**Digital Technologies’ Transformation of US Store-Based Retail Work**

**Semi-structured interviews with workers and managers, 2022-23**

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This dataset consists of interview notes on 63 semi-structured interviews of store-based retail employees in various locations in the USA (with the exception of two in Canada), conducted August 2022 through August 2023. The interviews focus on technological change and how it is affecting the labor process. However, they also inquire about the respondents’ career trajectories, pay history, and aspirations for future mobility; the details of their job functions and how those functions are organized; how labor in the store is supervised; any forms of worker collective action; the respondent’s subjective experience of work and supervision; and significant changes in any of these aspects of work. All interviews were conducted by investigators Carré and Tilly together or by Tilly alone.

The interviews were guided by two instruments, found in the Word files “Fulfillment-UCLA Worker Int-Order fulfillment-08.2022-final R3” (questions designed for workers doing fulfillment of online orders) and “Other-Reconciled\_Other Jobs V6\_08.09a.22” (questions designed for workers doing other jobs, such as cashiering, stocking, supervision, or management). There is substantial overlap between the two instruments. The number of questions in these questionnaires is sufficiently large that if a respondent gave substantial responses to all questions, the interviews would have lasted well over one hour. However, interviews were limited to one hour (see below). Consequently, interviewers were in most cases necessarily selective about which questions to ask, as is standard practice in semi-structured interviewing. However, interviewers made a concerted effort to gather information about new technologies and about the organization of work in all cases, and followed up on interviewee responses, especially those that seemed particularly informative or distinctive.

Respondents were recruited via a commercial online interviewee recruitment platform, User Interviews <https://www.userinterviews.com/> . A screening questionnaire was used to target employees at larger stores (50+ employees, including many with over 200), at grocery and general merchandise chain stores, and performing either frontline retail jobs (cashier, stocker or merchandiser, online order fulfillment) or supervisor or manager jobs. After some early interviews revealed that workers with short tenure at a store had very limited knowledge of operations and in particular of how technology had changed, we began to strictly screen for at least 1 year of experience at their current store and to preferentially choose respondents with 4 or more years’ tenure at their store. We originally planned to only interview frontline workers, but after experimenting with interviewing supervisors and managers and finding they were particularly knowledgeable about technological change, we began to regularly include supervisors and managers in the mix. The Excel file “User Interviews-Anonymized list-Retail 1+2+3+4-August-September 2022-August 2023-V18” contains a listing of all 63 completed interviews, along with persons who agreed to do an interview but then canceled or no-showed (these are the “missing” numbers that explain why the 63 interviews are numbered 4 to 81), showing key characteristics of interviewees (age and self-reported race or ethnicity, job and job tenure, employers and store size). Additional descriptors (gender, household structure, location) can be found in the interview transcripts.

In some cases we departed from our sub-sectoral focus on grocery and general merchandise stores, from our occupational focus, or from our size guidelines—either because we were interested in a glimpse at another part of the retail sector, because at the moment we were not attracting sufficient candidates that met our criteria, or in a few cases because we misinterpreted interview candidates’ responses on the screener. In terms of sector, we expanded our sample to include three big-box hardware/home improvement stores and two moderate-sized pharmacies (all of which are part of large chains, and organized similarly to big-box general merchandise stores), a few clothing stores, and several one-offs (auto parts, phone provider, Apple store, Disney store, candy store). Smaller stores included small clothing stores (which have a very different labor process than large grocery and general merchandise stores) and a small “dollar store” (small format, rock-bottom discount chain stores common in the USA; they have a labor process quite similar to that in large grocery and general merchandise stores, but with a more limited division of labor). Perhaps the biggest departure from our sampling frame is the inclusion of two merchandisers, who are stockers who work for third-party service companies, doing stocking and display-building for retailers (one of the two is concurrently employed part-time as a stocker at a store where she provides merchandising services, and we asked her about both jobs).

The resulting sample is by no means a representative sample of US store-based retail workers. But we believe it is qualitatively representative of more senior employees at larger-unit grocery and general merchandise chain stores in the US, with a sprinkling of respondents from other types of stores that offer some limited comparisons. Geographically, it includes multiple respondents from every region of the continental USA (along with two interviews from Canada that we included at points where we were not attracting enough qualifying US interview candidates).

Respondents were compensated, with the compensation tied to a one-hour interview, making it impracticable and unethical to conduct longer interviews. All respondents signed a consent form and were informed of their rights as human subjects to decline to answer questions or to terminate the interview, following a protocol approved by the UCLA Institutional Review Board. All interviews were conducted via Zoom.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed via Otter automated voice recognition software (by the time of release of these data, recordings will have been destroyed). Carré and Tilly took turns interviewing; both interviewer and non-interviewer took contemporaneous notes, with the non-interviewer taking more detailed notes. When Tilly interviewed alone, he also took notes. Though the Otter automated transcripts are more complete than the human notes, the automated transcripts are difficult to read (frequent time stamps; faithful transcription of repetition, false starts, and extraneous words [such a “like” appearing multiple times in a sentence]; errors like those common with voice recognition) and difficult to anonymize (respondent’s name is appended to every phrase). We did not have funds to pay for full transcription. Therefore, we combined human notes from the two note-takers (in some cases reconciling conflicting notes, in other cases simply pasting both sets of responses to a question into the notes file), and then used the automated transcripts and recordings to fill in gaps or incomplete passages and to reconcile conflicting notes between Carré and Tilly. The resulting files are thus primarily files of human notes (including word abbreviations and shortened versions of phrases) supplemented by some passages from automated transcripts.

Notes were anonymized in several ways:

* Removing names of respondents
* “Blurring” geographic details of store location, limiting them to state or in some cases to region within the US.
* “Blurring” details of respondents’ family structure and job and personal history (particularly for those with long tenure in their current employing company), including locations of previous jobs, and country of origin for migrants (typically just given as a continent).
* In two cases (candy store, phone provider) withholding the name of the company.

We believe that none of the elided information is necessary to understand the content of the interviews.

These interview notes include frank and often critical comments about corporate retail employers and about managers at the particular store at which the respondent was employed. Disclosure of the identity of persons making particular statements might endanger their present or future employment. We have done our best to anonymize interviews to minimize the risk of somebody's identity being detected. However, if large numbers of details about any particular respondent were to be released, it is possible that knowledgeable parties could nonetheless piece together someone's identity. In compliance with university Institutional Review Board requirements for protection of human subjects, we therefore request that those using the data maintain the notes files in a secure location, and refrain from releasing large numbers of details about any respondent.

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