mainstream job...

Anna: I don't know... maybe the shipping? -laugh-

This exchange provides rich insight into the way Eliza conceptualises both her boyfriend's role within her business, and her own work. Eliza outlines several responsibilities her boyfriend had taken on, to assist her with her Etsy activities. However, as she also outlines, she did not perceive him to be a member of her shop, primarily, because his activities are logistical and manual. As a passionate worker this could be aligned with her wider valorisation of 'creative' forms of labour. This is suggested in her comment that *'I haven't seen him in that way... because I make them!'* Her comments further speak to her wider perception of her Etsy based shop, as a source of fun and creative self-expression, rather than a business venture. In this manner, the role of her boyfriend is not clearly defined within a more normative framework of employee titles or responsibilities, a point illustrated by her amusement that his role could be described as 'shipping.' Eliza was not alone in these experiences.

Fellow passionate worker Rosie also explained the crucial role her parents played, in both financially supporting her Etsy shop venture and assisting in various Etsy based activities. Crucially, she identified that her parents had provided financial aid explaining, *'I don't want them to help me, but if something happens... then I've got that to fall back on.'* Indeed, Rosie communicated a degree of conflict regarding the role of parents, emphasising that she wanted to '*be able to support herself.*' Indeed, Rosie's complex perception regarding the role of her parent's support was further indicated at the beginning of the interview, wherein Rosie and I shared the following exchange:

> *Anna. Is it just you in your Etsy shop, there's no-one else?*
>
> *Rosie: Yes, that's right well my Mum and Dad help, but only like the little bits the mundane tasks I would love to do but just don't have the time like putting cards into envelopes and things.*

In this quote, Rosie further emphasises her desire to run her shop independently. In a similar manner to Eliza, Rosie does not present her parents' activities as skilled labour, but rather '*little bits*,' and '*mundane tasks*'. They do not operate as shop employees or workers. Moreover, by stating that she would 'love' to do these things, she emphasises further the value she perceives in being an independent Etsy seller. Interestingly, Rosie also stressed throughout the interview that she was extremely grateful for her parents help and that she '*couldn't have done this without their support.*' Perceived in relationship with each other, and in reflection of Rosie's status as a passionate worker, a fuller picture emerges.

Neoliberal feminism centres female emancipation on women's capacities to make appropriate choices (Gill and Scharff, 2007). Moreover, within the dispositif of the perfect, women's status as legibly feminine is dependent on their capacity to achieve and maintain success across all aspects of life (McRobbie, 2015). Career success constitutes a key element to this dispositif. Moreover, the passionate labour ethos emphasises the middle-class value attributed to 'loving' one's labour and undertaking creative, self-actualising modes of work. For some of my participants, these perspectives appear to contribute to a stratified perception regarding what constitutes 'real' work. More specifically, forms of material labour were communicated as being less

'work-like' than modes of creative work labour. The

perceived status of such work was further complicated when undertaken by loved ones and family members. Indeed, as illustrated, it appeared that Etsy.com's claims towards generating independent female entrepreneurs, belies the more nuanced experiences of my participants. Moreover, it seemed that conceptualisations of what constituted Etsy based work further impacted how participants discussed the role of loved ones in their Etsy.com shops.

6.9. 'Locked-in' to the Etsy.com platform

Several participants discussed their experiences of business ownership through Etsy.com as perceived failures. Celeste had spent a year dedicated to trying to make her Etsy.com-based shop a profit-making enterprise that she could use as her main form of employment. By her own description, this endeavour had ultimately failed, and she had recently begun working part-time as a care-worker alongside her Etsy work. At the time of being interviewed she expressed anger and disappointment both with the Etsy.com platform, but also with herself and her own perceived failings at not making her shop a 'success'. In discussion of potentially moving her shop to an alternative platform, she stated that:

> *I tried another platform. And I have to say, I find Etsy well structured. I understand, the app on my phone and on my computer... to me it's clear, it's easy to manage... and when I tried another platform? Oh my God, I couldn't understand anything about it! So, I said... OK, no. I started on Etsy, I'm going to stay there and just try to do better.*

Celeste's comments highlight the technical accessibility of Etsy.com, in comparison to a smaller competitor. A key feature that ensures platforms can both attract and 'lock in' platform users, is to ensure their sites provide a highly accessible user experience. This involves 'training' site users to become competent in a specific platform system, which are skills that are non-transferable to alternative platforms (Moore and Tambini, 2018). The impacts of this are witnessed in Celeste comments regarding the barriers she experienced in attempting to learn a new platform operating system.

To further contextualise this comment, Celeste had expressed to me that her

main interest in running her Etsy shop business, was to share her hand-woven homeware items. She expressed personal attachment to these items, and to the process of designing and making them. However, she struggled to engage with other aspects of running her Etsy shop and the forms of expertise these demanded, such as photography and social media. Indeed, she stated that she '*hated technology*' and just '*wanted to create*.' In this regard, she had chosen to build her shop via Etsy.com because she was already familiar with the site as a customer and knew how to orientate the platform as it '*was easy to manage*'. As she expressed, the main barrier she found in trying to create a business via an alternative platform, is that she '*couldn't understand anything about it*.' These are points which echo the comments I outlined in the previous section, regarding some participants lionising creative labour above other modes of work. However, unlike participants Eliza and Rosie, Celeste did not have family members assisting her with such tasks.

This was a viewpoint also shared by Jamie, who wanted to use Etsy.com to build a financially viable business, selling her gothic-inspired photography. During our interview, Jamie expressed disappointment regarding her experience of using Etsy.com. These centred on her struggle to make her shop financially profitable, alongside her feelings that her gothic style did not fit the aesthetics of the platform. She had therefore also made efforts to create a shop via NuMonday.com. She struggled with this, however, as the platform requires sellers to manually import photos and descriptions, which she found to be too time-consuming and labour intensive. Moreover, she found the user interface '*un-intuitive,*' and difficult to navigate. In this way, the technological accessibility of the Etsy.com platform ultimately formed a barrier to these participants moving their shops onto other platforms, as they had become 'locked-in' to Etsy.com's platform features.

The attitudes of these participants can also all be viewed as representative of the passionate labour ethos (McRobbie, 2016). Passionate attachment to their items further strengthened their bonds to the Etsy.com platform. As Jamie explained to me, other selling platforms such as UK based platforms Folksy.com and Notonthehighstreet.com do not fit with her gothic style and require sellers to target their items to a more niche audience. Indeed, she explained that she had paid for an application to Notonthehighstreet.com and been rejected

twice, further cementing her reliance on Etsy.com. For Celeste, her self-ascribed status as a creative rather than technological person further incentivised Etsy.com over alternative platforms. It appears then, that adherence to this Etsy 'passionate labour' ethos, can potentially further solidify Etsy seller's reliance on the Etsy.com platform.

6.10. 'You need people to sell to:' Etsy's craft monopoly

In her analysis of digital craft selling platforms, Luckman (2015:27) states that sites such as Etsy.com provides users 'ready access' to 'markets and business supports,' which they may not have in the physical world. She optimistically states that such access can prove particularly advantageous to platform sellers who 'may not be lucky enough' to have access to traditional face-to-face selling opportunities, such as selling 'newbies' (ibid). Such sentiments are reflected in the RSA's report that Etsy.com's 'global audience' provides sellers the opportunity to reach buyers unavailable to them outside of the platform. They argue that this directly results in the growth of Etsy based businesses, as it provides sellers a 'stepping-stone into business, as well as a springboard to becoming a more 'serious' venture' (RSA, 2014: 23).

The potential benefits of the scope of Etsy.com's market was highlighted in some of the comments shared by my participants. Interestingly, this appeared to be a view mostly shared by participants who were not reliant financially on their Etsy shops or were interspersing their work amongst other forms of paid employment. For example, participant's Cissy and Noelle both used Etsy primarily as a means of creative self-expression, rather than as sources of reliable income.

Cissy explained that her products were particularly popular amongst American buyers and that Etsy.com provided her a means to reach this specific audience. Noelle explained that her attraction to Etsy.com was largely due to the size of its '*outreach*,' which could connect her to a wider audience of buyers than '*if I had been on my own website or shop, which is completely detached from anything else*.' As her comments indicate, the size and scope of Etsy's marketplace fulfilled a role which she felt could not be replicated

outside of the site. For participants such as Cissy and Noelle, this provided a unique opportunity to connect with a consumer base that would otherwise be out of reach, particularly via their own independent websites.

However, not all participants shared these views. At the time of being interviewed, Katie was financially reliant on her Etsy based shop, but wanted to build a business outside of the platform. Although Katie stated that Etsy.com has '*been great for me*,' she was also critical of how growth and profit-orientated the company had become, whilst presenting itself as '*empowering*' for its users. She explained that when it came to Etsy.com's business practices, '*it's kind of scary being out of control of that.'* Her comment highlights her status as a platform dependent entrepreneur, wherein she holds little control over the wider actions of the Etsy Inc. company, nor how these may impact her shop.

In a bid to gain greater control of her business, Katie had recently created her own website. However, this was an endeavour she viewed with ambivalence, stating that '*people... they trust the site (Etsy), and you get way more traffic than you would if you just start a random website*.' As Noelle also explained:

> *People feel confident using it (Etsy), because it looks legit, it's not one of those DIY platforms that's like, 'Oh I'm going to put my card number and... where's it going to go?' People trust it and they know it.*

Amelia had hopes to widen her craft selling enterprises beyond Etsy.com and explained she felt Etsy could act as an intermediary step because it '*trains you a little bit*' and the platform '*eases you into'* the processes of online selling. However, she also explained that the benefit of Etsy was that it is a '*platform that other people can see and trust*.'

The perceived trustworthy status of Etsy as a brand, forms another key example of the impact of Etsy.com's features as a digital platform. Moore and Tambini (2018) highlight that digital platforms tend to provide services which are dependent on creating and maintaining positive user/platform relationships. This necessarily requires platforms invest in building high profile brand images (ibid). Etsy.com's recognised status as well-know and trusted brand contributes to its continuing dominance of the digital craft-selling sphere. However, several of my participants recognised that this is a difficult feat for smaller scale businesses to achieve, particularly via '*DIY platforms*'.

Etsy.com's continuing dominance has various consequences for sellers dependent on the platform, as I shall explore further.

6.10.1 'It's just difficult to compete with that'

Etsy.com's successful dominance of the craft-selling niche is reflected in Langley and Leyshon's (2017:15) comment that 'platforms target dominance of their own niche market... at the expense of others who are therefore destined to 'fail.'' As I have established, although Jamie was dissatisfied with selling via Etsy.com, she was also resigned to using the platform. When I asked her about this, she explained that the size of the available audience was '*vast*' and unlike so many other available platforms '*focused on handmade*.' Indeed, she explained that she had previously tried to use alternative craft selling platforms, such as the UK based platform Folksy, but found the site's market size too small. She explained further that, when it came to potentially creating her own site or using other platforms, '*it's just... difficult to compete with that (Etsy), because people are the main thing you need, the audience, you need people to sell to.'* Her comments further echo the effects Katie referred to, regarding Etsy's monopolisation of the digital craft-selling market. As she states, when it comes to selling niche items, it is imperative that sellers have access to potential buyers. The size and breadth of Etsy.com's marketplace is 'difficult to compete with.' Indeed, the lack of viable alternatives speaks further to the consequences of Etsy.com's monopolisation of the digital craft selling sphere.

6.11. Personal websites and 'spreading the risk'

In addition to Etsy.com forming a technologically accessible option for women sellers, several participants also cited the potential benefits of creating and running independent selling websites. However, although many participants discussed their desire to create and run their own selling websites, there were several key factors perceived as barriers to this.

Notably, several participants communicated a lack of confidence in their IT skills, and specifically their capacity to create and run websites. In discussion of why she had focused on building her online business via Etsy.com, Harriet explained that it's '*hard to make a free website look nice*.' This was a

comment she linked further, to her self-described status as '*not a very technologically minded person*.' Her comment highlights the restricted options available to participants, as the creation of independent websites is dependent on possession of skills and knowledge that are not made readily available to women.

Indeed, most of the participants I interviewed who did have their own professional websites, had gained informal help in designing them from family members or friends. Joanna, for example, explained that '*my brother-in-law did it and he knew all of that... he's a designer, he built it, I didn't!*' Similarly, Flora said that '*I built my own website, and it was rubbish, a friend of mine built me another website, for free, which was a lot better and more visible.*' In this regard, participants who were able to manage the risks associated with reliance on a single platform by creating independent websites, were able to do so via utilising their pre-existing social capital.

Crucially in these examples, relationships with others proved to be an important means to create alternative selling routes, outside of Etsy.com. In this regard, the privileges associated with navigating Etsy based risk are intersectional, dependent on modes of social, as well as economic capital. For example, even if participants were able to create their own websites, many still expressed barriers to attracting customers to their independent sites. I shall now explore this point in greater detail.

6.12. 'Etsy could go bust at any moment, they could close my shop tomorrow'

In discussion of the Etsy.com platform, many participants referred to a sense of instability and precarity associated with creating a business via the platform. Some identified this sense of risk as rooted in their dependency on the successes of the Etsy.com platform, and the wider Etsy Inc. company. A re-occurring phrase used to describe this was the challenges associated with placing '*all your eggs in one basket*.'

I have previously established that experiences of entrepreneurialism are marked by risk-taking (Brindley, 2005). However, many Etsy sellers operate as 'platform dependent entrepreneurs,' for whom, 'the entrepreneurial process,

which is already characterized by high risk, *is made even more precarious by being dependent upon a platform*' (Cutalo and Kenney, 2021:3). Some participants communicated this sense of risk as an awareness of the inherent instability associated with their dependency on the fortunes of another company. Betsy for example explained, '*I'm slightly anxious that I have all my eggs in another business's basket*.'

Betsy's perspective of her Etsy.com shop is noteworthy, as she is a full-time Etsy seller who primarily discussed her shop as a profit-orientated enterprise. Her choice to design and sell downloadable wedding invitation templates was partly due to their low overhead costs. This contrasts with sellers such as Rosie, Louise and Harriet, who discussed their Etsy shop activities in reference to a passionate attachment to their shop items. To add further context, Betsy explained she hoped to earn enough money via her Etsy shop business that her partner, who worked a physically demanding job, would be able to retire. In this respect, generating profit was a crucial motivating factor for her Etsy activity.

In discussion of the challenges associated with Etsy based selling she stated that:

> *Etsy in theory... could... go bust I mean they could close shop tomorrow because they're a business, and then my business is gone... I'm very aware of that and I'm thinking of ways to kind of spread that risk over the next few years.*

Her comments clearly indicate her dependency on her Etsy.com shop as a primary income source, and the risks she feels this entails. Her comments indicate further that these risks are associated with her business's ties to Etsy.com which could potentially '*go bust*' at any time. Moreover, her plans to 'spread that risk' emphasises the necessity for Etsy sellers to devise their own individual responses to the structural instability, associated with selling via the platform.

Such comments compliment Margot's perspective, who told me that:

> *All the sellers are very much at the mercy of Etsy... so it's kind of like, we are the bread and butter for them, and they could at any point... hike up the fees or put in new restrictions, and I'm always wary of that.*

Her comment that they are at the 'mercy of Etsy', highlights a sense of powerlessness regarding the actions of the company and how such actions may impact sellers. As she astutely notes, the dependency she and other sellers feel towards the Etsy platform forms another example of behaviour found across large scale digital platforms, which require large amounts of users to function. This, therefore, can lead to platforms enacting steps to 'lock in' users to their platforms (Moore and Tambini, 2018).

6.13. Leaving Etsy.com: 'I'm not in a position to take the risk'

I will now consider further some of the consequences for my participants as platform dependent entrepreneurs via Etsy.com. Louise designs, makes, and sells lingerie via her two Etsy based shops. By her own admission, she started her enterprise with very little; a sewing machine, a small grant from the Prince's Trust, and passion for fashion design. Via making and selling clothing items, she had previously experienced financial stability via these enterprises. Indeed, she stated that '*this time two years ago I had more money than I knew what to do with.*' Due to the stability in sales, she had experienced via Etsy.com, she was able to diversify her income and was previously also selling her items via a prominent local shop.

Crucially, Louise was able to predict her financial incomings and outgoings and planned her Etsy shop activities accordingly. Based on these successes, she had moved out from sharing a house with her mother and began renting her own flat independently. However, at the time of being interviewed, she was in a period of abrupt financial uncertainty. Her number of sales over two months prior to the interview had been '*shocking*,' which had impacted her capacity to replenish her stock. This further meant that she had to pull-out from selling her items via the external shop, as she no longer had '*anything to sell... I haven't got a business right now!... I've got nothing.*' The sudden change to her revenue had emotional and material ramifications for Louise, who stated she was currently experiencing '*so much stress and pressure*' due to the situation and was seriously concerned about being able to pay her rent that month.

For Louise, the changes she had experienced in her financial situation were completely unforeseen, and to her view, random. In discussion of the reasons why her Etsy shop had so suddenly '*hit a wall*,' she expressed that she had her

own '*conspiracy theories*' regarding the decisions Etsy Inc. makes behind the scenes, that she feels sellers such as her, are not privy too. For example, she highlighted Etsy's recent policy changes regarding shipping costs, which 'encourages' sellers to absorb the cost of shipping into the overall pricing of their items. She explained her experiences further, referencing a recent email she had been sent by Etsy.com

I got a really snidey email from them the other day, they emailed to say that with my shop, in May I had 40% less traffic than I did in May 2018, and they were like, 'ooooh but don't worry, we can help', and the first two solutions were all their promoted listings and Google listings, so basically, pay us some more money and we can help you, and it really annoyed me, because May was actually my best month sales wise, this year so far, it was kind of on par with last May. So, I didn't actually lose any sales I was just down on traffic... and I just thought... that was really snidey of them, to be like.. oh you know.. kind of making you worry.. that the traffic has dropped.

A: Right like kind of poking you and making you anxious about it...

P: Yeah and it's like ... 'ohhhhh don't worry, we can fix it... and I've tried promoted listings, they don't work. The Google thing.. I took massive hit, because Google shopping used to be free, it used to be like incorporated, and now they charge for it, and ever since that came if. I've taken a massive hit. With sales.

A: Right, is that also connected with you selling in the States? Because I know there was that thing where... didn't they change like, based on location as well?

P: Yeah, that's really impacted on me as well, the location. Because now you can search by free shipping... I can't offer free shipping internationally and I've tried free shipping, I've got smaller items in my shop, in both shops, which are listed as free shipping...it doesn't make a difference at all.

A: Yeah, but I'm really confused, who can actually offer free shipping? Like if you are just like an individual person working from home?

P: I think unless you do little things like cards or prints that kind of thing which are cheap to post, I don't think anyone can do it... and it's weird because not even Amazon do free shipping anymore, you've got to pay for Prime.

A: Well yeah like any other website there's an expectation that you pay for shipping...

P: Yeah or you have a subscription with them. I don't understand why Etsy are pushing for it. I really... I've tried doing it, I've tried doing the sales, I've tried doing the free shipping.. it's made 0 difference.

This interview excerpt shows Louise's increasingly critical perspective of Etsy.com's treatment of sellers and the pressure she felt from the platform to generate more profits, by purchasing further Etsy.com services. These actions were perceived by Louise as motivated by a desire to '*push out*' certain sellers from the platform, presumably those Etsy Inc. considers to be less financially profitable. However, the lack of clear information she felt was available to sellers regarding the changes being undertaken to the platform, contributed to her view of veiled and potentially nefarious company actions.

Louise's choice to describe her views as 'conspiracy theories' is perhaps revealing. Research suggests that conspiracy theories tend to propagate when individuals feel powerless or voiceless, particularly in the face of larger, more powerful institutions (van Prooijen, 2018: 433). This can be viewed in reference to the power dynamics at play between large-scale digital platforms, such as Etsy.com, and their users. Eliza implicitly framed this as the dynamic of parent/adult and child, which allows her to 'play shop.' However, in Louise's experiences, this dynamic has bred feelings of mistrust and helplessness, as she feels disempowered from understanding the decision-making processes that impact her shop.

As Cutalo and Kenney (2020:4) explain, ‘PDEs experience a great power imbalance in relation to the platform owners, who can unilaterally enforce changes in the competitive conditions on the platform.’ Such experiences of this power imbalance are further crystalised when sellers such as Louise become locked-in to selling via one specific platform. In discussion of the financial difficulties she was currently experiencing, Louise and I also discussed the possibility of her joining the NuMonday platform. However, she explained that:

> *The reason I haven't gone on there, is because you have to pay like a joining fee. I don’t think it's much but... I was like... well, I'm not in a position to take the risk on that right now.*

Even though she was currently incurring a high degree of financial uncertainty due to her reliance on Etsy.com, paying for a place on another platform formed too much of a risk to consider.

The financial consequences of leaving further bounded her to the Etsy.com platform, even though she currently was not able to make a livable wage from her shop. Her comments highlight further the potential consequences of becoming an Etsy-dependent entrepreneur.

6.14. 'I think negative thoughts aren’t helpful’

In acknowledgement of the power asymmetries at play on Etsy.com, I would like to further consider some ways participants employ methods to gain control over their working lives.

I have established that Etsy.com sellers may not feel able to change the actions of the Etsy platform but are able to change their own thoughts and behaviour. In discussion of the financial demands Amelia was experiencing, she was careful to frame these through a language of positivity and gratitude. When I asked her if she was currently able to plan financially, she explained that she was currently living on her savings, making financial cutbacks, and living with an extra flat mate to save money. However, she also expressed twice that she was ‘*really grateful*’ for her position, as, unlike another seller she knew, she did not have to financially support family members. When she explained the cutbacks she had made to her lifestyle to save money, she was

careful not to frame these in a negative way. Instead for example, stating that she could always '*run up and down the stairs*' instead of going to the gym, and she was happy to shop at budget store Lidl.

The decision to present financial adversity through a language of positivity can be viewed through Ehrstein et al (2020) work regarding neoliberal 'feeling rules.' Within this book chapter, they build on Gill (2007) research regarding gendered neoliberal subjectivities. In their (2020) empirical research into the website 'Mumsnet.com' they identified that normative ideals of motherhood curtail the expression of certain emotions. Under neoliberalism, people 'are called on to disavow a whole range of experiences and emotions—including insecurity, neediness, anger and complaint' (ibid:200). Moreover, Pavlidis' (2020) research regarding female athlete, argues that positivity and gratitude are feelings co-opted by post-feminism's version of female empowerment. Being 'positive' both fulfils normative expectations of feminine behaviour and aligns with post-feminist promises of emancipation through self-work and self-transformation.

Through the framework of neoliberal postfeminism, 'gratitude is entangled with expressions of freedom and autonomy' (ibid: 100672). It is possible to view Amelia's comments as originating from a desire to focus on the positive aspects of her situation, but also, a desire to gain control over the uncertainty of her financial situation. Indeed, when I asked Amelia if she was currently able to plan financially for the future, she instead answered by listing the actions she was currently undertaking to reduce her costs.

This speaks further to Amelia's changing relationship with her Etsy.com shop, as she expressed the need to take greater control over her financial situation, rather than framing them as a matter of destiny. McRobbie (2016) and Banet-Weiser (2011) have also both identified that 'unrelenting positivity' and 'girlish enthusiasm' are culturally viewed as necessary 'passports' towards female success –regardless of women's lived reality. Gill and Orgard (2015) further argue that self- confidence has become the 'imperative of our time,' operating as a self- disciplining mechanism that casts women's empowerment as a matter of 'self- improvement'. Women, unlike men, must continually labour to generate this source of self-confidence, regardless of the modes of sexism or discrimination they may encounter (ibid). The imperative towards

self-confidence therefore also constitutes a post-feminist and neoliberal endeavour, that places full responsibility for success and failure on the actions of individual women.

Amelia's was not alone in using the language of positivity to frame the challenges she encountered. When I asked Anita about any potential concerns, she may have about saving money for her pension, she explained:

> *Anita: It's something that I don't worry about because I think negative thoughts aren't helpful so...*
>
> *Anna: Right so like focusing on the future goals?*
>
> *Anita: Yeah, with a positive attitude.*

Anita's comment demonstrates a deliberate decision undertaken by Anita, to create and maintain a 'positive attitude' regarding her activities. She positions her attitude of positivity and hope as a guard against potential failure. Indeed, Alacovska (2018:43) argue that hope forms a crucial means for workers to live a 'sane life, in spite of precarity.' In the context of the interview, I felt that Anita's comments regarding her positive attitude were phrases she used regularly, indicating that she mobilised this sense of hope often. In discussion of some upcoming pricing changes to shipping, Rosie expressed that she was 'bothered' by the situation. However, in response, she was trying to 'not overthink it,' stating, '*I'm not going to let it bother me too much, I mean you're not going to know until it goes into effect.*' In this manner, the capacity to be hopeful provided Rosie a means to navigate her anxiety about the future and offered her some means of control over her life. Such examples illustrate the ways in which some participants utilise labour of self-work and emotional management, as means to survive feelings of precarity.

6.15. Conclusion

Within my recounting of my participant's experiences, it is possible to view their stories of financial uncertainty as not atypical amongst micro-entrepreneurs. Women are particularly impacted by the financial risk-taking associated with entrepreneurship, and vulnerable to financial failure. Moreover,

precarity has been identified as a defining feature of cultural labourer's engaged in wired forms of labour via the internet (Gill and Pratt, 2008).

Furthermore, the passionate labour ethos, which exchanges workplace security for passionate attachment to one' labour, is particularly impactful upon women (McRobbie, 2016). However, although their experiences may be aligned with wider issues of workplace precarity and gendered experiences of entrepreneurialism, it is imperative to also review such experiences in reference to the specificity of Etsy.com's practices, as a digital platform. More specifically, how various features of the Etsy.com platform have been created by Etsy Inc. to ensure that large numbers of sellers are attracted to the platform. Such features, such as the platforms usability and accessibility, prove to be attractive features for women 'locked out' from mainstream forms of entrepreneurship.

However, they can also prove to 'lock-in' users, an issue further exacerbated by Etsy.com's increasingly monopolisation of the digital craft selling sphere. This has led to some sellers becoming 'platform dependent entrepreneurs,' their businesses dependent on the actions of a wider company, which operates beyond their control or influence. My participants indicated that through doing so, it is possible to see how my participants gender, class, and life course position, intersect with the Etsy.com's platform features, to create a uniquely specific experience.

Chapter 7. Thesis conclusion

This thesis has been occupied with understanding the lived experiences of women engaged in Etsy based selling. It has been informed by the following research aims:

- To identify and understand the factors which impact on women's experiences of selling via Etsy.com.
- To explore how women Etsy sellers experience labour.
- To explore how selling via Etsy impacts women Etsy seller's wider lives.

I have also sought to answer the following research questions:

- Under what conditions do women Etsy sellers work?
- What forms of labour do women Etsy sellers engage in?
    - How are these forms of labour experienced?
- Does the status of being a woman impact on female Etsy sellers' experiences? In what way(s)?

This concluding chapter will therefore consider how I have engaged with my research aims and questions and indicate the key themes I believe have arisen through this research. Through doing this, I will also consider the limitations of my research project, and outline areas for future potential investigation.

7.1. Data chapters overview

Chapter 4. 'What does "better" even mean?'

My first data chapter introduced my participant subcategories and outlined their significance to the wider thesis. Crucially through this chapter, I pinpointed prior employment experiences as fundamental to participants current expectations of Etsy based work. Women's life course positions and family backgrounds also emerged as key informing factors in women's experiences. Across most subcategories, women discussed their dissatisfaction with previous employment experiences. Such dissatisfactions centred on the perceived lack of agency such jobs provided, which included a lack of control and flexibility in terms of working styles. Etsy.com was therein perceived as a pathway towards agentic, self-led, modes of employment. Moreover, for many

women it also represented a route towards meaningful modes of labour, which could offer participants some version of the 'good life.' However, notions of success were also inextricably linked to the post-Fordist work ethic, particularly the promised rewards of self-actualisation and self-realisation of labour. These were aspirations indicated across the participants typologies, but their articulations interacted with women's life histories and family backgrounds. The expectations expressed by participants loved-one's regarding success, proved particularly impactful to women's engagement with Etsy based work. It also formed a source of tension, as some women sough to align expectations of career achievement, with aspirations of individualised, passionate labour. In this manner, I have shown that aspirations towards 'better' forms of labour are more than individually wrought, but connected to women's intimate lives, family backgrounds and employment histories.

Chapter 5. Authenticity, relationality, and visibility

In this chapter, I addressed the imperative participants experienced to operate as 'authentic' Etsy sellers. I explored this mandate, in relationship to the forms of affective and immaterial labour my participants undertake. By highlighting specific experiences across my participant typologies, I argued that for many sellers 'being authentic' is experienced as a moral imperative. This is an imperative with specific gendered dimensions, as participants aligned authenticity with modesty and decorum. This was contrasted with discussions of 'fake' Etsy sellers, overly occupied with their self-image and making money. In this manner, the authenticity mandate reiterates ingrained expectations of appropriate middle-class femininity. I further argued that the authenticity mandate, re-frames women's entrepreneurial success as a form of 'destiny.' This stipulates that the forms of authentic labour required in Etsy work, merely requires women to express their essential attributes and qualities. In terms of marketing and promotional activities, women are navigating the expectation that they should transmit an 'authentic' representation of themselves and lives. However, my research shows the limitations of this ethos, which privileges women who possess specific traits, skills and modes of capital. The cruelty of this mandate is that it frames women's failures to successfully undertake such modes of labour as personal deficiencies. Moreover, for women who rely upon their Etsy shops as a source

of income, such ideals run up against material realities of entrepreneurship.

Chapter 6. 'All your eggs in one basket'

The final data chapter emerged in response to participants' discussions of the specific qualities of running a shop through the Etsy.com platform. The key points discussed related to Etsy.com's features as an e-commerce platform, and as a publicly owned company. The requirement for Etsy.com to attract and retain shop owners forms a crucial, impacting feature to women's experiences of Etsy based labour. I have shown that the platforms usability and accessibility form 'lock-in' features, which has resulted in some participants becoming 'platform dependent entrepreneurs' (Cutalo and Kenney, 2021). Sellers who do wish to leave must navigate Etsy.com's increasing monopolisation of the digital craft selling sphere, which has resulted in reduced alternative options beyond the platform. These are features exacerbated by pre-existing cultural and material barriers women experience when attempting to create micro-businesses online. For participants dependent on their shops for revenue, this leads to employment insecurity and precarity. Crucially, I have shown how the power asymmetry between platform owners and workers, impacts women's experiences of running Etsy based shop. I have further explored how personal relationships form a crucial component to navigating the demands of Etsy based selling, particularly in relation to financial precarity. Moreover, how these experiences are further informed by pre-existing forms of inequality, such as participants' access to financial and cultural capital, and life course positions. Therein, this chapter further establishes the complexities associated with operating as a female Etsy seller, specifically in relationship to the Etsy.com platform.

7.2. Limitations of the thesis

Before outlining some of the key emergent themes I identified within my thesis, I will address the limitations of this research project.

Firstly, this thesis in no way constitutes an exhaustive or full account of my participant's experiences of Etsy based work. While producing this thesis, I was led by my research questions and aims, which necessarily bounded the chapter

content I have presented. Moreover, there are elements of my participants' stories which, due to the constraints of a thesis project, I could not present. For example, although they were themes I identified throughout my fieldwork and analysis, I have not explored participants experiences of the private and public sphere and their relationship with their items with great depth. In this regard, the content of this thesis is informed by what my participants communicated was important to them and what I believed best answered my research questions.

Secondly, areas underexplored in the thesis also relate to the participants I was able to secure through my fieldwork. During my fieldwork, I spoke to several women who had children, who wished to participate in the project. However, the very fact of having children proved a challenge in securing such participants, who invariably were juggling their Etsy work with childcare duties. Ultimately only one participant (Rebecca) had a child. Therefore, the potential interactions between Etsy based work and motherhood remained an underexplored aspect of this thesis.

Finally, the limitations of this thesis also relate to the effects of my research design and participant sampling. As I have indicated in Chapter 3, my approach to securing research participants was informed by the field and my research design was largely inductive. Although this provided benefits to my research, as outlined and chapter 3, it also forms the source of some limitations. Namely, my thesis does not directly address processes of racialisation in participants experiences of legible femininity and the intersections of race with class and gender (Phipps, 2020). A sampling criterion that addressed specific experiences of social inequalities in women's lives could have potentially generated a more intersectional analysis of my participants' experiences. If I had used a more purposive sampling approach, I could have explored the impacts of wider social factors on women Etsy seller's lives such as the inclusion of ethnic and economic status as sampling criteria could have allowed greater exploration of the intersecting effects of race and class on women's experiences of Etsy.com-based work. Indeed, my inductive approach meant that the processes of categorising and analysing my typologies largely occurred though the processes of fieldwork and subsequent analysis, rather than at the point of research design. In this respect, I

acknowledge that achieving a balance of deductive and inductive research design is a nuanced and highly skilled craft, that I hope to develop through future research projects.

In the following section, I will outline some of the key themes I perceived through my scholarship and indicate their contributions to the sociology of gender, class and digital economies.

7.3. Key themes, contributions, and areas for future study

9.3.1. Gendered subjects of achievement and passion

Changes are occurring in how the markers of middle-class success are encoded and experienced (McRobbie, 2016). McRobbie (2016) and Farrugia's (2019) scholarship both outline increasing demands placed on young people to treat work as a site of pleasurable self-actualisation. For my participants, aspirations of fulfilling, meaningful modes of labour, are clear motivators towards Etsy based work. I have shown how the specific contours of these ambitions are shaped and informed by wider structural forces, relating to experiences of class and gender. My research adds further dimensions to such scholarship regarding the intersections between post-Fordist work ethics, notions of femininity and postfeminism.

Farrugia's (2019) work provided a critical framework for understanding my participants encounters with the post-Fordist work ethic. My research adds to his scholarship, by critically addressing intersecting classed and gendered encounters with this ethic. The post-Fordist work ethic impacts women across class backgrounds, however its specific dimensions are forged in reference to women's class status. In my work, I have shown that women's expectations of success are tied to classed encounters with the post-Fordist work ethic. I have shown that female 'subjects of achievement,' engaging in Etsy based work and aspiring to become 'subjects of passion,' are particularly tasked with navigating contradictory cultural notions of success.

This is an endeavour which is further complicated by family expectations of success and achievement. Moreover, my work indicates that working class

women's opportunities to become subjects of passion, was informed by their prior accruement of economic and cultural capital. This was capital gained by pursuing markers of achievement, such as postgraduate degrees and prestigious jobs. Margot, for example, came from a self-described working-class family that valued gaining a degree and a well-paid job. Through attaining these markers, she was financially and culturally positioned to prioritise her own conceptions of success, which deprioritised profit-making. In this way, I have further indicated the limitations of the post-feminist narrative that women's experiences of success and achievement, are born purely from self-endeavour, self-management, and making the 'right' choices.

As indicated in the work of Harris (2003), Gill (2007, 2017) and Gill and Scharff (2011) postfeminist discourse appeals to women as a homogenous cultural group, erasing differences of inequality. Becoming a 'can-do' girl, where workplace success is merely a matter of 'leaning in,' are pervasive, postfeminist narratives regarding female emancipation (Harris, 2003, Gill, 2017). My work has indicated some of the limitations of such narratives, wherein women's experiences of life and work are deeply impacted by wider structural inequalities, such as class and gender. Moreover, I have shown the complex, micro-level interactions with these contradictory demands and explored strategies women Etsy sellers employ to navigate them, such as high degrees of self-discipline and self-organisation. Rather than merely being expressions of an essential femininity, my research has indicated how such activities constitute skilled work.

Therein, my research contributes to scholarship regarding classed encounters with the post-Fordist, postfeminist work ethic and raises further questions regarding women's life chances within platform capitalism.

7.3.2. Generational experiences

My research also provides perspectives of older employed women and their expectations of labour via the Etsy.com platform. The older women I interviewed were not immune to cultural shifts occurring in the spheres of work, nor changing expectations regarding what constituted 'good' and meaningful forms of work.

Indeed, my two oldest participants, Margot and Phoebe, both expressed the desire to re-frame notions of career success to better suit their values and ideals of 'good work.' Foster (2018) indicates in his research regarding UK retirement policies, that recent governments have sought to postpone exit from the labour force by raising retirement ages and reducing public services for the elderly. Indeed, the intersections between class, employment and life course position are key areas of research within neoliberal scholarship. My research indicates the impacting effects of life course position, access to capital and women's capacities to engage in the passionate labour ethos.

Luckman (2015) has shown that career success as a female freelancer, is largely dependent on having already gained career success in another field. Within my research, women who had transferred into Etsy based work from previously financially well-renumerated careers were invariably older (aged 40+). Within this context, the possession of financial capital, such as savings and home ownership, provided a material and psychological 'cushion,' necessary to take on the risks associated with Etsy based work. This point is emphasised by the experiences of older participants, who had not transferred neatly from well-paid roles into Etsy based work. Indeed, for participants Betsy and Anita the necessity to generate a profit formed the critical, motivating force towards Etsy based work. Their life course position sharpened this experience; as Betsy stated, her Etsy shop was her 'last change' to make 'a lot of money.'

In this manner, my work contributes to scholarship regarding the intersections of generation and class, in women's encounters with contemporary work. It also provides avenues for future research regarding changing expectation and experiences of labour amongst older generations of women.

9.3.3. Contradictory femininities

This thesis has further contributed to scholarship regarding the forms of labour demanded of women engaged in freelance, entrepreneurial work through digital platforms. I have indicated the inherent tensions women Etsy sellers are experiencing, to align culturally normative ideals of femininity with demands of entrepreneurship.

I have drawn upon Skeggs (1997, 2005, 2009) work to illuminate the deeply classed qualities which inform our cultural notions of legible femininity. These

centre on prescribed qualities of decorum, modesty and other-centredness. Conversely, expectations of neoliberal femininity demand women utilise all aspects of self in the pursuit of being entrepreneurial, a mandate which requires self-promotion and visibility (Banet-Weiser and Arzumanova, 2012). These are expectations further impacted by the forms of relational labour, self-promotion and visibility required of Etsy based sellers.

As I have shown across my data chapters, the post-Fordist, postfeminist work ethic is supported by feminised passionate labour tropes. These include the perception that women's success hinges on following their individual 'destiny' and being 'authentic' to an essential self. Within wider cultural discourse, women are supposedly now empowered to be able to 'make-over' work, to suit their personal ambitions and individual interests (McRobbie, 2016). My thesis has critically addressed these tropes, indicating how they form a collision of neoliberal expectations of self-entrepreneurship, with traditional expectations of legible femininity. My research provides a unique insight into some of the consequences of this collision, as mediated by individual women.

Through my research, I have shown how Etsy based work requires women navigate these conflicting expectations, which coalesce further with women's access to forms of cultural and economic capital. Indeed, the moral dimensions afforded to being a 'genuine' and 'authentic' Etsy sellers, further indicate the classed dimensions to Etsy based selling. My research has shown that middle-class women are privileged in their capacity to communicate the 'right' authentic self and build connections with middle-class audiences. In this respect, my research challenges the essentialising nature of such tropes, which purport to form a route towards female entrepreneurialism available to any woman capable of capitalising on her 'authentic', passionate self. Indeed, experiences such as though shared by participants Celeste and Jamie, show the damage caused by cultural narratives that purport entrepreneurial success springs from an essential self, rather than formations of capital and skilled labour. Their experiences indicate the consequences of not possessing the 'right' essential self, wherein failure is internalised and can lead to feelings of self-blame and self-flagellation. My research therefore provides further insight into what Gill (2011) has described as being postfeminism's 'psychic life,' wherein neoliberal, postfeminist ideology structures individual women's

subjectivity.

Moreover, middle-class women are also not exempt from the effects of wider cultural imperatives towards hyper-productivity, which I have shown to be further embedded within features of the Etsy.com platform. For example, participants such as Louise, who expressed feeling pushed by the Etsy.com platform to raise their sale numbers, to absorb the cost of free shipping and offer discount sales. As I have shown, Etsy.com based selling requires constant, vigilant interaction with the Etsy.com platform, to ensure customers receive swift responses to enquiries, product listings are updated, etc. In this respect, I have shown that the Etsy.com platform perpetuates neoliberal expectations of unceasing productivity and forms an example of the neoliberal 'factory without borders,' wherein sites of life and labour are highly enmeshed (Hardt and Negri, 2000).

Furthermore, my research contributes to scholarship regarding the cultural positioning of women as the 'ideal' neoliberal worker, and the repercussions of this for female Etsy sellers. More specifically, I have explored how gendered expectations of female entrepreneurialism draw on a cultural 'baggage' of female experience, wherein work and life activities are fused and a 'women's work is never done' (Morini, 2007). I have further addressed these experiences in relation to neoliberal expectations of entrepreneurial citizenship, wherein individuals are compelled to treat all aspects of life and self as an entrepreneurial project, leading to high degrees of self-scrutiny, self-management, and self-flagellation. As I have outlined, the blurring of life/work spheres has complex outcomes for female Etsy sellers, such as unceasing workloads and low work/life boundaries alongside experiences of pleasure and self-fulfilment. My contributions regard the specifically gendered, classed dimensions of these experiences, indicating how women engaged in Etsy based work are must navigate complex cultural, societal, and economic demands.

In this respect, I perceive my research as contributing to feminist scholarship regarding the engendering of classed femininities, which are finding new articulations through the context of digital platforms.

9.3.4. Etsy as a platform economy

Etsy.com purports to offer women a risk-free entry point into business

ownership, without the requirement of formal loans or specific IT expertise, which they identify as particular barriers for women (2015, 2019). However, my research has indicated the exploitative qualities of the Etsy.com platform model. These particularly centre on its impetus towards market monopolisation, its seller lock- in features and reliance on obscured algorithms. Rather than being risk free, self- management of risk and precarity forms a clear defining feature of women's experiences of Etsy based work.

The management of risk and precarity formed a key mode of labour experienced by my participants. Women's capacities to undertake such forms of labour are not purely due to their capacity to make 'good choices,' as neoliberal narratives purport. Rather, my research indicates the for women engaging in Etsy based work possessing pre-existing forms of cultural and economic capital is vital. Particularly, to negate and manage effects of employment precarity. Moreover, my work further shows the importance of women's Etsy seller's private and intimate relationships as financial and psychological safety nets against experiences of precarity. Therein, my work further highlights the limitations of Etsy.com's claims towards enabling women towards entrepreneurial independence.

My work contributes to wider sociological debates regarding the forms of exploitation occurring within digital media spheres, where labour and leisure activities are closely entangled (Andrejevic, 2012, Hardt and Negri, 2000, Jarret, 2015, Ross, 2012). I align my research with Jarret's (2015) scholarship regarding the digital housewife, wherein she utilises the productive/consumptive figure of the housewife to illuminate the complex experience of labour/leisure found within digital media. Much like the domestic activities of the housewife are undertaken out of love, but are essential to the economy, I have shown that pleasurable features of using the Etsy.com platform - such as the ease and fun in creating a shop - are directly linked to the platform's profit-making model. Indeed, echoing features of the digital housewife, many Etsy.com seller's experience genuine emotions of pleasure and self-fulfillment – whilst also experiencing the effects of the power disparities 'baked in' to digital platforms (Jarret, 2015, Partin, 2020). Indeed, my research has further shown the vulnerabilities women experience to the asymmetrical power dynamics occurring between platform users and

platform owners, wherein platforms strive to create ‘platform dependent entrepreneurs’ (Cutalo and Kenney, 2021). Moreover, I have shown that the exploitative dimensions of the Etsy.com platform are interacting with pre-existing gendered inequalities, such as access to forms of economic and cultural capital. In this respect, my research provides a gendered perspective of women’s experiences of freelance labour via Etsy.com as a selling platform.

Furthermore, in consideration of the cultural lionisation of platform labour as a solution to economic woes, I believe my research to be of pressing importance (Srnick, 2017). The UK government has praised platform entrepreneurship as a key source of the UK’s continuing ‘economic resilience,’ which provides citizens opportunities to harness ‘idle’ assets and skills (Deane, 2016:7, Wosskow, 2014). Moreover, recent government publications such as the report ‘Unlocking the sharing economy: An independent review,’ describe platform-based businesses as particularly suited to women, as they offer ‘a real opportunity to work flexibly and to be ‘micro-entrepreneurs’’ (Wosskow, 2014:14). As my research has shown, such mainstream discourses have real life outcomes for women, and therefore demand further critical, scholarly engagement.

9.4. Conclusion

This thesis sought to understand the impacting effects of Etsy-based work on women Etsy shop owners. Through undertaking my research, a cluster of intersecting factors emerged. Fundamentally, my research indicates that long-standing cultural norms regarding appropriate and legible femininity inform female Etsy sellers’ experiences of Etsy based work. These are norms which shape how women engage in Etsy-based work, particularly modes of relational and affective labour. Moreover, I have shown that such expectations align with notions of respectable middle-class femininity and privilege women with pre-existing forms of cultural and economic capital. Such ideals find expression through the valorisation of ‘authenticity’ as an ethical ideal. However, the interlinking mandates of decorous femininity and authenticity can be hard to, reconcile with the demands of profitable business ownership. This, therefore, proves a particular challenge for women reliant on their Etsy shops for revenue.

In conjunction with such normative ideals of femininity, neoliberal and post-feminist ideologies further impact women Etsy sellers. These ideologies have positioned women as ideal neoliberal workers, who need only harness their natural entrepreneurial qualities to experience success. Moreover, that via the post- Fordist work ethic, women can makeover work to better suit their passions and interests, and experience labour as a source of self-actualisation and self-realisation. My research has shown the impacting effect women's generational cohorts, prior employment experience and family backgrounds have on achieving such aspirations.

I have further outlined ways in which such cultural expectations of women, find expression through the Etsy.com platform. Etsy.com purports to offer women a route towards such modes of meaningful, agentic work. However, my research has critically addressed how Etsy Inc. extracts profit from its platform users. I have shown that Etsy.com constitutes an example of platform capitalism, wherein user lock-in features and monopolisation of the craft-selling market have been mobilised to create Etsy.com platform-dependent entrepreneurs. For some Etsy sellers, this contributes to experiences of employment precarity, which requires individual risk management strategies. Through a wider framework of supposed neoliberal meritocracy, these are outcomes that are further internalised as individual failings. In this manner, my research provides insight into the interlinking effects of neoliberalism, post-Fordism, femininity, class, and platform capitalism on female Etsy seller's experiences.

Appendix A: Interview questions

Interview/Discussion Questions

Introduction

- Research objectives
- Informed Consent Form
- Confidentiality
- Any questions?

Section 1: Present Circumstances

- Age
- Nationality
- Where live?
    - Household?
    - Married/kids etc.?

- Other work/ life responsibilities?
- How many people are part of your Etsy shop? What do they do?

Section 2: The Past

Tell me briefly about your work history

- Reasons /changing work?
- Process that led you to join Etsy?

Probe for feelings about old jobs, any dissatisfaction

- Ways you work changed? How?

Probe for:

-structure?

-autonomy?

-flexibility?

-individualisation?

- freedom?

- *precariousness?*

- Any reasons why Etsy?
- Expectations about Etsy?

-This changed? How?

Section 3: The Etsy Shop

<u>Can you describe the process of setting up your Etsy shop?</u>

- Name?
- Layout?

- Images?
- Product?

Probe for personal link, aspects of self/personality

- Nuts and bolts?

- any surprises?

<u>Tell me about your product</u>

- How decided on product(s)?
- Describe products?
- Who is it designed for?

- See yourself in your product?

(*probe relationship – product represent self in some way?)*

- Why customers choose your product?

<u>Tell me about your customers</u>

- How/ describe/ relationship/ customers?
- How do you communicate with customers?

- Do you think your customers feel they know you?

  -Is that important?

- Why/why not?

- How? (Instagram, Pinterest, etc.)

Section 4: Branding

<u>Would you say you had an Etsy 'brand'?</u>

- How would you describe it?

- Do you try to create an image or 'story' with your brand?

  - How do you do this?
- How/decide/brand? *(process)*

- Relationship / brand?

  - See self in brand?

Does your brand fit your own personal style or aesthetic?

- Why/why not
- How important is this to you?

- Factors /successful/appealing brand?

- Links / social media platforms?

Section 5: Social Media/Marketing

Tell me about your use of social media

- What social media?
- Link / Etsy selling?
- How related?
- Importance?
- What/ on / social media?

(*probe for personal images, images of self/family, curated images)*

- Separate personal/professional?

    - Why/why not?

- How often/when update social media?

- Opinions/feelings?

- Is social media work?

    - What kind(s) of work?

Social Media Images

- Describe images?
- Process /creating images?
- How /decide/content?
- How/ satisfied /images?
- What /response /other people /images?
- How/ impacted/Etsy shop?

Section 6: Structuring and managing work

- Describe to me your most recent working day from the moment you woke up to the moment you went to bed

    - When begin/stop/breaks?
    - Etsy work /other activities?

- Where work?
- 'typical' day?

- Routine?

  - What routine?
  - Why?
  - Thoughts/feelings?

- How manage tasks throughout the day?

  - Challenges/difficulties managing/structuring work?
  - Manage deadlines?
  - Opinions/feelings?

(probe for: issues of time management, over-work, task bleeding, self-blame)

- <u>Tell me about the important of self-motivation</u>

  - Issues? Consequences?

  - Motivation to stop work?

  (Probe: motivation to start work, stay focused on activities, to finish work)

Section 5: The home/domestic labour

- Do/Etsy work/home?
  - Why/why not?
    - thoughts/feelings?
  - Impact of Etsy on home/home on Etsy?

- How do you know that you have 'arrived' at work?

- How do you know when you are 'home'

  - Other work at home?
  - Domestic work?
    - What do?
    - When?
    - Changes since Etsy work?
    - Opinions/feelings?

(probe for integration/separation of work/domestic work, view of this)

Workspace

- Would you say you have a workspace?
- Where do you work?
- Describe?
- Feel about/view workspace

Section 7: Family/Personal life

- Family/living arrangements?

  - How family/partner feel about Etsy?
  - Etsy impacted on family life?
  - How?
  - Family life impacted on Etsy work?
  - How?
  - Does your partner get involved in your Etsy shop?
  - What do they do?
  - What's your view on this?
  - Family/partner supportive?
  - How?
  - Impact?
  - Importance/significance?
  - Opinions/feelings?

(Probe for: role of partner, financial/emotional support, feelings about this)

Section 8: Financial Impact

Can you tell me about the financial considerations of running an Etsy shop?

- **Seasonal?**
- how manage this?
- How find/**dependency on sales**?

- **Plan** financially?
    - How?
    - Feelings/opinions?
- **Financial pressures**?

If relevant to participant:

- Etsy work when pregnant?
    - childcare/elder care/etc.?

(probe for bulimic lifestyle/financial precarity/ partner support, maternity leave)

Section 9: Me and Co/Labour of the self

What does it mean to be successful on Etsy?

- Particular / personality /does well selling on Etsy? Can you describe?

- Particular /appearance/aesthetic look of sellers does well on Etsy? Describe?
- Opinions/thoughts?

- Own personality/appearance part of Etsy brand/marketing?
- How?
- Feelings/opinions?

- Pressure about appearance/personality?

  - How responded?
  - How would you describe your professional identity if asked? E.g. An artist? Maker? Entrepreneur?
  - Why do you describe yourself this way?
  - How important is this description?

Networking /Etsy 'community'

- Do you communicate with other Etsy sellers online?
- How often?
- What do you talk about?
- How would you describe these interactions/relationships?
- How important is interactions/relationships with other Etsy sellers?
- Communicate in real life?
- Involved / Etsy groups?
- Online community groups?
- Meetups etc?
- Craft fairs?

-Views/Feelings on these?

- Would you describe it as networking?

- Interactions/friendships impact on shop?
- How?
- Thoughts/feelings?

Conclusion

- Thoughts about future of Etsy work?
- Advice for someone starting Etsy shop?
- Questions
- Thankyou's etc.
- Invitation to join future interviews/chat group

Appendix B. Plain language statement

Project Title: “Scottish women, creative labour and 'Etsy': An examination of freelance 'passionate' work under neo-liberal and post- Fordist capitalism”

Researcher: Anna Clover

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it involves. Please take time to read the following information. Feel free to ask me if anything is unclear or you would like more information.

About the study

This is a study about the changing nature of work in the UK. There is currently a growing proportion of women leaving mainstream work, and choosing to create businesses of their own at home. The online platform Etsy.com is one of the ways many women are choosing to change how and when they work.

I am trying to find out how women who do Etsy work experience these changes to how they live and work. The kinds of questions I want to ask include -

What are the benefits to Etsy work, and what are the downsides?
Does Etsy work allow women to take more control over their working lives? Does Etsy work make sense for women with children, or does it make family life more difficult?
Is Etsy work a good alternative to more mainstream forms of work?

What does taking part in the study involve?

When you take part in this project, you will be asked to participate in an interview. This will be a face-to-face interview with the project researcher, Anna Clover. This will be conducted in a comfortable, quiet location of your choice – it could be a public place such as a cafe, or a private location such your home or work. If a face to face interview is not possible, it can also be conducted via Skype. The interview will last about an hour and will be recorded with your permission.

I will ask a series of questions, but the interview will be quite relaxed, with the opportunity to bring up any areas of Etsy work that you might like to talk about. The interview questions will focus on your personal experiences of using Etsy as a seller, and your thoughts/feelings/opinions about those experiences.

You can choose to not answer any questions at any time. You also have complete freedom to leave the study at any time, without needing to give a reason.

What will happen to my answers?

If you agree, we would like to use the answers gained through our interview as a form of research data. The audio recordings and written transcripts of our interview will be stored on a password-protected laptop that only I, the researcher, has access to.

The contents of the interview will be completely anonymised. I will ask you to choose a pseudonym, and only I, the researcher, will know your real name. Any reference to other people/organisations/places etc. will also be obscured, to maintain your anonymity. Only I will listen to your interview.

It is important to note that there is always the possibility with interview data that based on your answers someone may work out who you are. For this

reason, I cannot guarantee complete confidentiality. However, I will do everything in my power to ensure sure your data is as confidential as possible, and that you remain anonymous.

The only time I would share information you have provided with another party is if you or someone you know is at risk of harm. If this happened, I would discuss the situation with you first.

We expect that the research will be completed by summer 2020. The interview data will be published as part of a PhD thesis, which may also be used to write journal

articles. The data may also be made available to other researchers, to help with future research projects. I will use pseudonyms throughout the research to hide your identity, and to obscure any references to locations/other people/businesses etc.

Will I see the report you write?

When the project is finished, I will produce a summary of the research findings, which I will share with you and any other research participants interested in the results.

Further questions or concerns

The study has been approved by the College of Social Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Glasgow. If you have questions about the research, you can contact the Principal Investigator, Anna Clover, using the details below:

Anna

Clover PhD

Researcher

University of Glasgow

School of Social and Political Sciences

Email: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

The project supervisors can be contacted via email at:

Dr Matt Dawson:

Matt.Dawson@glasgow.ac.uk

Dr Susan Batchelor:

Susan.Batchelor@glasgow.ac.uk

If you have concerns about the conduct of the research you can contact Dr Muir Houston, College of Social Sciences Ethics Officer, as follows:

Dr Muir Houston

Lecturer

University of

Glasgow School of

Education

Rm223, Level 2, St Andrew's Building, Glasgow G3 6NH

Email: Muir.Houston@glasgow.ac.uk

Tel: +44 (0)141-330 4699

Appendix C. Informed consent form

University of Glasgow | College of Social Sciences

Informed Consent Form

Project: Women, creative labour and Etsy

Researcher: Anna Clover

E-mail: xxxxxxxx@student.gla.ac.uk

This consent form is intended to check that you are happy with the information you have received about this study, that you are aware of your rights and responsibilities as a participant and to confirm that you wish to take part in the study.

Please circle as appropriate

1. Have you been given information regarding the research project, a description of its general purpose, and the opportunity to discuss any questions with the researcher? **Yes/no**
2. Do you understand that you are free to refuse to answer any questions and that you have the right terminate the interview at any time? **Yes/no**

3. Do you understand that your interview will be recorded? **Yes/no**

4. Do you understand that the information you give will be treated in the strictest confidence, and that any personal details will be anonymised? **Yes/no**

5. Do you understand that the research data may be shared with other researchers and that in the instance of possible harm to yourself/others, the researcher may share information with a third party? **Yes/no**

6. Do you agree to take part in the study? **Yes/no**

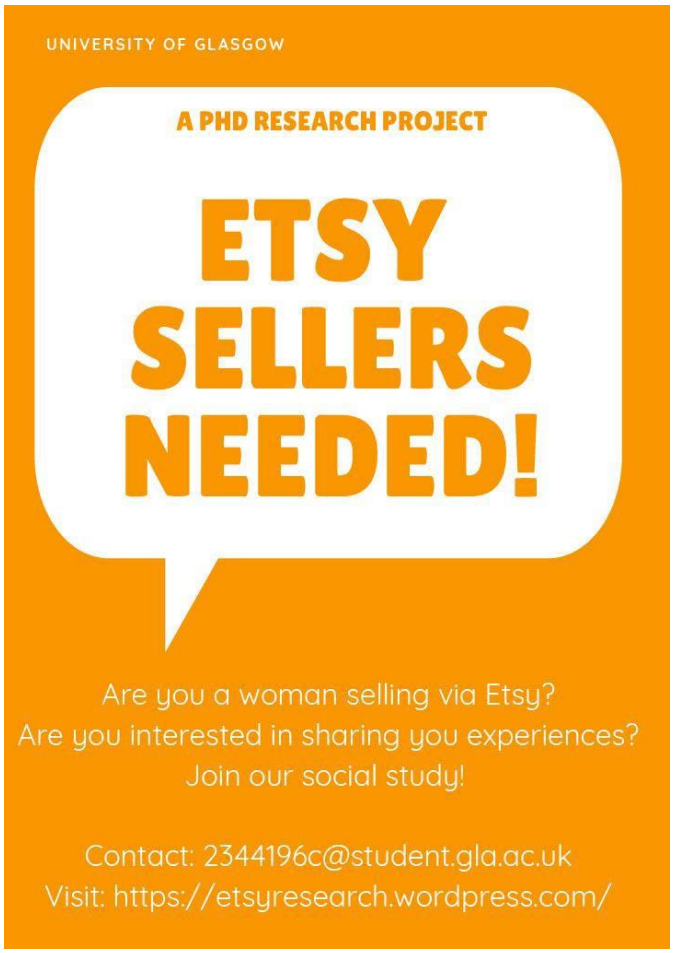
I confirm that quotations from the interview can be used in a final research report and other publications. I understand these will be used anonymously, with names, places and identifying details changed.

Name in block letters

Participant Signature: ..... Date:

Researcher Signature: ..... Date:

Appendix D. Recruitment poster



Appendix E. Recruitment flyer


UNIVERSITY OF GLASGOW
WOMEN
ETSY SELLERS
NEEDED!
For a PHD research project
Are you a UK woman selling via Etsy?
Interested in sharing your experiences?
Join our study!
https://etsyresearch.wordpress.com/
etsyresearchproject@gmail.com

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