# WALKING BAREFOOT

## A STUDY OF HIGH-SKILLED WOMEN IN THE GIG ECONOMY

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# Abstract

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| **Title** | Walking barefoot - A study of high-skilled women in the Gig Economy |
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| **Keywords** | Gig Economy, Gender, Inequality, Doing Gender, Redoing Gender, Ideal Worker |
| **Purpose** | Increase the understanding of the role of gender in the Gig Economy. |
| **Research Question** | How do high-skilled women experience work in the Gig Economy? |
| **Methodology** | This research follows a social constructivist approach with an abductive mechanism that allowed for parallel working with theory and empirical data. Ten in-depth semi-structured interviews build the foundation for the research in this thesis. |
| **Findings** | Adjacent to other findings, we found that the high-skilled women we studied viewed their role in the gig economy as a way of 'walking barefoot' by freeing themselves from gender structures and finding a balance between their work, family, and the self. |
| **Contributions** | With the metaphor of 'walking barefoot,' we have contributed to a new way of theorizing the dynamics of gender within the Gig Economy. |

# Acknowledgments

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# 1.0 Introduction

"The economy of tomorrow, we are informed breathlessly by journalists, will not consist of 'jobs', but rather 'gigs'" (Stewart & Stanford, 2017, p. 421). Friedman (2014) explains that a large part of the media attention focuses on these unusual work arrangements, where the necessity for the permanent relationship with the employer is eliminated, in such as way that it allows workers to move freely within this economy and erases the boundaries between what the workers desire to do and the kind of tasks they are offered to do. In September 2011 Horowitz summed it up for Atlantic: "We're no longer simply lawyers, or photographers, or writers … we're part-time lawyers-amateur photographers who write on the side". However, this kind of work has its downsides. Most of the scholars in the field relate the gig economy with insecurity and uncertainty which could undoubtedly affect the workers' desire to engage with this type of work (e.g. Kalleberg, 2000; Houseman, 2001; Friedman, 2014). Given that, we wonder, how do workers experience work in the gig economy?

Historically speaking, traditional work arrangements were seen as the foundation of work. The main characteristics of those arrangements were considered to be a fixed contract, regulated work hours, defined workplace, and job security (Kalleberg, 2000; Houseman, 2001; Gallagher and Parks, 2001; Boschak & Davis-Balke, 2006; Capelli & Keller, 2013; Friedman, 2014). Despite this, the sustenance of traditional work arrangements became high-priced, and in turn ignited a rise in the alternative work arrangements (Friedman, 2014). The foundation of those alternative arrangements is seen in the employer's ability to use the workforce without the promise of permanent employment (Gallagher & Parks, 2001).

Stewart and Stanford (2017) discuss the term 'economy of tomorrow', when addressing the prospects of the workplace which provides the employees with the flexibility that traditional work arrangements can not. That flexible workplace consists of short-term work, freelancing, and self-employment, all of which Lewchuk (2017) comprises under the notion of the 'gig economy'. In addition, Abraham, Haltiwanger, Sandusky, and Speltzer (2018) define the notion

two ways; (1) less-structures flexible work arrangements, and (2) work arrangements supported through online platforms. Furthemore, Petriglieri, Ashford & Wiśniewski (2019) also indicate that the vast majority of the research and media attention primarily concerns gigs[1] that are considered low-skilled. For that reason, our study aims to analyze the gig workers who are, in contrast, well educated and are performing gigs of a high-knowledge nature. Apart from that, scholars also warn that the gender preferences, when hiring for gigs as well as the flexibility of the sharing (gig) economy, might maintain or even emphasize the discourse of gender differences (Schoenbaum, 2016; Cook, Diamond, Hall, List & Oyster, 2018). One way to interrogate these potential gender differences is by studying women's experiences of work in the gig economy. In light of that, we will be studying high-skilled women performing gigs. Specifically, women that are a part of an all-female network, FemGIG[2].

In our study of the relation between high-skilled women and the gig economy, we find it relevant to introduce the literature of gender and work. Studies show that the traditional image of a worker is based on masculine ideals (Acker, 1990, 1992b, 2006; Collinson & Hearn, 1994; Fletcher, 1998; Alvesson & Billing, 2009), where Acker (1992b, 2006) implies that the notion of the 'ideal worker' is a societal construction associated with a strong and powerful man in organizations. Hence, indicating that in order to fit within the image of an ideal worker, a woman needs to act like a man. Furthermore, as already stated, the studies of high-skilled women in the gig economy are scarce, however, there is a multitude of research on female entrepreneurship where studies have shown that female entrepreneurs in many cases try to mimic masculine ideals (e.g. Mirchandani, 1999; Bruni, Gherardi & Poggio, 2004; Lewis, 2006). Taking that into account, we acknowledge the similarity of certain features between the gig economy and entrepreneurship, such as being autonomous in the work that one is doing (Burtch, Carnahan & Greenwood, 2018), nevertheless, we also recognize that one of the prominent differences is that the gig economy entails shorter assignments and ensures a higher degree of uncertainty (Friedman, 2014). Thus, we intend to understand whether the varied characteristics entrepreneurs display could also be applied to high-skilled women in the gig economy.

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[1] "Less structured work arrangement" (Abraham, Haltiwanger, Sandusky & Spletzer, 2018, p.1).
[2] FemGIG is a fictitious name for the company/network we will study

In continuance, the vast majority of the research in the literature of gender and work relates those two to the family aspect, as it signals that the historical discourses portrays women as the bearers of domestic duties, while it only depicts men as responsible for the work obligations (e.g. Bergen, 1991; Acker, 1994; Gornick & Meyers, 2008). This aspect is a matter Friedman (2014) thinks that the gig economy could potentially intensify, since the flexibility that it necessitates and the ability to work from home, might be suitable for workers who are seen as bearers of the family-related responsibilities, essentially, emphasizing women. Considering that our research draws on gender studies, where the existing literature explains historically gendered discourses which entail differences between men and women both in work as well as in domestic duties, we found the concepts of 'doing gender' and 'redoing gender' conducted by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) adequate as our theoretical lens for the study.

The concept of doing gender, implemented by West and Zimmerman (1987), is defined as a reproduction of differences between genders, which are not seen as habitual, biological or essential, but were on the contrary institutionalized in society. This institutionalization of differences creates norms and rules of conduct instructed by societal discourses on how women and men should behave, which consequently means that individuals cannot avoid doing gender. In turn, redoing gender is insinuated when individuals in society start to express gender in more vague ways (West and Zimmerman, 2009). Subsequently, by using these concepts we will be able to understand how high-skilled women in the gig economy experience their work and also observe whether these women are maintaining the historical discourse of women in organizational life, or if their work in the gig economy creates circumstances where the redoing of those discourses could be indicated. To conclude, the purpose of our research is to increase the understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy. Based on this purpose, this study will be guided by the question:

- How do high-skilled women experience work in the gig economy?

# 1.1 Disposition

The disposition of this paper takes the form of six chapters. Firstly, we lay out the foundations in respect to the purpose of our intended study and the question that guided the research, which is; How do high-skilled women experience work in the gig economy? Secondly, we will focus on presenting the relevant theoretical background, upon which we will base the research, as well as our theoretical lens, the concepts of 'doing and redoing gender' implemented by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009). Main fields of interest from theory will be as follows; (1) The gig economy, (2) Gender and work, (3) Doing and redoing gender. Thirdly, we will focus on the methodological and philosophical grounding that will help us in conducting the research, as well as the limitations and moral and ethics by which we will be guided. Fourthly, we will present the core data collected after conducting the interviews. The analysis was guided by the metaphor of 'walking barefoot' and is divided to five relevant themes following our findings: (1) Being stuck in tight shoes; (2) The decision to walk barefoot; (3) Continuing to walk barefoot; (4) Putting the tight shoes back on; and (5) Walking with one shoe on. We argue that by doing so, we apprehend the complexity of the research on gender inequality within the context of the gig economy, as well as expand the meaning of the interviewed women's reflections of their work in the gig economy. Followingly, we will discuss the analyzed data in line with the existing literature in the field. Lastly, we will explain the empirical findings and reflect upon the theoretical contribution of our study, as well as propose the basis for future research.

# 2.0 Literature review

The following chapter will consist of the core theoretical background, taking the form of three main themes; (1) The Gig economy, (2) Gender and work, and (3) Doing and redoing Gender. Our objective is to provide a reader with a broad theoretical background upon which we have based our paper, and to define a theoretical lens of 'doing and redoing gender' by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) that we used when analyzing the empirical data. More specifically, we outline the historical background of traditional and alternative work arrangements, as well as the characteristics of the gig economy and lay out the foundation of the existing research of gender and work field.

## 2.1 Gig economy

Historically, traditional work arrangements were seen as the backbone of the economy, which were characterized by a fixed contract, regulated working hours, a site of work and a certain level of job security (Kalleberg, 2000; Gallagher and Parks, 2001; Houseman, 2001; Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Capelli & Keller, 2013; Friedman, 2014). Further, Friedman (2014) also states that the position and the salary of the worker depended heavily on the previous work experience, whereas the future within that employment relied on the job performance. Moreover, Broschak and Davis-Blake (2006) signify that traditional or standard work is characterized by the relationship the employer has with an employee, as well as the level of control that the former has with the latter. However, substituting that traditional employment with more flexible alternative work arrangements can produce an "economic boost" (p. 185), as it would allow workers a better connection with the work they desire, as well as the reduction of costs that employers face when hiring them permanently (Friedman, 2014).

Alternative work arrangements can be defined as all types of arrangements that are, by the relationship between the employer and an employee, different from the standard or traditional work (Gallagher & Parks, 2001; Capelli & Keller, 2013). Even though there is no agreed definition on what constitutes alternative work arrangements, Gallagher and Parks (2001) indicate that the fundamental assumption of these arrangements is in the organization's ability to make use of the employees at any point in time without the need of a more permanent employment. Furthermore, the authors suggest that by doing so, the employers reduce the initial capital of the recruitment process (hiring, training, evaluating), given that the risk of an error when hiring is eliminated and that the duration of the arrangement is not clearly defined.

Alternative work arrangements are often also labeled as precarious work, and although there is no clear definition of what kind of work is precarious, Lewchuk (2017) describes it as a form of employment that ultimately leads to a feeling of lesser security in the workplace. The author indicates that the core workforce for the precarious work pose a challenge to define, however she also indicates that in literature temporary, contract, independent, on-call and self-employed workers would be seen under the label of precarious work. These types of work arrangements, even though seemingly similar, vary in definitions. As Capelli and Keller (2013) imply, the common factor in all of them is the worker's flexibility and ability to choose from various types of work tasks, therefore, signifying the importance of mentioning the variety of options on the market for these workers. Moreover, Houseman (2001) illustrates that the rise of the alternative work arrangements in comparison to traditional is inevitably growing. Thus, the significance of such work arrangements is becoming the primary source of new employment relationships (Allan, 2002).

In recent years the growing need for alternative employment surpassed the need for standard employment (Befort, 2003). Namely, Houseman (2001) states the market requirements for non-standard or alternative work arrangements are growing due to the organization's need to find workers with a specific set of skills, in order to facilitate the regular employee's demand for shorter working time, as well as assessing the potential of regular employees career advancement

within the organizations. Nevertheless, various authors argue that a rise in alternative work arrangements consequently elevates a rise in job insecurity which, in literature, does not relate to traditional employment (Houseman, 2001; Broschak & Davis-Blake, 2006; Capelli & Keller, 2013). However, the flexibility offered by "the economy of tomorrow" (Stewart & Stanford, 2017, p.421) provides not only the organizations, but also the workers with a flexibility which mostly does not exist in traditional employment. Thus, this new economy comprises principles where individuals will not have an employer, but will rather focus on completion of tasks, coordinating them through online platforms and getting adequately compensated for it. This way of working, is challenging the aspects of traditional arrangements as it ensures a greater and broader choice of workforce for employers and vice versa, indicating the possibility to change the working environment with greater ease than before (e.g. Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Friedman, 2014; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrześniewski, 2019).

When signifying the arrangements that would fall under the label of the economy of tomorrow, Lewchuk (2017) uses the term 'gig economy' where she lists short-term contract work, freelancing, and self-employment. However, the precise definition of the gig economy has proved elusive. Abraham et al (2018) refer to the term in two ways; broadly, the gig economy entails less organized flexible work arrangements, whereas more narrowly, it represents work arrangements facilitated through online platforms. The authors continue by instigating the view of the gig economy as an "on-demand economy" (2018, p.1), where goods and services are attained through online platforms and the need for the mediator (employer), in essence, becomes obsolete. As mentioned, the gig economy refers to a new phenomenon where workers are employed under flexible, non-standard, work arrangements working towards completion of a specific task in a given time (Friedman, 2014; Stewart & Stanford, 2017; Abraham, et al, 2018). Although it is a relatively new phenomenon, in the academic literature it was previously referred to as 'sharing or collaborative economy' (Stanford & Stewart, 2017; Burtch, Carnahan & Greenwood, 2018). Interestingly, the term 'gig' as Friedman (2014) explains comes from the music industry and refers to musicians performing a specific set for a performance, or as it could be related to an organizational sphere - a specific work task.

To narrow down the types of alternative agreements, the term 'gig economy' has often been used in a manner in which it referred to self-standing workers, disregarding the past work arrangements and with seemingly no promise for any future work arrangements (Friedman, 2014). Hence, gig work is often seen as appropriate for workers who might not have the ability to secure more permanent employment and in the process of hiring might be subjected to a certain degree of discrimination (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). Moreover, the vast majority of research, as well as the presence of the gig economy in the media is often linked to the low-skilled workers mediating through various technology platforms (Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrześniewski, 2019). Nevertheless, there is an indication that many independent workers in the gig economy are performing knowledge-intensive work, which could imply that the range of work within the gig economy is not limited merely to the low-paid work, e.g. personal drivers, care assistants, dog walkers), but it also entails high-paid work, e.g. consultants, accountants, lawyers (Friedman 2014; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wrześniewski, 2019).

There is also, however, a further point to be considered. Friedman (2014) argues even though there is a minority of workers that enjoy the benefits of the gig economy lifestyle, there is also a vast majority that would prefer traditional work arrangements. Apart from that, Schoenbaum (2016) also implies that the flexibility of working from home might be suitable for workers who are expected to take care of children and are obliged to family-related responsibilities. In addition, the shift into the flexible work arrangements and the evident gender-based preferences when hiring for gigs, could ultimately maintain or even intensify gender differences among sexes (Schoenbaum, 2016; Cook et al, 2018). Indeed, Young (2010) instigates that in comparison to men, women are more likely to work in inferior work conditions and have been throughout history overrepresented in the work that is often associated with a higher degree of precariousness. This, as the author indicates, is often connected with the gendered nature of work and sees women as less worthy due to the family responsibilities they are presumed to take charge of. However, given the fact that the existing research has been primarily focused on low-skilled workers in the gig economy and that the research on women in the field is immensely

scarce (Schoenbaum, 2016), we intend to explore the role that gender play in relation with the gig economy, as well as the reasoning and the experiences high-skilled women had when being a part of the gig economy.

## 2.2 Gender and work

Gillberg (2018) provides background and a point of view where women are always viewed as subordinate to men. The author explains that even during the epoch of Aristoteles and Platon, philosophers expressed that women were not viewed as worthy as men, which is also notable in the beginning of the 20th century when the society contended that women should not study higher degrees or be managers due to their envisioned lack of discipline and authority. Accordingly, as Acker (1992b) points out, all establishments that coexist in society (e.g. politics, religions, the economy & laws) have been created by men and are still in the present mostly governed by men, therefore, the discourse of viewing women as subordinate to men is still present in society and organizational life. For instance, contemporary studies show that women in general earn less than men (e.g. Antonczyk & Fitzenberger, 2010; Blau & Kahn, 2017) and have more difficulties to move higher up in organizations (e.g. Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia & Vanneman, 2001; Albrecht, Björklund & Vroman, 2003; Ashcraft, 2013).

Discrimination and inequality that women face in organizational life are broadly studied topics (e.g. Gherardi, 1994; Butler, 2004; Risman, 2009; Alvesson & Billing, 2009; Powell, Bagilhole & Dainty, 2009). Firstly, it is important to elucidate the meaning of gender inequality, which Acker (2006) defines as "systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes; workplace decisions such as how to organize work; opportunities for promotion and interesting work; security in employment and benefits; pay and other monetary rewards; respect; and pleasures in work and work relations" (p.443). Secondly, traditional scholars of gender studies mainly focused on the biological traits that are peculiar for women in respect to men, by studying the sameness or the differences between the sexes (Foss, 2010). Furthermore, Harding (1990) explains that this focus was present in biases against women held by the more powerful men in the society and caused oppression in regards to it. However,

this traditional view gained critique as it was overly conservative and thus not accepted by the vast majority of women, for whom it was intended (Harding, 1990, 2004).

In consideration of the foregoing, Connell (1987) argues that gender studies should rather be viewed through a social constructivism perspective - the practicing of gender, which he explains as "what people do by way of constituting the social relations they live in" (p.62). Moreover, Prasad, Prasad, and Mir (2011) imply that, to understand this constituting, we need to acknowledge it has a discursive nature, thereby understanding how reality is socially constructed in the means of language and structures. Consequently, how society and organizations speak about gender will affect how individuals construct and identify themselves as well as others. In order to provide an understanding on how organizations are influenced by gender structures, in the rest of this chapter we will exhibit some extent of the existing literature of gender and work.

Acker (1990, 1992b, 2006) argues it is vital to understand gender is not neutral in organizations, rather, she implies, organizations are gendered given that through history men have been in charge of all the organizational establishments. This gendered nature, in respect to power relation, has been specifically argued by Collinson and Hearn (1994), who indicate the omnipresent male dominance embedded within the organizational arrangements and the tensions. In addition, Alvesson and Billing (2009) explain how different occupational fields endorse specifically characteristics that can be related to masculine or feminine ideals. However, the authors point out these characteristics could be seen as ruled by the culturally enacted masculinity.

Acker (1990) explains several interactional processes where the distinction between the dominant men and the inferior women can be witnessed in organizational life. For instance, in the distribution of work between men and women where, for the most part, men are seen higher up in the hierarchy with the power over the organizational activities. More so, Fletcher (1998) argues that the current portrayal of work, as seen in organizations, elevates the difference between the "public and private spheres of life" (p. 165) where, in turn, the continuous institutionalization of gender divisions is sustained, in which the public sphere is seen as

male-dominated, whereas the private sphere has prevailing female presence. Collinson and Hearn (1994) illustrate the institutionalization of gender divisions in the detachment that men display when concerning the domestic sphere in organizations. By displaying it as distinctly separated they are recognized as in full control of their work sphere, in that sense, Collinson and Hearn (1994) argue for continuing the institutionalization of masculinity in organizations and making them "prime social unit of men's domination" (p. 6) . In addition, Acker (1990, 1992b) implies the language in society (e.g. social media & ideologies) also constitutes symbols which enhance the before-mentioned gender divisions. For instance, the ideal that successful managers are target-driven, bold and competitive (masculine ideals) rather than emotional, sympathetic and friendly (feminine ideals).

By understanding these interacting processes of gender structures, Acker (1990) concludes that a 'job' is always gendered, even if organizational rationales describe it as gender neutral. Acker (1992b) explains that for organizations to be gender neutral, the worker needs to be bodiless and abstract, however, this abstract worker is influenced by the institutionalization between men and women. Hence, she argues that discourses of abstract work which exist in the society are still associated with a strong and powerful man - the ideal worker (Acker, 2006). Accordingly, for a woman to fit into the image of the ideal worker, she needs to act like a man (Acker, 1992b). For instance, Powell, Bagilhole and Dainty (2009) research shows how women engineers behaved in a certain way to get approval from their male colleagues, whereas women copied behaviour from men and accepted the injustices they faced. The authors also explain that these women had an 'anti-woman' technique because they adage the benefits over the drawbacks to act as a man.

## 2.2.1 Gender and entrepreneurship

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of research that argues for the interrelatedness between the gig economy and entrepreneurship, which sees the gig economy as a form of 'new entrepreneurship' with limitless opportunities for individuals to make use of their resources, e.g. talent and intellect (Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016). Furthermore, Prassl (2018) explains how some features that entrepreneurs display, e.g. freedom, self-sufficiency,

independency, are also displayed by workers in the gig economy. Thus, we acknowledge the resemblance of certain features between the gig economy and entrepreneurship and deem relevant to present the literature on gender in relation to entrepreneurship.

The research on the aspects of female entrepreneurship portrays women as conveyors of the gender aspect in the field, which generally encompasses men-like characteristics (Lewis, 2006). The author indicates how that approach seemingly changes the features of entrepreneurship which is commonly seen as gender neutral. However, Bruni, Gherardi and Poggio (2004) state that the literature concerning the topic of entrepreneurship has in its essence correlated the view of an entrepreneur with masculine features, therefore, unintentionally assisting the process of cultivating the non-male and upholding the idea of masculinity. Thus, as the authors conclude, combining the concepts of entrepreneurship with masculinity.

Mirchandani (1999) exemplifies that by viewing entrepreneurship as gender-neutral, the research further institutionalizes the aspect of masculinity as implied. Hence, as Acker (1990) reflects, the gendered view on entrepreneurship would incorporate that the differences between men and women are essential to reflections in terms of superiority and inferiority. The connection with Lewis (2006) is made by linking that women entrepreneurs are inevitably subjected to the evaluation in accordance to the masculine ideals. Women's entrepreneurial behaviour can also be seen through various aspects in regards to the masculine norms (Mirchandani, 1999). For instance, Klyver and Grant (2010) suggest how due to the innit qualities and skills women obtain through their lives (e.g. compassion, care and reliability) they are less likely to achieve the same level of entrepreneurial skills as their male colleagues. The authors also argue that due to the institutionalized prospects of women having to bear the family responsibilities, networking is considered of great importance for women if they want to be seen at the same level as men. Some features signaled in the entrepreneurial terms, as Goffee and Scase (2015) explain, would automatically be prescribed as masculine, e.g. independence, risk-taking and ambition. Having that in mind, the aspiration for women to be an entrepreneur goes in line with mimicking male

entrepreneurial norms and if they act contrary to that, they could be seen as in conflict with their gender role.

For women not to be seen as segregated in the entrepreneurship aspect, Olsson (2000) discusses that they are to accept the concept of gender as no longer posing an issue in organizations. With that in mind, Lewis (2006) infers 'gender blindness' as an ideology that indicates men, who are seen as superior, while also reproaching the women, the inferior, and portraying them as guilty for being themselves. The author explains that by not accepting the norms of masculinity in organizations, some women could be seen as resisting the standards imposed on them. However, as Lewis (2006) once again points out, by refusing to resist the structures and the standards that privilege men in organizations, women are continuously contributing to their image of an inferior worker.

Mirchandani (1999) argues for an individual approach that would seemingly remove and obliviate the difficulties female entrepreneurs face. The author suggests that if women want to be viewed as rejecting the invisible masculine norms imposed on them by society, they should strive to "train or educate themselves better, develop more appropriate networks and mentoring relationships, and re-assign domestic work" (p. 227). Hence, Mirchandani (1999) argues the focus should be shifted from trying to change and resist the structures, to trying to change oneself, as in this case "the experiences of female and male entrepreneurship can be equalized" (p. 227). For that reason, as Goffee and Scase (2015) remark, being an entrepreneur would be a way for women to accomplish themselves, both professionally and personally.

## 2.2.2 Gender, work and family

A great amount of research has been focusing on the correlation between gender, work, and family aspects (Gutek, Nakamura & Nieva, 1981; Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991; Allen, Herst, Bruck & Sutton, 2000). Firstly, Gutek, Nakamura, Nieva (1981) discuss Parsons and Bales's (1955) study on how throughout history the traditional role of men and women, men were considered responsible for work, whereas women were in charge of domestic duties. Further,

Gutek, Searle, and Klepa (1991) delineate how regardless of changing gender roles in contemporary times, this tradition still persists. The study of a Swedish bank conducted by Acker (1994), indicates how primarily women should establish and position their working life in accordance with their domestic and family responsibilities. In the study, the author exemplifies how there was a structure for both women and men in terms of their work and domestic responsibilities. Acker (1994) points out that, while on one hand men were expected to take on full-time employment and have a career, women were on the other hand presumed to dedicate their time to domestic and family duties while neglecting their careers. Acker (1990) also notes that those who are devoted to their employment are in turn considered more responsible and authoritative, whereas those who are obliged to "divide their commitments" (p. 150) are often viewed as more inferior.

A view of domestic duties observed through the gender context can be defined as a symbolic ordinance of gendered connections and can be used to explain why there is no compromise between the time invested in paid and unpaid work between men and women (Ferree, 1990; South & Spitze, 1994). Hence, indicating how individuals do gender in regards to the domestic duties (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Moreover, there is a vast share of empirical studies showing how women are presented as a portrayal of domestic duties, for instance a study by Bergen (1991), in which he indicated that seventy percent of the domestic duties were performed by women next to their work employment. Also, Hartmann (1981) signals that the husbands actually created more work in the household then what they took care of. Nevertheless, there are also studies that indicate an egalitarian view of women's and men's responsibilities that consequently enacts a 'fairer' distribution of domestic duties (Kelly, Ammons, Chermak & Moen, 2010).

Hochschild (and Machung, 2012) use the term 'second shift' when explaining the concept of unpaid domestic work, following the completion of regular work. Further, the authors also ponder on the idea of a gender strategy, that when pursued, explains the process a man goes through in the early years when he is introduced to the beliefs of manhood and womanhood and

where he starts to reflect on his manhood. Moreover, Hochschild (and Machung, 2012) illustrate that a gender perception of each individual signals a connection to what the person wants to be identified with (work/home) and the power relation they are to have in a marriage. Hochschild (and Machung, 2012) further identify the three views of relational roles; (1) traditional, (2) transitional, and (3) egalitarian. Firstly, the authors explain how a traditional view portrays a woman who strongly identifies with her domestic duties whereas, in turn, expects her partner to be successful at work and have more power in their relationship. Secondly, they continue with an indication that an egalitarian view incorporates the same identity for both a woman and a man, with the same ratio of power. Thirdly, they conclude that a transitional woman aims to have the same identity as her husband in relation to work and domestic duties, however, she also believes her partner's main focus should be on work. The authors also argue that the 'transitional man' acknowledges the work aspiration of his wife, but nonetheless still presumes she will take a larger share of domestic responsibilities. On the whole, Hochschild (and Machung, 2012) conclude that amongst the three types of ideological roles, people are most commonly of a transitional belief.

A growing share of work-family literature also shows the conflict women encounter when trying to distribute domestic and work duties (Gornick & Meyers, 2008). Thornton (1989) explains how the position of women in households and in the labor market has been changing since the 1960s and 1970s. The author states how men are more likely to accept a woman who wants to pursue her career, and takes on a bigger role in the household. Further, when discussing the prospects of marital satisfaction, Suitor (1991) claims that the egalitarian division of labor concerning the domestic duties will ultimately contribute to it. Inglehart and Norris (2003) also indicate that with the appearance of modernization, as well as economic advancement, the changes in attitudes in relation to gender equality or inequality are being changed. However, there is literature that states the "stalled gender revolution" (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015) by explaining the severance between the societal structures present in organizations and personal ideals. As Cha (2010) explains, systemic inequality is being created due to the norm that individuals who are more present in the workplace, are more devoted to their careers and are rewarded for it

accordingly. Therefore, the author indicates, the institutional setback is being carried out, because even though women are still the main bearers of domestic duties, they are being penalized for engaging in them. Under the circumstance of those institutionalized norms, as Gornick and Meyers (2008) signal, women are expected to prioritize family responsibilities and in many cases opt for part-time work.

Whittock, Edwards, McLaren, and Robinson (2002) discuss the issue of a 'tender trap', a term indicating "getting left behind in terms of career development" (p. 306). The authors argue women are the primary users of the family-friendly methods of work that are introduced by many companies, as they are trying to evenly distribute domestic and family responsibilities. Given that, as Whittock et al (2002) demonstrate, women's domestic responsibilities are often being implied and their perception of work is being seen as less focused on the possibility of career development. Dex and Joshi (1999) draw in line the aspect of motherhood and a child's age as well, which could be the determining factor in deciding whether women with children or children prospects should take up more work, since with the increase of the age of their children women are likely to work more. Nonetheless, even though there is evidence supporting the uneven share of housework between men and women, there is also research that indicates that male partners are still likely to carry out a part of the weight of domestic duties if both partners are working (South & Spitze, 1994).

Acker (1998) further indicates how changing work conditions from hierarchical to more flexible could be beneficial to women in organizations. She signals that as part-time work is becoming a more common option in many workplaces, gender structures might be changing in favor of equal distribution between family and work aspects. Hence, Kvande and Rasmussen (1994) explain altered work conditions might assure equality in opportunities for both sexes. Thus, moving away from the institutionalized concept of work will allow for the equal distribution of both domestic and work responsibilities (Acker, 1998).

# 2.3 Doing & redoing gender

Alongside the existing literature of gender and work, in the following section we will explain our theoretical lens of 'doing gender' and 'redoing gender' conceptualized by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009). A theory that will be carried out throughout the paper. To begin with, West and Zimmerman (1987) define doing gender as the reproduction of disparities between men and women that are not habitual, biological, or essential, but in contrast have been constituted and consolidated in society. Further, to understand how individuals do gender in that way, the authors explain it is vital to understand 'sex', 'sex category', and 'gender' independently and also how they correlate.

Firstly, West and Zimmerman (1987) define sex as the sorting of males and females in accordance with their biological predispositions. Secondly, they define placement to a specific sex category as established through the implementation of the criteria regarding sex, however, in daily life, that placement is determined and maintained through manifestations instigated via social discourses that define an individual to be part of one or the other category. Finally, they determine gender as "the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking" (1987, pp.127). Thus arguing gender is a 'constant doing' rooted in the daily interactions in society, and is carried out by men and women influenced by societal, interactional, and political constructions, which are in turn institutionalized in society that conveys the nature of being feminine and masculine.

Garfinkel's (1967) research on a transsexual woman named Agnes, applied by West and Zimmerman (1987), describes an individual born as a man who decided to become a woman at the age of 17. The authors explain that her gender was not expressed in her choice of clothes, but rather shown in her behavior and actions that needed to be in a manner that was seen as appropriate for being a woman, something she needed to learn by analyzing other women. For

instance, her fiance informed her that as a woman, she should not express her own opinion nor try to ask for equality between her and other men. Furthermore, the authors discuss the way Agnes needed to learn how to do gender is what young girls and boys learn at an early stage. West and Zimmerman (1987) undertake Cahill's (1986a) research that elucidates how children are taught of solely two existing social identities that are identified either by birth or by their genital organ - a boy or a girl. Consequently, they start to view themselves and others in light of gender differences, and as a result convey femininity and masculinity as natural characteristics in society. Accordingly, the case of Agnes and Cahill's (1986a) study illustrates how gender is socially constructed in the means of language in society.

The notion of doing gender in an organizational context, that was examined by Gherardi (1994), emphasizes the obscurity of differences between women and men, and the conflict between them in the symbolic order of gender. The author argues the gender process is functioning in two levels of activities - the ceremonial and the remedial work. The former as where the symbolic order of gender is retained, replicated and culturally conveyed from the norms that exist in an organization, and the latter Gherardi (1994) indicates, signals the activity of reestablishing the symbolic order when it is breaking down (such as when a woman gets accepted from her manager, which most of the men in the company get, if she decides to approve this gesture. In this way she becomes a 'man', but also gets undervalued as a woman.).

In particular, West and Zimmerman (1987) explain it is fundamental to understand gender in relation to accountability - how individuals' behavior is viewed and defined. Comparatively, if behavior is in line with the societal institutionalization of being feminine it will pass without any consideration from the environment, but if a behavior is not in accord to the perception of being feminine, the environment will most likely react abruptly to it. For instance, Berk's (1985) research demonstrates how married couples divide domestic duties and her findings indicate that women do a significant amount of these duties, even if they are working externally. Moreover, these married couples Berk (1985) studied, did not regard this division of duties as unfair. Consequently, the accountability of women carrying out domestic duties is institutionalized in

society, and, as seen in this case, neither men nor women see these divisions as something worth acting upon (West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Notwithstanding the fact, as West and Zimmerman (1987) explain, that even if individuals have several different social identities in diverse contexts (e.g. at home one can be seen as a parent, whereas in the occupational field that same one can be seen as a professional) one will still be defined either as a woman or as a man. As a result, this constitution of men and women in different sex categories creates norms of how men and women should act respectively, which in turn means it is inevitable for individuals not 'do' gender. Ultimately, if men and women do gender as they have learned, at the same time they maintain, procreate, and impart the institutionalization of the differences between sex categories, which in turn is a powerful process for hierarchical actions in social reality.

It is important to note, however, that the practice-based approach of studying gender has its limitations. Poggio (2006) implies the main motive of researchers whose focus is on gender as a practice is to change the inequalities institutionalized in society. For instance, Lorber (2005) points out that in order to make the inequality in society evident, it is fundamental to find different means of confronting it. Poggio (2006) further asserts that this view is problematic, since it implies a fundamental challenge of changing inequality in the society. Moreover, she argues this type of research mainly focuses on raising suspicions and finding challenges rather than providing answers. Nevertheless, all this research remarks that gender is not static, rather something emerging in interactions and ever-changing. In that light, several writers have tried to find potential changes by conducting research that goes away from doing gender and instead focuses on undoing of gender (e.g. Butler, 2004; Risman, 2009; Deutsch, 2007).

Risman (2009) argues that if we perceive gender as a social construct and a tool of reproducing inequalities, our main goal should then be to evolve to a post-gender society. The author stresses how the youth in today's society (mainly girls) have more freedom to formulate themselves outside the confinements of prior structures of femininity. Alvesson and Billing (2009) also emphasize the importance of understanding how contemporary organizations strive to erase the

inequality between men and women. Ultimately concluding that in modern society and contrast to the past, it is presumably easier to oppose gender norms for many groups. Risman (2009) points out that it is crucial to view these changes as losing strength of old gender norms and as a result, individuals and society consequently start undoing gender. Deutsch (2007) infers that when talking about inequality, the notion of doing gender is used for reproduction of gender disparities and the notion of undoing gender on contrary is used to mark the reduction of the same. For that reason, doing gender provokes stereotypes and undoing gender extracts resistance to those stereotypes. Be that as it may, Butler (2004) also implies that when gender norms change and individuals are seen as undoing gender, those individuals change the perception of who they are and promote the novel perception of themself with greater likeliness to resist the gendered structures.

However, we argue in line with West and Zimmerman (2009) that these changes can not be seen in the context of undoing gender, rather it is about redoing, since the authors imply that it is inevitable not to do gender. They explain these changes as modifications of the accountability structures that might move to more vague ways of doing gender. For instance, Connell (2010) uses the term of redoing gender, when conducting a study on the experiences of the transgender people in the organziational context, where she explains the reframing of the apsects related to the masculinity concept. The author concludes, that regardless of talking about undoing or redoing of gender, both notions still signal the distortion of the gender disparities, essentially elevating the issue of gender inequality which ultimately indicates an initial move towards change.

## 2.4 Chapter summary

To summarise the presented theoretical framework, this chapter argued for the social constructivist approach of studying gender, due to the complexity and discursive nature of understanding gender. We discussed the novel research on the gig economy, as well as the similarities and the differences with other relevant fields of our research (e.g. entrepreneurship). Moreover, we researched the variety of effects that the characteristics of the gig economy have

on the concept of gender, and in that line re-argued for the purpose of our study. Furthermore, we presented the research by Acker (1990, 1992b, 2006) on the gendered nature of organizations, as well as the concept of ideal worker, which will be consequently used in the analysis. Considering that the idea of an ideal worker is institutionalized as an ideal of a successful man (Acker, 1990, 1992b, 2006) who is focused on accomplishing himself work-wise, we aimed to expose the historical discourse which labels women as presumably bearers of domestic responsibilities. Accordingly, the research led to the family aspect and the correlation with the gender inequality revealed in the literature. In that light the theoretical lens of 'doing and redoing gender' by West and Zimmerman was defined as it unravels the way that gender is being done, or redone in accordance to gendered discourses. Conclusively, we move into the methodological grounding for the research, as well as the analysis of the collected empirical data where we bring the concepts of 'doing and redoing gender' in relation to the women we interviewed for this research, to get a deeper understanding of their experiences of work in the gig economy.

# 3.0 Methodology

In this chapter we delineate and reflect upon our methodological and philosophical grounding for conducting this research. The aim is to briefly present the process of data collection and research design to allow a reader to get acquainted with the process of our research. In the beginning, we lay out the philosophical grounding with a focus on qualitative study and a social constructivist ontology. Furthermore, we explain the process behind our data collection and analysis of our empirical data. Moreover, we aim to explain the choice of the metaphor used for this study, as well as the storyline we created throughout the research. At the end of the methodological layout, we recognize the moral and ethics, and any limitations which arose while we were conducting the research.

# 3.1 Philosophical grounding

There are a variety of approaches to choose from when conducting research and collecting relevant data, and two distinguished methodologies (qualitative and quantitative) to justify the rationale of the intended study (Bell & Bryman, 2007). Given the purpose of our research, we will use qualitative methodology considering the aim of our research is to increase the understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy. Therefore, we see the use of qualitative methodology as fit for this type of research, since Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) emphasize qualitative methodology as relevant when writing about the complexity of social interactions and phenomena created within the social context. Similarly, as Ratner (2002) instigates, by using qualitative instead of quantitative methodology not only do we acknowledge the present subjectivity when analyzing and interpreting resulting data, but they also apprehend the neutral view in understanding the social context of their reality. That is to say, that reality is co-constructed with the actors in society and dependent on social interactions. Ratner (2002) concludes, that one without the other does not exist and that in order to understand the social reality, subjective processes (e.g. logical reasoning, perception, analytical thinking) are essential.

In order to examine and theorize the before mentioned aim of our research, we used the abduction inference mechanism which is explained by Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) to understand the underlying reasoning. Flick, von Kardorff, and Steinke (2004) emphasize that by using the abduction researchers in general aim to create a 'new order' that expounds the situation that requires a meaning-creation process. In addition, the authors denote that the newly created orders are "neither (preferred) constructions nor (valid) reconstructions, but usable (re-)constructions" (p. 163). With this in mind, and supported by the findings from Flick, von Kardorff, and Steinke (2004), we recognize that 'the order' we constructed by doing this research assisted us in answering the set research question. Likewise we also acknowledge, in line with Alvesson and Sköldberg (2009), that due to the complex context of social reality no definite answer or solution exists. Therefore, we did not want to make any conclusions that could implicate our findings to all women in the gig economy but instead only theorize on those we interviewed and analyzed accordingly.

Given that the aim of our research is to gain an understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy, we wanted to analyze the social context within which our interviewed women are situated. During the analysis of the data we collected, we came to a realization that the reality they experience is continually changing due to the influence of social interactions. For instance, during the interviews one of our interviewees addressed the issue of inequality and the way it affected her and made her change a view of the profession she was working in, as her boss, who was a male, made her feel undervalued. This example can be related to Bell and Bryman (2007) who define constructivism as a relationship with reality in which the social phenomena and their meanings and understandings are accomplished through social interactions. Given this ontological position, as Bell and Bryman (2007) assert, knowledge and a social context are indeterminate and under a persistent state of the amendment. Further, we make a connection to Schwandt (2014) and his view of constructivism, as he views apparent categories (e.g. sex, identity, reality) as an outcome of complex and socially constrained discourses. In addition, Bryman and Bell (2007) remind us that the categories the society views as apparent are merely a product of social interactions and that their meaning is constructed subsequently.

Throughout the interviews and analysis, we, as researchers intended to reach an understanding of the interviewees' past and present work experiences and their understanding of reality in connection to the inequality aspect in their working life. The principle the research was led by, was to delve into the reality they constructed. Hence, we can draw a connection to Sternberg (1999) who argues for the meaning creation being produced within the context an individual is situated in and within which that same individual interacts. Be that as it may, we acknowledge the cultivating research of interpretive tradition in the field of identity and gender and observance of how individuals make sense of reality (Prasad, 2018). However, we instead focus on the social aspects, rather than individual, of one's meaning creation processes. As previously stated, we observe reality in light of Schwandt (1998) as purposefully configured to fit the intentions of an individual. Even though Merriam (2002) indicates the foibles of having a human element in conducting and analyzing data might seem to have a negative effect on the study due to the presumably present biases, she also demonstrates that the result of a study is always of a "richly descriptive" (p.5) nature which allows the researchers to descriptively contribute to the intended study in the form of subjective interpretations of the analyzed data (Peshkin, 1988).

## 3.2 Collection of empirical data

The interest we as researchers expressed to study women in the gig economy, stems from reading an article by S. Horowitz in an online magazine Atlantic dated September 2011 with the title 'The Freelance Surge is the Industrial Revolution of Our Time'. This article sparked our interest because until then we only heard of the term 'Gig Economy', but were not fully acquainted with it. This article encouraged us to research more into the gig economy, which at this point is not a well-researched concept. We also found that several authors (e.g. Befort, 2003; Lewchuk, 2017; Abraham et al, 2018), as signaled before, indicate that a growing interest in the gig economy stems from the scarcity of research in this field. While analyzing articles on the topic of 'the gig economy', we identified that the vast majority talks about the presence of low-skilled giggers in the industry, thus seemingly indicating a lack of research on the topic of the engagement of high-skilled women in the same industry. Accordingly, due to the scarcity of research in this

field, we aimed to explore the evidence of studies covering the aspect of gender disparity. Therefore, we took the issue of equality, or better said inequality, and applied it to the concept of 'the gig economy'. Alvehus (2013) identifies that the basis of a good motive to cogitate into the research could be found in observing and analyzing the topic from a different perspective which is what we firmly believe we have done.

The matters of equality and inequality seemed relevant and interesting as both researchers are subjectively acquainted with the topic as one of us is a woman and the other a homosexual. We made a connection to Peshkin's (1988) reference by stating we ought to recognize that subjectivity could impact the research, however, we also acknowledge Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018) who suggest that the data we collected disciplines us in the findings of our research. Furthermore, Alvesson and Sandberg (2013) claim that not only it is important to have a clear stance, but also to be critical and self-reflective when conducting research. Hence, given the interest, we have expressed in the field and due to the private connection with one of the co-founders of the network, we have decided to interview women working for an all-female gig company, FemGIG, that deals with the issue of gender disparities in the organizational life by helping women secure gigs in the market.

## 3.2.1 Interviews

In order to delve more thoroughly into the research field, we decided to conduct ten in-depth semi-structured interviews which were held through an online platform - Skype, due to the current COVID-19 situation and the limitations of personal contact. Rabionet (2001) emphasizes how semi-structured interviews are a helpful tool, as they allow researchers to open up the field and grasp a meaning behind the interviewees' voices as a "window to their stories" (p.563). The conducted interviews were structured according to the interview guide which allowed the interviewees' to have the freedom to freely express themselves without much guidance from us. We felt that by doing so the interviewees would feel more comfortable when addressing sensitive topics such as gender inequality which is what we intended to include in the analysis part of our paper.

Interviews were structured to last approximately one hour and were focused on several main themes; (1) past working experiences, (2) inequality aspect in their working life, (3) reason why they decided to become a gigger, (4) struggles they might have experienced while gigging[3], and (5) the family aspect concerning the gig economy. We followed a line with Kvale's (2006) interest in conducting interviews, understanding that interviews can be a successful tool in clarifying proposed concepts, as well as a chance for interviewers to unravel the meaning behind the reality of the interviewees'. Overall, the author emphasizes the importance of giving the power of expression to people one interviews as it provides them with the ability to talk without any limitations about matters of a personal nature.

Taking into account the fact that the current situation in Sweden (a country where we are currently situated in and are conducting our research in) is burdened by the COVID-19 and the uncertainty surrounding it, we were not able to perform the interviews in person. As researchers we further recognize the shortcomings of having an online-interview, as an element of non-verbal communication and interactive abilities of both interviewees and researchers is somewhat missing. As Shuy (2002) explains some elements such as naturalness, sincereness, and more accurate results are often linked with in-person interviewing, however, the author also acknowledges the benefits of online interviewing which is a type that we conducted. Most significantly, Shuy (2002) further explains the effect the interviewer has on the interviewee and the ability to ask questions of a more sensitive nature when the interviewer is not in the same shared space.

In terms of the type of questions we asked, we mainly focused on the 'what' and 'how' questions which we can connect to the Gubrium and Holstein (1997) conceptualization expressed in Renstamm and Wästerfors (2018). We argue in the line of Gubrium and Holstein (1997), that what-questions are essential in portraying the substance of our phenomenon, whilst the how-questions can be seen as necessary in depicting how the phenomenon acted out. In our

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[3] Individuals performing gigs

instance we see 'what' as an act of gigging and the condition surrounding the act itself, while we view the 'how' as 'walking barefoot' which is a process of deliberate freeing of oneself from gender discourses. By interviewing in this way, we were able to reach a common understanding of the reasoning of the conceptualized research question.

## 3.3 Empirical analysis of data

As aforementioned, for the analysis part of our paper we conducted ten semi-structured interviews via an online platform called Skype. How we performed interviews was that one of the researchers was asking questions and directed the course of the interview, while the other observed and asked questions when they felt it was necessary. We can connect this type of interviewing to Brinkman's and Kvale's (2015) interpretation of being able to simultaneously observe and later on discuss the possible (mis-)interpretations. Moreover, we started the data analysis while conducting interviews and during the process of transcribing, and have decided to follow the following guideline including coding, sorting, and arguing which is determined by Rennstam and Wästerfors (2018). On a final note, we use [...] in the analysis of the empirical data to signify that we have taken part of the citation, as well as … to point to when the interviewed women were quiet.

In order to maintain the anonymity of our interviewees, as well as the trust they bestowed upon us when providing us with information, we decided to use fictive names which could not be related to their actual identity. We recognized that the age span of the women we interviewed is between 40 and 60 years old and that the majority of them were gigging in the period of 1-8 years, with an exception of one interviewee who has been a gigger for 15 years. Lastly, we observed how almost all of our interviewees but one, have children and a partner.

### 3.3.1 Sorting, reducing and arguing

When we started the interview process with the first of our interviewees we had questions prepared, but our main focus was on letting our interviewees answer as freely as they could without much interruptions from our side. We previously explained that interviewing in that manner allowed them to unravel the meaning of their stories, which could be seen in theory in Kvale's (2006) research and his interest in conducting interviews. Due to the sensitivity of our topic and the questions we asked, we decided to conduct our interviews in two phases during which we made notes on the types of questions we should ask the following interviewee. The two phases went in line with Corbin and Strauss's (1990) conceptualization that stated the first set of interviews should lay the basis of the thesis work, while the second set should allow the narrowing down of questions required for a deeper understanding of the presented concepts.

Interviews conducted for analysis and our research question (How do high-skilled women experience work in the gig economy?) were performed in the period of one week. Eight interviews were conducted in English, while two of them were done in Swedish. The examples of questions we asked are for instance, *What do you think of when we talk about the Gig Economy? What were the factors influencing your working life? How do you perceive your past work experiences? What made you decide to become a gigger? How do you perceive the gig economy now, while being a part of it?* Since we wanted our interviewees to be able to express themselves most safely and efficiently way possible, one of the researchers who is a Swede, felt that some of the interviewees would be more comfortable if their interview is conducted in their native language.

Accordingly, we recognize and accept possible limitations, as argued by Nes, Abma, Jonsson, and Deeg (2010) who explain that the essence of a message may potentially be distorted if translated. However, we are confident that we translated the communicated message in Swedish to English as close as we possibly could. We transcribed the interviews simultaneously while conducting them, given the limited time to execute the research and analyze the data. Following

the transcribes, we focused on the sorting of the material collected and have done this several times until we found the relevant data we could use for the analysis. We further complied with Rennstam and Wästerfors' (2018) explanation, that sorting data of any kind can be seen as disciplined, as sorting of relevant data allows the researchers to focus on the specific set of data that consequently contributes to the final outcome of the research. However, it helped us throughout the process as the final outcome of this sorting was valid data relevant to our field of interest.

The analysis of the collected material was sorted according to themes we extracted from the interview's transcripts. We have grouped the citations from the transcripts and arranged them according to the relevance of the theoretical background. In line with this, we followed Alvesson (2003) and his recommendation to be constantly reflective and look at the data from different perspectives to ensure we are making a valid and relevant qualitative study. Furthermore, we color-coded the themes of our transcripts, as it allowed us to re-read the transcripts with ease and we were also aware of what we should focus on. Brante (2011) suggests that categorizing material will allow an easier process of describing the material, as well as providing a foundation for the explanation of the data.

Following the process of categorizing and sorting the relevant data and material, we decided to re-analyze and re-read the chosen data. We followed Rennstam's and Wästerfors' (2018) guidelines on categorical reduction and chose to both emphasize and give priority to certain categorized themes in citations detriment to others which ultimately created a clear and manageable dataset. When reducing data, we started arguing for it by a choice of using the metaphor - 'walking barefoot', to create a better link with the theoretical overview and the collected data. We linked our choice of using a metaphor to Carpenter (2008), where she asserts that this allows for the researchers to "examine phenomena from a unique and creative perspective" (p. 274).

On a final note, we researched in the light of Alvesson and Kärreman (2007) who signal that different observations of the collected material should be a useful tool in an attempt to create alternating narratives which we signify as important in interpreting one's idea and experiences and in the wholesome understanding of their own identity. In this approach to the analysis, we were able to grasp the complexity of the interviewee's thoughts as well as the ever-changing nature of social reality.

## 3.3.2 The use of a metaphor

"Metaphors can be used to provide structure to the data; to understand a familiar process in a new light; to identify situation-specific interventions; and to evoke emotion" (Carpenter, 2008, p.274). Further, Carpenter (2008) signals how metaphors can be used by the researchers as a tool to delineate experiences with the use of language that is not merely focused on paraphrasing information. Also, Cornelissen, Oswick, Christensen, and Phillips (2008) explain how metaphors can be used as bridges between imagination and reality, to deepen our comprehension of the world. Given this research we decided that in order to present the complexity of the gender field, we connect it to the phrase 'walking barefoot' so we can truly depict the feeling of freedom and the process of liberation which we implied gig economy can represent for high-skilled women.

In order to create a storyline with relevant explanations from our interviewees and our according interpretations, we decided to use a quote from one of our interviewees, Monica, as the basis of a metaphor. She reflected on the difficulties she experienced in her past working life and the desire to 'free herself' from those by saying: "I want to walk barefoot in life". The reflection indicated the 'how' of the interviewed women to free themselves from the conditions they have been constrained to and the 'why' they have decided to do that. We relate 'walking barefoot' as freeing themselves from the constraints of gender structures and finding a balance between their work and self. Furthermore, we constructed an analysis section in accordance with the five main themes derived from the metaphor. Those themes are as follows: (1) Being stuck in tight shoes; (2) The decision to walk barefoot; (3) Continuing to walk barefoot; (4) Putting the tight shoes back on; and (5) Walking with one shoe on. By using a metaphor, the research can be observed

in a different manner and we, as researchers, believe we made it more accessible and usable for any further and future research.

## 3.4 Morals and ethics

Integrity and morals are considered to be of vital importance to qualitative research. Tracy (2010) indicates how ethics serve as a factor that constitutes the overall-accepting ultimate aim of quality in qualitative research. During the course of the interviews we made it clear to our interviewees that the anonymity and the integrity of each of them will be ensured by substituting their real names with fictional ones and also substituting data with alternate yet relevant facts that would obscure any possible connection to them. Further, Miles and Huberman (1994) argue for the need to consider the choice of actions in qualitative research as we were permitted to access the personal world of the interviewees. For that reason we gave all our interviewees the option to stop the interview if they ever felt uncomfortable due to the sensitivity of the topic we examined. We also asked them whether we were allowed to analyze data we collected from them, and ensured they all have access to the final analysis if they express a desire to read it. We were lucky as the women we interviewed were willing to contribute to our research with their thoughts and ideas, which made it easy for us to delve deeper into the analysis.

## 3.5 Limitations

The findings presented throughout this research need to be considered because of some limitations. As explained by Merriam (2002), when conducting qualitative research, the human factor is "the primary instrument for data analysis " (p. 5). Merriam further explains that the researchers' biases and inadequacies could have an impact on the outcome of the study. Consequently we acknowledged the first limitation when conducting our interviews, since the themes of our interest are sensitive and subjective in nature, by recognizing the need to distance ourselves from any subjective involvement and approaching interviews in the most neutral way possible. Further, we are also aware that inequality is a sensitive topic to address, therefore, we

are aware of the limitation that some of our interviewees did not want to openly talk about the issue.

In addition, we experienced a limitation with the current state of health emergency caused by the Coronavirus. The World Health Organization proclaimed a state of Public Health emergency of International Concern in January 2020 (WHO, 2020), consequently due to the risk of spreading the virus, limiting our interview methods to online platforms. As noted earlier, this disallowed us to observe the interviewees' natural physical appearance when engaging in the topics we aimed to discuss. Be that as it may, in the present time of uncertainty we were lucky that our interviewees' were even able to engage in the interviews, therefore, we did not see conducting them online as a determining limitation for the quality of the study.

## 3.6 Chapter summary

Within this chapter, we offered insights into the methodological and philosophical grounding used for this research. The qualitative methodology and a social constructivist approach were used due to the complexity of the phenomena created within the social context. Given that the study aimed to analyze the experience of work for high-skilled women in the gig economy, we found it appropriate to use the abduction inference mechanism. Abduction allowed us to argument the theoretical background with the collected empirical data to create the order which helped in answering the set research question; How do high-skilled women experience work in the gig economy? The research was conducted through 10 semi-structured interviews with high-skilled women of different occupational backgrounds, who are engaged with work in the gig economy, primarily focusing on the all-female network - FemGIG. We also elaborated the use of the metaphor 'walking barefoot', as it enabled us to conceptualize the findings and put the research into a perspective. Further, we acknowledged that gender and gender inequalities are topics of high sensitivity, therefore, we focused on asking open-end questions that allowed our interviewees to talk freely to an extent they were willing to. Lastly, we recognized the ethics and morals and presented limitations to the research that will be outlined in the following section.

# 4.0 Analysis

The following chapter will comprise the main empirical data obtained through interviews with high-skilled women who work in the gig economy. The findings are divided through the selected metaphor 'walking barefoot' into two parts. In the first part we will discuss their past working experiences that relate to the theme 'being stuck in tight shoes', and in the second part reflect upon them as a part of the gig economy and to the metaphor 'walking barefoot' where we divided it into different themes after our different findings: (1) The decision to walk barefoot; (2) Continuing to walk barefoot; (3) Putting the tight shoes back on; and (4) Walking with one shoe on. By using this division, we aimed to create a storyline that will enable us to further discuss empirical findings in order to get an understanding of how high-skilled women experience their work in the gig economy.

## 4.1 Being stuck in tight shoes

While we were conducting interviews, it became apparent that several of them experienced the feeling of constraint and the presence of inequality in their past working experiences. We used the expression 'being stuck in tight shoes' to exemplify these struggles. However, when the interviewed women were asked if they ever felt inequality between them and their male colleagues, we noticed how some of them got quiet and noticeably uncomfortable, whilst others started directly addressing the inequalities that they faced. In the latter reaction Linda pointed out:

> Oh yeah, definitely. I would say that I've experienced that everywhere. I think that men have always been given more space. They get more room to speak. And I've met it in every place I've worked or had an assignment. There's always men that use some kind of persuasion technique. So I would say I've met that everywhere my whole life. [...] I grew up to be a good girl, 'don't do that', 'you have to behave'. So you also bring that to your workplace.

In this citation, Linda explained twice that inequality is omnipresent throughout her life. We interpret this repetition as a signal that for her inequality is a matter that has always been an issue, for instance in her working life, when her male colleagues were given more time to speak and more liberty to use persuasion techniques.

Linda's view about growing up to be a 'good girl' is also explained by Jessica: "I think, throughout your whole life, as a woman you have learned that you should always be a good girl". Their explanations of how they grew up to be a 'good girl', show strong indications of how they were taught to do gender. Both of them express the need to act according to the existing structures or to be subdued by them as that is what women 'should learn to do'. Furthermore, Jessica gives an example of how a 'good girl' should behave, when she was 25 years old and worked as an IT consultant and her manager was a male over 50. She explains:

> Every time I came up with an idea, it was like, sweetie ... It was like he was patting me on the head. But then we could sit in big meetings and he would take my ideas as his own … and he would look at me and like, is she gonna protest that I said that. I felt that I couldn't, because I was a woman. If I was a man, maybe I would have protested. But it felt like me shutting up, made him respect me more … After it happened a couple of times, he kind of changed his attitude towards me when he understood that maybe all of my ideas were not that bad.

This mentioned 'patting on the head' is also something Monica witnessed herself and explains: "but the feeling of being called 'sweetie' ... they talked over me". We see this indication as an act of undervaluing the position of women in organizations, where a working woman is expected to be an approachable 'good girl' rather than having a say in any business-related matters thus allowing the existence of pre-determined power relations in the organizations. One example of this is when Jessica's manager took credit for her ideas. Furthermore, Jessica reflected on her behavior of being silent as a means by which she will receive acceptance from her manager. However, we observed that even with her manager's acceptance she undervalued herself for being a woman given that she would have protested if she was a man. Thereby, Jessica's citation

shows how the structures and how her behavior is viewed and defined, in this case being silent, is an act of doing gender.

Jessica's explanation of her decision to remain silent could also be seen as expressed by Linda, however in a different aspect. Linda encountered difficulties when she was in charge of a department alongside the two of her male colleagues who had departments at the same hierarchical level. She explains:

> There was an issue in my department and I wasn't there when the thing happened and one of these men took charge, went into my department and just changed decisions I had made. Luckily, at this time, I had a female boss. I got so upset about this. I don't know if I would have done something as big as I did if I wouldn't have a female boss. She supported me to protest, which made me feel comfortable.

Similarly, we can draw a connection between Jessica's explanation where she said she would have probably protested if she were a man, and Linda's justification that she probably would not have made an issue out of the situation if she was managed by a man. Yet again we can see how gendered structures made these women observe the perspective of having a male manager in a certain way, thus indirectly acknowledging the subordinate position they were taught to accept. Despite all this, Linda's experience differs since she had a female boss who made her act in a different manner and supported her action without making her feel as she was judged. In this sense, we see that Linda is redoing gender by stating her female boss now supported her actions. As a result, she did not need to oblige to the rules and was instead able to express the anger she felt.

One of our interviewees, Victoria, elaborates that during the years of working in the construction business, what she felt was a very conservative environment, she recognized the disparities between herself and her male colleagues. She states:

> Yeah. I think it was very hard to make my male colleagues, not all of them, of course, to see me as a professional. To them I was ... you know ... they treated me like I was a woman first and not a colleague, and they didn't listen to me. [...] I tend to show them my anger. I tried to be, you know, really sharp in my approach. Really try to make them see that I'm serious. But, it didn't really work.

Victoria's explanation that she was viewed as a woman and not a colleague could be interpreted as potential reinforcement of observing women as the second-sex gender, consequently, perceptualizing them only as women and not as a professional. Due to this Victoria expressed anger towards her male colleagues, which we interpreted as an attempt of redoing gender by trying to resist and change the inequalities she faced. However, as she explained, this did not make a change. This signifies she was constrained by predetermined structures of how women should behave and do gender.

The above-mentioned interviewees reflected on the issue of inequality openly, but we also noticed how some argued that even though they acknowledged the existence of the gender structures, they have personally not experienced them themselves. For instance, Susanna said: "I haven't, that doesn't mean that I don't know that it exists. But I haven't personally felt that because for me being a woman I've been treated differently." However, later in the interview, she stalled when answering a question and instead said:

> When I answer that question before, the biggest bosses have always been men in all the companies that I've worked in. It is very difficult for women to get in those high positions. I'm well aware that there is a difference in wages, and I've been working with men that I know have more money. A higher wage than I, for the same kind of jobs ... If I think about my friends, children and what they do,

they have the same feelings as me about not being well treated as a woman. So I don't know … Now, of course, I think I've been thinking about these questions. But I don't have personal experience of it. It's more about reading and being aware of the situation we're in.

As the interview started to take on a more reflexive tone, Susanna started rethinking the question. In the latter citation she explained how she knew she was treated differently as she had a lower wage than her male colleague, but she didn't see that as something that affects her personally. The confusion regarding the answer to the question may be due to her insecurity of feeling mistreated and seeing herself as a victim. In a similar manner, Olivia expressed that:

If it comes to gender … Yeah, maybe after my graduation, in the first jobs I felt that male employees had it easier. They were easily promoted, I would say. Later on, I wouldn't say this is my own experience.

This could be an indication that Olivia faced inequality when she first entered the job market, however, she further emphasized how she did not have any similar experiences later on. Undoubtedly Suzanna and Olivia acknowledge the existence of the structures, yet they both reject to accept them as a matter of concern. Similarly, the view that both Susanna and Olivia hold about not being their personal experiences is the same as with the rest of the interviewees we have not discussed yet.

As seen in this theme, several women openly talked about inequalities they faced in their working life and indicated how they were 'stuck in tight shoes'. However we have also shown that Susanna and Olivia as well as the rest of the interviewees did not acknowledge these gender inequalities as a matter that needs confronting. Accordingly, we reflect on the question, whether they were actually 'stuck in tight shoes'?

## 4.2 Walking barefoot

Our inspiration to use the metaphor 'walking barefoot' came from one of our interviewees and founders of FemGIG, Monica. She explained the experience of work for women including herself in the gig economy:

> We want women to take charge of their own time, because I want to do that, I want to walk barefoot in life, and barefoot doesn't mean travel to Thailand for six months. It is about deciding by yourself and for that we need to be brave.

As seen in this citation, 'walking barefoot' illustrates a way of trying to resist and change the existing inequalities for women in their working life. Comparatively, all of our interviewees explained their view of being a gigger in a similar manner by addressing the freedom and the flexibility the gig economy entails. Hence freeing themselves from structures they were priorly constrained to, and in that sense taking their 'tight shoes' off.

### 4.2.1 The decision to walk barefoot

In the following theme we analyzed how the women we interviewed took off their 'tight shoes' and instead decided to 'walk barefoot'. The aim was to understand the reasoning behind their decision to join the gig economy, where the apparent frustration they felt in their past working experiences was seen as one of their main reasons. As we observed, their frustration was specifically associated with the aspect of gender inequality.

We talked about Jessica in the first theme of our analysis and came to the conclusion that her 'tight shoes' reflect on the issue of her being taught to be a 'good girl'. Furthermore, later on in the interview she started to reflect on her frustrations with the working environment she was in, and her feeling that she was working tirelessly without being proud of the work she was doing:

We worked 50-60 hour weeks without really feeling that we did anything good.
[...] and one day, one of my managers asked me to do one more thing and I said,
yeah, here's my to-do list. Please prioritize it, and he laughed at me. So I was
like, OK, I can do this better by myself. To be my own boss and decide what to
do and what not to do and to find a balance in life. I think that is what I've …
found by being on my own.

By referring to this, Jessica explained that the frustration she felt while working tirelessly, in
addition to being undervalued by her male manager made her decide to be her own boss. We
observed that one probable reason why she decided to join the gig economy is due to the
inequality she faced throughout her working life. The tipping point for her was when her male
boss laughed at her. She then realized she was not willing to accept this kind of behavior
anymore. By the same token, Linda stated:

Before I worked in a hotel, first I was part of the management group and there I
felt that I could influence but when I came up to the head office, then it was
deadly. I wasn't happy there, a lot of male dominance.

In addition, Victoria disclosed:

I think I wasn't happy with my last employment, I wasn't happy with the
management there. [...] He wasn't a nice person and if you don't have confidence
in yourself I think it's very hard to go on working for that person.

We analyzed the above three interviewees, Jessica, Linda, and Victoria, in connection to the
theme of 'being stuck in the tight shoes', where they all talked about the presence of inequality
that was evident throughout their life and their decision to become a gigger. Jessica pointed out
"he laughed at me"; Linda explained the "male dominance"; and Victoria talked about her male
boss who made her feel unhappy. We argue that these examples show strong indications that
these women felt tired of the gender inequality they faced. Hence, in this case, their move to
become a gigger is an outcome of their frustrations from constantly feeling constrained, which

ultimately caused them to attempt to redo gender. It is, however, important to disclose that we do not view them changing the historically established structures, such as women who are taught to be good girls. Contrastingly, we see it as their own personal accomplishment and aspiration to change those established structures for their own good.

Contrary to the women analyzed above in this theme, we recognized that there were several interviewees who claimed they have never encountered inequality. This sparked an interest in us and we wanted to find out what was their reason for becoming giggers and joining an all-female network, FemGIG. With the first theme, 'being stuck in tight shoes', we indicated how both Susanna and Oliva talked about the gender structures that exist in society and that they have seen it during their working life. Despite admitting they witnessed gender inequality, they quickly retracted their thoughts and explained that it still was not their own experience. By doing so they seemingly acknowledged the existence of structures without a feeling of being constrained by them personally. This view was shared by several other interviewees. For instance, Astrid said:

> I would not say that I have. That's not my experience. Maybe there are some things that are underneath that I haven't really reflected on. But, I would not say that I have dealt with this issue.

Kristina also noted:

> No, nothing that I can like touch on ... I do not think so. [...] Then, you need to be vigilant about whether there are glitches or glances, or yes how men behave towards women and women towards men that you should do.

What is evident here is that they don't see that inequality affected them. However, we also acknowledge that these explanations were given when asked the question of gender inequality in relation to their past working experiences. Accordingly, this could be the potential result from a consequential line of events that could for instance have a background in a good working environment. We assume that their explanations may be a result of reinforcement of how women

should do gender, and as a result not seeing the potential inequalities as an issue rather than as something undersurface that they have not dared to explore.

Furthermore, during the interview with Elsa we felt that she became agitated when asked a question on the topic of inequality, as she said: "No, not at the job. I mean, not for me personally, but of course, you see the structures [...] and who will be the boss." We analyzed this explanation in the same way as the previous ones, since Elsa acknowledges the existence of the structures, however, she does not want to engage with them. Furthermore, she made a point of explaining how these perceived structures do not affect her. She explained:

> Since, I am a smart woman … Um, seriously, I don't really think about it that much. I don't see myself as a ... I mean, you often get into questions like, what do women have to think about when they are entrepreneurs? And I mean for me, I never see it like that ... You have to do something about the injustice of inequality but that's like a different thing. I think it's not very productive to sort of ... to divide it too much.

Unlike other interviewees who shared a view of inequality without it affecting them, Elsa had a different standpoint. She felt that the vision of a woman differs at least in her case, as she sees herself as a powerful intellectual woman, therefore, not subjected to the same injustices other women felt. We sensed that when she stressed: "Since I am a smart woman … Um, seriously, I don't really think about it that much", she indicated how the injustices other women feel do not relate to her. More precisely, how she did not want to put herself in the 'box' of how women should enact gender. According to what she said, we assume that Elsa is perhaps not doing gender according to the norms of how a woman should act in society. She rather sees herself as an ideal worker and in a sense identifies with the image of an ideal worker represented by a powerful man. Thus for her the weaknesses other women experienced are not a problem that concerns her, assuming she recognized the existing structures and the need for their rearranging, however, she does not hold herself accountable to act upon them.

As shown above, we argue that with these explanations Olivia, Astrid, Kristina, Susanna, and Elsa did not see themselves as 'stuck in tight shoes'. However, we note an opposing point of view when they reflected on the decision to become a gigger. To demonstrate, Oliva pointed out:

> I couldn't see myself continuing working at the same place until I retired. I wouldn't be happy with that situation, and because I'm, I want to develop, and I want to learn more. I felt like I couldn't go any further because I was at the top level when it came to HR. I felt the glass ceiling, or not really the glass ceiling. But I didn't come further.

In a similar manner, Susanna remarked:

> I don't like people telling me what to do … The freedom is deciding how to do things and not having to, like I said, hit my head against the wall when I want to do changes and try to always convince someone else that this is a good idea … I can do whatever I want to do. [...] it's so important for me to have my freedom and no one is making me smaller. I mean, I need space.

Further, even though she was not mentioned prior in the analysis given that she did not reflect much on the inequality she faced before being a gigger, Felicia has been gigging for the longest time of all giggers we interviewed - 15 years. She stated a very interesting reason why she decided to join the gig economy: "There were people always saying no Felicia you can't do it. I really couldn't express what I could do, so that was a really strong motive to start gigging."

We can see that all these interviewees explained the struggles and the constraints they felt, such as Olivia's description of reaching the glass ceiling and not being able to move upwards in the power hierarchy; and Susanna's clarification of feeling tired when fighting for her ideas, as well as being tired of people making her feel smaller; and Felicia's explanation of feeling tired of being said no to. Our interest in these explanations stems from the fact that they now started to discuss the struggles they faced, however, none of them acknowledged that those struggles might be connected to the pre-existing gender structures. We assume these struggles came from gender

inequalities we believe they faced but were never taught to question. For instance, Olivia mentioned the glass ceiling but directly reverted her thought and explained: "or not really the glass ceiling but…". Even if they were not able to understand it on a conscious level, we assume that it indirectly reflects the struggles of being a woman in organizational life. Consequently, the reasoning for these interviewees to join the gig economy is an attempt of redoing gender by freeing themselves from the constraints they faced in relation to gender structures. Hence, indicating that before they were, in fact, 'stuck in tight shoes'.

To summarize, we argue that all of our interviewees decided to join the gig economy and decided to 'walk barefoot' as a consequence of feeling frustrated with their past working experiences due to the gender inequality aspect. We stated that by being a gigger, not only did they feel freer and more flexible, but they also personally attempted to redo gender by fighting against the pre-established gender structures that indicate how a woman should behave. In light of this, in the next theme we analyzed the interviewees whom we argue were continuing with attempts of redoing gender while being a gigger.

## 4.2.2 Continuing to walk barefoot

With the following theme, we will discuss the interviewed women who, after taking their 'tight shoes off' continued to 'walk barefoot', and in that sense strived to redo gender structures in the society while being a part of the gig economy. We recognized that mainly two women indicated it clearly, and they also happened to be the founders of FemGIG - Monica, and Linda.

To begin with, Monica pointed out that:

> Both me and Linda have an ambition to help women dare to take a step out and take the place they deserve. I do not think that we can sit anymore and feel bad for ourselves, we need to go out and fight for us and other women and get the respect that we deserve.

In this citation, Monica indicated that women need to fight, and that in order to change and resist masculine norms they need to be brave. We can see from Monica's example that she views FemGIG as a tool of resisting gendered organizations that are masculine in their essence. In light of this, we assume that the network supports other women in similar situations and aims to make them feel brave. After Monica signaled that women need to be brave, she continued to explain:

> I want to do business in my own way, I want to walk into a boardroom with a flower dress and that should be okay, I need to be who I am … and if people do not want to do business with me, then they do not need to do it.

This explanation serves as a good example of trying to resist pre-dominated gender structures. As we observed, Monica made a decision to resist the latter structures by wanting to be seen with a "flower dress". The structures seemingly excluded her before expressing herself fully and by putting on that "flower dress" she would feel entitled to resist them. Her longing is perceivable as a form of resistance to the view that if a woman wants to become a successful businesswoman she should dress and behave like a man. A perception of the boardroom as male-dominated, together with the image of an ideal worker who is dressed in a dark suit is, in fact, an acknowledgment of dominated gendered structures in organizations. Also, in regards to the metaphor of 'walking barefoot', we argue that a dark suit displays the 'tight shoes', whereas 'walking barefoot' illustrates the flower dress. In such a way we came to an understanding Monica wanted to point out that, even if she wore a flower dress to the boardroom, she should not be seen as less valuable than her male colleagues. Consequently, inferring that seeing men as ideal workers are outdated. With that, her act of bravery could be seen as an act of redoing gender.

In continuance, the indicated strive to change the gendered organizations that is present amongst these women also illustrates struggles of 'walking barefoot'. Linda explained that their company sometimes struggled with potential clients and pointed out that: "We've met clients that question our business idea because they are worried about that. [...] it has happened that we have lost business because of this." In addition to that she followed with an example:

They said, 'I don't know if I want a woman that needs help'. So I mean. It's an argument that still exists. What society looks like and we need to help this society to change. That doesn't mean that the women that hang out with us are weak in any way, they are successful women and they could manage by themselves.

Linda indicated that starting her own business made her question whether her surroundings will be accepting of the business idea she and Monica had. The idea they came up with indicated help directed towards female giggers by matching them with relevant assignments. Linda also clarified that people who were not accepting of that idea refused to hire a woman who is not able to take care of herself. With this explanation Linda illustrated that some people view women as the weaker gender. The reasoning behind this view perhaps lies in the underlying aspect of masculinity in organizational life, and that women are hence inevitably being judged according to masculine norms. However, what Linda said: "What society looks like and we need to help this society to change", could once again reaffirm the strive to redo gender by starting an all-female network. Nevertheless, even if Linda explained this struggle, she still stated:

It's also I mean, this focus on letting women take place in society is and it's very right here and now. So it's working, and a lot of women easily … stand behind us because they think it's a good idea.

Monica also talked about this as:

People were really happy when we started FemGIG, but then to actually dare to use us it is harder because then they at the same time make a statement … and it is a lot of men sitting in boardrooms and deciding …

Even if the struggle is evident, we see an indication in Linda's and Monica's explanations that the support from those who think alike is essential to initiate a change. In addition, despite the fact, the structures in the society are immensely difficult to change, for these women it seemed just to try and redo gender norms by founding a network that aims to change the pre-assumed view of women.

As shown in the theme, Monica and Linda showed us their strive to change the gendered organizations that are as indicated bearers of masculinity, by using their company FemGIG as a tool. Nonetheless, we only discussed two of our interviewed women, therefore, in the next theme we will analyze the rest of our interviewees' reflections on their work experiences in the gig economy.

## 4.2.3 Putting the tight shoes back on

During interviews the vast majority of women spoke about how to cope with being a gigger while pondering how to be successful and explained their observations of how men did it. In that respect, we argue that the women analyzed in this theme, who in the theme 'the decision to walk barefoot' started 'walking barefoot', now showed indications of 'putting the tight shoes back on' which is recognized as reproducing the doing of gender.

Several of the interviewed women spoke about why they were a part of FemGIG. For instance, Kristina said:

> It was because I wanted to let go of being an employee and dare to take care of myself, dare to get my own business [...] but it is just because I get energy in the situations where all these women meet and help each other.

We find this point of view intriguing, because as Monica says: "women need to be brave" Kristina also notes: "dare to take care of myself". We see this expression and use of words, 'brave' and 'dare' as a possible attempt of redoing gender as indicated in Monica's example mentioned above. Nevertheless, it is the masculine ideal in a society that implies a bold and a daring man, the features which are not questioned if displayed by a man. By pointing out that they need to be brave, they at the same time indicate doing gender in the light of male entrepreneurial norms ultimately adapting to masculinity. Moreover, Astrid explained her view of the all-female network as:

> This network is to help women to be better at networking that normally men are.
> They are more accurate when they network with their friends, men than women.

We see her explanation as a way of acknowledging that the reason she wanted to learn how to network was that men were seemingly better at it. This could indicate that Astrid is trying to mimic men-like behavior by joining an all-female network. We surmise that by doing so, she is exhibiting how to do gender as an ideal worker which was visible in Kristina's example as well.

It should also be recognized that Elsa, whom we portrayed as attempting to accomplish herself as an ideal worker, remained uncertain of the necessity of founding an all-female network (FemGIG) even before she started gigging. As she explained:

> I think it's a good idea because women need to be lifted. I think it's an interesting way to do it because I mean, no, I am a part of it. But I think it's also an interesting thought, like the ones who actually use them, are actually looking for only women. So I think it's not like super … clear why they would do that because you also want things the best.

As we observed, Elsa delineated she never struggled with the inequality and that she did not understand the need to found that type of network: "it's not like super … clear why they would do that". Once again, she acknowledges the need that women need to be uplifted but excludes herself from that need. In her explanation she sees herself as different from other women. However, with a sense of reflection, she said:

> I mean, there is a reason why I'm in FemGIG. Because I'm super tired of the old
> white men. So of course. I mean, it's omnipresent. So it's always, something that
> exists that you don't know.

As we can see here Elsa explained that she did see the omnipresence of the "old white men" as an issue she felt tired of. We find it interesting how, when she spoke previously in the interview about not feeling unequal to her male colleague and that this is a topic that does not concern her, she still presented us with aspects which signal inequality. We wonder why else she would be tired of these 'white old men'. In which case her reason to join FemGIG, even if she still may be questioning it, might be the first step of acknowledging the inequalities she faced but which she does not want to bring to light merely because she does not want to be seen as a victim. However, we still got the impression that she did not want to enact herself as a woman who needs to be uplifted, but alternatively her desire to be identified with the image of the ideal worker which is anchored in the society.

In addition, when our interviewees were asked if they faced any difficulties while being a gigger, all of them spoke about it in the same manner. We noticed that the freedom that they have all been striving for has a downside. For instance, the struggle of not knowing when they will have their next gig, and also the fact that they needed to be vigilant of those struggles. Jessica pointed out:

> Yeah, I've been thinking, especially now, that I've been off. It's been a lot of
> thoughts like what happens with the economy now should I take an employment.
> And I have been thinking about like, oh, if I was a man, what would I do then? I
> would have believed in that, that this is going to work out somehow.

On the grounds that she is thinking about how a man would handle a certain situation, we presume Jessica perceives men as more capable of dealing with daily struggles. We see an indication of the embedded masculinity where she identified that if she was more man-like she would have succeeded in overcoming the struggle. Hence, her thoughts on risk-taking and bravery relate to an image of a gigger, which in her view relates to the image of an ideal worker and thus a man. In connection to Jessica, Astrid reflected on the reason why she was not able to acquire gigs sometimes:

> If I compare now, it could be that male are more self-conscious when they talk about something whereas women question themselves more. I think about my reality … There are more qualified maybe. Maybe I have not done exactly that kind of thing. I think we need to believe in ourselves more. That's where I think in general male are more stable.

Earlier in this theme we analyzed a citation from Astrid where she discussed the all-female network as a way of mimicking masculine norms in organizational life. Accordingly, as seen in this citation, she again started to reflect upon how men are better in being self-conscious and expressed how important it is for her and other women to believe in themselves more. By doing that, she once again obliged to the norm of the ideal worker and indicated that she might be deprived of opportunities by her fault as she is not a man.

In this theme we showed that while gigging the vast majority of our interviewed women were 'putting the tight shoes back on' by mimicking masculine norms of how to be successful. Consequently, we argue that this could be seen as an imitation of how women are doing gender in organizational life with respect to the ideal worker norms.

## 4.2.4 Walking with one shoe on

When our interviewees talked about their relationship to the gig economy, we observed how the majority of them reflected on the family aspect. Throughout the interviews we found two different points of view. Firstly we encountered women who decided to be a gigger because they had small children, and secondly we encountered women who decided to wait until their children grow up. It became evident now that all of the women we interviewed have a traditional view of being a mum and taking care of domestic duties thus reproducing how to do gender. However, we also saw that some women showed a combination of traditional and more novel ways of doing domestic duties. Hence, we argue, that several of the women we interviewed when relating to the family aspect, were seen 'walking with one shoe on' as a new way of balancing work and family.

To begin with, when talking about domestic duties, some of our respondents started reflecting on their past experiences. For instance, Kristina explained the problem of working too much: "We have both (her and her partner) worked way too much, when we look back at it. [...] But I think that both have done equally much and that has been important for me." Astrid explained it in a similar manner: "I would say that me and my husband split quite evenly." We interpret their explanations as they were never expected to do any extra work in their family environment and that both they and their partners saw domestic duties as something that should be shared equally between them. Moreover, Monica also felt that her partner and she evenly divided domestic duties, however, we felt her frustration that this aspect even needed to be discussed in this day and age. She elaborated:

> This discussion feels so 'mossy' but for many years they talked about how we women should be able to have a career and have children at the same time, but they never ask how the men can make a career and have children, I think it's so strange. I have been attending lectures to get tips on how to get my career

together, how damn mossy it is, really ... really … Now I have had a man who has been very involved and strived to be at home.

Once again Monica emphasized her frustration of the gender norms that exist in society. We see that the language used in society in relation to domestic duties, like the lecture she attended to get tips to succeed with her career, is something she wanted to change thus suggesting she wants to remodel the way that women are conceptualized in the society. However, in accordance with the majority of our interviewees, she also points out these aspects have never been an issue between her and her partner.

Continuously, some of the interviewed women explained that they had the time to become a gigger due to the fact that their children are now grown-ups. For instance, Kristina signaled that "My kids are big now and are working and taking care of themselves, so that's fine". Victoria also explained:

> Yeah, my kids are grown ups, and they don't live with me anymore. So they have their own lives, they're studying and working and traveling. So I have a lot of time to be focusing on me, my career, interests, hobbies and stuff. So, I can work a lot for a certain time if I want to, as I said, I worked 150% for a while and I can do that. But it's to me, it's not quality. In the long term you usually need to do other stuff. [...] I couldn't do that 10 years ago because I was really dependent on my income, to make my life go around.

Elsa too expressed her thoughts:

> This was a good timing when it comes to family. Because, as I said, my kids are now adults, and I don't support them financially, which means it's a totally different situation for me [...] I couldn't imagine how it would be to have small kids and try to support yourself in an unsecure situation.

These women revealed they could not reconcile being financially insecure and having a weight of responsibility upon them. Hence, they did not choose to become a gigger so they can spend more time at home and take care of more domestic duties, but they chose this profession so they can take care of themselves and have a choice in deciding what they think matters to them. This indicates that they were waiting to follow their 'dreams' due to the fact that they needed to take care of their children first, which could be related to the fact that these women felt they could not pursue their career given their children's age. They were constrained in the structures which compelled them to think that women need to prioritize their children before their career. But, we do not know how they and their partners divide their duties as a matter of fact, except for what the majority of them told us when they referred to the equal division.

Several other interviewees indicated the contrary perspective of being a gigger and emphasized that taking part in the gig economy made it easier for them to be there for their children. Firstly, Astrid highlighted: "I wanted to be able to spend more time based from home, to be more present with my children as they grow up [...] being able to work from home." Secondly, Linda explained that:

> Yes. But I think since I started working for myself and the kids were quite small, then my life changed to the better. But the first few years when my kids were small. I worked part time, and that was, of course, a choice to be able to be more present with the kids. Maybe today having that experience and feeling more strong and comfortable with myself, I might have made another choice.

In this citation Linda explains that, before she started to do gigs, she worked part-time to be home with her children. These thoughts, we argue, oblige to the traditional roles of women and men, concerning domestic duties. We understand that she might have done things differently now as she feels stronger and more comfortable with herself, thus pointing out that traditional norms by which women are expected to prioritize domestic duties were in fact something she did follow. Thus, we see this as being 'stuck' in gendered structures that entail women are

responsible for domestic duties. Moreover, she also explained that when she decided to start gigging, she felt a balance in life which came from being a gigger, which for her, could be seen as an attempt to achieve success both personally and professionally.

Jessica elaborated:

> I think that as a gigger, I can more decide that I work 80 percent, it's like on Mondays my daughter goes horseback riding, so I need to get off early. Period. That's just the way it is [...] So by having my own company, I feel like I've been able to do that much better because I decided that, OK, I don't take as much salary, maybe as I could. But I can take 10 weeks vacation per year … To be able to be with my family and have time off and do things together.

We interpret that Jessica's explanation could express two interesting facts. First of all, as we understood, Jessica indicated an element of the gendered structures when she said: "OK, I don't take as much salary, maybe as I could", which we explained above signal women as bearers of domestic responsibilities. This could be an indicator that, speaking in monetary terms, she haltered the progress of her career as she was prioritizing family responsibilities. Second of all, when Jessica said: "To be able to be with my family and have time off and do things together", we stress her choice of the word family. The word family does not signal a necessity to take care of her child, but instead a choice of wanting to spend time with her partner as well as her child. These explanations show how Jessica, Astrid and Linda had the opportunity to balance their family and work responsibilities when they walked away from their past work experiences and entered a more flexible work arrangement. Hence, even if we argue that these women are showing strong indications of how they should do gender concerning being a mom; we still argue that the flexibility that comes from being a gigger enables them to pursue their career and their dream of being their own boss - a gigger.

Within this theme, as we mentioned before, we recognised the two camps of women explaining the relation between the gig economy and the family aspect. On one hand, we saw how all the interviewed women reproduced the traditional view of domestic duties, while several waited to pursue their career until their children were old enough. With that in mind, we detected an indication of feminized gigging, since the male entrepreneurial norm is more related to what they want to do regardless of the family aspect. One the other hand, we argue that the women who explained that being a gigger is more about creating a good balance between family and work illustrate a rather novel manner of how to do gender. Consequently, we indicate that they depict simultaneous doing as well as redoing gender which in turn creates a new role of entrepreneurship for women. From this point of view they demonstrate the doing of the traditional view by feeling the need to be at home and take care of their children, but they also also suggest a way of redoing gender by pursuing their career. This could be interpreted in relation to the feminized gigging, since these women found a balance between being a mom and pursuing a career, ultimately, not following the line of the male entrepreneur. Therefore, we could see them as 'walking with one shoe on'.

## 4.3 Chapter summary

Throughout the analysis of the empirical data, we aimed to outline how the high-skilled women we interviewed experienced work in the gig economy by examining how they were influenced by various factors such as past work experiences, gender inequality and family. We reached an understanding that all of the interviewed women, both the women who at first did not reflect on the matter of gender inequality as well as those who did, were seemingly 'stuck in tight shoes' before deciding to become a gigger. In this manner indirectly acknowledging they are doing gender. Firstly, we found that all of the interviewed women made an attempt to redo gender by 'walking barefoot'. Secondly, we identified that two of the women, the founders, continued striving to redo gender while gigging which we illustrated as 'continuing to walk barefoot'. Thirdly, the rest of the interviewees were seen in contrast to the founders, as they demonstrated the reproduction of doing gender whilst gigging by mimicking male entrepreneurial norms. Hence, depicted as 'putting the tight shoes back on'. Lastly, we acknowledged that all of the

interviewed women signalled feminized gigging when addressing the family aspect, which presumes the traditional role women are assumed to take on as the bearers of domestic duties. However, it is interesting to point out that several of them did experience their role in the gig economy as an opportunity to find balance between work and family duties, simultaneously redoing and doing gender. We paradoxically depicted them as 'walking with one shoe on'.

# 5.0 Discussion

When one of our interviewees used an expression "I want to walk barefoot in life" in regards to being a gigger, we did not reflect on it directly. However, following the analysis of the empirical material we realized the innate simplicity of the phrase that would allow us to present the complexity of our chosen field of interest. We aimed to get an understanding of why our interviewees decided to embark on a journey into the gig economy and what was their reasoning behind their desire to 'walk barefoot'. Although all of them expressed their frustrations with negative experiences they encountered in their past working life, which we identified with the expression 'stuck in tight shoes', we also realized they longed for the freedom they would feel by 'walking barefoot'. Their desire for freedom is visible in different perspectives following their reflections of their role in the gig economy. For this reason we constructed five various themes that relate to the metaphor 'walking barefoot': (1) Being stuck in tight shoes; (2) The decision to walk barefoot; (3) Continuing to walk barefoot; (4) Putting the tight shoes back on; and (5) Walking with one shoe on.

Having considered that, in this chapter we will discuss our empirical findings with the chosen metaphor, 'walking barefoot' as it allows us to expand on the meaning behind our interviewees' reflection of their work experiences in the gig economy. We will relate this metaphor to the existing literature in the field of the gig economy and gender studies. By doing that we aim to answer our research question which is 'How do high-skilled women experience work in the gig economy?', and in a broader context increase the understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy which is the main purpose of our study.

## 5.1 Walking barefoot

As mentioned in the literature review, the majority of research on the topic of the gig economy as well as the media attention is focused on low-skilled workers (Friedman, 2014; Petriglieri, Ashford & Września ewski, 2019). However, novel research suggests a great part of gig work is of

knowledge-intensive nature (Friedman, 2014). For this reason we focused on analyzing women who are working with knowledge-intensive gigs. What's more, the empirical data was approached in a different light than Friedman (2014) who states that gig work is conceptualized as a type of work that does not require any previous work experience. Our research contradicts this view as all of the women interviewed for our study were performing gigs that require specific knowledge. Contrarily, our research coincides with Housman's findings (2001) which indicate the need from organizations to hire giggers with a specific set of skills and knowledge.

In continuance, we acknowledged that all women we interviewed were constrained by gender inequality they faced in their past work experiences, however, some reflected on that later on in the interview and not when initially asked. The work they did before to gigging could relate to traditional work arrangements which, as Houseman (2001) and Borschak & Davis Blake (2006) explain, could be characterized by the unequal power relations which often elevate the superiority and inferiority between genders. Hence, given that power relations and inequality they expressed using the terms like 'glass ceiling' and 'people making them smaller', we saw the women we interviewed as 'stuck in tight shoes'. Their frustration and clear differences they felt while they were working coincide with Acker's (2006) definition of inequality which is "systematic disparities between participants in power and control over goals, resources, and outcomes …" (p.443). What is more, it could be an indication of West and Zimmerman's (1987) explanation of doing gender as a behavior upon which individuals seldom reflect upon since they are following institutionalized norms.

Considering the frustration they felt with their past work experiences, we recognize that one of our main findings relates to the attempt of redoing gender which occurred once they decided to free themselves from the constraints of 'tight shoes' and 'walk barefoot'. By emphasizing the word 'attempt' in relation to redoing gender, we argue for their own achievement and aspiration to change those established structures they were 'stuck in' before. We deem it relevant to elevate 'personal' rather than changing institutionalized gender norms since we are aware that changing societal discourses is immensely difficult and cannot be done by a single individual. However,

we do see a link between West' and Zimmerman's (2009) concept of redoing gender and Mirchandani's (1999) configuration of an individual approach to entrepreneurship. This link could explain how, by resisting and removing difficulties the interviewed women faced, they strive to change their image and, in essence, become free for their reasons. Thus, we argue that the attempt of redoing gender, as indicated by Connell (2012), recognizes the presence of gender inequalities and, in turn, an initial move towards changing them.

Even though the minority of workers enjoy the benefits of the gig economy lifestyle, there is a vast majority who would prefer to be in a traditional work arrangement (Friedman, 2014). We have however seen that the women we interviewed in that sense belong to the minority, since they perceive their decision to become a gigger as a way of 'walking barefoot', and moving away from the constraints of 'tight shoes'. This is an indication that highly skilled women may see the gig economy in a different light to the low-skilled giggers. In a bigger context, this view through which we observe the women we interviewed and their desire to 'walk barefoot' is particularly interesting. Lewchuk (2017) explains how the gig economy or other work arrangements in which individuals have more freedom to be flexible are still considered precarious - less secure. Hence, we see the interviewed women's decision to enter the gig economy as contrary to the existing literature on the precarious work, which suggests entering the gig economy is not a means of liberation, but simply entering a work environment with unstable and uncertain conditions (Young, 2010; Lewchuk, 2017; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wiśniewski, 2019). Low-skilled giggers in the gig economy may feel like they are 'stuck in tight shoes', while they would perhaps feel they have more security in a traditional work arrangement, which is in stark contrast with the women we interviewed who felt constrained of working in traditional work arrangements. With this in mind, we argue that the reasoning behind women's decision to join the gig economy, as an attempt of redoing gender, may be conditional upon the level of skills that giggers in general exhibit.

During the analysis we have also noticed how only two of all of the interviewed high-skilled women, Monica and Linda, persisted striving to redo gender while being a gigger and thus 'continued to walk barefoot'. Their strive is most evident in Monica's example, where she talks about wanting to wear a flower dress to the boardroom. There is a correlation between Monica's desire to wear a flower dress and the metaphor 'walking barefoot', and also between the boardroom where both men and women are typically wearing suits and the expression 'being stuck in tight shoes' if we contextualize it to the 'ideal worker' which is a concept Acker (1990, 1992b, 2006) conducted research on. Acker (1990, 1992b, 2006) points out that the idea of an 'ideal worker' entices a figure of a man, consequently implying that a woman needs to adopt men-like features in order to be successful since due to the gendered structures in organizations men are seen as a more dominant gender, which is something that neither Monica nor Linda wanted to accept any more. Therefore, the role of the gig economy for these two women can be seen as a tool by which they resist their association with the gendered ideal worker, thus striving to redo gender norms in society.

In light of this, we found a somewhat different view of gender roles in the gig economy which is in contrast to Schoenbaum (2016) and Cook et al (2018) who argue that the gig economy could potentially emphasize the discourses of gender differences, whereas these women view the gig economy as a place where these differences could be changed. Mirchandani's (1999) research about female entrepreneurship can be seen as a connection to these two women since she points out that if women want to oppose gender norms in society, they need to develop networks and mentor relationships. This is something that both Monica and Linda have done by creating FemGIG - a network with the goal of making changes to the gendered norms in society.

Although this might be the view of the above-mentioned women, the rest of our interviewees indicated a contrary view of their role in the gig economy, and instead showed how they reproduced the doing of gender, for instance, when: (1) they encountered difficulties and thought 'what would a man do?', (2) they wanted to learn how to network, because 'men are better at that', (3) thought of men being 'as more self-conscious' than women. Further, the studies on the topic of gig economy indicate a rise in job insecurity (Houseman, 2001; Broschak &

Davis-Blake, 2006; Capelli & Keller, 2013), which is something that the rest of the interviewed women encountered while gigging. This reflects the vulnerability and insecurity that these women felt, and instead of reflecting on how they could deal with these insecurities as women, they started to think about what a man would do in their situation. Consequently, indicating that their role in the gig economy involves mimicking the features of an ideal worker. By doing this, they are 'putting the tight shoes back on'. In a broader context, this view of the women we interviewed that are striving to be successful by mimicking masculine norms and further institutionalizing the differences between men and women, corresponds a well-stated argument in the studies of gender and work (e.g. Acker, 1990; Lewis, 2006; Powell, Bagihole & Dainty, 2009; Goffe & Scase, 2015).

In addition, our research puts Gherardi's (1994) study in a broader context, since we observe it through the differences between traditional work arrangements and gig economy instead of observing it in a specific organizational context. She argued that gender processes are functioning at two levels of activity; the ceremonial and the remedial work. We can see our interviewed women as breaking down the symbolic order of gender with their decision to join the gig economy and 'walk barefoot'. Nonetheless, these women also indicate the remedial work by trying to mimic the ideal worker. By doing this they are reestablishing the symbolic order of gender and 'putting their tight shoes back on'. Overall it is clear these interviewed women are evaluating their role in the gig economy per the gendered ideal worker, as well as the remedial work reestablishment (Gherardi, 1994). We observe that these high-skilled women in the gig economy are reproducing the doing of gender by maintaining gender differences, which is something that the gig economy can do to a certain extent, as stated by Schoenbaum (2016) and Cook et al (2018).

On a final note, we have reached the conclusion that all of the interviewed women when reflecting on their role in the gig economy concerning the family aspect, signaled feminized gigging. This view presumes a traditional role women are assumed to take on as bearers of domestic duties, as seen in the research of gender, work and family (Acker, 1994; Whittock et al,

2002; Gornick and Meyers, 2008; Hochschild & Machung, 2012;). Even when women pointed out they have split their domestic duties evenly with their partner, which is perceived as an egalitarian view in their marital relationships, they are still mirroring the traditional role of marital relations by deciding to pause their career until their family is taken care of, and in that sense reproducing the doing of gender. However, interestingly, several women did experience the gig economy as a new way of balancing work and family responsibilities and we see these women as 'walking with one shoe on' and by doing so, they seem to be redoing and doing gender simultaneously. With that in mind, we can also argue that balancing both work and family responsibilities for these women contrasts the male entrepreneurial norms. Studies have shown men are expected to pursue their career and become accomplished in their profession regardless of their family responsibilities, while women are solely expected to carry the weight of domestic and family duties (Acker, 1994; Dex & Joshi, 1999; Whittock et al, 2002; Meyers, 2008).

The gig economy can be perceived as a platform to change the norm of a male entrepreneur, since several women viewed their role in the gig economy as a means to balance their work life and family responsibilities which opposes Hochschild's (and Machung, 2012) argument that the traditional view of women sees them as only responsible for domestic duties and that they are to be home. This view, instead, corresponds with Acker (1998) who challenged her research on the ideal worker by arguing that changing work conditions from hierarchical to more flexible could be beneficial to women in organizations, which in turn might lead to equal opportunities for both sexes (Kvande & Rasmussen, 1994). All things considered, we can see how, when gendered structures are changing, the role of these high-skilled women changes by being a gigger as they have a newfound way of balancing work and family.

# 6.0 Conclusion

The following section is an overview of our empirical findings which helped us answer the research question and create theoretical contributions. Further, we also propose topics which could be used as the foundation for future research.

## 6.1 Empirical findings

With this research we intended to answer the question: How do high-skilled women experience work in the Gig economy? Throughout the paper we used the metaphor 'walking barefoot' to expand the meaning behind their thoughts and reflections. We decided to divide the metaphor into different themes, depending on the findings. Firstly, 'being stuck in tight shoes' connotes that the women we interviewed were prior in their working life doing gender as taught and have faced gender inequalities. Secondly, we found that they saw the gig economy as a means through which they can free themselves from those 'tight shoes', and therefore 'walk barefoot' which we discussed as an attempt of redoing gender. Thirdly, we noticed that the vast majority of the women we interviewed recognized the uncertainty that the gig economy entails. This realization urged them to 'put the shoes back on', and subconsciously accept and try to mimic gender norms of an ideal worker when performing gigs. However, we also noticed that two interviewees used the gig economy as a tool to resist the gendered ideal worker and, therefore, 'continued to walk barefoot'.

Lastly, we viewed their role in the gig economy as feminized gigging, since all the women we interviewed reflected upon the relevance of being both a parent and a businesswoman, ultimately opposing the image of male entrepreneurs who prioritize the work sphere instead of the domestic sphere. Taking all that into consideration, several of the interviewees indicated a new way of balancing work and family responsibilities by both reproducing the traditional role of domestic duties and pursuing their career at the same time. In light of that balance, they indicated the redoing of gender roles. In a broader context, even if we showed different standpoints of how these women were seen figuratively 'walking' in the gig economy (with, without or with only

one shoe) we observe that their role in the gig economy is about 'walking barefoot' which signifies their goal of being free from gender structures and finding a balance between their work and self.

## 6.2 Theoretical contribution

The purpose of this research was to increase the understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy, specifically the role of high-skilled women and their experience of work. We imply, with the metaphor 'walking barefoot', we contributed to a new way of theorizing the dynamics of gender within the gig economy. By using this metaphor, we illustrated the work experiences of the women we interviewed and increased an understanding of the role of gender in the gig economy.

From studying the lifeworld of high-skilled giggers we have put the research of the gig economy in a different light since the existing literature on gig economy focuses mainly on the low-skilled gig work, which consists of workers who are working in inferior conditions with little possibility of permanent employment (e.g. Kalleberg & Dunn, 2016; Young, 2010; Lewchuk, 2017; Petriglieri, Ashford & Wiśniewski, 2019). Figuratively speaking, the existing literature views the gig workers' as 'stuck in tight shoes', rather than having the ability to 'walk barefoot', which we have seen in our study. In conclusion, the theoretical contribution of our study lies in the metaphor 'walking barefoot' which gives a new insight into understanding the role of gender in the gig economy, specifically for high-skilled women deliberating themselves from the gender structures while performing gigs.

## 6.3 Future research

Drawing upon our findings, we saw that the theoretical lens of 'doing and redoing' gender by West and Zimmerman (1987, 2009) could be applied to the aspect of high-skilled women concerning the gig economy and how their role is affected by the dynamics of gender. The future topic of interest could also be observing how high-skilled female giggers reflect upon the aspects

of gender inequality in contrast to the low-skilled female giggers. As seen in theory, Kalleberg and Dunn (2016) indicate the shift from traditional to flexible work arrangements depends on the prospects of uncertainty in relation to employment opportunities. In that respect, we see the opportunity to analyze whether women of limited or no education with scarce employment opportunities view the work experiences in the gig economy in the same light as those with higher education. There is also potential in researching how high-skilled men enact gender in the gig economy. In our research we merely observed the literature that focuses on the female perspective, thus, it would be interesting to see whether men are seen as doing gender in obedience to the gendered structures, or if they too made an attempt to resist those structures by becoming giggers. Finally, we also recognize the study we conducted is solely focused on Sweden, therefore it would be of benefit to see whether our findings could be applied to the context of a different national background.

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