

Text 1 Freddy, a driver with both Uber and Lyft, pulls into the parking lot when he comes to pick me up, giving me a moment to search out his large sedan on a bright day in Atlanta, Georgia. With more than three years of vagrant sociology research under my belt, I've learned to hop into cars on busy streets as soon as I recognize the vehicle's license plate from my smartphone screen. (...)

Freddy tells me he's a twelve-year veteran of the army, having left around 1989, just before the Gulf War. I explain to him that I'm not just another passenger; I'm a researcher studying how Uber and technology affect work. As I ask him basic questions, he tells me that he also works full time as the manager of a fast-food restaurant in a nearby city. When he has time off from his primary job, he commutes three hours into Atlanta to take ridehail jobs. During his vacation period, he spends about four days working ridehail jobs, heads home for a day or two and then returns to the lineup of drivers waiting for ride requests in the airport parking lot. "We have a quale (queue), a place where all the Uber and Lyft drivers park, and I stay there." His sister lives not too far away, and that's where he showers.

When I ask him where he sleeps in between driving shifts, he nods to the front passenger seat and exclaims, “You’re sitting in my bed!” With a reassuring smile, he adds that he’s not the only one who does it – men and women from outside the city are catching up on sleep in the airport parking lot. Sometimes he works fourteen to sixteen hours in a single day, and the next day he’ll do eight hours, depending on how he feels. He aims to average two hundred dollars a day, and on this trip, he’s proud to be earning “double money” – his vacation pay from his fast-food job supplements whatever he makes driving. “During the vacation period, I really had nothing to do,” he says, “and I’m a people person, I love meeting new people.”

As in the case of many of the people I’ve met during my research, driving is a second job for Freddy, and he genuinely enjoys the social connection he gains from conversations with passengers.

Alex Rosenblat, UBERLAND, 2018