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Women who host: An intersectional critique of rentier capitalism on AirBnB

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Abstract

Scholarship on AirBnB has often brought critical focus to the advancement of rentier capitalism and gentrification through the sharing economy. In this article we draw upon in-depth interviews with women in London who host their shared living space on AirBnB, to present meaningful empirical examples of women utilizing the platform as a way of surviving. Often, women in our research turned to AirBnB after facing exclusion from traditional labor markets, based on gender, age and/or disability. Others relied on AirBnB to meet their own housing needs, for instance: subletting their own bed to meet rent payments. Rather than departing from a critical class analysis, we instead hope to nuance understandings of rentierism on AirBnB by focusing on these women as complex *intersectional* subjects of capitalism. While many hosts fall clearly into the category of rentier capitalists, making money through property ownership, the lived realities of hosting were often more complex. We therefore use these women's lived experiences to complicate understandings of class subjectivity in the "sharing economy", drawing upon an intersectional perspective to showcase women who are hosting in order to subsist.

KEYWORDS
Class, disability, gender, platform economy, sharing economy

1 | INTRODUCTION

The marketing discourses of the "sharing economy" present the notion of digital platforms as a new way to utilize peer-to-peer lending, reducing consumption through the sharing of assets (Sundararajan, 2017). However, the term has been widely critiqued within academic circles (Ravenelle, 2017; Schor, 2017, 2021; Schor & Attwood-Charles, 2017). In particular, discussion has focused on the use of the term to disguise the underlying economic relationships that platforms are built upon (Woodcock & Graham, 2020). It has been argued by Ravenelle (2019) that AirBnB hosts are not "sharing" their home so much as renting it out. Therefore, research on AirBnB has largely turned its attention to examining the role of the platform in exacerbating economic disparities and driving gentrification—and there is strong evidence to support such claims (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018; Guttentag, 2015; Mermet, 2018). It is generally established that AirBnB hosting constitutes rentier activity (Ravenelle, 2019), with hosts extracting value from productivity elsewhere within the economy. This extractive activity, gaining income through rents rather than productive labor, is traditionally associated with a rentier class position.

However, this article draws upon rich empirical data in the form of in-depth interviews with women in London who share their living space on AirBnB. While there is clear support within our data for hosting as a form of rentier activity, there are also important cases where this conceptualization of class becomes complicated and fails to offer sufficient explanatory power for the inequalities unfolding. We therefore embrace an approach built around intersectionality (Bilge, 2013; Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016), to ask the question: How does an intersectional perspective complicate an understanding of rentierism among women who host on AirBnB? We explore this question in relation to two phenomena that were identified in our data among women who turned to AirBnB:

1. Women who are excluded from the productive economy (due to gender, disability and/or age).
2. Women who are unable to subsist within London on the income provided by the productive economy alone.

We build upon these findings by looking at hosts' own perceptions of gentrification and rentierism, to understand how they view their own positionality in relation to the increasing costs of housing in London. Through our examination of the interview data, we argue that AirBnB hosting offers an opportunity for some women facing complex intersecting inequalities of class, age and disability to survive financially where they wouldn't have been able to do so if they were dependent solely on the productive economy. However, we make clear that access to the resources necessary to utilize AirBnB in this way are not equally distributed—the women who are able to do so often relied upon particular forms of capital (as described by Bourdieu, 1986) that they had accrued throughout their lives.

2 | AN INTERSECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF AirBnB

To explore how classed subjectivities are intersected by multiple other markers of subjectivity, we engage with the work of feminist theorist Crenshaw (1991), who understands inequalities as always being produced within a complex power-laden network of socially constructed categories. Our approach is premised on the understanding that social exclusion rarely operates on a single axis of division (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). Intersectionality, as a concept, is grounded within black feminist scholarship—yet, it has been taken up and understood in a variety of contexts within and beyond academic scholarship. As Hill-Collins and Bilge note, most recently it has been co-opted by neoliberal discourses and institutions in ways which have worked to depoliticize it as a concept (Bilge, 2013; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016). We counter such depoliticization and use it here as a critical analytical tool which allows us to consider how the power dynamics of class, gender and disability work together to produce multiple forms of marginalization which otherwise may have been obscured.

Existing research examining experiences of marginalized groups' use of AirBnB has focused on discrimination around race, age and gender (Cheng & Foley, 2018; Farmaki, 2019; Farmaki & Kladou, 2020; Koh et al., 2019;

Törnberg & Chiappini, 2020). However, most studies into AirBnB and discrimination have predominantly centered on race; indeed, Su and Mattila (2020) argue that existing literature into the platform tends to neglect gender as a result. Koh et al.'s (2019) study into diversity on the platform found that the majority of hosts are white, even in cities where whites are a minority. Edelman and Luca (2014) show that non-black hosts charge 12% more in rent than their black counterparts, who are also subject to more cancellations based on their racial background (a form of discrimination also experienced by guests).

Where gender is examined within the literature, it is largely *only* with respect to discrimination, safety and risk (Baldick & Jang, 2020; Farmaki et al., 2019; Jun, 2020; Schoenbaum, 2016). Current research also tends to examine forms of discrimination as discrete categories of exclusion, rather than considering how they operate together—Koh et al. (2019) is one of the few studies to look at age, race and gender. Here, we widen the focus to include how gender, age and disability intersect with class, using a qualitative analysis. We address this significant gap by asking whether the platform also offers women certain economic opportunities, and how such opportunities may be limited by intersections of age and disability. We therefore aim to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how AirBnB marginalizes women along class divisions and affects women in differing ways; allowing women who were excluded from traditional forms of employment but who had existing forms of capital to flourish, while circumscribing the agency of those who felt dependent on the platform in order to simply survive.

3 | RENTIER CAPITALISM AND CLASS

There is an eager debate in economics over what counts as "productive." While the classical economics of Marx (1887) and Smith (1776) make distinctions between productive and unproductive activity within an economy, Mazzucato (2019) illustrates how the rise of neoliberal economics has blurred these lines in political economy. Because of this, money earned through interest and rents is often bundled together with productive labor in providing value to an economy. However, Mazzucato is keen to redraw the distinction—noting that, rather than being productive, rents are "the principle means by which value is extracted" (2019, p. 72). By drawing apart productive and unproductive income, it is possible to see where value in an economy is emerging—through labor—alongside how it might be exploited and extracted to other parts of the economy through profits and rents. The need to distinguish between value-producing labor and extractive returns on wealth and capital is an important factor in measuring economic inequalities (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014, 2020), as those able to extract money through profits and rents can accumulate far more than those reliant upon the limits of their own labor.

While Marx (1887) set out a structure of economic class that distinguished the proletariat or working class from the bourgeoisie owners of capital—those who produce value versus those who extract it—sociologists have since made numerous attempts to nuance ideas of class. Bourdieu's (1986) theorizations have offered some of the most notable contributions to modern attempts to define class: In his writing, everybody is an owner of capital. The question of what class a person belongs to therefore turns into a question of the quantity and types of capital to which they have access. This theorization is based on the expansion of the concept of capital—going beyond the traditional "means of production" and wealth, Bourdieu introduces forms of capital that are less tangible: an education, professional qualifications and accreditations alongside learned behaviors and ways of being. Where these forms of capital are recognized in an economy, they allow the subject to derive an increased income compared to what their labor would have otherwise provided. This symbolic economy perspective of class is a substantial departure from seeing class as a positionality in relation to production—in particular, it allows for a conceptual understanding of a middle-class group with extended access to forms of capital that allow them access to professional white-collar jobs. Scholars such as Savage et al. (2013) have built upon Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital to suggest that there are seven identifiable classes in modern Britain—drawn apart by different types and amounts of capital.

However, Bourdieu (1986), and some of those who build upon his work (such as Savage et al., 2013) have faced criticism for disconnecting class from fundamental economic relationships such as value exploitation,

extraction and dispossession (Skeggs, 2003, 2004, 2011, 2015) and generally moving the discourse of sociology away from interconnected socioeconomic power relations toward a free-market social theory (Fine, 1999, 2001) where inequalities are explained on the basis of individual economic actors. It is argued within these criticisms that Bourdieu's work serves to legitimize class exploitation by explaining differences in income as a result of capital ownership—rather than of fundamental economic power relations that extract value from the working classes and their labor. Skeggs (2003) responds to Bourdieu by arguing that class struggle has always been a struggle over value—over who is valued and who is devalued. This devaluation of a person legitimizes their exploitation, while valuing a person allows for them to be discursively justified in their earnings. This symbolic perspective can be linked to exploitation, extraction, and dispossession; looking at the symbolic aspects of class for their role in maintaining economic systems. Skeggs' approach to class does not, therefore, abandon Bourdieu's forms of capital, but rather interrogates them as tools of legitimating class difference—bringing the focus back to the role of labor in producing value, and the role of rents, profits and interest in extracting value.

We integrate this understanding of classed subjectivity with a corresponding poststructuralist theorisation of gendered subjectivity, one which argues that gendered subjectivity is a socially and culturally constructed form of signification which is not based on a pre-existing, immutable, naturalized sex binary (Butler, 2006). Building on such a perspective, our data is not understood to reflect an external 'reality' but is considered to be discursively constitutive of the social and always embedded within historically situated networks of power (Foucault, 1982). This approach allows us to examine how the lived experiences of female AirBnB hosts are always implicated within gendered power structures, which is central to our focus.

This article sits in a complicated position in relation to such a theoretical perspective: Women, especially older women, and those with disabilities, often face symbolic devaluation and exclusion from systems of economic advantage (Skeggs, 2003, 2011)—this paper looks at people who, despite these circumstances, are earning money through rents. It therefore asks: How does an intersectional perspective complicate an understanding of rentierism among women who host on AirBnB? In answering this question, it draws upon broad understandings of economic and symbolic inequalities that produce gendered subjectivities.

4 | METHODOLOGY

The data for this paper comes from a larger study of the experiences of people who earn income from the sharing economy in London. The recruitment for the full study did not specify gender as a qualifying criterion, and instead focused on gathering an economically diverse range of experiences from AirBnB hosts, Uber drivers and Amazon Flex delivery agents in the city. During participant recruitment it became clear that women, who were largely absent from the Uber and Amazon Flex populations, were strongly represented among AirBnB hosts, in line with existing research (Koh et al., 2019) as well as AirBnB's own 2018 report that showed 61% of UK hosts to be women (AirBnB, 2018). This paper narrows its focus to an analysis of the 14 female participants from the total AirBnB host sample of 17 who were interviewed in the spring and summer of 2018.[1] Data is also included from a pilot interview in the autumn of 2017 with a female host on the validation that the interview structure did not change significantly regarding the aspects of her data that are used in this paper. Substantively, her data was included here because it is believed to add an important contribution to the underrepresented experience of women with disability[2] using AirBnB. Of the 14 women, 13 were white, one was American Indian, two were in their 30s, three in their 40s, six in their 50s, two in their 60s, one in their 70s. The vast majority of these hosts shared their property with guests, rather than renting additional properties through the platform. The sampling is not, and was never intended to be, representative of AirBnB hosting more broadly. Instead, we are focusing our analysis on the experiences of a specific type of host who shares her living space with guests. The importance of these factors will be discussed throughout the analysis.

Sampling for AirBnB hosts was conducted through two procedures: first, text advertisements for participation were posted on four Facebook groups, two of which were groups for AirBnB hosts in London, one of which was a

group for AirBnB hosts in the UK. The final was a London community-based group not focused on AirBnB hosts, to find those who are not part of the host community. The second procedure involved snowball sampling; all interviewed hosts were asked if they knew other people who used AirBnB to generate an income and, if so, asked to pass on the contact details of the researcher. In many cases snowballing was redundant as hosts reported that their social network was already connected to the Facebook groups. Of the 14 female hosts in this paper, nine were recruited from Facebook groups for AirBnB hosts, one from a general community Facebook group and four were recruited through snowballing.

Participants took part in semi-structured interviews of approximately 1 h, though some ended up being longer as hosts engaged in less structured storytelling about their experiences using the platform. All hosts were compensated for their participation with either £20 cash or as a digital Amazon voucher—the latter allowed for remote interviews over Skype, Facetime or Facebook video call to increase interview accessibility. This remote interview option was chosen by four of the female participants including the two who declared a disability and one who was pregnant. All hosts who chose an in-person interview were asked where they wanted to conduct it—with prompts that a café near their home or place of work might be a suitable option. Most in-person interviews ended up taking place in cafés, with the exception that one female host preferred using a room at the university and another at her home.

Methodologically, the study borrowed from ethnographic approaches (Czarniawska, 2014), as interviewees were seldom solitary disconnected individuals. Instead, the approach of the study required gaining trust of the AirBnB community generally. In the first instance, posts to AirBnB hosts groups requesting participants were met with skepticism and distrust. Recent academic studies (for instance, Mermet, 2018) and news articles have argued that AirBnB hosts are part of a gentrifying movement, making housing in cities unaffordable—something which many of the hosts we spoke to firmly contested. In the early stages, recruitment was a process of negotiation with the community. Trust was gained through direct contact with key members of the host community, building up a relationship of trust and inviting them to take part in the study. After their interviews, they served as advocates for the study within the host community.

Analysis utilized inductive grounded theory tactics which attempt to look for emergent themes in the data which can inform theory production (Glaser & Strauss, 2010) alongside deductive approaches for key pre-determined concepts. This grounded approach employs simultaneous collection of material, classification and interpretation (Czarniawska, 2014). The analysis deductively sought out elements of class such as economic, social and cultural capital; based upon the definitions provided by Bourdieu (1986) and struggles over value as theorized by Skeggs (Skeggs, 2003, 2004, 2011) engaging with questions over who can define what is seen as valuable and worthy of economic returns. Inductive coding drew out issues of disability, age, and gender more specifically, these were unintended aspects of the study initially but became factors in the lived experiences of hosting for women in this study. We then applied an intersectional analysis which examined how these markers of subjectivity intersected with class relations to build up a picture of how gender and disability complicate understandings of the distinction between a productive labor class and a rentier class.

While race is a vital aspect of how gendered inequalities are being produced on platforms such as AirBnB, we do not specifically examine racialized aspects of hosting. It is important, however, to note that there was an absence of black and ethnic minority hosts in our sample (everyone in our sample was white, except for one participant). This is consistent with existing research which has shown there is a significant lack of black or ethnic minority hosts across the platform (Koh et al., 2019).

5 | WOMEN EXCLUDED FROM PRODUCTIVE LABOR MARKETS

Studies have shown that women tend to engage in less capital-enhancing activities online compared to their male counterparts (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). However, women are not entirely absent from the emergent gig economy's labor market. Instead, they end up using gig economy platforms that more closely reflect traditional gendered work

such as housekeeping (Churchill & Craig, 2019), and the home rental platform AirBnB (Koh et al., 2019). In this section, interview data will be used to showcase hosts who felt like renting out space within their property was their only remaining way to earn income independently, after disabilities left them unable to work. While this does constitute a form of rentier income-seeking, it is not necessarily gentrifying in the way other forms of rentier activity on AirBnB have been (Mermet, 2018). Instead, it allows opportunities for women who host on AirBnB to subsist after exclusion from traditional labor markets.

Jannette, has been renting her spare room in Camden since 2012. She became unemployed from a professional role after receiving a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis:

> I worked as an architect for about thirty years. My employability got compromised when I got diagnosed with MS in 2005… So, I negotiated a redundancy. I left there three and a half years ago.

Since then, Jannette has been able to utilise AirBnB as a way to support herself financially through a period of unemployment. Another host, Nikki, based in Camden, has been renting out the sofa bed in her living room since 2012. She had previously worked 80-h weeks in her white-collar job as a location scout for film and television productions before 'burning out' and developing Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME is disproportionately suffered by women, who are two to four times more likely to face the diagnosis when compared to men [Office on Women's Health, 2019]). For Nikki, the financial benefits of hosting allowed her to enjoy sustained income at a time when she was excluded from the labor market. This income also bridged the gap until her pensions started paying out. Nikki described how she was excluded from traditional employment and reliant upon government benefits before starting with AirBnB. She describes this as a particular struggle given her position as a single woman with a disability:

> I have a chronic handicap that meant I couldn't generate enough money … women in this country have been notoriously struggling to provide long-term pensions for themselves, providing a long-term income for themselves… AirBnB is a way of counteracting that struggle.

This suggests that AirBnB offers *some* disabled women an alternative to traditional forms of employment which might present disproportionate challenges; indeed, disabled women face higher levels of unemployment (Majiet, 1993). While encountering difficulties with her illness during her time hosting, Nikki explained how she was able to ask guests for assistance when needed:

> Sometimes guests would have to help me out, changing the sheets for the next guest and things like that.

Rather than a hotel, where there is a clear divide between the paying customer and staff who serve them, many of the female hosts described AirBnB as a sociable house sharing activity that allowed them to cultivate affective networks of care and friendship. For Nikki, this shifted dynamic allowed her some relief from the limits she faced in the traditional labor market. Being able to ask guests for help, constituted a more reciprocal-based form of labor, based around care and solidarity between host and guest.

Importantly, both Jannette and Nikki transitioned to AirBnB after long-standing successful professional careers that allowed them to get to a point of home ownership. Both had cleared their mortgages years ago and were left with minimal outgoings—a significant contrast to other hosts in this study who were contending with the escalating living costs in London. As Jannette describes, 'I've got no mortgage or anything … I mean there are outgoings, but they're quite modest.' While AirBnB offered a timely relief from the pressures that these hosts experienced because of their disabilities, it is crucial to remember that many disabled women will not have access to the resources that make this possible.

The flexibility and social nature of AirBnB provides a way for disabled women who own property to support themselves at home. While extensive critique has been leveled at AirBnB for its role in gentrification and promoting rentier takeover of housing stock (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018; Guttentag, 2015; Mermet, 2018), there is a need to address the nuanced lived experiences of hosts who turn to AirBnB because of economic precarity caused by disability. The class positionality of these hosts is complicated by the intersectional power dynamics to which they are subject—they are absent from productive labor not due to their lack of desire, but rather, their inability to work in traditional employment. Rather than contributing to gentrification, there is a need to consider how AirBnB is being utilized by some disabled women to alleviate the inequalities they face.

6 | WOMEN UNABLE TO SUBSIST IN LONDON'S PRODUCTIVE LABOR MARKETS

Beyond the women discussed in the previous section, who had been excluded from productive labor markets, there were several women who relied on the top-up income from AirBnB in order to avoid destitution. These class-based distinctions are highly gendered: women are much more likely to be in precarious lower-income, part-time jobs and burdened with additional care responsibilities or excluded from the workplace completely (Raw & McKie, 2020; Vosko et al., 2009). For many of the women in this study, often single and living alone, the high costs of housing in London made rent or mortgage payments difficult to manage even while working. While the previous chapter discussed middle-class women who were able to leverage their accumulated wealth to subsist while still facing the challenges of disability—this section discusses women in a range of different circumstances; including some who don't own a home at all and rely upon precariously sub-letting their own beds to get by. What they all have in common is concerns about being able to afford housing in London without the additional income that AirBnB provides them.

Katie describes herself as being "very" working class. Early in her career she held positions working for Network Rail before moving to London and working as a tube station attendant; this is where she is currently working part-time on night shifts. She was able to buy a two-bed basement flat in London on which she has a remaining mortgage period of 7 years. As she does not have a private pension, she plans to use her home equity to help her survive through retirement. However, a few years ago Katie's flat was flooded. Because she did not have insurance covering her home's contents, she lost most of her possessions. Katie told us that, "it will take maybe about another year or so" to rebuy basic items of furniture such as a settee and a bed for herself. As she describes:

> Everything was damaged… If you saw it, it was just a… I couldn't live there, like I said, for nearly nine months. Still don't have a bed in one of the rooms, I sleep on a camp bed in my room.

Despite the expensive damage to her home, Katie did manage to buy a bed for her spare room to continue to earn income from AirBnB, which she relies on to meet her mortgage payments:

> Just when you think you've caught up, something happens… You never really catch up. So again, [AirBnB] has been a lifeline for that. And as much as I complain, I've got to stick it, because there's nothing else that will give me as much money.

Rather than allowing her to feel independent (as was the case for many middle-class hosts), working-class hosts like Katie felt dependent on the platform in order to survive. Anna is another working-class single host who relies on income from irregular contract work to get by. She rents a one-bed apartment in London and sub-lets her bedroom using AirBnB while sleeping on the sofa. She described herself as "very poor - but 'poor managing' as opposed to 'poor non-managing'", where she can meet the basic costs of living but without much excess. She explained AirBnB hosting as an uncomfortable experience—feeling a significant invasion of privacy and levels of confrontation from

guests that made hosting difficult for her. She was continuing to host—compelled to sublet her own bed—because she felt that she had no other choice.

Woodcock and Graham note that many people who turn to platforms to earn an income "have no choice but to accept whatever work they can find," (2020, p. 92). This claim was made specifically in relation to productive labor platforms, such as Uber, Deliveroo and Amazon Flex, but it is worth considering how rentierism may serve as a last resort for women who have exhausted their income potential within the labor market. This issue is especially notable in London which has a notoriously high cost of housing (Hamnett, 2010). Vanessa (aged 34), told us that she turned to AirBnB after realizing how much the service charge was on the one-bed apartment she had recently purchased as her first step on the property ladder:

> I got hit with this big service charge that I didn't realise I would have to pay … they didn't make it clear … it was £4,500 a year.

Vanessa now earns around £2,500 per year from AirBnB and puts it in a separate bank account that goes directly toward meeting this unexpected cost.

Many of the women in this study also felt a sense of risk in hosting. Unlike traditional rentier capitalism, where the risks tend to be financial in nature (James III et al., 2008), hosts in this study were sharing their own private living space. Those we spoke to routinely mentioned a risk of sexual harassment or assault while hosting. While less dependent hosts talked about how they responded to such concerns by carefully selecting who they let into their home (at times, excluding male guests), working class hosts were unable to do so due to their dependency on income from AirBnB. Anna said there were times when hosting made her feel vulnerable. Unlike the middle-class hosts, she did not express a sense of pride over sharing her home or pleasure from building affective networks of care, and instead described an incident where a guest brought another person into her home without permission:

> I went home and she was still home, her shoes were there … maybe she was having a lie-in? And I went into my sitting room and just as I was taking off my jacket, I saw a guy creeping out of the room and then down the stairs and out the door very quietly. And I'm just like "what?" I confronted her, and I said "hey, was that somebody else just leaving my house?" And she's like "oh yes, that was just my friend come to pick me up". And I went "oh you know I'm really uncomfortable having people in my house who I don't know".

However, despite this, Anna felt that she had no choice but to put up with this sense of risk and vulnerability. Such gendered risk is deepened through intersections with age. Older single female hosts felt a greater sense of physical vulnerability. Indeed, older victims of sexual attacks are much more likely to live alone (43%) (Del Bove et al., 2005). Lea et al. found that 98% of sexual offenses against women aged over 60 occurred in the victim's home (Lea et al., 2011). Extensive literature has documented how older women face a double discrimination: not only are they subject to greater economic hardship, but they face more risk of attack and abuse (Nosek et al., 2001). Disability and age intersect to place elderly women who are physically impaired at an even greater risk of sexual assault (Baker et al., 2009). Jane explained the benefits of being able to choose bookings based on the gender of guests: when she first joined AirBnB she chose to only accept bookings from women. But it is crucial to remember that many older women will not have access to the resources that make this possible.

Therefore, many of the women in this study faced a choice: whether to trade a sense of personal safety to subsist economically. This shows a stark difference from the usual investment approach taken by most rentier capitalists—who generally would only partake in an economic risk, rather than a personal one.

7 | ESTABLISHING AN OPPOSITION TO MULTI-PROPERTY HOSTS

The hosts that we spoke to, who predominantly shared their own living space, were keen to distinguish themselves from hosts who buy additional properties to list on AirBnB's marketplace. Many of the women in this study spoke passionately on their criticism of such users of the platform who had multiple properties. Anna told us:

> One of the things that [AirBnB] gets the slack for all the time are the private … companies, the agencies, the multi-property landlords that rent out whole blocks and instead of taking on local people to lodge there full-time and being landlords that way, they make more money by … hiring an agency to manage it and doing AirBnB. And what that ends up being is a hotel by the back door. And it does things like destroy communities because suddenly nobody can live there.

Another host, Marjorie, who hosts guests in her spare room, expressed similar concerns. She told us that she "doesn't think it's good that properties are taken out of long term rental … it's a concern." This opposition to multi-property landlords utilizing AirBnB is not uncommon. Anna, as a member of a local home-sharing club, recalled an occurrence from a recent meeting when someone new arrived:

> [They represented] an agency that had hundreds of properties across London. And as soon as they said that, the person who was chairing our meeting said: "you missed the very beginning, but this meeting is not for you."

This opposition toward multi-property landlords utilizing AirBnB shows these women are eager to demarcate themselves from the rentier class. Economists looking at inequality have turned increasing attention to both the accumulation of capital and the growth of return on capital in recent decades (Piketty, 2015, 2016; Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014, 2020), which have together pushed down labor's share of income. Meanwhile, dominant economic discourses and national accounts have often served to exacerbate the problem by blurring the boundaries between value producing labor and extractive rent seeking (Mazzucato, 2019; Mazzucato & Shipman, 2014). The hosts in this study saw themselves in opposition to the gentrification movement that has dominated much of the discourse around AirBnB (Ferreri & Sanyal, 2018; Guttentag, 2015; Mermet, 2018)—their own usage of AirBnB was an attempt to allow them to remain in a city that is becoming increasingly unaffordable through the income provided by productive labor—as rent seeking landlords buy and redevelop neighborhoods. In this way, hosting helped many of the women we spoke to resist the growing financial pressures of gentrification.

8 | CONCLUSIONS

This paper has looked at women who host spaces within their own homes in London—often describing themselves as "home sharers". In so doing, it has attempted to understand the multifarious class position that they occupy, complicated by intersections of age, disability and gender. While the income that they receive may constitute rents, few in this study had initially intended to earn an income from their properties—they turned to it as a way to avoid economic destitution. While the platform has provided significant opportunities for those who are unable to engage in traditional employment, it has often come at the cost of dispossession of their living space as a means to survive within an economic regime that turns intimate spaces into necessary income, in a city where the cost of living continues to rise. It is therefore critically important to recognize the intersectional positioning of these hosts and the class privilege that allows some to escape many of the difficulties that commonly come with disability and gender inequalities, and labor market exclusion.

We have demonstrated in this research that theorizing these hosts as being part of a simplistically imagined rentier class is inadequate for explaining the inequalities which emerged in the data. Only through an intersectional analysis that explored class with a deep sense of contextualization were we able to demonstrate that these hosts utilize rentier mechanisms to varying degrees to secure their subsistence within an economy riddled with multi-dimensional inequalities. The underlying power relations are more complex than many studies have accounted for. To be sure, we do not deny that many, if not the majority, of AirBnB hosts are rentier capitalists in the traditional sense—buying and renting out properties and thriving outside of productive labor markets. Likewise, we recognize the role of AirBnB in driving gentrification in many areas, including London. This study looked more specifically at a particular type of host—the home sharing host who turns to the platform more out of necessity than choice. This included hosts who rented their own bed while sleeping precariously because they couldn't otherwise afford the costs of housing. Rather than driving gentrification, these hosts were often the very women subjected to the economic pressures of gentrification.

We also found significant differences within our sample. Hosts with sufficient capital were able to utilize AirBnB in more agentic ways than those suffering the most economic risk. While being otherwise excluded from the productive economy due to disability, the middle-class women took advantage of the flexibility and sociability the platform offered them, leading to a sense of greater independence. Meanwhile lower-income or more precarious, often single, female hosts who had exhausted their income potential or were met with unexpected costs, were using AirBnB to sublet or simply survive within an expensive housing market. As a consequence of this lack of agency and deep dependency on the platform, they felt compelled to expose themselves to gendered risks, a form of vulnerability which increased with age.

Such class-based precarity is only likely to worsen as AirBnB hosts in London exist within an increasingly competitive market. As a growing number of property owners realize the potential increase in returns that AirBnB hosting can deliver, current hosts talk of a drop in the number of bookings, with working-class hosts likely to be hit hardest due to their dependency on the income. Our research suggests that any future research into how the gig economy and platforms such as AirBnB operate in relation to social inequalities requires a complex and nuanced theoretical approach which takes into account of how multiple aspects of inequality intersect to produce significant classed differences. Future research should also consider how race contributes to internal inequalities among female AirBnB hosts, as this remains an area lacking in research that we have been unable to address here. Further, we appreciate that the issues we have highlighted must also be revisited in light of the continually evolving Covid-19 pandemic which has occurred since we conducted our fieldwork.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

ENDNOTES

[1] We use the terms 'woman/women/female', 'man/men/male' but acknowledge that such categories are socially constructed rather than fixed biological categories. All our interviewees were cisgender and self-identified as female.

[2] We understand 'disability' based on the social model, which defines it as the disadvantage or discrimination which arises from social, economic and environmental barriers to equal treatment based on an individual's physical and/or mental impairment (Burchardt, 2004) Such an approach calls for adjustments at the societal level rather than individual level and does not see this as justification for exclusion from participating in the labor market.

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