

EXPLORING THE WORK-RELATED EXPERIENCES OF RETAIL WORKERS IN
SASKATCHEWAN:
A NARRATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The retail industry is predominant in providing goods and services to customers worldwide. For example, studies have found that more than 10% of employees work in the retail sector in Canada. However, frontline retail employees experience considerable challenges, such as mistreatment and hostility from managers. Yet, research has generally failed to explore the nature of those challenges or offer strategies to address them. Using a narrative inquiry/approach methodology, the study explored the work-related experiences and conditions of four frontline retail workers at a Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada store. The study drew on critical theory and social justice theory as theoretical lenses to challenge the prevalence of neoliberal ideology at the studied workplace and its influence on the work-related experiences of frontline workers at that workplace.

The narrative inquiry building blocks of temporality, sociality, spatiality, and other narrative approaches, as well as the theoretical framework, guided the presentation and discussion of the study findings. The participants' narratives revealed they experienced neoliberal policies and practices that they thought constituted voicelessness, sexism, individualism, racism, nepotism, underemployment, and cronyism at their retail store. The integration of the participants' data created informative narratives of their work-related experiences and offered a way to improve their fragmented, scattered, and sometimes contradictory narratives into coherent narratives. The narratives also revealed that some participants perceived their workplace conditions as overwhelming, harsh, and alien. The implications of the findings of the study for policy, practice, and theory development, as well as suggestions for further research and recommendations arising from the study, are discussed.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

HRD- Human Resource Development

NHRD- National Human Resource Development

NA- Narrative Approach

CT- Critical Theory

SJT- Social Justice Theory

CRI- Corporate Retail Industry

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The Research problem

The retail industry plays a vital role in the Canadian job market in the era of globalization and increased consumption (Johnston et al., 2019). The industry prides itself on being one of the largest employers in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2020). According to Statistics Canada (2020), there “were approximately 2.2 million retail trade employees in Canada as of 2019, an increase from approximately 2.07 million in the previous year” (Para 1). Statistics Canada (2021) further estimates that “the total number of employees in the industry in Saskatchewan was 83,100, representing the largest employment sector in the province, followed by the health sector with a total of 80,400” (Para 1). The number of employees in the retail industry makes it critically important to explore their conditions and lived experiences. According to Reid (2020), exploring employees' perspectives in the sector through their narratives offers an in-depth understanding of their challenges and the strategies to address them.

Although the retail industry employs a predominant number of people in Saskatchewan and Canada, critical issues of underemployment and exploitation appear prevalent (Hosken et al., 2018; Klitmoller, 2019; Stevens, 2020) in the industry. Retail workers often experience low pay, limited hours, and poor working conditions that affect their socioeconomic well-being (Campbell & Price, 2016; Coulter, 2014). Some scholars have therefore, questioned retail sector policies and practices that have been perceived as agents of inequality, marginalization of employees, and injustice in organizations (Blowfield & Frynas, 2005; Houghtaling et al., 2019). In addition, studies that explore the lived experiences, needs, and personal development of frontline employees in the retail sector have not received much attention from researchers (Anitha, 2014;

Chen et al., 2010). In other words, issues related to equity and social justice in organizations have not received much traction since the core organizational goals are focused on ‘economic systems (policies and practices)’ and psychological (performance and satisfaction)’ (Swanson & Holton III, 2009, p. 102) to ensure the growth and development of organizations. Exploring the lived work-related experiences of frontline workers in the retail sector was therefore essential in understanding the challenges they faced in the workplace and the strategies necessary to address them.

Research purpose

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, the study sought to describe and explain the frontline participants’ perceptions of their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. Secondly, the study explored the participants’ perceptions of their employer’s workplace training and development interventions and the results of those interventions for them and their employer. Third, the study explored the participants’ perceptions of the strategies their employers could use to enhance and enrich their workplace conditions and experiences.

Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in the study.

1. In what ways did the participants describe and explain their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences in their work environment?
2. What forms of workplace training and development interventions did the employer offer the participants, and how did they perceive the results for them and their employer?

3. What suggestions did the participants offer to enhance and enrich their work-related conditions and experiences?

Researcher's Experience

My interest in exploring the work-related experiences of frontline employees in the retail sector stems from my own experience as a worker in that sector for more than three years when I came to Canada. As an employee at a retail store in Regina, I experienced and often observed various forms of mistreatment and injustice, such as discrimination, harassment, marginalization, favoritism, and sexism. The store had more part-time retail workers than full-time workers, and quite often, the workers' work hours were reduced without giving them prior notice. Often times, my co-workers and I discussed ways some frontline retail workers without managerial experience were promoted to management positions because they knew people in senior management. I often interacted with co-workers from different ethnic backgrounds as well as with retail workers at other stores in the city, and there was a general sense among them that workplace mistreatment and injustices similar to those I observed or experienced were standard practices across retail stores. Many retail workers thought such mistreatment had a severe adverse impact on their work life.

Based on my interactions with co-workers at our retail store as well as retail workers at other stores in Regina, I got the sense that some of them, especially those who had had good jobs in their home countries, appeared to regret their decision to migrate to Canada. They often complained about the minimum salary they thought was not enough for the basic needs of their families, stressful working conditions, lack of participation in decisions that affected them and many other forms of mistreatment and injustices they experienced at the workplace. In addition to my personal experiences as a retail worker, my interest in pursuing this study stemmed from

my interactions with co-workers as well as frontline workers at several other retail stores in Regina about their work-related experiences and conditions in the sector.

Further, engagement with literature during my doctoral studies was critical to my ability to explore and analyze the work-related experiences of frontline workers at the retail workplace and the conditions that influenced those experiences. The readings in critical and social justice theories and narrative inquiry/approach, for example, helped me make sense of the different forms of exploitation and marginalization the workers experienced. I was also able to reflect on some strategies for combatting what the employees perceived as the effects of neoliberalism on their workplace conditions as well as offer alternatives to the neoliberal status quo at work. In other words, I could draw on relevant literature to explore the hegemonic and systemic neoliberal practices in the retail sector that constituted oppression and marginalization of frontline workers in the industry and how those practices might apply to the experiences of frontline retail employees at the studied workplace.

Significance of the Study

This study was significant because limited research has explored the lived employment-related experiences of employees working in the retail industry in Canada and, more specifically, at the retail store where my participants, who were co-workers, were recruited for the study. Most studies on the work-related experiences of frontline employees reported in the literature were conducted in Europe and the United States (Deitz et al., 2021; Gaucher & Chebat, 2019; Jha et al., 2017; Yoo, 2017).

The study was also significant because the findings could help create awareness about the work-related experiences of frontline retail workers at the studied organization and the

implications of those experiences for them, their managers, employers, and maybe policymakers responsible for overseeing the sector. The findings of the study might also contribute to the development of innovative policies and practices that might benefit the frontline workers at the workplace where the study was conducted. In addition, the study's findings could influence the design, development, and implementation of workplace intervention programs and services at the studied workplace that might benefit employees. Finally, the study would help to contribute to the knowledge base and debate surrounding the work-related experiences and conditions retail workers face in Saskatchewan and maybe across Canada.

Delimitations and Limitations

My decision to explore the work-related experiences and conditions of frontline workers at a selected retail store in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, delimited this study. Regina was chosen because of my familiarity with the research site, the access to the participants, and the scarcity of studies such as this one across the prairies (Dionne-Simard & Miller, 2019; Stevens, 2020).

In terms of limitations, the findings of this study were limited in that they might apply only to the experiences of the frontline workers at the studied workplace. However, the findings of the study could also be transferred to other retail sector stores and their frontline employees as far as there was a high degree of similarity in contexts between them and the studied workplace. Several researchers (Krefting, 1991; Hannes, 2011; Korstjens & Moser, 2018) indicate that the transferability of the findings of a study depends on the degree to which the salient conditions or factors in that study context overlap or match the needs or characteristics in similar contexts. Transferability, therefore, requires ensuring the content of the interviews, the behaviors, and the observed events in a study are typical or atypical to those in another context. To ensure the

transferability of the findings of the study to similar contexts, I offered a description of the context of the study, sample characteristics in participants' recruitment, participants' profiles (e.g., demographic information, their experiences), and methods used to recruit the participants as well as the types of data obtained. Based on the research purpose, objectives, theoretical framework, and the research methodology employed for this study, readers will be able to see the parallel between the work-related experiences of the study participants and their own experiences or the experiences of workers in similar contexts.

In terms of the similarities and differences in themes that emerged from the findings of the study in relation to the literature broadly, scholars such as Venugopal (2015), Best (2020), Flew (2014), as well as Hung and Thomson (2016), have explored the influence of neoliberalism on workplace conditions. These conditions included the precarious nature of jobs, unstable and unpredictable work schedules, work controlled by management, and burnout and stress. The findings of the study revealed the participants thought they experienced similar conditions at their workplace. However, one participant questioned the value of union and unionization activities. The participant expressed a concern that some union officials typically pursue their own selfish interests instead of the interests of members.

Moreover, despite their experiences with the conditions at their workplace, the participants expressed gratitude to the retail sector for providing them with employment opportunities as new immigrants to the country. They thought that without such employment opportunities, they would have had difficulty feeding their families. The study also focussed on the solutions and alternatives to the participants' experiences with their neoliberal workplace conditions by combining elements of critical and social justice theories to analyze their work-related experiences. Because of the unique nature of the studied workplace, the broad theoretical

framework, and the use of narrative inquiry/approach methodology in the study, the findings of the study also provided some strategies for combatting what the participants perceived as the effects of neoliberalism on their workplace conditions as well as offer alternatives to the neoliberal status quo at work.

In addition, the findings of the study were based on the experiences of only four full- and part-time frontline employees from different departments at the selected retail store in Regina. Accordingly, the study's findings represented only the views of the participants who volunteered to participate. In addition, the study's findings did not represent the views of other key stakeholder groups at the studied workplace, such as employers, managers, unions, and public officials who regulate the retail sector.

Furthermore, I did not access the participants' employment records for the study because of privacy and confidentiality. I believe that accessing the participants' employment records or files during fieldwork, such as their annual performance review reports and responses to those reports, would have yielded additional data about their work-related experiences. Finally, the research design employed only qualitative data collection methods; no quantitative data collection instrument was used in the study. The use of quantitative data, such as a survey questionnaire alongside the in-depth participant interviews employed in the study, could have provided further depth to the data collected for the study.

Operational Definitions of Terms

In this section, I briefly offer operational definitions of the key concepts or terms used in the study. These terms are explained in detail in Chapter 2.

Neoliberalism: According to Harvey (2007), neoliberalism is a political-economic model that proposes that employee wellbeing can best be advanced by exercising their entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. Harvey argues the state's role in neoliberalism is to create and preserve that institutional framework.

Retail industry: Retail businesses sell finished goods to consumers for money. Retail businesses can include grocery, drugstores, department, and convenience stores. Service-related businesses, such as beauty salons and rental stores, are also considered retail businesses (Suttle, 2019).

Retail products can be sold through stores, kiosks, mail, or on the Internet.

Marginalization: An act of relegating someone to an unimportant or powerless position, making them feel like notes squeezed into the margins of society, crawled, and practically unrecognizable (Cocks et al., 2019).

Social justice: The theory is based on the ideas of transforming arrangements that promote marginalization and exclusionary processes. Social justice in organizations seeks to build employee respect, reciprocity, solidarity, and empathy. The theory acknowledges an imbalance between the powerful and powerless in organizations and society. It, therefore, advocates strategies to address that imbalance to build a just and respectful organization and society, regardless of race, class, and sex (Bonnycastle, 2011; Harcourt, 2014; Lundy et al., 2004).

Enterprise society: The term commonly refers to countries where the state consciously attempts to promote self-reliance, innovation, and individual achievement at the expense of collective development and the promotion of the welfare state. It is usually a feature of capitalist societies (Dean, 2014; Lazzarato, 2009).

Hegemony: The term expresses the power, control, and persuasion by dominant groups over the less dominant or marginalized groups (Johnsen et al., 2020). In the context of retail sector practices, employers typically employ the prevailing neoliberal strategies in their relationships with their employees, resulting in exploitation, marginalization, and perpetuating organizational inequities.

Critical theory: Critical theory seeks to equip the vulnerable in society, such as vulnerable employees at the workplace, with the necessary ideas and knowledge to help them question and subject forms of knowledge to critical synthesis. The theory challenges the status quo and seeks democratic and transformative values in the workplace and society.

Chapter Summary

The chapter has presented the research problem, the purpose statement, the research questions, the significance of the study, the limitations and delimitations, and the operational definitions of the key terms used in the study.

The next chapter discusses the literature reviewed for the study.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter presents the literature review for the study. The chapter starts with a review of literature relating to the fundamental role of neoliberalism in the lived experiences of frontline retail workers. The chapter then reviews the literature on critical and social justice theories to challenge the tenets of neoliberalism and its implications for the work-related experiences and the conditions of frontline workers in the retail sector.

Overview of selected literature on Neoliberalism

Perspectives on the definition of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a 19th-century economic and free-market capitalism model that was introduced under the pretext of globalization, free trade, deregulation, privatization, reduction of government involvement in trade, and private sector development (Ganti, 2014; Gledhill, 2019; Larner, 2003; Plehwe et al., 2007). Neoliberalism as an economic model or paradigm became prominent in the 1980s with the emergence of mega-corporations seeking the ideals of a self-regulating market (Steger & Roy, 2010). Neoliberalism is expressed in diverse ways in literature and other forums, as various perspectives on the definition have been widespread recently across several disciplines. (Birch, 2015; Hardin, 2014; Jessop, 2012; Martinez & Garcia, 1997; Thorsen & Lie, 2006; Thorsen, 2010). For example, neoliberalism is sometimes defined scornfully to characterize different market and socioeconomic processes such as privatization, free markets, and corporate power (Boas & Gans-Morse, 2009; Diaz-Bone, 2016; Eagleton-Pierce, 2016).

According to Larner (2003), “Neoliberalism was understood to refer to the process of opening up national economies to global actors such as multinational corporations and global

institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank” (p. 509). Free trade, globalization, and individual economic freedom, with fewer state regulations and oversight of corporate activities, have created an exploitative and marginalized work environment for employees. As Venugopal (2015) puts it, “Neoliberalism has become deeply problematic and incoherent” (p. 165) because many organizations have used the ideology in different ways to control, exploit, and maneuver vulnerable employees. Gooptu (2009) posits that “neoliberal governmentality for self-governing citizens and self-driven, pliant workers” (p.45) has negative socio-economic implications for vulnerable employees in the retail industry. Venugopal sees the offshoot of neoliberalism as an “expansive economic policy agenda, class domination and exploitation, and resurgence” (p. 165) that has created a system of inequality and oppression in organizations. Ahmad et al. (2022) mentioned that neoliberalism’s economic dominance and marginalization concepts promote corporate hegemony that disenfranchises voiceless retail industry workers. Further, neoliberalism, which other scholars (Best, 2020; Flew, 2014; Hung & Thomson, 2016) define as monetarism, has dominated microeconomic decision-making toward less intrusive and severe state regulations and monitoring corporate finances and workplace practices.

Neoliberalism definitions point to a system that focuses on the markets' liberation from restrictions deriving from aid and collusion. According to Menzetti (2010), neoliberalism seeks to create a market mechanism based on free enterprise, competition, and pricing rooted in the balance of supply and demand. The ideology focuses on monetizing organizational processes and primarily emphasizes shareholder profits. In neoliberalism, the meritocracy of employees is based on productivity-centered practices, self-enterprise, and lifelong learning as organizations

eliminate waste and increase profitability, leading to layoffs, precarious employment, and job insecurity (Harvey, 2005). According to Harvey:

Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate for such practices. The state has to guarantee, for example, the quality and integrity of money. It must also set up military, defense, police, and legal structures and functions that are required to secure private property rights and guarantee, by force, the proper functioning of markets.

Furthermore, if markets do not exist (in areas such as land, water, education, health care, social security, or environmental pollution), they must be created by state action if necessary. However, beyond these tasks, the state should not venture out. State interventions in markets (once created) must be kept to a bare minimum because, according to the theory, the state cannot possibly possess enough information to second-guess market signals (prices) and because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions (particularly in democracies) for their own benefit (p. 2).

Harvey's definition points to powerful neoliberal ideologies circulating through mega-corporations and political circles, causing unfairness, exploitation, socio-economic exclusion, and alienation among vulnerable employees. Neoliberalism improves the ruling class's power over the state and society. Further, as an economic concept in organizations, neoliberalism gives nation-states less authority to enforce laws and policies for organizations that protect employees from inequality and marginalization (Bernal & Grewal, 2014; Fawaz, 2009). By definition,

therefore, neoliberalism points to an economic system designed to protect and maintain capitalism in modern times at the expense of workers and the socioeconomic well-being of communities. The work of Garrett (2015) “recognizes the evolving modes of impoverishment, containment and quasi-incarceration” (p.1) neoliberalism practices have on low-class communities.

The neoliberal agenda is now deeply rooted in global economic structures, and the ruling elites and line managers are the direct beneficiaries. According to Rogers-Vaughn (2016), “neoliberalism is both a form of hegemonic control that serves the interests of financial elites and a form of governance that adapts to local circumstances and shapes individual subjects and their personal relationships” (p. 54). Elites in society and corporations use this concept to continue to wield power and control over the marginalized and the voiceless. Nonini (2008) points out that neoliberalism is a state-capture economic tool that holds the ruling class's interests and fails to comprehend the significance of state institutions as autonomous bodies capable of shaping institutions' political and financial mechanisms. Adetayo (2020) adds that neoliberalism conceives and implements state-capture mechanisms that continue to place power and control in the hands of the elite and relegate the needs and expectations of the workers from the mainstream discourse.

Birch (2015) acknowledges that neoliberalism requires dissection as an analytical tool and a way of understanding the transformation of society over the last few decades. He contends the concept has created an artificial economic system that serves the interests of the elites and leaves those without economic power in deprivation and marginalization. Moreover, as Mirowski and Plehwe (2015) argue, even though some scholars and neoliberal advocates point out some of the achievements of the concept, such as individual empowerment, open market

systems, and globalization of the economy, the system has created mass inequality in society. In other words, neoliberalism has reduced the meaning of work to a mere transaction between two parties (employer and employee), thereby overlooking employees' work and employment relationships' intrinsic importance (Bal & Doci, 2018).

Key Characteristics of Neoliberalism

One key characteristic of neoliberalism is the culture of commodity fetishism and the mass accumulation of debt by households worldwide (Rogers-Vaughn, 2016; Birch, 2015). Neoliberal elites control the media and other social platforms, and they feed the people with news and information that continue to impede the socioeconomic freedom of the underprivileged (Davis & Walsh, 2017). Steger and Roy (2010) point out that neoliberalism is a monolithic, static approach that the capitalists' elites have imposed on low-income people without any form of protection from the state. Bal and Doci (2018) contend that neoliberalism has created a condition of meritocracy for employees to achieve financial freedom and that work-life balance is a farce. One can argue that, even though there are laws governing the operations of organizations in terms of human rights and dignity of the employees at the workplace, however, the reality is that, due to the powerful influence of neoliberalism on the state institutions, most of these laws are not enforced (Birch, 2015). The effect of neoliberalism has forced the state institutions in charge of monitoring to sit back, resulting in exploitation, marginalization, and strenuous performance-oriented expectations (Gooptu, 2009). Employers have established a system with the notion that those who work hard are rewarded. Bauman (2000) adds that neoliberal free-market characteristics favor the most robust organizations.

Lack of state protection and regulation in the face of heightened capitalism and modern forms of exploitation of employees in the areas of (e.g., healthcare, unemployment, and housing

benefits) has exposed vulnerable people to suffer from the implications of increased self-reliance and individualism concepts. The growing inequality indicates that neoliberal ideology and people's experiences are increasingly conflicting (Stiglitz, 2012; Wisman, 2013). Increased capital accumulation, hostile workplaces, and injustices have created tension and mistrust between employers and employees, which often leads to harassment, bullying, attrition, and lack of long-term commitment in the retail industry. Booth and Hamer (2007) stressed that neoliberal culture and values in retail workplaces significantly influence frontline employee marginalization, resulting in a high turnover rate. Neoliberal ideology explains that every aspect of our lives is quantified on the market scale, as the market “operates as an ethic in itself” (Bal & Doci, 2018, p. 3). Individual abilities, skills, and inputs are quantified on a monetary scale. The idea of neoliberalism has turned workers into commodities exchanged for money. In recent times, the organizations' philosophies have been centered on a profit-driven agenda.

Scholars who subscribe to Neoliberalism have pushed back against any form of oversight and deregulation they consider intrusive to the effective functioning of the capitalist market system (Hickel, 2016), even in the face of corporate failure and the collapse of the global economy, as was the case of the 2008 global economic recession. A study by Brown (2005) expresses that:

The paradox of neoliberalism as a global phenomenon, ubiquitous and omnipresent, yet disunified and non-identical with itself. This dappled, striated, and flickering complexion is also the face of an order replete with contradiction and disavowal, structuring markets it claims to liberate from structure, intensely governing subjects it claims to free from government, strengthening, and re-tasking states it claims to abjure (pp. 48–49).

Brown's expression points to a system designed to continue the dominant trend of the elite at the expense of the lower class. The strategy of neoliberalism has influenced and infiltrated all levels of corporations and led many people to falsely believe that the concept is the emancipator of individuals from government control. However, the idea has enslaved employees, especially the voiceless and powerless in organizations and society, who are faced with underemployment and impoverishment. The inroads of neoliberalism in organizations have contributed to higher poverty levels and marginal inequality worldwide (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberal control has captured all ends of human life from economic, social, and political capital (Davies, 2014). The dominance of neoliberalism, as Brown (2015) puts it, is 'time-like' (p.35) because, over the years, the concept has been able to ascend all political and social circles, exerting significant influence and control on industries and state institutions.

Similarly, neoliberal power and influence can be attributed to the "crisis of accumulation" (Ayers & Saad-Filho, p. 246), which has led to "stagflation" (Boffo et al., 2019, p. 253). The ideals of Neoliberalism have paved the way for workplace practices founded on competition, ostracism, and inequality. Brown (2015) expresses, "Competition yields winners and losers; capital succeeds by destroying or cannibalizing other capitals" (p. 64). Neoliberalism's cannibalism leads to instability, insecurity, and discontent among the affected employees. Socioeconomic inequality is an inescapable consequence of neoliberalism (Dumenil & Levy, 2011; Gillespie, 2006; Harvey, 2005; Standing, 2011). The fundamental characteristic of neoliberalism is that it is "both a form of hegemonic control that serves the interests of financial elites and a form of governance that adapts to local circumstances and shapes individual subjects and their personal relationships" (Rogers-Vaughn, 2016, p. 55). Furthermore, Springer (2012) mentions that "Neoliberalism as a concept allows poverty and inequality experienced across

multiple sites to find a point of similarity, whereas disarticulation undermines efforts to build and sustain shared aims of resistance beyond the micropolitics of the local” (p. 136). As a result, global corporations have gained more power to manipulate state agencies into getting away with all forms of organizational injustices.

Moreover, the neoliberal divide-and-conquer strategy appears to undermine state institutions and other social activists and bodies (Hall, 2011; Harvey, 2005; Dumenil & Levy). As Hall (2011) puts it, “neoliberalism is a hegemonic project” (p. 27) that is aimed at sustaining control over the masses and keeping their capitalists' interests intact. According to Dumenil and Levy (2011), neoliberalism has reassessed upper-class dominance from the outset, indicating the wealthy elites' reclamation of socioeconomic spheres and political power. Harvey (2005) expresses that “redistributive effects and increasing social inequality have been such a persistent feature of neoliberalization as to be regarded as structural to the whole project” (p. 16). The increasing gap between powerful corporations and individual employees has led to greater socioeconomic disparity and inequality in the workplace (Cobb, 2016; Galbraith, 2012; Bal & Doci, 2018). Oyserman et al. (2012) found that employees are expected to be self-reliant by handling their affairs in neoliberalism.

Workers in vulnerable situations must acquire the education and skills to function efficiently. Further, Bal and Doci (2018) suggest neoliberalism has created a divided workplace that encourages “individualism, competition, a decline of labor agreements, control and monitoring, meritocracy, and social Darwinism” (p. 4) among the employees. Ideology has engineered the culture of employees to become ‘mini capitalists’ as they must invest and determine their future (Bauman, 2000; Zizek, 2014). The enterprise of self in neoliberal practices has created a system in which education, health, and unemployment benefits have been

significantly reduced. The welfare state has been replaced by a system where employees must invest in themselves individually for better employment opportunities (e.g., paying high university fees, health care, unemployment insurance, and personalized pension plans).

Subsequently, the desire to be competitive meant that all processes, activities, and people in organizations needed to be comparable using quantitative measures, and the resulting bureaucracy has led to the contradiction of the hyper-flexible and yet bureaucratic organization, where employees are closely monitored (Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). In addition, strict monitoring and control have become a central aspect of the contemporary workplace (Vallas, 1999). The fantasy of autonomy of neoliberal ideology appeals to people by emphasizing the importance of people's freedom to choose and their ability to make decisions for themselves (Ayers & Saad-Filho, 2015; Bauman, 2000). However, the management often abuses the system by providing power for patronage bargaining (Schwalbe et al., 2000), coercing the employees to accept their subordination to administrative authorities and interests. The neoliberal organization provides lifelong employment and benefits in exchange for the employees' commitment to work on their profitization goals (Sims, 1994). The center of the freedom paradox is the agentic and free individuals who can take care of themselves and do not need the states, the organizations, or any authority. Unfortunately, employees fail to succeed as "entrepreneurs of the self" (McGuigan, 2014, p. 228). Bal and Doci (2018) highlight the following:

The fantasy of freedom implies that neoliberalism has emancipated the individual from the heavy burdens of bureaucratic and rigid relations of paternalistic organization, trade unions, and collective organizing and instead offers the individual the freedom to assert himself in the market and compete with others and realize his interests. (p. 6)

Obviously, employees and society are made to believe that the neoliberalist approach to workplace policies and practices is better for workers to self-determine their destinies at work. According to neoliberalists, success results from determination, hard work, and an entrepreneurial mind. However, neoliberalization has nothing to do with an individual's inherited social, cultural, and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Moreover, equalizing an individual's ability ignores the issue of intersectionality (race, class, culture, religion, and nationality), which makes the workplace a unique and unequal playground for employees.

In addition, Porter, and Kramer (2011) exclaim that neoliberalism makes organizations focus on profit-boosting and shareholder value, thereby treating everything as cost-benefit. The workplaces are now characterized by subservient employees who work harder to achieve organizational goals and vice versa. Employees will likely approach the relationship with an employer solely with instrumental goals in mind. For example, organizations do not invest in employees unless they contribute to the goals of profit maximization and monetary improvement. Gilbert (2007) paints a bleak picture of neoliberalism's impartiality regarding profit maximization, stating that profitability and shareholder value can be increased by laying off employees or reducing working hours without considering the employees' socioeconomic conditions.

Consequently, neoliberal characteristics make employees competitive in the labor market, where individualism takes center stage at the expense of collectivism. Moreover, existing organizational practices, such as selective hiring, firing, nepotism, partiality, and talent management, support a system of competition among employees for the best careers, jobs, and promotions (Delbridge & Keenoy, 2010). Therefore, the ideology dictates the contemporary workplace as instrumental, individualized, and competitive, creating tension and sometimes an

unfriendly working environment for employees. Table 2.1 summarizes the key characteristics of neoliberalism discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.1

Key Characteristics of Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism	Characteristics
The rule of the market	It emphasizes the liberation of private or free enterprise from government restrictions, even if the social damage caused is high. Actively favors big business and the wealthy in society.
Cutting public expenditure for social services	Reduce expenditure on public purposes such as education, health care, and other social intervention programs. Example: cuts welfare, eliminates social services, dental and medical benefits, poor pension plans for the employees, high cost of daycare.
Deregulation	Neoliberalism limits government regulation on anything that reduces the control of employees and profit. Removes/ weakens labor law protection of employees. Favorable free-trade policies empower corporations at employees' expense, for example, cheap labor and resources, unsustainable wages, and underemployment.
Privatization	Neoliberalism helps sell state-owned companies, services, and goods to private investors. Examples of critical industries are banks,

tollgates on highways, railroads, airports, water, hospitals, and schools.

Removing community or public good Neoliberalism has replaced community, collaborative, and public good with individual responsibility. This has put pressure on the poorest section of society in education, job security, underemployment, and security.

Enterprise of self Neoliberalism has created a competitive labor force where an individual's ability in monetary terms is more valuable than cooperation and collectivism. This has led to a volatile workplace, undue competition between employees, and lifelong learning at a considerable cost.

Source: Author: Based on Harvey (2005), Bal and Doci (2018), and Peck (2010)

Implications of Neoliberalism for the Retail Sector Employees

Before discussing the implication of neoliberalism on the retail sector employees, an overview of the advent of corporate retail stores is briefly discussed. The corporate retail stores in Canada in the 1900s saw an influx of employees, primarily women and young people, playing different roles in organizations (Boothman, 2011). Most of these employees were Canadians, but from the early 1990s, many immigrants started to arrive in Canada. Since then, the demographics of front-line retail workers have changed considerably.

According to Coulter (2011), "The retail workplace is largely comprised of women workers, many of whom are immigrants and/or racialized, a reflection of the deepening feminization and racialization of precarious and low-income workers, a trend particularly

prevalent in large Canadian corporate stores” (p. 88). Coulter adds that the demographics of retail store employees indicate that they are primarily immigrants, young men, and women seeking to pay the fees for their tertiary education or support their children on their low wages. The retail outlets in Saskatchewan are no different as the hegemonic system of exploiting vulnerable employees for the market's needs and neoliberal governability for self-governing citizens and self-driven, flexible workers continue to create inequality and socioeconomic marginalization (Goptu, 2009). Research suggests that neoliberal encroachment in the retail sector has created a system where the state has limited powers to monitor the socioeconomic well-being of the workers (Antonio & Bonanno, 2000; Klerck, 2008; Van der Zwan, 2014). Corporate retail sector policies and practices give employers much power to dictate terms to powerless employees. Such actions have led to increased inequality and marginality in the retail sector.

The ideology currently dominating the global market spheres (Curran & Hill, 2017; Morgan, 2015; Thorsen & Lie, 2006) gives the employees less power and a voice to determine their wellbeing. Neoliberalism has affected the retail workplace, the behavior of employees, and the organizational learning and development programs employees must undertake. Insufficient literature regarding the understanding of the effects of the neoliberal model on retail sector employees' socioeconomic freedom has constituted growing inequality and the need for further debate and studies in the field. Institutional and systemic discrimination in the workplace has created a vacuum in which researchers measure the influence of neoliberalism based on their assumptions and perspectives about the concept (Subramaniam, 2018; Woods, 2018; Thorsen & Lie, 2006). Neoliberalism profoundly affects social justice and equality conditions in organizations as the quest for monetary gain supersedes employees' interests and well-being

(Adams et al., 2019; Byrd, 2014a; Harvey, 2005). A lack of in-depth awareness of neoliberal ideological effects legitimizes rather than contests its negative influence on the retail industry. The doctrine has benefited many corporations' wealthy elites (management and shareholders). Still, it has led to ever-increasing socioeconomic inequality among employees at the grassroots of the retail sector worldwide.

Neoliberalism's presence in organizations involves categorical attempts to reduce trade unions' power, increase the number of temporary workers rather than offer permanent employment, and use pro-profit market principles in organizations (Bidwell et al., 2013; Kotz, 2009). Although some retail organizations are unionized, neoliberalism often aims to dismantle collective approaches and practices (Coulter, 2014). Institutions have the absolute power to block legislation threatening their profit-based practices and survival. According to Peck (2010), Neoliberalism:

Often prosecuted in the name of deregulation, devolution, and even democratization, this offensive is typically associated with attacks on labor unions, planning agencies, entitlement systems, and public bureaucracies by way of the now-familiar repertoire of funding cuts, organizational downsizing, market testing, and privatization (p. 104).

Peck's statement points to a system that has been designed to suppress the collective voice of the employees. For example, organizational policies and practices are usually taken through the top-down approach. In most cases, employees are not part-takers in the decision-making process but passive role players who implement the decisions from the top hierarchy. Individual interest is mainly considered at the expense of collective employee interest. The state no longer has a system that effectively monitors and scrutinizes the organizations' policies and

practices that foster marginalization, exploitation, and injustices. Gooptu (2009) adds that market-driven competitiveness for economic growth and capital accumulation of organizations have caused employees to be subjected to market ethics, competition, and commodification of skill sets and abilities, resulting in unhealthy competition and dissatisfaction.

Furthermore, the system has created a world that favors the wealthy at the expense of needy people, resulting in educational, income, social, and opportunity inequality. The invasion of neoliberalism has seen the employees sell labor power, skills, and creativity like any other artifact (Brookfield, 2005). The neoliberal presence in organizations has created unnecessary and unhealthy competition among workers. According to Ayers and Saad-Filho (2015), the neoliberal economic grip on the world's financial systems has severely affected the employees' emancipatory prowess by creating slave labor conditions in the retail sector. Such influence establishes a platform for unscrupulous policies and practices with devastating unequal socioeconomic conditions. The exploitative practices have long- and short-term socioeconomic consequences on the front-line retail sector employees. In addition, neoliberal discourse in the retail sector creates avenues for misinterpretation and representation. Brookfield (2005) emphasizes that the neoliberal practice of "free trade across national boundaries chiefly allows corporations to get richer by exploiting new markets while reducing costs through the exploitation of cheap, un-unionized labor" (p. 21). The manipulative practices disenfranchise the employees and expose them to persistent inequality and marginalization in the workplace. According to Coulter (2011), totalitarian, repressive, and alienated management practices contribute to the employees' stress and health conditions in the retail sector.

Moreover, social structures in organizations and society have gradually adopted neoliberal systems and norms with grave consequences for the employees' socioeconomic emancipation and actualization (Bal, 2017). Several policies favor individual appraisal rather than collective rewards, creating unnecessary tension among employees. For example, awards such as the shining star, employee of the month, and outstanding employee of the year promote competition and sabotage between individual employees rather than collective rewards that can boost employee morale. In addition, Bal and Jansen (2016) mention that the rise of temporary retail sector work provides organizations with the desired flexibility to hire and fire workers without offering lifetime employment and benefits such as job security and work-life balance. Consequently, the employment relationship in the retail sector is increasingly transactional (Bal, 2017; Rousseau & McLean-Parks, 1993), where the value of long-term commitment to organizations has lost its meaning to employees.

Furthermore, Glynnos (2008) points out that meritocracy remains a powerful force in supporting hegemonic and neoliberal ideology in retail organizations, thereby undermining the economic viability of the employees. The relationships between effort and merit are based on the benefits the organizations obtain from the employees and ignore structural differences due to privilege, including one's social class, ethnicity, or gender (Burke, 2013; Littler, 2013; Raday, 2019). The meritocracy logic has created the idea that the fittest will survive in the workplace where those with power and influence can navigate their way, resulting in an unequal and exploitative work environment. The competitive work environment is seen as indispensable and fair because everyone has the same opportunity to succeed (Harvey, 2005). However, such an environment does not provide opportunities for every employee to flourish as purported. The practice reduces employees not connected to those in the top hierarchy in a disadvantaged

position. Harvey (2005) adds that an individual is susceptible to an illusion of personal growth in such a setting and becomes overly focused on his progress and development, identical to continuously maintaining and improving one's market value. The idea leads to instrumentalized, commodified, and exploited individuals for the organization's benefit.

Pro-neoliberalists have created an impression that growth and progress are yet another maneuver that smoothens the doubts of hard work, developing an advanced skill set, and commitment to its goals (Vahabi & Mohajer, 2020; Encarnacion, 2004) and enhances the employees' socioeconomic conditions. Undoubtedly, the influence of individualism and competition is deeply integrated into the implicit assumptions that underlie exploitative and hegemonic retail sector practices. Employees are bound to deliver performances of interest to the employer as they contribute to organizational productivity, such as profitability or shareholder value (Walsh, 2007). The profit-centered neoliberal procedures in the retail sector have significantly affected employees' impoverishment and devaluation of their intrinsic values. In such a neoliberal echelon, employees' experiences and well-being are irrelevant if they do not contribute to organizationally money-centered outcomes (Bal et al., 2012; Zacher, 2015). According to Lepak and Snell (1999), organizations' investment in employee training is usually presented as a paradox, as training may enhance employee commitment and, thus, their intention to remain with the organization.

Several studies have shown that neoliberal agencies (employers) tend to focus on proactive employees who have successfully developed their careers (Amann & Baer, 2022; Crowley & Hodson; Fieldman, 2011; Navarro, 2020; Saad-Filho, 2019). At the same time, they neglect employees who are not assertive or do not engage in aggressive behaviors or career development (Dorling, 2019; Seibert et al., 1999). The trend has resulted in extensive research

on concepts such as proactivity, job crafting, employability, performance, and creativity (Berg et al., 2013; Boies et al., 2015; Tims et al., 2013; Frenkel, 2013; Pegg et al., 2012; Pool & Sewell, 2007). Based on these conditions, most organizational employment practices aim to hire and keep “desirable employees” and dispose of undesirable ones. The organizations, therefore, engage in layoffs to improve shareholder value despite the negative consequences for employees. Table 2.2 summarizes the various concepts and issues about neoliberalism discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.2

Summary of Neoliberalism in the Retail Sector

Definition: Neoliberalism is a political and economic practice that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework.

Characteristics:

- The free market, free trade, privatization of public institutions and state organs,
- Limitation of state influence on organizational practices, antiunion in organizations.
- The state provides security, defense, police, and legal structures to protect the interest of securing private property rights and ensuring their protection by force.
- The state should not engage in the activities and practices of corporations. State interventions in markets must be kept to a minimum.
- The state cannot possess enough information to second-guess market signals because powerful interest groups will inevitably distort and bias state interventions.
- Reducing state expenditures on social services

- Removing community or public good
- The commodification of the labor force or employees.
- Promote and encourage lifelong learning and self-assisted self-expression.

Implications of Neoliberalism on the Employees in the Retail Sector:

- Systemic discrimination,
- Intergenerational exploitation of vulnerable employees
- Adverse effects on quality of life,
- Increase inequality in organizations and society.
- Commodity fetishism,
- Manipulative and exploitative practices,
- Totalitarianism and repression,
- Alienation and individualism,
- Unfair competition between workers and organizations' competitors
- Flexible but unstable jobs,
- Voicelessness of marginalized employees
- Unethical workplace practices,
- Promotion and perpetuation of organizational undiscussable
- Institutionalization of inequity and deprivation,
- Deregulation of workplace policies and procedures,

Critique:

- Impact on global trade,

- Increases in underemployment and inequality.
- Promotes standardization and rising poverty levels.
- Perpetuates oppression and marginalization.
- complex and misunderstood economic theory,
- Flawed by its mass production of an unequal society.

Source: Author: Based on Harvey (2005); Gooptu (2009); Bal and Doci (2018); Brown (2005)

Theoretical Framework: Critical Theory and Social Justice Theory

Introduction

There is a historical engagement between critical theory and social justice theory on the one hand, and addressing issues of marginalization, oppression, and exploitation in organizations on the other. The theories provided a lens to challenge neoliberalism and its influence on the work-related experiences and conditions of frontline workers in the retail sector.

According to Alvesson and Willmott (1992), “critical theory drawing from the enlightenment tradition, considers the theory to be tasked with liberation from unnecessary restrictive traditions, ideologies, assumptions, power relations, identify formations, and so forth, that inhibit or distort opportunities for autonomy, clarification of genuine needs and wants and therefore greater lasting satisfaction” (p. 435) for the voiceless and powerless people in the social order. The theory calls for an emancipatory agenda to address societal inequalities (Callaghan, 2016) and create awareness and consciousness of frontline employees who are often victims of injustices and hegemonic oppression. Social Justice Theory also advocates for “a scholarship in encouraging praxis specifically designed for analyzing inequalities of power and privilege and, consequently, intersectionality” (Dill & Kohlman, 2012, p. 6) in the interest of the marginalized and oppressed in the workplace.

These dual foci theoretical perspectives offer the opportunity for a framework for understanding issues of systemic inequality and oppression that continue to perpetuate socioeconomic hardships and increasing distress among the frontline employees in the retail sector. According to Langman (2005), the theories collectively are critical of the “neoliberal globalization and its associated militarism” (42) that have turned the workplace into agencies for

exploitation and marginalization of frontline workers in the retail sector. Morrow et al. (2004) opine that the theories have a distinctive set of tasks that make them essential to question issues of power and domination to create awareness and reconstruction of society. Critical theory insists on exposing hidden injustices in the workplace. At the same time, social justice theory advocates for a democratic and transformative workplace where issues of power and domination can be controlled. These theories are further discussed, considering their respective definitions, characteristics, and implications for the studied retail workers.

Considering the fundamental goals of critical theory and social justice theory in exposing and addressing marginality in the workplace, the narrative approach offers the opportunity to listen to the participants' lived and told experiences. According to Lewis and Adeney (2014), studies of participant stories in narrative research “often disrupt or run counter to the larger ‘taken for granted’ dominant narratives” (p. 162). In addition, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) indicate “the narrative inquirer does not exclude the possibility of analyzing the oppressive effects of macrosocial conditions” (p. 50). On the contrary, “there are.... real differences of opinion on the epistemological, ideological, and ontological commitments of the narrative inquirers” (p. 37). Regarding the issues of power, domination, and systemic marginalization of the voiceless in the workplace, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) point out that “Many social theorists who ground their work in a pragmatic ontology examine the macrosocial conditions of oppression....as do many narrative inquirers” (p. 50). Hence, the narrative approach is vital to exploring the participants' experiences from critical and social justice theory paradigms. However, the complexities of exploring these narratives could be a challenge or tension in understanding the participants' different experiences.

Critical and social justice theories provide perspectives that can effectively inform narrative research by exploring the experiences of retail workers. These theories allow for historical and pedagogical experiences on the issues to be thoroughly examined. According to Horkheimer (1972), critical theory allows a researcher to ask questions that expose elements of oppression and marginalization. At the same time, Byrd (2014) maintained that social justice seeks to deconstruct systems that perpetuate inequality and injustices through allyship and collaboration. Hence, these theories are justified as a choice to explore the lived experiences of the retail workers of neoliberalism through the frames of critical and social justice theories. The following sections below explore the broader view of the dual foci of critical and social justice theories by exploring the definitions, characteristics, and implications for retail workers.

Overview of selected literature in Critical Theory

Perspectives on the Definition of Critical Theory

According to the work of Horkheimer (1972), critical theory seeks human “emancipation from slavery,” acts as a “liberating ... influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (p. 246). The theory considers the transformation of modern-day hegemonic capitalism (neoliberalism) into a consensual form of social life that seeks the liberation of the oppressed. Critical theory's birth came when power, control, oppression, and exploitation issues had taken center stage in organizations and society. The critical theorists were concerned about the elites' abusive behaviors and systemic control of all resources. Brookfield (2005) expresses that the “theory helps us to understand that these puzzles are not necessarily procedural kinks or pedagogic tangles of our own making that we need to take responsibility for unraveling” (p. 6). The theory helps reflect on emancipatory practices that seek to bridge the gap between the powerful and the powerless. Brookfield adds, “Critical social inquiry is, therefore,

towards the transformation of capitalism into a real democracy in which such control could be exercised” (p. 250) in a hierarchical manner. The critical approach is rooted in the values of inclusion, equity, and social justice, and it opposes inequitable organizational traditions such as oppression, exploitation, and marginalization.

Crossman (2019) states that critical theory is a social theory geared toward critiquing and changing society from the claws of oppression and injustices that have been the foundations for discrimination and marginalization for generations. Crossman indicates the core concept of critical theory is to dig beneath the surface of social life and uncover the assumptions, grand, and meta-narratives that keep the underprivileged from understanding how the world works. Adopting critical beliefs in organizations and institutions promotes a society based on democratic values of fairness, integrity, and kindness. As Caterino and Hansen (2019) put it:

Critical theory identifies the subjective and intersubjective forms of life in modern societies along with the institutional and structural features that generate and maintain relations of domination and oppression and that present barriers to the realization of greater freedom, equality, and solidarity. (p. 133)

Critical theory, therefore, seeks to question organizations and systemic structures that curtail social democratic values, economic and human liberty, and emancipation from social configurations of oppression. Critical theory scholars question organizational activities and practices that hinder human freedom and liberation. The theory advocates the elimination of all hegemonic and oppressive conditions in organizations to give voice to the voiceless in organizations (How, 2017) and to offer opportunity to those disadvantaged with respect to class, privilege, gender, race, origin, and ability. The theory, therefore, seeks reforms in organizations

for better workplace practices that ensure respect and dignity for workers (Ashgar, 2013). Horkheimer (1982), in his several discussions and studies about critical theory, stated that the theory “seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (p. 244). In other words, critical theory challenges the status quo and strives for democratic and deconstructive values in the workplace and society. Bohman (2005) suggested that critical theory could be a helpful tool in tackling society's current wrongs. To achieve this, the author proposed that critical theory identifies the challenges in organizations and proposes practical actions necessary to change the system of inequality.

Critical theory “helps to realize the ways dominant ideology limits and circumscribes what people feel in life, then raising awareness of how this happens and provides the necessary theoretical opening for understanding how an educative process might enable people to give up their illusions” (Welton, 1995, p. 13). Several actions, policies, and practices that promote organizational inequality and marginalization can be exposed through critical discourses. Ashgar (2013) also maintained that the critical theory's role is to expose social factors that produce oppressive and influential groups to dominate the oppressed and repress most people in society. The critical theory opens possibilities for constructive reforms in the workplace (McEvoy & Richards, 2003; Morrow & Brown, 1994; Cohen et al., 2000). Brookfield (2005) indicates critical theory is grounded in the “activist desire to fight oppression, injustice, bigotry and create a fairer and more compassionate world” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 10), and that the theory concepts penetrate marginalized and oppressive ideologies of hegemony and power and attempts to seek democracy at work.

Critical theory “examines the dynamics of power and ideology and the emancipation of the less powerful by revealing the dynamics of questioning the justification of power and

ideology of the more powerful” (Nesbit, 2005, as cited in Paul, 2005, p. 44). The theory considers the transformation of modern-day hegemonic capitalism (neoliberalism) into a consensual social life reflective of emancipatory practices striving to bridge the disparity between those with socioeconomic power and the powerless. Horkheimer (1972) also adds that critical theory “therefore leans towards the transformation of capitalism into a “real democracy” in which such control could be exercised” (p. 250). According to Thompson (2017), the birth of critical theory brings in a “form of social criticism that contains within it the seeds of judgment, evaluation, and practical, transformative activity” (p.1). The author notes critical theory is a profound way of questioning “everyday life with a deeper, more rational knowledge” (p. 2) of organizational practices. Further, critical theory’s “ability to see the inherent relation” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 3) between those in power and authority in societies makes it an agency for “transformation, to new shapes of human activity, since it anticipates a release of emancipatory reflection and a transformational social praxis” (Schroyer, 1973, p. 31).

Critical theory practices can “penetrate ideology, countering hegemony, and working democratically” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 10) to alleviate the suffering of many people trapped in neoliberal conditions. To achieve its transformative agenda in organizations, stakeholders must consider that the political and ethical dimensions are integral to contemporary critical thinking programs (Kincheloe, 2000). Critically conscious employees or citizens should be able to “disengage themselves from the tacit assumptions of discursive practices and power relations to exert more conscious control over their everyday lives” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 12). The critical theory approach highlights that “society is structured economically to favour a fortunate few” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 21). Furthermore, critical theory’s “ability to see the inherent relation” (Brookfield, 2005, p. 3) between those in power and their activities creates a useful theoretical

tool to explore organizations' conditions. Koltonski (2014) also expresses that critical theory is a diagnostic theory that aims to unmask the ideology that falsely justifies forms of socioeconomic oppression in organizations and society. The theory creates a platform that builds awareness about societal marginalization and inequality variables and seeks to end oppression. Critical theory exposes a community built on the intention of exploiting those at the grassroots for the productivity and profitization of these organizations. Critical discussions and introspection about employer and employee relations about unequal and unfair organizational discourses can assist in democratic and responsive behaviors that interest both parties.

Key Characteristics of Critical Theory

The literature has identified some key characteristics of critical theory that are essential for creating a workplace responsive to all stakeholders involved in the organization. Critical theory teaches individuals or groups about the consequences of power and how power affects people's freedom. The theory strongly advocates that people be equipped with the knowledge to understand how oppression affects individuals (Gaddis & Foster, 2015; Keucheyan, 2014; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Critical awareness enables the oppressed to change oppressive forces and inequality in organizations and society (Buchanan, 2018). The theory strives for social action and consciousness to guide individual and group activities to ensure emancipatory transformation and revolutionary reforms (Berry, 2014). The theorists working with critical discourses align themselves with the interests of those whose voices are taken away by those in powerful positions. Critical theory is concerned with the "historical and social genesis of the facts it examines the social contexts in which its results will have their effects" (Hoy & McCarthy, 1994, p. 16). Critical theorists do not believe in a one-size-fits-all approach because critical factors such as the environment, time, culture, and other historical factors can dominate

organizations' oppressive human processes. Therefore, it is fundamental to note that critical theory plays a multidisciplinary role in contemporary society by examining its problems and prospects of alleviating democratic change.

Moreover, Devetak (2012) stresses that the unique characteristic of critical theory is its insistence on self-reflection. Individuals and groups affected by repressive and exploitative practices in the workplace need to acquire the knowledge and skills that can awaken their critical awareness to fight for their freedom. Self-regulation accounts for how knowledge emerges and is situated in specific contexts and systems. Ashley (1981) points out that “The emancipatory interest is concerned with ‘securing freedom from unacknowledged constraints, domination relations, and conditions of distorted communication and understanding that deny humans the capacity to make their future through full will and consciousness” (p. 227). The theory investigates the underlying principle of creating just and democratic organizations of economic, political, and social life beyond the state level to the entire community.

Critical theory is grounded in advocacy for grassroots emancipation from the oppression of power and hegemony in the hope of seeking emancipatory justice. The critical theory seeks a society that reflects on its practices and enacts rules and regulations that can bridge the gaps between the rich and the poor (Fuchs, 2009; Lykes & Hershberg, 2012; Buchanan, 2018). Individuals are empowered through the theorists' awareness of factors and conditions that foster exploitation and repression in organizations and society (Griffin, 2018). Such actions by the theorists create an informed environment where the affected individuals and sympathizers of their plights can question the hegemonic systems that disenfranchise them from socioeconomic empowerment and liberty. From a critical perspective, the pretext of the neoliberal workplace has created victims whose potential and individual interests are often sidelined for the

organization's goals. Critical theory reflects on the struggles of the less fortunate in society and uncovers the institutions upon which such practices are built (How, 2017). Critical theory is the moral framework where the principles of wrong and right are used to evaluate the experiences of oppression and inequality.

Critical theorists assert that universal theories and ideas are inherently oppressive power structures that control and support inequality and marginalization (Lazarsfeld, 2020). Historically, organizational structures and workplace practices have produced an unsatisfactory quality of life with rising poverty, deprivation, and miserable victims of oppression (Vrasti, 2011; Leary, 2019). The theorist asserts that power structures create social problems in which the socioeconomic challenges of the masses are often suppressed by the elite's systems of domination and control of economic capital in society.

Ideally, critical theory builds and promotes rationality as an alternative to ideology (Brookfield, 2005). The theorist seeks to reengineer a unique society to counter any forms of internal and external influences that support and sustain oppression (Salehi, 2019). The theory addresses societal problems by aiming at people whose plights are taken for granted and advocating for social justice for the oppressed (Allen-Brown & Nichols, 2004). Society is fixed on the fundamentals of commodification and commercialization of society. Therefore, the critical theory provides a better structure for examining oppressive intent and actions (Albert, 2014). The unique ability of the critical theory to question society's upheavals and wrongs makes it a standout theory from traditional approaches that often ignore social issues that affect people in organizations and communities.

According to Horkheimer (1972), the struggles and the hassle for the marginalized in society gave birth to the critical theory that seeks human emancipation from slavery and acts as a redemptive tool for social and economic transformation. The advocacy of this theory is about creating a world that satisfies the needs and powers of marginalized people. Critical theory has seen its prominence among organizations, individuals, and social movements as they identify various dimensions of dominance in modern societies (Bohman, 2005). On the other hand, the theory provides the descriptive and normative bases for social inquiry to decrease domination in organizations and increase freedom in all forms for disadvantaged people. Amid global outcry about the levels of inequality and marginalization in society, critical theorists and other functional advocates have raised their voices about marginality and unfair treatment meted out to employees at the lower levels of organizations and the lower-ranked members of society. According to Agger (2012), the critical theory exposes social problems and structures influenced by the goals and ambitions of the capitalist elite as they continue to maintain power and dominance over the poor people in society.

Critical theorists observe the enormity of oppression and domination of those in affluent positions in organizations and society and begin to provide descriptive and normative discourses of social inquiry that focus on reducing dominance (Anderson, 2021; Morgaine & Capous-Desyllas, 2014; Sayer, 2011). The forbearers of this theory, such as Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse, and contemporary ones, such as Freire, Chomsky, Brookfield, and Gadamer, question the ethical, philosophical, and historical dimensions of oppression in society. Their intentions from the initial stages of critical pedagogy and practice are to create a balanced society regardless of class, race, gender, or any other societal divide. Theorists emphasize that for their work to be effective and transformative in society, whatever interventions or suggestions are laid

out for reparation must be “explanatory, practical, and normative” (Fenton, 2018, p. 275). Thus, theorists must be practical enough in their approach to enforce social change. Horkheimer (1972) states that critical theory supporters should be able to explain the wrongs in society, identify variables to change it, and provide constructive and precise forms of criticism and attainable goals for social transformation.

Giroux (2001) draws our attention to the essence of preventing the loss of truth and knowledge that questions inequality and marginalization in our social spheres. He emphasizes that the unique characteristics of critical theory seek to challenge systems of oppression and claim truth and moral universality in ethics. Critical theorists must create conditions that allow their intent of creating a real democracy to flourish (Giroux, 2020; Comprises, 2011). In addition, critical theorists seek a philosophical point of view that promotes the relevance of eliminating superior capacities in society. Table 2.3 summarizes the key characteristics of the critical theory discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.3

Key Characteristics of Critical Theory

Critical Theory	Characteristics
Emancipation	-The ultimate objective of any theory should be the emancipation of man from oppression and exploitation.
Economic determinism	-The theory exposes cultural and economic repression in organizations and modern society.

Power & Control	-Employee awareness of power, control of organizational structures, oppression, hegemony, systems of marginalization, equity, transformation, deconstruction, and relational interaction. - Employees and the employer.
Critical consciousness	-Ability to question and negotiate -Provision of ethical standards in the workplace -Creating critical sub-consciousness among employees -Effective and dialogic critical thinking and innovative capabilities. -Taking an active and reflective role in the decision-making process.
Metacognition	-Employee values, Self-consciousness, awareness of systemic inequality, effective thinking capabilities, and sound judgment regarding exploitation.
Constructivism prowess	Ability to reflect and evaluate circumstances, deconstruct meaning, and knowledge to act against injustices.

Source: Author based on Caterino and Hansen (2019), Horkheimer (1972), How (2017)

Implications of Critical Theory for Retail Sector Employees

Critical theory plays a vital role in questioning organizational ethos that acts as a tool for oppression and marginalization in the retail sector. The theory creates a platform for a thoughtful review of activities, practices, and policies in the retail industry. Critical conscious employees and civic society question inequality and inequities in the retail sector and society to seek

redress. Critical theorists question the failure of traditional structures to challenge or synthesize factors that promote and sustain domination, marginalization, and inequality in the workplace (Davis, 2011; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011; McLaren, 2007). The theorist, through advocacy, invigorates the workers' critical consciousness to create a platform to make their voices heard concerning things that affect their workplace and work-life conditions. Through activist movements and extensive literature on critical social discourses, retail sector employees can be actively empowered to question systems and forms of oppression to make amends through collaborative approaches (Giroux, 2020) in the workplace and society.

On the contrary, many institutions are not taking proactive measures to address such issues of marginalization and exploitation. Instead, they continue to follow the path of repressive policies and practices to enhance their profit and control over the employees. Therefore, the diagnostic approach of critical theory is vital to reviving the awareness of retail sector employees to advocate for just and ethical practices. The theory equips the employees to question unfavorable working conditions and the exploitation of their experiences (Bronner, 2017; Alvesson & Willmott, 2012). Critical intentions and actions could ensure democracy, accountability, and organizational value responsiveness. The theory paves the way for collective and collaborative decision-making in organizations where all stakeholders' interests are addressed responsively and reciprocally.

Furthermore, the theory proposes equipping employees through civic education to ensure social change through a critical transformative agenda (Dejours et al., 2018). Best (2020) states that an employee who thinks critically could speak out against structural and systemic practices that promote oppression and marginalization in the organization. Retail sector employees whose rights and privileges have been taken by their employers through critical conscious actions could

seek their liberation. The pursuit of critical theory in the retail industry can help to question the influence of empiricist and enlightenment economic structures that provide a platform for the massive socioeconomic divide between employers and employees (How, 2017; Pease et al., 2020). Adopting a critical approach in the retail sector of the economy could help mitigate inequality, instability, and unsafe living conditions the frontline employees face daily.

The praxis of critical theory is essential in the diagnostic processes of exploitation, deprivation, and marginalization of retail sector employees through neoliberal market agencies. Furthermore, workplace practices that enforce long work hours, minimum pay, and inadequate benefits call for critical awareness and action. Therefore, to create a path to transformation and democratic values in the retail sector, the need for employees to speak up about issues and conditions affecting them is paramount to socioeconomic reconciliation. Furthermore, critical theory is oriented toward exploring, examining, analyzing, and seeking transformational changes that are needed in the retail sector and its employees (Bratton et al., 2021). The influence of critical theory on the workplace exposes the hidden structures that continue to sustain inequality and marginalization in organizations.

Critical theory advocacy in the retail industry aims to liberate employees' metacognition and constructivists' prowess (Barone, 2014; Dejours et al., 2018; Harvey, 2005). Critical theory culture develops holistic employees who identify discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization in their organizations. Critically aware employees are empowered to engage in constructive dialogue with their employers about organizational policies and practices that promote oppression and inequality (Harvey, 2005). Furthermore, critical-conscious employees develop different forms of critical reflexivity to measure values, judgments, and assumptions (Brookfield, 2005). Although several studies conducted from the critical theory perspective

aimed to explore the construction of knowledge and the internalization of meaning about power and control in organizations and society, a gap exists on how critical theory can influence retail workers' work-related experiences. It is hoped this study could play a significant role in the search for a suitable and equitable retail work environment and experiences that focus on fulfilling employees' economic and social needs based on organizations' ethical practices.

While the application of critical theory has made inroads into inequality, marginalization, and exploitation in the workplace, the hegemonic machinery in organizations continues to undermine or paralyze the theory's ability to initiate meaningful workplace reforms. Drawing on critical theory to equip employees with a critical mindset is ideal for exploring their understanding of power and exposing inequalities and marginalization in their organizations. There is no doubt that critical theoretical practice can enhance the employee's knowledge of the fight against injustices and oppression in the organization. Therefore, I included critical theory in the theoretical framework for the study to help expose what appeared to be the oppression, marginalization, and exploitation the selected employees experienced at their workplace. Table 2.4 provides a summary of the critical theory discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.4

Summary of Critical Theory

Definition: the theory seeks human “emancipation from slavery,” acts as a “liberating ... influence”, and works “to create a world which satisfies the needs and powers” of human beings (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 246).

Characteristics:

- Transformation of modern hegemonic capitalism (neoliberalism) into a consensual form of social life.
- Emancipation of employees from exploitation and repression.
- Employees' economic determinism is based on wages and rewards.
- Employees' awareness of the effects of power and control.
- Create critical awareness on the job.
- Employees' Awareness of Systemic Inequality and Marginalization

Implications of Critical Theory on the Employees in the Retail Sector

- Exposes tools for oppression,
- Challenges to systems of domination,
- Invigorate workers' critical consciousness,
- Empowers employees,
- Creates accountability and a democratic environment,
- Promotes a transformative agenda in organizations.
- Addresses marginalization.
- Increases employee activism,
- exposes retail sector enslavement practices,
- Liberates employees from the claws of inequality,
- Addresses organizational inequities and
- It equips employees to be able to challenge marginalization and exploitation.

Critique:

- Anti-scientific - theory criticizes the positivists' way of solving social problems.
- Impractical assumptions and suppositions, the theory's deconstruction approach is deemed as not feasible.
- Undermined by contradictions- several critics see the theory as not offering solutions but only criticism.
- The ethos of the emancipation of employees is sometimes complex,
- Suffer from cliquishness, conformity, elitism, immodesty, anti-individualism, uncriticalness, and naivety,
- Failure to generate practical analysis and practical interventions.

Source: Author: Based on Thompson (2017); Horkheimer (1972); Pease et al. (2020)

Overview of selected literature in Social Justice Theory

Perspectives on the Definition of Social Justice Theory

Social justice refers to emancipatory, political, and philosophical theory focusing on the concept of fairness with respect to individuals in society and equal access to wealth, opportunities, and social privileges (Boutain, 2005; Wang, 2016). The concept of social justice originates from philosophical discourse and is widely used to pursue restitution and equity in society and organizations with a history of marginalization and oppression (Byrd, 2018; Greenberg & Tyler, 1987). The theory sprang to the fore due to the broad wealth and social standing disparities between the rich and the poor (Bradley, 2015). The theory predominantly pursues equitable access to resources for the masses, equity, participation, diversity, and human rights (Byrd, 2012). Several definitions focus on redistributing capital, property, and wealth due to extreme levels of inequality and worldwide economic distress (AlMatar, 2015; Danermark &

Gellerstedt, 2004; Thurow, 1981). Social justice identifies societal injustices and urges initiatives to help oppressors and oppressed in organizations to build mutually beneficial relationships.

Many scholars define social justice based on the discrimination that people at the grassroots face daily, ranging from sexual, ethnicity, heritage, social status, religion, wealth, and others.

Therefore, the theory advocates for the equal and complete participation of people of all social identity groups.

According to Adam and Bell (2016), inclusive and affirming human agency and the capacity to work collaboratively enhances transformation in the workplace. Freire and Macedo (2005) admonish that “almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors” (p. 45). Advancing social justice in organizations and society requires reflective practice, where sympathizers and victims of marginalization can work in solidarity with oppressors for transformative change. The effort creates awareness of the redistribution of wealth to underprivileged groups through the provision of livable wages, jobs, education support schemes, and opportunities to grow (Tozer et al., 2020). Hegemonic consciousness is crucial to social justice discourse to ensure democracy through a collaborative effort between marginalized employees and their employers.

Meyers (2016), however, stresses that even though activists and sympathizers of social justice activities advocate for equity and transformation in the workplace and society, the actual implementation of such policies is bureaucratically left in the hands of government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and advocacy groups. Stagnation in the change process creates a system in which those affected by injustices and inequality are left at the mercy of institutional oppression and marginalization. Jost and Kay (2010) also assert that social justice is a political and philosophical theory that asserts dimensions to the concept of justice beyond those embodied

in civil or criminal law principles, economic supply and demand, and traditional moral frameworks.

For instance, the theory focuses on relations between groups within society, that is, the rich and the poor, and the impact between the voiceless and the powerful. The fundamental definition of social justice theory is that people have equal or equitable access to wealth, well-being, health care, and socioeconomic equity (Chubbuck & Zembylas, 2016; Thompson, 2016; Tyler et al., 2019; Venn, 2019). Efforts to advance the ideals of social justice target various demographics to counteract perceived oppression and marginalization that causes social inequalities. The theory targets quality redistribution of power and status, where people are treated with dignity and respect irrespective of their socio-economic status and power. The supporters of this theory often work to achieve goals by peaceful and non-peaceful means (dialogues/protests) in the forms of government programs, social campaigns, public activism, violent revolution, and even terrorism.

According to Van Den Bos (2003), social justice generally tries to find a fair and equitable distribution of power, resources, and obligations in society to all people, irrespective of race, ethnicity, age, gender, ability, status, and sexual orientation, religious and spiritual background. Furthermore, social justice theory pursues inclusion, collaboration, cooperation, equal access, and opportunities (Walton et al., 2019). In addition, social justice seeks to redefine the unjust and unequal socioeconomic structures that have contributed to increased poverty, racism, ethnic phobia, and xenophobia. In addition, Bell (2007) defines social justice as “a democratic, participatory, inclusive process of workplaces where all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure...able to develop their full capacity...and capable of interacting democratically with others” (p. 1).

Furthermore, the definition calls for impartiality and inclusion, regardless of their conditions and status. Social justice theory explores “the protection of equal access to freedom, rights, and opportunities, as well as taking care of the least advantaged members of society” (Rawls, 2003, as cited in Robinson, 2010, p. 79). The theory provides a platform for researchers to examine social injustices and take initiatives toward fairness and equity for marginalized employees. Social justice theory asserts the protection of equal access to liberties, rights, and opportunities and cares for the least advantaged employees in the retail sector and communities (Robinson, 2010).

According to Jost and Kay (2010), social justice theory pursues the benefits and burdens of society as dispersed according to allocated principles. The theory considers distributive, procedural, and interactional justice that encourages unity, equity, and mutual respect. In addition, Byrd (2018) postulates that:

The concept of organizational social justice should act as a vision of equity, fairness, dignity, and respect in the workplace across lines of difference that is presented as a progressive workplace norm that balances the scale between privilege (decreasing the force exerting power) and marginalization (pushing back to gain power). (p. 4)

Byrd emphasizes the essence of balancing the scale between the privileged and marginalized, hoping to level all instruments and circumstances in organizations that create and sustain agencies of oppression and inequities. Byrd (2018) calls for creating awareness of oppression, inequality, marginalization, and poverty among stakeholders, such as management, employees, researchers, and community advocacy groups, to seek democratic ideals. The

concept of social justice advances the ideas of morality, equity, and ethical behavior to create freedom (economic and social) for the marginalized in organizations and society.

Gewirtz (1998) adds that social justice is centered on the ideas of disrupting and subverting arrangements and systems that promote exclusionary and marginalization processes. The core fundamentals are to create an atmosphere in organizations and communities to engage relevant stakeholders to reclaim human rights and dignity among people. In addition, social justice is seen “as an exercise of altering these institutional and organizational arrangements by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions” (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162). Unfortunately, the ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism have created a system that supports egoism and a competitive work environment where employees compete for economic survival.

In essence, social justice explores tensions between hegemonic “complicity and consciousness, choice and constraint, indifference and compassion, inclusion and exclusion, poverty and privilege, and barriers and opportunities” (Charmaz, 2005, p. 5). Therefore, such a critical stance toward transforming organizational practices could only be realized when proponents and actors take pragmatist action on organizations, social institutions, and societies that continue to preserve any forms of marginalization and vilification of people. Freire (1970) points out that social oppression in society and organizations can trigger transformative learning events, leading to social justice outcomes for affected individuals.

Key Characteristics of Social Justice Theory

Social justice advocacy addresses issues concerning race, gender, disability, the rights of people, and the sustainability of the environment (Asch, 2017; Bhuyan et al., 2017; Cohen,

1987). According to Etzioni-Halevy (2009), social justice theory acts as a watchdog on the elites' and industry's activities, perpetuating marginalization, oppression, and inequality. The theory's actions push for alleviating inequality construed by critical pedagogy, social reconstruction, and cultural education (Garber, 2004). Such unique characteristics of social justice theory create a platform for affected individuals and their sympathizers to mobilize and resist forms of oppression. The theory advocates for peace and stability through dialogue and social actions. Social justice knowledge leads to awareness of the need to restore inequalities by giving equal weight to the voices of the least advantaged groups.

Social justice theorists, activists, and researchers advocate for the emancipation and empowerment of the marginalized in society through opening access and opportunities to all people, regardless of their socioeconomic class, gender, race, and so on, for quality human conditions (Nilsson & Schmidt; 2005; Ratts et al., 2009). In addition, the promoters of the theory demand equity, responsive participation, diversity, and human rights for people of all ethnicities or creeds. Unfair and unequal policies are rife in government agencies and organizations that further disadvantage low-income people (Fincher, 2020; Graham, 2007). Therefore, interest groups strongly advocate for social justice to alleviate organizational inequalities. Sympathizers of this theory search for and give voice to the voiceless through mobilization of the marginalized and awareness programs to steer the world towards the path of reconciliation, democratization, equity, and transformation.

The unique plan social justice advocates and activists put forward is to search for socio-economic justice in the organization. However, the advancement of the world through technology, globalization, and economic development has brought about practices and activities that have severely affected human rights and emancipation (Kinley, 2009). Overcoming

unfairness, which is practically caused by unequal access to economic resources and power, has been one of the core foundations of social justice theory. The advocates fight for equal, effective legal, organizational, and political rights for marginalized individuals. Several scholars and social justice advocates have supported the agenda of addressing injustices and oppression in society. Social justice is multidimensional, including at least three types of institutions or dimensions: economy, culture, and politics (Sarid, 2021). According to Ibanez (2015), social justice is flexible to diverse frameworks or political units, such as the state or smaller units (due to decentralization processes) and larger units (due to globalization processes).

Stringent obstacles such as policy framework, institutional culture, and history of oppression could be addressed considerably through reflective social justice activities (Smyth et al., 2019; Restubog et al., 2021). In addition to society, social justice considers nature (or ecosystem) an equally real scenario that offers moral and efficient limits to human action. Oplatka and Arar (2015) point out social justice discourses dismantle privilege norms that favor individuals in organizations and society. The work of Shields (2020) stresses that the social justice philosophy has promoted and encouraged reflection on ideologies and issues that support oppression, discrimination, and racialized societies. The revival of social justice advocacy in organizations is receiving much attention in the media through social networks and advocacy groups. Many organizations have started implementing policies and guidelines to address unequal representation and hidden forms of oppression through HR departments. Blackmore (2009) expresses that increased accountability by social justice advocacy has focused on social injustices and inequality to the point where the state and its agencies can no longer ignore issues of oppression and marginalization.

However, the participation of stakeholders could address oppression, exclusion, and marginalization. The need for reorganization to analyze and expose power dynamics that continue to be instruments of injustice and inequality is essential for the organizations' transformation and reformation. However, Jean-Marie and Normore's (2006) work exclaims that the term social justice is an elusive construct. The politically loaded phenomenon is open to several interpretations on most occasions. Therefore, it is significant for those involved in social justice practices and policies to have defined goals to ensure equity, equal access to opportunities, and adherence to human rights.

Human justice issues have always been challenging in an era where human capital has been commodified (Collins & Bilge, 2020; Garland, 2016). Social justice activism and advancement in organizations consider making the workplace democratic, harmonious, and representative of all races, classes, sexual orientations, and creeds. Table 2.5 summarizes the key characteristics of the social justice theory discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.5

Key Characteristics of Social Justice Theory

Social Justice	Characteristics
All stakeholder centered	Recognizes and respects all stakeholders involved in organizational practices, regardless of their position or power.
	Acknowledges and addresses the concerns of marginalized groups.

	Fairness in the decision-making process and the enforcement of rules and policies.
Collaborative	<p>Representative in decision-making / comprehensive consensus building</p> <p>Recognizes the ability of individuals to participate in decision-making. Equitable respect for the rights of employees and employers.</p>
Value-based	<p>Accountability of management to employees. Recognizing the views and plights of the employees. Provision of adequate support and resources to support employee development.</p> <p>Response to employees' needs and aspirations.</p>
Activist	<p>Addresses the issues of marginalization, exploitation, and repression of vulnerable employees. Responds to employees' social, economic, and cultural needs.</p> <p>Honest approach to addressing the needs of employees in terms of race, gender, power, hierarchy, and sexual orientation.</p>
Experiential	<p>Flexible and adaptable to the social and cultural needs of the employees and the society in which the organization is located.</p> <p>Provision of rewards and services aligned with the ethical standard of practice.</p>

Multicultural Embraces intersectionality and various epistemological, ontological, and axiological constructs of all those involved in organizational practices without prejudice and stereotyping, stressing equity and reflective transformation in the organization.

Sources: Author: Based on Dawson et al. (2018), Byrd (2018), Ingram & Walters (2007)

Social Justice Theory Implications for Retail Sector Employees

The fundamental condition that calls for social justice is that social oppression occurs in many forms through the hierarchies of organizations and society (Grimes et al., 2013; Perez & Martinez, 2008). Employees at the frontline of the retail sector face several forms of discrimination, such as bias, favoritism, prejudice, and stereotyping, which lead to the oppression of powerless employees in the retail sector. Social justice advocacy examines practices, rules, policies, and customs that disadvantage employees due to their social status and the exploitative conditions of the organizations. Factors such as institutional control, ideological dominance, and the imposition of the dominant culture and epistemologies on marginalized employees are challenged by social justice conventions (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). Social justice agencies and sympathizers question the deliberate attempt by those in powerful positions and those from the dominant cultures to suppress and disempower individuals from minority groups and lower socioeconomic scales. Social justice practices examine the historical implications of narrow conceptualizations of workplace opportunities that favor certain people over others. The unfair categorization and classification of people on the job create undue pressure on employees.

To ensure that inequality and distribution of opportunities and balance are attended to, the social justice paradigm must create opportunities for employees to flourish regardless of

social conditions and ethnicity (Lambert et al., 2012). Several international human rights and equitable justice agencies call on HRD practitioners, institutions, and managers to become change agents in organizational equity and transformation. Pantic and Florian (2015) mention the need to develop social awareness and commitment to seek restoration as vital for addressing inequality and marginalization against retail sector employees. In addition, the social justice ethos in the retail industry aims to promote equal economic, educational, proportional representation, and workplace opportunities for all employees in the sector. The capillary intent of that theory requires that workplace policies and practices reflect the needs of employees. The approach aims to develop the capacity of employees and the marginalized to support each other and create prospects that can help equitable workplace conditions and practices. Bhugra (2016) exclaims that factors that affect social justice in the workplace include derogatory and demeaning practices against employees with lower socioeconomic conditions that lead to mental illness, excessive stress, and lack of confidence. Bhugra further states that social justice advocates for a just and equitable society and values diversity, inclusion, and the provision of resources to meet the needs of the people.

Furthermore, social justice in the workplace seeks to ensure the safety and security of employees in the retail sector. The theoretical concept advocates for gender equality, LGBTQ + rights, racial equality, and individual and social awareness of intersectionality (Byrd, 2014a). Social justice means that all institutions' structures and processes should be free, equally accessible, and available to all individuals, irrespective of their characteristics. In recent times, due to the advocacy and media attention on organizational practices and behaviors, initiatives and interventions are being put in place to meet the basic needs of employees. Much emphasis on the need to empower the marginalized, vulnerable, and impoverished (Moore et al., 2017) has

received much support and solidarity. From a critical point of view, advancing social justice practices appeals to socioeconomic democracy that provides a voice to the disenfranchised and oppressed employees in organizations. Additionally, social justice advocacy calls for compassion and harmony with the marginalized in society. The theory strives to provide opportunities, freedom, and a platform to offer marginalized employees a unified voice for liberation.

A robust social justice ethos (belief system/ ideology) tramples (does away with) marginalization and exploitation and empowers vulnerable employees whose human rights and privileges can create an inclusive workplace. Wang (2018) mentions that social justice practice not only embraces equity, fairness, participation, and empowerment, but it broadly considers what instruments or activities can be embraced to advocate for “democracy, social transformation, critical approach, and ethical/moral care” (p. 472). According to Pierson (2009), social justice concepts advocate a broader perspective on issues that create platforms for the social exclusion of vulnerable employees. Pantic and Florian (2015) admonish the need to prepare employees, employers, and external stakeholders in organizations through social inequality awareness programs to equip them to respond to issues of marginalization. Lizzio et al. (2007) expressed that social justice processes help explain aspects of behavior that indicate the inappropriate treatment of employees in organizations. Authors such as (Colquitt et al., 2001; Finn, 2020; Tyler et al., 2019) agreed that social justice initiatives in organizations could contribute to a comprehensive understanding of factors that can promote equitable and empowerment processes.

In addition, McMahon et al. (2008) pointed out that management in organizations must explore their organizations' environmental context, including social, economic, and political systems that influence managers to ensure transparency, reconciliation, and democracy in the

workplace. Berkovich (2014) acknowledges that social justice events can help remove numerous organizational barriers and constraints by directly addressing the exclusion of disadvantaged and disempowered social groups. Wang (2016) explains that for organizations to be democratic, leaders, HR professionals, and supervisors dealing with injustices must work together with the oppressed to devise practical solutions to their challenges. The interwoven complexities of organizational practices require inclusive, transformative, and moral/ethical approaches (Grimani & Gotsis, 2020). Social justice practices can also help build honest, holistic, and morally grounded relationships between employees, management, and the community.

In advocacy discourse, social justice advocates are steering the world and socioeconomic policies toward a free, just, and equitable environment where everyone can have equal representation (Byrd, 2014b). In a capitalist-centered dispensation, the masses adhere to the voices of powerful and influential individuals whose interests are to protect and control the people's affairs through institutionalizing their core assumptions about others. The philosophy of social and emancipatory justice in society tries to find a fundamental role in advocating for reparation for disadvantaged employees (Filler, 2017). Ideologically, social justice practices aim to provide all the necessary information individuals in organizations and communities need for their empowerment. The need to access information can lead to liberation and empowerment toward building democratic organizations.

Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) economic, cultural, and social capital theories, social justice agencies must consider the social and spatial influences that create possibilities for unequal accumulation of resources and unequal distribution of wealth. Israel and Frenkel (2018) concede that organizations and society need to level traditional playgrounds that breed class, hierarchies, and societal marginalization. This requires social justice advocates to consider what

Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’ for people to share social status by having equal chances of gaining social positions. Proponents of social justice (Abel & Frohlich, 2012; Bowman, 2010; Hart, 2013) caution against social structures that erode personal liberties in the organization.

The pro-social justice domain and advocacy consider critical discriminatory, oppressive, and marginalization instruments ingrained in organizations' policies, practices, and underlying foundations constituting oppression and resentment. Current studies of social justice across the spectrum of organizations have acknowledged inadequate, comprehensive, and practical steps needed to address inequality in organizations and society. Therefore, despite the extensive literature in the theoretical framework of the field, transformative social justice requires an integrated approach to identify the concepts and measures practicable enough to address organizational inequities of oppression. For example, despite extensive literature on inequalities and social justice interventions in institutions such as schools, the health sector, and state organizations, the comprehensive search in various literature points to the fact that much needs to be done in the retail industry to address systemic and socio-historical inequalities. Table 2.6 summarizes the social justice theory discussed in this chapter.

Table 2.6

Summary of Social Justice Theory

Definition: It is a political and philosophical theory that asserts dimensions to the concept of justice beyond those embodied in civil or criminal law principles, economic supply and demand, and traditional moral frameworks (Jost & Kay, 2010).

Characteristics:

- Relations between groups within society, the rich and the poor, affect the voiceless and the powerful.
- Collaborative workplace representative decision-making.
- Dismantle discrimination, inequality, and repression against employees.
- Multicultural and integrated workplace.
- A flexible workplace that indicates democratization and the participation of all stakeholders.
- Accountability and culturally receptive practice in organizations and society
- Provision of rewards and punishments in line with equity and ethical standards.

Implications for Retail Sector Employees:

- Addresses oppression and marginalization
- Exposes biases such as favoritism, nepotism, and stereotypes.
- Deconstruction of Ideological Domination
- Strives for liberation and democratization of the workplace.
- Promote diversity and inclusivity, compassion, and solidarity among employees.
- Creates and promotes inclusion among employees.
- Provides a platform for the employees' voices to be heard, a unified voice for liberation.
- Eliminates barriers to inequality and injustice and equitable empowerment processes.
- Deconstruction of hegemony
- Promotes reciprocity and team building.

- Educates marginalized employees.
- Reconstruct enlightenment.
- Addresses intersectionality

Critique:

- Cultural complexity of the workplace,
- It is difficult to predict the political intentions of participants or activists.
- Sloganism and ineffective propositions
- Resistance from organizations
- Splintering effects of activists' intentions,
- The impracticality of some of the assumptions,
- The complexity of socio-economic and sociocultural perspectives
- Not proactive in defining injustices and marginalization in organizations.
- Cumbersomeness of social justice interventions, moral use of power

Sources: Author based on Byrd (2018); Wang (2016); Adam and Bell (2016); Berkovich (2014)

Chapter Summary

This chapter has explored the literature in neoliberalism as an essential contextual background to the study. Further, the literature relating to critical theory as well as social justice theory were reviewed in an effort to challenge or question the key tenets of the neoliberal ideology and its prevalence at the retail workplace. The chapter reviewed some perspectives on the definitions and characteristics of each as well as the implications of neoliberalism, critical theory, and social justice theory for retail workers. The comprehensive review of neoliberalism

literature as well as critical theory and social justice theory frameworks enabled exploring causes and effects and the gaps that were identified in the study by taking into consideration the lingering effects of neoliberalism within the retail workplace context in Regina. The literature review and the theoretical framework helped guide the presentation and discussion of the findings of the study.

The next chapter discusses the research design and methodology for the study.

Chapter 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter presents the research design and methodology. It discusses the rationale for my choice of the qualitative approach as well as narrative research as the research methodology. The study used the narrative inquiry to explore the work-related experiences of four frontline retail workers in a selected store in Regina. The chapter further discusses the participants' recruitment and sampling procedures, data collection methods, data analysis and interpretation procedures, ethical considerations, as well as issues of the trustworthiness of the study's findings. The chapter concludes with a summary.

Qualitative Research Approach

Qualitative research obtains data through open-ended questions, observation, and conversational communication (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Turner III, 2010). The qualitative research approach is based on the disciplines of social sciences (sociology, psychology, anthropology) and humanities (education, philosophy, arts, history, and religion). The qualitative approach to inquiry allows for in-depth and probing questioning of the participants. In qualitative studies, the researcher tries to understand the feelings and motivations about a phenomenon to help them draw conclusions about that phenomenon. In addition, the qualitative research approach explores and provides deeper insights into people's real-life problems (Tenny et al., 2021). For example, qualitative researchers explore participants' experiences, behaviours, and perceptions about a situation to understand the impact of power, oppression, and marginalization on the people being studied in a given context. Qualitative data must be holistic, rich, and distinct to be credible.

I chose the qualitative research approach over the quantitative research design because I wanted to explore the participants' work-related experiences and conditions and the strategies that could enhance their workplace conditions and experiences. Furthermore, the qualitative approach was selected because it is based on the collective and personal histories of the research participants. These experiences are built on the researcher and the participants' subjectivities, interpretations, and reinterpretations in creating dominant encounters (exploitation, racism, sexism, and marginalization) that the participants experience at the workplace.

Qualitative research approaches bring a depth of understanding to the research questions and give the researcher, the participants, and the readers a holistic view of the situation. Tewksbury (2009) added that the qualitative approach “centralizes and places primary value on complete understandings, and how people understand, experience, and operate within milieus that are dynamic, and social in their foundation and structure” (p. 39). According to Berg (2007), the qualitative study explores “meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, symbols, metaphors, and detailed descriptions of phenomena” (p. 3). This study sought to explore the participants’ work-related experiences and conditions. The qualitative research approach was therefore deemed most appropriate for unraveling their perceptions of the challenges and perspectives they faced about their workplace.

Narrative Approach

The narrative approach is mainly used to refer to the umbrella of methods within qualitative research that uses stories to describe meanings that people make of their environment (Polkinghorne, 1995). People narrate their experiences through stories about issues, circumstances, and conditions they witness of things around them (Andrews et al., 2008). According to Sandelowski (1995), “Narrative is a framework for understanding the subject and

interview data in qualitative research” (p. 162). The author adds, “Narrative as an interactive and interpretative product is the focus even before it becomes the researcher’s purpose” (p. 162); participants' stories play pivotal roles in narrative research. As Mishler (1986) puts it, “A prevailing conceptualization of narrative is that it is one of many modes of transforming knowing into telling” (p.161). Polkinghorne (1988) adds, “human beings are immersed in narrative telling themselves stories in a virtually uninterrupted monologue” (p. 160) as they listen to and make meaning of their own stories and others. To many narrativists therefore, “narratives are present in language, images, gestures, myth, paintings, and conversations” (p. 162). In addition, Polkinghorne sees narratives as “stories that include temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events: to render or to signify, the experiences of persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner (p. 162).

Scholars such as Clandinin and Connelly (1990), Clandinin, Cave and Cave (2010), Rosaldo (1989) and Riesman (2008)) mentioned that narrators are usually socially positioned to tell their stories at given biographical and historical moments that influence their experience. In narrative research, the social context and the prevailing circumstances often impact the participants' stories. As a researcher, I sought to understand the participants' experiences through their contextual, social, and environmental framework. Riesman and Speedy (2007) mentioned that narratives “have realist, modernist, post-modernist, and constructionist strands, and scholars disagree on the origins and precise definitions (p. 428). The work of scholars such as Clandinin and Connelly (1994) considered the historical origin of narrative research and traced it back to pioneer educators such as Dewey's (1938) theory of experience, MacIntyre's (1981) notion of narrative unity, Polkinghorne's (1988) narrative knowing and Bateson (1994) views of change, to mention a few. The diversity and inclusivity in narrative research are key strengths of the

research methodology (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Hickson, 2015; Reisman, 2008; Rudman & Aldrich, 2017; Sunday et al., 2020). Reisman further describes “Narrative analysis as a family of analytic approaches to text” and notes that “(a)s families, there is a conflict of disagreement among those holding different perspectives” (p. 151). This study drew on different narrative approaches to explore the experiences of retail sector employees in a selected retail store in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Clandinin and Connelly (1994) re-trait that narrative ways of knowing involve constructing and reconstructing personal and social stories influenced by individual experiences. According to Griffin et al. (2010), this approach is a “means for inquiring into storied experiences” (p. 2)—the personal undiluted experiences in everyday life about past, present, and future significant in narrative research. According to Clandinin and Rosiek (2007), narrative researchers study the participants' experiences by seeking ways to enrich and transform the experience for themselves and others. Binder (2011) asserts that narrative refers “to the process of inquiry, or how humans make meaning of their experiences by endlessly telling and retelling stories about themselves that refigure the past and create purpose in the future” (p. 1). Binder classified narrative events as a “phenomenon of telling” (p. 1) stories about human experiences. These authors’ perspectives of narrative research influenced the steps and the processes I used in my study throughout data collection as well as the analysis and interpretation processes.

Features of narrative approach as a methodology

According to Remenyi and Williams (2008), “the essential features of the narrative approach in an ordered context will allow for its relevance to be easily perceived and understood” (p. 135). Esin (2011) adds, “Narratives are stories with a clear and sequential order

that connect events in a meaningful way for a finite audience. Stories and narratives are often used interchangeably. The sequence is necessary for the narrative. A narrative always responds to the question ‘And then what happened?’ (p. 93). Narrative researchers see this approach as a powerful form of giving meaning to experience. The work of Mattingly and Garro (2000) posit that “narrative mediates between an inner world of the thought-feeling and outer world of observable actions and state affairs” (p. 1). The approach is seen as a medium through which people talk about their lived world and their experiences. In narrative research, participants not only talk about some independent and individual realities, but they also help construct the reality within relationships between the narrator and their lived world.

Narratives are produced through social interactions between the narrator and the researcher (Smith & Sparkes, 2008). Narratives are creative means of exploring and describing participants' realities, which are arranged and bound in time (Esin, 2011). Ontologically, the narrative approach considers nature and social reality that lie in the understanding and use of lived experiences. Epistemologically, it is a process that can lead researchers to understand the complexities of human experiences and social processes that shape these experiences (Andrews et al., 2004). Epistemology implies that “researchers see multiple and sometimes contradictory layers of meaning, to reconstruct meaning through linking these layers, and to explore and understand more about individual and social processes” (Esin 2011, p. 95). There are several ways in which narrative researchers conduct research and some methodologies cannot always fit exclusive categories (Oloo, 2016). Burck (2005) pointed out that some narrative research approaches can be considered in multiple ways or may combine methodologies in various ways to achieve the desired results from the participants. With that being said, I considered myself as occupying a methodological hybridity space within this method of inquiry. As such, this study

drew on narrative inquiry and other narrative approaches to explore the lived experiences of the selected retail sector workers in a retail store. “The hybridity lends itself to the fact that while narrative ways of knowing often have philosophical differences, they can complement each other (Oloo, 2016, p. 93). Narrative inquiry and narrative approach have significantly influenced conversations, writings, and methods of interacting with the participants. According to Chase (2005), narrative ways of knowing as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods - all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them (p. 651). The meaning the participants give to their narratives and that of others makes the methodology appealing to explore the lived experiences of the researcher and the participants.

According to Clandinin and Caine (2013), narrative researchers use both narrative inquiry and approach to explore participants lived and told stories about a phenomenon interchangeably. I used the narrative approach to explore the lived experiences of marginalization, oppression, and injustice that affected the research participants. The narrative process allows the researcher and the participants to explore aspects of lived experiences “which are sources of oppression, suffering, conflicts or failures” (Nowak-Dziemianowicz, 2020, p. 148). The study, therefore, used a narrative approach to explore the participants' work-related experiences and conditions.

The central characteristics governing narrative research in the qualitative study are “individual experiences, the chronology of the experiences, collecting individual stories, re-storying, coding for themes, context or setting, and collaborating with the participants” (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019, p. 518). These processes allowed me to explore the employees’ perceptions of their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. The methodology helped the selected participants and me to explore our work-related experiences

from the personal, social, place (context), and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2013; Daiute, 2014). According to Creswell and Guetterman (2019), narrative research has emerged as a popular form of qualitative research because researchers can explore the experiences of individual participants through their narrations. Therefore, the narrative analysis helped the study participants tell their stories about the issues and conditions that affected them at the retail store.

The narrative approach provides a productive space to expand participants' experiences, given their encounters in “connecting the everyday workplace experiences and socio-economic questions” (Mumby, 2014, p. 252). According to Canella and Lincoln (2009), the encounters may enhance the participants' commitment to challenge the contradictions they experience that arise from their workplace conditions. Using the dialogic narrative approach for the study helped me to explore individual participants' perceptions of the accounts and meanings they associated with their workplace experiences and conditions (Allen & Hardin, 2001). I used the narrative approach to deepen the analysis of organizations' power social and economic processes as exploitation agencies. Sellar (2015) suggests the methodology allows the researcher and the participants to confront oppression and develop transformative approaches to create equitable workplaces that accommodate and represent all stakeholders' needs.

Furthermore, scholars and researchers have sought to question the assumptions that produce workplace inequities, injustices, and marginalization possibilities; therefore, using the narrative was likely to create awareness about those issues in the workplace (Farias & Laliberte Rudman, 2016; Iannacci, 2007). According to Hardin (2003), narratives involve making sense of the participants' lives as lived within a particular socio-historical context. Narrativists advise that the workplace environment, policies, and procedures need critique to reform the direction of

inequities faced by employees, especially frontline employees, through social justice and inclusive development (Hickson, 2015; Kim, 2015; Kreiswirth, 1992).

Using the participants' narratives, I was able to explore the participants' work-related experiences and conditions from a “social, temporal, and spatial view” (Haydon et al., 2018, p. 125) and other narrative approaches for a research project that uses stories to understand experiences. These three common places (social, temporal, and spatial views) focus on the relationship between the participants and the researcher as well as their interconnected inquiry perspectives, thereby providing valuable data for the study. According to Haydon et al., sociality in narrative inquiry explores the participants' personal, social, and cultural experiences. Temporality explores the past, present, and future of the participants' lived and told experiences. Spatiality considers the environment and the institutions or organizations in which the participants are situated. The temporality, sociality, and spatiality framework therefore allow researchers to understand the participants' lived experiences based on their backgrounds. I drew on the notion of participants' experiences, neoliberalism concept, critical theory, and social justice theory perspectives to help in the narrative processes.

Furthermore, Webster and Mertova (2007) point out that the three building blocks of narrative inquiry or approach provide researchers and participants with a rich framework through which the lived experiences could be co-constructed and investigated to address the complexities and nuances of injustices in their workplace. The interactive properties give the participants and researcher a solid foundation to engage and develop valuable connections and a broader understanding of the issue under investigation. Fundamentally, social, cultural, and environmental influences on experiences made narrative inquiry or approach suitable for my study, which sought to capture the employees' encounters at their workplace based on their

social realities and their understanding of those realities in telling their narratives. I, therefore, obtained the research data by listening, observing the non-verbal expressions of the participants, recording, and interpreting the stories imbued with the meaning constituted in the daily life acts of each of them. The narrative approach provided an excellent opportunity for research participants to tell stories of their lived experiences at their workplace from an anti-oppressive standpoint (Johnson & Christensen, 2014).

Recruitment of the Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select the participants for this study. According to Etikan et al. (2016), in purposive sampling, the researcher uses non-probability sampling techniques to choose a sample of participants from the target population who were frontline retail workers at the selected retail store. The researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide information by virtue of their knowledge or experience about the study topic. I used purposive sampling by targeting information-rich participants by first having an informal individual conversation with each of them to help limit the study's bias level (Benoot et al., 2016; Shaheen & Pradhan, 2019). The approach involves identifying and selecting individuals or groups of proficient and well-informed individuals with a phenomenon under study. In addition to knowledge and experience, the availability and willingness of participants to participate were critical to the study's success. In addition, the participants' ability to communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner is essential in selecting research participants. Etikan et al. (2016) added that the fundamental purpose behind purposive sampling is to concentrate on people with particular characteristics who can better assist with the relevant research. Etikan et al. also indicate that qualitative researchers use the purposive sampling technique when the research does not aim to

generate results to create generalizations about the entire population. Purposive sampling helped me recruit knowledgeable participants about the research topic, as it allowed me to intentionally select the participants based on their ability to elucidate specific perspectives on the research.

In terms of participant recruitment for the study, I approached 15 potential participants at the beginning. All of them were frontline retail workers who worked in different departments at the studied workplace. I chose the workplace because I had worked there for over three years. Although the retail store had over 700 full-time and part-time employees, only 15 potential participants were initially contacted because of their knowledge, interest, and experience with the research topic. I talked to them individually at work and briefed them about the study to see if they would be interested. After about a week, I contacted all 15 participants by phone to determine if they would be willing to participate in the study, and only nine agreed. The other six cited various commitments, such as family, time, and lack of interest, as reasons for not participating in the study. The rationale for recruiting my former co-workers as study participants was the easy access, I had to them and my belief that their narratives would provide in-depth perspectives into their work-related experiences and the factors that influenced those experiences. I was cautious, however, to address several issues associated with the ethical implications of using them for the interviews. The issues included informed consent, confidentiality, and my role as a researcher. As well, my role as a former co-worker made the power relations between the participants and me more symmetrical during the interview. I have discussed each of these issues in detail later in this chapter.

I met with each of the remaining nine potential participants who agreed to participate in the study individually to provide them with further details about the research. At those meetings, I gave each potential participant a letter of invitation, consent forms, and declaration forms in a

sealed envelope to read and sign if they were willing to participate in the study. They were given about a week to read the documents and ask for clarification about their concerns. After a week, I contacted the nine employees again to see if they were still interested in participating in the study and arranged to collect the signed documents. Of the nine participants who initially agreed to participate in the study, only four signed the papers and agreed to continue. The participants were two full-time and two part-time employees working as frontline workers in different departments at the selected retail store. All four participants, two men, and two women, were immigrants from Africa and Asia to Canada. Three participants were of Asian descent, and the other participant was of African descent.

Although I was a Ph.D. student, the relationship and familiarity I developed with the participants minimized power and control issues during fieldwork for the study. I worked as an employee with the participants for over three years. I worked in the same department with two participants; the other two were acquaintances from different departments in the retail store. The participants were, therefore, able to share their experiences without fear of reprisal. Their willingness to share their experiences with me was also based on their trust in me and my explanation of the ethical procedures I would adhere to during fieldwork for the study. My position as a researcher evolved on multiple occasions because I was an employee and a student at the same time. I found it challenging to listen to some of the participants' stories about the challenges they had to endure. Some of the stories were draining and appeared to reflect the participants' regret in coming to Canada, making them difficult to hear at times.

Data Collection Method

In qualitative studies, rigorous data collection approaches are the main factors that influence quality and trustworthiness (Kitto et al., 2008). According to Gibbs et al. (2007), such a

procedure critically affects the study's result. Narrative research uses different data collection methods where the researcher and participants work together in a collaborative relationship. These methods can be field notes of the shared experience, journal records, interview transcripts, observations, storytelling, letter writing, autobiographical writing, documents such as class plans and newsletters, and writing such as rules, principles, pictures, metaphors, and personal philosophies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Webster and Mertova (2007) add that “Data gathering techniques which inform the narrative sketches or critical events may include surveys, observations, interviews, documentation, and conversation that can enhance the time, scene and plot structures of the critical event” (p. 23). Haydon et al. (2018) add that narrative inquiry is relational as it focuses on the relationship between the researcher and the participants as well as the interwoven dimensions of inquiry into “temporality, sociality and spatiality” (p. 126). From the three-dimensional perspective, the researcher considered the narrations of the participants through their past, present, and future (temporality); the personal, social, and cultural perspectives (sociality); and the environmental and institutional (spatiality) to obtain credible data about their retail sector lived experiences.

The data collection instrument used in the study was a semi-structured, one-on-one relational interview. The interviews were conducted outside of their workplace and their working hours. Since the narrative inquiry is fluid and not dictated by a set of procedures or linear steps, I collaborated with the research participants from the theoretical narrative inquiry perspectives of temporality, sociality, and spatiality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Due to the fluid nature of this method of inquiry, the stories were told in a friendly manner and were not restricted by the interview questions and procedures.

Interview process

Semi-structured interview questions were used to conduct the interviews. Semi-structured interviews gave me room to prepare a topic guide or a certain number of questions to be covered with the participants (Whiting, 2008). The interviews took place from August 1 to August 30, 2021. The interviews began with unstructured questions such as, "Why did you choose to work in the retail industry?" After that, the employees discussed various topics throughout the extended interviews. Due to the COVID-19 outbreak and movement restrictions, I conducted the interviews (conversations) through Zoom meetings. In addition, the Zoom video interviews allowed me to observe other non-verbal expressions that contributed to understanding their perspectives on the phenomenon. Narrative interviews or dialogues are often conducted with each participant on multiple occasions until saturation or redundancy is reached (Daiute, 2014). Multiple interviews or discussions are necessary because "one-shot interviews cannot produce information of adequate quality, quantity, and validity" (Read, 2018, p. 1). The adoption of multiple interviews allowed me to verify, emphasize, probe, and crosscheck the participants' responses. Vogl et al. (2018) add, "Multiple interviews in narrative research can provide a rich understanding of the dynamics at play in complex relational systems and the different perceptions of the individual participants involved" (p. 177) at different times. In addition, a series of narrative interviews helps the researcher, and the participants develop familiarity, allowing the researcher to probe the participants about their experiences with a phenomenon for more detailed information. The multiple interviews helped me investigate further, seek clarification, confirm the participants' previous statements, and ensure their perceptions and assumptions about the concepts were accurate.

Several semi-structured interview questions were developed for the interview sessions. The interviews were conducted in three sessions, each lasting for about 2 hours for a total of 6 hours of individual interviews for each participant. A total of about 24 hours was therefore spent during the entire interview process. The data I obtained from each interview session was transcribed by me and shared with each participant for review and corrections before the next interview. Furthermore, the interview notes were shared with the participants after each session. The participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts and interview notes. This review process allowed the participants and me to review the transcripts and notes collaboratively, add omissions, and correct misinterpretations where appropriate.

During the interviews, participants were asked questions about their level of education, gender, years of work experience, years as employees in the organization, perceptions about policies and practices, benefits and challenges, marginalization in the sector, how policies and procedures in the retail sector could be improved, and many other experiences that emerged from the conversations. Multiple interview sessions provided room for follow-up questions for clarification and corrections where necessary. For example, I sought clarification from the participants' comments during the previous interview at the beginning of the next interview session. According to Read (2018), "Serial interviews provide rich opportunities to challenge or verify information given in previous interviews and to triangulate and cross-check the participant's answers in relation to other sources" (p. 5). The multiplicity of interactions with the participants minimizes errors, misinterpretation, and miscommunication by crosschecking the participants' narratives.

The guiding questions for the interviews (see Appendix C) were developed from the literature review for the study. Interview questions were given to the participants one week in

advance before the interview, and all the participants were asked the same questions.

Additionally, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw from the study at any time or terminate the interview before the start of each interview session. I allowed ample time for the participants to reflect and adjust before answering the questions. As a form of acknowledgment of the participants' time and willingness to participate in the study, I offered each of them a \$50 gift card.

Participants' profile

To protect their identities and confidentiality, participants were assigned pseudonyms. At the same time, I advised them to keep any information about their participation in the study and the materials about the study a secret to avoid any forms of victimization and retribution from their colleagues who did not participate in the study, as well as management, and they agreed to do so. Furthermore, participants were assured their identities and workplaces would remain anonymous, and all their information or data would be kept confidential. To help ensure that no relationship between their real identities and pseudonyms could be determined, the names assigned to them were Ahmed, Lahori, Zara, and Oladuni.

Table 4.1 summarizes the participant's work-related experiences in the retail sector in Regina, Saskatchewan.

Table 3. 1

Participants Profiles: Summary of Participants' Experiences in the Retail Industry

Participant (pseudonym)	Gender/Sex	Participant's Position	Family Status	Years of experience
Ahmed	Male	Produce Associate	Single	5

Lahori	Male	Produce Associate	Married	5
Oladuni	Female	Customer Service	Married	3
Zara	Female	Pharmacy Associate	Single	3

Each participant entered the interview with a unique experience and perspective on the practices and policies they perceived as affecting their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. I found the participants' willingness, openness, and honesty to talk about the issues and encounters in their lives encouraging and credible because of my own experience as a former retail sector employee at the studied workplace. The participants had a range of 3-5 years of retail work experience, with a group average of about four years as retail sector employees. Two of the four participants were married, and the other two were single. Three participants came to Canada as immigrants, and one participant came as an international student but had completed her studies and held a post-graduate work permit at the time of the interviews. All of them were born outside of Canada.

One participant was still a student and worked as a part-timer in the retail store at the time of the interviews. Many of the participants had previous professional work experience in their home countries. Three participants held a bachelor's degree or higher post-graduate qualification. Only one participant was still pursuing an undergraduate degree during the interviews. The participants' experiences, therefore, reflected a mix of education, diverse work environments, and a unique culture as they shared their stories as frontline retail workers. Based on the stories they shared during the interviews, it appears that their exposure to diverse experiences and cultures seemed to have positively influenced their perspectives.

My role in this Narrative Inquiry/Approach

To conduct a narrative study about the lived experiences of frontline employees in the retail sector, I reflected on my own experiences as a frontline retail worker as well as paid attention to and learned from the past events that created tension and dissatisfaction for me as a worker. Reflecting on or examining those past events enabled me to understand what informed my narratives in the study. With that in mind, my role in the inquiry was to think narratively based on how the participants' stories related to the three-dimensional framework of sociality, spatiality, temporality, and other narrative approaches. As a result, I was conscious of the social, cultural, past, present, future, environmental, and institutional narratives that made up the participants' lives in many different places over time.

With the collaboration of Ahmed, Lahori, Zara, and Oladuni, I explored their experiences at their workplace from their past, present, and future, as well as their perceptions of the conditions that influenced their experiences. The participants and I unpacked the stories by considering the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. As a researcher, my line of questioning revolved around “thinking forward, inward, outward and backward” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 50). Such an approach helped me ask difficult and emotional questions from the perspectives of power, domination, marginalization, exploitation, and oppression concerning their lived, social, and spatial experiences. I interacted with the participants through a critical lens that helped to unravel the different forms of injustices and inequities they thought they were experiencing as frontline retail employees. Throughout the interviews, I was able to interact with the participants by reflecting on their internal (inward) conditions, such as feelings, hopes, and moral disposition; outward conditions to understand the influence the environment had on their

experiences; as well as backward and forward along a temporal dimension, thinking about the past, present, and future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Data Analysis and Interpretation Procedures

Data analysis in qualitative studies often comprises the preparation and organization of data in the form of (text data as transcripts, image data as photographs, and artifacts) for analysis and interpretation. Researchers reduce the data into themes through the processes involved in coding and condensing the codes and representing the data in figures, tables, or discussions (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). With regard to narrative inquiry, Webster and Mertova (2007) suggested that “findings from narrative studies are presented through the narrative in the forms of a scene, plot, character, and event sketches related to critical events” (p. 23). And as James (2017) mentions, the rationale behind analyzing narrative inquiry research is fundamentally about searching for the meanings and making sense of the experiences. Conway (2003) explains that data analysis of narrative inquiry should comprise a collaborative reflection on the data among all the participants involved in the study and the researcher.

Data from my participants were analyzed through re-storying or retelling (Lester et al., 2017). Lochmiller and Lester state, “Re-storying or retelling is the analytical process of gathering the stories told and restructuring them in relation to time, place, plot, and so on” (p. 109). Lewis and Adeney (2014) advised narrative researchers to take time for a thorough reading of the data gathered to identify “commonalities, connections, and patterns as well as unique moments that stand out” (p. 168). I followed these authors' advice in this study's data analysis and interpretation. After multiple participant interviews, the stories were saved on my password-protected laptop. I listened to the audio recording of the participants' stories several times, after which I transcribed the data.

Next, the audio transcripts were downloaded and shared with the participants. I read the transcripts several times, and each participant was advised to do the same to ensure accuracy and to provide additional information if they wished to do so. I then made the necessary additions and corrections in consultation and agreement with the participants. Following that, I reviewed the transcribed notes by sifting through the transcribed data, sentence after sentence, to locate essential ideas (themes) that made compelling connections with shared details and the narratives relating to their work-related experiences. I employed the thematic approach to data analysis and interpretation for the study (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As already stated, I analyzed the interview transcripts and generated themes relating to the research purpose and questions of the study. The analysis process proceeded with a line-by-line analysis of the interview transcripts and field texts. After the transcription, I read each participant's data multiple times to familiarize myself with the texts and chronologically arranged their narrations.

Maguire and Delahunt (2017) offer some practical, systematic thematic analysis outlines that provide credibility to qualitative research. Most studies adopt the outline to describe and interpret the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants to uncover the meanings they ascribe to situations and events in specific contexts. Quotes from the participants' narrations are included to aid in understanding particular points of interpretation and demonstrate the prevalence of the themes (King, 2014). Thematic analysis in qualitative research identifies themes and patterns in qualitative raw data (Braun & Clark, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). King and Brooks (2018) add that thematic analysis indicates forms of qualitative data analysis that primarily focus on identifying, organizing, and interpreting themes or patterns in textual data. There are two types of thematic analysis, which are deductive and inductive thematic analysis procedures. Braun and Clark (2006) express that deductive (top-down) thematic

analyses are driven by the stated research questions or the researcher's focus on the intended results of the study. Inductive (bottom-up) thematic analysis, however, is driven by the data collected from the participants, with no preconceived notions of the codes or themes. I relied on the inducted thematic approach in data analysis and interpretation for this study, as I sought to allow the themes to emerge from the participants' narratives. Direct quotes from the participants' narratives were essential in analyzing and interpreting the study's findings, as they provided context for the process.

To repeat, more extensive participants' narratives were included in the presentation of the findings to give the readers a richer assessment of their stories about their work-related experiences. Using quotes and themes helped me organize the data into interpretable chunks of information that were used to communicate the findings. According to Aronson (1995), extracting participants' narratives into themes helps the constructed stories stand with merit. In addition, the themes from the participants' narratives provide in-depth information to inform the reader about their perspectives on a phenomenon. That was the process employed in this study.

Ethical Considerations

As the study involved human participants, ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Board (REB) at the University of Regina on 20 July 2021 (See Appendix D). The REB process ensured that the study was consistent with ethical standards. Lewis and Adeney (2014) advise narrative inquirers to be respectful of the participants' stories. Johnson and Christensen (2014) add that narrative inquirers should "leave any judgmental baggage home" (p. 385) throughout the research process. As I was aware that trust was a critical attribute of narrative inquiry, I gave the participants space to share their stories without my interruption.

Josselson (2006) has advised narrative researchers to have an ethical duty to protect the privacy and dignity of those whose lives are studied to contribute to our scholarly fields. She adds, “As a matter of good methodology, the researcher has to be transparent about his/her interests to make a research alliance with the participant” (p. 540). I explained the rationale for the research to the participants and followed the ethical rules and procedures during fieldwork as required by the REB. Creating an enabling environment gave the participants space to share what they wanted with me because they trusted that their anonymity would be protected. Clandinin et al. (2007) express that although ethical issues are compulsory in all research with human participants, narrative inquiry requires special attention as the research seeks detailed information about the lived stories. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) sum it up as:

In narrative inquiry, inquirers must deepen the sense of what it means to live in relation in an ethical way. Ethical considerations permeate narrative questions from start to finish at the outset as the ends-in view are imagined; as inquirer-participant relationships unfold, and as participants are represented in research texts. (p. 483)

I was, therefore, mindful of my role and responsibilities as a researcher to protect the integrity of the study as well as the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. I adhered to the necessary ethical standards and processes to the best of my ability. No single incident of a breach of trust between the participants and me was reported throughout the process. I reminded the participants of my ethical obligations to them before each interview. After the transcription of the interview data, each participant was provided with the opportunity to read their transcripts to correct mistakes and add any omissions. The participants were happy with each step of the study because they thought their secrets were safe with me.

Trustworthiness in Narrative Studies

As with any qualitative study, trustworthiness in this narrative research relates to the findings' credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Loh, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To help the readers make sense of these concepts, each of them is discussed in relation to how they were addressed in my study.

Credibility

Narrative researchers see credibility as vital in evaluating an inquiry's quality. Tobin et al. (2010) indicate that credibility is the extent to which the findings of a study is credible and suitable. Moreover, as Creswell and Guetterman (2019) put it, credibility relates to the processes and the efforts the researchers use to obtain reliable data and develop the data into convincing and truthful tools. Conway (2003) also adds that narrative inquirers have to work harder to demonstrate that the study has been conducted exhaustively, consistently, and precisely for the reader to determine whether the research process is credible. Nowell et al. (2017) note demonstration entails disclosing the method(s) of analysis, strategizing, and systematizing the research process without intentionally hiding anything from the reader. I made efforts to develop familiarity with the participants and the site conditions. As a former employee at the studied workplace with three years of working experience, I had insider knowledge of the site and some of the conditions the participants faced in their daily practices. I was able to position myself in proximity to the participants' narratives and immersed myself in the contexts of their narrations. The holistic and reflective observation and synthesis of the participants' narratives helped me to develop a broader understanding of the circumstances and the context in which they were situated throughout the study.

All the participants responded to the same interview questions at different times, and I was able to manually analyze their data and develop the main themes and sub-teams. I continuously made clear to the participants throughout fieldwork that their participation in the interviews was entirely voluntary. They could withdraw from the study at any time or refuse to answer any questions they were uncomfortable answering during the interviews. The interactive approach adopted during the interviews helped me to detect and minimize unscrupulous data. I made an effort to ensure the data analysis process followed a rigid process that eliminated bias and false representation of the participants' narratives. All these strategies helped to boost the credibility of the study.

Transferability

According to Merriam (2009), transferability in qualitative research measures the level of applicability of the findings of a study to other settings, contexts, and environments. Guba and Lincoln (1994) also add the qualitative researcher is responsible for providing adequate background information about the research context to enable the reader to decide whether the findings of a study are transferable to another context. The information I obtained from the participants and the study context could help provide the contextual information that could facilitate the transferability of the study findings based on the similarities in contexts and the readers' assumptions and perspectives.

As indicated in Chapter 1, to ensure the transferability of the findings of the study to similar contexts, I offered a description of the context of the study, sample characteristics in participant recruitment, participants' profile (e.g., demographic information, their experiences) (Hannes, 2011), the methods used to recruit the participants and the types of data obtained. Based on the research purpose, objectives, theoretical framework, and research methodology

employed for this study, readers will be able to see the parallel between the work-related experiences of the study participants and their own experiences or the experiences of workers in similar contexts. In other words, the study's findings might be transferable from the perspective of the experiences of frontline workers' neoliberal workplaces in the retail sector or industry across capitalist countries such as Canada.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the consistency and “stability” (Guba, 1981, p. 86) of qualitative research findings. It attends to the degree to which the findings of a qualitative inquiry could be “consistently repeated” (Guba, 1981, p. 80) when an outside researcher with the same or similar participants in the same or similar context repeats its research procedure. Establishing dependability depends on how well the process of the study is documented. To enhance the dependability of the current study, a clear “audit trail” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 323) was created to help an external researcher to develop a thorough understanding of the research design, data collection process, as well as the data analysis and interpretation procedures. The operational details of data collection, analysis, and interpretation were carefully documented at each stage of the process to give the reader a better perspective of my logic and inquiry process.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers “to the degree to which the findings of an inquiry are a function solely of the subjects (respondents) and conditions of the inquiry and not of the biases, motivations, interests, perspectives and so on of the inquirer” (Guba, 1981, p. 80). In a qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the data collection instrument and the pilot of the data analysis process. The researcher’s philosophical and epistemological position, subjective

decisions, perspectives, and self-reflexive ability are closely relevant in establishing confirmability in the findings of a study.

To reduce researcher biases and extend confidence that the findings were grounded in the data and adequately represented the participants' perspectives (Tobin et al., 2010), I crosschecked participants' narratives to allow them to confirm the information and the meaning they provided. In other words, I "involve[d] participants in assessing whether the researcher's interpretation accurately represents them" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 125) after each interview was analyzed and preliminary interpretations of the data were made. During the interview, I constantly sought confirmation and clarification from participants by summarizing or rephrasing their ideas for them to see if I accurately captured their thoughts. After data analysis and interpretation, I took the emerging themes and sub-themes to them to confirm the credibility of my decisions, that is, whether the themes were accurate and made sense to them. In addition, an audit trail was provided. The source data interviews were scrutinized in detail to account for the research procedures, themes, and sub-themes used in the study. These procedures would allow the outside readers to decide how accurately my accounts represented the participants' realities.

Chapter Summary

The chapter has discussed the research design and methodology for the study. First, I briefly explained the qualitative research approach and the reason why the approach was considered appropriate for the study. I then discussed the narrative approach as the research methodology. Furthermore, I discussed the participant recruitment and sampling process, the data collection method and procedures, data analysis and interpretation procedures, ethical considerations, and the trustworthiness of the findings of the study.

The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 4: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was threefold. First, the study sought to describe and explain the participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. Secondly, the study explored the participants' perceptions of their employer's workplace training and development interventions and the results of those interventions for them and their employer. Third, the study explored the participants' perceptions of their employers' strategies to enhance and enrich their workplace conditions and experiences.

This chapter presents the findings of the study. The presentation was guided by the research purpose and questions, the theoretical framework, as well as the three building blocks of narrative inquiry. As mentioned in Chapter 3, an essential and central component in narrative inquiry, as described by Clandinin and Connelly (1990, 2000) and Clandinin (2013) is the idea of relations among temporality, sociality, and spatiality in narratives about the phenomenon being studied. The authors also indicate a narrative is commonly explored in relation to these three dimensions, and they sometimes reveal a more substantial influence from one of the dimensions, although the interconnectedness of the dimensions is always present. They indicate that the interconnection creates the commonplace of a three-dimensional inquiry space with the researcher attending to the research participants' past, present, and future storylines.

Temporality refers to the influence of the past, present, and future on the participants' narrations in research (Clandinin (2013)). People live in a continuous narrative, and narratives are often expressed as memories of the past, present, and future. When narratives are, however told, the experience is remembered, and subtle changes are often made to accommodate new experiences. Consequently, subtle changes in the narratives about the participants' work-related

experiences would be expected based on the changes they might have experienced over time. Their previous experiences might likely influence their perceptions of workplace factors and conditions in the future.

With regard to sociality, researchers focus on how people's interactions, understandings, and perceptions of their environment influence their narratives (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; 2000). According to the authors, people's experiences are expressed in narratives, and as social norms change, so do their narratives. For example, transferability in narrative research would depend heavily on the social context of those experiencing the phenomenon. Depending on who the audience is, the narrative will change based on the experiences of the narrator, environment, and context. Obviously, the nature of the relationship between the participants and I would change their narratives. Narratives from the three-dimensional framework were central to the participants' identity throughout the study. While telling their stories about their work-related experiences, the participants narratively constructed and repeatedly reconstructed their identities and who they socially were connected to, including other participants and me as a researcher. As the participants made sense of their experiences by telling narratives, a vital part of their narratives included me, and that undoubtedly influenced how the narratives were told. In other words, participants' narratives would have been different if they were told to someone who is not familiar with the topic.

Spatiality refers to the context and environment where the phenomena under study occurred, in other words, the retail store in Regina, Saskatchewan. The fact that the interviews were conducted on Zoom and the participants took part from their homes might have influenced their narrations. In addition, the previous work-related experiences in their home countries likely influenced their perceptions of the work-related factors and conditions that influenced their

current workplace in a new country. It was likely, therefore, that when the participants recounted their narratives, their lived environment influenced how they were presented to the researcher. In general, the participants' three-dimensional narrative perspectives were explored to inform the situations and conditions they encountered in the selected retail store. Each participant had the opportunity to tell their lived stories from their understanding of the issues, practices, and events they experienced in the retail store. The participants' temporal, social, and situated conditions shed much light on their work-related experiences. In addition, the interviews focused on exploring what the participants perceived as their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences.

Since I had previous work experience at the selected retail store where my study was conducted, the participants' narratives and mine were interwoven as they influenced each other during the data collection process. My previous working relationship with the participants helped us bond again, as the participants were able to speak freely without any reservations about the issues that affected them in the retail sector. I believe the participants were comfortable and spoke with confidence about their experiences as front-line workers in the retail sector.

Participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences

Question 1- Findings about the participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and conditions that influenced those experiences.

Based on the integration of the participants' data, several themes emerged from their narratives, including their perceptions of their experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. The specific themes related to their: demographic profile or information, the rationale for working in the retail sector, experiences with their work conditions, experiences of

being a retail sector employee, experience with their management, work environment, and relationships, workplace practices, and their duties, economic survival as retail workers, personal achievement as retail workers, unionization and unions, the decision-making process at their workplace, salary and other benefits, the role of the organization in achieving their personal goals and aspirations, job security, employer-sponsored workplace training, and development programs, and suggestions to enhance the experience, and workplace condition were thoroughly discussed throughout during the data collection process.

Participants' demographics

Before asking participants about their perceptions of their work-related experiences, I explored their demographic information. The demographics of the participants, especially their marital status and family size, were vital because they could affect their experiences as frontline employees in their new country. Exploring the marital status of participants was vital in the study. The experiences of participants who were single lived alone, and supported themselves only were likely different from the experiences of those who were married and responsible for supporting their families. Although I was married at the time of data collection for this study, I was living alone in Canada, as my spouse and children were living overseas. However, I was still responsible for supporting them with my low monthly wage and salary, and I had to rely on credit card debt to support them. My experience was similar to married participants, although single participants also indicated they had to rely on credit card debt to support themselves because of their low salaries and wages.

As explained in Chapter 3, I used pseudonyms for participants' names to respect their confidentiality. The initial biographical questions allowed the participants to settle in during the interview sessions. Their background information allowed me to interact with the participants in

relation to the three dimensions of CNI. I continually reflected on how the participants, and I were situated within the three-dimensional inquiry space. Such reflective praxis provided a holistic understanding of how the interviews were conducted, taking into consideration each participant's lived experiences. In addition, the initial biographical questioning created room for familiarity between the participants and me and their perceptions of themselves and their encounters as employees in the retail industry. The demographic questions were related to the participants' age, marital status, educational level, employment history, and rationale for working as retail sector employees. The participants gave a brief overview of themselves as follows:

Ahmed was a 25-year-old single man with no children at the time of the interviews. He had been in Canada for six years, was a third-year student at the university, and had no prior tertiary education. Ahmed has worked in the selected retail store for over five years because he is not able to get any experiential or cooperative training in his field of study. The retail job was his first ever, as he had not worked in any other organization. He further indicated that as a student who was unable to secure any experiential training, the retail sector became his only option, as other job sectors required experience and skill set, he did not have.

Lahori was a 56-year-old married man with three children. He has been in Canada for more than six years at the time of the interviews. He had a bachelor's degree from his home country and no formal Canadian education. He has worked in the selected retail store for over five years because he could not find any job in his field of study. He mentioned that he could not get any job opportunities in his field of study because he did not have Canadian qualifications or work experience. Before coming to Canada, he worked for different corporate organizations in roles such as manager, supervisor, and coordinator. However, he indicated that most places he applied for jobs in Canada had a negative perception of foreign credentials, qualifications, and

experience, especially those acquired in developing countries. He also thought racism was a factor in his inability to land a job in his field.

Zara was a 31-year-old single woman with no children at the time of the interviews. She had been in Canada for four years, had a master's degree from her home country, and completed another master's degree in Canada. She has worked in the retail store for more than three years. She started work at the retail store when she was still a student because, like Ahmed, she could not find any job in her study field that could have provided her with experiential learning during her studies. Similar to the views expressed by Lahori, Zara thought racism and discrimination were key factors in her inability to find a job in spite of her field of study.

Oladuni was a 29-year-old married woman with one child. She had been in Canada for more than four years. She had a bachelor's degree from her home country and a diploma from Canada. She had worked in a retail store for more than three years at the time of the interviews because she could not find a job in her field of study. She mentioned that despite having forwarded several applications for job openings in her field of study, she had not been successful in getting a job. She thought her lack of success in getting a job in her field of study indicated that employment prospects in Canada were shrouded in secrecy, where those connected with mainstream society were favored compared to those from diverse/ minority groups.

Participants' rationale for seeking a job in the retail sector.

One of the key issues that emerged in the participants' data related to their rationale for working as frontline employees at their retail store. When asked why he chose to work in the retail sector, Ahmed shared his reasons this way:

When we first moved to Canada, I wanted to be financially independent of my parents, so I applied for as many jobs as possible. I sent many resumes to several companies, but unfortunately, none of them got back to me. At this point, I had become frustrated enough that I decided to go to my current job and talk to the managers. It took some time, but eventually, I could talk them into giving me a job. I have been there ever since.

Unfortunately, due to the unorthodox nature of my job, I started to think that I never got any other job because I did not have any work experience. Also, I was only four months old in Canada; I did not expect any other job to be hiring since my knowledge about the job market was narrow at that time.

Ahmed's comments indicated he thought his store and the retail sector, in general, offered employment opportunities to people even if they did not have extensive experience. He indicated he did not have to follow the standard procedure for getting a job at his workplace because he knew someone who knew the manager. He did agree that such a move could be viewed as a nepotistic or unethical practice since it did not follow the standard norms or procedure for new hires. Ahmed appeared to point to the issue of cronyism at his retail store, as those who were connected were easily offered job opportunities based not on their qualifications or abilities but on whom they knew and how well they were connected.

Concerning his rationale for working at his retail store, Lahori said:

I was not attracted to this job if I could say so because I was an immigrant; I needed to feed my family when we first got here, so this job was what I could get when we got here. In short, this was to help us survive. Also, I was new, and this job was easy to get, obviously for survival reasons. However, in other employment sectors, I noticed that they

required some forms of certification and re-education even to stand a chance of applying, so in a bid to have some form of income to feed the family, I took the retail job.

Lahori's comments indicated that he was concerned about his family's survival as immigrants to a new country, so he decided to take a retail sector job. From his expression during the interview, however, it was apparent that Lahori did not consider the retail sector job his ideal choice, as his need to survive in a new country informed his choice of the job. Guo (2009) indicates many prospective employees in Canada, especially immigrants with foreign qualifications and experience, such as Lahori, do not get the opportunity to work in their field of expertise because of bureaucratic labor market regulations. Lahori thought the retail store was the only sector that provided opportunities to potential employees with limited or no barriers to employment. His comment pointed to how his decision to work at the retail store was informed by his environmental circumstances. Lahori summed up his rationale for working in the retail sector this way.

I think they brought us here to enslave us. I came here as a skilled worker, but now those skills are not useful at all. I don't think I needed as much education to be a frontline worker in the retail industry. So, I inquired further about what he meant by 'they brought as here' he went on to say, 'I came to Canada as an immigrant with the hope that one could get a decent job with better pay and working conditions. During the immigration process, I read about the opportunities here and was told by the agency that handled the process that I could quickly get a professional job when I moved here; however, that was a deception to me.

Zara, however, had a contrary perspective on her decision to become a retail sector employee in Canada. She said:

I did an administrative job back home, but when I came to Canada, and after visiting some retail stores, I found it attractive, I applied for a position, and then I got a job as an associate in this retail store. I found it attractive for a couple of reasons; flexible work hours and easy-to-handle tasks. When I started, I was a student and worked the hours and schedule that fit my availability. Also, as a newcomer here in Canada, I found that it was the only place to find a job with flexible hours that fit my study plan. Furthermore, my job as a pharmacy cashier was not difficult because it allowed me to focus on my studies.

Zara's comments indicated that she took the job in the retail sector because of the flexibility and easy access the sector presented to her as a student and her previous work experience in her home country. Additionally, as a newcomer to Canada, Zara found the job attractive. Many new immigrants to Canada find the retail sector a place that is open to offering them their first entry-level job in the Canadian labor market. Zara, however, mentioned that easy access to frontline retail jobs did not typically translate into job security, a living wage, benefits, and participation in decision-making. When asked about her retail work experience at the store, Zara said:

If I look at what has happened since I have been here, I can tell you that my experience is negative. We work a lot, but at the end of the day, what do we get for all this hard work? When I finished my studies, I asked the manager for more hours, but she told me that the request could not be granted because her department could not afford to give me more

hours. Also, I tried to move to a different department where I could get more hours, but when I applied for the advertised position, I was not even called for an interview. I saw a new employee working in that position, and when I enquired, I was told she was connected to one of the managers. You see, the years I have worked here do not count towards getting a permanent job here. It is so disappointing. Everything they promise here is the opposite; I can tell you that. This makes me question the policies and practices here.

Oladuni, on her part, said:

I was attracted to this field because I have years of experience working in the retail sector in my home country. Therefore, when I got here, I first worked in a small retail shop with very few employees, so we were always overworked. As a result, I applied to work in this large corporate retail store. Due to my previous experience, I got the job easily and have been working here since then. However, the pay level in my previous retail store was much lower than what I was earning in my new company. However, during the intake here, I was told that they offer an opportunity for growth and the management is not as confrontational as in the previous one.

Oladuni's comments indicated she had some work experience in the retail sector in her home country, and when she arrived in Canada, she thought progression in the field was a great idea. She thought the promise of promotion and other opportunities at her new workplace was very enticing. She, however, pointed out that *"Even though I had experienced as a retail employee back home, the politics and injustices are too much here."* When I asked her to clarify her political and injustice comments, Oladuni also indicated:

Since the organization is a multicultural workplace, people are treated based on their looks, who they are connected to, whom they know, and their kind of friends. I have seen on several occasions how the clique system works here. We are not treated the same, and we are not enjoying similar conditions from scheduling to how much of a raise one gets at the end of the year. When it comes to promotion, contrary to what was promised, people are promoted based on their connections to management and not on their abilities or experience.

Oladuni's comment indicated the problems that often came with working with diverse people from different backgrounds and experiences. Some research (Guo, 2009; Coutler, 2014; McGuigan, 2014; Bal & Doci, 2018) suggests that in the face of globalized and multicultural work environments, employees are often exposed to various forms of discrimination and marginalization based on their relations and cultural background. These researchers argue that challenges with integration might emerge when the workplace comprises diverse groups of employees, as peoples' stereotypes about others who look different from them sometimes become problematic. In most instances, therefore, instead of diversity being the organization's strength, they argue it becomes a hindrance to employee cohesion and integration. In addition, the rhetoric of an inclusive and diverse workplace that points to the strength of neoliberalism also racializes workers from minority groups, who may be exploited as cheap labour due to their vulnerability and situation in the work environment. The participants thought that was the case at their retail store.

They also thought the retail sector in general and their retail store, in particular, provided them with easy access to employment opportunities as new immigrants in Canada. They identified varying reasons for taking up a job in the retail sector, such as experience, attractiveness, and easy access. Their past, present, and future conditions and social perspectives

informed the decision to take up retail sector jobs. They thought Canada was a welcoming country for everyone; and yet they perceived the bureaucratic certification, credentialing, racism, stereotyping, and discrimination as barriers to employment for many immigrants (Morrison, 2015).

Additionally, they pointed out that many professional immigrant employees felt trapped in the retail sector due to the work requirements in the other sectors of the Canadian economy. Based on their experiences, it appeared the participants perceived their work-related experiences as predominantly negative, as they were dissatisfied with the conditions at their workplace. They thought they experienced injustices and exploitation at their workplace, making it difficult to think of any long-term plan as frontline workers. From my interactions with the participants and my personal experience as a retail sector worker, I can say that much needs to be done to ensure that immigrant workers and people of color are afforded equal employment opportunities.

Participants' perceptions of their working conditions

Another issue that emerged from the participants' data related to their perceptions of their workplace conditions. They experienced what could be characterized as inconsistencies, individualism, and hostility in their dealings with management and supervisors. Ahmed described his working conditions this way, "My time working here presents different experiences with some good and others bad." I asked him to clarify his comments, and he went on to say,

I have had the unfortunate displeasure of working with and under people, and I hope never to have to work with them again. Unfortunately, with a culture of greed from management and some associates, I have considered never working a retail job ever again once I am done with my studies. Sometimes, I might be the only one working an

eight-hour shift when there is always enough work for at least two people. Therefore, I am always overworked and exhausted.

Lahori also described his working conditions and experiences in this way:

For this job, I will say, sometimes, it is flexible. For example, customers do not disturb me since I work overnight. But on the other hand, there are some complexities in working with different people from all over the world, culture conflicts, value conflicts, and, more importantly, some of the colleagues and management are difficult to work with in my workplace. Although I have worked with some great managers and colleagues simultaneously, some hostile and non-cooperating individuals are challenging to work with, so it gives me stress anytime I am scheduled to work with such people.

Lahori thought that even though the job was flexible and sometimes easy to handle, interpersonal relationships with colleagues and some managers became a hindrance at times. His narration indicated he thought his workplace environment was complex because of individual differences and interests, conditions that he thought affected frontline employees. Lahori further stressed, “*Sometimes due to cost-cutting by the management, instead of two or three people working overnight, I work alone, and I go home super exhausted. It is draining mentally and physically*”. According to Naidu et al. (2019), profit-centered practices in organizations often lead to fewer overworked employees, which increases stress and poses health risks to them. Ahmed and Lahori, even though they have learned some service skills at the workplace, still saw the sector as hostile (each one for themselves) and increasingly exploitative. They thought management mechanisms that created an individualistic atmosphere created hostility and tension among the employees because they competed for positions and recognition.

In contrast to the perspectives of Lahori and Ahmed, who appeared to consider their working conditions as hostile, Zara expressed that the working environment was *“friendly, and I have learned a lot from my colleagues. I have had a lot of positive inspiration from my immediate manager and associates.”* Zara mentioned that her colleagues and immediate manager were helpful, and she learned a lot from them. However, she also commented on an issue she considered a negative workplace experience.

Sometimes, other employees call in sick, and instead of the management calling for a backup, they leave those spots unfilled, and I have to work alone doing everything. This is stressful because one person performing tasks for two to three people is overwhelming and stressful.

AlMatar (2015) mentioned that management practices and policies that support an employee performing multiple tasks that would normally be performed by two or more employees was detrimental to their physical and mental wellbeing. In addition, Zeytinoglou et al. (2004) added that the unpredictability of working hours and the number of people scheduled to work on a shift creates work-personal life conflicts and contributes to higher stress levels for the employees. Zara thought that was the case at her workplace, as management’s interest in cost-cutting measures was reflected in their refusal to call for replacements when employees reported sick. She believed that the management’s choices exposed her and her colleagues to increased stress because they had to work under pressure to complete tasks that would normally be assigned to two or more employees.

Oladuni also indicated, *‘I get more customer experience here compared to my previous workplace. Since this is a more prominent organization, I have the opportunity to learn from*

different situations. I feel good when I help people solve their problems. Oladuni thought her work experience had offered her some form of opportunity to gain Canadian work experience and learn more about workplace culture and customer behavior. According to her, *“helping others through customer service brings fulfillment because retail frontline work gives me the opportunity to serve others.”* While she acknowledged what could be perceived as a positive perspective about her workplace, Oladuni also mentioned some negative experiences at her workplace. She spoke about the behaviors of managers as well as what she thought were hidden organizational policies and practices that promoted discrimination, exploitation, and marginalization at her workplace. Oladuni further expressed:

I dislike politics in the organization. There are a lot of politics within the organization in terms of growth, and I will also say that in terms of your color, they discriminate against you. There is systemic discrimination, which I see daily. I am a black woman working with white and other races. They show some stereotypical attitudes trying to portray supremacy. When I probed further on this statement, she added, “Look, the policies on paper all point to transparency, diversity, inclusion, and any other sugar-coated words one can think of, but that is not the reality. Personally, I am always faced with different systemic challenges. I often see issues of race, class, and status raise its head all the time.”

Zeytinoglou et al. (2004) indicate the retail workplace is filled with different forms of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, regionalism, and entrenchment of the dominant culture at the expense of minority groups. It appeared Oladuni’s experience related to some of those discriminatory practices. Like Oladuni’s comments, the other participants mentioned some forms of discrimination and oppression they faced as frontline employees. When I asked him for

some examples of such incidents, Ahmed said that his manager, because of the stereotype of people from his country of origin, victimized him and sometimes threatened to have him fired. He thought employees were treated based on their race, origin, sexual orientation, and gender, as frontline employees who were white were treated better than those from minority backgrounds. Lahori also indicated that, although he has worked in the same department for many years, he has been overlooked for promotion on many occasions. Oladuni's experience was similar, as she also pointed out that, "*looking at the management demographics, people who look like me do not stand a chance of getting promoted.*"

Reflecting on the participants' experiences and my personal views about the retail sector where they worked, I would say I also experienced negative work-related experiences, such as reduced hours, poor wages, voicelessness, hostile customers, and discrimination from some managers when I was a frontline employee in that store. In addition, I witnessed what Tomioka et al. (2011) would characterize as various forms of exploitation and uncertainties regarding scheduling, equity, fairness, favoritism, and other forms of marginalization. For instance, I was aware some employees were given more hours, increased wages, and faster promotions based on their race and whom they knew in management. They also received unequal punishments for similar offenses. I thought management at that retail store was hegemonic and oppressive because of the conditions of favoritism, management hostility, biases toward promotion, unexplained schedule cuts, coercive management practices, racist sentiments, and verbal abuse I endured during my time there. The participants' comments even though stemming from their experiences and different backgrounds, resonated with my own experiences. Exploring their lived stories confirmed my views about how that workplace has continued to create inequality and marginalization of frontline workers.

Perception of being a retail sector employee

When I asked him about his perceptions of being a frontline retail worker, Ahmed said:

To tell you the truth, I do not feel proud working here. In contrast, I feel demoralized when I think about the amount of work I have to do and how much I am rewarded as an employee. Worse still is how society perceives retail workers. I do not feel proud being here because most of my friends who work in the other sectors look down on me.

Lahori also stated:

In fact, I am just doing this job because, at the moment, I have no option. My family depends on me financially, and considering the expenditure in Canada, not having any job at all can lead to an economic disaster. Generally, in my community, when people who work in high-paying jobs, such as doctors, educators, and nurses, talk about their jobs and the benefits in any of our meetings, I feel bad and inferior. In short, I negatively perceive working in the retail sector. Therefore, when my extended family asks me what I do in Canada, I cannot tell them. I feel ashamed.

Zara, on her part, said:

I am not proud to work here because the benefits of working here are non-existent. I have been working here for the past three years with virtually no achievement. Considering the level of education I have acquired and my experience over the years, working as a front-line retail employee is a downgrade. Nobody respects you from managers, customers, and community members. Sometimes it becomes a mockery of my educational qualifications.

Oladuni also indicated:

I feel stressed anytime I get up to go to work. I don't feel like I am doing anything at all that can change my socioeconomic situation. This job has impoverished me as I have to depend on credit cards and sometimes a line of credit to make ends meet. I am always thinking about how I can get out because even my peers who work in other places will make comments that show their lack of respect for retail sector employees. For me, my perception of retail work is negative.

The participants addressed what they considered the negative stigma associated with being retail employees at their workplace and among people from their home communities living in Regina. They thought their communities considered their treatment as retail workers negative. Such perceptions and attitudes made them feel inferior to those from their home countries working in other labor market sectors. Coulter (2014) contends retail sector employees, especially frontline employees, often have to deal with disrespect from management, customers, and some community members because frontline retail work is not widely valued in society. The participants' thought the conditions they encountered at their workplace were consistent with Coulter's comments.

Participants' experiences with management

Management in the retail sector has often come under scrutiny due to several forms of inequality, abuse, and marginalization incidents reported in the retail sector (Coulter, 2014). When asked about his experiences with management at his workplace, Ahmed was blunt. He indicated:

Since I was new to Canada, I did not know the workplace culture and management obligations due to my naivety. I made sure to present myself as someone open to criticism

and ask for help with things I could not do. It all came to a halt when my manager bluntly told me I was a bad worker one day out of the blue and that he would get me fired. I was shocked as I had never experienced anything or anybody like that before in my life. The hostility is apparent, and as a matter of fact, my manager, even though he is a minority and an immigrant like me, the level of his racism is horrific.

Coulter (2011) mentioned that many retail sector managers use intimidation and aggressive strategies to force employees, especially frontline workers, to work toward the achievement of organizational results. Ahmed thought that was the case with his experience with his manager. For example, he said, *“Initially, he treated me as everyone else did, but that changed as he started to become passive-aggressive.”* Ahmed continued:

Management shows clear signs of nepotism. They have hired people with no previous work experience to head entire departments on multiple occasions. Meanwhile, other associates have many years of employment history in the department. They are always overlooked, and this is a big disappointment to me. What happened to their promise of promoting from within and that everyone has an equal chance of being promoted?

I was not that surprised by Ahmed’s comments, as I also observed nepotism and favoritism by some managers when I worked in that retail store. I once asked a manager with whom I related well about such practices, and he told me the employer was always looking for employees whose goals were aligned with their goals. When I asked him what he meant, he said, *“We want obedient workers.”* According to Delbridge and Keenoy (2010), existing management practices in the retail sector, such as selective hiring, nepotism, favoritism, and talent management, support a system of competition among employees for better careers, jobs, and

promotions that causes discomfort and injustice to frontline employees. Harvey (2005) also adds that nepotism and favouritism disadvantage employees who are not connected to the managers in the organization. Ahmed's experience with his manager appeared to support the views expressed by both authors.

When asked about his experience with management as a retail sector frontline employee, Lahori indicated:

Some small managers from other countries with substantial power gaps and mono-cultural working environments have difficulty adjusting to working in an organization with a multicultural background. For example, I observed that the non-Canadian-born managers are bossy and keep a power distance from us, the frontline employees. Another interesting observation was that one of the minority managers in a department used to hire many people from his country of birth.

While multiculturalism in organizations is generally seen as adding value to organizations, Lahori thought it also had challenges if not handled properly, as the concerns and needs of employees who belong to minority groups might be sidelined or overlooked. As he put it, *"In most instances, we (employees) cannot express our grievances openly for fear of victimization here, but one can always deduce that such politics of nationalism or tribalism plays itself.* He also thought that *"Management should be able to work with everyone without stereotyping or stigmatization."* From his comments, my personal experience at the studied workplace where I was also a frontline worker, Canadian-born and foreign-born managers exhibited biases, favoritism, and prejudice toward some frontline employees, and that often led to different forms of discrimination and oppression at the workplace. For example, during my time as a retail

worker, I observed different forms of engagement and interactions that some managers had with employees with whom they shared the same race or ethnicity. One of the foreign-born managers often spoke his local language with frontline employees from his tribe, with no regard for others who did not speak the language.

Contrary to Lahori's experience, however, Zara had a positive experience with her immediate manager. According to her:

My supervisor, I will say that she is a very good person as a leader. Moreover, as a leader, she is performing her role better. She is very kind and cooperative. She is helpful and always strives to maintain the company policy. However, organizational policies laced with neoliberalism features hinder our equitable representation, voicing the challenges we face, hostile working conditions, discrimination, marginalization, and a coerced working environment. For example, my hours were drastically reduced without notice because I spoke to the manager about long hours. Furthermore, the issue of annual evaluation and salary increase is flawed by the organization's goal of profit maximization. My manager will often say that my hands are tied because the company's policy does not allow her to exceed a specific increment range.

Positive management practices in organizations promote employee engagement and engagement, leading to increased productivity (Zeytinoglu et al., 2004)). These authors indicate that equal and fair treatment of employees creates a safe and healthy work environment that decreases stress and dissatisfaction and leads to positive workplace outcomes for retail workers. Zara's comment about her workplace mirrored the perspective of these authors. At the same time, she also expressed reservations about the management at her workplace. According to

Zara, “*Company policies and procedures are not always helpful for employees, such as unpaid breaks, reduced working hours, and few employees on schedule. In addition, some organization policies and procedures hinder employee job satisfaction and empowerment.*” Ashgar (2013) contends that for employees to achieve job satisfaction and equitable participation in the workplace, organizations should initiate reforms beyond policies and procedures in striving for better workplace practices. Zara probably thought that should be the case at her workplace.

Concerning her perception of the management, Oladuni had this to say:

As a leader, I will say that she is kind of weak because she has a very nonchalant attitude toward her job. She takes things for granted, and most of the time, when you complain about how things need to be done, she becomes hostile toward you.

Oladuni’s body language and nonverbal expressions appeared to suggest she thought her manager’s promotion was not based on merit. She considered practices at her workplace nepotistic because promotions were not based on merit but on connections to those at the higher hierarchy of the organization. She thought nepotism was what got her manager into the position. According to Piomelli (2008), favoritism, prejudice, and stereotyping in the retail workplace continue to pose a threat and disadvantage employees with the requisite skills and experience to be in the management position. The participants thought that was the case at their workplace.

Working environment and relationships

I asked the participants about their perceptions of the nature of the working relationship between them and management. Ahmed thought:

The working environment represents each one for himself. It is very individualistic. I have just come to accept it. The working environment is hostile and unwelcome, as

teamwork barely exists, and the relationship with management is sometimes formal and, at times, tense. Management always instructs us on what to do, so I can say there is no friendly relationship with management.

Ahmed's comment aligned with my experience working at the studied workplace. I thought there was no teamwork or team appraisal in the sector, as employees sometimes even work against each other to be rewarded or promoted. According to Lazzarato (2009), neoliberal economic concepts have distorted organizations into an 'enterprise society' based on individual skills, productivity, and competition between employees, resulting in inequality in organizations and privileging of a few individuals. Furthermore, Lazzaro indicates that competition-driven concepts create an atmosphere in which backstabbing, and competitiveness succeed at the expense of others, diminishes teamwork and collaboration among employees. That was my experience at the studied workplace.

Lahori, however, indicated that for him, the atmosphere and relationship with others were "friendly to some extent, especially among employees. However, some employees will laugh with you and go behind you to backbite to management to gain favor. The workplace policies, in which the upper management had absolute control, such as hiring, firing, and promotion, appeared to have created a system for employees to compete with each other for their job and job security. Lahori thought that was the case at his workplace. He went on to indicate that:

Aside from backbiting, gossip, and bickering, we relate well despite our different cultural and geographical backgrounds. However, I will say that the relationship with management is not friendly, as most I have encountered feel they have power and are above us.

Lahori's comment indicated that he thought his work environment and relationship experiences were positive, although he lamented what he perceived as backbiting. He asserted that employee relationships at his workplace was based on "Mind your business first," and absolute trust did not exist because employees had to watch their back constantly.

Zara and Oladuni thought their relationship with colleagues and management was tricky because the intentions of some employees were complicated. They thought it was not easy to know who was genuinely on their side or competitor. They thought there were times when conditions at the workplace were tense because some managers came to work with their problems and behaved in a way that made their subordinates feel bad. Zara and Oladuni also thought management's relationship with the employees was somehow detached, as some managers related better to only those they knew and ignored others they did not know. Oladuni indicated that such an environment "*is not conducive to teamwork.*" She thought that employees always had to watch out for themselves because they did not know who was on their side or competing with them for future positions. Zara said, "*I always have to be mindful of what I say or discuss with my colleagues. The workplace is filled with condescending people who can quickly go behind your back to say something bad about you to the management.*" According to Zeytinoglu et al. (2004), the retail work environment and relationships between employees and their employers often exacerbate workplace tensions and antagonism. The participants in the study thought that was the case at their workplace, leading to increased stress levels for them.

Workplace practices/duties

The issue of their perceptions about their workplace practices and duties also emerged from the participants' data. Ahmed indicated that even though he was aware of his work schedule in

most cases, he had no idea of the specific tasks he was expected to perform until he started his shift work. He said:

Managing multiple tasks is hard; sometimes, I stop stocking the shelves and help one customer after another. Doing multiple tasks, especially when I am the only one working, leads to a lot of stress. It can be mitigated if any department manager comes to help, but that is, unfortunately, a pipe dream. They schedule a few people per shift and do not bother to check if one is overwhelmed with the workload.

Zeytinoglu et al. (2004) mentioned that the retail sector resorts to cost-cutting that exposes employees to hazardous working conditions such as multitasking, fewer employees on a shift, and extended shifts have adverse effects on their physical and mental health. Ahmed thought that was the case at his workplace. He also indicated:

Managers deliberately schedule a few employees per shift as part of cost-cutting measures. Yet, ironically, they get rewarded with bonuses by the organization if they manage to save money by hiring fewer employees, reducing employees' working hours, and so on.

Lahori added, “*Workplace practices/duties are usually filled with lifting heavy loads, multitasking, and running around helping customers.*” He thought employees often had to multitask to ensure the needs of management and customers were met and that such multitasking activities often caused physical and mental strain on them. Oladuni also said, “*I always run around helping customers with their needs and also have to perform other tasks like stocking, zoning, and temperature checks.*” The participants indicated they were always busy performing different duties during their shift work, and they often found undefined tasks and activities physically and psychologically frustrating and draining. Zara added:

Sometimes, I get out of breath because of all the multiple tasks I must perform. I often feel like I need a helping hand, but they do nothing, even if I complain to management about the consequences of scheduling a few employees.

The participants commented they found the multi-tasks assigned to them during shift work frustrating and exhausting. They appeared to question the management's rationale for recruiting and scheduling fewer frontline employees between shifts. According to them, there were situations where the management assigned more tasks to one employee instead of getting more people to perform that task. They thought such management practice perpetuated hostility and created a tense and stressful work environment that negatively affected their mental and physical health.

Participants' economic survival

The issue of their perceptions of their economic survival also emerged from the participants' data. When asked how they survived financially as frontline workers, the participants indicated that they had to work more than one job to make ends meet. They talked about borrowing from close friends and family members as well as using credit cards, which increased their household debt. Even though the participants had different experiences because of their backgrounds, they thought the socio-economic challenges they faced were similar.

Ahmed said, *"I have been working here for five years, but I have not saved anything. All I can say is that my employment letter has only helped me acquire more credit cards, which means more debt."* Similarly, Lahori added, *"working here is just a deception that one is employed, but the reality is that I am always struggling financially."* Zara agreed that, *"one cannot achieve financial freedom working as a retail employee because I do not have any*

money.” Oladuni echoed, “*I am always struggling to pay my bills; it is stressful to do a minimum-wage job.*” According to Campbell and Price (2016), volatility and the precariousness of the retail sector jobs make it almost untenable for employees to support themselves and their households. The participants' thought their financial situation was precarious, and the only way out was to seek alternative employment; otherwise, their credit record would be ruined. Coulter (2014) mentions that “Improving retail work is in everyone’s interest” (p. 4). Further, scholars such as Giroux (2018), Barone (2014), Fenton (2018), and Byrd (2018) indicate it is important for employers to emphasize issues of equity, fairness, and social justice in organizations to help improve workplace conditions for employees. These authors also contend retail sector employees deserve socioeconomic liberation with better working conditions. Coulter (2014) mentions that because of their low wages, frontline employees in the retail sector are forced to work two or more jobs simultaneously to make a modest living. Many frontline workers in the retail sector however still struggle financially despite these multiple jobs and long hours of work. The participants’ comments indicated they thought their work-related experiences were consistent with the perspectives expressed by these authors. They faced financial problems because they were saddled with low wages, which they thought worsened their financial situation.

Personal achievements as frontline workers

When I asked him about what he could consider his personal achievement as a frontline employee at the studied workplace where he has worked for more than five years, Ahmed indicated: “*I can say my socialization and communication skills have improved due to exposure to different associates and customers worldwide.*” He thought that working on the sales floor and talking to different people had helped him to develop certain traits he did not have before taking up the job. Ahmed, however, indicated that as a frontline retail employee, “*There are also many*

negative achievements because I have to always survive on a modest salary, which is a substantial financial burden. I have not achieved anything financially except credit card debts. I am always tired, and as young as I am, I am developing backache and other health conditions.”

To him, his work as a frontline worker added to his debt because his earned salary did not meet his financial needs. Lahori also indicated:

I have not achieved anything positive so far, just that I am here in Canada and hoping for a better opportunity. But unfortunately, the negative effects outweigh the positive as I am in so much debt and have to do more than two jobs to survive. I am always stressed about my financial situation. I was better off at home, but now, I must constantly consider paying rent, bills, and other family expenses.

It appears Ahmed and Lahori had negative work experiences as frontline workers because despite what they considered their heavy workload, they still had financial challenges. Zara had this to say about her achievement as an employee at her workplace, *“My social life is a mess since I have to work long hours to survive. Economically, I am so broke that I have not had much from working in the retail sector.”* Oladuni also indicated, *“Ironically, I have incurred too much debt; I have not achieved anything. That is why I have always looked at other options somewhere.”* The perceived socioeconomic constraints, the participants revealed their challenges, which made them to consider their workplace unattractive and stressful.

Participants’ perceptions of retail sector jobs

The issue of their perceptions of retail sector jobs such as their jobs at their workplace also emerged from the participants’ data. When I asked him about his perception of retail work in general, Ahmed said, *“My perceptions about retail work are financial challenges, no social*

life, lack of growth, and indebtedness. In addition, most of my colleagues who have family, bonds, and car loans are maxed on their credit cards and line of credit. Zeytinoglu et al. (2004) indicate the unpredictability of work hours in the retail sector has a negative financial burden on the employees. The authors contend that many frontline employees only take retail sector jobs as the last option because they have nowhere else to go or see such jobs as a stepping-stone for seeking something better. Lahori also saw his workplace and the retail sector in general, as a workplace with *“long hours, low pay, heavy lifting, hostile management, and a place of isolation and individualism.”* His comments painted a bleak picture of his workplace conditions, and he thought he and his colleagues would never consider frontline work as a lifetime job.

Zara added, *“A retail sector is a place of inequality and marginalization because there is so much politics and manipulation going on here that physically and financially affect us, the vulnerable employees.”* Oladuni also indicated, *“My perception about the retail sector is that it is a place of exploitation, class, and racial discrimination. To add to these, I can tell you; it is where nepotism and favoritism take center stage in the promotion and other opportunities.”*

When asked further about what she meant by racial discrimination, nepotism, and favoritism, Oladuni said, *“People are not treated on merit or ability; it’s all about how you look, whom you know, and how you are; connected to the organization. Organizational goals and policies of the employer making more money led to many of the injustices I have mentioned.”*

The participants' experiences and mine at the studied retail store revealed they faced several challenges. They thought their key challenges were nepotism, favoritism, rigorous work, lack of support from management, burnout, and many other issues that affected them physically, emotionally, and psychologically. The participants also thought their experiences at the workplace were clouded by management policies and practices that continued to affect their

work-related experiences adversely. Their comments helped to broaden my knowledge of how the activities at the studied workplace affected them based on their temporal, social, and spatial lives.

Unions and unionization

The participants and I discussed their perceptions about the issue of unions and unionization at their workplaces. When I asked him whether his workplace was unionized, Ahmed said, "*No, we are not unionized; each employee is for themselves when it comes to bargaining for the proper wages and other benefits.*" Ahmed's comments indicate he thought his workplace encouraged the employees to fight for their rights to bargain for improved working conditions, equity, and job security without, as Coulter (2011) put it, any chance of being "intrinsically and extrinsically tied to any form of collective rights" (p. 78). He thought the lack of unions contributed to "*unfair salary arrangements in the organization. For example, I have been with the organization for five years. To my surprise, a person who just was hired last week without any previous experience or expertise takes home higher hourly wages than me.*" Ahmed also thought the lack of unions subjected the participants to unfairness, lack of equity, and transparency. Birch and Springer (2019) stated that the neoliberal economic model in the retail sector frowns on unionization, and the anti-union policies open employees, especially frontline workers, to unfair and nonresponsive workplace treatment. Ahmed thought that was the case at his workplace. He thought the anti-union policies and sentiments existed at his workplace because "*the management is scared; if we come together, we can act as a unit to demand more salaries and better working conditions.*" He thought the management was afraid of 'union scrutiny' and so they did not want the employees to come together to fight injustices, marginalization, and exploitation. Bidwell et al. (2013) contend resistance to unionization by

retail sector employers creates injustices and inequities for employees and reduces their engagement at work. Ahmed appeared to agree that was the case at his workplace.

When asked the same question about unions, Lahori also commented said: *‘No, we do not have any unions.’* Unlike Ahmed, however, who attributed some of the challenges his colleagues faced at work to the lack of unions, Lahori had a slightly different view about unions. He said:

Unions, in some places, are a blessing, whereas, in others, it is a curse. I have worked in some organizations with unions; my experience with those with good union leaders is that they always have the interests of employees at heart and go to collective bargaining agreements with employers to get the employees what they deserve. Nevertheless, the experience in the organization with bad union leadership was awful; instead of union leaders fighting for the employees who are their employers, they turned out to be on the side of the employer most of the time.

Lahori thought the management's ability to block the formation of unions at his workplace was probably because they saw them as threats to their profit-oriented practices. As an example of what he thought was management's hostility to unions, Lahori indicated that one of the branches of the retail store where the study was conducted had voted to unionize, and six months later, that branch was shut down because management concluded it was no longer viable financially. He also thought that because managers wielded considerable power at his workplace, they could incentivize union leaders to prevent them from negotiating better working conditions and terms for the employees, even if there are unions. For Lahori, therefore, *“Corrupt union leaders take bribes from the employer and ignore the plights of vulnerable employees.”* Lahori further indicated, *“In this current organization, I think they frown on unions because they want*

the avenue where they can negotiate the needs and the welfare of each employee individually; to me, this leads to exploitation and slavery.” He thought participants were powerless as individuals, and so the lack of unions exposed them to exploitation, abuse, and oppression. Coulter (2011) mentioned that some non-union retail “managers made schedules and would allocate shifts based on their personal preferences and past sales performances” (p. 81). He indicates that without unions in organizations, the mediation between the employers and the employees suffers because the management's neoliberal exploitative and profit-centered goals do not give the employees a better deal in terms of salary negotiations, yearly increments, promotion of employees, welfare, and benefits. Lahori thought that was the case at his place of work.

Zara and Oladuni concurred that their workplace was not unionized. Zara thought because her workplace was not unionized, “*We are just tools for making money. How we fill, what we think, and our experiences here do not matter. You just have to come to work and go home when your shift is over.*” Oladuni also added:

I can say that the organization does not support collective activities or actions. I think it is a form of exploitation because we have no one to speak for us when we are not unionized. The management can give us whatever they want and fire whomever they want because we are not unionized.

According to Coulter (2011), unions in retail organizations are essential in building employer and employee “relationship among material conditions, political consciousness, and collective praxis” (p. 78). He contends the formation of unions in the retail sector is therefore vital to employees’ wellbeing and engagement at the workplace, as unions act as mediation agents

between employees and employers, and their presence could help to curtail the injustices and organizational inequities that cause marginalization and exploitation of employees.

My personal experience with unionization at my former workplace echoed the participants' experiences about unions. The participants thought they suffered injustice and exploitation in the absence of unions at their workplace. They thought the absence of unions exposed them to abuse and exploitation by their managers. However, Lahori indicated that union leaders sometimes sought their own interests instead of fighting for the employees' interests.

Decision-making process at the workplace

Another issue that emerged from the participants' data related to their perceptions of the decision-making process at their workplace. They characterized the decision-making process at their workplace as top-down management. They thought decisions about the organization's practices and strategies were often made at the top often, with hardly any input from them. When asked if he thought frontline employees had a say in how decisions were made at his workplace, Ahmed replied, *“Not at all; policy, practice, and standards come from the head office. It is always a top-down approach. To tell you the truth, employees do not have any say in decision-making in this organization.”* According to Harris et al. (2006), involving employees in decision-making contributes significantly to their engagement, increased productivity, and low turnover. Martin (2018) also added that employees demand flexibility, participation in decision-making, and freedom to perform their tasks effectively. Ahmed thought that was not the case at his workplace. Similarly, Lahori added,

No, we are always told what must be done, and we do so accordingly. Usually, the order from the above is the system we work under in this organization. This type of

management approach is horrible; we are like tools. Voicelessness and hostile conditions cause many employees to leave the organization.”

Lahori thought that for his workplace to maintain or retain frontline workers, management should provide equal opportunities for them to participate in the decision-making process about issues that affected them. As Naidu et al. (2019) indicate, the lack of employee participation in an organization's decision-making increases the burden of uncertainty and insecurity for them and increases their stress level. Lahori thought that was the case at his workplace. He further commented:

It is not helpful, after all. We live in the global north, the beacon of democracy and human liberty, so if the organization does not consider our views in decision-making, it shows that we, the employees, are just commodities for making money. It is ironic to live in a democratic country and work for autocratic organizations. I have always felt that I am the milking cow the organization uses to make money, but I am not part of any decision-making in the organization.

Lahori thought that for his workplace to maintain or retain frontline workers, management must create an environment that can democratically and respectfully accommodate the concerns of employees, which he thought was not the case. Zara added, “*No, they do not consider employees’ opinions of employees in decision-making.*” Zeytinoglu (2004) mentioned that a hazardous and hostile work environment where employees do not participate in decision-making contributes to dissatisfaction, higher turnover, and low productivity. Zara noted that without participants' active engagement and participation in formulating and implementing organizational practices and strategies, their perceptions of exploitation and marginalization would continue to persist. Zara further indicated:

There are always policies and guidelines from above that must be implemented no matter the impact on the employees. It does not feel good at all because sometimes it feels like you are just an empty object. It gives that kind of feeling of disconnection between the employees and the big bosses or the management in the organization.

Zara thought the lack of participation of frontline workers in the decision-making process at her workplace created an environment in which they felt detached and demoralized. According to Zeytinoglu (2004), isolating employees from decision-making can cause workplace conflict, absenteeism, and staff turnover. Zara thought that was the case at her workplace.

Oladuni also added:

They pretend to listen, but if you look at organizational policies and practices, the views do not matter. My own observation and conclusion that I have drawn from the entire situation is that our views do not matter; we are voiceless here, and none of our experiences and expertise matter. What you say will never be implemented, and such surveys are often done once a year. I think they only do that to mark the checkbox.

Oladuni agreed with her colleagues that management at their workplace did not involve them in decision-making. In addition, she said, “*the organizational practices and policy implementation are always the directives of top management,*” and therefore, the employer was often unwilling to grant them their requests. Zara and Oladuni believed the lack of participation in the decision-making process at their workplace created what they perceived as an atmosphere where they felt isolated, which affected their self-esteem. Their perception appeared to support Zeytinoglu’s contention about conflict, absenteeism, and high worker turnover at workplaces that do not encourage employee participation in decision-making.

Salary and other Benefits

The participants' data also revealed their perceptions of their salary and other benefits offered by their employer. When I asked him about his satisfaction with his salary and benefits, Ahmed indicated:

I am not happy with the money I make from the sector. In reality, after my expenses, I barely have anything to save. It is all about the organization getting costs as low as possible. Hmmm, every company wants to be as financially liable to their employees as possible.

Ahmed thought his employer wanted cheap labour to maximize profit. Further, he added:

That is why there is a minimum wage. In an ideal situation, everybody, even the basic pay, should have been 15 -16 dollars per hour. However, due to their cost-cutting measures, if I want to stay at my current job, I will never be able to take care of myself financially. Therefore, it is impossible to be financially independent and live a better life working in the retail sector at the grassroots.

Coulter (2014) mentions that most retail workers only earn a minimum wage, and the earnings are below the poverty line. She also indicates that retail frontline employees are still burdened with socio-economic challenges, even with full-time hours. Ahmed thought that was the case at his workplace. She further revealed, “The *rigorousness of the job does not match the amount of money employees make as wages.*” Mackenzie and Stanford (2008) expressed that frontline workers in retail stores cannot attain financial freedom from their wages because their salaries are often minimum wage. Ahmed thought that was the case at his workplace. Regarding other benefits, he said,

My workplace is filled with inadequate and discriminatory benefits policies. For example, full- and part-time workers do not have the same health and pension plans. Even part-time employees who work the same hours as full-time employees are deprived of equal benefits.

Lahori also added:

To be honest with you, it [salary] is not enough. It is just for bread and butter. Economically, there are no chances of excelling; even if you take two jobs, you are still not economically free. Due to the minimum wage, no matter how hard you work, there is no economic freedom.

Lahori further commented,

Since I have been an employee here, the total salary increment over these five years is not up to 2 dollars. At the same time, considering Canada's living conditions and commodity prices, I still have to battle inflation and an unending rise in commodity prices. I have realized that the sector is exploitative. Because I still have nothing to show you economically after more than five years.

Lahori's comments indicate he thought retail sector employment, including at his workplace, was not socio-economically sustainable, as employees struggled to make ends meet. About other benefits such as pension, medical insurance, dental, and daycare services, he stated:

I am a full-time employee, but honestly, the kind of health and dental plan the organization provides is lower-grade and does not cover all the medical and dental

services. Regarding the pension issues, I have to pay extra money biweekly to beef up my pension savings. Again, what the organization provides is not adequate.

Concerning the availability of childcare services for families, Lahori indicated there were no daycare services, so parents with young children had to foot the bill for daycare. He also thought no subsidies were available to parents to help with daycare services for their children.

Zara agreed with Ahmed and Lahori. According to her,

I feel sad and stressed whenever I get my biweekly salary because the hard work does not match the pay. The salary just covers my bills. I cannot survive on it at all. Usually, I am left with nothing after paying my bills and buying the essential food I need to survive. Even working more hours does not make any difference because the minimum wage adds up with taxes and other deductions. In fact, my salary is depressing, and every payday is just stress.

Coulter (2014) contends work is vital for employees, as it influences their lives in terms of enhancing their socioeconomic status, health, purchasing power, and acceptance in society. She indicates that minimum wage can negatively affect employees by adversely affecting their stress level as well as their occupational health and life expectancy. Zara thought this was probably the case at his workplace.

Oladuni also commented, *“Such poor earnings kill one’s morale by making one feel inferior because some people will rub it on your face like, oh, you’re working and working, but you’re constantly struggling. So, what do you do with your money?”* Oladuni thought that she and the other participants found societal perceptions of their jobs and benefits stressful, ultimately affecting their health and happiness. She also drew attention to what she considered

the inequality in profit sharing, health, dental plans, and pensions between them and their management. She said:

It is shocking to see an organization that makes millions of dollars of profit paying its employees poverty wages and employing more part-time employees. To me, I see how they are always trying to make more money at the employees' expense. They give us pittance and fatten their pockets with our sweat. The salary and bonuses the upper management make are unfair.

Oladuni further indicated, “*I have to take more than two minimum wage jobs and the sad reality of sacrificing work-life balance for my economic survival.*” The participants expressed dissatisfaction with what they thought were the low wages and inadequate benefits they received. They thought minimum wage left them in socioeconomic distress. They also pointed to inequality in terms of what they perceived were differences in pay, rewards, and other benefits they received compared to what their managers received. The participants thought their low salary was one of the leading causes of workplace stress that affected their health and well-being. They considered the low wages the primary reason for their abject poverty, marginalized position, and lack of equity in the workplace. They thought their workplace conditions were filled with injustice, inequality, and exploitation, as their salary and reward were not based on the work they provided and the profit the organization made every year. They believed such workplace conditions created an atmosphere of stress, doubt, mistrust, and socioeconomic hardships for them.

Job Security for the employees

Another issue that emerged from the data related to the participant's perception of their job security. According to Ahmed:

No one is guaranteed job security in this sector; no one is indispensable here. If the organization does not see an employee as profitable, they just get rid of you. For example, a colleague got injured and took extended time off work. After six months, the company replaced him even though he was willing to return when he recovered. Another person had a family emergency and traveled to his home country. Due to the complexity of the problem, the employee could not return on time as agreed; the management fired him.

Ahmed's comments revealed he thought his organization only considered the interests of employees who contributed to its profit-making goals. Lahori also added, *"We are all still useful to the organization as long as we help them make money. They will discard you when they realize you are no longer useful to them."* Lahori thought employees were always at the mercy of management, and since the organization had no form of collective bargaining, frontline workers could not be granted job security. Zara mentioned, *"No one is ever promised a lifetime job in this sector. People come and go, and even though no one really cares about you, management always tries to find other scapegoats."* She thought she and her colleagues were often subjected to increasing instability and job insecurity, as they could easily be replaced. Oladuni also said, *"Since we are voiceless here and our opinions do not matter in terms of decision-making, they can easily let you go. There are no guarantees, even if you are a permanent employee."* Oladuni was of the view that management wielded control over the decision-making process, including who stayed and who was let go in the organization.

Workplace training and development intervention programs

Question 2 - What forms of workplace training and development interventions did the employer offer to the participants, and how did they perceive the results of those interventions for them and their employer?

The findings of the study revealed the participants' thought their employer-sponsored workplace training and development programs were designed primarily to benefit the organizations. As Ahmed stated:

Every year, we are asked to complete computer-based training/learnings (CBLs) that give an overview of what we must do in the organization as employees. Sometimes, such training is to mark the checkbox because, year in and year out, most of those videos are very repetitive, so I will say that I do not see any concrete learning here. Other than that, there are food safety videos like proper cleaning and equipment and stuff like that. Sometimes, they bring videos of new information about the organization that employees must know. These Computer-based training /learnings are the main learning tools in the organization. Therefore, these are the kinds of training we receive in the organization. It is all about the organization getting better and making the customers happy.

Ahmed thought the training and development programs offered in the organization focused primarily on organizational improvement, productivity, and efficiency to meet customers' needs and not on their wellbeing. As he put it, *“Organization policies and practices only focus on improving production, profit, and sustenance; there is nothing in terms of training or programs to help us achieve personal developmental goals.”*

Lahori also indicated similar perceptions about the training and development programs offered at their workplace. He said:

There are no programs here for our personal development, so I don't see myself moving up anywhere working here. Because I have tried on many occasions even to get the departmental manager position, I have been unsuccessful. Top management will keep saying we all have equal opportunities to grow, but that is not the case. I have witnessed people being brought in as departmental managers who know nothing about our department. I have always sensed great forms of nepotism, favoritism, and nationalism here. These are often the undesired parts of the organization. So, the rhetoric that everybody has an equal chance of opportunities and growth here is just a PR gimmick.

Similar to Ahmed's views, Lahori thought the training and development programs offered at his workplace were tied to the enhancement of their performance and productivity. In other words, the interventions were perceived as exclusively benefiting the organization and not the workers.

Zara and Oladuni's comments were similar to those of Ahmed and Lahori. They thought the only form of training and development program provided at their workplace was the annual CBL (computer-based learning) program. The CBL programs focused on how the organization could appeal to its customers to maximize profit. According to Zara:

Every training I have participated in here since joining the organization is about how to make customers happy and increase profit. So, for example, training on how to smile when customers approach us for something asserts the organization's intentions and profit-focused goals.

Zara thought her workplace training and development programs in general focused on what was relevant for employers to maximize profit by increasing employee work efficiency.

Oladuni also indicated:

Training and development here mean organizational development and improvement.

There is nothing for the employees here—no training on mental health and financial literacy. Everything is about CBLs on how the organization can run smoothly and make more money or maintain its competitiveness against its rivals.

The participants thought the training and development programs offered by the organization were generally designed to improve employee performance and productivity and to enable them to meet customers' needs. The workplace did not provide training and development programs to aid employees' personal development and improvement. Several scholars indicate the goal of workplace training and development programs must go beyond organizational efficiency, productivity, and performance and address issues of employee empowerment and well-being (Byrd, 2018; Jost & Kay, 2010; Barone, 2014; Giroux, 2020). These scholars contend that programs that focus on employees' mental, physical, and emotional wellbeing, as well as their personal development and empowerment, are likely to enhance their engagement and retention at work. The participants, however, thought that was not the case for their employer-sponsored training and development programs. They felt that by their almost exclusive focus on issues of organizational efficiency, productivity, and performance, the training and development programs further disenfranchised and marginalized them, as vital issues of abuse, marginalization, and exploitation were hardly addressed in those programs.

Suggestions to enhance and enrich work-related conditions.

Question 3 - What suggestions did the participants offer to enhance and enrich their work-related conditions and experiences at their workplace?

The participants' data also revealed what they thought were suggestions that would enhance and enrich their work-related conditions and experiences at their workplace. Two key issues emerged from their data.

Critical education, dialogue, unionization, and state monitoring

Concerning his suggestions about ways to improve the conditions at his workplace, Ahmed indicated:

This study has been an eye-opener for me and possibly my immediate colleagues with whom I will definitely have these conversations. Therefore, I will suggest that this should be an opportunity to speak about these challenges among draw management, the state, and we and others' attention to challenges in the retail sector regarding employees' socioeconomic needs and emancipatory practices needed for the transformation of the sector's policies and practices. To add to this, I think we as employees do not have to be docile anymore; with the advent of technology, I know we can do something without being noticed. My interactions with you have awakened my spirit of activism. I will work to make known to the general public through social media platforms the organizational inequalities that go on here using anonymous means to make my voice heard. I know grassroots activism could go a long way to speed up the transformation process.

Some scholars have argued that dialogue, critical awareness, and social justice practices are necessary to help create awareness about workplace conditions that adversely affect them (Carr, 2007; Dachner et al., 2021; Thompson, 2016; Wang, 2018). Ahmed thought the dialogue between frontline workers and management would help address the workplace injustices the participants faced. Lahori also indicated:

We need to be more aware through constant critical education and have these forms of discussion, which will motivate us to expose the socioeconomic rights the system has taken from us... We need to have a union here that can negotiate our economic, social, and emancipatory needs with management. In addition, I think the state must reconsider its role by providing some form of monitoring to help minimize this form of exploitation.

Lahori thought that in addition to critical education, unionization at the workplace and monitoring of workplace conditions by relevant authorities was essential. He felt that participants' awareness of the conditions that affected them could help improve their workplace requirements. Zara also said:

Management must re-think policies and practices promoting and sustaining inequality and exploitation. They should provide a platform for employees to air their grievances. State institutions have to monitor activities that breed injustices. Barriers to collective bargaining should be eliminated. Fair wages should be paid to employees; there should be unions for collective bargaining. Studies like this are significant; without hearing the voices of the employees whose voices have been taken away from them by the neoliberalism practices by corporations, it will be impossible to institute or advocate for transformation in the sector. From our discussions, I realized that there are so many

wrongs going on against us as front-line retail employees. Henceforth, I don't think I'll keep quiet anymore. I think I can use different media, such as social media, to expose the rot in the store. I cannot sit there and watch this continue.

Zara thought that improved and enriched work-related conditions and experiences of the participants were essential for the democratization of her workplace. She thought some reforms in her workplace conditions might be helpful in making the decision-making process there more democratic, and such reforms would also help to enhance the wellbeing of the participants and other frontline workers at her workplace.

Oladuni believed training and development programs that helped the participants to be conscious of the issues that adversely affect them could enhance and enrich the conditions at her workplace. She said:

We need to be dialogic about these issues and push the boundaries to seek deconstruction in the workplace and reconstruction of retail policies that are fair and inclusive retail policies. I guess the first thing to look at is changing policies within the organization because some exploitative and repressive policies were made long ago and are still in existence. The organization must be sanitized from all forms of marginalization and oppression... As employees, a study like this one is an eye-opener and draws one's attention to things and practices that continue to perpetuate injustices against employees. Structural imbalances at the management level must be addressed. All the historical activities in the organization that has created several mishaps in the organization have to be re-dressed to have a democratic organization that will strive for inclusivity and collaboration dialogues in the decision-making process... I think it is time for the

mobilization of all the associates in retail sectors to fight for what is just, what is accurate, and what is ethical when it comes to implementing social and economic justice for the employees. Looking at all we have discussed so far; I can see why our organization does not want us to have a union.

Since to Zara's perception, Oladuni thought that reforming the policies and practices at her workplace in areas such as unionization, the relationship between participants and their managers, and collaborative decision-making between them and management could help to improve the conditions at her workplace. The participants thought they experienced different forms of injustice and marginalization at their workplace and the need for them to seek what they considered a just and democratic corporate workplace. The participants thought robust democratic and emancipatory plans were required to address what they perceived as injustices and marginalization at their workplace. They saw dialogue and reciprocal relationships between them and management as significant in improving their workplace conditions. In addition, pro-employee-responsive policies and practices could contribute to embracing social justice and equity at their workplace.

Several scholars (Crossman, 2009; Katerina and Hansen, 2019; Brookfield, 2005; Devetak, 2012) have questioned corporate hegemony at the workplace and suggest the need for critical analysis of power relations and privilege through the critical education of employees. They also call for actions that transform the workplace to address unfair inequities and improve the life and wellbeing of employees. These scholars remind us that social and political power in the workplace is often manipulated for the benefit of management. They suggest critical and social justice theories are likely to shine a questioning light on workplace conditions. The participants' comments support these scholars' ideas. They thought that creating an atmosphere

for discussions of injustices could empower them to seek equity and transformation at their workplace. One participant thought that marginalization and exploitation could be addressed if the employees were empowered to ask critical questions because empowered employees with the correct information could help to initiate advocacy against injustices and exploitation at the workplace.

Ethical policies and practices

Another suggestion that emerged from their data related to the participants' thoughts about ethical policies and practices at their workplace. According to Ahmed:

I think what is fundamentally significant is for managers and those at the top to make all the rules and decisions to demonstrate ethical behaviors in policy formulation and implementation. Without ethics, advocacy and recommendations cannot yield any positive outcome. Suppose I consider all the sweet words I was told during the orientation about the freedoms and benefits I was entitled to in the organization and when I joined. In this case, I realized that all those words were said to give me false hope of being committed to the organization, and I am disappointed about all the sweet words without reflective actions. When dealing with a system like this, we need to be well informed about what even those ethical frameworks are and be able to measure how we are treated. It is vital for us to be able to negotiate our wages and benefits with management without any penalties, but the way things are right now, this cannot be achieved without being punished directly or indirectly by management. Well-intentioned ethical management could be the standard way of liberating and transforming the retail sector.

Ahmed thought that unless an ethical framework guided their workplace policies and practices, it was likely that inequality, marginalization, and exploitation would continue to exacerbate. They would continue to experience adverse working conditions. Lahori also said:

Our organization needs to look at all the factors that impede employee liberty and growth from an ethical perspective. If management inculcates ethics into their practices, the workplace could be democratic, and all the employees could be treated with respect and dignity. Ethical leaders can treat all people equally, regardless of who they are or their position in the organization. I believe that with the presence of ethics in the workplace, issues of inequality, repression, exploitation, and marginalization could be reduced. This will give us a voice to advocate for our individual and collective freedom. In the face of increasing injustices and victimization by management, for organizations to reform and be more representational, we all need to be aware and take proactive actions to address organizational injustices from an ethical perspective.

Ahmed and Lahori thought that without responsive and reflective ethical practice at the workplace, participants' inequality and marginalization would likely continue. Zara also added:

I firmly believe that if our organization decides to be ethical, many of the problems could quickly be addressed. We could be part of the decision-making in this organization. We could have voices to discuss the issues and conditions that affect us as front-line employees without retribution and victimization. In fact, the oppressive and repressive practices in the retail sector always make me question the word democracy and the level to which the term is measured. I see a lot of organizational practices that go against the

ethos of human rights, but nothing is done about it, and such behaviours are still ongoing. Therefore, when we talk about how an ethical framework could revolutionize the workplace, it should not be word of mouth but practical undertakings that can bring real change to marginalized people like us.

And according to Oladuni:

Without management and those in charge of ethical practice, inequality, nepotism, and inequities in the retail sector would continue to grow. I firmly believe that mutual respect and understanding in an ethical workplace should be fundamental in organizational practices. Unfortunately, the power gap between management and front-line employees is often not visible. We need to see that all stakeholders discharge their duties with the understanding of ethics and reciprocity in the workplace. I have realized that if all the rhetoric in organizational policies, practices, and management behaviors is checked within the ethical measure, we can see transformation and democracy in the workplace.

The participants perceived ethical practices could help address the challenges they faced at their workplace. They thought the oppression they experienced at their workplace was based partly on gender, class, race, ethnicity, national origin, and sexual orientation, and they advocated for what they perceived as an ethical environment that would improve their workplace conditions. Based on the findings of this study and my personal experience as a frontline retail employee as a former frontline worker at the studied workplace, the participants perceived the conditions at their workplace as overwhelming, harsh, and even alien, and they thought reforms at their workplace conditions that were ground in an ethical framework would help those conditions.

Reflections on the participants' narratives in the context of narrative approaches

As brought out in Chapter 3, I employed narrative approach/inquiry to study the participant's work-related experiences. Drawing on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I explored their work-related experiences from the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and spatiality. The inquiry space, therefore, provided a methodological tool to guide and interpret the participants' stories.

Sociality or interaction was conceptualized as the link between the participants' personal and social factors of experience. The participants were able to share their work-related experiences by looking inward to their feelings, hopes, and desires about their workplace conditions and outward to existential environments, such as their perceptions of their community members about their work as retail sector employees as well as frontline workers at other retail workplaces. Temporality or continuity involves looking backward to earlier experiences, connecting them with current experiences, and looking forward to the future and experiences that might be implied or anticipated. The participants could reflect on their work-related experiences back in their home countries and, at the same time, imagine the kinds of reforms they thought might help improve their work-related conditions in their new work environment. The suggestions they offered to enhance their experiences at their workplace indicated that was the case. Spatiality or environment concern's locations in the participants' geographical space, which in this case was primarily their workplace that provided added meaning to their stories. The spatiality aspects included their perceptions of their relations with management and their supervisors, other participants as well as frontline workers at their workplace.

Throughout the participants' story construction, I functioned as both an insider and an outsider. I worked as the frontline retail employer at the workplace where the study was

conducted for three years, and I was, therefore, familiar with the conditions the participants were facing at that workplace at the time of the interviews. That familiarity provided me with an insider view to elicit and understand the participants' stories. I was also able to establish a friendly relationship with them through my contacts and at social gatherings. That relationship allowed me to adopt an outsider's view as a researcher and help to foster open discussions about several aspects of their perceptions of their workplace conditions. Moreover, the interactions between the participants and I seemed to have motivated them to verbalize their thoughts more eagerly about their workplace conditions. The participants' appeared to have seen the interview sessions as conversations, implying that they considered them fruitful dialogic talks. One participant even suggested the interview sessions were eye-opening, which demonstrated the role of social interaction in fostering understanding about their workplace conditions.

Therefore, the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework proved effective in guiding the participants toward self-investigating their workplace conditions. The participants' stories were characterized by all three aspects of the narrative inquiry space, including the shift in work contexts (spatiality), relationship with other participants, frontline workers at their workplace, as well as their managers and supervisors (sociality), and connection with their previous and future work-related experiences (temporality). These characteristics reinforced the situated, interactive, and continuative features of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework in investigating the participants' work-related experiences.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the findings of the study. Based on the integration of the participants' interview data, several issues emerged from their narratives about their work-related experiences. The issues included their perceptions of their workplace conditions, their

experiences with management, the lack of unions and unionization activities, the employer-sponsored training and development programs, and some suggestions to enhance their experiences at the workplace. The presentation of the findings was also informed by the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space: temporality, sociality, and spatiality and other narrative approaches.

The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Introduction

As brought out in Chapter 1, the purpose of this study was threefold. First, the study sought to describe and explain the participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences. Secondly, the study explored the participants' perceptions of their employer's workplace training and development interventions and the results for them and their employer. Third, the study explored the participants' perceptions of their employers' strategies to enhance and enrich their workplace conditions and experiences.

This chapter discusses the findings of the study. In addition to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2, the study's findings are discussed in relation to the three building blocks of narrative inquiry as well as the integration (Tropea, 2011) of the participant's narratives. According to Tropea, integration is the merger of multiple dialogues and conversations into one narrative that ultimately creates a narrative plot. Even though the findings of this study were presented with multiple conversations from the participants, their narratives pointed to similar experiences they encountered in the retail store. According to Mattingly (1994) and Tropea (2011), a narrative without a plot would be a string of words with no meaning, as a plot emphasizes the issues and moves the narrative forward by highlighting both connections and tensions within that narrative.

Although the presentation and discussion of the finding of the study drew on multiple narrative clips of the participants' data based on the research purpose and questions, the integration of their narratives with the literature reviewed for the study as well as my personal experiences as a former retail sector employee helped to create informational narratives about their work-related experiences. The integration of the individual participants' data, therefore,

offered a way to improve their fragmented, scattered, and sometimes contradictory narratives into coherent narratives.

As indicated in Chapter 4, one of the issues that emerged in the participants' data related to their demographic profiles. According to Buzdugan and Halli (2009), exploring the demographic profiles of research participants within the three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry contributes to the construction of their perceptions of their identity in relation to a study. Exploring the participants' educational qualifications and employment backgrounds helped me to perceive how they felt or saw themselves and their roles at their workplace. The findings indicated that regardless of their educational qualifications and working experience over the years in their home countries, the participants thought their qualifications and work experiences did not count toward getting a job in their field in Canada.

They also thought their work experience back home did not reflect their status at work in their new country. Although the participants, except Ahmed, had tertiary degrees, they still worked as frontline employees. Inquiring about the participants' education level was therefore vital to exploring their employment patterns and history at their workplace and the retail sector and the reasons for their inability to secure employment in the other sectors of the economy in Canada. I was also concerned about understanding why they continued to work as frontline employees at their workplace that paid them minimum wage despite their level of education. The participants expressed some form of regret and resentment about their workplace because they thought they were overqualified as frontline workers. Additionally, the participants identified the challenges of being an immigrant in Canada and the roadblocks (glass ceilings) that hindered their employment opportunities in their respective fields in Canada.

Participants' work-related experiences and conditions

The findings of the study revealed several and multiple issues that emerged from the participants' work-related experiences and the workplace conditions that affected those experiences. Several issues included their perceptions of their lack of involvement in making decisions that affected unionization and lack of their ability to form unions to fight for them and seek their welfare, low salaries, wages, and limited benefits, as well as workplace training and development programs that focused primarily on organizational efficiency, performance, and productivity instead of their wellbeing. The findings revealed they considered these experiences discriminatory and exploitative, making them feel marginalized at their workplace.

While they appeared grateful to their employer for offering them job opportunities as new immigrants to Canada, they detested what they thought were miserable work conditions. The participants perceived that systemic marginalization and exploitation were prevalent at their workplace. They further indicated the marginalization and exploitation they experienced would be addressed only by the concerted effort of their workplace stakeholders, such as managers, supervisors, and government agencies. The findings of this study supported those of Coulter (2014). Coulter (2014) found that the retail workplace was saddled with hostility from top management toward their employees. The participants in this study lamented the different forms of injustices they faced, such as exploitation and inability to provide input into making decisions that directly affected them. They indicated that such maltreatment was detrimental and unjust to them, affecting their health and well-being.

Based on the analysis of the participant's narratives, it was clear the participants thought their workplace was dominated by neoliberalism's acclamation of individual freedom and enterprise of self (Honneth (2004). Honneth, however, states that such false claims undermined

the employees' collectivism, self-realization, and authenticity to work freely without fear of being compromised or victimized. The participants indicated that a lack of autonomy to work freely without being bossed around by managers had psychological effects on them, such as anxiety and depression, which in the end, affected their self-esteem and self-worth.

The participants' sentiments aligned with those of several scholars (Harvey, 2005; Park & Mah, 2011; Furman & Orszag, 2018; Davis et al., 2019; Blowfield & Frynas, 2005; Coulter, 2014). These authors have criticized what they characterized as neoliberal retail sector workplace policies and practices, which they view as exploitative, autocratic, and discriminatory in terms of the impact on especially frontline employees. They indicated no relationship between them and leadership outside the workplace, as they ignored their dignity and respect as human beings. Honneth (1996) suggests that such an insincere neoliberal relationship between management and employees distorts the ideals of employee freedom and their commitment to the advancement of the organization. The study's findings indicated what the participants thought was the case at their workplace.

Disrespecting employees has consequences. Coulter (2014) has described abuse, sexism, unfair promotion, lack of transparency in the employee salary scale, and undemocratic decisions that continue to affect the employees' socio-economic well-being in the retail sector. She laments that, "Workers often must contend with disrespect from employers and customers, and retail work is not widely recognized or valued in society at large." (p. 2). Coulter (2014) also notes the social stigma attached to retail work affects employees' self-esteem and confidence. The findings of the study revealed the participants thought these issues existed at their workplace. They perceived their workplace conditions as hostile, exploitative, and individualistic because of what they considered the capital accumulation and profit-centered policies and practices (Harvey,

2005) of their organization that exposed them to different forms of maltreatment and ridicule by their managers, including the lack of their involvement in the making decisions that affected them. The interviews revealed overt and subtle evidence of workplace marginalization and exploitation. According to Harvey (2005), neoliberalism's disguise of workplace freedom exposes employees to manipulation and exploitation. The participants' experiences shared in this study indicated they thought that was the case at their workplace. They thought the hostility between them, and their management contributed to mistrust among them and between them and management. They believed their lack of representation and inclusion in the decision-making process that affected them, such as their work schedules, wages, and benefits, opened them to unfair treatment, exploitation, and hostile working conditions, leading to high attrition in their retail store.

Coulter (2014) has indicated that employee engagement and a democratic working environment positively affect productivity, as workers feel respected and committed to organizational goals. Similarly, Anderson et al. (2021) have also acknowledged that a representational workplace promotes healthier, happier, and loyal employees, decreasing turnover and increasing productivity. These authors also note that neoliberal-infused retail sector policies and practices do not see workers as an integral part of the organization; therefore, their views are not considered significant in decision-making processes in the organization, probably because of the lack of union organizing activities in several retail workplaces, such as the one where this study was conducted. Moreover, according to Richards et al. (2012), the influence of neoliberalism in the retail sector constitutes propaganda and language condemning any forms of employee emancipatory identities such as unions, equitable and livable wages, universal basic income, and ethical workplace practice.

Coulter (2014) also laments the inadequate political and social action concerning the diagnostics of the practices and policies that exploit and marginalize employees, which she argues affects employees' physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being. The findings of this study support the perspectives of these authors. The participants thought the anti-union policies and practices at their workplace exposed them to victimization, harassment, and potential dismissal without cause. They felt that if their workplace was unionized, some degree of efficiency would be achieved through formalization and standardization of management policies and practices in such areas as training and development, safety procedures, work schedule, and hours of work, as well wages and benefits that could positively affect their psychological and physical wellbeing.

According to Coulter (2011), unionization in the retail sector provides employees with a collective voice to fight for their rights and privileges. He expresses that a non-unionized workplace exposes employees to marginalization and exploitation by management. Payne et al. (2022) also add that unions play active roles in shaping and advocating for better working conditions for their membership, such as wages, family and maternity leave, retirement, paid vacations, holidays, and childcare benefits. Further, Tilly and Galvan (2007) indicate that, unlike non-unionized workers who experience horrible working conditions and an exploitative work environment, unionized retail workers are able to negotiate for their collective well-being in terms of better wages and salaries, improved working conditions, regular work hours, as well as better health care and retirement packages. In addition, Ikeler (2019) contends that non-unionized retail sector frontline employees are exposed to the precarious nature of neoliberalism. The author indicates the lack of collectivism in retail organizations without unions renders the employees vulnerable to management's brutality and exploitation. McGrane and Berdahl (2015)

also contend that unionized workplaces offer employees benefits and higher wages than non-unionized workplaces. The findings of this study revealed the participants thought similar issues of inequality, marginalization, and exploitation occur at their workplace. They thought unionization at that workplace would be helpful to them, as their union would fight for their rights and privileges.

Workplace training and development programs and their perceived outcomes

The study's findings revealed the participants' thought their employer-sponsored workplace training and development programs were geared towards improving organizational productivity, performance, and efficiency and hardly focused on their personal development and wellbeing. They opined that such neoliberalism's focused training brings resentment and skepticism among the employees as they feel exploited and commodified. Omoikhudu (2017) indicated that employer training and development-centered programs create a significant problem for employee satisfaction and retention in the retail sector. The author called for responsive approaches to training and development activities to enhance employee satisfaction and commitment. The findings of the study indicated the participants agreed with employee-responsive training and development programs to seek redress in their organization.

The participants thought that their organization only focused on programs and activities that helped them make money, improve customer satisfaction standards, and increase sales. They also pointed to what they perceived as inadequate departmental training that did not provide employees with a better understanding of their duties. In addition, the participants pointed to inadequate support after training as they are often exposed to management blame games and ridicule. The participants mentioned that in addition to organizational improvement, the organization does not offer workshops or training programs to aid their mental health, personal

development, and growth. They contended that any lifelong learning programs employees are interested in must be funded by themselves with zero organizational support. They perceived that the organization's sole interest was to use them as monetization tools to remain competitive. Their sentiments aligned with long-standing research about training and development in the retail sector (Robert, 2013; Omoikhudu, 2017). That research points to a neoliberal workplace where profitization supersedes any other interest in the organization.

According to Lepak and Snell (1999), organizations' investment in employee training and development is usually presented as a paradox because training and development may enhance employee commitment and, thus, their intention to remain with the organization. The authors also note that the wealth-centered training and development culture at the retail workplace has eroded employee interest. Fundamental training programs such as mental health training, financial literacy programs, and job security that could have benefited the employees are often ignored and never discussed in their workplace. Lepak and Snell further point out that top management considers training and development programs as organizational performance and profit improvement strategies. The participants in this study thought the training and development programs offered did not consider their needs and input, which contributed to their dissatisfaction. They admitted that increased management secrecy regarding training raises their suspicion of what they see as exploitation and marginalization. They also indicated the exclusive training focused on performance, efficiency, and productivity was partly responsible for what they saw as the rise in inequality, marginalization, exploitation, and organizational inequities at their workplace.

According to Coulter (2014), "We purport to live in democracies, yet the workplace where frontline employees spend much of their time is largely devoid of democracy" (p. 4). The

participants pointed to autocracy and lack of representation of the employees in the organization. They indicated that in a democratic country, management soliciting their ideas about their needs and wants in terms of decision-making about training and development programs would have seen a lot of commitment from them. However, the rigidity of training programs has created dissatisfaction among retail them. Their rights to decide which training and development programs they need are trampled upon by hierarchical organizational structures that have been used as an agency of exploitation and marginalization.

Participants pointed out that inequality and organizational inequities are increasing since the organization's programs are only centered on the socioeconomic development of the organization. The lack of trust in the ideas and experiences has created a gap between front-line workers and management. The participants further indicated that a radical approach is required to dismantle and reconstruct retail sector practices. Hegemonic practices that only center on profit maximization at the expense of the employees' socioeconomic development and emancipation should be dismantled. They perceived the need to consider the political commitment to employees' well-being through social justice activism. Such an approach could enhance the collaborative participation of management and employees. In addition, the participants also mentioned the need for intellectual training and development programs ingrained in critical awareness that can enhance employee participation. Employee involvement is paramount to the transformation of retail sector practices and policies. According to Peters and Waterman (1984), "The rationalized employment relationship misses out on a key value driver in the post-industrial economy: employee commitment and loyalty. As such, organizations ought to instill the workforce with strong sentimental attachments to the business enterprise" (p. 112) to improve productivity, satisfaction, retention, and competitiveness.

The participants believed that employees' commitment and engagement in organizational practices and activities could be strengthened when they have a say in workplace training and development programs. A democratic environment where they can share their feelings, thoughts, and experiences (Dobre, 2013) without ridicule or marginalization would enhance their participation and engagement. Coulter (2014) pointed out that unchecked marginalization and socio-economic inequality in the retail sector can increase employees' displeasure and lack of engagement. The imposition of training and development programs contributes to employee discontent and raised suspicion of exploitation and marginalization. Depressed and coerced employees are susceptible to injuries, diseases, stress, and a rise in turnover rate (Mayer et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the employees seeing the fruits of their labor enriching corporate bosses and managers create a vacuum for them to question their societal self-worth. Critical theory ideals of "Seeking human emancipation from the circumstances that enslave them" (Horkheimer, 1982, p. 244) could play a central role in creating awareness of the retail sector's draconian policies and practices that continue to perpetuate inequality and totalitarianism. It was clear from the participants' narrations that retail sector training and development programs only benefit the organizations. However, the employees' interests and needs are not prioritized, and they continue to suffer the consequences of neglect and horrendous working conditions. All the participants perceived that the unsupervised workplace could continue to exploit them, and their hope of securing freedom from entrenched systems of injustices remains a pipe dream. The proposed reforms mentioned would hopefully take place at the participants' workplace and not necessarily across Canada due to the limitation in terms of the size of the participants involved in the study.

In addition, the participants thought of appropriate forms of workplace education and training as well as informed activism by them. They hoped other frontline workers at the studied workplace could help improve their workplace conditions by forming active voices to address marginalization, exploitation, and oppression issues. In addition, they perceived that state agencies responsible for overseeing their workplace, such as non-governmental organizations, civic groups, government agencies, and sympathizers of retail sector marginality, could play a fundamental role in helping them to improve their workplace conditions. The participants further thought workplace education, training, and informed activism could be achieved when they rallied together to speak about the issues that affected them as frontline employees.

Furthermore, the participants thought the lack of a union in this organization was the leading cause of all these injustices. According to them, a union could have addressed injustices and inequities they encountered in the organization. They perceived that anti-unionism had taken away their collective voice and liberty. The participants further indicated that employee complaints about the bad things happening in their retail store expose them to repression and victimization. The employees are at the mercy of their managers' inhumane conditions because expressing dissatisfaction about the activities and practices that constitute inadequate training and development outcomes exposes the individual employees to victimization and possible expulsion. Zara noted that some of her colleagues had their work hours drastically reduced because, per the management assertion, their performance was not at par with their expectations.

In addition, an employee had her hours drastically reduced because she drew the manager's attention to the sector practices that continued disenfranchising her. The lack of unions in the retail sector seriously threatens employees' liberty, collective bargaining, and the expression of their opinions about things that affect them. Union strategies focus on creating fair

atmospheric conditions in the retail sector for all stakeholders involved in the organization.

Unions are democratic and representational of the employees “created to fight for the dignity and better living standards for working-class people” (Coulter, 2014, p. 160). The slogan “United we stand, divided we fall” is pivotal in retail workplaces. A lack of collectivism creates a vacuum for the employees to be exploited. Individual employees do not wield much power to stand for their rights and improve work conditions. Zara bemoaned that individualism in her retail store is the root cause of several exploitative and marginalization practices against her and her colleagues. The participants acknowledged that non-existent unionization in the selected retail store was the root cause of many organizational inequities and exploitative practices.

In addition, the participants perceived the need for more proactive measures from state institutions such as the Ministries of Commerce and Labor to monitor retail sector policies and practices. A platform should exist where the employees can directly report any forms of abuse, imposition, and distress they encounter at the workplace. Coulter (2014) opined that cultivating workers' sense of status and commitment should be engrained in ethical and social justice praxis, where the employees' well-being takes center stage in the formulation of training programs. The participants further indicated that the organization's lack of employee development programs created uncertainty and economic hardship. Nonini (2008) mentions neoliberalism as a state-capture financial tool that fails to comprehend the significance of employees' development and well-being towards strengthening the organization. The need to address the concepts of power, the crisis of accumulation, and stagflation remain paramount in the transformation process of the retail industry (Harvey, 2005; Nonini, 2008). According to Coulter (2014), “Retail does not exist without workers. No stock is put in a pot, no products are sold, and no transactions occur without workers to complete these and all other necessary tasks” (p. 7). Therefore, the significance of the

retail workers' attitude towards sector development cannot be underestimated. The participants indicated that for any successful implementation of training and development programs in the organizations, management should involve them (employees) from the beginning, as any imposition will not work.

The participants retorted about the challenges they faced at their workplace. They called for the organization's and state agencies' management to monitor employees' welfare and advocate for frontline employee welfare to work together to improve workplace conditions. I refer to management in this study as authorities or employers at the studied workplace. The participants' narratives indicated they did not perceive their management was willing to critically monitor the organizational structures, policies, and practices in a way that might help to improve their workplace conditions. They thought agencies responsible for overseeing their workplace, such as non-governmental organizations and civic groups, could help to play a fundamental role in monitoring the organizational structures, policies, and practices. Such initiatives would improve their workplace conditions and experiences. Further, they thought their management could work with these agencies to improve their workplace conditions and use the additional resources necessary to help improve the conditions they faced at work.

Furthermore, the participants called for holistic involvement and sensitization of the workplace so that their voices, needs, and expectations could be heard and addressed. Even though there are no unions at their workplace now, the participants pointed out that involving them in decision-making could help clear doubts about management's ulterior agenda of continuous exploitation and marginalization. They perceived reflective and responsive training and development programs could improve efficiency and workplace conditions. In addition, they proposed a collaborative approach by the state institutions, management, oversight bodies, and

other stakeholders to address marginalization policies and practices they encounter. They further highlighted an urgency for transformative interventions. One of the participants went on to say that as frontline employees in a democratic country, they wanted their voices to be heard and be paid livable wages that reflect their well-being. Creating an ethical retail industry for the employees and the employers could enhance the transformation process and democratization. Cruz (2016) contended that employees' values must align with their employers' training programs to improve equity and social justice in the retail industry. The participants in this study drew my attention to the need for transformational change in their organization's processes and practices to enhance their wellbeing as employees. They indicated that inequities and hostile working conditions were on the rise at their workplace. The use of critical and social theories as a theoretical framework developed for this study helped me unpack the workplace oppressive and organizational structures that undergird the training and development programs. The programs should be able to foster critical and ethical consciousness among employees to help transform their performance, efficiency, and productivity as well as their personal lives.

Researchers suggest that workplace training and development programs that focus exclusively on issues of performance, efficiency, and productivity over issues of workplace justice, ethics, and equity for employees are likely to foster dissatisfaction and increased suspicion about management (Brookfield, 2005; Coulter, 2014; Mayer et al., 2022; Patel et al., 2018). These researchers contend employee wellbeing and safety issues should be as much a priority in programs as are performance, productivity, and efficiency issues. The findings of this study support the contention of these authors.

The participants thought the training and development programs offered by their employer hardly focused on their wellbeing and development. They knew such programs were

offered elsewhere, but they could not afford to pay for them from their low salaries and wages. They called for programs that addressed their wellbeing and developmental needs and could create a space for them to question perceived injustices in the workplace. According to them, programs should also focus on developing critical thinking skills. In addition, they thought programs that concentrate on improving their workplace conditions, such as mental health training, comprehensive workplace health and safety training, financial literacy, and career development training, could enhance their wellbeing, development, engagement, and retention.

Suggestions to enhance and enrich retail sector work-related conditions and experiences.

The study's findings revealed that the participants offered suggestions to enhance and improve their work-related conditions and experiences. In general, the recommendations related to ways to improve their relationships with their managers and supervisors, including their participation in making decisions that affected them. The participants saw their involvement in the decision-making process on issues that affect them, such as collective negotiation for fair wages, family leave, work, and vacation scheduling, improved hours of work, increased benefits, and childcare opportunities at their workplace as improvement of their workplace conditions. They also thought a continuous dialogue with their supervisors and, if necessary, with management could help address their perceptions about their workplace conditions. As indicated in the literature reviewed for this study, researchers such as Byrd (2012) and Brookfield (2005) contend that employee participation in the decision-making process will likely make them feel part of the organization's processes and help contribute to their commitment, satisfaction, and engagement. The findings of the study revealed the participants agreed with these authors. They also thought participation in decision-making would help them make quality decisions about their lives at work and outside the workplace.

In addition to participating in decision-making and dialogue with supervisors and managers, the participants thought integrating critical perspectives in their workplace training and development programs would be helpful. They contended that it might help to create awareness among them and other frontline workers about the conditions they faced at work and how to address them. Several scholars (Dejours et al., 2018; McGuire, 2014; Brookfield, 2005; Freire, 1970) contend that critical perspectives on workplace training and development can enhance the employees' capacity to reflect upon the training and development content and process. These scholars argue that critical reflection becomes a cornerstone of emancipatory approaches to training and development that help employees confront and question social, political, economic, and structural forces or conditions that affect them at work. The findings of this study revealed that the participants advocated for transformative intervention and changes in their workplace training and development programs to help address what they thought were the adverse conditions they faced at work. They thought responsive training and development programs that also focused on their mental and physical wellbeing could help to improve their satisfaction, retention, and commitment to their workplace.

Another suggestion that emerged from the participants' data related to the need for unions and unionization activities at their workplace. They indicated their employer was against them forming unions and engaging in unionized activities, which they thought disadvantaged them. According to the participants, a union could address the injustices and inequities they encountered at their workplace. They thought the anti-unionism of their employer had taken away their voices and liberty because individual employees who complained about the bad things happening at their retail store could face repression and victimization with no opportunity for them to defend themselves. Coulter (2014) indicates that the absence of unions in the retail

workplace threatens employees' liberty, fair collective bargaining, and their opinions about issues that affect them. She also contends that union strategies focus on creating suitable workplace conditions for workers. A democratic and representational atmosphere is “created to fight for the dignity and better living standards for working-class people” (p. 160). Further, Coulter (2014) believes the lack of collectivism at the workplace creates a vacuum for the employees to be exploited, as they cannot stand for their rights and demand improved work conditions since they do not wield much power as individuals. The participants thought that was their experience at their workplace.

The fourth suggestion offered by the participants related to adequate and effective workplace supervision; they imply the retail sector requires practical supervision by the relevant state authorities. They all thought the lack of proper oversight by authorities opened them to injustices and exploitation. The participants thought their management was unwilling to adequately “monitor” the organizational processes and procedures that might help improve their workplace conditions. They thought state agencies responsible for overseeing their workplace could play a fundamental role in monitoring any form of oppression and marginalization to help to improve their workplace conditions and experiences. The state agencies such as the Department of Labor-Bureau of Working Conditions, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Human Rights Commission-Canadian Human Rights Act, and State Ombudsman could monitor organizational processes and practices that constituted exploitation, marginalization, and oppression. Further, the participants thought their management could work with the state agencies to improve their workplace conditions. They stressed the need to create avenues for them and other employees to report abuse, injustice, and other forms of mistreatment they encounter at work to the relevant agencies for action.

Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed the findings of the research participants' perceptions of each of the four research questions for the study. In addition, the four participants discussed the findings and data regarding retail workers' work-related experiences. The analysis and interpretation considered theoretical frameworks by drawing on the relevance of the concepts, namely, neoliberalism, critical theory, social justice theory, and the three building blocks of narrative inquiry (temporality, sociality, and spatiality) and other narrative approaches. On the other hand, challenges such as employee wages, unions, job insecurity, marginalization, inadequate state control, racism, sexism, and authoritarianism frequently occurred in the discussions and presented in the findings.

The next chapter discusses the study's implications, positionality, recommendations, and suggestions for further research.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

The study's last and final chapter discusses the study's implications for theory development and policy and practice at the workplace where the study was conducted. The chapter also offers some recommendations arising from the study and suggestions for further research. The chapter starts with a brief overview of my positionality as a researcher and a former frontline worker at the retail store where the study was conducted.

My positionality as a researcher and ex retail worker

As indicated in Chapter 3, I employed narrative inquiry/approach to study the participants' work-related experiences and conditions. The study drew on Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) work to explore the work-related experiences and circumstances of the participants from the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, which are temporality, sociality, and spatiality and other narrative approaches. The inquiry space, therefore, provided a methodological tool to help guide and interpret the participants' stories. The three-dimensional narrative inquiry framework effectively guided the participants toward self-investigating their workplace experiences and conditions. All three aspects of the narrative inquiry space characterized the participants' stories. These included the shift in their work contexts (spatiality), their relationship with other participants, frontline workers at their workplace, as well as their managers and supervisors (sociality), and connection with their previous and future work-related experiences (temporality). Three of the study participants reflected on what could be characterized as their perceptions of what their typical working days looked like during the interviews. Much of their reflections focused on complaints about their management, specifically

in matters relating to work schedule changes, often with little advance notice to them. They complained about the unstable and unpredictable schedules, the uncertainty about the timing of work shifts, and short notices for assigned work schedules. They also reflected on their managers' use of just-in-time scheduling practices to align their work as closely as possible with customer needs. They complained about late shift work at night and being required for open shifts, which interrupted their sleep patterns. In short, they thought the disrupting or precarious work schedules, on-call shifts, and last-minute changes to schedule timing with short advance notice caused immense strain with severe consequences for their health and wellbeing. In addition, the participants who had what they considered good jobs back home often reflected on the good life and status they enjoyed in their home countries compared to their job as frontline workers in their new country. They often wondered whether coming to Canada was worth it. The married participants occasionally had similar regrets but were generally grateful for coming to Canada because of the opportunities it offered to the children.

Concerning my positionality as a former employee at the workplace where the study was conducted, I started the study with questions and experiences that helped me reflect on what I thought were the complexities of working in the retail sector, particularly at my former retail workplace. My knowledge and experiences as a former retail worker at the workplace where the study was conducted contributed to my curiosity to explore the participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and conditions and the factors that influenced them. I wanted to understand if the participants' experiences were similar to or different from my experiences as a former employee. The findings revealed that the participants' experiences were identical to what I experienced while working at this retail location. Their narratives confirmed my views about what I had thought was the voicelessness, exploitation, marginalization, and other forms of

mistreatment that my co-workers and I endured at that retail workplace during my time there. The study also highlighted limited research that addresses retail workers' marginalization and exploitation. In addition, through the interactions with the participants, my own experiences, and the literature reviewed for this study, I have realized that the powerless employees' entrenchment and entrapment of neoliberalism have dire consequences for the participants, their families, and their communities. The ripple effect of marginalized and depressed employees results in several health-related complications that affect people's well-being and, at the same time, put pressure on the healthcare system.

Similar to the participants' views, I thought some of my co-workers were promoted to supervisory positions based on their race and country of origin, not their merit. I believed I was denied promotions for which I was qualified because managers responsible for promotions would often favor frontline workers from countries where they (managers) came from. Unfortunately, I did not share the same country with any of the managers as an employee. Demaj (2012) found that nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism negatively affected employees who were not connected to those in high positions. He added that these unethical practices directly affected employee behaviors and organizational commitment. Kerse and Babadag (2018) also opined that although many organizations, especially in the service industry, downplayed the effects of nepotism, its impact was rife and contributed to employee turnover and lack of long-term commitment to the organization. Based on my experience as a frontline worker and the study's findings, nepotism, favoritism, and cronyism affected the participants' attitudes and ties to their organization. My experience of being denied a permanent position and eventual promotion aligned with the participants' experiences.

While the participants' narrations of their experiences about their work-related conditions were similar to mine in many ways, their past, present, and future experiences, however, indicated variations in their narratives. For example, they thought their retail workplace was one of the most accessible entry points to the labor market in Regina for newly arrived immigrants to the province. At the same time, they often perceived their managers as both friendly and hostile to them based on specific situations or circumstances, such as whether they shared the same country of origin with their managers. The participants saw the adverse conditions they experienced at work, such as unequal treatment, minimum wage, reduced work hours, minimal benefits, unfairness in promotion, inadequate yearly salary raises, and other forms of mistreatment as evidence of their marginalization, oppression, and exploitation at work. Unfortunately, similar experiences rang true when I was employed as a frontline worker.

As I continuously reflected on the participants' narratives and my own experience, I concluded that the challenges they faced were probably the direct result of the processes and procedures that were in place at their workplace. They offered some suggestions they thought would help to address their work-related experiences and conditions, including what could be characterized as transformational change. The participants thought that transformational change at their workplace would enable them to critically question and reflect on what they perceived were the injustices, marginalization, and oppression they experienced and how they might be able to address them. They thought some of these could be managed by discussing power, control, and domination issues in the training and development programs offered at work.

Implications of the findings for the study

Theoretical Implications

The research explores the study participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and conditions within a specific context or workplace. It mainly provides adequate evidence to justify a meaningful theory-based contribution to the field. With that in mind, the findings of this study must be viewed "as a catalytic element in the unfolding of theoretical knowledge" (Merriam, 1988, p. 45) in the area retail sector. Accordingly, the study could be viewed as a contribution to theory-based in the retail workplace as far as the general conditions are widely considered as similar to those where the study was conducted. The generation of substantive theories has been viewed as restricted to particular research settings/contexts or problems, which, in this case, was a retail workplace in Regina.

Besides being limited, especially studies that focus on the experiences of frontline retail workers, some scholars have argued the literature on the retail sector workplace has been primarily viewed as descriptive (McGuire, 2014; Brookfield, 2005; Byrd, 2018). Accordingly, although only 4 participants were interviewed for this study, research of this nature that critically analyses and evaluates participants' perceptions of their work-related experiences and conditions, as well as situates the work in a specific context, might be very helpful in refining some theoretical perspectives relating to the retail workplace. Accordingly, from a theoretical perspective, understanding the participants' experiences and conditions at work within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space based on an integrated theoretical and ethical framework (see Fig. 6) may be critically helpful to understanding the working conditions at the retail workplace.

Policy and Practice Implications

Although policymakers were not interviewed for the study, the participants' narratives provide some insight into policy development and practice at the studied workplace. The findings of this study have stressed the importance of employee involvement in decision-making and implementation processes at the retail workplace. If reforms in the participants' work-related experiences and conditions are to succeed at the studied workplace and maybe the retail sector in general, then the evidence presented in this study suggests some policymaking processes and procedures at that workplace should be re-examined. It looks like management and supervisors at the workplace where the study was conducted appeared to be displaying a paternalistic and condescending attitude and, in the process. They systematically underestimated the knowledge and concerns of the participants and other frontline workers in the decision-making processes about policy and practice at work. Instead of confining all decision-making to managers and supervisors, decision-making, as well as other workplace processes and procedures should involve the participants and other frontline workers, especially in matters that directly affect them. One way might be for employers to allow the participants and other employees to form unions. Workplace unionization activities could encourage members to participate actively in policy and practice decision-making. If the findings of this study were any indication, then incorporation of the views of frontline retail workers in matters that directly affected them would enrich the decision-making at their workplace. Enriching the decision-making process would, in turn, enhance the prospects for successfully implementing workplace processes and practices that would benefit the organization and the employees. In other words, abandoning the non-participatory or top-down approaches in both workplace processes and procedures in favor of a broad involvement of the participants' preferably through their unions would be helpful to the decision-making process. The

participants thought collectivism in the form of unions provided them with a unified voice to challenge the status quo at their workplace.

Recommendations Arising from the Findings of the Study

Based on the findings of this study, three key recommendations were offered. The first recommendation related to employee involvement and participation in decisions making at the workplace, especially specific decisions that directly affected them. The participants thought a mechanism, such as unions and the unionization process, should be established to enable them to participate in decision-making to help enhance their decision quality and acceptance. Closely related to this recommendation is the issue of regular oversight and supervision of their workplace by the relevant authorities and agencies such as the Department of Labor-Bureau of Working Conditions, Occupational Safety and Health Administration, Human Rights Commission-Canadian Human Rights Act, State Ombudsman, and Community Advocacy Groups. Adequate supervision and oversight activities will be helpful, as authorities can monitor retail workplace conditions and promptly address the issues that might emerge.

The participants in this study thought effective supervisory mechanisms by the relevant state agencies could reduce exploitative practices exhibited by their employer at their workplace. They felt that inadequate monitoring was among the principal sources of the injustices and marginalization activities they encountered that must be addressed. The third recommendation is the need to revamp workplace training and development programs. They indicated rebuilding or transforming the workplace programs to include discussions about power relations, domination, and control at work and develop strategies with management to address inequality and marginalization.

Suggestions for Further Research

As I discussed in Chapters 1 and 3 of this study, transferability suggests the findings of a study gained in a particular context can offer valuable lessons to similar contexts, and they can be used to provide evidence to the reader to assess the integrity of a study (Cope, 2014). In other words, Cope contends the findings of a qualitative study, such as this one, are considered transferable if the findings have meaning to individuals not involved in the study or if the research readers can associate the results with their own experiences. However, while the study's findings might be transferable, they cannot be generalized to the retail sector as a whole because of the small sample size. Therefore, a comprehensive and in-depth province-wide study of the work-related experiences of frontline workers in the sector might help provide additional insights into the general situation facing them. Such a study might seek to explore the perspectives of a more diverse group of retail sector workers as well as other stakeholder groups, such as store managers and supervisors, union officials, workers' families, educational institutions, as well as government officials responsible for overseeing the activities of the sector.

The province-wide study could even be replicated across the Prairies or nationally. Secondly, the revised theoretical framework developed (Fig. 6.1) is based on the findings of the study and the literature review. The framework may be used in further research to generate testable hypotheses to refine our understanding of how each of the issues that emerged in the study might inform the work-related experiences and conditions of workers at the studied workplace or the retail sector. For example, it may be possible to use statistical modeling to assess the relative contributions the identified issues, such as low wages or absence of unions as well as the perceived management hostility and racism, make to the work-related experiences and condition of frontline workers at the studied workplace or the retail sector. In conclusion, a

cross-sector study that explores the work-related experiences and conditions of retail workers in fields such as healthcare, the restaurant industry, and financial institutions can provide a much broader understanding of frontline employee experiences and conditions in those sectors, and what could be done to transform the sectors to support them.

Concluding Comments

The literature surrounding the retail sector workplace has pointed to a complex set of factors that affect employees' work-related experiences and conditions, especially frontline workers. Many of the studies about the retail sector have focussed on exploring the experiences of management and supervisors and less on the experiences of frontline workers, such as those that participated in the study. By focusing on four frontline workers at the workplace where the study was conducted using the three-dimensional framework of narrative inquiry, this research has provided some insights and understanding of the participants' experiences and work conditions as well as offered some strategies for addressing their perceptions of the maltreatment they experienced at their workplace.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the study's theoretical framework drew on neoliberalism and critical and social justice theories. I argued that using the three theories to frame the study helped uncover the participants' challenges and offered some strategies for addressing the challenges. The use of neoliberalism, for example, helped to explore what the participants thought were the different forms of injustices and marginalization they experienced at their workplace. The use of critical and social justice theories provided the lenses through which ideas relating to the transformation of the participants' work-related experiences and conditions could be described and analyzed. To the extent, then, of highlighting the complex issues associated with employee work-related experiences and conditions and how to address their perceptions of the mistreatment they faced at work, this study has offered some meaningful insights and suggestions.

Finally, copies of the study's findings will be made public through the University of Regina web link and other sources that could help heighten the awareness of frontline workers' encounters. I will also present the findings of the study through conferences, seminars, workshops, and some selected social media handles. In addition, the results will be published in peer-reviewed journals, scholarly articles, and media outlets. I hope to become an advocate for addressing marginalization and exploitation in workplaces because highlighting the needs of oppressed employees could help to address injustices, impoverishment, and marginalization they encounter daily.

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Appendixes

Appendix A - CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Exploring the Experiences of Retail Workers in Saskatchewan: A Narrative Approach Study **REB Approval Date:** 28/06/2021

Researcher: Issah Gyimah **Email:** gyimah2i@uregina.ca or cg4676@gmail.com

Supervisor: Abu Bockarie, Associate Professor, Faculty of Education Phone (306) 585-5601

E-mail: AbuBockarie@uregina.ca

Purpose of the Research:

This study aims to explore the experiences of workers in the retail industry in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada. Second, the study will describe the factors that the participants perceive as affecting those experiences and the meanings they attach to those factors.

Three subsidiary questions will be addressed in the study.

1. In what ways did the participants describe and explain their work-related experiences and the conditions that influenced those experiences in their work environment?
2. What forms of workplace training and development interventions were offered to the participants, and what did they perceive as the outcomes of those interventions for them and their organizations?
3. What suggestions did the participants offer to enhance and enrich their work-related conditions and experiences?

Procedures:

- After providing your consent to participate in this study, you will participate in a total of 6 virtual interviews divided into three sessions. Each session is anticipated to last for 2 hours via Zoom Video calls. You will be asked to reflect on your lived experiences as an employee in the retail industry and how those experiences have influenced your socioeconomic situation. The interview will be recorded, and interview notes will be taken. The interview will take place via Zoom meeting from a suitable location to be determined by you (the participant) and the researcher, and such a location will not be the participant's workplace. Because you will require a secure environment to feel at ease and freely share your experiences. There will be a total of four (4) participants who will individually take part in this study.
- I recommend you print two copies of this consent form and sign them. I will collect a copy of the consent forms from you and keep the other copy in a secure place where nobody, whether a family member or anyone else, will access your record.

Funded by: N/A

Potential Risks:

- Since the study is a narrative study/approach of the participants' lived experiences, there may be a psychological and social risks during the interview.

In the event that any participant experiences such challenges, the researcher will refer the affected participant to Saskatchewan Healthline, 2755 Avonhurst Dr, Regina, SK, S4R 3J3. Tel: +1877-800-0002. For emotional, social, and psychological assistance.

Potential Benefits:

You have no direct personal benefits because you participated in an interview for this study.

However, by agreeing to participate in this study, you will be contributing to valuable grassroots knowledge about employees' experience in the retail industry. As a token of appreciation for your time in taking part in this study, you will be rewarded with a token of a 50-dollar gift card.

Each participant will receive a gift card after the last interview. The gift card will not be taken away from you should you choose to withdraw from the study after the interview.

Confidentiality:

- Your identity, department title, and organization's identity will be kept strictly confidential in this research. Your participation in the study is voluntary, and if you feel insecure and would like to withdraw from the study, you will be able to do so from the beginning of the interview to the transcription stage.
- Even though the data from this study will be published on the University of Regina Library database, possibly published in academic journals, and presented at educational conferences, your identity will remain confidential at every stage. Although I will report direct quotations from the interview, I will use pseudonyms (alphanumeric code) to reference each participant throughout the transcribed material, analyze data, and write the final report. In addition, each participant's department title and identifying factors will be excluded from the transcribed material, analysis of data, and findings. Throughout the thesis, I will refer to the retail organization as Supermarket G. More significantly, the consent forms will be stored separately from the data, so it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses.
- After your three sessions of interview and potentially one follow-up interview, before the data is included in the final report, you will be allowed to review your interview transcript and add,

alter, or delete any information as you see fit. This step will ensure that I have accurately transcribed the interview audio recording and interview notes without any omissions or biases.

Storage of Data:

Once a participant has completed the consent form and provided contact information, I will personally arrange to collect all the signed documents at a location convenient for the participant. All the paper documents will be stored in a secured locker with a key in my supervisor's office. Other electronic documents will be stored in a password-controlled computer, encrypted password USB Drive, and secured U of R Filr file sharing platform. In addition, any other data, including keyed interview transcriptions, analysis, and findings, will be encrypted and stored on my password-protected laptop.

Upon completion of each interview, the digital video file will be transferred from the laptop recorder to a password-encrypted file and stored on my password-protected laptop. Once the transcripts have been typed, I will scan the interview notes using my scanner and save them to my password-protected laptop. I will then shred the hard copy of the interview notes I took during the interview using my shredder. Finally, all work related to the study, including the keyed transcriptions, analysis of findings, and the completed thesis, will be stored on my password-protected laptop.

The material must be stored for a minimum of five years post-thesis publication. Therefore, five years post-publication, the video recording, scanned interview notes, and transcripts will be deleted from my laptop. In addition, the copies of the participant consent forms will be shredded in the locked cabinet in my supervisor's office.

Right to Withdraw:

- Your participation is voluntary; you can answer only those questions you are comfortable with

and have the right to skip questions you are unwilling to answer. You may withdraw from the research project for any reason and are free to withdraw from the research up to two weeks after the last interview. Suppose you choose to withdraw from the study. In that case, your consent form and contact information will be deleted, and all related data, including digital video recording, transcribed interview, analysis, and findings, will be deleted or shredded. You will not be able to withdraw after two weeks after your last interview because data analysis and interpretation would likely have started. Therefore, the withdrawal from the study after that point would no longer be feasible.

Questions or Concerns:

- The Research Ethics Board approved this project at the University of Regina. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Chair of the University of Regina Research Ethics Board at 585-4775 or by e-mail:

research.ethics@uregina.ca

- Contact the researcher(s) using the below information:

Issah Gyimah

Ph.D. Candidate, Faculty of Education

University of Regina

Regina, SK S4S 0A2

Phone: redacted personal phone number

Email: gyimah2i@uregina.ca

Consent:

By signing below, YOUR FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT IS IMPLIED and indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study.

Signature

Printed Name

Date

Appendix B – Letter of Invitation

June 2021

Dear Research Participant

Thank you for volunteering to participate in three semi-structured interview sessions for the study: “Exploring the Experiences of Retail Workers in Saskatchewan: A Narrative Approach.” This study aims to explore employees' workplace experiences in the retail industry in Regina, Saskatchewan, toward a Doctor of Philosophy in Education. The study focuses on employees at the grassroots whose shared experiences could contribute to creating awareness about workplace practices from the perspective of their socio-economic well-being.

This study is significant because limited research has explored retail employees' experiences in Canada. The study will provide insight and information about employees' retail sector experiences. The limited number of studies that critically explore the field presents a significant gap, and this study seeks to contribute to filling the gap. Furthermore, studies into the practices and policies in the retail industry with respect to the employees' management, rewards, and well-being have not received much attention in academia and institutional scrutiny. Using critical perspectives to explore the organization's strategies and their influence on employees through the narrations of their personal experiences will allow you to share your experiences, giving the participants the platform for their voices to be heard. In many institutional hierarchies, employees at the grassroots are often marginalized, and their voices and input toward organizational development are silenced. Hence, this proposed study will play a significant role in questioning the organizations' structures and practices through the participants' experiences.

In addition, the proposed study will help to examine critically and question organizations' profit-centered ethos that benefits the rich few at the expense of the masses. While many studies have sought to question widened income disparities between the rich and the poor in the retail industry, nothing significant has been undertaken to question neoliberalism's role in perpetuating socio-economic inequalities from the lens of the employees' experiences. Adopting a narrative approach to this study is essential because it could open possibilities and new avenues for understanding employees' challenges in the retail industry.

The study is significant because it could help create awareness about employees' experiences and challenges among employers, policymakers, other stakeholders, and researchers. Additionally, the findings of this study may inform management, supervisors, owners, and other interested persons in society about the effects of retail industry policies on employees.

The total time for the interviews will be 6 hours. The interview sessions are divided into three, and each session is anticipated to last for 2hrs via Zoom Video calls. You will be sent a zoom link with a password for each meeting. As a token of appreciation for your time in taking part in this study, you will be rewarded with a token of a \$50 gift card. Each participant will receive a gift card after the last interview. The gift card will not be taken away from you should you choose to withdraw from the study after the interview.

This study was approved by the University of Regina Research Ethics Board (REB) on the 28th of June 2021. Suppose you have any questions or concerns about your right or treatment as a volunteer to participate in this study. In that case, you may contact the University of Regina Research Ethics Board Chair at (306) 585-4775 or by e-mail at research.ethics@uregina.ca or

my supervisor: Dr. Abu Bockarie, Associate Professor and Faculty of Education. Phone (306)

585-5601 E-mail: Abu.Bockarie@uregina.ca

Sincerely

Issah Gyimah

Student of Graduate Studies and Research

Phone: redacted personal phone number

Email: gyimah2i@uregina.ca

Appendix C- Transcript Release Letter**Title: Exploring the Work-Related Experiences of Retail Workers in Saskatchewan: A****Narrative Approach**

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and have been provided with the opportunity to add, alter, and delete information from the transcript as appropriate. I acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Issah Gyimah. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Issah Gyimah to be used in the manner described in the Consent Form. I have received a copy of this Data/Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Signature of Researcher

Appendix C- Sample Collaborative Interview Questions

Introductory open-ended questions?

Participants' biographical data.

- How old are you?
- Gender
- What is the highest level of education you have currently?
- Marital status
- Number of children
- Accommodation status (Owner / Renting)

Employment Related Questions

- How old were you when you started working in your current job?
- Is this your first job? If not, what other work did you have before your current job?
- Tell me about how you decided to start working at your current job.
- How long have you been working at your current job?
- Tell me about your current job. What is it like to work at your current job?
- What do you like about your job?
- What do you not like about your job?

Management related questions

- Tell me about your immediate supervisor. What is he/she like as a leader?
- Are you unionized?
- Does management consider employees' views in decision-making?
- What is the work environment like?

- Tell me about a typical day at work, from the time you get there until you leave for the day.

Personal goals and aspirations

- What do you think about the future as far as your job goes?
- Tell me about your capacity a little bit...who are you in the retail industry?
- Tell me about how you came to be a retail sector worker.
- When did you desire to work in the industry?
- What was it, and what is it like? What did you think then? What do you think about your experiences in this sector...? Did anyone influence your decision to work here? Tell me how he/she influenced your actions and their relation to the industry.
- Could you describe the events that led up to or preceded after you took a job in the sector?
- What contributed to your years as a full-time/ part-time employee...?
- Where do you see yourself in two years [five years, ten years, as appropriate? Describe the person you hope to be, then? How would you compare the person you hope to be and the person you are right now?

Intermediate Questions

Workplace environment-related questions

- What, if anything, did you know about workplace practices that you think are unfair and bother you and other employees---
- What, if anything, did you know about workplace practices that you think are fair and do not bother you and other employees---

- Tell me how you feel about your salary, working hours, and other benefits----?
- What happened next?
- Who, if anyone, is involved in such a decision-making process? How are they involved, and how is that affecting you personally?
- Tell me about how you learned to handle such issues affecting your life---
- How, if at all, have your thoughts and feelings about working in the retail sector changed?
- What positive changes have occurred in your life since working here?
- What negative changes, if any, have occurred in your life (or ---) since then?
- As you look back on----, are other events that stand out in your mind about the organization practices you are not happy about...? Could you describe it in detail? How did this event affect your life? How did you respond to -----the event, the resulting situation?
- Could you describe the most important lessons you learned from working here-----?
- What helps you to manage financial and social challenges at the workplace----? What problems might you encounter? Tell me the sources of these problems.
- Who has been the most helpful to you during this time? How have they been helpful?

Ending Questions

Skills and skills development (rewards and punishment)

- What forms of training does the organization provide? Does the training assist in workplace individual development and growth?
- How much of the skill development is dedicated to employees' social development?

Addressing the challenges

- What are the most important ways to address the challenges you mentioned earlier in the organization---
- Tell me how your views and actions depending on the topic and preceding responses, may have changed since you started working here----
- How have you grown as a person since----? Tell me about the strengths that you have discovered or developed through----‘If appropriate. What do you value about your workplace now? What are your colleagues say as well?
- After these experiences, what advice would you give to someone intending to take a job at this workplace-----?
- Is there anything that you might now have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Appendix D- Ethics Approval Certificate

Research Ethics Board

Certificate of Approval



PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR

Issah Gyimah

DEPARTMENT

Faculty of Education

REB#

2021-053

SUPERVISOR

Dr. Abu Bockarie

TITLE

Exploring the Experiences of Retail Workers in Saskatchewan: A Narrative Approach

APPROVED ON

July 20, 2021,

RENEWAL DATE

July 20, 2022

APPROVAL OF

Application for Behavioural Research Ethics Review

Invitation Letter

Consent Form

Collaborative Interview Questions Transcript

Release Form

Full Board

Delegated Review



Meeting

The University of Regina Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above-named research project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that

may pertain to this research project and for ensuring that the authorized research is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the original protocol submitted for ethics review. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period, provided there is no change in experimental protocol or related documents.

Any significant changes to your proposed method, procedures, or related documents should be reported to the Chair for Research Ethics Board consideration in advance of implementation.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

In order to receive annual renewal, a status report must be submitted to the REB Chair for Board consideration one month in advance of the current expiry date each year the study remains open and upon study completion. Please refer to the following website for the renewal and closure forms: <https://www.uregina.ca/research/for-faculty-staff/ethics-compliance/human/ethicsforms.html>

Kim Dorsch Ph.D. REB Chair University of Regina

Please send all correspondence to:
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Research and Innovation Centre 109 Regina, SK S4S
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