

Leaving and moving on from the corporatized workplace: An emotional and feminist economic
geography of tension and conflict at work

by

Alison Jane Braithwaite

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Examining Committee Membership

The following served on the Examining Committee for this thesis. The decision of the Examining Committee is by majority vote.

Supervisor: Daniel Cockayne
Associate Professor, Geography and Environmental Management
University of Waterloo

External Examiner: Suzanne Mills
Associate Professor
McMaster University

Internal Members: Nancy Worth
Associate Professor, Geography and Environmental Management
University of Waterloo

Steffanie Scott
Professor, Geography and Environmental Management
University of Waterloo

Internal-external member: Jennifer Clary-Lemon
Associate Professor, Department of English Language and
Literature
University of Waterloo

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

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Abstract

Employers have a vested interest in understanding why people leave. Feminist economic geographers have extensively researched the culture of the corporatized workplace, though they have rarely explored why people leave. This research examines the stories of people who left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change. It explores what these stories can tell us about (i) the culture of the corporatized workplace, (ii) why people leave, and (iii) the pathways to starting a business oriented to positive change. Rather than looking at the workplace through the lens of identity, this research examines the workplace through the lens of care and affect theory.

This research applies qualitative research design principles and uses narrative inquiry to collect partial life histories focused on why people leave the corporatized workplaces to start businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change. I did not provide criteria for what constituted businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change in any recruitment information. Participants were left to self-select into the study based on their own assessment of their business. I conducted 26 unstructured interviews where participants were asked to share experiences of three places: (i) the corporatized workplace, (ii) the liminal between leaving the corporatized workplace and starting their own business, and (iii) the business they viewed as oriented to positive change. The research applies affect theory using the work of Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant as analytical tools. It also relies on Gibson-Graham's work in creating alternative economies.

The research addresses why people leave the corporatized workplace at two scales: i) the systemic and ii) the personal. It then addresses the movement from the corporatized workplace to the business that participants defined as a positive change business. Many described that movement as a journey.

At the scale of the system, the research identifies how *the gameboard* (the structure and ethos of the workplace), *the Kool-Aid* (the stated culture of the workplace), and *the game* (the lived culture of the workplace) press against those that care creating a *care ceiling*. A care ceiling is an invisible barrier to professional advancement for those who embody ethics of care. At the scale of the individual, I applied Ahmed's definition of emotions to determine what was pressing against the participants, causing them to leave the corporatized workplace. The main factors in their leaving are (i) the manufactured urgency of the corporatized workplace that causes participants to behave in ways that

are contrary to their values and (ii) value conflicts that occur with others in their workplaces. Those value conflicts cause slow wounding in the form of moral injury, which causes many participants to feel alienated and ultimately to leave the workplace. Many leave feeling burnt out, like they have lost pieces of themselves. The liminal is a journey of what bell hooks refers to as “remembering myself” and is driven by curiosity. It involves encounters that open possibilities, finding belonging, exploring Gibson-Graham’s (2006) “other possible worlds” (p. xii), and creating reparative stories. For those that complete the journey, it ends in a different way of being, where participants embrace *species being*, which can be defined as a place of owning themselves. The journey parallels the process used by Gibson-Graham to guide communities to alternative economies.

This research contributes to the literature of economic geography, particularly feminist economic geography, including research on workplace culture and reparative approaches. It applies Marxist concepts of alienation and species being to the modern workplace. It also contributes to human resource management literature on why people leave their workplaces. Finally, it contributes to our societal understanding of how the culture of the corporatized workplace is reproduced, how challenging it is to transform, and provides insight into what people in the corporatized workplace are being asked to “lean into,” a neoliberal and individualistic framing popularized by Facebook (now Meta) former COO Sheryl Sandberg.

Keywords

Workplace culture, ethics of care, alienation, moral injury, slow wounding, affect, belonging, species being

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Dedication

This is dedicated to my father, Keith Braithwaite, who so wanted to be here to celebrate this milestone in my life and to my mother, Anita Braithwaite, to whom education was very important. I love you both.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

If all the world is a commodity, how poorer we grow. When all the world is a gift in motion, how
wealthy we become.

(Wall Kimmerer, 2013, p. 31)

Why people leave the workplace is a significant focus of the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature. This is because it hurts the bottom line when people leave their workplaces. Therefore, employers want to understand how to improve employee retention rates. Adapting their workplaces based on understanding why people leave allows them to do that. Since the pandemic, there has been a torrent of stories about the state of *corporatized workplaces*. The term corporatized workplace is borrowed from Mountz et al. (2015) and refers to a workplace driven by self-interest, productivity, efficiency, and the accumulation of power and wealth. We have heard stories of “the great resignation,” quiet quitting, burnout, and a general disillusionment with the functioning and culture of the corporatized workplace. Working from home gave some people a taste of relative freedom and a way to find some balance in their lives in a way that was not available to them when commuting to work stole much of their day. This research analyses the stories of people who have left the corporatized workplace in Canada to start businesses oriented to positive change, first to discern why they left and how they transitioned to a business they see as oriented to positive change, and then to determine what that says about the culture of the corporatized workplace.

By looking through the lenses of gender, power, identity, and care, feminist economic geographers have contributed extensively to the understanding of workplace culture (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Bryant & Jaworski, 2011; Cockayne, 2018; Crang, 1994; England & Lawson, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006; S. Lee, 2018, 2019; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Pini et al., 2010; Pini & Mayes, 2012; Schoenberger, 1994, 1997, 2001; Warren, 2016; Worth, 2016a, 2016b). They describe the corporate project as driven by self-interest and the accumulation of power, success, and admiration. However, interrogating why people leave the corporatized workplace could build on and contribute to this work. This is especially the case when looking at what happens when a subset of people not specifically invested in the corporate project leave the corporatized workplace to start businesses that they view as oriented to positive social or environmental change. They leave because their values conflict with that kind of corporatism.

Their values may be more aligned with feminist economic geographers and *feminist ethics of care*. Ethics of care is an embodied orientation to the world that recognises its interconnectedness and interdependence (Lawson, 2007; Singh, 2017). Understanding that interrelatedness can create a feeling of responsibility for those relationships and nurtures reciprocity, empathy, compassion, and curiosity (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Lawson, 2007; Singh, 2017). Its affective orientation is love and acceptance and it opens people to possibility (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Bowlby & McKie, 2018; Gilligan, 2011; C. Milligan & Wiles, 2010; Popke, 2006; Tronto, 2005). Understanding that with interconnectedness comes responsibility for each other and the earth (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Collard et al., 2015; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Raghuram et al., 2009; Tronto, 2005). It is also important to see care relationships as “historicised, fractured and contested” (Raghuram et al., 2009, p. 9).

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the research. I will do that by providing a background of the study and its context. I then examine how feminist economic geographers view affect and the corporation and outline how this research contributes to that work. Following that, I present the research question and objectives, the method of inquiry, and finally, review the organisation of this dissertation.

1.1 Broader Context

The corporatized workplace is a child of the capitalist system. It is based on self-interest, productivity, efficiency, and accumulation of power and wealth; it uses those that care for its own benefits and then rejects them when they start to interfere with those interests. Capitalism is a system built from deep woundings—the burning of witches (Federici, 2004, 2018); the extraction of people from their homelands to sell them as chattel into enslavement (Ghosh, 2021; Kendi, 2019; King, 2019; Menakem, 2017); and the practice of violently disappearing Indigenous people, their language, their culture, silencing the stories of this land, and renaming places to commemorate the “heroes” from the “discovery” and “conquering” of this continent (Battel Lowman & Barker, 2015; Ghosh, 2021; Howitt, 2020; Regan, 2010). Canada spun a one-sided history that buried the truth of how the country was built (Battel Lowman & Barker, 2015; Regan, 2010). Capitalism extracts value from people, curtailing their freedom while masquerading as a way to self-fulfilment (Horgan, 2021; Marx, 1976 [1867], 2007; Swain, 2012). Following in the wake of capitalism is pain, suffering, and alienation (Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Crang, 1994; Federici, 2004, 2018; Horgan, 2021; Kendi,

2019; Marx, 2007 [1844]; Menakem, 2017). Tension and conflict birthed capitalism. This research examines the mechanisms of wounding and alienation within the corporatized workplace.

Robyn Doolittle and Chen Wang (2021) examine the gendered power gap in Canada to demonstrate that women are still largely absent from positions of power in universities, cities, provincial government departments and government-owned corporations. In their exposé, they present evidence of what I refer to as a *care ceiling*, based on this research. This concept of a care ceiling is like the term *glass ceiling* (Cotter et al., 2001; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Taparia & Lenka, 2022; United States Department of Labor, 1991), which describes a seemingly invisible barrier limiting upward advancement in various organisations including corporations for women and people of colour. I define the care ceiling as *the invisible barrier to professional advancement for those people who embody ethics of care. The social and cultural norms of society and the workplace conflict with values embodied in ethics of care. That conflict creates alienation, slow wounding, and moral injury, which result in those who care leaving the workplace. The effects of the care ceiling become more intense as a person moves up the hierarchical workplace. It causes those who care to feel diminished and potentially leave the workplace.*¹ The care ceiling occurs because the values of the lived culture of workplaces, especially the embodied values of senior management, conflict with the values of those who care.

Doolittle and Wang’s article includes a small paragraph that states, “the current system hurts men, too” (p. E5). It goes on to say that “supportive, warm, and caring” (p. E5) men make less money and are viewed as less capable of managing people. It made me reflect on the fact that there is something more going on than the power gap described by Doolittle and Wang (2021). There may be a care ceiling in workplaces, meaning those who are “supportive, warm, and caring” are blocked from moving into positions of power. Warmth and care are characteristics that are traditionally gendered female. So, the power gap that Doolittle and Wang (2021) revealed could also be a result of a care ceiling. By shifting from a gender lens to a care lens, this research adds another layer to the already well-researched gendered and racialized dynamics at play in the corporatized. The concept of a care ceiling suggests that the corporatize workplace eventually rejects those that care. Looking through a

¹ Based on glass ceiling definitions (Cotter et al., 2001; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Taparia & Lenka, 2022; United States Department of Labor, 1991) from which I borrowed language.

care lens provides a different view of the corporatized workplace centred on values rather than identity. It adds a dimension to the gendered framework as some women embody the competitive, self-enhancing, and power-accumulating nature of the corporatized workplace, and some men reject it.

More research is necessary to determine the extent and definitiveness of the care ceiling. With this different view, it is possible to see other ways of intervening in the corporatized workplace culture that go beyond the limitations and politics of the identity lens and yet may indirectly benefit those demographics. Understanding that there is a value clash between care and the predominant values of the corporatized workplace and its effects on the individual could help to lessen the personal conflicts that occur within the workplace. To shatter the care ceiling would require placing people in positions of power who reject cultures of competition and individualism. Rejecting that culture involves embracing the values of equality, care for people, society and the earth, listening, and honesty (Schwartz, 2012). In the workplace, it involves encouraging and rewarding those who embody care ethics, restructuring the organisation to eliminate hierarchical structures, prioritizing listening, and communicating in ways that build interconnections and responsibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Laloux, 2016). Rather than looking for employees that fit a workplace, create a workplace where people feel welcomed and appreciated for who they are and the skills they bring to the table.

Retaining and engaging employees in corporate Canada has become more of a challenge since the pandemic. According to Statistics Canada (2022b), the unemployment to job vacancy ratio is at a historic low, making it difficult for employers to fill vacancies. Older workers are retiring, and there is a lack of qualified younger workers to replace them (Killick, 2023). In addition, people are rethinking the type of work they want (Paglinawan, 2022). According to Gallup (2023), globally workplace stress is at historic levels. 56% of Canadian workers reported being stressed. Globally, 44% report stress. Only 21% of Canadian workers report they are thriving or engaged. Meanwhile, 52% are “quiet quitting” (p. 4), doing only the minimum required by their job specification. 17% are “actively disengaged” (p. 4) or “loud quitting” (p. 4). Gallup (2023) warns that loud quitting is a major risk because these employees are acting in ways that undermine organisational goals and resist their leadership. On a global level, the cost of this disengagement (quiet and loud quitters) to the economy is estimated at US\$8.8 trillion (Gallup Inc., 2023). The World Economic Forum puts the

annual price tag of burnout to the global economy at US\$322 billion (Bruce, 2019). Adding to this, 47% of Canadian employees reported that they intend to leave the workplace, and 60% of them believe it is a good time to leave (Gallup Inc., 2023).

Those quiet quitters want more care in the workplace through freedom, open communication, fairness and respect, clear and strong guidance, the ability to learn and grow, and having their wellbeing prioritized (Gallup & Workhuman, 2022). There are calls to create cultures that humanize the workplace (Bruce, 2019; Carucci, 2021; Gallup & Workhuman, 2022; Killick, 2023; D. Moore, 2022). There is evidence that care saves money. According to Gallup and Workhuman (2022), “creating a culture of recognition can save a 10,000-employee company up to \$16.1 million in turnover costs annually” (p. 3). Yet that may be difficult to achieve without looking at the systemic problem identified by this research. Transforming the corporatized workplace requires deconstructing the very foundational values of the capitalist system, which begins by recognising care ceilings in the workplace.

1.2 Affect and the Corporation

Mainstream economic geographers view the firm as a network of social relationships extending beyond the firm's legal entity (Hsu, 2012; Yeung, 2000, 2005b). They stress the importance of those relationships and make opaque references to the tensions (Peck, 2018; Scott, 2000; Sturgeon et al., 2008; Yeung, 2005a) and conflict (Amin & Thrift, 1992; Hudson, 1999; Peck, 2018; Scott, 2000; Taylor & Asheim, 2001; Yeung, 2005b) that exist. They understand the firm as a web of conflictual relationships but usually do not directly interrogate those relationships. They do not examine them more closely to understand the tensions and conflict and how they may affect people, even to the point of compelling them to leave, nor do they investigate the systems' role in creating those tensions and conflicts. My research directly examines those tensions and conflicts, providing insights into the nature of those conflicts and tensions by examining the behaviours, relationships, and dynamics within the corporatized workplace.

Feminist economic geographers (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Bryant & Jaworski, 2011; Cockayne, 2018; Crang, 1994; England & Lawson, 2005; Gibson-Graham, 2006; S. Lee, 2018, 2019; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Pini et al., 2010; Pini & Mayes, 2012; Schoenberger, 1994, 1997,

2001; Warren, 2016; Worth, 2016a, 2016b) examine the dynamics of the workplace and its culture through the lens of gender, power, identity, and care. Schoenberger (1997) uncovered how entangled corporate culture, power, and identity are to the point that leaders make decisions that benefit their identity and maintain their own power but risk the firm's collapse. McDowell (1997) found that those in power want to be surrounded by people like themselves and, therefore, define the concept of who fits in the workplace and who does not. As a result, the culture of the workplace is socially reproduced to emulate those in power. Not fitting in causes hurt (G. Rose, 1993) and discomfort (Ahmed, 2012). Worth (2016b) uncovered the coping strategies that young women applied to address the pain caused by age and gender discrimination in the workplace. Although not explicitly stated, Cockayne (2018) examines the pain and suffering related to not being a cultural fit within the underperformed confidence culture of the digital media workplace in San Francisco. My research adds to this literature on—broadly speaking—the concept of fit by uncovering the damage that results when people feel pressured to compromise their values to fit.

Pini et al. (2010) describe the pain inflicted on the community and workers who lost their jobs from a mine closure in Australia. The difference between that study and my research is that it involves a group of workers all losing their jobs involuntarily at about the same time in the same workplace. Though they describe the pain inflicted by the closure, they do not follow the workers to examine how they recovered. My research looks at individuals who leave their jobs, mostly voluntarily, without a community of people experiencing the same loss. My research also queries how people shift from that loss to a business they deem as oriented to positive social and/or environmental change. The interesting thing about Pini et al. (2010) is that it demonstrates the mining company's ability to dissipate the pain and suffering of the community as they establish and operate their mine. They do that by performing care. The company oriented itself with the community and its employees as being "supportive, responsive, gracious and caring" (p. 569). That performance of care was immediately pulled when they closed the mine prematurely.

Worth (2016a) uncovers pain in the form of the precariousness of today's work environment, its effect on millennials, and how they instinctively create relationships of care to counteract their feelings of precarity. My research demonstrates that due to the corporatized workplace's hierarchical nature, people throughout the organisation can share a sense of insecurity. Even those with power and

privilege at the organisation's top can feel precarious. Feminist economic geographers also look at ways to dissipate the negative effects of the corporatized workplace by creating connection, slowing their pace, and creating spaces of care, reciprocity and support within the workplace (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bartos & Ives, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015) and the capitalist system (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Although their work does not address the shift from the corporatized workplace to creating a business, it offers strategies for people to recover from any pain the workplace may inflict.

This research adds to understanding the relationships and power dynamics within the corporatized workplace. It follows in the footsteps of other feminist geographers in uncovering the messiness of the relationships within the workplace (Ahmed, 2012; Ey et al., 2017; Gregg, 2009; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997, 2001, 2001), which contrasts the reductionist view of the firm as a network of banal relations (Hsu, 2012; Yeung, 2000, 2005b). By analysing the data at the systemic scale, it is possible to see the messiness created when an organisation's stated culture—*the Kool-Aid*—and its lived culture—*the game*—are incongruent. *The Kool-Aid* is a term some research participants used to refer to the stated culture of their workplace – the values, beliefs, and stories explicitly shared about who the organisation is and how it operates. Chapter 4 provides a more thorough definition and analysis of the Kool-Aid. *The game* is also a term used by research participants to refer to the lived culture of their workplace. It describes how people within the organisation actually behave, and it can be diametrically opposed to the stated culture – the Kool-Aid. Participants tended to conflate the two terms. In Chapter 4, I make a clear distinction between the terms. The research unearths the conflict that can occur when someone pushes against those playing the game. In doing so, it adds to the work of feminist economic geographers. The dynamics of the Kool-Aid and the game are investigated in-depth in Chapter 4.

This research expands on Marx's notions of alienation and species being in the context of the corporatized workplace and the “positive change” businesses created. It connects alienation to moral injury, slow wounding, and trauma. Many think Marx's view of alienation is antiquated and no longer relevant today. This research builds on the view of Swain (2012), Horgan (2021), and Chatterjee (2022) that alienation does have relevance and does apply to today's workplaces. Contrary to those

who have criticized Marx's concept of species being for its essentialism², idealism (Swain, 2012)³, and perfectionism (Harvey, 2018)⁴, this research tracks the journey from alienation to species being. It demonstrates the pathways to becoming the social being that acts freely and consciously in a way where "life engender[s] life" (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75). It occurs by actively de-corporatizing the self so individuals re-discover (Chatterjee, 2022) and fully own themselves (van der Kolk, 2014).

This research also contributes to the literature on emotion, affect and care in the corporatized workplace (Cockayne, 2018; Ey et al., 2017; Mountz et al., 2015; Pini et al., 2010; Pini & Mayes, 2012) by applying affect theory to examine the corporatized workplace at the scale of both the system and the individual. By applying affect theory in this way, it is possible to see how the social presses against the individual to the point that they leave. It also demonstrates how important care is in the corporatized workplace. Those who care build relationships, mentor people, create high-performance teams, and provide opportunities for the growth and development of individuals. This adds value to the workplace. This research also advances the body of knowledge developed from the Marxist theory of alienation by connecting it to affect theory, moral injury, slow wounding, and trauma. It contributes to the field of economic geography by scrutinizing the dynamics of the corporatized workplace that cause alienation, and offering up the idea that entrepreneurship can be a pathway to what Marx called species being (Chapter 6). Species being is a full and evolving expression of what it means to be human, the expansion of collective consciousness through social interaction (Chatterjee, 2022; Marx 2007). It contributes to the Human Resource and Management (HRM) literature on why people leave the corporatized workplace by analysing what presses against workers at both the systemic and individual scales.

The corporatized workplace promises security and success by providing good salaries, benefits, and advancement opportunities. It promises the good life (Berlant, 2011), happiness (Ahmed, 2010b), and self-expression (Horgan, 2021). However, as Berlant (2011) warns, it can lead to *cruel optimism*. *Cruel optimism* is when something you are striving for or conditioned to strive for blocks your ability

² Essentialism because Marx describes it as a natural essence of human beings.

³ Idealism because it is judged as unrealistic.

⁴ Perfectionism it represents the highest expression of being human.

to thrive. This research uncovers the mechanisms within the corporatized workplace that thwart people's ability to thrive while purporting to offer them something they should want or need.

Although this research focuses on a population of people who were predominantly privileged enough to be able to choose to leave secure employment, it does offer a view of the importance of care in the workplace, how people who care are integral to the functioning of the workplace, and how that work of care is only valued until it gets in the way of those playing the game. An awareness of the importance of care in the corporatized workplace could translate into an awareness of the unpaid and underpaid care work that society depends on, which, for the most part, is carried out by women and marginalized people.

1.3 The Research Question and Objectives

The question that guided my research is:

- Why do people leave the corporatized workplace in Canada to start businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change?

I framed the research question this way because I was interested in attracting participants who embodied a different ethos to the competitive, self-interested, and power-accumulating nature found in the corporatized workplace. The businesses participants ultimately created may not be viewed as oriented to positive change by others but are by the participants. It is also important to note here that I discovered in interviewing participants that very few left the corporatized workplace directly to start a business oriented to positive change. Most left, not knowing what they would do next, and eventually started a positive change business.

The **objectives** of this research are:

1. To determine what motivates people to leave the corporatized workplace.
2. To determine the role of emotion, affect, and care in the decision to leave.
3. To evaluate how the stories about leaving the corporatized workplace add to our understanding of workplace culture.
4. To determine how the corporatized workplace affect participants' sense of self.
5. To understand the pathways to starting businesses oriented to positive change.

To meet these objectives, I pull from the HRM literature that examines why people leave the workplace, feminist economic geographers' view of workplace culture, and feminist and Marxist views on how capitalism acts to separate and alienate. These topics are summarized here and examined in greater detail in the literature review in Chapter 2.

When assessing why people leave the workplace, HRM literature generally asks employed people about their intention to leave rather than asking those who have left the workplace why they left. As will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 2, the literature points to many reasons why people leave—the personal cost outweighing the benefits of staying, job satisfaction, fit, how appreciated a person feels, and positive or negative events that shock them into self-reflection. What is missing from this literature is an assessment of how power dynamics within the workplace factor into the decision to leave.

Power is an essential lens through which feminist economic geographers interpret workplace culture and identity. Feminist geographers claim capitalism markets a “fantasy of wholeness” (Gibson-Graham, 1993, p. 19). Gibson-Graham uses this term when they ask the question: How do we see capitalism? We see it “not as our ‘reality’ but as a fantasy of wholeness” (p. 19) and “one that operates to obscure diversity and disunity in the economy and society alike” (p. 19) in their effort to “smash capitalism” (p. 10). As will become apparent, the fantasies of capitalism written by the corporatized workplace are the Kool-Aid or stated culture of the workplace. It is a myth because capitalism actually creates separation, categorisation, and alienation (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020). They see the workplace as based on the masculine values of competitiveness, individualism, and rationality (Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 1997, 2004, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997; Webster & Boyd, 2019). Ahmed (2012) reveals that a workplace's stated or explicit culture diverges from its embodied, unspoken, implicit rules or lived culture. Some participants referred to the stated culture as *the Kool-Aid*. I have adopted and used that term when referring to the stated culture. The lived culture or the implicit rules of the workplace result in what Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as *the field* (p. 94) and Missildine (2007) refers to as *the game* (p. 129). According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), the field is relational and is like a game, but its rules are unwritten and “appears in the unspoken” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 15). The game is a competition with the goal of “making it” (Missildine, 2007, p. 138). Several participants referred to

the game, and I use that term when referring to the lived culture of the corporatized workplace. The dynamics of the Kool-Aid and the game provide insight into why some people may leave the corporatized workplace. Chapter 4 addresses those dynamics.

From a Marxist view, the capitalist system alienates the worker first, through their relation to the product by stealing the life they put into producing that product (Ahmed, 2010b). It then separates them from the means of production because they do not own the means of production. It then alienates them from their own nature as it denies them self-expression through their labour, and finally, once alienated from themselves, they become alienated from others (Ahmed, 2010b; Horgan, 2021; Marx, 2007 [1844]). Alienation can evoke a range of emotions like anger, frustration (Berardi, 2009; Harvey, 2018; Horgan, 2021), resentment (Harvey, 2018), exhaustion (Han, 2015; Horgan, 2021), apathy (Guo et al., 2022), and can ultimately lead to depression (Han, 2015; Swain, 2012) or melancholia (Ahmed, 2010b; Han, 2015). All these emotions can lead to someone turning away from the corporatized workplace.

Throughout this dissertation, I refer to “*positive change*” businesses as a shorthand for *businesses viewed by participants as oriented to positive social and/or environmental change*. Because I left it to the participants’ judgement as to whether their businesses created positive change, it means there was a range of interpretations about what that meant. The kind of business was less important to me than the fact that participants saw that what they were doing after leaving the corporatized workplace was in some way positive. I asked them to explain if I was unsure why they considered their business to be oriented to positive change. Appendix 1 includes a list of those “positive change” businesses.

I use the word corporatized because a few of the study participants worked for organisations that are not strictly corporate, but participants felt that their work experiences shared many similarities with corporate ones, for example, government agencies or departments and crown corporations. I chose the word corporatized because Mountz et al. (2015) used it to describe the neoliberal university, workplaces driven by numbers, marketability, “efficiency, productivity and excellence” (p. 1241) characteristics that apply to a wide range of organisations and not only strictly corporate ones. It aligns with Marxists who describe capitalist social relations as spreading through society—or what Tronti (1962) referred to as “factory and society” (p. 1). It has become known as the “social factory” (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020, p. 32). The social factory universalises capitalist social relations to

individualise and categorise people so they can be controlled and exploited (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020). Those social relations are ubiquitous to society itself (Tronti, 1962). In effect, the weaving of a myth masquerades as true nature (Horgan, 2021; Marx, 1976 [1867], 2007; Swain, 2012).

Originally, I had intended to look at why women leave the corporatized workplace, which is well-researched outside the field of geography. Then I read Hanson and Pratt (2003), who demonstrated that solely focusing on white, middle-class women could result in blind spots. That spurred me to expand the scope of the research by abandoning my gender-based framing. At that point, I also limited the scope of the study to people who started “positive change” businesses. I did that because I thought this would be a way to select people who did not align with the competitive, individualistic nature of the corporatized workplace. I thought that standpoint could offer a unique perspective on the corporatized workplace. Another reason I chose to focus on people who started “positive change” businesses after leaving the corporatized workplace was Gibson-Graham et al.’s (2019) call to action for economic geographers to “intervene and bring to light pathways that will steward our earth system” (p. 18). I thought this research would provide insights into pathways to starting a “positive change” business and facilitate similar shifts for others.

I have personal reasons for choosing this research. I left the corporatized workplace because of burnout (see Appendix 2: My Story) and wanted to understand and put words to my own experience to prevent others from experiencing the same level of alienation. This dissertation may be the start of my reparative story.

1.4 Method of inquiry

I employed a narrative inquiry approach to my research by collecting partial life histories (Cameron, 2012; Davies et al., 2018) from participants relating to why they left the corporatized workplace to eventually start businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change. I used an unstructured open interview style to collect my data, allowing participants to share their stories their way. Affect theory drove the data analysis. In particular, the work of Ahmed (2014) and Berlant (2011). I applied Ahmed’s (2014) view of emotions as surfaces that delineate the social from the personal first by looking at the systemic scale—how the dynamics of the workplace pressed against participants (Chapter 4). I then looked at the data at the scale of the individual and what specific events,

expectations, and encounters pressed against participants (Chapter 5), causing them to leave the workplace. When examining the shift toward a “positive change” business (Chapter 6), I then employed Berlant’s (2011) concept of “the event” (p. 5), which opens a space of aliveness and possibility for a “radical break” (p. 5) from the everyday into something new. The feminist theories of transformation (Gibson-Graham, 2006; hooks, 2004b, 2009; March, 2021) and reparative reading (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003) were also important in making sense of the data. I explore the methodological choices I made in this research in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.5 Organisation of the Dissertation

I organised this dissertation into seven chapters. In this chapter, I introduced the context of the research including positioning it within the existing literature and claiming its value to the field of economic geography and affect. I introduced the research questions, defined the research objectives, delineated the methods of inquiry and concluded with this outline of the organisation of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review in which I situate the research within three areas: (i) the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature on why people leave the corporatized workplace, (ii) an examination of how the culture of the corporatized workplace is addressed by HRM and feminist economic geography literature as well as addressing its effects on power and identities, and (iii) a review of how HRM, feminist economic geographers, and Marxist literature view the separation and alienation caused by the capitalist system and the corporatized workplace.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodologies, which include using narrative inquiry to collect partial life histories of participants’ experiences in the corporatized workplace, making the shift, and starting a business they view as oriented to positive change. There are seven parts to this chapter: (i) the research aims and objectives, (ii) my positionality and how it influences the research, (iii) an overview of the research approach, which includes a description of recruitment and participant descriptions, (iv) how data was collected using unstructured interviews, (v) how data was analysed by creating timelines, power and impression maps and mapping the events of the in-between. In this section, I also describe coding methods, how I determined participants’ personal values, and how I

use writing to make sense of the data. (vi) I review the ethical implications of the research, and (vii) provide a brief conclusion of the chapter.

Chapter 4 uncovers the tensions and conflicts that cause participants to leave the corporatized workplace at the scale of the system. It provides a vocabulary that I use when I address the scale of the individual in Chapter 5. There are five sections to Chapter 4: (i) *“being successful being yourself,”* which describes how participants embodied ethics of care, which is largely in opposition to the culture of self-interest, productivity, efficiency, and accumulation of their workplaces, (ii) *the gameboard*, which describes the structure and ethos of the corporatized workplace, (iii) *the Kool-Aid*, which describes how corporate workplaces use their stated culture as a means of seduction to attract and retain employees, (iv) *the game*, which describes how the lived culture feeds competition and insecurity within the corporatized workplace, and (v) *the conflict*, which describes how the game presses against those being successful being themselves causing conflict within the workplace.

Chapter 5 examines why participants left the corporatized workplace from the scale of the individual. It makes visible the interpersonal conflicts and tensions that cause them to leave. It uses affect theory and four narratives to demonstrate the role slow wounding, moral injury, alienation, and trauma play in participants leaving their workplaces. I chose the four narratives because they illustrate different manifestations of these concepts—self-exploitation, the withdrawal of care, and personal values conflict.

In Chapter 6, I use affect, Marxist, feminist, and anthropological theory to examine the shift from the corporatized to what participants viewed as a positive change business. The chapter describes the shift as a journey and a rite of passage that moves the participants from alienation toward species being. The chapter is divided into four parts (i) the journey, which describes entering the liminal and how the journey is driven by curiosity; (ii) the liminal as a journey to “remembering myself” (hooks, 2009, p. 15) and includes encounters that open participants to possibilities, *communitas* as finding belonging, exploring “other possible worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii) and creating reparative stories; (iii) reintegration, which includes embracing a different way of being, and (vi) the challenge of shaking off the conditioning of the corporatized workplace.

I conclude the dissertation with Chapter 7, which consists of four parts: (i) a summary of the key findings, (ii) values and contributions of the research, including academic and practical applications, (iii) the limitation of the research, and finally, (iv) recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Why People Leave the Corporatized Workplace

“It [capitalism] expects the enthusiastic participation in a universal competition where it is impossible to win without fully and convincingly deploying all our energies.”

(Berardi, 2009, p. 91)

During the pandemic, there have been many stories about the mass exodus from the workplace and organisations wanting to know what they can do to retain their employees (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Dodge, 2021; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2021; RBC Economics, 2021; Tauag, 2021; Wilson, 2021). This desire to know why people leave is not a new interest to employers. They have a vested interest in retention because there is a significant cost incurred when employees leave (Ahmetoglu et al., 2021; Aladwan et al., 2013; De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2019; Trevor & Piyanontalee, 2020; Vardaman et al., 2015). Therefore, the topic has been studied extensively in Human Resource Management (HRM) literature. The culture of the workplace is a significant determinant of why people leave. Feminist economic geographers’ views on culture and identity also provide insight into why people may leave the corporatized workplace. Marx’s (2007) concept of the alienation that the capitalist system creates in workers also sheds light on why people could be driven to leave the corporatized workplace. Mechanisms of how to overcome alienation may inform why people would choose to start businesses they view as oriented to positive change when they leave.

The literature review in this chapter is divided into three parts, all of which provide context as to why people leave the corporatized workplace. I start with a review of the HRM literature about why people leave. I then examine feminist literature. In particular, how feminist economic geographers view culture and identity and compare it to the perspectives of the HRM literature. The final section of this chapter focuses on how the capitalist system creates suffering through alienation and how that alienation can be minimised. Each of these sections represents areas of research that I am contributing to the HRM literature on moral injury and why people leave, feminist economic geographers’ views of the corporatized workplace, the concepts of separation and alienation, and Marxist and feminist views of how to overcome alienation.

2.1 Why Do People Leave the Corporatized Workplace?

In this section, I examine how HRM scholars approach the question of why people leave. Why people leave the workplace is an important focus of HRM literature because there is a cost to organisations when people leave. According to Gallup, voluntary turnover costs US businesses one trillion dollars annually (McFeely & Wright, 2019). In Canada, replacing an employee who has voluntarily left costs from one-third to two times their annual salary (Randstad, 2023). There are costs for recruitment, replacement, and training someone new (Aladwan et al., 2013). When people leave, there can be disruptions to operations (Trevor & Piyanontalee, 2020) and customer relations (Aladwan et al., 2013), as well as a loss of organisational memory (Vardaman et al., 2015), social capital (Ahmetoglu et al., 2021; Aladwan et al., 2013), competitive advantage, and productivity (Ahmetoglu et al., 2021). Morale can be affected (Aladwan et al., 2013; Vardaman et al., 2015) when an employee leaves. The nature of the employee leaving can seriously impact that organisation. De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Talloen (2021) warn that losing women managers could negatively affect the social cohesion of the workplace. This is because during the pandemic, they “supported employee wellbeing” (p. 3) more than male managers. This suggests that there is some recognition of the value of care in the workplace, yet it is only recognised as women’s work. Workplace disruption can also occur when people with a healthy moral compass leave. It risks the ethical footing of the workplace, making it more difficult to attract morally motivated employees (Schaumberg & Flynn, 2019). What is missing from the analysis is the mental, emotional, and financial cost to the employees who leave, especially those who leave because of burnout.

HRM studies generally ask employees about their intentions to quit while still employed rather than doing research with people who have already left organisations. Research demonstrates there is very little correlation between intent to quit and leaving an organisation (Cohen et al., 2016; H.-F. Lee et al., 2019; Vardaman et al., 2015). Intent to quit may be a better indicator of psychological detachment from work than actual turnover (Boudrias et al., 2021; Burris et al., 2008). This psychological disengagement has been referred to as “quiet quitting” (Gallup, 2023, p. 4), where employees actively disengage from giving more of themselves to work than their job description requires (Benchetrit, 2022; Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Newport, 2022).

Early HRM research argues that an employee would stay with an organisation when the benefits they receive for their work equal or exceed the cost or effort they put into the work (Mitchell et al., 2001; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Job satisfaction became an important factor in measuring the intention to leave (Aladwan et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2018; Allisey et al., 2014; Haines III et al., 2018; Mitchell et al., 2001; Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Shalley et al., 2000; Tauag, 2021). Job satisfaction is a measure of *intrinsic factors*—a sense of accomplishment, feeling that their talents are being well used, knowing what is expected of them, understanding how their work fits into the organisational goals, and freedom to be creative—and *extrinsic factors*—behaviours of supervisors and organisational leaders—that motivate higher productivity from employees (Daley, 2017). Later studies also point to characteristics of leadership and supervision affecting retention (Boudrias et al., 2021; Breevaart et al., 2022; S. Kim et al., 2017; H.-F. Lee et al., 2019; Sepeng et al., 2020). According to Aydin Kucuk (2022), “loyalty, trust, respect, and affection” (p. 466) are important to the quality of these relationships. This suggests that care is important to job satisfaction.

Mitchell and Lee (2001) conclude that “job embeddedness” (p. 190) predicts both “intent to leave” (p. 194) and “voluntary turnover” (p. 191). Job embeddedness measures relational links between others in the organisation, the perception of an individual’s fit with the organisation, and what an individual would have to sacrifice if they were to leave (Mitchell et al., 2001). Vardaman et al. (2015) examine these links. They find that the more central an employee is within the relational web and the more advice-giving they provide, the more likely they are to stay in the workplace. It is interesting to note that though some of the HRM research that I reviewed on why people leave does look through the lens of gender and race, it does not directly consider power dynamics within the workplace. Vardaman et al. (2015) do refer to power, but it is in reference to the power that would be sacrificed by “centrally located” (p. 5) “advice-giving” (p. 5) employees should they choose to leave. This assumes that this “centrally located” (p. 5) “advice-giving” (p. 5) employee is driven by power when in fact, it could be care that drives that employee.

The culture of the workplace is an important element in employees choosing to stay and influences how valued or appreciated they feel in the workplace (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Derler et al., 2021; Dodge, 2021; S. Nelson & Duxbury, 2021; Wilson, 2021). What the HRM literature reveals about the specifics of why people intend to quit include things like

how well they are treated—economically, socially and psychologically (Rashid et al., 2018), how supportive the environment is (Allisey et al., 2014), and whether their voice is heard (Van Gramberg et al., 2019). The values of the organisation affect whether employees stay (Boudrias et al., 2021; Haines III et al., 2018; Schaumberg & Flynn, 2019; Walters et al., 2020). Things like family-friendly policies (Afzal & Azmi, 2021; De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021), how just the corporation is (Haines III et al., 2018; Huang et al., 2019; S. Kim et al., 2017), and whether the organisation embraces corporate social responsibility (Rashid et al., 2018; Walters et al., 2020) are important in retaining employees. A caring workplace is important to people's decisions to stay in the workplace.

The concept of *fit* becomes an important factor in people's intention to quit (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Kalleberg, 2008; Mitchell & Lee, 2001). Kalleberg (2008) describes fit as people's "needs, preferences, and abilities" (p. 24) matching the job requirements. Fit is not only about matching job requirements it is also about fitting into the work environment, and the culture of the organisation (Bui et al., 2017). How well a worker's values match those of the organisation is an important element of fit (Aydin Kucuk, 2022; Bretz & Judge, 1994). A good fit results in better work engagement, which benefits the employer and is less likely to cause an employee to burnout (Bui et al., 2017). Burnout, stress and emotional exhaustion all play a role in people's intention to quit (Breevaart et al., 2022; De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Derler et al., 2021; Dodge, 2021; Kalleberg, 2008; H.-F. Lee et al., 2019; Thorpe-Moscon et al., 2019; Wilson, 2021). There was no discussion of how trying to fit in affects the employee or how fit is defined by those in power who want to be surrounded by people like them (McDowell, 1997). Also, missing is the concept of *belonging*, which Brene Brown (2019) defines as being accepted for who you are. It is therefore not possible to reach that place of belonging without feeling some level of care.

There are demographic differences that affect people's intention to leave and actual turnover. Gender (Aladwan et al., 2013; Derler et al., 2021; S. Kim et al., 2017; RBC Economics, 2021; Stone, 2007; Wheeler, 2018), age (Aladwan et al., 2013; S. Nelson & Duxbury, 2021), family situation (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Talloen, 2021; RBC Economics, 2021), race (Ali et al., 2018; De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021; Nouri, 2016), ethnicity (Nouri, 2016),

education (Aladwan et al., 2013; Ali et al., 2018), and whether someone is a primary caregiver (S. Kim et al., 2017) play a significant role in people's intention to leave. The rate of growth of experienced professional women leaving their jobs in the US in the summer of 2021 was higher than that of men (Derler et al., 2021). Parents in the US were more likely to quit their jobs in 2021 than non-parents (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Talloen, 2021). In Canada, those between 40 and 60 years old were more likely to leave during the pandemic because they did not feel appreciated. When women are the primary breadwinner in the family, they are more likely to quit their jobs when faced with a family crisis than women who are not the primary breadwinner or men (R. Y. Kim, 2020). People of colour in Canada think about quitting because of the emotional tax—the effects of feeling different than others due to race, gender, ethnicity and the need to be on guard against discrimination—they pay in the workplace (Thorpe-Moscon et al., 2019). Nouri (2016) found that differences in gender, race, ethnicity, position within the firm's hierarchy, and area of specialisation made a difference in turnover rates in the Big Four accounting firms in the US. When examining the intent to leave among public procurement officers, Ali et al. (2018) found those with higher levels of education, those who were with the organisation for longer, those who were the primary earners for the family and those who were managers were less likely to want to leave. On the other hand, Black people were more likely to want to leave their jobs.

HRM research also suggests that shock plays a role in people's decision to leave (Holtom et al., 2005; Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Tauag, 2021). Shock can be a positive or negative event that sparks self-reflection about just how satisfied an employee is with their job. Mitchell and Lee (2001) define shock as “any expected or unexpected change to an ongoing social system that shakes an employee out of a steady state or challenges the status quo...” (p. 199). To me, shock is similar to Berlant's (2011) “event” (p. 5) where there is an encounter of some kind that creates a moment of interruption where the space of possibility—the potential for liveliness opens. Thrift (2003) refers to these events as “creative improvisation” (p. 103), where the routine of daily life is interrupted and there is the possibility for something new and different to be created. Tauang (2021) points to the pandemic as a shock that spurred many people simultaneously to rethink their job choice.

According to the HRM literature, in addition to an acceptable salary and benefits, people are looking for more care in the workplace. They want to feel valued by their manager and their organisation, a

sense of belonging, and a sense of work-life balance (De Smet, Dowling, Mugayar-Baldocchi, & Schaninger, 2021). The fact that corporate hierarchies are usually gendered and racialized, with white men normally inhabiting the top of the hierarchy (Acker, 2006), suggests that some people become more and more excluded as they move up the corporate ladder. Cormier (2007) supports this idea finding that the higher a woman moves up the hierarchy the more alone she may feel (Cormier, 2007; Kay & Shipman, 2018; Network of Executive Women, 2018). Watts (2009) describes the acute “otherness” (p. 4) that is experienced being the lone female in the highly masculinized culture of construction and the isolation that is felt not being accepted as an insider. Till (2019) cites a 1999 MIT study that finds senior women feel more excluded and have less of a voice than junior women, which leads to a sense of dissatisfaction. I would suggest that this sense of otherness from being the only one in the room is not limited to just women. The concept of the emotional tax (Thorpe-Moscon et al., 2019) supports extending this intensification of feeling excluded as people move up the workplace hierarchy to those of different races, genders, and ethnicities.

Moral injury or *moral distress* also drives employees from the workplace. The concept of *moral injury* has its origins on the battlefield but is now applied to workplace experiences. The Moral Injury Project (n.d.) defines moral injury as “The damage done to one’s consciousness or moral compass when that person perpetrates, witnesses, or fails to prevent acts that transgress one’s own moral beliefs, values, or ethical codes of conducts” (para 1). For something to be a moral injury, it requires (i) a betrayal of what is right, (ii) by one’s self or a person in authority, and (iii) a high-stakes situation (French et al., 2022; Phelps et al., 2021; Shay, 2014). Those betrayals can occur through actions or lack of actions (French et al., 2022). Moral injury shatters trust immediately and in the long term (French et al., 2022). Moral injury can cause people to think negatively “about themselves or others” (Greenberg et al., 2020, p. 1). Healthcare professionals refer to it as *moral distress* (Burston & Tuckett, 2013; Morley, 2018; Pauly et al., 2009; Prompahakul et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2021). The intensity and frequency of moral distress are related to the ethical climate of the workplace (Pauly et al., 2009). A culture that focuses excessively on the bottom line, efficiency (Pauly et al., 2009), productivity, performance measurements and record keeping (Prompahakul et al., 2021)—something the corporatized workplace is known for—contributes to moral distress. As does a lack of resources necessary to enable people to perform their work adequately. Moral injury and moral

distress are a product of hierarchical power structures (J. Anderson, 2021; Burston & Tuckett, 2013; French et al., 2022; Prompahakul et al., 2021; Shay, 2014). This sets up systemic forces that press against individuals, obstructing their abilities to do their jobs in alignment with their moral compass and professional ethics.

Anderson (2021) equates moral injury to trauma. Haines (2019) describes the cause of trauma as “an experience, series of experiences, and/or impacts from social conditions, that break or betray our inherent need for safety, belonging, and/or dignity” (p. 74). This very much aligns with the descriptions of moral injury and distress. Trauma and moral injury both involve events that cause betrayal and/or impacts from social conditions. The hierarchical power structures of the corporatized workplace and its relentless focus on efficiency and measurement are social conditions that press against an individual, constraining their ability to work in accordance with professional and personal ethics. Like trauma, the effects of moral injury can be devastating (J. Anderson, 2021; French et al., 2022; Greenberg et al., 2020). According to Phelps et al. (2021), moral injury can result in post-traumatic stress disorder. Jarl Anderson (2021) refers to it as trauma or a “soul wound” (p. 5). Others have referred to moral injury as an “injury to the soul” (Hodgson & Carey, 2017, p. 1213) and “a wound in the soul” (Brock & Lettini, 2011, p. 1).

According to Duran (2019), the term “soul wound” (p. 10) originates from Indigenous people and refers to the collective wounding from intergenerational and racialized trauma caused by colonialism. Ahenakew (2019) refers to it as separation from nature and from each other arising from colonization. This sense of separation corresponds to Marx’s definition of alienation, which is caused by the capitalist system. The value system of capitalism drove colonialism. I see parallels between “soul wound” (Anderson, 2021, p. 5) and bell hooks’ (2009) use of “a breaking down of the spirit” (p. 15). hooks describes “a breaking down of the spirit” (p. 15) as the damage that occurred as a result of the internal split and the sense of not belonging she felt when living away from the place she belonged—the “backwoods of Kentucky” (p. 15). There hooks felt connected to the land, her people, and her culture. Moving away left her feeling alienated from those roots. The values (honesty and integrity) and beliefs that formed her foundation in childhood were contrary to those of the places she found herself living. The value clash hooks experienced by being uprooted from her Kentucky home caused her moral injury. Moral injury can result in severe anguish and a loss of one’s sense of self (J.

Anderson, 2021), which Marxists refer to as alienation and trauma specialists would identify as the consequences of trauma (J. Anderson, 2021; Haines, 2019; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022; van der Kolk, 2014).

The HRM literature points to a variety of possible reasons that people leave. For the most part, it examines the intent to leave, which does not necessarily translate into actual leaving. Cohen (2016) claims managers focus on turnover rates rather than the causes of turnover. This suggests that HRM literature is not practically applied because of the counting culture of the corporatized workplace. HRM research focuses on the costs of voluntary turnover to the organisation but neglects the costs to individuals who are leaving because of moral distress. Though it does obliquely refer to the effect of power through things like gender and race, the literature fails to directly address how the power dynamics within the corporatized workplace may affect people's decision to leave the workplace. The possible loss of power is recognised as a potential reason to stay in the workplace. An employee's orientation to care is not considered a factor in their decision to leave. The value of care to the corporatized workplace is touched upon in a limited and gendered way. Its value to the workplace as a moral orientation is not presented. Though fit is identified as an important factor in retention, the idea of belonging, and accepting people for who they are is not addressed by the HRM literature that I read. The focus of HRM is on the organisation not on the individual.

2.2 Culture of the Corporatized Workplace

To understand why people leave the corporatized workplace, it is important to understand its culture. Table 1 compares how HRM literature and feminist economic geographers conceptualize corporatized organisations. The HRM literature views culture as defining "who we are" (Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 24), "what we do" (p. 24), and "how we do things" (p. 30). Feminist economic geographers take a fuller view of culture and its messiness (Cockayne, 2018; S. Lee, 2018, 2019; McDowell, 1997, 2004; Schoenberger, 1997). They dive deeper by asking the question, why do we do what we do? (M. Rose, 2021). Schoenberger (1997) examines culture by asking: "what [do] we do under what social and historic circumstances? how [do] we think about or understand what we do? and how [do] we think about ourselves in that context?" (p.120). It is their willingness to dive more deeply into the messiness and dynamics of culture that informs my research. They look at what produces culture,

what culture produces, and why. Rather than looking at how culture benefits talent acquisition, employee engagement, and performance; feminist economic geographers look at the unintended consequences of culture through the lens of power, identity, and social relations. They see the dysfunction and want to understand why it happens. Schoenberger (1994, 1997, 2001) discovered that an individual's identity and what they are committed to—power, social and financial capital, benefits that a workplace provides them, a way of thinking, a strategy, and relationships they believe in—can stymie change. What people are committed to can result in decisions that personally benefit the individual but put the company they work for at risk. The view of feminist economics geographers has given me a new lens to make sense of the corporatized workplace.

Table 1*How Culture is Conceptualized by HRM and Feminist Economic Geographers*

	Management Literature	Feminist economic geographers
Culture is...	• Assumptions developed by people solving problems together (Schein, 2010, p. 18) • Assumptions that are “good enough” to guide future members on how to “perceive, think, and feel when addressing problems” (Schein, 2010, p. 18) • Creates identity—“Who we are” and “what we do” (Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 24) • What we do and how we do it (Giorgi et al., 2015; Schoenberger, 1997) • “Behavioral norms, standards and customs”(Schoenberger, 1997, p. 116) • “Rules of the game” (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 116) • Unites people to ensure effective operations (Schoenberger, 1997)	• Broader and messier view (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 119) • “What we do and under what social and historical circumstances” (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 120) • “How we think about or understand what we do?” (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 120) • “How we think about ourselves in that context?” (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 120) • Why we do what we do (M. Rose, 2021) • “The combination or sum of those people [in your workplace]” (Cockayne, 2018, p. 764)* • “Norms and things” (Cockayne, 2018, p. 764)* • “Silent agreements” (Cockayne, 2018, p. 764)* • The “unsaid” (Cockayne, 2018)*
The emergence of culture...	• Culture emerges from the identity of the leaders (Giorgi et al., 2015) • Is manufactured by management (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Fox, 2016; Giorgi et al., 2015; Schein, 2010) • Different professions have their own culture (Giorgi et al., 2015, Schoenberger, 1997)	• There is not just one monolithic culture (McDowell, 1997; Schoenberger, 1997) • Different work units and profession have their own cultures (McDowell, 1997; Schoenberger, 1997) • Those sub-cultures can be hierarchical, conflictual, and result in competition and power struggles (McDowell, 1997; Schoenberger, 1997)

	Management Literature	Feminist economic geographers
What shapes culture...	• Organisational identity shapes culture, and culture shapes identity (Giorgi et al., 2015) • The values that drive action (Giorgi et al., 2015) • The stories that are told that create identity, make meaning, and provide vision (Giorgi et al., 2015) • Framework that defines what the focus should be on (Giorgi et al., 2015) • Categorizing people, things, and ways of doing things to “define and structure distinctions” (Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 17) within an organisation • A toolkit “of stories, frames, categories, rituals, and practice” ” (Giorgi et al., 2015, p. 6) designed to create meaning and action	• Culture creates “practices, social relations and ways of thinking” and is also a product of those things (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 120) • Corporate strategy informs corporate culture, which then informs corporate strategy (Schoenberger, 1997) • Corporate culture is interconnected with managers identities and emotional commitment (Schoenberger, 1997) • Creates a way of life (Schoenberger, 1997, p. 121)
Culture drives...	• Performance and achievement of strategic goals (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Chow & Liu, 2009; Fox, 2016) • Attracts talent (Kontoghiorghes, 2016) and affects employee commitment (S. Taylor et al., 2008)	• Attachment to irrational strategies that risk the survival of the firm (Schoenberger, 1997) • Which are executed through an interplay of power, material practices, social relationships and thinking (Schoenberger, 1997)
Cultural change...	• Cultural change is slow (Schoenberger, 1997) • Cultural change involves creating new values, stories, frameworks, and categories (Schoenberger, 1997)	• Culture is in a constant state of becoming (Schoenberger, 1997)

Management Literature	Feminist economic geographers
	• Cultural change is a struggle over power (Schoenberger, 1997)

* Quotes from research participants about workplace culture

There is a stated culture and a lived culture in the workplace. The *stated culture* is defined by the published mission, vision, and values of the workplace (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016). It includes the stories, categories, frameworks, rituals, and practices established by the workplace (Giorgi et al., 2015). What the HRM literature refers to as the *lived culture* or *actual culture* (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016) is what Ahmed (2012) refers to as *institutional habits* (p. 102)—the routine embodied action that can become unconscious and obstruct change. The lived culture are the unwritten rules of the workplace (Sabattini & Dinolfo, 2010) or the “unspoken” (Gilligan, 2011, p. 15). It can be as simple as a look that signals the inappropriateness of a behaviour (hooks, 2004b). The stated culture can be aspirational (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016), providing a vision for moving forward (Bolman & Deal, 2008). It could be better labelled as the *marketed culture* used to entice employees, potential employees, and customers and to generate political and community support. BHP Billiton provides example of how culture is marketed (Pini et al., 2010). When siting a mine, BHP Billiton marketed their culture to get the community and politicians on board and entice employees to feel part of something good (Pini et al., 2010). Yet that marketed culture was immediately rescinded when BHP decided to pull out of the community shortly after opening the mine. Therefore, the *marketed culture* can be applied in certain situations and not others.

Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) would refer to the lived culture as *the field*. The field is like a game without “explicit and codified” (p. 98) rules. So, to understand the field is to understand its relationality and I would suggest also to perceive the sometimes subtle signals that enforce the norms of the field. According to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), if a person is playing the game, they are consenting that the game is worth playing. People play the game to preserve or grow their capital—social, economic, and cultural. What Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992) refer to as the field, Missildine (2007) labels *the game*. *The game*, according to Missildine, is about “making it” (p. 138) and it generates competition with those who play it. The sole rule of the game is: “Don’t take it personally” (p. 130). Those who are successful at the game surrender themselves to the bottom line, separate themselves from the role(s) they play at work, and personify the stated values while understanding it is only performance (Missildine, 2007). The incongruency between the stated culture and the lived culture could create confusion, cognitive dissonance, and disillusionment for employees (Cha & Edmondson, 2006) who don’t know the rules of the game or who live the *stated culture*. This incongruency is the subject of Chapter 4.

Workplace culture and, therefore its game has its roots in the economic concept of *homo economicus*—the economic man (Hayter & Patchell, 2016). The ideal worker is still perceived to personify *homo economicus*—a man with no responsibility, no family (Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Stone, 2007; Thomas et al., 2019), total independence, and “no childhood or old age” (J. Nelson, 1992, p. 115). For the most part, the “somatic norm” (Amis et al., 2020, p. 198) of a worker is “white, middle class and male” (p. 198). Melinda Gates acknowledges the masculine norms of the workplace by saying, “We are sending our daughters to workplaces designed for our fathers” (Network of Executive Women, 2018, p. 8). McDowell (2001) describes the workplace as being built from traditionally masculine values. These values are based on competition, individualism, and rationality (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 2004; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997; Webster & Boyd, 2019). Berdahl et al. (2018) add aggression, ambition and strength to the list. Schwartz (2012) would label these values as focused on self-enhancement and rooted in power and achievement. He contends that the purpose of disseminating values is “to develop commitment to positive relations, identification with the group, and loyalty to its members” (p. 15). The focus of the corporatized workplace is productivity, efficiency, and continual improvement (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Lawson, 2007; Mountz et al., 2015), where overwork and speed are revered, and the emotional and affective are disregarded (Berg & Seeber, 2016).

Berdahl et al. (2018) see the game as a masculinity contest where both men and women compete for dominance in the workplace. Though she does not refer to it as a game—as I do and as I discuss further in Chapter 4—I interpret hooks’ (2004b) description of the making of masculinity as describing the masculinity contests of the game and its tactics in a corporate setting. hooks (2004b) describes the making of masculinity as a promise of domination. It is opportunistic, with the goal being to get ahead (hooks, 2004b), and there is the belief that getting ahead is done at the expense of others (Swain, 2012). According to hooks (2004b), playing the game is supposed to be fulfilling but people are left isolated and alienated before they discover it is not. To get ahead, an array of “psychological terrorism and violence” (p. 18) tactics are deployed—shaming, demeaning, taunting, teasing, humiliating, threatening, withdrawing, competing, and engaging in power struggles. The purpose of those tactics is to undermine and demolish “the inner self of another” (p. 57). hooks (2004b) reminds us that women can be proficient players of the game. Those that play risk “losing in

terms of their substantive life” (p.72). To play the game means changing yourself (Worth, 2016b) and disassociating from your authentic and emotional self (Bartos & Ives, 2019) to meet the norms of the workplace.

Some workplaces and masculinities do not conform to these masculine norms. Warren (2016) describes the men who work in the male-dominated surfboard industry as displaying both “blokey” (p. 44) masculinities and passion, love, and soulfulness as they shape boards and connect with customers. McDowell (2001) uncovers the feelings of love between men in corporate finance—more senior men creating father-son relationships with their juniors and the fraternal type of love that men in the same positions have for each other. The action research of Gibson-Graham (2006) also steps out of the masculine norms and embraces feminist ethics of care to create alternative economies and workplaces with communities.

To Ahmed (2012), culture is about “who takes up space” (p. 123), who is comfortable in the space, what conversations take place, and “who is habitual” (p. 123) in the space. I see this as another way of saying who is a fit for the space. Who is habitual in the space is dictated by the identity norms that are embedded within the unwritten (behaviours and beliefs) and written (policies and procedures) rules of the workplace (Ey et al., 2017). The rules establish the boundaries within, which fit is secured. In the corporatized workplace fit and habitual are an embodiment of the masculine norms rooted in the concept of homo economicus. Those rules include norms of behaviour that dictate what emotions are acceptable to be expressed, what Arlie Hochschild refers to as “feeling rules” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 59). Those rules are gendered and racialized (Ahmed, 2012, 2014; Gilligan, 2011; hooks, 2004b). Feeling rules are about commodifying emotions (Hochschild, 1983) and they limit subjectivities in the workplace (Gregg, 2009). According to Hochschild (1983), feeling rules are part of building the illusion of corporatized culture. It takes “emotional labour” (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7) to manage or suppress authentic emotions to perform the appropriate emotion for the workplace. The consequence of which is a separation of an individual from their authentic self, which can result in cynicism and the inability to listen to their own emotions (Hochschild, 1983). The HRM literature labels this separation from authentic emotions as “emotional dissonance” (2014, p. 2531). Not fitting in therefore requires emotional labour. It causes pain (G. Rose, 1993) and discomfort (Ahmed, 2012), and I would add stress and possible burnout.

Masculine norms dictate who and what gets rewarded, how people are treated, and how work-life balance is viewed (Berdahl et al., 2018). Masculine norms are perpetuated by rewarding “survival of the fittest competitions” (Ely & Kimmel, 2018, p. 629). Competition is about proving value and worth (hooks, 2004b). Those who reward the competition are rewarding those who play the game well and will perpetuate the game and the culture. According to Ely and Kimmel (2018), this type of competitive workplace culture negatively affects both men and women and causes men who are actively engaged in contests of masculinity to feel insecure and threatened. Joronen and Rose (2021) point to vulnerability as the source of power and that the accumulation of power can never resolve that feeling of insecurity. Other survival games are played in the workplace, like Bartleby’s “I would prefer not to” (Han, 2015, p. 25; Ngai, 2005, p. 1), being reduced to the bare life of the *homines sacri*⁵ or the undead (Han, 2015), quiet quitting (Benchetrit, 2022; Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Newport, 2022), or mastering snark⁶ to survive the drudgery of the office whose only rule is don’t offend anyone (Gregg, 2009).

The dominant groups—those aligned with power and those who are “habitual” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 123)—define fit and choose who fits and who does not (Valentine, 2007). Employees are hired, developed and promoted to meet the cultural norm of the organisation (Amis et al., 2020; Cockayne, 2018; Hanson & Pratt, 2003; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Network of Executive Women, 2018; G. Rose, 1993; Winders & Smith, 2019). Those (regardless of gender) doing the hiring, developing, and promoting do the work to reproduce the existing norms of the organisation by ensuring each employee fits the cultural dynamics of the workplace (Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Cockayne, 2018; Kay & Shipman, 2018; Sandberg, 2013). The norms are, also, enforced by colleagues (Gregg, 2009)

⁵ *Homines sacri* – is defined by Han (2015) as someone “stripped of all transcendent value” (p. 51). In other words, the walking dead. Topolski (2015) describes the cause of the undead as the destruction of individuality, plurality, and uniqueness.

⁶ Melissa Gregg (2009) demonstrates how the corporate culture reflects the broader culture of society today. Superficial friendship is an automatic expectation when arriving in the workplace. Employees perform identities through the electronic, written word. Language or literacy is the hegemonic currency, and employees judge each other's skills. There is an undercurrent of passive aggressiveness because there is a lack of ability or will to communicate face-to-face. Online forums have become a place of real support and friendship where employees air grievances. Snark is the instrument of choice. "Snark is best understood as a less than fortunate side effect of the copious ways the contemporary workplace relies on simulations of affect to maintain the bonds of capitalist enterprise" (p. 253).

and superiors (Cockayne, 2018). McDowell (2001) demonstrates how senior men in the banking industry are willing to mentor young men who are like them in the implicit rules of behaviours of the workplace. Amis et al. (2020) provide an example of how experienced board members reproduce norms by being more likely to share the expected behaviours with white male newcomers than with women and racial minorities. According to Bryant and Jaworski (2011), those whose behaviour or identities do not align with the norms are labelled an outsider and excluded. Ahmed (2014) labels them killjoys—the one who thwarts others’ happiness. Not being able to fit in creates discomfort and requires the misfit to do the work necessary to not only make themselves comfortable but also others in the workplace feel comfortable with their difference (Ahmed, 2014; Baker & Cangemi, 2016). Worth (2016b) demonstrates the effort millennial women take to adapt themselves to meet workplace norms.

Popular books are full of strategies instructing women on how to fit the culture of the corporatized world and find success (Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Kay & Shipman, 2018; Sandberg, 2013), which suggest that women are the problem and not the workplace. Adamson and Kelan (2018) encapsulate these strategies as *confidence*, where women are asked to fake it until you make it, *courage* to push through systemic barriers by overcoming personal ones, and *control* over self by walking the thin line between too emotional and too cold (Gill & Orgad, 2015). Ultimately, the way to success in the corporatized workplace is by “exercising (hyper)agency, making the right personal choices, working hard on self-discipline and taking full responsibility for succeeding or failing” (Adamson & Kelan, 2018, p. 12) rather than by just being yourself. According to Cormier (2007), these types of self-adjustment drive women out of organisations. There is almost no discussion in these books of the systemic change that is necessary to create equitable workplaces where people feel a sense of inclusion and belonging.

To challenge the norms or to speak out against the dominant culture is to refuse to “just get along” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 50) and risks being seen as the source of the problem (Ahmed, 2012; 2017), to be seen as an “affect alien” (Ahmed, 2010a, p.39; 2017, p. 68). To actively work to shift the dominant culture is to push up against “institutional habits” (p. 102)—the routine embodied actions—and “institutional will” (p. 26)—what the organisation is willing to do (Ahmed, 2012). According to Ahmed (2012), challenging the dominant culture is moving against the wave of how things are done,

and it can feel like pushing up against a brick wall. That wall is invisible to those who embody the norms because they live their best lives surfing the wave (Ahmed, 2012). To move against the wave of “institutional will” (p. 26), habits, and norms is to be wounded, exhausted, and potentially drowned by the habitual flow of the lived culture and games. Doreen Massey was an *affect alien* who pushed against the masculine norms of the geography academy. Her disbelief, frustration, and anger were palpable in her writing (Massey, 1991; 1993). Massey directed those strong emotions at members of geography’s dominant culture because of their inability to see what from her standpoint was blatantly clear, and their resistance to listening and hearing another’s perspective.

The workplace has a role in constructing identities (Ey et al., 2017; Lee, 2018; McDowell, 1997, Schoenberger, 1997). Identities are fluid, complex, relational, and situational (G. Rose, 1993; Valentine, 2007). Self-categorisation theory sees identity as a way of navigating through situations and adjusting self to the norms of encountered spaces (Liu, 2008). This results in the more unique identities of the individual being suppressed (Liu, 2008). Identities are performative (Gregg, 2009; G. Rose, 1997). Emotions are integral to their emergence and performance (Curti et al., 2011; Ey et al., 2017, Gregg, 2009). They are shaped through power relations and assessing our differences by comparing ourselves to others (G. Rose, 1993). In the workplace, identity is a continual process of negotiation (Worth, 2016a). The employer can impose identities on a group. For example, through stories, the Australian extractive industry imposed the identity of “independent, resourceful and strong” on “mining women” (Ey et al., 2017, p. 161).

Schoenberger (1997) discovered just how entangled the identities of senior managers are with the identity of the corporation. Each shapes the other. The corporation bestows on senior managers the privileges of a capitalist—high income and status, the ability to control and manage capital, and the “authority to risk the existence of the firm” (p. 140). It allows corporate leaders to use its capital to support their power through educational, social, and cultural capital. They have the power over others in the workplace, the power to imagine and implement their visions of the way things should be (Schoenberger, 1994, 1997, 2001). Their commitment to their own identity and the power the corporation bestows on them is intertwined with who the corporation is and how things are done there (Schoenberger, 1997). Changing the culture or identity of the firm risks the destruction of leaders’ identities (Schoenberger, 1994, 1997). Attempts to shift the identity of the corporation are attempts to

shift the identities of the senior managers. This threatens the managers' sense of self (Schoenberger, 1997). It also leads to stuckness caused by blindness that prevents them from seeing external threats to the survival of the firm (Schoenberger, 1997). Ahmed (2012) defines stuckness as “an expression of what an organization has already committed to” (p. 128). That commitment is embodied in what senior managers are already committed to—the honorary benefits of being an ex officio capitalist and being associated with a company that creates things those senior leaders love (Schoenberger, 1997).

The corporatized workplace is messy. Culture is an entanglement that creates and dismantles identities, divisions and categorises, bestows power to some, and creates an illusion. Some aspects of culture are clearly stated and other aspects bubble below the surface and are manifested in the subtlety of the unwritten and unseen. There is an enormous pressure to fit yet deciding to fit can mean giving up parts of yourself and that leads to a sense of separation and alienation.

2.3 Separation and Alienation

Capitalism's goal is value extraction. To do that it creates an artificial world that appears to be natural to those embedded within it because its processes are viewed as natural, universal and unchanging rather than socially constructed (Gibson-Graham, 1993; Swain, 2012). Gibson-Graham (1993) declare capitalism as “a fantasy of wholeness” (p. 19). It is built on separation (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Decolonial Futures Collective, 2020; Federici, 2004, 2018; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gilligan, 2011; Hochschild, 1983; Massey, 1992; McDowell, 1993, 2000, 2004, 2016), categorisation, (Acker, 2006; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Hanson & Pratt, 2003; S. Lee, 2019; McDowell, 2000, 2016) and alienation (Ahenakew, 2019; Ahmed, 2010b; Berardi, 2009; Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Chödrön, 2016; Han, 2015; Harvey, 2018; Horgan, 2021; Kahane, 2010; Marx, 2007 [1844]; Roviello & Temerson, 2007; Swain, 2012). Ahenakew (2019) would see the capitalist system as an illusion that further intensifies that feeling of alienation and separation. It does that by preventing people from seeing their intrinsic worth, co-opting them into artificial systems of belonging and meaning, and preventing them from seeing and taking responsibility for their interrelatedness.

That separation, categorisation and alienation originate from the violence and force from which capitalism emerged (Ahenakew, 2019; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2004, 2018; Ghosh,

2021; Horgan, 2021; King, 2019; Marx, 1976 [1867]; Menakem, 2017; Regan, 2010). Marx (1976 [1867]) described this violence as “blood and fire” (p. 875) and “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (p. 926). Capitalism extracts value from people, curtailing their freedom while masquerading as a way to self-fulfilment (Horgan, 2021; Marx, 1976 [1867], 2007; Swain, 2012). It is exploitative and has facilitated the establishment of a “social, cultural, and economic power” (Bonds & Inwood, 2016, p. 717) structure that places white European men at the top of the hierarchy and subjugates all others to varying degrees (Bonds & Inwood, 20016). Capitalism owes its establishment and continued success to enslaved labour and the expropriation of land and resources from Indigenous people, as well as their violent displacement and attempted annihilation (Ahenakew, 2019; Bonds & Inwood, 2016; Ghosh, 2021; King, 2019; Menakem, 2017; Regan, 2010). As a result, the capitalist system has been built on a system of white supremacy that remains today (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). One based on perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, valuing the written word, paternalism, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress, objectivity, and a right to comfort (Jones & Okan, 2001). It has people see each other through different classifications, creating artificial divides that stoke competition, hijack their energy and attention and prevent them from changing the system (Swain, 2012). According to Berardi (2009), capitalism presumes workers will fervently engage all their energies in trying to win the competition.

Alienation can be seen as a loss of self, an othering of self, or as self “becoming thing” (Berardi, 2009, p. 108). Marx (2007 [1844]) sees alienation as a capitalist process where the worker is alienated from the *means of production*—denying their self-expression through their labour (Swain, 2012); *from the product*— “The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object.” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 166; Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 70); *from others*—through competition and manufactured divides (Swain, 2012) or “individualisation and categorisation” (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020, p. 32); *from themselves*—the needs of production being privileged over those of the worker (Swain, 2012); and *from nature*—the destruction of the reciprocal relationship between humans and nature (Swain, 2012), which eliminates the intrinsic value of life (Decolonial Futures Collective, 2020). Horgan (2021) sees it as a process of denaturalisation. Arendt points to *world alienation* rather than alienation from self as pivotal to the issues of modernity (Topolski,

2015). She defines it as a feeling of not belonging and of rootlessness. Ahenakew (2019) calls this separation a “collective soul wound” (p. 15). To Harvey (2018), it’s “universal alienation” (p. 137). I build on these ideas around the concept of alienation in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation.

“The soul at work” (Berardi, 2009, p. 3) is another form of alienation. Berardi (2009) describes it as people going above and beyond at work, working overtime without compensation, and being constantly shackled to their work by technology. Han (2015) refers to this overproducer as an “achievement-subject” (p. 46). An achievement-subject is driven by a “yes we can” (p. 8) attitude, which leads to a lack of sovereignty and constant self-exploitation. Gabor Maté (2022) would refer to this drive to achieve as a possible trauma response (p. 26). This overachievement can appear as a choice (Han, 2015; Horgan, 2021) but is rooted in pressure. The pressure to work faster, more efficiently, harder, constantly improve, count, track, and monitor. All that is deemed important to the bottom line (Horgan, 2021; Mountz et al., 2015). The outcome is burnout (Han, 2015) or “snap” (Horgan, 2021, p. 137). Snap is a term borrowed from Sara Ahmed (2017) where, in an instant, there is a realisation that “she just can’t take it anymore” (p. 190), which results in severing from the source of the wounding. There is a turning towards something new (Horgan, 2021). Chapters 4 and 5 examine the causes of snap and burnout.

Historically, HRM literature points to workplaces “as a major source of alienation” (Frost, 1980, p. 501). It also sees alienation as an important focus in 21st-century workplaces (Conway et al., 2020; Shantz et al., 2014; Soffia et al., 2022). Alienation is being separated from your “true nature” (Frost, 1980, p. 501), relinquishing self-expression and control over your work, and preventing self-realisation (O’Donohue & Nelson, 2014). It is caused by a mismatch between the expectations and needs of the employee and their job (Xia et al., 2022). It results in people feeling like they have no sense of control, fulfilment, belonging, or identity (O’Donohue & Nelson, 2014). Since alienation involves the conflict between an employee’s desire for freedom and the organisation desire for control, O’Donohue and Nelson (2014) recommend that both the individual and the systemic need to be considered to manage alienation in the workplace. Alienation emerges when an individual’s needs—for security, belonging, connection, self-esteem, autonomy, personal growth, fulfilment, and self-worth—are not met (Efraty et al., 1991; Shantz et al., 2014). It is affected by workplace structures like control mechanism, technology, and organisation (Shantz et al., 2014), the ability of an

employee to influence workplace decisions and progress ideas (Conway et al., 2020; Shantz et al., 2014), the quality of social relationships (Conway et al., 2020; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Soffia et al., 2022) and a sense of reciprocity in those relationships (Xia et al., 2022), job mobility (Guo et al., 2022), an employee's perception of how just the workplace is (Durrah, 2020) and whether an employee feels overloaded by their responsibilities and workload (Conway et al., 2020).

Managers play a role in alienation (Conway et al., 2020; O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Soffia et al., 2022). Without supportive, trusting, and respectful leadership, employees risk feeling alienated (Conway et al., 2020; Shantz et al., 2014; Soffia et al., 2022). A sense of meaningfulness is important to ensure against alienation (O'Donohue & Nelson, 2014; Shantz et al., 2014; Soffia et al., 2022; Xia et al., 2022). According to Bailey & Madden (2016), managers and leaders can shatter an employee's sense of meaningfulness when they: "disconnect people from their values" (para. 2), "take employees for granted" (para 3), "give people pointless work to do" (para 4), "treat people unfairly" (para 5), "override people's better judgement" (para 6), "disconnect people from supportive relationships" (para 7), and put "people at risk of physical or emotional harm" (para 8).

Alienation causes suffering (Ahmed, 2010b; Marx, 2007 [1844]; Swain, 2012) by stifling a worker's freedom to develop mentally, physically, and spiritually (Marx, 2007 [1844]). I examine how the corporatized workplace creates suffering in Chapters 4 and 5. To Buddhist monk and teacher Pema Chödrön (2016) alienation evokes heartache. Alienation causes anger, frustration (Berardi, 2009; Harvey, 2018; Horgan, 2021), resentment (Harvey, 2018), anguish (Berardi, 2009) and exhaustion (Han, 2015; Horgan, 2021). Being alienated from others results in "sadness, terror, and pain" (Kahane, 2010, p. 26), distrust, back-stabbing (Roviello & Temerson, 2007), and rage (Swain, 2012). For some, work is repetitive and uninspiring, and boredom creeps in (Horgan, 2021). The inability to self-realise ultimately leads to depression (Han, 2015; Swain, 2012) or melancholia (Ahmed, 2010b; Han, 2015). Separation from nature and others intensifies the sense of artificial divisions and leads to the denial of the responsibilities that come with interconnectedness and reciprocity (Ahenakew, 2019). The HRM literature recognises the suffering caused by alienation and describes it as emotional exhaustion or burnout (Guo et al., 2022; Shantz et al., 2014), and suppressed wellbeing (Conway et al., 2020; Shantz et al., 2014). It causes decreased self-esteem, long-term sick leave, and depression (Dong et al., 2022) and can manifest as disengagement, disconnection, disillusionment (Conway et

al., 2020), employee silence (Dong et al., 2022), and knowledge hiding (Guo et al., 2022). HRM's interest in alienation relates to employee and organisational performance, retention, and the cost involved with its effects.

The capitalist system drives people to harmful actions (Horgan, 2021). Capitalism normalises that harm and dismisses it as “that is how the world is” (Hübl & Maté, online event, July 30, 2021). Trauma specialist Thomas Hübl revises that missive to say, “That is the way the world is when it is in pain” (Hübl & Maté, online event, July 30, 2021). To Joronen and Rose (2021), that is the “woundedness of living” (p. 1404). It creates an existential feeling of vulnerability and precarity. That vulnerability immobilises, depletes and limits agency (Joronen & Rose, 2021). Trauma specialist Gabor Maté (2022) describes trauma as a shattering of self and connection to the world. According to Peter Levine (2022), that loss can happen slowly, making it difficult to notice. The definition of trauma corresponds to the definition of alienation because both trauma and alienation involve the separation or alienation from self, others, and the world (Marx, 2007 [1844]; Maté & Maté, 2022). Joronen (2021) would describe the harmful actions as slow wounding caused by “mundane and unspectacular forms of violence” (p. 996). In Chapter 5, I use Ahmed's (2014) view that emotions are surfaces that delineate the individual from the social to examine how the social pressing against the individual can cause this slow wounding.

It is possible to overcome alienation. To understand how to overcome alienation, it is important to understand the concept of *species being*. Marx (2007 [1844]) defines species being as a state of being when people are in control of their own labour, their own means of production, directly benefit from the work all of which contributes to their aliveness. It is a conscious being who is free to create the world in a way that life creates life (Marx, 2007 [1844]). It is a state of being that predates the capitalist system. He does not provide a pathway back to species being but does map a route out of alienation through a different way to organise labour (Swain, 2012). Gibson-Graham (2006) said that it was about seeing the economy differently and taking a relational approach, a caring approach to creating and growing alternative economies. They flattened or eliminated power structures, something Horgan (2021) sees as a way of giving workers more control over their work. They created an affective atmosphere of love, connection, curiosity, and playfulness, which promoted listening, reciprocity, and creativity. Slowing things down, shifting from quantity to quality and choosing

effectiveness over efficiency (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Mountz et al., 2015) have also been proposed as ways of shifting the system that causes alienation. Swain (2012) suggests bringing meaning back into work, so it no longer feels hostile. Feminist geographers (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015; Webster & Boyd, 2019) choose to work in the margins and create paradoxical spaces (Bondi & Davidson, 2005; hooks, 2004a; G. Rose, 1993)—space located within yet in resistance and contradiction to a larger more dominant space. According to hooks (2004a), they are spaces of “radical openness and possibilities” (p. 159). They create spaces of friendship, love, collaboration, nurturing and support to counter the corporatized culture of universities (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015; Webster & Boyd, 2019).

Species being is a concept introduced in Marx’s early writings and abandoned in later works. Philosopher Eugene Kamenka claims he turned “viciously” (Santilli, 1973, p. 80) from it because it was not seen through the lens of class (Santilli, 1973). Dyer-Witheford (2004) contends that Marx set it aside because it was impossible to manifest species being in his time. It required collective consciousness to evolve before the concept could be embraced. Swain (2012) points to the fact that economics became Marx’s interest, which took him from the concept of species being. As indicated previously, the literature is critical of species being for its essentialism, idealism (Roelvink, 2013; Swain, 2012), perfectionism (Harvey, 2018) and human-centredness (Roelvink, 2013). Like Chatterjee (2022) and Roelvink (2013), my research supports the relevance of *species being* today. It demonstrates that species being emerges by healing the woundings inflicted by the corporatized workplace. Then, participants enter a constant refinement of their species being by the co-creation between self and business.

Organisations are being reinvented. Coralus, an organisation that funds companies that are focused on the United Nations sustainable development goals, sees their economic system as modelling the ecosystem. It is based on sharing resources and nurturing radical generosity, trust, reciprocity, and mutual support (*We Are Coralus*, n.d.). Laloux (2016) introduced the concept of *teal or evolutionary organisations*. Those organisations also, view themselves as a living ecosystem. They are based on the idea of self-management, wholeness, and evolutionary purpose. Through self-management, they create a fluid and responsive system that distributes power. They apply structures and practices that allow people to drop professional masks and invites them to bring their whole self to work, rather

than “predict-and-control” (p. 116) the future, the organisations “sense-and-respond” (p. 116) their way into the future.

bell hooks (2004b) has created a pathway to shift from the “false self” (p. 154) imposed by masculine cultures to the true self. It starts with mourning that “old self” (p. 162), which involves being willing to come back to the body and feel the pain, to become vulnerable and speak the pain into spaces willing to hear it. To seek wholeness through integrity, self-love, emotional awareness, and mutual connection. Accept love and affirmation rather than doing and performing to feel valued. Seek strength from being responsible for yourself and others. Choose trust, love, generosity and playfulness (hooks, 2004b). In Chapter 6, I use this literature to interpret the movement of participants from the corporatized workplace to the businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change.

2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reviewed HRM literature, which focuses on the employer’s need to understand why people leave the corporatized workplace. I then turned to feminist literature, particularly feminist economic geographers, and contrasted their ideas of culture with those of HRM literature. Feminist literature, though not always directly addressing my research question around circumstances of leaving the workplace, has a unique worker-centred perspective on workplace culture and identities that inform my research. In the final section, I looked at research related to alienation, specifically Marx’s view of worker alienation, which speaks to how the capitalist system has created a way of life that alienates workers from their work, themselves, others, and the natural world. This provides a helpful lens through which to view my research. I also examined how the HRM literature views alienation and discusses road maps to overcome alienation. This chapter set the stage for an examination of the systemic structures and power relations (Chapter 4) and the factors that press against the individual to cause alienation and the moral injury that contributes to both alienation and participants leaving the corporatized workplace (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 explores the pathways that participants took to shift from alienation to species being and contributes to both Marxist and feminist reparative literature.

The HRM literature that I reviewed is understandably more interested in the effect employees leaving has on the organisation than on the impacts on the individual who leaves. Cohen et al. (2016) report that managers focus on turnover rates at the organisational level rather than the reasons that an individual may have for leaving. That stymies system changes and makes workplace behavioural changes unlikely. For many of the studies, surveys were used as the data gathering tool, which limits the ability to understand at a deeper level why employees have the intention to leave or are choosing to leave. Though HRM literature does look at leaving the workplace through the lens of power in the form of the embodied structures of gender and race, the only direct reference to power that I saw was Vardaman et al. (2015). They refer to the power that would be sacrificed by the advice-giving employee centrally located within the relational structure of the workplace if they decided to leave. HRM scholars do speak to worker disengagement as a component of the intention to leave. I see worker disengagement as a symptom of alienation and therefore Marx's concept of worker alienation is an important lens through, which to view my research.

How feminist scholars view workplace culture offers an alternative story about why people may leave the corporatized workplace. Their viewpoint is more worker focused. They use power as a lens to examine systems that have been constructed by society, a lens that is not considered by the HRM literature that I reviewed. Feminist geographers see culture as a force that artificially divides and separates. When looking at the historical roots of capitalism, this division and separation was created through physical violence. Through the eyes of feminist scholars, culture is seen as a force that, to use Ahmed's (2014) words, "presses against" (p. 27) individuals moulding their identities. People are moulded so they fit in or at least choreograph performances of identities to give the appearance of fitting into workplace culture. It is the dominant culture that presses up against the uniqueness of the individual shaping them into something that suppresses their individuality. The pressure caused by the historical physical violence that created the space for capitalism to emerge has been replaced by psychological violence (hooks, 2004b) that pressures some people not to be themselves to survive or for some thrive in the workplace. The pressure of the corporatized culture and the psychological violence it evokes cause slow wounding (Joronen, 2021) that can cause people to turn away from the corporatized workplace.

When I read this quote, “the worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 166), it resonated with how I felt about my situation in the workplace. It was like someone had put into words what I was feeling in my body working in the corporatized workplace. I felt it as the life force slowly draining out of me. That recognition of self was a piece of the puzzle as to why I left the corporate world. It gave me an understanding of the larger system that was pressing against me and was a factor in why I left. I see it as an important concept in answering the question of why people leave the corporate world. Where Marx looks at alienation through the system of capitalist production, informed by feminist geographers, I approach alienation in this research by looking at the social relationships of the workplace. The roadmaps offered by feminist scholars to create spaces within the workplace and themselves that are counter to the capitalist culture that creates alienation are consistent with research participants’ stories of their shift to businesses they view as oriented to positive change.

Answering the question of why people leave the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change adds to the work of feminist geographers, their views of workplace culture, workplace identity, and creating spaces that are counter to the dominant narrative of the corporatized workplace. It also contributes to the literature on worker alienation by looking through the lens of affect and emotion. In the next chapter, I lay out the methodology I applied in conducting my research.

Chapter 3: Research Approach

“We do not conduct fieldwork on the unmediated world of the researched, but on the world *between* ourselves and the researched. At the same time this ‘betweenness’ is shaped by the researcher’s biography, which filters ‘data’ and our perceptions and interpretations of the fieldwork experience.”
(England, 1994, p. 86)

3.1 Research Aim and Objectives

This study focuses on the stories of people who left their roles in corporatized workplaces in Canada and started businesses they viewed as oriented toward positive social and/or environmental change. The aim of the study is to examine those stories to determine what motivated them to turn away from the corporatized workplace and towards starting a business. The question that guides my research is:

Why do people leave the corporatized workplace in Canada to start businesses oriented toward positive environmental and/or social change?

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I worded the research question in this way because I wanted to interview people who embraced a different way of being than the competitive, self-interested, and power-accumulating ethos of the corporatized workplace. The businesses that were ultimately created may not be viewed as oriented to positive change by others but are by the participants. The aim of this research is not to theorize or evaluate the “positive change” businesses that were created. Rather, it is to learn from the experiences these participants had in various corporatized workplaces and then examine the pathways they took when they turned away from those workplaces to start businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change.

It is important to note that very few participants left the corporatized workplace directly to start a business they viewed as oriented to positive change. Many had no idea what their next step was going to be after they left the corporatized workplace. Several began businesses that left them still attached to the corporatized workplace by an umbilical cord. They did contract work for other corporatized workplaces, doing the same work and solving the same types of problems that they did when they were in the organisation that they had just left. One participant spoke openly about how difficult it was to separate herself from that corporate work because the work was comfortable and easy to do:

It's that thing that I know—how to solve those problems, and it feels good to solve those problems with people and help. To know that... I was generous with what I knew how to do, and I took a burden off them. And they started to like what they did. So, it's probably almost like making their time in prison a little bit nicer. I can help them make their time in prison a little bit nicer. [chuckles] That feels nice... The comfortable part is it's easy for me. It's familiar. I know that I'll make a difference at the human level in a business ... and... I can just start tomorrow. It's no big deal... The selling my soul part is that... none of that is really in service to me... I'm not learning anything new. I'm not getting up excited for the day. I just know the task at hand. And I know how to do it. So, it's like familiarity versus fulfilment... Yeah, familiarity versus fulfilment.

So, remaining attached to the corporatized workplace by contracting services appears to offer comfort and security and a level of knowing that the work “[made] their [clients’] time in prison a little bit nicer.” Eventually, those businesses evolved into what participants viewed as positive change businesses.

The corporatized workplace extends beyond what economic geographers view as the firm. Mountz et al. (2015) used the word corporatized in describing the neoliberal university, one driven by numbers, marketability, “efficiency, productivity and excellence” (p. 1241), creating time and performance pressures. They are hierarchical in structure with a focus on money over people. Whether an organisation is corporatized is not directly related size, though larger companies are usually hierarchical in structure and that can magnify the particularities of the corporatized culture. In essence, the corporatized workplace is distinguished by its values and its affective state. The corporatized values are the masculine-based values based on the accumulation of power, wealth, status and success (Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 1997, 2004, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997; Webster & Boyd, 2019) and promote competition, individualism, and rationality (Berg & Seeber, 2016; Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 2004; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997; Webster & Boyd, 2019). Schwartz (2012) would describe them as the values of self-enhancement and conservation (protecting the status quo). Its affective state is one of anxiety, fear, and insecurity. The goals are what Schwartz (2012) describes as the “prevention of loss” (p. 251) and “self-protection” (p. 251).

This is in contrast to Gibson-Graham's approach to building alternative economies. Their approach is to create a community of equals, one that values all voices and does not eliminate differences in an effort to get along but rather embraces differences and encourages them to create new possibilities and approaches to the economy (Gibson-Graham, 2006). It is based on a collaborative and democratic business model where when making decisions everyone gets an opportunity to have their voices heard and encourages experimentation and playfulness (Gibson-Graham, 2006; 2013). Their work is based on values of self-transcendence and openness to change. Their focus is self-expansion and growth for people and the community. The affective state is anxiety-free based on love, acceptance, and openness. Laloux (2016) also provides a framework to de-corporatize organisations. According to Laloux, these organisations which he refers to as *Teal Organisations*, "have a noble purpose" (p. 114). His description of noble corresponds to Marx's description of species being as taking action where "life engender[s] life" (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75). Teal organisations create self-managing teams, invite organisational members "to drop the mask, reclaim [their] inner wholeness, and bring all of who [they] are to work" (p.55), and rather than "trying to predict and control the future" (p. 55) by incentivise people to meet targets members "are invited to listen and understand what the organization is drawn to become, where it naturally wants to go" (p. 55). They feel their way into the future.

Laloux (2016) provides several examples of teal organisation. One is the French auto parts manufacturer FAVI. The company operates with several self-managing teams. Each team is set up as "mini-factories" (p. 65) focused on meeting the needs of one customer (an automaker like Audi and Volkswagen). In addition, there are other "upstream production teams" and support teams like engineering and sales support. There are no layers of management between the teams and the CEO. Each week, the teams meet and together plan how to meet their customer's orders and agree to a shipping date. Independence and a sense of responsibility for each other come out of this team approach. It has resulted in the company having 50% of the market share and being trusted for their quality products and on-time delivery. The structure results in high-profit margins that employees benefit from by making 16-17 months of salary most years. The company benefits from low employee turnover. This contrasts with their competitors who have moved to China.

Participants shared their work experiences in public, private, not-for-profit sectors, and crown corporations. Participants self-selected into the study. I accepted their view that they worked in a corporatized workplace. However, there was one person I did not accept into the study because he worked in the military. I see that workplace as having a unique focus and culture that is beyond the definition of corporatized. In hearing participants' stories, it was apparent to me that I was hearing about was the quality of social relationships that Mountz et al. (2015) described in the corporatized workplace of neoliberal universities. Participants described their workplaces as having a bottom-line focus and a drive for efficiency, productivity, and excellence. These are workplaces driven by the bottom line and that manifests as competition within and between businesses. The fact that participants' corporatized workplaces extend beyond what economic geographers consider as the firm is explained by the "social factory" (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020, p. 32; Tronti, 1962). *The social factory* is a term used by Marxists to describe how capitalist social relations spread through society.

It is important to point out that a few people I interviewed discussed their experiences working for large not-for-profits. Although these organisations did not meet what people might traditionally label as corporate, they did demonstrate similar pressures created by the effects of the social factory spreading corporatized principles through society. They were hierarchically structured, and though there was not a drive towards profits, there were fund-raising targets and projections people were pressured to meet. One participant described the children's health charity she worked for as a "well-oil machine" and "it's a grind." This is how she described her experience:

You almost lost track of the person... You took your focus off the person because you're so focused on the numbers. That's really great that you made that relationship with that family whose child [was sick], but did you bring in the \$10,000 from them that you had planned to?... So, there wasn't a lot of wiggle room for that. It was really like: did you get the money, or didn't you?

This organisation may have a noble purpose, but its focus is on raising money, not building relations or empathising with the parents of children who are ill. It was also not about experimentation it was about "the grind" where the year was mapped out, "you're constantly doing, especially with a big charity... These three months you do this, these three months, you do this, these three months, you do

this.” There was no experimentation, no feeling into the future, no joy from creating something new. I would consider this workplace corporatized.

One participant joined a men’s health charity after he left the corporatized workplace. They had a noble cause, they had “a compassionate, empathetic, caring team of people who put people before money.” They were trained to understand that no matter who is calling or what they are calling about “you have no idea what that person is going through” and it is important to allow them the opportunity to immediately share their struggles by: “When you pick up the phone, the first thing you want to say is, ‘Hey, how you doing?’ You know, can we chat?” For five years, this team had the ability to create their own way forward to meet their noble purpose and they had fun doing it. Then, the global corporate office wanted to exert more control over the approach to fundraising, which limited the ability to be creative. Basically, they began to corporatize the organization to become more like the well-oiled machine of the children’s health charity described previously and that study participant subsequently quit the organisation to create his own.

I did not define for participants what a business oriented to positive social/environmental change was. I let them know they “are eligible to participate if you left a traditional corporate workplace in Canada to start a business oriented toward positive social/environmental change.” I allowed them to self-select into the research if they felt their experience fit that description. If I did not understand why their business would be considered positive change, I asked them to explain it to me. There were times when interviewing that I wondered if this business was just as one participant said, “making their time in prison a little bit nicer.” Appendix 1 provides a list of participants’ “positive change” businesses. These businesses included helping First Nations communities with governance and the development of seven generation strategic plans, a green energy cooperative, a regenerative farming operation, manufacturing a plant-based beverage developed to address irritable bowel syndrome, a consulting company that assists Indigenous communities in thriving through building partnerships with industry and government, a company that focuses on the future of work supporting those that will be replaced as a result of AI automation and shifts to renewables from fossil fuels, a personal trainer who focuses on an older clientele, a lawyer focusing on conflict resolution and peacemaking in the workplace, a concierge business that frees people to be their genuine self, a consultant that assists

companies to identify unconscious biases and unpack the ethos of the corporatized workplace, a career counsellor that helps people find work that is meaningful to them and at the same time create wellbeing in their lives, and a women's clothing company that promotes "thoughtful consumerism" in order to address the negative environmental and social effects of the fashion industry.

Very few of the organisations created by participants met the high standards set by Laloux's teal organisations. However, at least one of the few that were beyond the solopreneur was close the challenge was the ownership level still embodying corporatized principles. Two not-for-profits that were created did. They had noble purposes. Their small size mimicked the structure of self-guided teams. They were a community of equals that experimented, shared information, were playful in their approach, and creatively solved problems that they encountered. Although not all created teal organisation, many participants themselves shifted into a space of dropping their own masks and reclaiming their wholeness and letting go of "trying to predict and control the future" (p. 55) and began to listen and feel their way into the future. Perhaps this personal transformation is the first step to de-corporatizing the workplace.

Several participants started coaching businesses, which could be argued to be about helping people succeed or at least feel more comfortable in the corporatized workplace. When I asked those coaches about their businesses, some talked about the ripple effect that changing one person can cause in an organisation. Others talked about shifting the culture of organisations through coaching. A couple of participants said that when being hired by a workplace to coach someone, they warn that coaching may result in the person being coached leaving the workplace. One coach uses horses to assist clients in figuring out the impact that they want to make in the world. Another has become a forest therapist so she can teach people about their connection to the earth, making them more likely to look after it. Two other coaches influenced by taking yoga teacher training have applied yogic philosophies to shift the corporate workplace. One is focused on leadership and wellness, offering corporate retreats. The other is focused on aligning workplaces to their values by making visible the interdependent relationships within the organisation and the lines of support that need to be nurtured.

As indicated in Chapter 1, there are five key objectives to the study. The first is to understand what motivates participants to leave the corporatized workplace. The second is to determine the role

emotion, affect, and care have on the decision to leave. The third is to evaluate what their stories of leaving say about the culture of the corporatized workplace. The fourth is to determine how the culture of the corporatized workplace affects participants' sense of self and finally, to understand the pathways to starting businesses that are oriented to "positive change."

In this chapter, I describe the methodology and methods employed in my research. The chapter is divided into six sections. This section describes the aim and objectives of the research. The next section discusses my positionality and how it informed this research. I then describe my research approach. Included in that section is a description of my recruitment process and the study participants. In the fourth section, I detail my data collection. The fifth section describes my approach to data analysis, and finally, I review the ethical implications of the research. As the researcher, I understand that I am the "data-collection instrument" (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1411), which makes me inseparable from every aspect of the research. Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to describe how my positionality affected how and why I made the various decisions associated with research design.

3.2 My Positionality

I have written and rewritten this section more times than I would like to admit. It has been such a challenge to define who I was and who I am in relation to this research. Part of the challenge is that my experience in the corporatized workplace was such a defining experience, yet it left me with no definition of myself, let alone what position I held. I understand that my research is filtered through my experience in the corporatized workplace. As Bourdieu (1989) warns, "failing to construct the space of positions leaves you no chance of seeing the point from which you see what you see" (p. 19). McDowell (1992) demands that as researchers, we "recognize and take account for our own position" (p. 409) because it influences how we interpret and construct the knowledge that we share.

How I view my positionality has changed over time. Recognising the gap between past me and present me that Simandan (2019) highlights, past me would have (and did) write a confessional about my experience in the corporatised workplace. Present me recognises that research is a process where "researcher, researched and research make each other" (G. Rose, 1997, p. 316). Positionality is about reflecting on the power dynamics within the research relationships (Proudfoot, 2015, 2019; G. Rose,

1997; Simandan, 2019). Through this PhD journey, I know myself as a feminist economic geographer who applies affect and emotion theory to the workplace. I claim the space as a feminist researcher because I see knowledge as situated (shaped by the circumstance in which it was produced), partial (created through a limited view of the world, based on location, the views of the participants, the researcher, the characteristics of their relationship, and the research approaches), and positional (dependent on how the researcher is positioned within the research) (Elledge, 2022; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Proudfoot, 2015, 2019; Wickramasingha, 2023). I see myself as an economic geographer because my research interest is the workplace. I am also an idealist who believes in possibilities. I am a pantheist who sees the energy of the universe as an expanding consciousness that evolves as humans evolve. I align with Marx's thinking around alienation and species being.

I am a white, heterosexual cis woman. That makes me very similar to the embodiment of the ideal worker, *homo economicus*. Not being married for most of my career and never having children made me more like *homo economicus* as I had no responsibility. My whiteness has afforded me benefits in life. My whiteness allowed me to move through spaces with comfort and ease because most of the spaces I enter are built from white supremacy. I was offered three different jobs in the private sector, none of which had been advertised and I did have to compete for any of them. Unlike those who with black or brown bodies, I did not have to be hypervigilant as I moved through spaces in my life. I knew I was safe. When I walked into the local Ministry of Environment after university and asked if I could volunteer to get work experience, I immediately got a meeting with one of the managers. When I applied for a job there a year later, I was remembered and hired on contract. In my various workplaces, though my femaleness made me an outsider, my whiteness made me an insider. I felt comfortable speaking out when I saw injustices. If I were a woman of colour, I do not think I would have felt as comfortable challenging the white males in power. My whiteness gave me the benefit of unearned trust (Pillippo & Nolan, 2024). In most of the spaces that I entered in my life and in my career, and I entered many spaces in my career where I was not known, I had an immediate rapport built on unearned trust. Being white undoubtedly helped with my career advancement, like many of my participants, my career grew organically. I was given the privilege of advancing by just being myself.

I entered the workforce at a time when affirmative action for women was in its infancy. With it came a backlash from some of my white male colleagues, instilling in me the need to prove myself capable. I chose to work in a field where I felt constant pressure to fit into the masculine persona of the workplace. Also, I was living with the responsibility of being a good performer, so it was easier for the women following behind me. I have been socialized as white, which involves perfectionism, a sense of urgency, defensiveness, quantity over quality, worship of the written word, paternalism, ‘either/or’ thinking, power hoarding, fear of open conflict, individualism, progress is bigger, objectivity, and an expectation of a right to be comfortable (K. Jones & Okun, 2001). My environmental background and my experiences growing up in North Vancouver have me seeing the world as a web of interconnected relationships, dependent on each other to thrive. I have worked against paternalism, ensuring people understood how and why decisions were made. I also worked against power hoarding by actively attempting to shift the workplace towards the values of care and integrity, deconstructing power structures, and ensuring people had a voice and felt appreciated for the work they did. Then, I burned out and did not have the capacity to do that anymore. I lived with a sense of urgency. It is less now because I don’t have the capacity for it like I did. It is also by choice in an attempt to deprogram my socialization into whiteness, and I understand more clearly how urgency can steal a sense of connection to self and others.

As a result of the social factory and my upbringing, I feel the pressure to be productive, to be of value, and to see some social interactions as a value exchange. I have been socialized into the “stiff upper lip” and “soldier on” mentality of my working-class British father. He embodied the belief that success comes to those who work hard, and it worked for him. This predisposed me to be an “achievement-subject” (Han, 2015, p. 46) in my workplace, though because of my experience in the corporatized workplace, I do not have the capacity for it anymore. All of these qualities are qualities of white supremacy and are the antithesis of the slowness proposed by ethics of care (Mountz et al., 2015; Berg & Seeber, 2016)

3.2.1 Researcher Researched Power Dynamics

Power dynamics are present in all social interactions (Elwood & Martin, 2000) and are particularly important to understand in the researcher and researched relationship (Anyan, 2013; Elwood & Martin, 2000; England, 1994; Katz, 1994; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997). The power relationship

between the researcher and the study participant is asymmetrical, with the researcher holding much of the power (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997). Enmeshed in those power dynamics are the socially constructed hierarchies of power in society—gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and age (Elwood & Martin, 2000; England, 1994; Katz, 1994; McDowell, 1992). Even the location chosen for data collection can affect the power relations between researcher and participant during data collection (Elwood & Martin, 2000). The researcher has the power to create the research questions and make methodological choices, including the questions to ask if interviewing. Once the data are collected, the researcher has complete control over data analysis, meaning-making, and the presentation of the research outcomes (Anyan, 2013).

Participants do have some power in this relationship. England (1994) points to the fact that the researcher requires participants to provide their perceptions, understandings, and interpretations of the phenomenon being researched. Anyan (2013) outlines several ways in which study participants have control. They have the power to volunteer as a participant. With respect to interviews, they can decide what to share, how much to share, and what to leave unsaid. They set the pace of the interview. They have the power to decline to answer questions or terminate the interview at any time. Yet, I would argue that how a participant exercises this power depends on how they perceive the power dynamics of their relationship with the researcher. It also does not consider the power the researcher has to design their data collection methods to offer participants more or less control or to encourage them to share more or less details with the researcher.

Feminist geographers encourage the use of methods that create “collaborative and non-exploitive relationships with participants” (McDowell, 1992, p. 406), such as in-depth interviews. The methods should centre listening, empathy, and validation of the participants’ experiences (McDowell, 1992). Listening builds relationships (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; McDowell, 1992) because it demonstrates respect and develops trust (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017). Anyan (2013) suggests that the uneven power dynamics in the researcher/researched relationship “makes the interview an erroneous tool” (p. 6). McDowell (1992) suggests that “non-exploitative research relations are a utopian ideal that is receding from our grasp” (p. 408). The response for feminist researchers is to position themselves in our research and practice reflexivity to understand how our position influences every aspect of our research (England, 1994; Katz, 1994; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997). According to Gillian Rose

(1997), that process is challenging and may be unachievable. Proudfoot (2015) would agree with that stating, “We [researchers] are not transparent to ourselves” (p. 1138). Horine (1990), the creator of the *Johari Window Model*, also demonstrates that we have blind spots, things that others know about us but are not known to us, as well as things that are not known by either ourselves or others. What I know about my own positionality is partial and situational, and I may never understand just how partial and situational it is.

When I reflect on the power dynamics within the research relationship, it is important to acknowledge that the people I interviewed mostly occupied positions of power and privilege within their corporatized workplace. Looking back at the definition of the economic man or ideal worker in section 2.2, it is a white, male, (Amis et al., 2020, p. 198) with no responsibility, no family, independent (Adamson & Kelan, 2018; Stone, 2007; Thomas et al., 2019), with “no childhood or old age” (J. Nelson, 1992, p. 115) and I would add able-bodied. In section 2.3, I identified the foundation of the capitalist system as white supremacy (Bonds & Inwood, 2016), which puts the white European man at the top of the hierarchy. The workplace was created for this “somatic norm” (Amis et al., 2020, p. 198). Those most closely associated with that norm are the ones who can take up space, feel comfortable in that space (Ahmed, 2012) and receive the advantages of this “naturalized social, cultural, and economic power” (Bonds & Inwood, 2016, p. 717) without having to be conscious of those built-in, systemic advantages. I must admit that throughout my research I read numerous books that described these power structures and follow numerous social media accounts to educate myself. It was not until I was questioned that I realised I had not clearly delineated the role my race played in my life and my career. This questioning also demonstrated to me my uncomfortableness in explicitly speaking about the implications of race. That uncomfortableness affected my decision-making throughout my research. I examine this in greater depth in section 3.2.6 below.

Many participants were privileged enough to take time to reflect after leaving their workplaces without immediately being concerned about money. Three participants took jobs with less responsibility to pay their bills as they figured out their next steps. At the time of the interview, many were operating self-sustaining businesses that they viewed to be oriented to positive change. I would say that many participants had more *power within* than me at the time of the interview. *Power within* emerges when people feel their self-worth, capacity and agency (Mathie et al., 2017; Naylor &

Thayer, 2022; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). Regardless, as a researcher, I have the power, as Rose (1997) suggests, to interpret their stories, curate what is shared, and present it in the form of this dissertation.

3.2.2 My Values and Beliefs

I believe that everyone has value and should be appreciated for who they are and what they add to the spaces and relations they encounter. I also believe that the workplace and the world can change to be more caring. When I was about six years old, I had an encounter with Chief Dan George of the Tsleil-Waututh Nation. That had a huge influence on my values and beliefs. His stories gave me an understanding of the aliveness and interconnection of everything on the planet. He also instilled in me a sense of responsibility to care for the earth. I embrace the values of universalism, benevolence, and self-direction. They guided my career until they couldn't and have guided this research. According to Schwartz (2012), universalism drives "understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and the protection" (p. 7) of the wellbeing of people and the planet. Universalism is justice and equality based. Benevolence focuses on "preserving and enhancing the welfare of those" (p.7) around you. Honest, loyal, helpful, and responsible are characteristics of those who hold benevolence as a value. Benevolence creates an internal motivation to create collaborative and supportive relationships. The goal of self-direction is "independent thought and action [by] choosing, creating, [and] exploring" (p. 5). It is also accompanied by the need "for control and mastery" (p. 5). Under pressure or in conflict, I can become assertive and direct. My values drew me to the concept of feminist ethics of care, which motivated me to want to hear from people in my research who were oriented toward care. This influenced the structure of my research question adding "to start businesses oriented to positive change." They drove my decision about methodology. Particularly my choice of narrative inquiry and unstructured interviews.

The corporatized workplace was not created for me. However, I see now that I was socialized for it. Applying Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values, I can see how my values put me in opposition to the values of the corporatized workplace. Those values were embodied to different extents by the executive team that I was part of and many of the senior managers I worked with. My values also drove my desire to change the workplace. Like the participants in Ahmed's (2012) study, I felt like I was pushing up against a brick wall, and it was exhausting. This conflict in values put me in the

position of feeling moral injury, and my personality changed. It stifled my capacity to act in accordance with my values. I felt like I was in a fight for my survival, and I behaved accordingly. It left me feeling a lot of shame.

3.2.3 My Biases

My work experience left me with a strong negative view of the culture of the corporatized workplace, its power structures and practices. I hold the belief that corporatized workplace culture negatively affects people's physical and psychological wellbeing. It left me with a strong desire to change it and help people understand it. As a result of my experience as a woman in the corporatized workplace, I have a strong bias against white men in power. I see them as entitled players of *the game* (see Chapter 4) with a lack of self-awareness. However, the men I interviewed for this research have softened that bias. This research also revealed to me that I see and judge behaviours through the lens of my gender. This is even though I know that behaviours, for the most part, are more varied within genders than between them and that intersectionality influences human behaviours (Hyde, 2014). I have a hypersensitivity to any pressure from others to make me change to fit in. I have a bias towards supporting women in the workplace. I also have a distaste for women who play *the game* or overtly use their femininity for their own gain. I know I have, at times, benefited from how people perceive me for my gender, my whiteness, and my physical attributes. I understand that I have been socialized into my gender. Gilligan (2011) claims that girls are separated from their honest voice in adolescence when they are faced with the choice of relationships or an honest voice. I, however, had a voice in the workplace. From the start of my career, I spoke truth to power to shift power dynamics toward justice and equality.

3.2.4 My Story

I am indebted to those who volunteered to participate in this research. In choosing to share their stories, they offered up parts of themselves, trusting me to listen deeply to what they shared, to reflect on its meaning, and to weave what I heard into meaningful knowledge that could possibly make a difference. There is a huge responsibility that comes with the role of researcher. I do not know what motivated them to volunteer. Looking back, I think it would have been interesting to know. Then, I could have perhaps woven some of their expectations into this account of why people leave the

corporatized workplace to start businesses they view as oriented to positive change. This write-up is based on what they generously shared about their experiences in the corporatized workplace and their movement towards their “positive change” businesses. Yet every aspect of who I am is interwoven into every decision I have made in this research. The why of this research is rooted in my experience in the corporatized workplace. The how of my research is rooted in my values. I designed the research to allow participants to feel comfortable and free to share their stories their way. Those I interviewed shared so much of themselves with me, and I did not get an opportunity to share my story with them. In an act of reciprocity, I offer mine to them in Appendix 2. It is a partial story, lacking so much in comparison to the depth that they provided me.

To summarize my story, I joined a company that had the reputation of being a good one. They were philanthropic and seemed to take their environmental performance seriously. It didn't take long to realise that they were not who I and others perceived them to be. Looking back, I was determined to make the company into what I had expected it to be before I joined it. I managed to create cultural change from an environmental perspective. I did that by offering up my values and beliefs as the basis for an environmental program that shifted the company's relationship to the environment. Throughout my time there, I faced many value conflicts with senior managers. During an ‘action research study’ I conducted with women in the company for my master's degree, one participant said, “Look [at] what we do for the environment, but what do we do for people?” That question led me to focus on the culture from a people perspective. I, with rest of the executive team, developed a program with a focus on both integrity and care. I really believed that the program would shift the culture.

After the role out of that program, a longtime employee died. His death really affected me. It made me look at how much my work was affecting my mental and physical health. I really hated working there. My personality changed as a result. I could feel the life force draining from my body, and I cried on the way to work most days and sometimes at work. I had no capacity to do the work. I did not like myself anymore. I also knew I did not want the company to have any part in my funeral. It was their habit to be very visible at the funerals of their employees. It was in an executive meeting just after that funeral that I pushed once more to find out what was at the root of an environmental issue that I was concerned about. There continued to be a wall of silence about the issue. It was then that I realised the executive team had completely different definitions of integrity and care than mine.

When the president came into my office to chastise me for my behaviour, especially so soon after the death of that employee, the words “I can’t be here anymore” spilt out of my mouth. I left the company a shell of my former self. When I ask myself why I didn’t leave earlier, the answer that I can come up with is I really thought I could make the company into what I had understood it to be before I joined, I didn’t see any career options for myself that would not involve the same energy drain or provide the same level of remuneration. At the time, I did not understand that what I was experiencing was because of value conflicts.

I have been schooled in care from a young age. In essence, Chief Dan George taught me about ethics of care through the stories he shared. Like the knowledge imparted by feminist geographers (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Lawson, 2007), the stories taught me about interconnectedness, interdependence, cooperation, acceptance, and nurturing wellbeing of everything on the planet. My mother introduced the idea of listening to each other by using a talking stick that was passed around the family so we all had a chance to be heard. I attended an experimental open-concept public elementary school in North Vancouver where care was part of the culture. I learned about care through yoga and the practice of seva—selfless service and through sitting in and leading circle dialogues. I have been trained as a yoga instructor, which was all about holding sacred space and ensuring people’s safety. I was also trained as a yoga therapist. That is where I learned the power of just being present for someone, reflecting back to them what they said, and asking only two things— “What is happening now?” and “Tell me more about...” Through my executive coaching course, I learned to hold a compassionate space of listening with curiosity and asking questions to assist the person being coached to determine for themselves their next steps. All of this is integrated into my research design and how I approached my interviews.

I have included a timeline of my career in Appendix 3. In Appendix 4, I have included an impression map that reflects what pressed against me in my position working as an environmental specialist in the private sector. Impression mapping was part of my data analysis (see section 3.5.3). I have not included a power map (see section 3.5.2) of myself. Based on Shalom Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic values (see appendix 7), I summarize the power map as my “self-transcendent values” (p. 7) of “benevolence” (p. 7) and “universalism” (p. 7) pressing against the lived culture of the executive team, which were based on the self-enhancement values of power and achievement. According to

Schwartz (2012), self-enhancement values are “anxiety-based” (p. 13) and result in “self-protection against threat” (p. 13). Self-transcendent values are “anxiety-free” (p. 13) and are based on “self-expansion and growth” (p. 13). The effect this conflict had on me was to feel like I was, to use the words of one participant, “on a different planet” than many senior managers and the executive team of which I was part. It caused confusion, frustration, disillusionment, anger, and rage. I felt like I was fighting for my life. As a result, I shifted into an anxiety-based ethos.

3.2.5 Insider Outsider

Because of my experience in the corporatized workplace, I would be considered to have an insider position in relation to my participants. When a researcher shares experiences, identity, language, and membership with participants, they can be viewed as an insider (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The researcher takes on the position of outsider when they don’t have membership, knowledge, or experiences in common with the participants. Researchers have challenged the idea of insider and outsider as either/or and seeing the position of the researcher in the space in between (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Dhillon and Thomas (2019) describe it as complex and fluid. The multiplicity of positions and power relations are based on things like gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation (Dery, 2020). Other identities that I shared with some participants that could make me an insider is my gender, my age, my training as a yoga teacher and as a coach, and my experience as part of an executive team. I shared values with many of the participants, which made my position an insider. With others, my value system made me an outsider.

I was also an outsider– most importantly, I have not started a business. I made attempts at the height of my burnout but did not have the capacity for it. For some participants, my age and gender made me an outsider. I do know what it is like to experience ageism in the workplace because I experienced it when I began my career. I did not, however, experience ageism for being older in the workplace like a couple of my participants did. I also have no direct experience being a man in the workplace. Because of my whiteness, I have never experienced the workplace as somebody who is not white. However, I did feel the challenges of being “the only” in the room. I was born Canadian and don’t understand what it feels like to immigrate to this country for work. However, I have experienced culture shock, moving from BC to Alberta, then from Alberta to Ontario, and when traveling. That is in no way to suggest that my experience of culture shock equates to the experience of new immigrants. I have

never worked for a not-for-profit, a crown corporation, or a multinational corporation. Nevertheless, I have been a volunteer board member for a few not-for-profits. I did not work in the same industries as many of the study participants, but I do understand some of the industries because, as an environmental officer, I would have inspected those types of facilities. I have some knowledge of consulting because I have been part of teams that relied on the expertise of various types of consultants. I know the oil and gas industry because I lived in Calgary during junior and senior high school. My father sold equipment to that sector. The parents of my friends were employed in that sector, and my work experience provided me the opportunity to see their facilities, including the oil sands of Fort McMurray. I have also experienced many other industries through my time working for the government, yet that knowledge does not extend to experiencing the social dynamics of those workplaces.

Insider outsider status is fluid, and a researcher fills a multitude of positions during the research process (Dery, 2020; Dhillon & Thomas, 2019). During the interview process, it is hard to track those shifts in positions. I do know there were times that I felt a high level of resonance with some of what participants were sharing, and at other times, I could feel my biases creep in. I did experience some of the advantages of being an insider. Initially, I had easy access to participants (Decoo, 2022; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009) because, like me, they knew and respected one of the people I reached out to help recruit participants. For the most part, I was familiar with the culture, practices, and language that were used by the participants, which made communication easier (Decoo, 2022; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). They had a level of trust and acceptance of me, and participants shared deeply about their experiences in the corporatized workplace (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), though it is not possible to understand how each participant may have perceived me.

I am aware of the disadvantages of being an insider. Being an insider can make me less objective and biased by my lived experience (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002; Decoo, 2022; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). I did understand that my lived experience could affect my approach to my research. I was only going to interview women. Due to my work experience, I viewed workplace dynamics only through the lens of gender. After reading Hanson and Pratt (2003), I learned that focusing on women can prevent the larger picture of a phenomenon from being exposed. I then thought of focusing on why senior leaders leave the corporatized workplace. Then, I decided it may not give me a complete view of why people

left the corporatized workplace because I would only be looking at the top of the organisation. I had intended to do a survey and follow up with more focused interviews. When I looked at the questions I was asking in the survey, I realised they were very biased toward my workplace experience. The survey also did not give participants the ability to tell their complete story. Having completed many surveys in my life that left me frustrated when none of the choices applied to my experience, or they didn't capture the nuances of my situation, I decided against a survey. I adjusted my approach to allow participants greater freedom to share their stories their way. During the interviews, I was quite relieved and excited when I had participants whose experience in the corporatized workplace did not correspond to mine in any way. When they had good experiences, it reminded me how important it was not to let my experience overshadow what I was hearing.

Being an insider can also result in “role confusion” (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009, p. 58). According to Dwyer and Buckle, this happens when the researcher forgets their role as a researcher and becomes the role that gave them insider status. My insider status was moderated by the fact that I had been out of the corporatized workplace for about 6 years when I started my research. Nobody shared the type of position I held in the corporatized workplace. I was more of a distant insider than a nurse researching nursing (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002), a Sikh researching their own community (Dhillon & Thomas, 2019), or a Mormon interviewing members of the church that were known to them (Decoo, 2022).

3.2.6 How My Positionality Affected My Research Design

My positionality affected my research design. That effect begins with the phrasing of my research question, which originated from my failed attempt to start my own business during my burnout and my witnessing of many people who became solopreneurs after leaving a corporatized workplace. The wording of my research question eliminated a group of people who may have joined other organisations with cultures of care that would have permitted me to look at the corporatized workplace through the lens of care. It would have been interesting to broaden my research question to open it up to participants who may have joined activist organisations focused on creating positive environmental or social change or to those who joined social enterprise with “noble purposes” (Laloux, 2016, p. 114). The wording also eliminated a group of people who would no doubt have been able to shed light on the culture of the corporatized workplace and those are people who stayed

despite wanting to quit. Those people could have also offered an understanding of corporatized workplace culture, as well as identified why people stay and the coping mechanisms they embrace in order to stay and survive that culture.

The research question also demonstrated that my individualism played a role in its wording. I could have expanded the research question to include people who joined social enterprises or groups engaged in social or environmental action. When I created the question, I could see no other option to find caring people who had left the corporatized workplace than individuals who had started their own businesses oriented to positive social or environmental change. My whiteness could also be implicated in wanting to speak to those who started their own business, believing that because they were in control of the business, they would be the best to describe how it functioned and whether it functioned differently than the definition of the corporatized workplace that I have used in this research. That is despite reading Cha and Edmondson (2006) taught me that a leader who started a company may believe they are making a decision based on the values that were developed for the organisation, but their employees may see their actions as being misaligned with those values. That incongruence can cause employees to label that founder as a hypocrite and to feel disillusioned. That disillusionment is precisely what happened to many participants in my research.

My design is based on white feminists' view of care, which is seen through the lens of the global north. It does not consider other models of care that originate in other cultures, such as Māori ethics, Ubuntu, and Confucianism (Raghuram, 2016). It also doesn't consider how care is contested. When designing a more caring workplace, it is important to consider how to negotiate different cultures of care and different needs for care (Raghuram, 2016). My research lens demonstrates my sense of entitlement that workplaces should be designed in a way that makes me comfortable even though that design could make other people uncomfortable because of their different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

Race was invisible for the most part in my data. I realise I never asked about the racial makeup of the companies in which participants worked and that I assumed they were predominately white. Occasionally, I asked about the diversity of organisations that participants worked for, but I was not consistent with that question. I realized that asking white people about the diversity of the companies of the companies they worked for may not provide a consistent measurement of how diverse they

actually were. Looking at it now, I realized that I unconsciously assumed that the people participants described in their workplaces were amorphous with only gender and values separating them. This fallback position that I might describe as non-race is actually the somatic norm of whiteness. Like other women I interviewed who freely spoke about gender struggles, I prioritized my gender over race. Only one Chinese Canadian participant spoke about the workplace as racialized, his own and his coworkers. He described the leaders of one company he worked for as “racist, misogynist, exploitative white males.” Very few people spoke about race, or the privilege bestowed upon them by their whiteness. One participant did speak about her white privilege in this way: “I’m a very privileged person who’s been given opportunities and didn’t have to do anything other than show up.” She shared about receiving a job offer over a coffee because she could solve a problem that needed to be solved. There was no job posting and no interview. She also recognised the privilege of having different people recommend her for different positions and of being privileged to negotiate a severance package when others may not even be offered one. She suggested her boss “obviously has some privileges he needs to unpack,” after sharing that he instructed a courier who had come up the elevator to the company’s reception area to take the elevator back downstairs and go around to the back of the building to enter there. Another participant spoke of the uncomfortableness of being a white owner in a company that was focused on serving Indigenous communities.

3.3 Overview of Research Approach

I chose to approach my research through narrative inquiry, collecting partial life histories (Cameron, 2012; Davies et al., 2018) from participants relating to why they left the corporatized workplace to start businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change. Kok (2007) sees life course “as a sequence of positions” (p. 204) that a person travels throughout their life. The positions of my research are the corporatized workplace, the in-between and the “positive change” business. Using a life course approach overcomes the criticism that corporate interviews offer “temporally ‘thin’” (James, 2006, p. 298) data because they focus on a “single point in time” (p. 298).

The methods I employed contrast with how economic geographers generally conduct their research. Historically, economic geographers have researched the corporate workplace by direct observation and interviewed people who are currently employed in the workplace or sector of interest (Cockayne,

2018; S. Lee, 2019; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Schoenberger, 1994, 1997). James (2006) thinks that this approach can result in “temporally ‘thin’” (p. 298) data. I have taken a different approach by interviewing people who have left their place of work. The stories that were shared by study participants are temporally rich. Most participants shared stories that encapsulated their entire careers and involved leaving several different corporatized workplaces. Cockayne (2018) observed caution in some of his participants to fully express their thoughts and feelings about their current workplace. The participants in my research seemed quite open and honest in their storytelling. It was apparent that most of them had reflected on their experiences in the corporatized workplace. They seemed at ease when speaking about their experiences in the workplace. That freedom translated into creating a different understanding of the dynamics of the corporatized workplace.

I chose a narrative approach for several reasons. Firstly, I understand the power of stories. I have used stories in the past to train people, to shift corporate culture and as a data collection tool in both my master’s research and in writing my book (Braithwaite, 2018). Secondly, it gives participants the freedom to share their experiences in their own way without being limited by specific questions that may not have matched their experience and without interruption. Thirdly, I understood that some people who have left the corporatized workplace may need to share their story in its completeness and have it heard and witnessed. Fourthly, I recognise that by sharing their story, participants may gain some personal insights because, through stories, we make sense of our experiences (Duff & Bell, 2002; Riessman, 2008; M. Rose, 2016; Wall Kimmerer, 2013) and create understanding (Bawaka Country et al., 2016). Finally, my research is about affect. It is about the process of being moved. To use Sara Ahmed’s (2014) words, turning away from one place—the corporatized workplace—and turning towards another place—a positive change business. Personal stories are entangled with the social, political, and affective context (Cameron, 2012; M. Rose, 2016) and, therefore, are an apt choice for understanding why people leave the corporatized workplace to start businesses they view as oriented toward positive change.

Narrative inquiry is “the study of the ways humans experience the world” (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 2), “the study of experience as story” (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 477), and about life and living (p. 478). Stories offer the richness and thickness of description and understanding (Cameron, 2012; de Vries, 2018) that crystallization demands. Fusch and Ness (2015) equate data

richness to quality, specificity, complexity, its interwoven nature, and its subtleties and multi-layered nature. Thickness relates to quantity—how much data has been collected (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Employing narrative inquiry unearths subtlety (Wang & Geale, 2015). Stories open spaces for instruction and inquiry (Borrows, 2019).

There are challenges with the narrative approach. First, it offers a partial perspective (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Borrows, 2019). Its partiality means the research can't be generalized (England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; Josselson & Hammack, 2021; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997). It is specific to those I interviewed (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). One participant was very aware of her partial view of her experience of the corporatized workplace, saying things like, "I mean, it's one side of it, right?" As most of those that I interviewed left voluntarily, their singular view of the workplace is what pressed against them, resulting in them turning away from it. Storytelling relies on memory, which according to Jones (2007), invokes the imagination. Every time an experience is shared, the memory is recreated, and the way it is told changes (Simandan, 2019). When sharing memories, the narrator attunes the story to who they are in the moment or their telling. (Riessman, 2008). One of my participants acknowledged her story has changed over time, "I have a clear picture of the story now. I would say that I probably changed that story over time... I'm going to tell you the version that I think is the settled version."

Because of my experience in the corporatized workplace, I understand that it can take time to understand and process the experience. There is an evolution of understanding that occurs over time. It is important to understand that narrative truth is not *the* truth (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). It is the truth of the individual sharing the story based on what they experienced and the meaning that they have made from it (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). The interpretation may evolve as the person sharing it evolves. Narratives provide an opportunity to examine how meaning is made from those life experiences (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). In my view, capturing stories that have been reflected upon provides a clearer view of why people leave than asking about intent to leave or asking someone in an exit interview who may be guarded with their answers or may not have had time to reflect properly on what happened.

I used unstructured interviews to collect partial life histories of participants' careers. I investigated three key themes through these interviews as was outlined in my recruitment letter (see Appendix 5):

1. the experience in the corporate workplace (company, culture, values, emotional environment, role, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, tension/conflicts within them/within the workplace, supports)
2. the experience of making the shift (supports, personal values, emotions, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, conflicts/tensions)
3. the experience in creating a positive change business (culture, values, emotional environment, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, conflicts/tensions, supports)

What I discovered is that there are not always clear boundaries between those phases, and the phases can overlap significantly. Sometimes, participants leave the corporatized workplace mentally and emotionally before they leave physically. Some participants began preparing themselves for a transition into their own business before they left the corporatized workplace. Many quit without knowing their next steps. Before they created a “positive change” business, others offered themselves up as consultants doing the same work as they did in the corporatized workplace. I see the stories of participants as being about a journey from one place—the corporatized workplace—to another—their business they viewed as oriented to positive change. For some, the journey is relatively rapid; for others, it takes time. To make sense of their journey, I developed *power maps* and *impression maps* for each participant. I developed *power maps* (Figure 1 – subsection 3.5.2) to identify the power dynamics that were experienced by each participant in the corporatized workplace and how those dynamics affected them. The *impression maps* (Figure 2 – subsection 3.5.3) were developed to clearly illustrate what was pressing against participants in their corporatized workplaces.

3.3.1 Recruitment

I took a purposive approach (Davies et al., 2018) to sampling. That purposive approach began with the development of my research question. I knew I was not interested in why people leave one workplace for another because that could be about the desire to acquire more—more power and control, more recognition, more money, and more social capital. I didn't want to hear about that. I was interested in talking to people who had a set of values that were contrary to those of the

corporatized workplace, people who wanted to make a difference and people who cared. What led me to be interested in this were two questions that Debra Meyerson (2000) raised in her research: (i) “What if emotions were honoured? (ii) “What if the work of doing this was valued and visible?” (p. 168). That led me to think about how the corporatized workplace was not designed to honour emotions and, therefore, did not see or value the work of honouring emotions. I wanted to make that visible in some way. I decided to somehow find people who cared and did the work of care in the workplace because they have an important perspective to share. I also understood from my own experience that my leaving had something to do with holding a different worldview than what seemed to be the norm of those in my workplace.

All knowledge is situated (Elledge, 2022; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Proudfoot, 2015, 2019; Wickramasingha, 2023). What we know depends on what we attend to, how we perceive the world and how our brain functions (Simandan, 2019) and how power and social differences affect the production of knowledge (Haraway, 1988; Proudfoot, 2015, 2019; G. Rose, 1997). I wanted to attend to people who had a care ethic because I felt they would offer a particular view of the corporatized workplace that feminist geographers had exposed in the academy (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Mountz et al., 2015; Webster & Boyd, 2019). An orientation to care seems to be overshadowed by the mainstream media’s (Doolittle & Wang, 2021) and HRM literature’s (Catalyst Organisation, 2020; Chan et al., 2018; Krivkovich et al., 2018) focus on women in the workplace. I also wanted to address in some way Gibson-Graham et al.’s (2019) call to action “for economic geography to attend to ethical economic actions that make other worlds possible” (p. 1). I decided the best way to address both the call to action and to hear from people who are more likely to embody care ethics would be to interview people who had started businesses oriented to positive environmental and social change. This makes the knowledge from my research, like all knowledge, situated and partial (Elledge, 2022; England, 1994; Haraway, 1988; McDowell, 1992; Proudfoot, 2015, 2019; Wickramasingha, 2023).

I took a purposive approach to sampling by contacting organisations and individuals that I thought would be connected to people who had left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive change. This means that I used my social and professional connections as a starting point for recruitment. My purposive sampling is steeped in my positionality of whiteness. I reached out to

organisations that I had participated in or were familiar with in some way. They were places where I felt comfortable, meaning they were places of whiteness; one was a place of femaleness. This would be true for my connections on the social media platforms that I used to recruit. If my positionality (section 3.2) were different, my purposive sampling would have resulted in different participants being interviewed and a different view of the corporatized workplace may have resulted. According to Bradshaw and Stratford (2000), because interviews are about “analysis of meanings in specific contexts” (p. 45), representative sampling is not expected. Purposive sampling is used to obtain participants that can best address what is being researched (Baxter & Eyles, 1997; W. C. Morse et al., 2014) and relies on the judgment of the researcher (Martin & Flowerdew, 2005, p. 97) to make choices as to where best to find participants. I reached out to the following organisations to request their assistance in recruiting participants for this research study: Royal Roads University’s executive coaching program, Innovation Guelph, Common Good Solutions, SheEO, Laurence Follows Openings, and several individual executive coaches that I knew. I also posted recruitment invitations on Facebook and LinkedIn. All of these spaces were predominantly white spaces. I noticed that study participants were more likely to volunteer from organisations where I had a personal connection with the contact person responsible for the recruitment. My relationships and, therefore, my positionality affected my access to participants.

3.3.2 Project Participants

Throughout this dissertation's writing, participants' anonymity has been front of mind. I have used pseudonyms. I have not identified the names of the companies for which they worked. In the information letter for the interview (see Appendix 5), I indicated that we can be identified by the stories we tell. I have obscured identifying details for anonymity. I have also chosen here to provide consolidated information about them rather than individual details attached to participants' pseudonyms.

The people that I interviewed worked in corporatized workplaces in Canada. Some shared stories of multiple corporatized workplaces before ultimately leaving the corporatized world. In all, I heard stories of over 80 companies, some in much greater detail than others. Some participants changed jobs several times; others were involved in mergers and acquisitions that significantly affected the culture of the organisations for which they worked. Participants worked for family-owned companies,

national and multinational companies, start-ups, not-for-profits, crown corporations and government. In their careers, several participants changed work locations. Some worked overseas before coming to Canada; others moved locations within Canada, and three shared experiences of working overseas—two for multinationals and one for a Canadian crown corporation. At the time of the interview, 11 participants were in Ontario, 10 in British Columbia, two in Alberta, and one each in the US, Quebec and the Maritimes.

Participants worked in several different sectors. They include consulting (environmental, IT, and management), healthcare, seniors' housing, hospitality, tech, manufacturing (beverage and pharmaceuticals), oil and gas, aviation, finance, water treatment, legal services, international development, public management, recreation, retail, employment services, and printing. Some participants reported having good experiences in some of their workplaces, and a few had consecutive bad experiences as they moved from one job to the next. Some focused their storytelling on the last corporatized workplace in which they worked. Others described their career from the time they started working.

I interviewed 16 women and ten men. The ages of participants at the time of the interview were, on average, 51½ years of age. The youngest was 27, and the oldest was 67 years old. On average, they left their corporatized workplace at the age of 44.3 between 1991 and 2020. Many participants held positions of power and privilege within their organisations. This is not surprising as many participants heard about the research through an organisation that trains coaches. It is people in positions of power within organisations who can afford coaching or whose companies would provide them with a coach. I interviewed people who were sole contributors, putting them at the bottom of the hierarchical structure of their organisations. For most, that position did not necessarily mean a lack of power or privilege. Many sole contributors were in sales, giving them freedom and control over their work and, for some, generous salaries and bonuses based on performance. Twenty participants were white, and all but two were straight, which aligned very much with my positionality.

The whiteness of participants offered them unearned assets from the foundations of white supremacy that built modern capitalism (Bonds & Inwood, 2016). This would include the positions of power that they obtained, the ability to move through spaces comfortably without fearing for their safety, not

having to adjust their behaviour to fit into a culture of whiteness, and not having to be hypervigilant as one Chinese Canadian participant explains:

I'm very conscious of those things. I've always been this weird little old soul kid who was very conscious of everything going around. And that was one of my protection mechanisms... I learned very early to read the room to figure out who was going to be potentially a bully or an enemy or tormentor, who was going to be in the middle and who was going to maybe be a friend, right?

This protection mechanism is not regularly required by white people, more so by white women, but not anywhere near the extent that this participant describes. Hypervigilance takes energy, energy that white people can use to do other things. This participant also spoke about how difficult it was to get a job when sending out resumes after completing an engineering degree at university:

I remember being at university and...I would submit 40 resumes, and my classmates would submit 40 resumes. And the three of us that were visible minorities with visible minority names got way less interviews. So, there was another friend of mine who was Southeast Asian Canadian born had a very Southeast Asian name, right, was obviously not an Anglo and another Chinese Canadian as well. And the three of us in the class got, I would say, 10% of the interviews than any of the others did.

Not being white requires far more effort than being white. As Sara Ahmed (2012) describes, it also requires doing the work to help white people be comfortable with their discomfort of having someone in a space who does not match their somatic norm.

Another Chinese Canadian shared her experience in the workplace: “

Just being a woman in the workplace was really interesting for me because I am Asian and smaller. I would say I'm petite in stature, and I've definitely been like, “Oh, she's the intern,” right? And I'm not the intern. I'm like the project manager here and ...you know, they just kind of discounting you in the room. It's definitely happened

Later in the interview she discusses being discounted because of her age (27 at the time of the interview). To me, she seems to prioritize her gender and stature over her race as the reason for being discounted. Gender was a prominent lens through which women viewed the workplace. Ageism was discussed by one other female participant. She felt her older age played a role in her being let go from her role in government with an exit package.

For the most part, the people I interviewed were privileged and in positions of power. They all had secure, full-time employment when employed in the corporatized workplace. Most of them worked for organizations that offered health benefits and paid vacation. They had a significant level of security that is not available to people in the gig economy. I did not ask them directly what their salaries were, but I could glean from what they shared that almost all would have made over the average Canadian salary. Many made significantly more. One participant spoke of his uncomfortableness with the amount of money that he made:

I felt odd not really doing a lot of anything and getting paid what I knew was like top 1% of people in Canada. It just seemed I don't know... It's an odd feeling, but it just didn't feel good to really be doing... I could see people around me that were friends of mine working their tails off and making ... a tenth of what I was making and think like I just didn't feel like I could speak authentically about what I did as working hard.

He was the only participant who shared that he did not have to work hard. Although he was likely the highest-paid participant in the study, several others worked in the C-suite or in other senior management positions in large corporations. As most participants were white, they had the added benefits provided by the white supremacy culture of the corporatized workplace (Bonds & Inwood, 2016), which includes upward mobility within the workplace and the comfort that meeting the somatic norms of a space provides (Ahmed, 2012). These types of benefits provided a pull to stay. Participants' class and whiteness provided them with a capacity to leave the corporatized workplace that others may not have.

The voices and experiences of those who had no choice but to stay in the corporatized workplace have not been considered in this research. Their voices count and could provide other perspectives of corporatized culture, its effects on their sense of self, the emotional and affective geography of the

corporatized workplace, why they stay, and the coping mechanisms required to stay. Interviewing those who don't leave but want to, could provide greater insight into the role of race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and family responsibilities play in preventing people from leaving their corporatized workplace. There are likely many more reasons than just the financial risk or geography that keep people in their workplace. It could be that staying in a known place with known social connections and known dynamics is preferable to leaving and landing somewhere that is worse. The voices of those who stayed would not have provided me with such a clear care lens through which to examine the corporatized workplace. As demonstrated by Erica Schoenenberger (1994, 1997, 2001), there is a benefit to researching those who have power and privilege within the corporatized workplace. It allowed her to shed light on the messy dynamics of the corporate workplace, where culture, power, and identity are entangled to the point that leaders make decisions that benefit their identity and maintain their power but risk the firm's collapse. She also uncovered the conflicts and tensions between different professionals within the same firm and how those conflicts can also risk the firm's demise.

Although I interviewed the powerful and the privileged, the knowledge that was created could not have been created without them. I would not have seen the care ceiling so clearly if I had not interviewed white men with power and privilege in the corporatized workplace. One participant who embodied the somatic norm of white supremacy and capitalism and yet cared about people confirmed my suspicions there was a care ceiling. The man had been groomed in the ways of the game as he moved up the corporate ladder, and rather than embracing the suggestions, he was shocked and shaken by them. The clarity about the existence of the care ceiling came when the executives read his care for those below him consulted on the decision to promote him to senior management as resistance to the "institutional habits" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102) and "institutional will" (p. 26) of the company. They did not support his promotion and he therefore did not get it. Instead, he left the company. The understanding of workplace dynamics this research offers will benefit people at all levels within the corporatized workplace, particularly those suffering from the slow woundings of moral injury.

Identity played a role in whether participants felt like insiders or outsiders in their workplaces. One woman was overtly excluded from workplace activities and advancement opportunities because of

her gender. Another woman spoke about the asymmetrical difference in responsibility women had in comparison to men when it came to parenting, which affected work/life balance. Women were more likely to raise the effect of having children on their workplace experience; only one man did. Women also shared how they had significant experiences that were invisible to the corporatized workplace yet had a significant effect. These included perimenopause and miscarriages. Women raised the issue of unsupportive women colleagues more frequently than sexism. One Chinese Canadian participant shared extensively about his negative experience with whiteness in the corporatized workplace and as he grew up. He also spoke about the effort it took to manage racism and assess the psychological safety of the corporatized space. I interviewed one other person who identified as Chinese, one who identified as Indian, another as Middle Eastern, another as Mexican American and one who identified as mixed race. Four participants had noticeable accents that could mark them as outsiders in the workplace, but none spoke about it affecting their workplace experience. Others pointed to their outsider status being a result of their not having the same educational background as others in the workplace. The most significant thing that made participants feel like outsiders in their corporatized workplaces was a difference in worldview from others in the workplace and the lived culture of the workplace. I will address these worldview differences in Chapters 4 and 5.

I did not directly ask participants about their family situation, though some shared it with me as part of their story. This oversight demonstrates that my positionality of being single for most of my career and not having children resulted in a blind spot and a gap in my research. At the time they left the corporate workplace, five participants are known to have been single; two were divorced with primary care of the children, 14 were partnered (married or common law), 10 of those participants were known to have children when they left the corporatized workplace, the other four I have no data on whether they had children or not. Four participants did not mention their family situation in the interview. One participant was married with children at the time of the interview, but I am unsure of his family status at the time that he left the corporatized workplace. It was women who brought up their family status as it related to leaving the corporatized workplace. Being a new mother seemed to shift a woman's relationship to her work and factored into them leaving the corporatized workplace. One divorced mother with primary care for her children spoke about the pull to stay in the corporatized workplace so she could afford to pay for their education. It may seem intuitive that it is

easier to quit your job when you have a partner. However, I found it easier to quit when I was single because my decision to quit did not affect anyone else. I also had more freedom to uproot myself because I did not have children. However, once I finally quit, being married allowed me to take more time from the corporatized workplace and work on my PhD. One participant who quit the corporatized workplace a few times had to work to bridge her into the next step in her career. Two other participants found jobs to provide income as they shifted from the corporatized workplace to a business. The jobs included working as a dog walker, on film and television sets, and as administrative support in a doctor's office. Each of those jobs paid less and offered less status than their roles in the corporatized workplace.

Most participants (22) left voluntarily; three had a severance, and one had an early retirement. Four left involuntarily with a severance. The stories shared about the corporatized workplace by those who voluntarily left were very similar to those who left involuntarily. The participants who voluntarily left because a severance was offered were provided a level of security who left without a severance did not have. Choosing to leave with a severance did not necessarily prevent them from requiring time to heal from the damage inflicted upon them in the workplace. One participant left his workplace because his company wanted to move him back to his country of origin with only a month's notice. It was not enough time to uproot his life and young son. Another left because the company was going to transfer him to the US, and he did not want to go. One person who left involuntarily spoke of the shame she felt because of the nature of her departure. Another person who left involuntarily talked about how it was not how she had wanted to leave after giving the company so many years of service.

On average, they started their businesses at the age of 45 years between 1991 and 2020. The youngest person to start a business after leaving the corporatized workplace was 26. The oldest was 61. It would be easy to conclude that the average age participants left the corporatized workplace is reflective of their stage of life or of a midlife crisis. However, this could just be an anomaly of my purposive sampling. Two participants left the corporatized workplace in their 20s. One of them had the advantage of living with her parents as she shifted from the corporatized workplace. One person was running her business as she was working in the corporatized workplace. Two were offered positions to lead the creation of new not-for-profits shortly after giving their notice. Three participants left directly to start businesses that offered services like what they had done in the corporatized

workplace. Four participants began to take the courses or get the support they needed to start their businesses when they were in the corporatized workplace. The rest had no idea what they were going to do next when they left.

The number of stories participants shared makes it difficult to summarize the locations, sectors, and positions of each job. Table 2 is a summary of the locations of the last corporatized workplace that participants shared stories about. All participants left at least one corporatized workplace in Canada. Some left more than one. The table does not include every workplace or sector that participants shared about. The most significant story of alienation did not necessarily come from the last place a participant left. Some participants felt alienated in most of their roles. Two shared details of how power manifested itself in subtle ways (language, communication choices, spatial positioning of the workplace, and lack of decision-making) in their workplaces. One of those travelled through several different companies and sectors before leaving the corporatized workplace. The other one lived through several acquisitions, each one providing more insight into the corporatized workplace's culture. I did not limit my data analysis to the last corporatized workplace participants described.

Table 2

Last Corporatized Workplace: Location, Sector, Position

Location of the last corporatized workplace they left	BC	10
	Alberta	3
	Ontario	11
	Maritimes	1
	Overseas	1
Sector of the last corporatized workplace participants left	Consulting	4
	Hospitality	2
	Finance	2
	Manufacturing	2
	International development	1
	Tech	2
	Senior care	2
	Resource Extraction	5
	Civil Service	2
	Legal Services	1
	Printing	1
	Retail	1
	Healthcare services	1

Position within the workplace when participants left	Executive	5
	Senior Manager	3
	Manager	10
	Sales	3
	Individual Contributor	5

All participants started what they felt were positive change businesses. Twenty-four of those businesses were owned and operated by the participants. Sixteen participants were solopreneurs. Nine of those were coaches. Many solopreneurs worked in collaboration with other solopreneurs or under the umbrella of larger companies to fulfil contracts. One of the coaches had created a business aimed at breaking down the silos of communication within corporations. He does it by demonstrating how interconnected everyone's roles are and identifying where mutual support exists or should exist between those silos. From what he shared; his company will contract other coaches to support corporations through his process. Two participants were hired to lead the development and operation of new not-for-profits. Generally speaking, participants' "positive change" businesses focused on addressing the issues that they experienced in or because of the corporatized workplace. Four participants were not solopreneurs and operated their businesses with several employees. Two participants created not-for-profits. One was entirely volunteer-based, and his income came from teaching at a community college. Six people I interviewed were just launching businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change, so the companies were not at a point where the culture within the organisation was known.

More than a few times, as I interviewed, I asked myself whether these positive change businesses were transformational in the way of Gibson-Graham (2006, 2013) or Laloux (2016). Many had a noble purpose, and several were about "life engender[ing] life" (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75). However, there were times when I felt that the business was being created in a way that made the founder comfortable. The workplace structures and practices were that of the founder, and when they grow, will the internal culture of the workplace take on "the naturalized social, cultural, and economic power structures associated with whiteness" (Bonds & Inwood, 2016) which is the foundation of the capitalist system? One participant was actively working to "unpack" her whiteness and spoke openly about the privileges her whiteness bestowed upon her. She was also applying what she learned from that unpacking to her business helping clients with their branding and communications.

As mentioned in section 3.2, my research question was constructed only to include those who had started their own business and not people who joined another already existing organisation. Some participants did join not-for-profits some as volunteers, others as employees after leaving the corporatized workplace. Two returned to the corporatized workplace after their experience in the not-for-profit sector. Some volunteered as a first step in re-entering the world after burnout from the corporatized workplace. Two became employees after volunteering for not-for-profits while they worked in the corporatized workplace. Two left not-for-profits when they realised the not-for-profits were focused on power, control and money over people like the corporatized workplace. Two participants did leave the corporatized workplace to join new not-for-profits as the founding executive director. One participant created a Canadian not-for-profit based on an existing U.S. not-for-profit and works with other similar organisations across the world. After a few years of being a solopreneur, one participant was considering returning to the business world, but this time, he wanted to join a social enterprise.

Two-thirds of the participants were solopreneurs and about one-third of the participants were trained as executive coaches. This could represent a limitation to my research. The large number of solopreneurs limited my ability to examine and contrast the cultural experiences and power structures of the corporatized workplace with the workplaces created in these “positive changes” businesses. The question of whether these “positive change” businesses can actually develop different cultures or whether they will continue to perpetuate the dominant hegemonic structures and systems within the corporatized workplace remains. For the most part, the coaches worked in different corporatized sectors. For the ones that worked in the same sector, they had vastly different roles. This means they provided diverse stories about their experiences in different corporatized workplaces, and my research benefited from that. Their focus as coaches was quite diverse as well, though many had trained at the same place.

There is also the potential for coaches to share a worldview that would affect the outcome of the research. Coaches may be an asset to this research because, in my view, coaches are more likely to embody care ethics. This view is based on my white, feminist view of care and my training as an executive coach. As mentioned before, I structured my research question in the way I did to be able to look at the corporatized workplace through the lens of care. I recognise that some coaches may focus

their businesses on helping people enhance themselves through the accumulation of power, status, wealth, and respect. These values are in opposition to the values of benevolence and universalism (Schwartz, 2012) that I would associate with those involved in ethics of care. Those that I interviewed were trained to listen with curiosity, hold space without judgment, and leave the person they were coaching feeling seen, heard, and understood. When speaking about their businesses, participants described their desire to shift the culture of the corporatized workplace one person at a time, one team at a time, or at the scale of the organisation.

One participant, a serial entrepreneur in the tech field, was in the process of “deliberately engineering the culture” of his new start-up. He had founded several successful businesses and developed a framework for building a culture that provided “psychological safety” and created “trust.” His process was rooted in the ideas of Stephen Covey. He has applied the system many times over the years within his own companies and in helping others as an angel investor. At the time of his interview, he was in the process of developing two new companies with a healthcare focus and applying his framework to make it happen. Unlike with the previous start-ups they were involved with, the founders “are not interested in exiting” this start-up, and the company is “definitely mission driven” rather than “profit and revenue driven.” Placing mission over profits puts this start-up in contrast with corporatized workplaces.

There were three companies that were designed and developed in a way that contrasted with the ethos of the corporatized workplace. One stepped out of the capitalist principles to ensure their company brought value not only to its bottom line but also to the communities it served. Its structure was flat, and its culture was built on open communication and people supporting each other. This company is BCorp certified, so has third-party validation as a company oriented to positive environmental and social change. One created communication tool for their employees to prevent social conflict and tension within the company. They shared those systems with their corporate clients. The final one is a not-for-profit with a small team with a common mission to deliver a food program to local schools. They focused on building reciprocal relations with other local not-for-profits by sharing information and resources with them.

When I initially proposed my research, I anticipated that participants would leave the corporatized workplace because they were turning toward creating a business that made them feel they were making a positive change in the world. What I discovered in this research is that most participants did not leave the workplace directly to start a business they saw as oriented to positive change. They were not turning toward creating a business. They were, in fact, turning away from corporatized workplaces that were driven by self-interest, productivity, efficiency, and the accumulation of power and wealth, leaving participants with a feeling that nobody had their back. I also expected to be able to analyse the differences between the cultures of the corporatized workplace and those of the “positive change” businesses that were created. Given how many participants were solopreneurs and how only a few of the businesses had developed to the point that there was an active culture, I was unable to pursue this analysis. Instead, I focused on the movement from the corporatized workplace to ultimately creating a business they felt was oriented to positive change.

3.4 Data Collection

To collect the data, I chose an unstructured open interview style. Unstructured interviews are the primary means of data collection for narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). This choice is steeped in my own positionality. Not everyone would feel comfortable sharing their stories, and some may be very careful with whom they share their stories. A white researcher may not be who they would want to receive their stories. Unstructured interviews provide freedom to the participants to share in a way that makes sense to them and provokes more depth in the sharing (Davies et al., 2018; Lorimer & Parr, 2014). For others, structured questions could be their preference because the questions put boundaries on the research and give them a clearer understanding of the scope of the research. One of the challenges with unstructured interviews is that participants can drift from the main purpose of the research and may require gentle re-direction to get back on track (Martin & Flowerdew, 2005, p. 101). Most of the people I interviewed stayed focused and, if they did drift, corrected themselves. To start the interview, I simply asked participants to share experiences of three places: (i) the corporate workplace, (ii) making the shift/the in-between, and (iii) creating their “positive change” business in whatever manner was most comfortable for them. To share your story is to be vulnerable (Raynor, 2017). I took steps to make participants feel less vulnerable by ensuring that interview time was still convenient for them and reviewing the purpose of the research and what

to expect during the interview. I reminded them that their participation was voluntary, that they should only share to the level they felt comfortable, and that they should feel free to skip any question that I asked, and that they could stop the interview at any time for any reason.

I allowed for silence in the interview. Silence provides participants “time to absorb, reflect, and make sense of a situation” (J. Morse, 2018, p. 807) as they are interviewed. Having left the corporate workplace myself, I understood that for some participants, their experiences may have been painful, and the research interview may be the first time they had space to tell their stories. Listening closely and carefully and allowing space for silence was therefore vital. In my experience, silence opens space for the participant to pause, reflect and feel what else wants to be said. This approach to interviewing is based on deep listening, what Clough & Nutbrown (2012) refer to as radical listening— “the interpretative and critical means through which ‘voice’ is noticed” (p. 26) and involves listening beyond the words to understand the intention behind the words and the effect of the participant’s positionality. As mentioned previously, my training as a yoga therapist gave me experience with listening deeply and being present with someone in silence. Though reflecting on this now, silence can also make people uncomfortable and can be seen as manipulative, inviting people to fill the silence with words and stories that they had no intention to share. My executive coaching training taught me how to be present with someone, listen, ask for clarification, and ask questions that will move the client forward. When they completed the telling of their stories, I asked open-ended questions for clarification about what they had shared. It was at that point that I exerted more of my power as a researcher as I chose where I wanted clarification or what to hear more about. The clarification questions that I asked were affected by my positionality.

There were many times that I felt attuned, sharing emotions and orientations (Ahmed, 2014) with the experiences of participants. As I listened to participants’ stories and sat with the data that attunement (Ahmed, 2014) challenged my unresolved feelings about my experience in the corporatized workplace. Things like working long hours, going above and beyond, the pressure to fit in, a lack of belonging, and a feeling of being on a different planet from others on the executive team all resonated with my workplace experience. I experienced similar personality changes as some participants described, shifting from being inspired, creative, and enthusiastic to being angry, frustrated, confused, and disillusioned by the behaviours in the workplace. I experienced the visceral feeling of losing

pieces of myself, found completing the simplest of tasks almost impossible, and felt the tears flow without stopping on my way to work and sometimes at work. As a result, I perceived the workplace as hostile to me and had very strong opinions about the corporate workplace and its male-dominant culture. Like some of my participants, I left the workplace abruptly. Participants' stories left me feeling reassured that I wasn't the only one who had experienced these things. That was accompanied by a sense of grief that the workplace can cause that level of woundedness to others as well.

When participants' stories did not align with mine, I felt a sense of curiosity. When a participant described just leaving her toxic workplace and moving on, trusting that another opportunity would appear. I got curious about what it was about her that was different from me and other participants who had stayed in that misery. I was in awe of the participant who entered the workplace knowing exactly what she wanted to gain from it, who didn't seem to take the actions of her co-workers personally, and clearly knew her path forward. The contrast between her approach and my approach was so palpable that it could not be ignored. One participant whose motivation in the corporatized workplace was to make "a shit ton of money" still left feeling like he was falling apart from the "assault on humanity" he had experienced in his workplace. This highlighted to me that what caused participants to break apart in the workplace could not simply be the difference between those who are in it for themselves and those who care about people. I also have to admit that there were times when people shared things that rubbed me the wrong way, things that I would normally challenge in non-research spaces, and I did not get curious in those times. I stayed quiet because I was performing the role of the researcher.

I interviewed 26 people between November 13, 2020, and June 7, 2021. This sample size is above the minimum sample size of 15 for qualitative research and within the most common sample size of 20-30 that was found after reviewing 560 dissertations (M. Mason, 2010). I felt that I had reached saturation after 22 interviews because I had a large enough sample to adequately answer the research question and "to capture a range of experiences" (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013, p. 193). Phillip and Nolan (2024) speak to the unearned trust that is bestowed upon whiteness. I experienced this during my interviews. I seemed to quickly develop rapport with my participants. Like Phillip and Nolan, I felt participants treated me like a peer and offered me access to their stories based on how I presented as a white female researcher. Looking back, I see how there was an assumption by participants of our

shared view of the problems of the corporatized workplace, which is also an artefact of whiteness (Pillipo & Nolan, 2024). However, one participant who worked for oil and gas emphasized to me many times his different standpoint:

Corporate life for me, who did travel, lots of freedom to do my job; good people, that autonomy of work. We had targets, we had expectations, but we all worked as a really strong unit in my company, in my group, especially. I can't remember any time in my probably 11 or 12 years in that industry where I felt, "Wow, this is brutal. I don't want to be here." In the sense that the people are not nice; in the sense that the economic environment is not good...[I] never woke up in the morning thinking, "Oh, man, I don't want to go to work."

He reiterated that he had no issues with the sector, the company, or the people he worked with.

When I reviewed the people I interviewed, I noticed they were predominantly white and realized that I may not have captured the range of experiences of the non-white population. There are so many reasons that could explain my difficulty recruiting non-white participants. One is that I recruited from white spaces that I felt comfortable in. Indigenous people, people of colour, and Jewish people have all been studied without their consent. White colonizers have and continue to exploit, misrepresent, appropriate, and silence the voices of Indigenous people and people of colour (Battel Lowman & Barker, 2015; Menakem, 2017; Milner, 2007; Ghosh, 2021). Ceremonial artefacts, artefacts of the everyday, and bodies of these people have been stolen and placed in museums without permission. These actions foster a lack of trust in colonial structures like universities and their researchers. In addition, I recruited and interviewed during the pandemic. The black population of Canada was affected by COVID at much higher rates than whites due to being "overrepresented in frontline jobs" (p. 112), choosing not to vaccinate because of their "mistrust of the healthcare system" (p. 112) and the inequities within the healthcare system due to structural racism (Olanlesi et al., 2024). The murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers and the actions of Black Lives Matter were still reverberating through the zeitgeist and my social media feeds. It may not have been a good time to request people's free labour in participating in a research project. The way I designed the study, using narrative inquiry and unstructured interviews requires people to be vulnerable and exposed. Society on a daily basis makes people of colour feel vulnerable and exposed. I still reached out to

organisations that were focused on supporting a more diverse group of workers and entrepreneurs (Indo-Canadian Chamber of Commerce, Black Business and Professionals Association, AfroBiz.ca, the Durham Region Association of Black Professionals and Entrepreneurs, the FLIK Community) and interviewed four more people as a result. These were all organizations that I did not have any connection to adding to my challenge to recruit.

I recruited during the pandemic, so my interviews were virtual. This enabled participants to decide where they wanted to be for the interview. I did suggest in my recruitment letter that virtual interviews were just like “sitting in a café having a conversation.” It was included to ensure participants understood there were privacy risks to using online platforms for interviews but also suggested a level of comfort and intimacy in the interview process. One participant went for a walk while he was being interviewed. I used the Webex virtual conferencing system for most of my interviews. One was conducted over the phone at the request of the participant, and another was through Google Meet (at the suggestion of the participant) when a WebEx connection could not be made. On average, interviews took about 76 minutes, which resulted in 1,969 minutes of data. The shortest interview was 44 minutes, and the longest was 125 minutes. I used Webex automated transcripts for all the recordings. For the two interviews that were not recorded through WebEx, I ran the audio through WebEx to get the automated transcript. I then listened to the interviews again to correct any transcription errors and removed personal identifiers from the transcripts.

3.5 Data Analysis

When I completed the interviews, I turned to an Excel spreadsheet that I had created to store data about all the interviews in one place. It included information about participants’ roles in the corporatized workplace, the sectors they worked in and the location from where they left, their chosen pseudonyms, a summary of the plot of their story, my reaction to the interview, and themes that I noticed when reviewing the transcript. I also wrote about how what they shared connected with the literature I was reading at the time. The spreadsheet provided easy access to summarized data. Later, I created a separate Excel spreadsheet designed to easily count and report consolidated data about the project participants included in section 3.3.2. That was a challenge because the interviews were free-flowing stories without interruption, and I did not specifically ask participants about how old they

were or what year it was when something happened. I learned stories are not always linear. There can be meanderings, and as people speak, they can jump back and forth in time while telling their stories.

The result of the interviews is a collection of work narratives (Dombeck, 2003; Worth, 2016b) or a modified life history that maps events (Davies et al., 2018). Collecting life history narratives provides an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the “how, why and when” (Davies et al., 2018, p. 6) of the journey from the corporatized workplace to starting a “positive change” business. When a life history or personal narrative is shared; it is not just a story about an individual, it also brings to life the relationships and connections of that individual (J. Mason, 2004). I learned how challenging it is to analyse data that is not structured. Structured questions would have put a first level of organisation on the data, which would have made it easier to analyse. However, I am glad I did not do that because I know I would not have collected the depth and thickness of data that I have. The unstructured interview style uncovers “the subtle complexities” (Herod, 1993, p. 305) of situations and provides a depth of understanding of the complexity of relationships and “real-world predicaments” (Schoenberger, 1991, p. 181). Without the depth of data I have, I may not have gained the understanding of the culture of the corporatized workplace that I now have. If I had used structured interview questions, I might have missed the personal transformation that participants experienced with their shift from the corporatized workplace to a business they view as oriented to positive change (Chapter 6). Consistently hearing about that personal transformation took me by surprise. Therefore, it is unlikely that I would have created a question that would have captured that aspect of participants’ journeys.

My data analysis was guided by affect theory, specifically the work of Sara Ahmed and Lauren Berlant. Two concepts of Sara Ahmed’s informed my data analysis. The first is her description of affect as turning towards something when it affects us positively or away from something when it affects us negatively, which is a process of difference-making (Ahmed, 2010a). To me, the act of leaving the workplace is the act of turning away. For one participant, the turning away from the corporatized workplace was driven more by the choice to turn towards her “positive change” business. The second concept is Ahmed’s (2014) view of emotions as neither outside-in nor inside-out but rather as surfaces that delineate the social and the individual. Ahmed applied David Hume’s concept of seeing emotions as impressions, something that presses up against us. What made an

impression on me was Ahmed's wordplay with the word impression, and I used it in my analysis. Ahmed (2014) states that "how objects impress upon us...can be a mark on the surface" (p. 6). I see that "mark on the surface" as a potential wound— what Joronen (2021) describes as a slow wounding. I apply the concept of slow wounding in Chapter 5.

Lauren Berlant (2011) speaks to "the event" (p. 5)—an encounter with an object that precipitates a "radical break" (p. 5), which opens space for the possibility of aliveness. I see "the event" as similar to Thrift's (2003) "creative improvisations" (p. 103), where the rhythm of the everyday is interrupted by something new, different, and unexpected, and it sparks the opening of a new kind of space. With both the radical break of an event and creative improvisations, there is the offering of a shift for an instant. If that opening is not chosen, then it is back to the ordinariness of life (Berlant, 2011). I noticed that participants described these types of encounters in the liminal space between the corporatized workplace and their businesses. These encounters are what spurred participants onto the possibility of creating a business. I use the concepts of events or encounters, which create openings to new possibilities in Chapter 6.

I think it is also important to note that there can be an event or encounter that, rather than creating an opening, creates a closing down or a turning away. The stories about the corporatized workplace were about events as well, but were not events that opened participants to possibilities. They were encounters, moments of interruption, or better described as moments of injury or slow wounding that made them feel diminished and are the focus of Chapter 5. These events shifted participants into an affective state of paranoia and fear (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Naylor & Thayer, 2022; Sedgwick, 2003) and caused them to perceive the workplace as hostile or unsafe. My intention here is not to use the term 'paranoia' in a medicalised way that would pathologise my participants. Instead, I use it like Eve Sedgwick (2003) and Gibson-Graham (2006), who use paranoia to describe an affective state. They challenged the affective orientation of academics and the economy, respectively, to shift the viewpoint and open people up to possibilities by shifting out of an affective state of paranoia. In his theory of basic values, Schwartz (2012) refers to "anxiety-based" (p. 13) values that create self-protection against threat (p. 13). Though Schwartz's language is different, what he is expressing is a similar affective orientation to that used by feminist scholars. These were moments that shifted

participants into feeling alienated from themselves, the workplace, and others in the workplace and caused many to lose their sense of self.

I used affect theory in three ways. First, I looked at how power within the workplace pressed against the participants' way of being. I then looked at the things that were pressing against the participants in the corporatized workplace that caused slow wounding, and finally, I searched for the events in the in-between that caused participants to open to new possibilities that led them to start their "positive change" business.

Since my approach to my research was a narrative inquiry, it may have made sense to use narrative analysis. I had intended to use the *Listening Guide* (Gilligan, 2015; Gilligan et al., 2003, 2006) as an analytical tool, which I see as a type of narrative analysis. I even tried it on one of my first interviews. I found that it was onerous and very time consuming. I felt like I did not have the expertise to apply the approach without more training. It seemed to unnecessarily take me into the details of an individual's story when there were clear themes being shared—corporate culture vs personal worldviews, alienation, and recovery. Though I did not apply narrative analysis, I did address some of the aspects of the five readings of narrative analysis. While listening to the audio to check the automated transcripts, I noted the themes I was noticing, I noted links between the stories that were shared and the literature I was reading, and I noted where individual stories were linked. The power and impression maps I created visually represent linking stories to theory.

Learning the benefits of narrative inquiry, I can see now that it could have addressed some of the challenges I had during my research. When I was coding themes, I felt like I was breaking participants' stories apart and losing their wholeness. Narrative analysis maintains the wholeness of the individual (Josselson & Hammack, 2021) and may have eased my concern about losing the individual in my research. There are several reasons that narrative analysis would not have been the appropriate choice for me. Firstly, to me, the "larger meaning of the text" (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 26) what was explicitly being shared made delving into the "microfeatures of the language" (Josselson & Hammack, 2021, p. 26) to decipher the implicit meanings unnecessary. Secondly, I would have been a neophyte in applying this process, and that would have added a level of complexity that I did not have the capacity to take on. Thirdly, the time it would have taken may have

prolonged my already long PhD journey. Finally, as a PhD candidate, I did not have the resources to engage others in reviewing my data to prevent the biases of my own experiences being projected onto the research (Josselson & Hammack, 2021). That being said, narrative analysis is something that would be interesting to apply to discover what other layers of knowledge there are in this data.

3.5.1 Timelines

I began by creating timelines for each participant, which provided a shorthand written summary of their careers. They are like a résumé of turning points with descriptions to twig my memory about who they were. Most participants started their stories with their first job. A few started further back than that and shared stories of their parents and the influence they had on who they had become. Some started with their schooling. On the left side of the timeline was a list of jobs they had, and on the right side of the timeline were crib notes about the turning points and what participants felt about each workplace. The timelines gave me an easy reference back to the basics of each participant. Most Participants had “accidental careers.”⁷ They fell into a position and moved up “organically”⁸ because they were good at what they did and offered value to the company. These terms are consistent with the idea of “being successful being yourself” that was introduced in Chapter 1.

In Appendix 3, I provide an example of a timeline. It is a timeline I created based on my career. I have not included examples from my participants as I believe including people’s career trajectories may make them more identifiable. My timeline provides more detail than the ones I did for my participants.

3.5.2 Power and Affect Mapping

I created a *power map* for each participant (see Figure 1). I created them because I noticed that many of my participants spoke in dichotomies, describing the workplace as this and not that. I originally saw those dichotomies as descriptions of, on the one side, *power over* and, on the other, *power with*. *Power over* is about domination, control and oppression (Foucault, 1982; Mathie et al., 2017; Naylor & Thayer, 2022). It is driven by fear and insecurity (Foucault, 1982; Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020) and

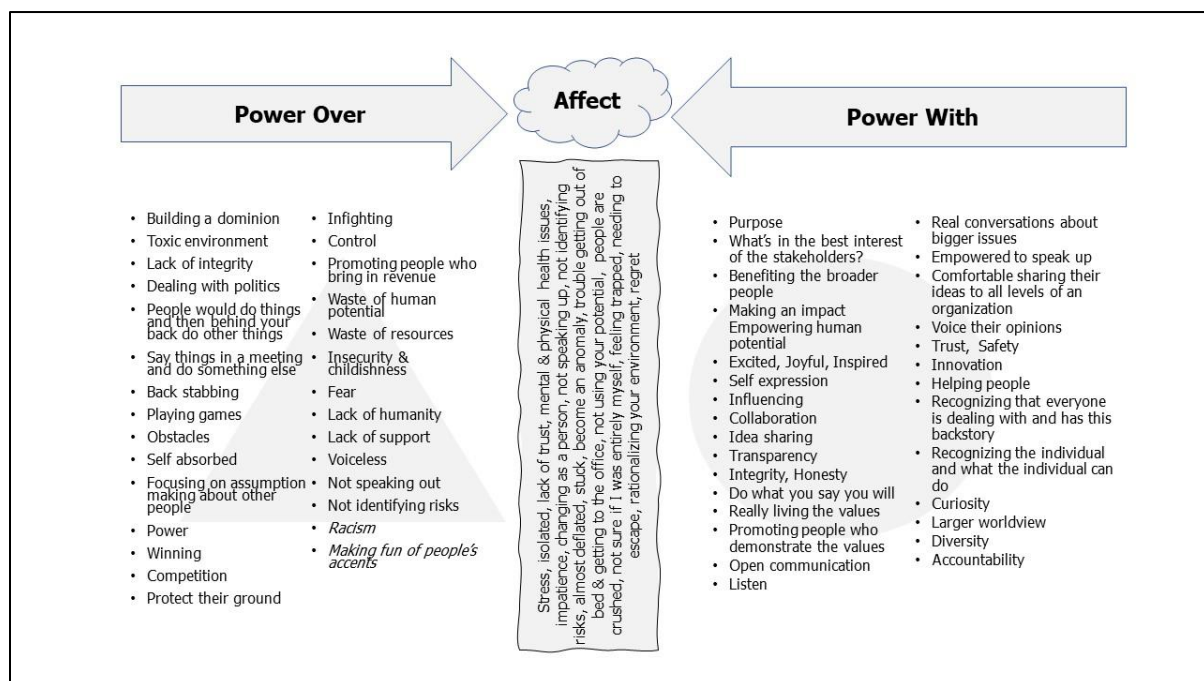
⁷ A term used by study participants.

⁸ A term used by study participants.

acts to separate (Haines, 2019, 2019; Kahane, 2010). According to Kahane (2010), it denies others self-realisation. For Haines (2019), it involves “encouragement to control, win, fight, and know more, to earn one’s worth and identity” (p. 58). *Power with*, on the other hand, is about collaboration, support, and care; it acknowledges interconnection and creates relationships across differences (Mathie et al., 2017; VeneKlasen & Miller, 2002). What emerges from that are new possibilities and relationships. Power with is Gibson-Graham’s (2006) approach to creating alternative economies.

Figure 1

Example Power and Affect Map



Most participants describe the corporatized workplace as having power over dynamics, and several of them describe themselves as having a power with or caring disposition to some degree. I noticed these power structures make an impression, evoke emotion, and create a turning away (Ahmed, 2010a). I prepared what I call *power maps* for each study participant, paying attention to this polarity of what the workplace was and was not. I also paid attention to how they described themselves and their

businesses. I listed the description of the corporatized workplace on the left side (over a triangle) and listed the participants' preference for a way of being in the workplace on the right side (over a circle). Where the triangle and circle meet, I listed the affect created by the workplace pressing against the participant. See Figure 1 for an example of one of these power maps.

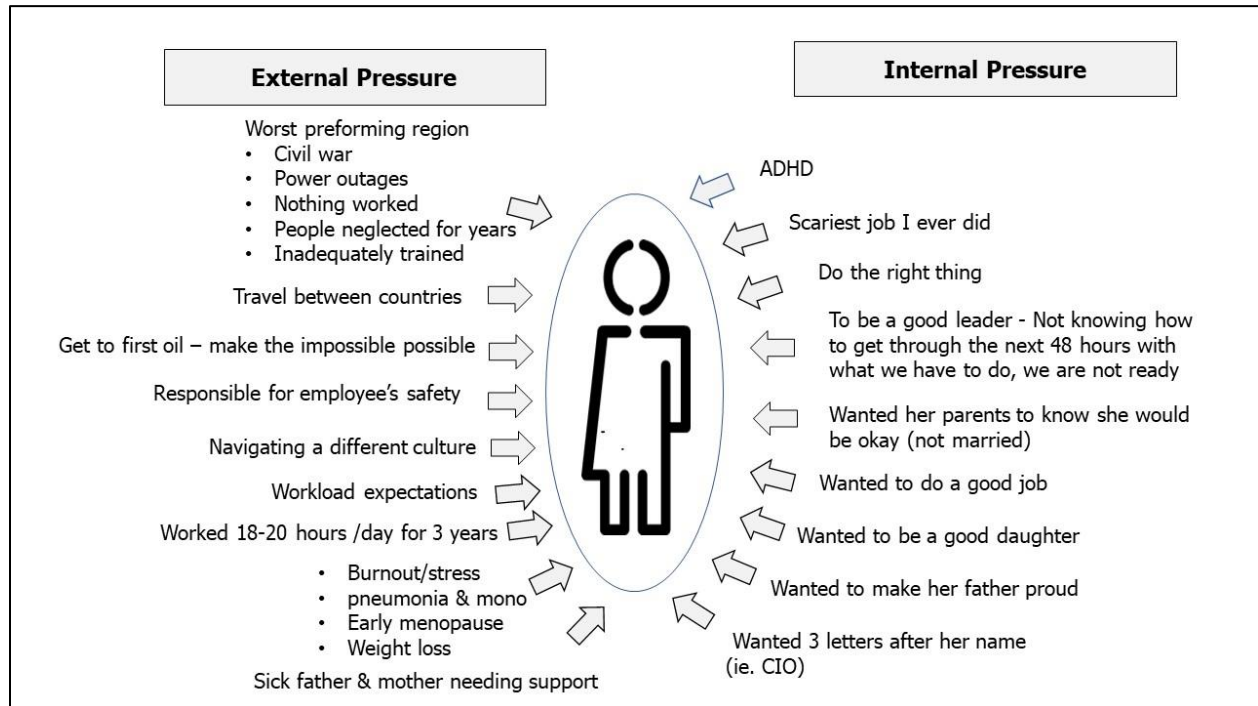
As I analysed the data through writing, I realised that this dichotomized view that participants often described was a bit simplistic and that the workplace was more complex than just power over meeting power with. I will describe that complexity in Chapter 4.

3.5.3 Impression Mapping

Based on Sara Ahmed's (2014) use of impression as a mark on the surface and Joronen's (2021) slow wounding, I went through the transcripts looking for turning points that made an impression on those I interviewed. I created an *impression map* (Figure 2) for each participant and each of the workplaces that they left. These impressions or slow woundings (Joronen, 2021) happened in the corporatized workplace before they had moved on to something new. For two participants, those impressions were anticipatory—what a participant envisioned could be true for them in the future if they stayed in the workplace. Their envisioning of what might manifest for them in the future was created from observing others in the workplace. Those observations of their possible future contributed to their leaving.

Figure 2

Example Impression Map



3.5.4 Event Mapping of the In-Between

For the in-between time, when a participant has either mentally or physically turned away from the workplace but has not yet started their businesses (described in more detail in Chapter 6), I looked for the event(s) that opened the participant up to the possibility of something new, something that creates aliveness. There were much fewer of these events than the slow wounding that occurred in the workplace. Rather than mapping them, I just took notice of them and added them to the timeline described above. For some, it was one event that caused a major shift; for others, it was a slower process with a few events over time. I also noticed that for some participants, the ones that were significantly wounded by the workplace, there was a period where they were incapable of affecting or being affected. All they could do was feel what they felt.

3.5.5 Coding

In addition to the above mapping, I did some basic coding. I coded my data twice, once online using Dedoose software and then again manually using paper and highlighters. The reason I did that is that I took a term off to focus on my father's care, and when I came back to the data, the only way I felt I could re-engage was to get close to it again in a way that I am comfortable working and that was on paper. In Dedoose, I first thought of dividing the transcripts into three places—the corporatized workplace, the in-between, and the “positive change” business. This was challenging because, for some participants, the in-between was located entirely within their corporatized workplace. They mentally and emotionally exited the workplace before physically leaving. The HRM literature calls this psychological detachment (Boudrias et al., 2021; Burris et al., 2008). I started to see the shift from the corporatized workplace as a movement not from one physical location to another—i.e., from the corporatized workplace to a “positive change” business but as a disintegration or alienation from self. That disintegration occurred in the corporatized workplace, and a pilgrimage or journey of reintegration was required. I used Marxist coding: *false consciousness*, *awakening to false consciousness*, and *awake to false consciousness*. At that point, I thought about writing a chapter on alienation, how it manifested in the workplace and how participants awoke to it. In addition to corporate culture, I coded for *alternative culture*, which related to descriptions of care in the workplace and *leaving stories*, which was the story of ultimately how a participant left. I used the codes *reconstituting self* and *landed in self* as a way of coding the shift from the corporatized workplace to the “positive change” business. Reconstituting self represents the actions that a participant took to recover from the corporatized workplace. Landed in self was when a participant articulated that they knew who they were and what their purpose was. It also represents that point where the participant seemed to have shifted from an extrinsic source of drive and validation to an intrinsic source.

After I returned, I changed my coding to *corporate culture*, *care*, and *pilgrimage*. I define *corporate culture* as descriptions that define who/what the workplace is and what and how things are done in the workplace. I define *care* as actions of appreciation, support, mentoring, collaboration, nurturing, reciprocity, compassion, curiosity, and the willingness to have tough, honest, and open conversations. *Pilgrimage* is how I started to see the shift from the corporatized workplace to a “positive change”

business. It includes actions that participants took to move themselves out of the corporatized workplace and into their businesses. By coding for corporate culture, I started to see that participants were speaking about a difference in culture between the top of the workplace hierarchy and the bottom, and I took note of those mentions. Many also mentioned how difficult it was to change things. What stood out as well were moments or descriptions of the lack of care and support that people desired in their workplaces.

Participants used the phrase “the Kool-Aid” to represent the stated values and “the game” as the lived culture. I later divided corporate culture into the *Kool-Aid*—the stated culture of the workplace, which is what an organisation says they do and believe in and *the game*—the lived culture of the organisation, which is what the organisation actually does and believes. The HRM literature distinguishes between the stated and lived culture (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016). However, Lang (2004) describes Kool-Aid in broader terms than I use in this dissertation. He refers to any cult like behaviour and ideology that a group of people unquestionably follows. One could argue that the game is a form of Kool-Aid. I have chosen to apply it to the stated culture because that is how it was used by those I interviewed. When I adopted those terms, I could see beyond the power maps I had created for each participant to a more complete view of the workplace dynamics participants described, which is the focus of Chapter 4. The impression mapping I developed for each participant based on Ahmed’s view of emotions as surfaces that delineated the individual and the social is the basis for Chapter 5. It examines why participants left the workplace at the scale of the individual. It focuses on what is pressing against participants, wounding them to the point that they eventually leave.

I coded *emotions and affect* explicitly described by participants throughout their journey in the corporatized workplace, the in-between and their self-identified positive change businesses. I did this by noting when a particular emotion was named. Examples of emotions in the corporatized workplace and the in-between that were explicitly stated were love, anger, fear, vulnerability, shame, and regret. My primary analysis of affect was through power and impression mapping. I also took note of words and phrases that explicitly described affect such as devastating, draining, exhausted, trapped, crushed, and visceral reactions like skin crawling, feeling my soul leaving my body or feeling sick to my stomach were coded.

To code for the pilgrimage from the corporatized workplace to a business, viewed by participants as oriented to positive change, I drew from the wisdom of feminist scholars. Specifically, from Gibson Graham's (2006, 2013) work developing alternative economies. They started from where people were, brought them into a community of equals, used curiosity to drive creativity, and developed new economies. Participants started to get curious, asking themselves questions about who they were. I coded this *curiosity*. I pulled from bell hooks' (2009) work on finding belonging and used the term "remembering myself" (p. 15) and used the code *remembering*. For hooks, this meant a physical journey back to her Kentucky roots. For participants, it was an internal journey to rediscover themselves. Using Berlant's (2011) concept of "the event" (p.5), I looked for encounters that opened participants to aliveness and possibilities and coded them as *openings*. I noticed that many participants had moments where they found belonging, where they found a community where they felt safe, supported, and alive. I coded those as *belonging*. Many participants took journeys of exploration, some travelling, some taking courses, and others by shifting their business focus. I coded this *exploration*.

Many shared reparative stories about their time in the corporatized workplace. I must admit that this triggered me because, at the time of coding, I could not fathom creating a reparative story of my experience in the corporatized workplace. As I was writing Chapter 6, I began to understand the importance of those reparative stories. I coded them as *gifts*. I also coded for when I felt that participants had *landed in themselves*. Not every participant had reached that point; perhaps some may never get there, and perhaps others didn't share their reparative stories. It is a point where a person drops their attachment to their corporate identity, pulls the pieces of themselves back together, and has the internal confidence that comes with aligning their purpose to who they are. They seem to be actively creating their life their way. Paul's realisation best demonstrates it, "I can do anything." I later saw this point as having reached *species being* (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75), which I see as the opposite of alienation. It also corresponds to van der Kolk's (2014) "owning yourself" (p. 205), a state of being calm, focused, and present with a sense of aliveness.

3.5.6 Participants Personal Values

Personal values play a significant role in this research. I coded for personal values based on Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values. Ideally, I would have had each participant complete a

Schwartz value assessment for this research, but I did not include that in the research design. Instead, I reviewed the interview transcripts, looked for the value statements made by participants, and coded them based on Schwartz's basic values. I, therefore, think it prudent to provide a summary of Schwartz's theory of basic values.

The basic values identified by Schwartz (2012) are consistent cross-culturally. The theory defines each basic value's goals, characteristics, and motivations. Schwartz (2012) places the values in a circle. Those values that are most compatible with each other are found close together in the circle. Those that conflict are across the circle from each other. Appendix 7 includes a copy of Schwartz's circular image. Below, I have placed the values in a table format that includes the goals and descriptors of the values in an easy to reference visual. When going counterclockwise, the order of the values is consistent with the order found in Schwartz's circular structure. I chose this order because benevolence, universalism, self-direction, and stimulation were the values common to many of the participants in my research. If you bend the table into a circle, you will find conformity and tradition beside benevolence. The goals and descriptors in the table are direct quotes from Schwartz (2012, pp. 5–7). I included direct quotes in the table because they were the words that guided my attribution of personal values to each participant.

Schwartz (2012) also groups the values into four different dimensions. I list these dimensions in the counterclockwise order they appear in the circle: i) self-transcendence, ii) openness to change, iii) self-enhancement, and iv) conservation. They form the four quadrants of the circle. As seen in Table 3, self-transcendence is the dimension reflected by benevolence and universalism; openness to change is the dimension shared by self-reflection, stimulation, and hedonism as it relates to having fun. The hedonism values reflect self-enhancement as “spoiling oneself,” achievement, and power. Security, conformity and tradition are about conservation. Because they are located across the circle from each other, openness to change is contrary to conservation. Likewise, self-transcendence and self-enhancement conflict with each other.

Schwartz (2012) examines these dynamics of values further by categorising self-enhancement and openness to change as having a personal focus, with conservation and self-transcendence having a social focus. Schwartz also identifies the affective nature of these dimensions. Schwartz identifies self-enhancement and conservation as “anxiety-based values ” (p. 13) to prevent loss and protect the

self against threat. I see these dimensions corresponding to the affective state of paranoia of Sedgwick (2003) and Gibson-Graham (2006). According to Schwartz (2012), the dimensions of openness to change and self-transcendence are “anxiety-free values” (p. 13) that promote gain, self-expansion and growth. This state of openness and self-transcendence corresponds to the affective state of acceptance, care, and trust of Gibson-Graham’s (2006) work. Appendix 7 provides Schwartz’s figure *Dynamic Underpinnings of the Universal Value Structure*.

Table 3*Definitions from Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values (Schwartz, 2012)*

	Value	Goal	Descriptors
Self-Transcendence	Benevolence	“preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the ‘in-group’).” (p. 7)	“(helpful, honest, forgiving, responsible, loyal, true friendship, mature love) [sense of belonging, meaning in life, a spiritual life].” (p. 7)
	Universalism	“understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of <i>all</i> people and for nature.” (p. 7)	“concern—for the welfare of those in the larger society and world and for nature (broadminded, social justice, equality, world at peace, world of beauty, unity with nature, wisdom, protecting the environment)[inner harmony, a spiritual life]” (p. 7)
Openness to Change	Self-direction	“independent thought and action--choosing, creating, exploring” (p.5)	“(creativity, freedom, choosing own goals, curious, independent) [self-respect, intelligent, privacy]”(p. 5)
	Stimulation	“excitement, novelty, and challenge in life.” (p.5)	“(a varied life, an exciting life, daring)” (p. 5)
	Hedonism Having fun	“pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself.” (p. 5)	“(pleasure, enjoying life, self-indulgent)” (p. 5) Two types of hedonism: 1. Having fun 2. Spoiling oneself
Self-Enhancement	Hedonism Spoiling oneself		
	Achievement	“personal success through demonstrating competence according to ... prevailing cultural standards, thereby obtaining social approval” (p.5)	“(ambitious, successful, capable, influential) [intelligent, self-respect, social recognition]” (p. 5)
	Power	“social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources” (p. 5)	“(authority, wealth, social power) [preserving my public image, social recognition]” (p. 6)
Conservation	Security	“safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self.” (p. 6)	“(social order, family security, national security, clean, reciprocation of favors) [healthy, moderate, sense of belonging]” (p. 6)
	Conformity	“restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms.” (p. 6)	“(obedient, self-discipline, politeness, honoring parents and elders) [loyal, responsible]” (p. 7)

Tradition	“respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides.” (p. 6)	“(respect for tradition, humble, devout, accepting my portion in life) [moderate, spiritual life]” (p. 7)
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When an individual holds two values together, it creates an underlying motivation (Schwartz, 2012).

When universalism and benevolence are present, the motivation is “enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests” (p. 9). Self-direction and universalism result in “reliance upon one’s own judgment and comfort with the diversity of existence” (p. 9). Stimulation and self-direction result in “intrinsic interest in novelty and mastery” (p. 9). Hedonism and stimulation result in “a desire for affectively pleasant arousal” (p. 9). When power and achievement are present, the motivation becomes “social superiority and esteem.” When achievement and hedonism occur together, the result is “self-centered satisfaction.” Conformity and tradition create “subordination of self in favor of socially imposed expectations” (p. 9), and finally, benevolence and tradition result in “devotion to one’s in-group” (p. 9).

What I discovered in applying Schwartz’s theory is that these values can each have a different intensity and quality to them. For example, universalism can focus solely on environmental protection, equality, and social justice, or people may embrace them all. The level of commitment to each can be minor or it can become the purpose of their being. So, how universal values express themselves is quite personal, as is the intensity of their expression. I roughly ordered participant’s personal values based on how many value-based statements were shared. The order of priority in which participants place their values could be different than how I have arranged them. I am also aware that if they had been sharing stories on a different topic than the focus of this research, the order of their values might have been different.

Achievement is not always incongruent with the value of benevolence. When achievement-oriented people drop the “prevailing cultural standards” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 5) and redefine success, they can redirect their competitive nature to more self-transcendent actions. Ken, for example, shared “the ladder of success” in section 4.2 of this dissertation. He describes it as, “If you're a competitive individual with, maybe, just enough insecurity, you will want to do everything you can to move up the ladder, and that leads to all kinds of behaviours.” He described himself in the corporatized workplace: “I am competitive. And that was... the structure... It was all about making more money. Whatever the competitive nature was, it satisfied the competitive nature I have to be successful.” After leaving the corporatized workplace and creating a company with his wife, Ken describes his

achievement orientation differently, “The competitive nature is still there, but not in the...needing to win. It's more like competitive to evolve, right? ... it's not binary anymore.”

Jacob also shifted his achievement orientation after he left the corporatized workplace. In the corporatized workplace, Jacob was all about “making a shit ton of money” and “grinding the numbers.” His focus shifted in his business, where he has married yogic philosophy with business culture. He is still very much about measurement, quantification, and striving to improve the numbers, but the numbers he focuses on are no longer about money. They are about people and leadership. He describes it this way, “I think we... have the wrong measuring sticks for things...we talked about the P&L as being ...profit and loss ... but to me... it should be like people and leadership, right?”

Lynn is another person who has significantly shifted her definition of success. “[At the beginning of my career] I was caught up in how much money I should be making, where should I be? Like, what title should I have at this point?” In her own business, Lynn describes herself: “I am looking to not have money drive my business. Obviously, I would like to make money, but I don’t want it to be the defining factor...I want my integrity to be intact.” Success for Lynn now is defined differently than when she was in the corporatized workplace. Success is now all about integrity and being aligned with her values.

3.5.7 Writing

Writing became my primary way of making sense of my data. It became my way of listening deeply to those I had interviewed. Their words were like pieces of a puzzle that I was moving from a Jackson Pollock painting toward the clarity of a blueprint. I wrote in a spiral. I started writing about the data and what I saw in the data. I wrote about the data in a free flow, starting with two topics: the power dynamics within the workplaces, which became Chapter 4, and then using Ahmed’s emotions as surfaces; I wrote about what pressed against participants, which became Chapter 5. I wrote in detail because it was hard to figure out how to honour each participant without including all their stories. I felt this deep responsibility to respect the stories and the storytellers. As I decided which stories to leave out, I felt a sense of grief in letting them go. It leaves so much unsaid and leaving something of value unsaid is challenging for me. I let go of some powerful stories to prevent repetition. Chapters 4

and 5 informed the structure of my literature review. The literature review then informed the rewrite of each of the chapters. Each chapter written spurred another rewrite of the other chapters.

The challenge for me was that the stories were so entangled, so deep, and so personal that I needed to find a way to tell the story without losing the essence of the storyteller. It was writing the tribute for my father's funeral that allowed me to let go of the details. When writing his tribute, I found myself stuck in the details of his stories. His life, like my research, was an entanglement of interconnected stories. How is it possible to honour him without telling the stories? I managed to find his essence in his stories, and that is what I ultimately shared. That helped me find the essence of the stories in my research and to rewrite my chapters, looking for the essence of the story that needed telling.

When I read Mikko Joronen and Mitch Rose (2021) on the woundedness of power that suggests insecurity and vulnerability precede power, I was struck by how often I had heard from participants about insecurity in the workplace. Their paper validated the woundedness I saw in my data and highlighted the insecurity people in positions of power can feel within the corporatised workplace. It made me understand that they protect themselves and their place in the hierarchy by maintaining the status quo. When I wrote to them to thank them for their paper and the effect it had on me, they suggested further reading. Joronen's (2021) paper about slow wounding in Palestine resonated well with my research. That paper sparked me to recognise and name what was pressing against the study participants as slow wounding.

3.6 Ethics Implications

The data collection method I chose involved interviewing people, which meant the University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee needed to review it. An application for ethics review requires a description of the study, a description of the participants, recruitment methods and procedures, the procedures for ensuring the privacy of the participants, how data will be stored and managed, how I will obtain consent, and how participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study. I received approval—ORE#42662—on October 28, 2020, to proceed with the research and began recruiting participants.

Before the interview, I sent an “Information letter for one-on-one interviews” (Appendix 5) to the participants. That letter outlined who was eligible to participate in the study, what to expect during the interview, the potential risks—anticipated not to be any more than those experienced in day-to-day life—the benefits of the research, how participants’ identities will be kept confidential, the technology to be used to conduct the interview, and a section to inform participants that their participation is completely voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent to participate at any time. At the time of the interview, I reviewed the content of the information letter with each participant and then asked for their verbal consent. I kept a paper log to record verbal consent (Appendix 6) and recorded the date consent was given to participate and to record the interview. That log includes a unique identifier number used as the file names on interview transcripts. I have since renamed the file using the participants’ pseudonyms. The log was stored separately from the transcripts in a locked box in my home office in St. Catharine’s, ON.

To protect the confidentiality of participants, in writing this dissertation, I have used pseudonyms and obscured other identifying details like withholding the names of workplaces. In the information letter for the one-on-one interview, I advised participants that the stories we tell can sometimes identify us.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I laid out my approach to the research, described my positionality, recruitment methods and participants, data collection methods, and my approach to data collection and analysis, and provided a brief outline of the ethics implications. The next chapter is my first empirical chapter. In that chapter, I examine why participants leave the corporatized workplace from the scale of the system. I explain how the *culture*, the *Kool-Aid*, and the *game* cause alienation and play a role in why they leave.

Chapter 4: Culture, Kool-Aid, Games and Alienation

“Propaganda and organization force people into acting according to the rules of a fictitious world, thereby actively denying themselves, by denying their spontaneous opening to the world.”

(Roviello & Temerson, 2007, p. 924)

This chapter provides the systemic context for why people leave the corporatized workplace. In the stories shared by study participants, they spoke about how the system of the corporatized workplace played a role in their leaving and what pressed upon them as individuals (Chapter 5). This dissertation addresses both the systemic and individual scales. It was challenging to decide in which order to address them. I struggled with questions like: Do I address the individual or the system first? How do I speak to the system without including the effect the system has on the individual? Are my first two empirical chapters talking about the same thing? The system is something that acts on the individual scale. Those individuals' values, beliefs, and habits become so embodied by a group that they are unspoken. People who share the system's values, beliefs, and habits or have been so well programmed to embody the system become blind to it. Those who align with and benefit from the system will embrace it and not see the many ways it benefits them. The systemic becomes visible through the eyes of those it presses against, those who do not align with it. In the case of my research, those people embody ethics of care. It is, therefore, only possible to make a system visible with the stories of the affected individuals. Without the affected individuals' stories, it is easy to ignore the systemic issues and blame the individual for its effects. I decided to address the systemic scale first because it addresses the macro structures and behaviours of the corporatized workplace and provides a vocabulary I use when addressing the individual scale.

In this chapter, I argue that those who are *being successful being themselves* face a workplace culture that is foreign and confusing for them. *Being successful being themselves* is a term that one participant used to describe himself and others in the corporatized workplace who do not play the game. They are not actively trying to get ahead by performing their roles and demonstrating to those above them that they understand the rules of the game. They do not compete to look good. They just are themselves and support others around them. They have a value system that opposes those who play the game. Using Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values, I would describe their values as based on self-transcendence rather than the self-enhancement that drives those who play the game. From a power perspective, they apply *power with* and *power to* actions. Power with is about creating “new

relationship and possibilities through collaboration” (Naylor & Thayer, 2022, p. 796). Power to “generates new possibilities and actions” (p. 796). They also have a “sense of their capacity and self-worth” (p. 796) meaning they have *power within*.

Those being successful being themselves find the workplace culture confusing because it is designed to promote competition, instil insecurity, drive workaholism, keep people in a state of stress and exhaustion, and build insecurity and complacency. One participant explains that pressure in this way: “We kind of act like we're saving lives when... the reality is there's just like tons of money on the table, and everybody's trying to get that off.” The culture separates them from themselves, their values, rhythm, and drive by providing extrinsic rewards and pressurizing the system. I deploy two central concepts—*the Kool-Aid* and *the game*—that I have derived from my analysis, which describe the culture of the corporatized workplace and create the dynamics that play a role in people leaving. The Kool-Aid is an act of seduction of workers by the corporation. Self-interested individuals who desire more power, money, and success created the game.

Four people that I interviewed referred explicitly to the *stated culture*—i.e., the “official” image that the organisation presents to its employees and the outside world (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016)—as “the Kool-Aid.” Others did not use the term Kool-Aid but did describe the stated culture of their workplaces. Nine people used the term *the game* when speaking about the actual or lived culture—the culture embodied in the workplace (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016). Others describe similar workplace behaviours without using that label. I adopted the terms in my dissertation because participants use them to express contempt, and they add layers of meaning that the sanitized terms stated culture and lived culture fail to do.

Workplace culture figures prominently in the stories shared by those I interviewed. Jake, a participant who rose through the ranks of a multinational beverage manufacturer, summarizes corporatized workplace in this way, “...the conflict between people who are being successful by being themselves versus people that are being successful because they play the corporate game.” He goes on to define being successful being themselves in this way:

The way it happened wasn't conscious. The way it happened was actually by just doing me. Just me following my heart doing what I love and somebody seeing that passion and that level of interest...somebody discovering me because... I didn't consciously try to get there.

In this chapter, I look more deeply at those being successful being themselves—many of my study's participants—and those who play the game.

I have divided this chapter into five sections. The first section—*being successful being yourself*—describes the study participants' values and orientation to their work. The second section—*the gameboard*—describes the various hierarchical structures and the ethos of the corporatised workplace through the many metaphors participants use. The third section—*the Kool-Aid*—describes how employers use the marketed culture to seduce potential employees to the workplace and to retain them with the promise of the good life (Berlant, 2011), of happiness (Ahmed, 2010b), of self-expression (Horgan, 2021) and possibly transcendence or self-realisation. The fourth section—*the game*—details the politics of the workplace, how several participants see those dynamics as foreign to them, and how the game intensifies as people move closer to the organisation's top. The fifth section—*the conflict*—provides details of the conflict between those who play the game and those being successful being themselves and underscores how the corporatized workplace reproduces poor behaviours.

4.1 Being Successful Being Themselves

As Jake described, many people I interviewed were as Jake described “being successful being themselves.”

The way it happened wasn't conscious. The way it happened was actually by just doing me. Just me following my heart doing what I love and somebody seeing that passion and that level of interest...somebody discovering me because... I didn't consciously try to get there.

They entered the workforce without a clear career plan. They “fell” or “stumbled” into their careers. Veronica, a public relations manager for a global oil and gas company, described her career as “organic.” Given that I interviewed people who had left the corporatized workplace to eventually start businesses they viewed as oriented to positive change, it is not surprising that most of those I interviewed are inclusive and collaborative in their approach. They are people who create great teams,

take the time to mentor others, and some fight for justice for those below them. They are interested in bringing out the best in people and doing what is right for the company, the people they work with, their customers, and the community. Jennifer, who worked for a small environmental consulting firm that was “swallowed” by a larger company and then swallowed again by an even larger one, spoke of the desire to be “on the right side of history” in her work. These characteristics suggest that people being successful being themselves embrace care ethics and the values of universalism and benevolence. According to Schwartz (2012), the goals of those who embrace universalism are “understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection of the welfare of others” (p. 7). The goal of those who have benevolence as a core value is “preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with who one is in frequent contact” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 7).

Feminist scholars would view this as a reparative position based on connection, love, surprise, and learning from mistakes (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). The reparative is grounded in hope, the ability “to realize that the future may be different from the present” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 146). Using the language of Schwartz (2012), the reparative is about expansion and growth. Its ethos is “anxiety-free” (p. 13). Its focus is “self-transcendence” (p. 13) and “openness to change” (p. 13). I would say that the reparative stance supports a calm and integrated nervous system.

Many participants had a different affective relationship with power than others in their workplaces. Psychologist Jarl Anderson (2021) refers to this difference as their “assumptive world” (p. 2)—beliefs about how the world works driven by their “deeply-held core values” (p. 2). Several participants were driven by justice, respect, and care for others. The accumulation of power was not a driver for them. Many of the study participants had immense positional power within their workplaces, which gave them a greater voice and less fear about expressing their thoughts and ideas. James, an executive in the financial sector, believed in “doing what was best for the organisation as a whole,” even when it meant giving up departments that reported to him to others. His colleagues questioned how he could give up the power bestowed upon him by having those departments. He responded, “I was never driven by building that dominion.” Instead, what was best for the organisation drove James. This behaviour aligns with the motivations Schwartz (2012) identifies for those who hold the values of both universalism and benevolence, which is “the enhancement of others and the transcendence of self-interests” (p. 9).

Cynthia, a senior manager in a provincial government focused on the wellbeing and growth of others, was aghast to hear a colleague tell her she had “a lot of power.” She did not see it as power; she saw it as influence. Though Cynthia did not share her thoughts on the difference between power and influence, it appears that power is distasteful to Cynthia. I surmise that she interprets power as seeking the goals of “status and prestige [and] control or dominance over people and resources” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 5). According to Schwartz, these goals are in direct opposition to Cynthia’s values of universalism and benevolence. For Cynthia, that value conflict felt like something pressing against her in a way that wounded her.

Most of those I interviewed had different values than the lived values of those in their workplaces. Cynthia juxtaposes her values against the lived values of her corporatized workplace:

[The corporatized workplace is] less about creativity, more about results, more about evidence, less about instinct. Not that ability to kind of talk about issues and really peel the layers off the onion, if you will... where you can kind of get underneath something and examine it. You know, there isn't that space to talk or discuss in a way... respecting that people come from different points of view, different perspectives and wouldn't we all do better if we were able to honour the differences as opposed to have people all be the same?

Feminist geographers (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 2004; C. Milligan & Wiles, 2010; Mountz et al., 2015; Popke, 2006; Webster & Boyd, 2019) have written about these types of contrasting values for years. Particularly in contrasting feminist ethics of care—an embodied, intentional action based on interconnectedness, compassion, reciprocity, listening and cooperation—against the neoliberal ideology of individualism, independence, competition (McDowell, 2004), efficiency (Lawson, 2007) based on fear, anxiety, uncertainty (B. Anderson, 2016), and paranoia⁹ (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). Ethics of care is a reparative stance that creates openness to

⁹ Again, my intention here is not to use the term ‘paranoia’ in a medicalized way that would pathologize my participants. Rather, I used it like Eve Sedgwick (2003) and Gibson-Graham (2006), who used it to describe an affective orientation. They challenged the paranoid affective orientation of academics and the economy, respectively, to shift the viewpoint and open people up to possibilities.

possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006). The values of the corporatized workplace, given its power over structures and practices, are degenerative (Kahane, 2010).

Cynthia's reference to instinct over results suggests that she looks to her body's messages for knowledge in decision-making. Cynthia also speaks to the desire for a deeper understanding of people and situations. Desiring a deeper understanding is a core behaviour of those who embody ethics of care (Tronto, 2005). Care ethics challenge the assumptive world that neoliberalism instils (Bartos & Ives, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015; Webster & Boyd, 2019; M. W. Wright, 2010). Cynthia describes the contrast that most study participants experienced in the corporatized workplaces that they left, the contrast between their embodied ethics of care and the neoliberal principles lived in the corporatized workplace.

Several participants believed that care was good for the bottom line. Christine, who worked as an internal consultant and trainer for various food services companies said, "The more I can take care of people, the more they take care of the business. The more it grows, the more my results become something that they don't question." Jacob, who worked in finance and sales for a couple of companies before joining a start-up, agrees that "capitalist goals" cannot be separated from "the human experience." He sees them as powerfully connected. Improving the human experience in the workplace is the mission of Jacob's "positive change" business. Essie, who worked part of her career investigating toxic work environments, embodies an ethic of care. She believes "people thrive when matched with people who care about them." She walked side by side with underperforming people to enable their success. She would have tough conversations to make it clear to them what their responsibilities were, and she would take responsibility for eliminating barriers for them. She acknowledged the value they bring to the team. To be an authentic partner in their success, Essie suspended judgment, led with her heart, remained curious and was willing to learn. Based on my data analysis, I interpret Jake's reference to people being successful being themselves as those who embody ethics of care.

Not all participants embraced ethics of care or the values of universalism and benevolence in the corporatized workplace. Jacob embraced the values of the corporatized workplace. He was "about making a shit ton of money" and would "grind operations" to make more money. Charlotte had a

drive to succeed in her workplace. She had a career plan, understood the pathway to success within her organisation, and planned to move up more quickly than the standard timeframe of the workplace. There is also a contradiction in my data. Even those participants who seemed to emulate ethics of care worked hard and excessively long hours. Perhaps the desire to achieve can be driven not just by wanting to achieve success and admiration, as Schwartz's (2012) theory suggests, but also from the standpoint of loyalty to and care for others, which are aspects of benevolence. I address this further in Chapter 5.

4.2 The Gameboard: The Structure and Ethos of the Workplace

The purpose of the gameboard is to create just enough insecurity to drive people towards the organisation's goals—an acceptable bottom line—and to drive competition. The gameboard is an artificial structure that defines what is important, creates an external reward system, constructs and deconstructs people's identities, and provides a false sense of purpose, hijacking people's drives. Alisa describes it in this way:

I was putting... all my ideas of success in the same basket, and that basket was this mythology around the corporate workplace, and a culture that I thought was really trying to bring out the high performance in me. And, yes, it brought out high performance in me, but it was just extrinsic motivation. It was just like a carrot-dangling experience.

The gameboard sets up extrinsic reward systems that drive high performance. It keeps people running towards something unobtainable, the very definition of Berlant's (2011) cruel optimism. It gives people the false belief that the corporation has their best interests at heart, but as many participants eventually understood, that is a myth.

Participants used several metaphors to describe the corporatized workplace—a race, a hamster wheel, a battle. Lynn began her corporate career in advertising and ended it in communications for a Canadian healthcare company. She describes the game as a rat race infused with “climb over the top energy” and the pressure of “rush, rush, rush, urgency, urgency, urgency.” Jake sees it as a “long-distance race, and your job is to keep running... there's no finish line”. A never-ending long-distance race evokes the feeling of exhaustion and stress. This never-ending race contributes to a “lack of

being” (Han, 2015, p. 19), which I see as the inability to slow down and be in your body. Kathleen, someone who wandered through the corporate world (hospitality, IT, employment services, ending her career as an events manager for an IT company), used the metaphor of a hamster wheel. This description speaks to some workplaces’ repetition or habitual nature that can induce boredom. Liz felt bored working for a national not-for-profit, and Ken felt bored working in sales for a large financial institution. The cyclical nature of their businesses drove the boredom. Anand, an IT consultant at a Canadian bank, felt bored and frustrated when he had to stay until the end of the day even though his work was completed earlier. I suggest that both the speed and urgency of the workplace and the boredom experienced by some participants separate people from their natural rhythm and catapults them into capitalism’s unnatural speed and rhythm. The unnatural rhythm maintains the body and mind separation so criticized by feminist scholars and emotional geographers (Adams-Hutcheson, 2017; Ahmed, 2014; B. Anderson, 2006; Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bondi, 2005; Davidson & Milligan, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2011; Gilligan, 2011; G. Rose, 1993).

Lynn sees the pace and urgency of the corporatized workplace as pressuring people to cut corners to look for efficiencies to win the race. The constant pressure to do more with less and do it faster creates stress and insecurity. Arianna Huffington—co-founder of *The Huffington Post*—links insecurity with workaholism (Adamson & Kelan, 2018). Most of those I interviewed worked well beyond the average usual work hours in Canada of about 40 hours per week (Statistics Canada, 2022a). According to Berardi (2009), capitalism “expects the enthusiastic participation in a universal competition where it is impossible to win without fully and convincingly deploying all our energies” (p. 91). The gameboard of the corporatized workplace seems to facilitate the over-deployment of those energies to the detriment of other aspects of life or the creation of “other possible worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii).

Some participants experienced the workplace as a battlefield. Participants battled for others, for justice, for doing the right thing, and sometimes with themselves. Perceiving work as a battlefield is the result of alienation. Alienation makes human activity appear hostile (Swain, 2012, p. 7), which makes people feel unsafe. A sense of safety, along with dignity and belonging, is a core need of human beings (Haines, 2019). This feeling of being at war triggers “fight, flight, freeze, appease or dissociate” (Haines, 2019, p. 96). Remaining trapped in that feeling causes stress hormones to be

continually secreted into the body, leaving people in a place of constant alert, and that activates the nervous system (van der Kolk, 2014). Chronic stress results in a sense of powerlessness, distrust, and suspicion (Haines, 2019). Creating an environment where people are under stress narrows their perception, causing them to focus on what is most threatening and what aligns with their current direction (Kohn, 1954; Staal, 2004). This narrowing of focus to what is most threatening—like a looming deadline or work crisis—benefits productivity but dampens creativity. Wanting to minimise the threat, people focus on work above all else, which affects their personal lives and the possibility of them creating something beyond their workplace.

In response to the idea of the workplace as a war zone, Kathleen dissociated. Trauma specialists identify dissociation as a trauma response (Haines, 2019; Levine, 1997; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022; Menakem, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). As she put on her morning make-up, she would tell herself, “This is my warpaint because I was going to war... Here’s corporate Kathleen. Here’s work Kathleen, and I’ve got to be that Kathleen for people.” With the application of her warpaint, she became someone else— a “false self” (hooks, 2004b, p. 154) in which; according to bell hooks (2004b), Kathleen abandoned her integrity, and denied herself. Berardi (2009) would describe it as self “becoming thing” (p. 109)—the act of alienation. The warpaint offered her a level of safety in a hostile environment. She left her real self at home and a different entity walked out the door. The protection of her war paint split her from herself and numbed her to the workplace (van der Kolk, 2014).

Most of the participants’ workplaces were hierarchical in structure. According to Haines (2019), hierarchical systems are structured like the patriarchy to encourage behaviours “to control, win, fight, and know more, to earn one’s worth and identity” (p. 58). Anand saw the hierarchy as rigid. Many participants spoke of the difficulty of creating change in their organisations because of that rigidity. There were clear signals of power within the hierarchical structure—titles, the size and location of offices, who was able to communicate with whom, and who was worthy to get a response to their emails or phone calls. Hierarchy maps levels of worthiness (Haines, 2019), power (Acker, 2006), and inequality (Acker, 2006; S. Lee, 2019). It creates power differences (Acker, 2006; S. Lee, 2019; G. Rose, 1993), distance, condescension (Bourdieu, 1989), envy (Hochschild, 1983; Ngai, 2005) and resentment (Hochschild, 1983). It suppresses democracy and enforces secrecy (Hochschild, 1983).

All the signals of power and status get wrapped into the identity of the person they are bestowed upon (Schoenberger, 1997). Gaining status means gaining power and worthiness. The gameboard is constantly in flux, adding to the sense of insecurity and vulnerability. People move around the board, assets are bought and sold, what gets measured changes, directions shift, and what is most important, morphs. Each one of these movements of the gameboard affects everything and everyone.

Alisa provides a good example of how ranking things by status levels can happen organically and encourage the game. Management consulting firms rank their projects in a hierarchical structure based on the size and status of the client and how much money they are making the company. Alisa describes people's reaction to being on what they interpreted to be a lower-status project:

People would say, like, "Uurgh, I'm on this project," and they'd... really complain about it before they even started the project, and they're like, "Oh, yeah, sorry, you're on that one. That's the red-headed stepchild project" ... Something in the culture was telling them this isn't the coolest shiny object you could be on; it's over here, and it starts to create that want in people, and it starts to create that weird dynamic of competitiveness and of, you know, kind of scratching and clawing to get what you get [laughs as she's talking]. But, you know, if people did not have the project that they wanted, they thought it was going to hurt them.

Not getting a project of adequate status caused people to complain, and they would be pitied by those who managed to snag a project of higher status. Those on the lower status project became envious and resentful as well as perhaps feeling unworthy that they were not placed on a higher status project. Ranking like this creates an insider/outsider status, alienating those on the inside, i.e., those with high-status projects, from those on the outside, i.e., those on low-status projects. High-status projects are seen as "the coolest, shiniest object," which drives people to want the cool shiny object. That desire for the status provided by that shiny object then drives competition, which results in "scratching and clawing" to get the shiny object, which can leave people wounded. That competition and the desire for the shiny object, then drives people to work harder and longer. The drive toward the shiny object created by the culture of the workplace stifles the possibility of other ways of being in the workplace. It prevents people from reflecting on what truly matters to them or asking themselves, "What do I stand for?"

Being someone who was successful being herself, Alisa took a different approach. As a project manager, Alisa reframed things so that people felt good about the projects they were working on:

So, I would do kind of my Lucille Ball creative ways of... let's have everybody laugh. Let's call this project something new. You guys need... a break... You need to not think about it in those terms. What if we called it something else? And we gave some of the red-haired stepchild projects that nobody wants with a 10-foot pole, we gave them names, and we treated the team with respect, and we created a place where it could be the best project ever. And so, a month would go by, it will be like, "Oh, my gosh, you're on that project?"... "Yeah, I'm on that project." "So cool, I wish I was on that." So, it's like, I was able to...reframe the problem they thought that they were in because again... something in the culture—This is interesting. I've never made this connection until right there—Something in the culture was telling them this isn't the coolest shiny object you could be on. It's over here.

Like other participants, Alisa created a safe space of "radical openness and possibilities" (hooks, 2004a, p. 159). Spaces that were in paradox to the dominant culture of the corporatized workplace. The value in it for an organisation is enormous. Here, Alisa has shifted the affective orientation of the project and got people excited about what they are doing. That reframing of the project had the team working together to deliver what the team wanted— "the best project ever."

The hierarchical structure provides a clear pathway to success. Charlotte, who worked at a global management consulting firm, described how everyone knew the path up the ladder and how long it would take to make each move. Ken described the "ladder of success"—published monthly rankings of every salesperson in the organisation—as a race that fostered comparison. "If you're a competitive individual with, maybe just enough insecurity, you will want to do everything you can to move up the ladder, and that leads to all kinds of behaviours" (Ken). The "ladder of success" creates insecurity, which drives some people to do better. For others, it could be soul-destroying. Extrinsic motivators fuel people to make more money for the company as they make more money for themselves. It also builds their identity—to be a top salesperson. As a result, they may lose sight of what is intrinsically important to them as an individual.

Ways of measuring are part of the gameboard. Capitalism aims to extract as much value as possible (Marx, 2007 [1844]; Swain, 2012). To extract value, the corporatized workplace focuses on efficiency and productivity (Mountz et al., 2015). To become more productive and efficient, there must be systems of counting and measuring. Christine, an internal consultant in food services, talked about the inspection and auditing system within that industry as being “so horrible” and “just heartbreaking, heartbreaking.” Mark, a general manager in seniors’ residences, shared that there was “a dashboard for everything”, everything was measured, and “every week there was a new dashboard... to figure out ... It was overwhelming. It was just too much.” In addition to being a catalyst for competition, Mountz et al. (2015) claim that a “counting culture” (p. 1244), like the success ladder, performance awards, audits, and dashboards, encourages shaming and self-shaming. Shame is a tactic to get people to conform (Gilligan, 2011; hooks, 2004b). Yet, the counting and measuring miss important things that humanize the workplace, like care exchanges (Mountz et al., 2015). Calvin, an engineer in oil and gas, said to me, “Not everything can fit into a spreadsheet.” Not everything that is important gets counted or measured.

Calvin did not experience this hierarchical gameboard. His company’s gameboard was structured to minimise control, neutralise competition, and give people more control of their work. The company set up teams as “mini oil and gas companies,” with each person offering a different skill set for the project. Those professionals, rather than being in separate departments, were physically located in proximity to each other, making “those skillsets... close by and accessible to me, and I knew them, and they weren't just that person up on that floor that's part of that big team of lawyers. They were my friends” (Calvin). This structure neutralised the hierarchical power structure by flattening it. Team members valued each other and the expertise they brought to the team. This flat structure eliminates the infighting that Schoenberger (1997) observed in Lockheed Martin, where the identities of physicists and engineers were so aligned to their profession that they did not value each other. Their inability to work together put the company’s future and their jobs at risk. In the structure of Calvin’s workplace, everyone has a voice, and their voices and expertise are respected and needed to solve problems together. This structure resembles Gibson-Graham’s (2006, 2013) approach to building alternative economies. It also seems to follow the self-managing team structure of teal organisations, which builds a sense of interdependence and mutual responsibility (Laloux, 2016). A *teal*

organisation uses self-managing teams, invites organisational members “to drop the mask, reclaim [their] inner wholeness, and bring all of who [they] are to work” (p.55), and rather than “trying to predict and control the future” (p. 55) members “are invited to listen and understand what the organization is drawn to become, where it naturally wants to go” (p. 55). They feel their way into the future. According to Calvin, as his team worked together, they connected professionally and personally.

From her experience working in public consultation for a large engineering firm, Jennifer provides another reason Calvin may not have experienced the corporatized workplace in the same way as others:

...the sciencey people, like the ecologists and the water people and the biologists. I found that they were... quite satisfied with where they were because that was always where they intended to be... And none of them seem to be morally conflicted really with what we were doing, or why we were there.

Jennifer observed that technical people were doing what they had always envisioned they would do—work their craft. They focused on solving complex technical problems, and their work involved no moral conflict. Calvin worked within a firm that presented him with complex technical problems to solve with a team of people focused together to solve the problem. It removed him from the moral conflicts that come with being a person like Jennifer, whose role was to represent the company and its clients to the public during the public consultation for large and controversial mineral extraction projects. This idea of a difference between technical people and front-facing workers is supported by Conway et al. (2020), who found that people in “client-facing roles” (p. 2688) suffer more from emotional exhaustion—“a core element of burnout” (p. 2680).

4.3 The Kool-Aid: The Seduction

From the stories I heard, I interpret the Kool-Aid as the values and stories marketed to potential and existing employees to seduce them with the promise of being part of something bigger—a dream. As mentioned earlier, the Kool-Aid promises the good life (Berlant, 2011), happiness (Ahmed, 2010b), self-expression (Horgan, 2021) and perhaps also transcendence or self-realisation. Some participants

shared stories from their careers where they experienced happiness, self-expression, and self-realisation, but when denied, it played a role in their leaving. The Kool-Aid is what Horgan (2021) refers to as “softer techniques of control” (p. 25) used to align interests in the workplace. It is effectively used on employees, customers, the public, and the government to lull them into a sense of security by demonstrating good intentions that align with the various interests of these groups. Bloom (2019) sees this control as restraining people’s self-determination. The Kool-Aid can be viewed as an elixir that builds the myth of the corporatized workplace and creates *false consciousness*. False consciousness is a blindness to the effects of the economic system and, therefore, how the workplace affects everyday lives (Ahmed, 2010b; Edwards, 2006). Ahmed (2010b) equates it to “one’s being has been stolen” (p. 167).

Scholars have criticised false consciousness as an arbitrary description of why people act in ways that prejudice their wellbeing, as an act of victim blaming, and of criticising a person because of their social status (L. Lee, 2022). Hossler (2021) refers to it as being reductionist because its sole focus is “economic relationships” (p. 204). Thompson (2015) criticised it for not being relevant to the functioning of modernity. Yet people argue for its applicability to modern society (Hossler, 2021; Thompson, 2015). Thompson sees false consciousness as a way of thinking socialized through society’s dominant ideas, values, and cultural messaging that naturalise existing power relations. Elites shape the message to “actively distract subordinates from questioning the basis of their social relations” (p. 449), which locks people into a way of thinking that thwarts the ability to comprehend the power relations that define society (Thompson, 2015). False consciousness produces a “distorted understanding of reality” (Hossler, 2021, p. 204). Feminist scholars (Hanson & Pratt, 2003; Haraway, 1988; Lawson, 2007; Massey, 1991, 1993; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997) have worked to expose this hegemonic myth making that prevents people from seeing the cause of their exploitation.

I chose to apply *false consciousness* in my research because it provides a theoretical framework that fits the research data. It is tied to the economic system that created the corporatized workplace and the Marxist concept of *alienation*, which I apply in Chapter 5 when examining why people leave at the scale of the individual. The Kool-Aid is an ideology created to unite people for a common purpose. It creates a common way of thinking. The Kool-Aid can act to blind people from understanding the underlying systems of power that exploit them. Many of my participants also got to the point of

discovering it was a false narrative. The result of the false consciousness that the Kool-Aid serves up is cruel optimism—a promise that impedes participants’ thriving (Berlant, 2011, p. 1).

The Kool-Aid can also be an aspirational (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016) instrument that moves a workplace toward different social relations and power structures. In my experience, it can shift people’s perspectives and views of the world and a company’s relationship with the world. Participants shared experiences of cultures that inspired them and made them feel valued, like they were making a difference, ones where they learned a tremendous amount, especially about themselves. Many were gifted a greater sense of self through some of their workplaces. In workplaces where people felt supported, valued, and appreciated for what they were doing, where they felt passionate about their work, and where they were free to create, a greater sense of self was developed. They were cultures with values that were in significant contrast to those workplaces that ultimately drove them to leave the corporatized world. Those cultures can be fragile, as is evident in Chapter 5. A change in a supervisor or leader, an acquisition, a sale, or a change in an organisation’s focus can shift the culture and people’s workplace experience. Even those whose experience in the corporatized workplace took them to the brink of losing themselves spoke about the gifts they received and the self-awareness that came from their experiences.

Two events popularized the use of the term “drinking the Kool-Aid.” The first is Thomas Wolfe’s book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test*, and the other is rooted in the 1978 Peoples Temple Agricultural Project tragedy (the “Jonestown” tragedy). In his book, Wolfe (1968) chronicles the psychedelic, countercultural journey of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters. The book includes a recounting by Clair Brush, a reporter with the Los Angeles *Free Press*, of her first accidental psychedelic experience. At the gathering, two garbage cans full of Kool-Aid laced with LSD were brought out and offered to the guests. Clair drank the Kool-Aid, not knowing it was spiked with LSD. The Kool-Aid was intended to allow people to experience the “ecstasy of the All-one” (Wolfe, 1968, p. 273). It was an offer to share the transcendent experience of the “All-one” (p. 273)—“flowing together” (p. 127) with the divine power. Drinking that Kool-Aid offered transcendence, if only temporarily. Flowing together as one is what the corporatized workplace desires and is what the stated culture is attempting to create. The stated culture is also referred to as the “desired culture” (Fox, 2016, p. 220), suggesting that it is aspirational (Deeds Pamphile & Ruttan, 2022; Fox, 2016).

The aspirational culture may offer the promise of transcendence or ecstasy. Cocker (2018) describes Kesey's offer of drinking the Kool-Aid as about opening to "new perspectives, attitudes and creative realms" (para. 7). Creating "new perspectives, attitudes and creative realms" (para. 7) is a great business strategy for outperforming the competition. "New perspectives, attitudes and creative realms" (para. 7) also promise the opportunity for self-expression, which Horgan (2021) argues that work dangles but does not deliver. Instead, work is "an affront to freedom" (Horgan, 2021, p. 161).

In colloquial terms, the Kool-Aid expresses two different sentiments, esprit de corps, originating from the book *The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test* (Wolfe, 1968) and the more sinister potential for "danger and death" (R. Moore, 2003, p. 93), originating from the Jonestown tragedy. Cult leaders are notorious for seducing members into believing in and living their dreams, which can have dire consequences in terms of members losing themselves and, at times, losing their lives. The Jonestown tragedy was the culmination of self-proclaimed messiah and cult leader Jim Jones' reign over his followers. After years of weaving stories to create a utopian community, Jones offered a Kool-Aid-like drink laced with cyanide and tranquilizers to his followers in Guyana, believing death was a preferred alternative to living under the evil forces threatening the community (Heyrman, 2019; Missildine, 2007; R. Moore, 2003; Thomsen, n.d.). Most community members willingly consumed the concoction and died. Jones's deadly Kool-Aid offering, like the psychedelic example of Wolfe (1968), was an invitation to transcend the menacing material world to the utopia that, in this case, awaited after death.

The two stories have different messages. Wolfe's story is about being offered Kool-Aid with unknown effects because he was part of a group. Clair Brush drank it without understanding how it would affect her. Her feelings of oneness and transcendence were only temporary. Applying this to the corporatized workplace, the message here is that it is possible to experience the unity and transcendence from the Kool-Aid served, but the effects may only be temporary. On the other hand, Jonestown began with a community based on the self-transcendent values of universalism and benevolence with an emphasis on social equality (Chiu, 2020). It was a community working together to improve the world (Chiu, 2020). After a dress rehearsal to test their loyalty, where Jones offered members a Kool-Aid-like drink he told them was poisonous, the fatal event unfolded similarly, but this time with the poison (Chiu, 2020). Loyalty is a characteristic of those who hold benevolence as a

value (Schwartz, 2012). It is also seen in those who hold conformity as a value (Schwartz, 2012). This tragic event suggests that the Kool-Aid served in the corporatized workplace, though masquerading as unity and transcendence, may create dire consequences for the person consuming it.

Alisa, who worked in a multinational management consulting company for 15 years, bought into the dream “by believing in the company, drinking their Kool-Aid, being a model citizen of that culture ...absorbing their values and trying to be my strongest self.” She felt what Wolfe had experienced—flowing together with something greater than herself, becoming one with her employer. Her experience is exactly the purpose of values. Values play a critical role in catalysing cohesion and loyalty within a group (Schwartz, 2012). *Drinking the Kool-Aid* is trusting with your whole being what is said; it is accepting things unquestioningly (R. Moore, 2003). It nicely corresponds to the Marxist term false consciousness. Drinking the Kool-Aid refers to workers who are unaware of the effects of the capitalist system on them (Ahmed, 2010b; Edwards, 2006). Alisa mentions “absorbing” workplace values, suggesting those values became a part of her and who she was. As Schoenberger (1997) describes, in absorbing those values, Alisa’s identity became entangled with the identity of the company and the role she played. Absorbing the corporate values alienated Alisa from her values, which are integral to a sense of self (Hitlin, 2003).

Like the psychedelic experience, Alisa’s flowing with the corporate Kool-Aid was temporary. She started to feel like continuing to drink the Kool-Aid put her wellbeing at risk, aligning her more closely with the Kool-Aid of the Jonestown tragedy. Alisa speaks directly to the risk, “I think the risk of staying, the consequence of staying in someone else's dream, staying in someone else's world is too great and the consequence for me to stay there was too, too limiting, too great to stay.” The consequences to Alisa for believing the Kool-Aid and absorbing the corporate values was “snap”—breaking suddenly under pressure (Ahmed, 2017, p. 189). Her snap was a moment of *awakening to false consciousness*. Being *awakened to false consciousness* is where she recognises her suffering, and also recognises the source of her suffering (Ahmed, 2010b). According to Ahmed (2017) *snap* can also be “the start of something” (p. 188). Alisa’s snap will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Charlotte did not see the risk in aligning with someone else's dream. She cited Steve Jobs' creation of Apple by saying, "There's people that wanted to bring that [dream of Steve Jobs'] to life and believed in his dreams and got that out there. And so, what's more beautiful when you can get someone to believe in your dream." Steve Jobs was also referred to as a cult leader by some (Dailey, 2011; Mallett, 2015; Zeller, 2011). From Charlotte's perspective Steve Jobs went out to find those willing to be part of his dream rather than seducing people into his dream. There is no doubt that for some people, that was true. People may join a company because their dreams align with its mission. The caution is to notice when your dreams diverge from the company's or their practices do not align with your values. Ignoring those disparities could result in the Kool-Aid becoming toxic.

Izzy not only drank the Kool-Aid but, as a trainer, she also served it to others. Izzy delivered the core values training for the company for which she worked. She explains it as "I really felt that with my heart. I delivered that training. I was very, very proud of that." Izzy was attuned to the Kool-Aid—sharing an affective orientation with it (Ahmed, 2014)—as evident from her words, "I felt it with my heart." This is the moment that her "being" was stolen, the moment she succumbed to false consciousness. In merging with the company's core values, Izzy lost herself. When Izzy switched roles to one that entailed taking actions contrary to the corporate values she had taught; she awakened to false consciousness. Her role in serving up the Kool-Aid made her feel "like a fraud... It's awful to know that you have given people misinformation... It's like, giving people a medication that you tell them is going to help them and then... it doesn't." There was a shift in Izzy from seeing the Kool-Aid as creating esprit de corps to seeing it from the more sinister perspective of "danger and death" (R. Moore, 2003, p. 93), awakening her to the *cruel optimism* (Berlant, 2011) of the corporatized workplace.

Christine likens *awakening to false consciousness* or realising the Kool-Aid served by the company was more toxic than a sweet treat "to finding out that Santa Claus isn't real... all of a sudden. It's this devastation that you've been loyal for 25 years to a company that you believed had the same values as you, and they don't." I see the values espoused by the Kool-Aid as having what Schwartz (2012) describes as a "social focus" (p. 13) and include benevolence (we care), universalism (we are in this together), and security (you will have stability here). Those are the values that entice people towards a workplace. The masculine values of power and wealth accumulation, and achievement of status and

success define the lived culture of the corporatized workplace (Ely & Kimmel, 2018; Lawson, 2007; McDowell, 1997, 2004, 2005; Mountz et al., 2015; Mountz, 2016; Schoenberger, 1997; Webster & Boyd, 2019). According to Schwartz (2012), these two sets of values oppose one another. There is a moment of cognitive dissonance, sitting with stunned disbelief, as you begin to understand that people around you, people you trusted, were lying to you all your life. When I hear Christine use the word “devastation,” I see it as grief and loss. Incongruency between actual—the game—and stated culture—the Kool-Aid—can lead employees to label the firm and its leaders hypocrites (Cha & Edmondson, 2006). This incongruence causes “emotional exhaustion” (Wagner et al., 2020, p. 390) in employees, prompting them to leave. It also caused her to feel betrayed. Betrayal results in disappointment, frustration, outrage, resentment, indignation and bitterness (Cha & Edmondson, 2006). That sense of betrayal caused what Jarl Anderson (2021) refers to as a “moral injury” (p. 1) or a “soul wound” (p. 5), something that I will expand upon in the next chapter.

Drinking the Kool-Aid feels different when you have awakened to false consciousness. Alisa describes it in this way:

Drinking the Kool-Aid means going along with what you're told ... Drinking the Kool-Aid means just going with it. Somebody who gets paid more has made this decision for you and you need to suck it up and you need to just do it. But it can also mean, like, this really inauthentic thing.

Alisa's description sounds more like being forced to drink the poison and pretending it is not going to make you sick. The price paid is inauthenticity. Alisa's description aligns with Mickel's (2000) definition of drinking the Kool-Aid as “blindly” (p. 90) adhering to corporate dogma. According to Lang (2004), blind adherence results in surrendering your integrity. “It signifies that the person in question has given up personal integrity and has succumbed to the prevailing group think” (p. 39). Regardless of whether you merge with the culture or you “suck it up,” it is possible to lose yourself and your integrity, as will become more apparent in Mary's story in the next chapter.

Charlotte was one of the last people that I interviewed. When I shared with her that I was noticing a theme of alienation—people losing parts of themselves and some to the point of disintegration—Charlotte pushed back against the idea in this way:

Mentally, how you can separate from yourself when you are working...in the corporate world? ... I feel like you actually gain a better sense of yourself, if anything... As much as you... give yourself away... you're equally getting something in return...Maybe it's monetary. Maybe it's time, maybe it's the mentorship or the opportunity... but if everybody sees it that way... nobody would work, but there's no way like that; that's not how the economy works. That's not how the world works, unfortunately.

I agree with Charlotte that the workplace provides opportunities for a better sense of self, and I am sure that other participants would agree. They shared stories of gaining self-awareness and a better sense of self in some workplaces. Some participants gained a better sense of self even in the workplaces that they eventually chose to leave because they felt that they were losing themselves. I gained a better sense of self and an understanding of what I am capable of in the company that I eventually left feeling completely diminished.

Charlotte was in her late twenties when I interviewed her. She worked for about three years in management consulting before leaving to start her own business. Things were pressing against her, like being discounted and not being considered for opportunities, which was “very disheartening and discouraging” for her. Having studied business in university, she understood “they're not going to cater to you as much as you dream of ... because it's a machine ... You're, a gear there. You're just doing the job, and then you're easily replaceable.” Knowing this meant that she did not take things personally—*the game's* sole rule of (Missildine, 2007), as I will elaborate on in the next section. The instruction of not taking it personally could justify the disheartening behaviours, as “It's just business.” Trauma specialist Thomas Hübl would likely revise that missive to say, “It's just business when it is in pain” (Hübl & Maté, 2021). Charlotte describes herself as extremely competitive, so the competitive nature of her workplace aligned with who she was. Her career was not “accidental” but was very strategic, making her less susceptible to the Kool-Aid and alienation. Before joining the company, Charlotte had developed a business plan. She knew what she wanted from the workplace. She wanted practical business experience in fashion and retail to help her when she decided to start her business.

Liz is another person who, rather than feel alienated, knew what she wanted. She moved through several sales roles in the hospitality sector, joined a major national not-for-profit, and then re-entered the private sector, working with a company that supports not-for-profits. She is someone else who took control of her career. She left jobs and changed sectors when she had a sense that “something was missing.” She was also confident that she would easily land somewhere else if she left a job. She quickly exited her last corporate role at a family-owned business because she found herself in the middle of family arguments, and she left with only an inkling of her next step. When I interviewed her, she told me exactly what she wanted to eventually do—be a consultant who assists not-for-profits in becoming more successful. Liz was successful being herself. She did not compete to look good or ingratiate herself on those in power. Making a positive difference in people’s lives drove her. She embraced self-transcendent values. However, unlike other participants, she had a vision for where she wanted to go in her career and searched for the missing piece. She was also clear about what behaviours were acceptable and unacceptable to her and made quick decisions to remove herself from situations that did not align with who she was.

Charlotte and Liz offer lessons on how to approach the corporatized workplace. When you enter a workplace, know what you want to get from it. Understand that you are in a role, and you are replaceable no matter how specialised your knowledge is. Liz is an example of how important it is to listen to the inner voice and courageously act on it. Though a caution here, a nervous system activated from feeling unsafe, stressed, overwhelmed, or precarious makes it hard to hear and act on that voice. Have a clear understanding of what you will not accept in the workplace. To have a clear understanding requires you to know your values and set boundaries based on those values. There is also nothing wrong with an accidental career that grows organically if you pay attention to whether following that organic path is moving you further from what is important to you. This advice is from a very privileged perspective. It does not acknowledge that some people, because of their social identities or precarious situations do not have the same ability to make these types of decisions.

4.4 The Game: Feeding Competition and Insecurity

Corporate culture is more than the promises served as *the Kool-Aid*; playing simultaneously is *the game*. *The game* corresponds to Bourdieu and Wacquant’s (1992) “field” (p. 98), which is like a game

without “explicit and codified” (p. 98) rules. While Lynn, a study participant, and Missildine (2007) use the Kool-Aid and the game interchangeably, I see them as two different aspects of the culture of the corporatized workplace driven by different motivations. The Kool-Aid is an act of seduction by the corporation to convince people it is a great place to work. It intends to create unity through conformity,¹⁰ loyalty,¹¹ and the ability to flow together as one.¹² *The game* is the self-interested strategies some individuals engage in to gain power, money, and success in the workplace. The game runs on self-enhancement, which, according to Schwartz (2012) includes power, achievement, and hedonism. Its motivators are “social superiority and esteem” (p. 9) and “self-centred satisfaction” (p. 9).

Jake describes the game as that of “survival of the fittest” and “self-preservation” and suggests that it begins in high school, where the path to success is revealed—go to university, get a degree, get a job, and then focus on getting more— “more money, more status, more house, more cars, more stuff, more toys.” This idea aligns with Tronti’s (1962) “social factory” (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020, p. 32), where the social constructs of the factory spill out into the rest of society. That path to success is cultural messaging. This ideology prevents people from thinking differently and creating new definitions and pathways to success because it is naturalized. Thompson (2015) describes this naturalization as the foundation of false consciousness. According to Jake, the consequences of pursuing more is to “never get peace, you never get contentment... you're not grateful for what you have,” and there is the potential to be “physically or mentally beaten from the experience.”

In Jake’s view, questions like: “How can I get ahead? What can I do? How can I overcome this person or that thing?” drive the game. These questions are similar to Missildine’s (2007) view of the game being about “making it” (p. 138). According to James, the game is about power, winning, and people protecting their territory. It encourages competition rather than “working collaboratively in the best interest of the stakeholder” (James), which is consistent with Missildine’s (2007) findings. James describes the game in this way:

¹⁰ Based on Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic values.

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Based on Wolfe’s (1968) description of a psychedelic experience.

People would do things behind your back, and it was that sort of lack of—lack of integrity that, for me, was sort of a big issue. So, you would never know what people are really thinking and there wasn't that transparency. People would say things in meetings and do something else, and I would see it all the time... People would do one thing in meetings and then completely behind the scenes... trash talk ... other people.

According to James, the game is about lack of integrity, transparency, and honesty. Not knowing whether to believe what someone says in a meeting leads to a lack of trust. A natural response to hearing someone trash-talking others is to wonder what those people may be saying about you behind your back. This leads to more insecurity, stress, and the need to be “constantly looking over your shoulders” (Veronica). According to Missildine (2007), the sole rule of the game is: “don't take it personally” (p. 130). Those who are successful at the game surrender themselves to the bottom line, separate themselves from the role(s) they play at work, and personify the Kool-Aid while understanding it is only performance (Missildine, 2007). They don't care about people because people are replaceable. Instead, they align themselves with those who matter—those in power above them (Missildine, 2007).

Jake was unknowingly groomed in the rules of the game as he rose toward the top of the organisation. A male colleague, who later became CEO of another company, quite clearly provided Jake with the “don't care about people” (Missildine, 2007, p. 118) guidance of the game. His advice to Jake was, “You'll do a lot better when you stop caring so much.” A director that Jake respected reinforced the “don't care about people” attitude when he said, “If you want to move up in this company, you should get away from being on the social committee and the volunteer committee. Let the new people handle that.” The way Jake describes his role on these committees is all about care. He saw them as an opportunity to mentor and create social connections across the organisation. He listened to understand the challenges of people at different levels in the organisation. The committees were an opportunity to create together and make a difference within the company and the community. I would describe the motivations as “self-transcendence” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 9) and “enhancing the welfare” (p.7) of others. I do acknowledge that for some people on these committees, it could have been about self-interest, wanting to be seen by the right people, or acquiring experience to add to their resumes. I interpret the direction to leave the committees to the new people as a clear indication that people at

the company's lower levels are the ones who are permitted to care, not senior managers. According to Gilligan (2011), this "I don't care" mantra starts with the indoctrination of boys into the idea that caring is not masculine (p. 174). Jake didn't see the comments as mentoring, instead he shared that they:

shook me because I started to think that I was doing it wrong that... being good, being kind, thinking about my fellow employees, knowing the role that I played in keeping high energy and a positive attitude was wrong and it got to a place where there was so much conflict...

Jake was doing it wrong if he wanted to have an executive role. He was not playing the game.

These encounters made an impression on Jake. Initially, Jake felt shock and disbelief— "are you kidding me?" He experienced some confusion at what to him seemed absurd comments, especially coming from people whom Jake thought embodied the corporate values, like him. Jake did not understand that playing the game meant performing the Kool-Aid in a way that appeared natural (Missildine, 2007). The comments "shook" Jake, which was possibly their intention, to shake him out of his way of being and into another: that of performing the role of an executive of the company. The comments did shake his very being and got him doubting himself, wondering if his way of being—"being good, being kind, thinking about my fellow employees" and "keeping high energy and a positive attitude"— was wrong. The grooming to ensure Jake fit in at the top played a significant role in him leaving a company and industry that he loved and helped to shape. It also left him feeling diminished because of the clear message he received that you can't be yourself if you want to get ahead. Jake's experience demonstrates how the game feeds people's insecurity and how the game culture of the corporatized workplace rejects people who care.

Other participants also did not fully understand the game. Women, in particular, found the game to be foreign to them, two of them describing it as the sense of being on a different planet. Here's what Cynthia said:

The piece I didn't understand as well were the rules of the game... I didn't understand... the competitiveness... I don't really have a competitive bone in my body... that was a very uncomfortable place for me... There were others that were— particularly women— very

competitive. And it just... never sat with me... If something doesn't come naturally to you, it's hard to see. It becomes a blind spot, and you kind of don't see what's really going on or how to manage the situation... I didn't always know how to show up comfortably... when that competitiveness... or the lack of women supporting women showed up... It eroded my trust.

Cynthia knew a game was being played and that she did not understand its rules, which. “eroded her trust.” Competitiveness is required to survive or win the game. Competition “didn’t come naturally to” Cynthia, which was a disadvantage if she had wanted to play the game and she did not want to. Not having a “competitive bone in her body” suggests that competition is not part of her structure, not part of her core values, so of course, Cynthia was uncomfortable. Because the game was not part of who she was, she was blind to it, which made it impossible to manage it. “Women supporting women” is part of who Cynthia is. She, therefore, expects that other women would engage in similar behaviour. The fact that they did not, must have left her with a sense of betrayal. It also eroded her trust. This alienated her from others in the workplace, and as alienation does, left her perceiving those women as hostile (Swain, 2012). Cynthia was blind to the rules of the game. Is it then possible that those who play the game are blind to or confused by how those *being successful being themselves* managed to get ahead?

As mentioned in section 3.3.2, there were two women (Lynn and Jennifer) that became observers of the game. They shared details about their understanding of the power dynamics within the workplace. They described how power manifested in language, spatial positioning of offices, delayed or lack of decision-making, rules about who was permitted to speak to whom, and when people responded to emails. They also described the ambiguous nature of language used by people who played the game. It provided those who play the game protection from responsibility and from being criticized for what they said. Lynn and Jennifer also described acts of entitlement and behaviours that people enacted to ingratiate themselves with those in power. Understanding how people play the game did not protect these two women from being affected by the game. It did, however, provide them some amusement as they shared their stories. I also detected contempt at the absurdity of what they were describing.

The game is one of fit. The dominant groups—those aligned with power and those who are “habitual” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 123)—define fit and choose who fits and who does not (Valentine, 2007). According to Brene Brown (2019), fit is “being accepted for being like everyone else” (p. 160). McDowell (1997) suggests that fit is being like those in power, and there is a benefit in proclaiming sameness by dressing like them. This behaviour was apparent in the management consulting firm where Alisa worked:

I had one colleague who would deliberately dress like the partners and buy the same shirt as a partner, only to have the gag of walking up to the partner and go, “Hey, we shop at the same store”. That... individual got promoted.

Fit is a performance. Performing fit is an act of self-betrayal (B. Brown, 2019). I would add that choosing not to perform fit can be seen as an act of rebellion and results in being read as an “affect alien” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39, 2017, p. 68)—the cause of the problem (Ahmed, 2012; 2017). Blatantly demonstrating that you know how to fit seems like a “gag” or a joke. Ann, a senior manager at a global pharmaceutical company, referred to “inside jokes” as a tactic of those who played the game. If you are in on the joke, you’re an insider, a fit.

People use shame to encourage others to fit in. Shaming and exclusion are used as a tool to indoctrinate people into ways of being (Gilligan, 2011; Gregg, 2009; hooks, 2004b; McDowell, 2015). Being shamed is where Missildine’s (2007) rule of “don’t take it personally” (p. 130) is required. According to James, “the push to fit is what kills so much human potential.” Killing human potential is a form of alienating people from themselves. Sean was a mechanical engineer who worked in the tertiary oil and gas industry before leaving to work for a large multinational oil and gas company. Being the son of a Chinese immigrant, Sean understood that people who don’t fit “have to work twice as hard.” He shared that it took energy to read the room to determine how safe it was to take up space. Sean’s journey to fit in started at a young age. He played sports to fit into the culture of Canadian masculinity and he fought on the ice to shake stereotypes and pre-empt racist attacks. After leaving the oil and gas industry, Sean became a serial entrepreneur. His business success may be partly driven by his desire to blow apart people’s preconceived and limiting beliefs about who he is.

4.5 The Conflict

This chapter is not complete without addressing the conflict that Jake raised between those being successful being themselves and those who play the game. The power maps in Figure 1 illustrates the conflict. The source of conflict translates to a conflict between worldviews or values. It begins at the systemic level as a conflict between the Kool-Aid or stated culture and the game or lived culture. To examine the Kool-Aid in the form of the common values used in the corporatized workplace, I turned to Lucidity (n.d.), a professional services company. I could not include a list of the actual values of the organizations about which participants spoke because some of the companies no longer exist, some participants did not share the names of the companies that they worked for, and the values that companies have on their website today may not correspond with those that they had at the time the participant worked there. Lucidity compiled a list of the top 10 most common company values. They appear on the list as teamwork/collaboration, customer focus, respect, integrity, passion, innovation, celebrate success, accountability, diversity, and leadership. When reviewing this list, equating them to ethics of care is possible. The values are relational and suggest interdependence (Askins & Blazek, 2017; McDowell, 2004; Popke, 2006; Raghuram et al., 2009). They suggest behaviours that are the basis of care ethics like collaboration, customer focus, respect, integrity, celebrating success, accountability, and valuing diversity (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Gibson-Graham, 2006; McEwan & Goodman, 2010; Mountz et al., 2015). Passion could translate into the affective orientation of ethics of care, which is love (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gilligan, 2011). The Kool-Aid fails to align with ethics of care because a list of values on a website does not translate into their embodiment. Embodiment is an important aspect of ethics of care (Gilligan, 2015; Popke, 2006; Raghuram et al., 2009). Looking at this list of values through the lens of Schwartz (2012), they suggest self-direction, universalism, benevolence, and stimulation (though passion could also be hedonistic). It is important to point out that the values are vague. Different people could have radically different definitions of these words. Nevertheless, nowhere do they suggest the aspect of self-enhancement (Schwartz, 2012)– drive for power and achievement– that is the foundation of the game.

The game and the tendency to protect the status quo prevent people from reaching their full expression. According to Anand, we each have creativity needing expression, but in the corporatised world:

where a lot of decisions are made on balance sheets and bottom line... there is ... not enough room for expression, for creativity... there is not enough room [for] going off track and experimenting with life. There is not enough room for a let's think about win/win.

According to Anand, a win/win takes longer to achieve than a win/lose. Because of quarter-to-quarter targets it is easier to choose the win/lose. Focusing on the bottom line may be efficient but may not be effective. Schoenberger (1997) demonstrated that leaders of corporations do not make effective decisions for those corporations. Many of their decisions are self-interested and can harm the company. Other decisions are made because they are good enough (Mountz et al., 2015; Schoenberger, 1997). What Anand is expressing here represents the value conflict that is built into the capitalist system. That conflict is at the root of the tension and conflicts within the corporatized workplace. The pressure to focus on the bottom line, to apply short-term thinking places people within what Schwartz (2012) describes as anxiety-based values where the focus is prevention of loss and self-protection against threat. Feminist scholars (G. Brown et al., 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Naylor & Thayer, 2022; Sedgwick, 2003) would describe the affective orientation of the capitalist system as paranoid. It is a stance where people protect themselves from surprises, are in a state of hypervigilance from the fear and suspicion they feel (Gibson-Graham, 2006). That hypervigilance suggests an activated nervous system with people in a survival mode of fight, flight, or freeze (Levine, 1997; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022; van der Kolk, 2020). A win/win decision is a caring and effective way to decide. To reach a win/win decision, Gibson-Graham (2006) would recommend shifting from the paranoid stance of the capitalist system to a reparative stance that opens people to possibility.

The systemic value conflict expresses itself at the individual level between those being successful being themselves and those who play the game. Those being successful being themselves embody the Kool-Aid, care ethics, and the values of benevolence, universalism, and self-direction. Those playing the game perform the Kool-Aid but embody the self-enhancing values of the game. A plethora of affect is present in encounters between people with conflicting values. As described earlier in this chapter, the emotions include feeling shock, confusion, devastation, betrayal, alienation, frustration, anger, bitterness, self-doubt, and grief.

Though the conflict occurs at all organisational levels, it intensifies as people move up the hierarchy. James describes what happens when people become more senior in an organisation in this way: “The sense of sometimes being stuck... your world shrinks. The number of opportunities out there shrink, and you think... will I ever be able to find another job where I’ll be able to be compensated like this?” When someone feels alienated from their work and perceives they have no other job opportunities, they will feel more emotionally exhausted (Guo et al., 2022). This sense that your world is shrinking, and the accompanying emotional exhaustion can develop into a sense of insecurity and vulnerability. As people get promoted, they can move away from what is important to them, increasing their sense of alienation and people being successful being themselves can start to push against those in power. All of this can intensify competition. When describing the game’s competitive nature, many participants used war metaphors suggesting they were fighting for their lives. According to Joronen and Rose (2021), capitalism breeds insecurity. That sense of insecurity is because the capitalist system is “unmediated and owes them nothing” (p. 1402), translating into an existential threat. That sense of threat intensifies feelings of insecurity, vulnerability, alienation, unworthiness, and wounding.

The culture of the corporatized workplace spawns bad behaviours. According to James, “The way people act [in the workplace] is all driven by different insecurities... about their own abilities or the power they have within their groups.” Because of their insecurity, “there’s a lot of ... almost childishness that happens... a lot of things that happen just to hold onto that [power]... They’re maintaining the authority but maintaining their authority could be as much as maintaining their way of life.” This statement is much like Schoenberger’s (1997) view of the corporatized workplace and describes “institutional habits” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102) that create the “institutional will” (p. 26) of the company embodied in the top of the organisation. Schoenberger (1997) exposes how people’s identities become so entwined with the power and prestige the corporation bestows on them that they work to maintain it even if it puts the company at risk. Veronica also spoke about the “atrocious leadership” she witnessed in the workplace and pointed to insecurity as the root of the “draconian and horrible” behaviours. Schwartz’s theory of basic values (2012) explains these behaviours. He defines the self-enhancement values of achievement and power to be “anxiety-based values” (p. 13). They focus on the “prevention of loss goals” (p. 13) and “self-protection” (p. 14). Extrapolating from this,

if someone who plays the game feels threatened or insecure, they will likely become defensive in an effort to protect themselves against those (existential) threats. That defensiveness could be manifested as “draconian and horrible” behaviours.

It was not only those who played the game whose behaviour changed. It was also those that I interviewed who were successful by being themselves. Ann spoke about getting into too much conflict with a senior person. Christine noticed a shift in her behaviour—not being kind—because she was not being true to herself. Essie spoke about becoming hostile. When participants pressed against the game, they experienced a range of emotions like shock, surprise, and disbelief, which morphed into confusion, frustration, disillusionment, indignation, anger, and rage. When two different worldviews press against each other, personalities change. Applying Schwartz (2012) once more, those that embrace the values of universalism, benevolence, and self-direction have “anxiety free values” (p.13). These are values that promote “growth or self-expansion” (p. 14). It would seem that the affective nature of encounters with those who play the game can shift people from the openness and anxiety free state that their values elicit into anxiety. In those encounters, they are experiencing a feeling of being denied the ability to be themselves. Applying Joronen and Rose (2021), this would be experienced as an existential threat. They would feel wounded and in need of defending themselves, of fighting for their lives.

Promoting those that play the game perpetuates the game. Jacob describes it this way, “

If somebody is a really shitty leader... like really shitty, their chances of getting promoted are still very high as long as they are getting the numbers ... And so, the capitalist mindset is, you know, grow, grow, grow. Got to hit the numbers for Wall Street... but they're not actually living our values. We don't really have values, or we have different ones.

Promoting people based on their ability to play the game results in leadership that does not live their Kool-Aid, their *stated* workplace values. Jacob suggests that the stated values become irrelevant, and the values of the game pervade. This increases the existential threat people feel in the workplace, and “draconian and horrible” behaviours become the norm.

Missildine (2007) claims that those who are at the top of the organisation stop being players of the game and take on the role of referee. They may do that by protecting the rules of the game. Yet they are also the kingmakers. They decide who ultimately makes it on the executive team. Jake thought that he would be CEO one day. He was on his way to being a director when he started to push up against the executive who, as MBAs, “wanted to market from a book.” Jake felt that they were not listening to what the rest of the organisation “actually wanted out of the working environment.” That was something that Jake understood because he had built strong connections at all levels of the company. Jake’s values of self-direction, universalism, and benevolence were facing off against the conservation and self-enhancement values of the executives. According to Schwartz (2012), conservation based values include security, conformity, and tradition. As referees of the game, they want to ensure the game continues for their security. That means maintaining the status quo, conforming to the traditions taught in business school, and expecting subordinates to respect their opinions on how to do things. Both Jake and the executives were feeling an existential threat. According to Jake, this resulted in a “confrontation with them.” This confrontation cost Jake a promotion to director, which he had fully expected to get, and the president expected to give him. The reason he gave for Jake not being promoted was: “I just received some, some negative feedback... a couple of my senior executives have come to me and said that you are confrontational and that you are not a team player.” Not being considered a team player was incomprehensible to Jake.

Jake’s way of being challenged the social norms of the organisation giving him, as Ahmed (2014) suggests, a different affective relationship to those norms. Speaking out against established norms results in being attacked (Ahmed, 2014). I would suggest that is what happened to Jake. Those senior executives are the gatekeepers of the social norms. They play for a different team than Jake had played for in his 13 years with the company. To maintain the status quo, those senior executives with their value system are looking for people who have a similar affective orientation to the norms as they do. They want people who share their values on their team. Reproducing the existing norms of the corporation makes senior executives feel comfortable. As a result of not getting that promotion, Jake turned away from the job, business, and industry he loved because the conflict was “palpable”. He left without knowing his next step with a confidence level that was “a little low.”

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter uncovered the often invisible and insidious systemic dynamics of the corporatized workplace, which presses against employees to the point that they leave. From participants' stories, I identified four components of the workplace that interact to create those dynamics—people being successful being themselves who generally embody ethics of care and align with the corporate Kool-Aid, the gameboard—the structures and ethos of the workplace, the Kool-Aid—the stated culture of the organisation that tends to align with care ethics, and the game—self-interested strategies aimed at accumulating more power, money, status, and success. The hierarchical nature of the gameboard accentuates competition and a sense of insecurity in the workplace. Those who embody an ethics of care tend to get shocked, confused, and frustrated when confronted by people playing the game, causing further alienation. They feel like they are on a different planet. The different worldviews of those being successful being themselves and those who play the game cause conflict. Conflicts occur at all levels of the organisation but intensify as people move up because those at the top of the organisation promote those who play the game. Those in power defend the game because it is the status quo. Any changes to the status quo require changing their identity, which feels like a threat.

The value conflicts between those who play the game and those who embody a care ethic create a care ceiling, either preventing the advancement of those who care or alienating them to the point that they leave. The value conflicts create moral injury to those who embody the Kool-Aid, leaving them feeling frustrated, angry, and pushing against the status quo. Their personalities change, as Alisa's story in the next chapter demonstrates. They become frustrated, angry, hostile, defensive, and confrontational while standing for what they feel is right for the organisation and for justice, care and support for their team. As a result, those who embrace a care ethic become an "affect alien" (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39)—someone refusing to put on a happy face and "just get along" (p. 50). Affect aliens "refuse to share an orientation to certain things" (p.39) with others. Standing for what they feel is right becomes confrontational. Those in power—those who are protecting the status quo and embodying the "institutional habits" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102)—read those taking a stand as "the cause of the problem" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 142) or, as in Jake's case—as not a team player. Those taking a stand start to question themselves. They begin not to recognise themselves. They become alienated and leave the workplace feeling diminished. This is how the care ceiling works.

In this chapter, I looked at the macro-scale of the corporatized workplace culture. In Chapter 5, I look at the micro-scale—what is happening on the personal level of the individual. It examines how the system works through the individuals based on what values and beliefs they embody – the game or the Kool-Aid. In that chapter, I apply Ahmed’s view of emotions as surfaces that differentiate the personal from the social by examining what is pressing against participants in a way that causes them to turn away from the workplace and leave.

Chapter 5: Slow Wounding and Moral Injury Make People Leave

“Capitalism is something, the argument goes, that compels us, or companies, to act in harmful ways, but not something we can do very much about.”
(Horgan, 2021, p. 14)

In this chapter, I address my research question—why do people leave the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive social and/or environmental change? —on a different scale. In Chapter 4, I looked at the corporatized workplace at the scale of the system. In this chapter, I examine the workplace at the scale of the individual. I have organized this chapter around the narratives of four participants. I retell their stories in a more narrative format instead of using longer direct quotes to be succinct. As Bissel (2023) suggests, there may be times when quotes may not be beneficial to our writing. The interviews may have been the first time participants told their stories in their entirety. Participants constructed their stories as they shared. As a result, sometimes they would interrupt themselves with a different unrelated thought or idea before returning to the story. I noticed that participants speak in run-on sentences using the word “and” to connect their thoughts. The stories, therefore, were not linear or straightforward. These are similar challenges to those Bissel (2023) outlines. I decided to summarize the stories and support the summary with quotes to ensure participants’ voices remained. I interweave my analysis into their stories.

I examine the stories through the lens of alienation (Ahmed, 2010b; Marx, 2007 [1844]), slow wounding (Joronen, 2021), and moral injury (J. Anderson, 2021; French et al., 2022; Greenberg et al., 2020). Marx (2007 [1844]) defines four types of alienation: (i) alienation from the product of labour (p. 73), (ii) alienation from the labour process (p. 73), (iii) alienation from self or species being (p. 76), and, as a result of these estrangements, (iv) an alienation from others (p. 76). The idea of applying alienation to my data came after reading a Marx quote by Ahmed (2010b): “The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him, but to the object” (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 70). Ahmed (2010b) went on to refer to alienation as “one’s being has been stolen” (p. 167). The quote seemed to describe the energy drain experienced by many participants. The concept of slow wounding (Joronen, 2021) seems to align with Ahmed’s (2014) concept of the social pressing against the individual and the impression maps (see Chapter 3) that I had created for each participant.

Each point of pressure is an enactment of a slow wounding. Many slow woundings that pressed upon participants involved a moral dilemma or value conflict, which causes moral injury. Many participants shared stories of leaving more than one corporatized workplace in which they experienced moral injury, slow wounding, and alienation. This chapter aims to identify how these things happen and how they contribute to people leaving the corporatized workplace.

I need to make three things clear. Firstly, my research involves a subset of people who left the corporatized workplace—those that left and ultimately started businesses they believed were oriented to positive social or environmental change. Other people could have left their corporatized workplace for other reasons. Given that study participants are interested in creating positive change, it is not surprising that what caused them to turn away from the corporate workplace is value-based wounding. Secondly, none of my participants used the terms moral injury, slow wounding, or alienation—these are the concepts I am using to make sense of and analyse their stories. After reading this chapter, some participants, may feel uncomfortable with how I labelled and interpreted their stories. However, the literature supports the terms, which resonate with my own experience of the corporatized workplace (Chapter 3 and Appendix 2). Thirdly, I cannot read and interpret these stories without my corporatized workplace experience being present. My experience guided my navigation through participants’ stories and how I have presented them here.

As the HRM literature suggests, some events preceded people leaving the corporatized workplace. The events that participants experienced preceding their departure were COVID (Charlotte), being “swallowed” by a larger company (Jennifer), having a company purchased after going into receivership (Paul, Sean), the birth of a child (Alisa, Liz, Jennifer), leadership change (Rita, Cynthia, Ibrahim, Izzy, Patricia), changes in the industry itself (Patricia), restructuring (Ann, Veronica, Sean), illness (Christina, Mary, Ibrahim), being asked to relocate geographically (Anand, Jacob), and asset sales (Veronica). In most cases, these events were not what precipitated the leaving. As suggested by HRM literature (Holtom et al., 2005; Mitchell et al., 2001; Mitchell & Lee, 2001; Tauag, 2021), the events motivate participants to reflect on what mattered to them and consider whether the workplace aligned with that. The events, however, are not the real reason participants left.

Participants left due to an accumulation of external and internal pressures and encounters that pressed against them (Ahmed, 2014) causing what Joronen (2021) calls slow wounding. Slow wounds are embodied and visceral (Joronen, 2021). The slow violence that inflicts the wound operates across time and space (Emery, 2020). The slow wounding involved the expectations of the workplace and the expectations that those I interviewed placed on themselves. Participants lost their affective capacity because of the slow wounding. Many left diminished, disempowered, angry, and, in some cases with significant physical and mental health issues. For some, the slow wounding caused what appears to be a rupture in the surface, which Ahmed (2014) suggests delineates the social from the individual, threatening the integrity of the self.

Moral injury causes slow wounding. As described in Chapter 2, *moral injury* occurs when people's values and belief systems are violated by something they have done, witnessed or failed to prevent (The Moral Injury Project, n.d.). bell hooks (2009) would describe it as soul damage caused "by my trespasses and those who trespass against me" (p. 22). Moral injury is also described as a betrayal of what is right by one's self or a person in authority in a "high stakes situation" (French et al., 2022; Phelps et al., 2021; Shay, 2014, p. 182). The definition demonstrates how people in the same situation may not feel the same sense of moral injury because each person has a different concept of "what is right." It is based on their values and beliefs, which form the core of who they are. The effect of moral injury can be devastating and can feel like a "soul wound" (J. Anderson, 2021, p. 5) or "a breaking down of the spirit" (hooks, 2009, p. 15). In this chapter, I apply Shay's (2014) definition of moral injury to my analysis of the stories. As a reminder, Shay (2014) states that for something to be a moral injury, it requires (i) a betrayal of what is right, (ii) by one's self or a person in authority, and (iii) a high-stakes situation (French et al., 2022; Phelps et al., 2021; Shay, 2014).

Participants' responses to woundings and alienation were different. Liz reacted quickly and left the workplace. Calvin anticipated the workplace's effect on him and left before it happened. The intensity of the alienation and woundings varied between participants. Veronica's company offered her an exit package before the intensity of the alienation got to the point where her capacity to affect and be affected diminished. Rita had established a trigger point for her to initiate her exit from a workplace that was alienating her. It was when her second in command had reached the point that he wanted out. For Essie, one workplace caused her moral injury to the point that she left. For Christina it was her

profession that caused her moral injury. Nevertheless, she stayed committed to the profession, trying different disciplines. Lynn worked in different industries to find a workplace that aligned with her. Lynn left all but one of those workplaces because of value conflicts within the workplace, one very abruptly and another involuntarily.

The corporatized workplace changes people. Bissel et al. (2020) see personality changes as the alienation of “losing touch with self” (p.1899). James, who worked in finance, became more impatient. He describes the changes as “you stop recognising the parts of you that... were excited and joyful, and really inspired.” What changes people, what causes them to “lose pieces of” themselves are cultural conflicts that boil down to cultural dissonance—when the shadow values (J. Anderson, 2021), ideals, and behaviours of the corporatized workplace conflicts with an individual’s values, ideals, and definition of acceptable behaviours. Anderson’s (2021) shadow values are what HRM literature refers to as the lived values of the organisation. As discussed in Chapter 4, the game is the dominant lived culture of the workplaces described by participants. The values of the game are about self-enhancement (gaining more power, prestige, and money) and are in direct conflict with the self-transcendent values of most of the participants. These value-based conflicts exact moral injury. Each encounter in the workplace that inflicts a moral injury is causing a slow wounding. As those slow woundings accumulate, participants become more alienated from the workplace, their role, others, and themselves.

Being in an environment perceived to be hostile puts people on edge and triggers the “fight, flight, freeze, appease or dissociate” (Haines, 2019, p. 96) mechanism. When that mechanism is triggered, it escalates the sense of being in a hostile environment. This then starts a downward spiral into alienation. Lynn described herself as “spiralling out of control” in the advertising firm where she worked. In a hostile workplace, people start to isolate themselves and become frustrated, impatient, and angry. They become shocked by their behaviour, which can amplify their self-critical voice. That amplification exacerbates their downward spiral and narrows their perceptive field to a point where they cannot see an alternative. The result is people behaving in ways that contradict their sense of self.

There are those whom Han (2015) refers to as “achievement-subjects” (p. 46) who drive to outdo themselves in a way that feels like freedom but is self-exploitation. Achievement-subjects are driven by the “yes, we can” (Han, 2015, p. 8) of the achievement-society. Han’s achievement-subject would likely hold the value of self-direction (Schwartz, 2012). Its defining goal is “independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring” (p. 5). Several achievement-subjects I interviewed waited until, to use Gabor Maté’s (2003) terminology, their bodies said “no” before quitting. Lynn experienced that bodily “no”. In a meeting with senior management, she quit, “literally, my body took over, I slumped over the table and the words, ‘I don’t think I should be here. I’m really unhappy,’ came out.” The body “no” can be because of physical and mental health issues. Christina, a lawyer, shared with me that she developed three different forms of cancer, one after the other and said, “I believe it was stress related.” She “kept working through all the surgeries and chemotherapy until the fourth surgery” when she finally took time off and lived at a monastery for 18 months.

Participants’ stories are an entanglement of encounters, thoughts, and feelings. I chose to present my data as narratives because stories demonstrate the depth and complexity of what was pressing against participants in a way that themes fail to do. Stories are irreducible, personal (Cameron, 2012) and layered in meaning (Andrews et al., 2013). They can offer insight into the “broader social and political context” (Cameron, 2012, p. 574). These narratives allow me to demonstrate that it was not one encounter or event but an accumulation of slow woundings that pressed against participants, causing them to turn away from the corporatized workplace. Narratives seem the best way to demonstrate the concept of moral injury, slow wounding, and alienation. Stories have a stickiness (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 29) that a thematic analysis—i.e., as can be seen in the organisational framework of Chapters 4 and 6—does not. Stickiness results from when something is infused with emotion and affect—positive or negative (Ahmed, 2010a). That stickiness is important because I want people to clearly understand the dynamics of the workplace and the effects it can have on individuals. As Mitch Rose (2016) suggests, sharing these stories is also a way to acknowledge the participants that gave rise to my understanding of the corporatized workplace. All the stories I heard were rich, deep, and full of wisdom. I feel honoured to have been able to listen, receive, and be with each storyteller and their stories. Having to let go of some of those stories in the writing of this chapter was challenging. I let go of some powerful stories to prevent repetition and conserve space.

As discussed in Chapter 4, some participants were not affected by the injuries at a soul level. They are the ones who knew when to say “no” to their workplace and left quickly and reasonably unscathed. It is almost like the surface, which delineates the personal from the social, was somehow thicker, more intact, perhaps more sensitive to the potential for moral injury or more attuned (Ahmed, 2014) to the messages from their body than those who stayed. They also could be the ones who understood what was in their control and what was not. They may have had less of a pull to stay in the workplace, less attachment to the security that a salary and benefits provide, or they may not have embodied the societal messaging about the path to success that Jake described (see Chapter 4). As Tolia-Kelly (2006) states not all bodies have the same “capacity to affect and be affected” (p. 213). The ones who left more quickly had more capacity to act in response to behaviours that could cause moral injury and had boundaries that said, “No, this is unacceptable,” and left.

In this chapter, I spotlight the stories of four participants who I believe demonstrated diverse types of moral injury and slow wounding. First, I chose Mary’s story because it best illustrates the behaviours and consequences of drinking the Kool-Aid and being an “achievement-subject” (Han, 2015, p. 46). Mary’s story also demonstrates how someone can sacrifice so much of themselves by being attuned (Ahmed, 2014) to the company values.

I chose to share Alisa’s story because it clearly shows how workplace encounters can create slow wounding in the form of moral injuries. The woundings press against the surface that Ahmed (2014) claims delineates the personal from the social to the point of feeling like the self is destructing. Alisa’s story is longer because I wanted to ensure I included each encounter that caused her moral injury to demonstrate the cumulative effect of slow wounding. Several participants felt this sense of self destruction or self-alienation (Ann, Christina, Cynthia, Essie, Izzie, Jacob, Jake, James, Jennifer, Lynn).

I chose Ibrahim’s story because he experienced a leadership change that shifted his workplace from one of acceptance, care, and trust to one of paranoia, fear, and suspicion. That shift can feel like a betrayal and that sense of betrayal causes moral injury. This type of change of workplace leadership was experienced by several participants (Cynthia, Izzy, Patricia, Rita, Jacob).

I chose Mark's story because he faced a situation that put two of his values in conflict. This meant that no matter what he decided, it would lead to self-betrayal. Probably the most common form of self-betrayal by participants was staying in a workplace and role that was causing them to feel alienated from themselves. Nobody else I interviewed described being in this type of internal value conflict in the detail that Mark did. It is a moral dilemma that shapes the corporatized workplace and can lead to heartbreak and regret.

5.1 Mary – Moral Injury Through Self-Exploitation

Mary's story involves the interaction between her "achievement-subject" (Hans, 2015, p. 46) tendencies and a nearly impossible assignment, Mary experienced what HRM literature calls "role overload" (Conway et al., 2020, p. 2678). According to them, role overload occurs when the amount of work and the level of responsibilities are beyond what is possible, considering the available time. It leads to alienation and emotional exhaustion, and this is exactly what happened to Mary. It led her to voluntarily leave the company with a package wondering if it was all worth it. She adored her job, the people and the company she worked with. Mary worked as a senior IT executive for a multinational oil and gas company. She felt that the values and culture of the company aligned with who she was. I would say she drank the Kool-Aid (see Chapter 4). The company was extremely forward-thinking. At the time it had significant renewable energy goals, and was a strong advocate for women, queer people, and those with disabilities. When I worked in the environmental field, I was similarly enamoured with that oil company and held them up as an example of what to strive for sustainability wise. Mary's alignment with the corporate values suggests that Mary holds the values of benevolence and universalism. When they caused an oil spill, Mary saw her friends "desperately trying to do something about it." Mary perceived no gap between the lived and the stated culture. One of the reasons that Mary may not have perceived a gap is that she, like Calvin (Chapter 4), solved technical problems. She was not on the front lines where the company's actions may have been subject to more moral scrutiny by the public. Mary felt valued and supported by senior management and had the resources she needed to make things happen. Mary saw her work colleagues as family and "to this day...would do anything for them and vice versa."

In her late thirties, the company offered Mary a promotion to Chief Information Officer (CIO) in a region of the world that was in crisis. The goal of the position was to get to first oil within 18 months. Its success would create billions of dollars in revenue for the company. The area had no infrastructure. There were frequent system outages. The company had neglected the employees in that region for twenty years. The position required Mary to split her time between continents. When offered the role, Mary asked the question, “Why me?” In her words, this is the answer she received:

because we need a leader; we need someone who can pull people together to believe in the impossible and make it possible, and so that's what you do naturally. And so, you're going to be surrounded by really strong technical people, and you can do it.

One of the prime reasons the project was impossible was the tight deadline. In addition to that, what pressed against Mary in taking the role was the lack of infrastructure, the neglected employees, the country that was in a violent crisis, and the billion dollars in revenue that were at stake. This placed Mary in a “high stakes situation” (Shay, 2014, p. 182) something that Shay claims is a factor is creating moral injury. She also had the pressure of being immersed in a different culture, which had her coming to work early so she could greet each person before the business day started. Added to that were the expectations she put on herself—wanting to be a good daughter. Being single at the time led her to want her parents to know that they didn’t have to worry about her future. She wanted to do a good job, and she wanted to make her father proud. “I can tick off the box that I got the three letters [CIO] beside my name and my dad will be proud.” In addition, she was traveling back and forth to Canada because her dad was sick, and her mum was struggling. All that pressed against Mary caused slow wounding.

Reflecting, Mary now sees the offer “as a pretty big ask.” Mary had not considered the physical, mental and I would add emotional toll this role would have on her. That “pretty big ask” made her extremely ill. The stress of the job destroyed her endocrine system and caused premature menopause. After voluntarily leaving the company—though from a health perspective Mary really had no choice—Mary fell into a deep depression. Contemplating if it was worth it, Mary reflected, “I’m not so sure that it was. I love my life, and I’m happy about it...But I don’t know if it was physically worth what happened to me.” She also reflected on the positives—being supported by a group of “white,

middle-aged men” who “had my back... and let me lead.” If she needed anything, they would look after it for her. She experienced “a ten-year MBA in a matter of a year and a half,” and her confidence level grew, and her ability to articulate things improved.

I see the position that Mary accepted as a *glass-cliff* assignment, although Mary may not agree with that classification. A *glass cliff* is a precarious position offered to women where they are more likely to fail (Mulcahy & Linehan, 2014; Ryan & Haslam, 2007). Glass cliff assignments can be seen as either a recognition of a woman’s ability to manage crisis or a discriminative practice of placing a woman in precarious positions (Ryan et al., 2011). Given its location—in a war-torn area without the necessary infrastructure and with a neglected staff—the job could be considered precarious and requiring crisis management skills. Even with Mary’s ability to make the impossible possible, there was a likeliness of failure, given the hostile nature of the region. Ryan et al. (2011), identify another reason women are appointed in times of crisis: to have someone to take the blame if things go awry. If things had failed, Mary could have been a scapegoat for the failure. When classifying this as a glass cliff assignment, Mary’s expertise and qualifications for the role are unquestioned. She had the skills and abilities to do the impossible job, and she proved it could be done but not without great cost to her wellbeing.

The company chose Mary for her ability to engage others to make the impossible possible. I interpret her boss’s answer to Mary’s “why me?” as enticing her into the position by inferring it will be easy for her to accomplish because she has an innate ability— “what you do naturally.” No one in those circumstances under that pressure is “a natural.” That glass cliff assignment was a trespass against Mary, to use the words of bell hooks (2009). hooks believes the soul is damaged “by my trespasses and those who trespass against me” (p. 22). The company’s offer of a glass-cliff assignment could be a betrayal of Mary. That betrayal is another component of moral injury (Shay, 2014).

Mary’s ability to make the impossible possible demonstrates the “yes we can” (Han, 2015, p. 8) attitude of “achievement-subjects” (p. 8). With her “yes we can” attitude, Mary drives to outdo herself in a way that feels like freedom but, according to Han (2015), is self-exploitation. The response to Mary’s “Why me?” question demonstrates that Mary’s leadership understood she had the disposition of an achievement-subject, including the inclination for self-exploitation demonstrated by her

willingness to work long hours. That knowledge may have factored into the decision to offer her the position. The unrealistic deadline created for the project fed Mary's achievement-subject tendencies. That urgency and the intensity of the harsh environment she was working within would have triggered Mary's amygdala. This would narrow her focus to what is most threatening (Kohn, 1954). For Mary, that was getting the impossible done. That focus would result in her neglecting herself and working those 18-20 hours per day for three years. To do that required Mary to override the compelling messages her body was sending her. Her simultaneous pneumonia and mononucleosis infections could be considered as her body saying no (Maté, 2003). Her illnesses were the manifestation of her alienation from self. Ignoring the messages of her body could be considered a betrayal of self. The situation itself had Mary focused on what was most threatening in the moment, and that was her work, removing her own self-care as an option.

Mary's core values also played a role in what happened to her. Based on what Mary shared about her experiences in various corporatized workplaces and applying Schwartz's (2012) theory of basic values, Mary seemed to embrace self-direction, benevolence, achievement, and universalism. The defining goal of achievement is "personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards" (Schwartz, 2012, p. 5). The defining goal of self-direction is "independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring" (p. 5). These two values would explain why Mary accepted the CIO position. The motivation of people who hold the values of universalism and benevolence is "enhancement of others and transcendence of self-interest" (Schwartz, 2012, p. 9). These values of caring for others over self provide another explanation of why she may have ignored the messages to rest that her body was sending her. The value of benevolence makes Mary loyal. She demonstrated that by her persistence to work even when she was sick. The values of self-direction and achievement explain her tendency to be an "achievement-subject" (Hans, 2015, p. 46). Together, all these values explain why Mary could make the impossible possible. However, Mary's values of benevolence and universalism are in direct opposition to the values of the capitalist system, which are about self-enhancement—more profits, more market share, more prestige in the industry, more dominion over resources.

Mary's work experience caused her to become alienated from herself. In drinking the Kool-Aid, Mary seemed to merge with the company. In that merging, she lost her sense of self, and the company's

goals became her goals. In her state of false consciousness, that oil company stole quite a significant amount of Mary's being—her endocrine system, her fertility, and her mental health. In speaking of alienation, Marx (2007 [1844]) says, “the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes... the poorer he himself—his inner world—becomes... therefore the greater this product, the less is he himself.” (p. 70). With the intensity with which Mary worked and the billions of dollars in revenue the project was forecasted to generate for the company, I would argue that Mary was spending much of herself. The more of herself that she spent, the poorer her physical health became. Mary became alienated from her body and emotions as the company extracted value from her through the product she was instrumental in producing. Mary seemed only to awaken to her suffering and understand the source of her suffering after leaving that corporatized workplace.

Although Mary had a group of “white, middle-aged men” who “had my back”, they seemed to care for her in a way that supported the mission by providing the resources, the needed experts, advice, and a sense of belonging. What they did not support was her wellbeing. What was missing from the care and support Mary received was someone telling her that she needs to look after herself, that she should not be working 18-20 hours per day, and when she was sick, that she should take time off to recover. This failure to care for her wellbeing is a betrayal by those in power and it caused moral and physical injury. What “achievement-subjects” (Hans, 2015, p. 46) need is someone to teach them to say “no” or teach them to listen to their bodies and respond before they scream “no.” Mary put her whole self into this assignment resulting in a “soul wound” (Anderson, 2021, p. 5) that bankrupted her physical and mental health and alienated her from her inner world. It required time to repair (see Chapter 6).

5.2 Alisa – Slow Wounding from Moral Injury

Alisa's stories of moral injury involve a “high burn project” and a series of four encounters or events—(i) returning to work after maternity leave, (ii) senior partner not living up to a promise, (iii) managing partner denying her the ability to pursue what she loved, and (iv) being “voluntold” to attend an innovation conference. The encounters diminished her to the point that she voluntarily left the company with the excuse that she was moving for her husband's work. Unlike Berlant's (2011)

description of encounters, Alisa's encounters were not moments of interruptions that open space for possible aliveness (Berlant, 2011) or gaps and rhythms in everyday life that open spaces for creative improvisation (Thrift, 2003). These were encounters, moments of interruption (or, better put, moments of injury) that caused Alisa to doubt herself, to feel diminished, and to shift into what Gibson-Graham (2006) refers to as the "emotional and affective disposition of paranoia" (p. 4) and fear that occurs when people perceive the workplace as hostile or unsafe. They were moments of feeling alienated from self, from the workplace, and others in the workplace. Feeling like the workplace is hostile would have triggered her "fight, flight, freeze, appease or dissociate" (Haines, 2019, p. 96) mechanism, which escalated her sense of being in a hostile environment beginning a downward spiral. The encounters were instances that may not have fazed someone else. They could be disregarded as "that's business" by those who understand the rule of the game— "Don't take it personally" (Missildine, 2007, p. 130). They also could have been overlooked by people who did not share the same value system as Alisa.

Alisa, a project manager for a multinational management consulting firm, reported several things pressing against her. These pressures included expectations that she put on herself, like to be a "really good mother" to her newborn child, to be "a good role model" for other women within the organisation (even when a role model was not available to her), to advance her career, and be "a good employee." She was a "star performer" who knew how to create high-performance teams. She did that by tapping into everyone's intrinsic motivation and making work fun. Arriving back from a year of parental leave, Alisa wanted to balance work with motherhood. What she heard from the young women in the office was "If anyone is going to figure out management consulting and motherhood, it's you", which Alisa described as both a great feeling and an added pressure. Upon her return, Alisa was thrown immediately into leading a "high-burn project"—notice how burnout is normalised in this workplace. It had her working 14-hour days and weekends. The high-burn project placed Alisa in a situation of role overload, which fed her alienation, resulting in emotional exhaustion (Conway et al., 2020).

Returning from maternity leave was the first diminishing encounter. Management consulting involves working at a client's office for extended periods to complete projects. It is not unusual for colleagues working on different projects not to see each other for months, and the pace of the workplace meant

“that nobody noticed a year went by.” When Alisa returned from parental leave people thought she was back from working on a project. They were “not even talking about the mother piece, not asking about me, not asking about my child,” and that hurt. Their lack of caring is the antithesis of how Alisa would have reacted if someone she knew had returned from parental leave. Being someone who took care to see the uniqueness of the people on her teams and customize her approach to managing them, Alisa would have shown interest in a team member returning from maternity leave. This lack of interest in her child and her as a mother caused Alisa a moral injury and was the beginning of her sense of alienation.

That “high-burn” project that Alisa was assigned seemed to cause her to betray herself—to betray her desire to be a good mother. Like Mary, Alisa was an “achievement-subject” (Han, 2015, p. 46) and demonstrated those self-exploitative behaviours. From Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic values and what Alisa shared about herself, I surmise her values to be benevolence, universalism, self-direction, and achievement. Alisa’s values of self-direction and achievement gave her a predisposition to being an achievement-subject and putting other people’s interests before her own (Schwartz, 2012). On that high-burn project, Alisa was taking calls at midnight and 5 am. That and her 14-hour days were “starting to affect us at home.” Leading her to ask, “Am I really choosing my work over my one-year-old? And I’m like ‘no, of course not but I don’t know how to... turn them off’.” She also did not know how to ask for help. With the work’s pace and the project’s demands, there is no way Alisa could turn it off. Alisa was under stress. Like Mary, she experienced Kohn’s (1954) tunnelling effect, narrowing the focus to the most threatening or aligned with the current direction. For Alisa, that meant focusing on the “high-burn project” above all else. The tunnelling effect explains why she would ask herself if she chose to work over her child. The urgency of the workplace makes work the constant threat and steals people’s attention from what is most important to them—for Alisa that was to be a good mother. Though on the surface, it looks like a self-betrayal, it was a betrayal caused by the pace and urgency of the workplace and the culture of a company that normalises burnout.

Alisa became alienated from herself and the workplace. She describes how she felt in this way:

I was... silently crying for, for a way out... Writing an email that made me feel icky... It would take me an hour to write what would be a 5-minute email... I'd look in the mirror. I

wouldn't recognise myself... I wouldn't feel myself. Nothing felt real. It felt like... an alternative reality [laughing]... where I was in the twilight zone kind of thing.

This high-burn project took Alisa to the point of not recognising herself, suggesting that she was alienated from herself. The fact that she felt like she was in the twilight zone and things didn't feel real suggests that she was alienated from others in the workplace, the work, and life itself. Being alienated caused her to take an hour to write an email that should have taken 5 minutes. This project was the beginning of Alisa's unravelling.

Alisa shared three other diminishing encounters, which I interpret as moral injury. The first was an encounter with a senior partner, who demonstrated her complete lack of integrity. Alisa described a town hall meeting where the results of an anonymous feedback survey were revealed. Alisa had provided "candid, not harsh" comments about the "elephant in the room." I did not ask Alisa about the specifics, but understood it meant "an obvious major problem or issue that people avoid discussing or acknowledging" (Merriam Webster, n.d.). Her comments were read out by the senior partner, who then demanded to know whose comments they were, "I need that person to speak up right now! We're going to look into this and we're going to find out who said this." According to Alisa, the whole room was stunned at this demand given there was the promise of anonymity. No one was more shocked than Alisa. At this point, Alisa awoke to false consciousness, "They were looking out for their own interests, and I needed to look out for mine." Alisa became aware that the company was not who she thought they were. The senior managers were playing by rules different from Alisa's. The realization that nobody is looking after her so she better start looking after herself is the moment when Alisa began to shift from her natural state of seeing possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2013; Sedgwick, 2003) to a hypervigilant affective state of paranoia (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003) and anxiety (Schwartz, 2012). It left Alisa looking over her shoulder to protect herself from further betrayal.

The fact that the senior partner did not honour her promise of anonymity put Alisa in a value conflict with her. Schwartz (2012) indicates that based on her benevolence and universalism values, Alisa's motivations are the "enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests." These motivations led Alisa to make some honest comments about an ignored problem. She intended to move the

company into a state of possibility by honestly dealing with the elephant in the room. Based on her reaction, the senior partner's values were anxiety based (Schwartz, 2012) and come from what Sedgwick (2003) refers to as a paranoid affective state. The senior partner's reaction seems to be an act of protecting the status quo or what Ahmed refers to as "institutional habits" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102). In the meeting, Alisa encountered the "institutional will" (p. 26) of the company embodied in that senior partner. Viewing the encounter through the lens of Schoenberger (1997), the senior partner was protecting the company's institutional habits and her own identity. She was entangled with the company's social norms (institutional habits) and the power and benefits the company bestowed on her. Another possibility is that the senior partner was under such stress that she, too, had shifted into a state of alienation. Alienation would cause her to see the workplace as hostile and shift her into a state of paranoia. Regardless, to Alisa, it felt like a betrayal by someone in authority.

This encounter meets Shay's (2014) requirements for a moral injury. It is a (i) betrayal, (ii) by a person in authority, (iii) in a high-stakes situation. In this one encounter, I see at least four different betrayals by the senior partner. First, the obvious betrayal of trust was the broken promise of anonymity. Second, her dishonesty violated Alisa's core values, which include honesty, transparency, and care. Third, she betrays Alisa's expectation of care. This senior partner was someone who should have been a role model to Alisa. Because Alisa cared about people and wanted to be a good role model for other women, there was an expectation that her leaders would reciprocate by offering her the same care. Yet, the senior partner's behaviour was so contrary to Alisa's way of being that it killed any possibility of that reciprocity. According to HRM literature, this perception of lack of reciprocity in workplace relationships can cause alienation (Conway et al., 2020).

The final betrayal was that the senior partner made the person behind the comment, Alisa, the problem. This encounter unearthed Alisa's different affective relationship to the social norms of the workplace. To Alisa, it was important to discuss the "elephant in the room." To the senior partner, discussing this "elephant in the room" was unacceptable. Being a senior partner, Missildine (2007) would place her in the position of refereeing the social norms. Not discussing the "elephant in the room"—not talking about or acknowledging a major problem—is the social norm of that workplace. Ahmed (2014) claims that "sustaining particular kinds of affective relation to social norms" is how injustice works. According to Durrah (2020), when people perceive injustice in the workplace, it

makes them cynical and fosters alienation. It is evident from her stories that justice is important to Alisa. To avoid repeating mistakes, Alisa wants to understand what went wrong. Rather than accepting the comments and wanting to get to the bottom of the problem, the senior partner saw the person who made those comments the problem. Betraying Alisa yet again with her fight for the status quo of the social norms by devaluing the comments and making the commenter the problem deepened the moral injury inflicted on Alisa by the encounter.

The next diminishing encounter was when Alisa's managing partner betrayed her by refusing her the opportunity to become who she wanted to be. Alisa described this as occurring at the height of her burnout when she took the courageous step to ask her managing partner for what she wanted—a new role. Alisa explained to her managing partner, “We need to be foot on the ground coaching leaders in these organisations as we're making ... these business transformations and technological change.” Alisa wanted to be part of making that happen. She was asking for more meaningful work that aligned with her values and personal life. The response from the managing partner was, “Absolutely not! You're not doing that because that wouldn't roll up to my revenue...that's another partner and you'd have to move... so forget it. You're not doing that. You're too valuable for us here.” The response shocked Alisa because she did everything possible to support the growth and development of her team members. Alisa's interpretation of the message from her boss was, “If you're going to do that, you're dead to us. So don't even think about doing that.” Alisa described it as a “mini trauma.” According to Anderson (2021), moral injury is trauma.

Again, this second incident meets Shay's (2014) requirements for a moral injury. The “absolutely not” uttered by her managing partner was a betrayal. Her boss, a person in authority, betrayed her in a high-stakes situation. Alisa asked for a position that aligned with who she wanted to become. The “absolutely not” was another case of a person in authority demonstrating to Alisa that she would not be cared for by them in the same way that she cared for her team members. This managing partner did not care for her personal development. He cared only for *his* revenue and the performance bonus that he would get as a result. He is another example of a senior leader looking out for his interests, not Alisa's. The decision by the managing partner is a transgression of Alisa's values, which is a factor in her moral injury (The Moral Injury Project, n.d.). Again, the encounter is one of two people with

oppositional values—Alisa’s benevolence and universalism in conflict with the self-enhancement values (Schwartz, 2012)—of her managing partner.

The encounter intensified Alisa’s alienation. Her expectations of reciprocity in her workplace relationships were denied, which shattered trust (Xia et al., 2022) and alienated her more (Conway et al., 2020). The decision of the managing partner is also an injustice, adding again to Alisa’s feeling of alienation (Durrah, 2020; Shantz et al., 2014). Marxist theory says that being alienated is to become a thing (Berardi, 2009; Marx, 2007 [1844]). Alisa’s managing partner did not see her as a person. He saw her as a valuable line item on his balance sheet. He saw her as a thing. Something that he could extract value from not just for the company but for his benefit. In addition, Ahmed (2010b) equates alienation to when “one’s being has been stolen” (p. 167). This moral injury stole several things from Alisa, who she wanted to become, a possible pathway out of burnout, the potential for aliveness, and that role could have provided her with the opportunity to move from alienation toward Marx’s (2007) species being (see chapter 6).

The final thing that this encounter achieved was an affective shift. Using Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic values, Alisa’s values would normally have positioned her in an expansion and growth orientation. The shift of Alisa’s was to an anxiety-based orientation of self-protection against threat. Applying feminist theory (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003), the encounter shifted Alisa’s usual orientation of possibility to a paranoid affective disposition. The cause of the affective shift was Alisa’s managing partner denying her ability to leave the high burn project. In essence, it trapped Alisa in a position that was causing her an enormous amount of stress. It also closed the door to self-expansion and growth, which would have intensified Alisa’s feeling the workplace was not safe for her. That feeling of being in an unsafe environment would activate her nervous system and put her more deeply into a “fight, flight, freeze, appease, or dissociate” (Haines, 2019, p. 96) response.

The final encounter caused Alisa to feel like she would self-destruct. It happened when she was “voluntold” to attend the company’s innovation conference. Her 60-member team was not allowed. “They didn’t get the day off to go play” (Alisa). Alisa did not expect the company to invite her team to the conference. She was angry and frustrated at the inequity of having to leave them to work on the “high-burn project” while she was being “voluntold” to attend a conference that would involve food,

comradery, and playful activities to inspire teamwork, creativity, and innovation. Alisa cared about her team. To Alisa, it felt like an injustice:

I was like a cat... I couldn't go through the threshold of that door. I said if I go in that room right now and innovate and just park all the really hard work, and all the important work that my team is doing back at the client office...when your team is not invited to come... that day was "pass." I said, "no, thank you. I can't go through those doors. I will self-destruct. I will self-combust", right? ... I will turn into flames if I go in there because it was so, it was so— I was so in conflict with my values, of the truth and that just, that was the biggest, one of the biggest injustices I could see.

The analogy of the cat fighting not to cross the threshold into that conference can be seen as Alisa feeling like they were trying to cage her by "voluntelling" her to attend and illustrates her activated nervous system—"fight, flight, freeze, appease or dissociate" (Haines, 2019, p. 96). Being voluntold to attend further shifted her into an anxiety-based orientation and the need to protect herself from threats (Schwartz, 2012). Again, from a feminist theory perspective it shifted Alisa further into paranoia. To use Gabor Maté's (2003) words, this was Alisa's body saying "no."

To Alisa, it is a deep injustice to be, because of her position in the hierarchy, "voluntold" to attend an innovation conference to "play" when her team remained back at the office doing the hard work. In this situation, Alisa is motivated by her universalism and benevolence to be loyal to and care for her team and ensure they are treated equally (Schwartz, 2012). These values are in direct conflict with those of the workplace doing the voluntelling. Voluntelling is an expression of power over with the "defining goal" (p. 5) of "control or dominance over people and resources" (p. 5). That value conflict caused Alisa moral injury. Alisa's reaction to this injustice—"to self-destruct" or "to turn into flames"—demonstrates how a moral injury can feel like a physical wound so deep that you can self-destruct. Her language also aligns with Gabor Maté's (2022) description of trauma as a "fracturing of self and of one's relationship to the world" (p. 23). Those who play the game would not perceive this inequity as an injustice. They would more likely perceive it as an entitlement or a reward. They would not have felt like they were self-destructing because they knew not to care about people (Missildine, 2007) (see Chapter 4).

Another moral injury was caused by being “voluntold” to attend the innovation conference. Because Alisa cared about her team, she likely felt that if she went to that conference, she would betray her team. She would be concerned that they would have felt abandoned and betrayed by her if she attended. In her mind, Alisa resisted being perceived by her team as behaving like her leaders—only looking out for her own interests and not her team. Given her values, the thought of being perceived that way and causing that hurt and moral injury to her team members would have been unbearable to Alisa. It would deepen her moral injury.

The way Alisa speaks about her burnout demonstrates her alienation. She used visceral terms to describe her experience and acknowledged how it changed her. “I was left with like, the carcass of myself... I'm being highly emotional... tears would spontaneously squirt out of my eyes horizontally... so much stress, ... just like coming out of me.” She was described by the partner who was responsible for the high-burn project she was managing as “a complete disaster”, “terrible”, “aggressive”, and “argumentative.” He recommended that she take an anger management course. Alisa’s aggressive and argumentative behaviour is a natural response to a workplace where she does not feel safe. She is defending herself, her values and her way of being in the world. It would feel doubly threatening to her because, at one point, she believed that the corporate values aligned with her values. The suggestion that Alisa takes an anger management course demonstrates a need for managers to understand the signs of burnout and how an organisational culture can create it. Alisa knew she was her “worst self” but didn’t know how to ask for help. According to her, it wasn’t in her nature to ask for help. However, this workplace that Alisa perceived as threatening would have made asking for help nearly impossible. To ask for help people must feel safe.

The workplace changed Alisa. Bissel et al. (2020) describe personality changes as a signal of self-alienation. She now saw herself as a thing, a dead thing, a carcass. This self becoming thing (Berardi, 2009) is another confirmation of her alienation. Her horizontal tears speak to the overwhelm she experienced from all that was pressing against her. It reflects the leakiness of the surface that Ahmed (2014) claims delineates her personal from her social. Given that leaky surface, the only way Alisa had to defend herself was by being “aggressive” and “argumentative” becoming her “worst self.” Management’s anger management solution for Alisa’s change in personality was aimed at the symptom, not the cause, of her behavioural change. The cause was, in fact, systemic. Her boss was

applying what Adkins and Lury (1999) call the process of *individualisation*. They define *individualisation* as erroneously placing the responsibility on an employee to manage their own emotions and stress when that workplace stress stems from a “socially stratified” (p. 609) workplace and its power relations. In other words, the manager was putting the responsibility on Alisa to deal with the stress that was created by the dynamics and hierarchical structure of the workplace. This pattern of individualisation instead of system change is rampant in writing about the corporatized workplace. This is particularly true in popular literature like *Lean In* (Sandberg, 2013) and *The Confidence Code* (Kay & Shipman, 2018). These books outline how women lack the characteristics that will make them successful in the corporatized workplace and offer them strategies to change themselves to fit. However, they neglect to recognise that the system of the corporatized workplace was not designed for women and changing that system would be more effective in nurturing the wellbeing of workers.

5.3 Ibrahim – Moral Injury Caused by a Shift from Care and Trust to Paranoia and Fear

A change in leadership caused Ibrahim’s moral injury and alienation. Ibrahim worked overseas as a community developer for a Canadian corporation. He worked on the ground with communities and felt like he was making a difference. From what Ibrahim shared, it is apparent that he loved his work. His boss was entrepreneurial and provided Ibrahim with what Bartos (2021) describes as “critical care.” It involves three aspects of care—audacious care, Socratic care and material care. His boss provided audacious care by boldly standing in solidarity with Ibrahim by having his back, speaking well of him to senior management, and standing for him when it was necessary. He provided Socratic care by challenging Ibrahim with much responsibility, allowing him the freedom to take risks, make mistakes, and learn. He provided material care by taking the time to have difficult and honest conversations that provided Ibrahim with clear feedback, so he knew what to expect and to course correct. His boss spoke about making a difference and creating a caring environment encouraging growth and development.

That caring boss left the workplace. Ibrahim said that “left a sort of a vacuum in the department.” The new CEO shifted the dynamics of the workplace with his focus on paperwork rather than changing people’s lives. The new CEO wanted things done his way and was not open to criticism. The focus

became upward looking (as occurs in the game) rather than on the outcomes of the projects on the ground. Workplace behaviours became “secretive... not a lot of talk even... among ourselves.” There was a need “to use the right language” with senior management. The environment became “touchy” and not “conducive to collaboration.” Ibrahim “was not learning anymore.” The leadership change shifted his workplace's affective atmosphere from trust and acceptance to paranoia, fear, and suspicion. This shift is the opposite affective shift to what Gibson-Graham (2006) nurtured in their action research focused on creating alternative economies. From the value perspective that Schwartz (2012) provides, the leadership change caused the workplace to shift from the values of self-transcendent (benevolence and universalism) and openness to change (stimulation and self-direction) to the values of power and conformity. The shift resulted in the workplace being anxiety-based. The focus was on self-protection against threat rather than the self-expansion and growth orientation that it had been. The shift destroyed the horizontal bonds of connection in the workplace, as is evident by there being a lack of talk “even amongst ourselves,” alienating workers from each other. This destruction of horizontal bonds happens in totalitarian regimes (Arendt, 1994; Topolski, 2015). It also changes people's capacities to affect and be affected. According to Ibrahim, some people left because of the change, while others stayed and seemed to adapt to the new environment.

The change in leadership caused alienation. Using Ahmed's (2010b) view of alienation as “one's being has been stolen” (p. 167), it is possible to see how this affective shift in the workplace wounded Ibrahim by stealing things from him. Each thing taken from him is a slow wounding. The things stolen from Ibrahim were a caring, supportive boss, and his ability to be the person that he was becoming under the mentorship of that boss, and a space where he was “open to the world and to the possibilities of being transformed” (Singh, 2017, p. 759), and his ability to use his energy to create. His energy instead was used to navigate a touchy workplace, appease those above him, and be very careful about what he said, how he said it, and to whom he said it. Ibrahim also lost his freedom to take risks, to collaborate, share information, learn, and make the difference he had hoped to make. Adding to that, he lost touch with his purpose, which is also a form of alienation (Bissell et al., 2020). Ibrahim lost all that had been promised to him when he joined the corporation.

These thefts would understandably be perceived as a betrayal by a person in authority “in a high stakes situation” (Shay, 2014, p. 182), making it a moral injury. The moral injury affected Ibrahim.

He described it in this way, “I was no longer happy. I was ... no longer stimulated. I was looking for another challenge.” He felt like he “was no longer belonging” in the workplace. He was not sleeping at night, he was drinking more, and his physical and mental health were affected. He became “very, very anxious about it,” a feeling that would further alienate Ibrahim from himself. Ultimately, what drove Ibrahim from the workplace was similar to Alisa’s—the realisation that his new boss did not have his back. Ibrahim’s descriptions of his alienation are consistent with the states of mind that O’Donohue and Nelson (2014) summarize. Alienation affects people’s state of mind by creating in them a sense of “powerlessness” (p. 303), “meaninglessness” (p. 303), and “of not belonging” (p. 304), leaving “no sense of identity or self-fulfilment” (p. 304). The fact that Ibrahim was “looking for another challenge” suggests that he feels a sense of meaninglessness in his existing role. That and the fact that he is “no longer happy” or “stimulated” suggests that he lacks self-fulfilment or power. Ibrahim no longer feels a sense of belonging.

The HRM literature also explains Ibrahim’s alienation. According to O’Donohue and Nelson (2014), the shift from freedom, responsibility, and self-expression to the control and paperwork focus would cause alienation. Ibrahim’s values—benevolence, universalism, self-direction, and stimulation—suggest a need for self-expansion and growth (Schwartz, 2012). Alienation from the product of labour, the labour process, and himself (Efraty et al., 1991; Xia et al., 2022) happened when those needs were not met. The shift from working directly with communities to a paperwork focus meant Ibrahim could no longer apply and improve his skills. According to Soffia et al. (2022), this negatively affects wellbeing. That shift to paperwork also meant he no longer “viewed [his work] as beneficial to others” (Conway et al., 2020, p. 2677). This loss resulted in an increase in “negativity and emotional exhaustion” (p. 2677). Ibrahim also lost his voice during the shift in the workplace. The loss of caring relationships stifled Ibrahim’s ability to influence the workings of the corporation. The secrecy in the workplace meant people no longer openly shared. According to Conway (2020), not having a voice in the workplace creates alienation. That alienation translates into decreased job satisfaction and increased emotional exhaustion (Conway et al., 2020).

Ibrahim’s story demonstrates how easily a workplace can shift. It only takes one person with a different leadership style to shift the affective atmosphere for those who report to them. Other participants experienced a change of leadership that equivalently wounded. Cynthia lost a caring boss

when he left the workplace. Izzy got a new supervisor who was not as supportive of her as her first supervisor. For Patricia, it was succession within a family-owned business with the next generation having different ideas about running the business. The changes stifled Patricia's freedom to sell in the way that had worked for her and the company for years. Rita experienced a similar challenge with the next generation of a family business. As CEO, she had grown the company from two people to 500 people. With the next generation becoming involved, Rita no longer had the freedom to make the decisions that she felt were best for the company. She had created the company based on her caring values and beliefs. With the change, Rita felt she could no longer represent the company. For Sean, it was working with receivers who wanted to make the energy services company that he worked for profitable before they sold it. Then, having the company sold to investors who did not know the industry but felt they knew better how to run the company than the people who had brought it out of bankruptcy. For Jacob, it was a change in personality that occurred in the founder of the start-up where he worked. The founder shifted from being "a really good friend of mine and turned into a complete and total psychopath," which wounded him significantly.

5.4 Mark – The Moral Injury Caused by No Choice but Self Betrayal

Mark's moral injury was from being given an ultimatum by his boss that put his values in conflict. Personal values are ordered hierarchically based on their importance and sometimes those values conflict with each other (Arieli et al., 2020; Schwartz, 2012). These types of value conflicts need navigating. Mark shared his belief that when he took a job, he was committing to following the standards put down by the organisation, rightly or wrongly, because they pay him. From this description, I infer that conformity is one of Mark's values. The goal of conformity is "restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms (Schwartz, 2012, p. 6). Schwartz (2012) describes the behaviours associated with conformity as obedience, politeness, honouring authority, and loyalty. Also important to Mark is to connect with people, share stories and make them smile. He felt "it's all about relationships." This statement suggests that Mark embraces benevolence as a value. According to Schwartz (2012), holding these two values suggests what motivates Mark is "normative behaviour that promotes close relationships" (p. 9).

Though benevolence and conformity are side-by-side in Schwartz's circular graphic of basic values, there was still an inner conflict that manifested in Mark. Schwartz (2012) describes both benevolence and conformity as including a sense of loyalty. Because of his benevolence, Mark's loyalty aligned with the residents and staff of the retirement home. His value of conformity made him loyal to the company and his superiors. Aggravating this situation was the fact that Mark accepted the role at the seniors' residence knowing "it wasn't what I wanted to do" but he did it anyway because they "flushed \$150,000 in front of me." He described the culture of that workplace as "intense," like "Black Lives Matter on drugs," and early in his tenure, he had a run-in with the Regional Director for which he apologized.

Several things pressed against Mark. The first was the fact he was in a role that he knew was not right for him. Then, there was the culture that he perceived as being too politically correct. The counting culture of the workplace also pressed against Mark. There were "dashboards for everything... it was overwhelming. Just too much." The need to keep records of everything left Mark little time "to go around and shake hands and listen to people's stories... make them smile... and feel good." His ability to connect with people is his gift. "When people take away my ability to give that gift, it's not so good but they pay me... and they pay me well." He also sensed that the regional director was "skulking around trying to find something wrong" and "standing over your head watching the numbers really, really close." This surveillance left him dreading visits from the regional director. From the beginning, the workplace disenchanted Mark. According to Soffia et al. (2022), not being able to "give that gift" creates alienation and affects people's wellbeing. It is also possible to see Mark's value conflict starting to surface, with him reconciling his gift of building relationships with people being thwarted and being paid well. From a values perspective (Schwartz, 2012), his benevolence conflicts with his power value. All that is pressing against Mark is causing him slow wounding.

Mark is already working with self-betrayal—taking a job he knew was not right for him, resulting in a moral injury. He is not the only person who betrayed himself in this way. Other participants betrayed themselves by taking jobs knowing that they were going into a toxic culture (James, Lynn) or knowingly accepting a position to work for an "atrocious leader" (Ann). Participants stayed in positions that were wounding them because they felt trapped and didn't know where to find another

job that would similarly compensate (James, Ann, Christine, me). As Ann moved up in the pharmaceutical company she worked for, she got further away from what she loved doing. These are all examples of self-betrays. Yet, an aspect of the system (Chapter 4) is involved—a system that sells a story of what it means to be successful. The story is that success means moving up the hierarchy, which is about more power, money, and success.

The moral injury that was the final straw for Mark was an ultimatum delivered by his boss, who was “squeezing the numbers.” This squeezing of the numbers creates an artificial lack of resources. Lack of resources is seen as a contributor to moral distress (Prompahakul et al., 2021). The ultimatum was to cut the kitchen staff’s hours—a nearly impossible feat because the kitchen staff were unionized—or fire the maître d’. This ultimatum made no sense to Mark. He explained that his property had “the best resident survey results... the best occupancy rate in the entire organisation, and the staff satisfaction survey—very, very good,” and according to Mark, his property was already making significantly more profit than other properties. Mark didn’t see how saving the maître d’s salary would compensate for the lack of service, and the animosity and shock that would ripple through the community. He felt residents would go into a shell and recovery would take time. His boss “says just do it,” and Mark “pushed back hard” because he cared about people and felt it wasn’t the right way to do things. That ultimatum launched Mark into a moral conundrum that he couldn’t win—care for the residents and the people who worked for him or follow the standards put down by the organisation by obeying his boss. No matter what his choice, betraying himself was a given. Ultimately, he had to choose between betraying the maître d’ or continuing to betray his boss by not firing him. He chose to fire the maître d’.

That decision caused Mark a moral injury. Firing the maître d’ without a justifiable cause on the surface could be considered an act of self-betrayal. Nevertheless, it was done under the duress of an ultimatum from a supervisor who required him to betray himself. Adding to this injury, Mark empathized with the maître d’ explaining, “he didn’t want the [severance] money... he wanted his pride. He... wanted to feel... valued.” This comment suggests that Mark understood the pain or moral injury he had inflicted on the maître d’, and that intensified Mark’s feeling of moral injury. Anticipating future moral injury from being required to make similar gut-wrenching decisions, Mark

shared, “I just knew I couldn’t do that anymore because that was only one thing. There was going to be more things... I don’t have to endure it. I’m not going to.” Within three months he was gone.

Mark’s decision still weighs on him, and he has regrets:

As a young person, you do it [follow the standards of the organisation] because you need to support your family and kids and all the rest of it. As an older person, that’s less important. Now, I mean, if I get broke enough then I’d probably do it again, just to get the job. But it’s goofy how it works...I wish there was a way you could die and come back and do it again...because... taking the correct path all the way on pays dividends and rewards.

These thoughts demonstrate the internal struggle that Mark is still having as he looks back on his career. It is haunting to me that even after saying he wishes he “could die and come back and do it again... taking the correct path,” he said, if he was broke enough, he would again go back to the corporatized workplace. Reflecting, Mark also feels he didn’t support his boss well because when he talked to staff, he said, “this is not something I really want to do. It’s something that I must do.” This interests me because he didn’t like what his boss asked him to do. He didn’t see eye to eye with her, and she put him in an untenable situation. Yet, for Mark, “it’s all about relationships.” Because Mark was not able to nurture a functional relationship with his supervisor, he feels regret and grief. Mark is also grieving and regretting not being loyal to his supervisor in explaining the firing of the maître d’ to his team.

Mark’s story illustrates the heartbreaking value conflicts the corporatized workplace creates when people care and take things personally—two approaches the game cautions against (Chapter 4). Navigating value conflicts can render people a shell of themselves, just a thing with no moral compass, justifying their decisions as “It’s just business.” I see Mark’s story as an example of what bell hooks (2004b) accuses the patriarchy of, encouraging people “to surrender their integrity and live lives of denial” (p. 156). Something that I and many participants also did. I would argue that the corporatized workplace is built from patriarchal values and asks people “to surrender their integrity.” This invitation or demand to surrender integrity can result in creating Han’s (2015) “undead,” those who keep doing their job and “are too alive to die and too dead to live” (p. 51) and others who embrace an important principle of the game—not to care. Not caring permits people to justify their

heartbreaking decisions with “It’s just business.” Based on Thomas Hübl’s (Hübl & Maté, 2021) words from Chapter 2, it would be better said as “It’s just business when it is in pain.” Through the eyes of feminists like Gibson-Graham and Sedgwick, it would be said this way, “It’s just business when it is in paranoia, fear and suspicion.”

5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the scale of the individual using Ahmed’s (2014) view of emotions as surfaces that delineate the social and the individual. Through the stories shared, it is possible to determine how the social presses against the individual, causing slow wounding in the form of moral injuries. Those pressures left participants feeling some level of alienation, leaving some feeling like they would disintegrate. The language many participants used was feeling like they were dying, like Alisa’s feeling she would self-combust or self-destruct. Value conflicts cause moral injury and feel like betrayal (J. Anderson, 2021). When the workplace presses against an employee in this way, it threatens the integrity of that individual, which threatens the integrity of the surface that Ahmed (2014) refers to that delineates the social from the individual. Like slow wounding, each moral injury is felt viscerally and becomes embodied (Joronen, 2021), something that is quite apparent in Alisa’s story. They are received by the individual as violence operating over time and space (Emery, 2020), which is evident in each of the stories shared in this chapter.

From Mary’s story, it is possible to see leadership who provided care enough to ensure the mission was supported but not to the extent of caring for the physical, emotional, and mental health of employees inflicted with moral injury. Alisa’s story demonstrates that leaders who are out of integrity, and focused on their bottom line can turn their star employees into things denying their employees the growth and development they want, creating cultures of competition, normalising burnout in the workplace, and assigning people to “high burn” projects without the support that they needed also caused moral injury. It also demonstrates that leaders did not get curious about people’s changes in behaviour; rather, those changes became the fault and responsibility of the individual. The systemic problem became the individual’s problem. The participants’ stories demonstrate that moral injury occurs with leadership changes that shift an organisation’s affective culture from care, trust, and possibility to paranoia, fear, and suspicion. That shift feels like a betrayal in which “one’s being

has been stolen” (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 167). Every stolen piece is a slow wounding resulting from moral injury. The intensity of how that moral injury feels depends on the individual, their values, and what else is pressing against them. From analysing these stories, I conclude that one incident or encounter can cause more than one moral injury.

The workplaces participants shared about put people into heart-wrenching internal moral conflicts when “squeezing the numbers” becomes the priority over caring for people. When a workplace is a place that markets care, like a retirement home or a long-term care home, the moral conflict is more profound. It is possible to see in Mark’s story that the regional director who delivered the ultimatum may also be suffering the same moral conflict as Mark, or perhaps being higher up the workplace hierarchy, there was some distance between her and the maître d’ allowing her to see the maître d’ as a line item (a thing) rather than seeing him as a human being, or she could have embraced the don’t take it personally rule of the game (Missildine, 2007) and accepted it as just business. No matter how she perceived the situation, her behaviour can be interpreted as another wounded person in a wounded system perpetuating the wounding and exemplifying how the corporatized workplace is socially reproduced.

Many of the moral injuries described in this chapter were caused by what I see as manufactured urgency created by the corporatized workplace. This urgency activates the survival brain and then narrows their focus to what is most threatening to them (Kohn, 1954), which is their work. This primitive brain function then feeds the self-exploitative behaviour of the “achievement-subject” (Han, 2015, p. 46). Manufactured urgency is a form of control that sets employees up for self-betrayal. The constant focus on what is threatening keeps their brain activated on the task at hand. That means they are not in touch with the messages from their bodies. Like in Mary’s case, not resting when she was sick. That narrowed focus can also cause people to forget to make conscious choices for what is most important to them. Alisa questioning whether she was choosing work over her child is an example of this. However, these are not choices. The brain is wired to deal with what is most threatening (Kohn, 1954; Levine, 1997; van der Kolk, 2014). A workplace with manufactured deadlines, high-burn projects, and competition creates a threatening environment that causes some people to make choices that betray themselves.

This artificial urgency and the tendency for the workplace to place people into positions of value conflict is a way for the corporatized workplace to reproduce itself. These systemic pressures alienate people from themselves and may cause personality changes (Bissell et al., 2020). Alisa became highly emotional, aggressive, and argumentative. James became impatient. Jake became confrontational and was labelled as not being a team player (see Chapter 4). Essie described herself as hostile when standing for justice in the workplace. All these behaviours according to Veronica's are the "draconian and horrible" behaviours of the "atrocious leadership" many experienced in the corporatized workplace. Most of the people I interviewed were leaders in their organisations. Under the pressure of the workplace, they shifted into a survival state viewing the workplace as unsafe and a threat. They started to behave in a manner that imitated the power and achievement values of the workplace and yet, opposed their values, which places them out of integrity. There is no longer a delineation between the individual and the social, which is how they lose their sense of self. From the stories of those pushed this far, it seems their "draconian" behaviours were directed upward in the organisation rather than downward. Leaving was the only option to recover their integrity. It leaves the question of how many leaders that demonstrate those horrible behaviours do so because they hold the values of power and achievement, which puts them in alignment with the lived culture (the game) and how many of those leaders are suffering from a workplace system that has placed them out of integrity with their values and beliefs?

The stories shared with me support this argument. The senior partner in Alisa's story, who demanded to know who made the comments on the survey, undoubtedly felt threatened by them. Her behaviour could have resulted from feeling completely out of integrity and the sense she was losing parts of herself. When Alisa became her "worst self", it was because the workplace asked her to compromise her integrity. Veronica put the "draconian and horrible" behaviours down to insecurity; someone promoted from a job he were good at into a management position where he felt insecure about their ability to lead. Lynn has a similar theory developed from her experience with a "draconian and horrible" leader in her advertising role. According to Lynn, the man was creative. He got into management and stopped "doing [his] craft." Management is not what he thought it would be and he was "really miserable." After he left his role, Lynn heard that "he's much happier."

Some participants were not affected in the same way by the behaviours in the workplace. It is not the event that causes the trauma; it is how the person reacts to the event that makes the trauma (Levine, 1997; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022). Liz just left when she couldn't take the constant fighting within the family that owned the company for which she worked. She just decided that behaviour was not okay, and she left without the moral injury wounding her sense of self. According to van der Kolk (2014), "owning yourself" (p. 205) fully creates resiliency. It could be that Liz had such a keen sense of self that she owned herself fully and was resilient enough just to move on. Calvin and Veronica had the experience of seeing their future possible soul wounding. Veronica witnessed the "undead," those "too alive to die and too dead to live" (Han, 2015, p. 51), every day on her commute. She described them as "so exhausted... so kind of beaten up... people just look grey... they just look vacant. I just remember thinking; I don't want to be this person... This isn't going to define me." When offered a package, Veronica took it and left. Calvin shared that "working in the oil and gas industry helped me understand that... there's an ease at which one could be lulled into complacency," and he didn't want to wake up 30 years later realising he too had been lulled. Calvin chose to see what else was out there over the possibility of becoming complacent. Perhaps building complacency is the ultimate goal of the capitalist system.

Participants continue to feel the consequences of moral injury even after they leave. The affect seems to stick to their body. Mark still struggles with the moral dilemma the corporatized workplace inflicted on him. Others viscerally relived their moral injuries in the corporatized workplace. When Essie shared her story of pushing against the injustice of the "institutional habits" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102) of her workplace she said, "I know I sound hostile...when I tell this story, but I can still feel the blood boiling in my guts." Christina's response to the "enormous amounts of stress" she experienced from working in a profession with values that conflicted with hers was the feeling "I can't breathe." As Christina was sharing her experiences with me, that inability to breathe became alive in her body again. She said, "Give it a moment; it will pass." The moral injury stuck in their bodies resurfaced as they shared their stories. This resurfacing is exactly what happens with trauma. Trauma is deeply embedded in the tissues of the body, and the retelling of the experience can trigger a flight, fight, freeze or appease response (Adams-Hutcheson, 2017; Haines, 2019; Levine, 1997; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022; Menakem, 2017; van der Kolk, 2014). Traumas are what Anderson (2021) refers to as

a “soul wound” (p. 5) and what bell hooks (2009) describes as “a breaking down of the spirit” (p. 15). A soul wound can shatter core beliefs and hurl people into an existential crisis (Starnino et al., 2019), leaving them questioning who they are and what they believe in. These are injuries to “a person’s moral, emotional or spiritual nature or sense of identity” (Hodgson & Carey, 2017, p. 1217). The soul wounding inflicted by workplace culture could explain why some participants turned to spiritual practices (see Chapter 6) to support their recovery from the corporatized workplace.

Inadequate support, lack of freedom to grow, to be yourself, and to organise your work your way, and feeling unfilled or not making a difference can cause moral injury. Both Ibrahim and Alisa mentioned feeling like nobody had their back. Many others expressed this same feeling in the workplaces they left. Not feeling like someone has your back can feel like not being cared for and supported in a way they would expect. Being prevented the freedom to grow and develop was a theme in the stories that were shared. A senior partner denied Alisa an opportunity to switch roles and grow into the person she wanted to become. Ibrahim had who he was becoming stolen from him. Liz expressed feeling unfulfilled. For Anand, it was having to stay on a Friday afternoon even though he had finished his work, causing him boredom. Rita felt her freedom taken away when the next generation of the family joined the company, “I lost my freedom... I was trusted...I had my freedom, and the minute my freedom was taken away... I was frustrated... The company’s not me anymore... I didn’t feel like I could represent this company anymore.” For Patricia, it happened when the next generation of the family-owned printing company introduced new monitoring and control systems. The electronic systems took away her freedom to manage her sales role in the way she had been for years and in a way that had made lots of money for the company.

Lessons can be learned from the stories that were shared. All the stories speak to the importance of understanding your values and paying attention to the values of others in the workplace. Opposing values are a source of conflict and tension within the workplace. The personal values of leaders in the workplace can significantly impact those below them, especially if they oppose your values or the Kool-Aid (stated values) of the workplace. Value conflict is the source of “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1). Moral injury can propel you into an existential crisis. The stories demonstrate the importance of feeling supported in the workplace and that someone “has your back.” Not having that can make you feel like the workplace is a threat and can shift you into anxiety and self-protection

(Schwartz, 2012) or into the affective state of suspicion and paranoia (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). Pay attention to whether workplace dynamics are creating that shift in you.

Mary's story is a warning against being too attuned to the corporate Kool-Aid as it risks "moral injury" (Anderson, 2021, p. 1). Ahmed (2014) defines *attunement* as "to share emotions," "learnings", and "an orientation toward objects" (p. 223). Izzy was also a Kool-Aid drinker, as indicated in Chapter 4. When talking about her experience of waking up to false consciousness, she said, "I would much prefer to work for a company that treated me as if I was a number because then, at least, I knew where I stand... right?" Izzy is saying that she would prefer honesty over being betrayed by lies. Waking up to false consciousness causes "moral injury" (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) and as Christine mentioned in Chapter 4, that moral wounding feels like finding out Santa Claus isn't real. Mary's story also demonstrates the dire consequences of not paying attention to the messages that your body is sending. Listen to your body and give it rest when it needs it.

Together Mary and Alisa's stories caution against overworking. They highlight the risk to those who value self-direction or becoming an "achievement-subject" (Han 2015, p. 46). Self-direction is the freedom to create and choose your goals (Schwartz, 2012). It offers self-expansion and growth (Schwartz, 2012) and the affective orientation of acceptance, trust, and possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). Being in a role that provides that ability feeds the soul. Initially, it can feel like what Marx (2007 [1844]) calls species being. *Species being* is a state of being when people are in control of their own labour, own the means of production, and directly benefit from their work. When in a state of species being, you feel a sense of aliveness. That feeling can set you up for self-exploitation. When working in the corporatized workplace, you don't have control over your labour. The mission of the organisation you work for controls your labour. The workplace can redirect your labour at any time. Veronica is an example of this. She joined a company to be a spokesperson for green energy. Shortly after joining the company, their green energy assets were sold. Instead, she became the spokesperson for heavy oil. That asset sale stole her alignment with her purpose. Pay attention to your misalignment with the purpose of the company. You may directly benefit from the work, but you don't own the means of production, which means other people are also directly benefiting from your work. The effect is clear in the case with Alisa's managing partner who was so concerned about her value she to his bottom line rather than her wellbeing and development.

There were other ways the workplaces encouraged overworking. The pace of the workplace can affect your ability to maintain work-life balance. Though work-life balance is a systemic issue, the individual is made responsible for managing it (Lupu & Ruiz-Castro, 2021; Sanfilippo, 2023). A fast-paced workplace makes that nearly impossible. It triggers a tunnelling effect where what is more threatening or most aligned with the current direction becomes the focus. In a fast-paced workplace, the focus becomes the work. Not everyone had a fast-paced workplace. Anand, Ken, and Liz experienced boredom in their workplaces due to the repetitive nature of their work and the lack of challenge with the work. Alisa's workplace normalised burnout with the use of the term *high burn project*. Normalising burnout makes people believe that working to the point of emotional exhaustion is acceptable behaviour. This normalisation benefits the employer not those doing the work. Be attentive to what behaviour is normalised in your workplace and how that could affect your wellbeing.

Ibrahim's story cautions us to pay attention to changes in the workplace. One change can significantly affect your state of mind and how aligned you are with the workplace and its mission. The changes can shift the workplace and you from an affective orientation of possibility and openness described by feminist scholars (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003) to that of suspicion and paranoia. Schwartz (2012) would describe it as from the anxiety-free orientation of expansion and growth to the anxious orientation that creates self-protection. Ibrahim's story was about a change in leadership. Other participants experienced other types of changes that created an affective shift in the organisation and them. They include ownership change (Jennifer, Mary, Ken, and Paul), asset sale (Veronica), generational change in a family-owned business (Rita and Patricia), and a change in the behaviour of a founder (Jacob).

Mark's story cautions against taking a job that is not what you want to do just because the money is good. Pay attention to situations where your values conflict with each other. If you have no choice but to take the job, take Charlotte's approach and clearly define what skills or self-development you want from that workplace. Also, do what Rita did and clearly describe what will trigger your exit from the workplace. Rita decided to leave when her Chief Operating Officer had had enough. You could set a time limit. You could set a limit based on your affective orientation. How far are you willing to shift from expansion and growth to anxiety and self-protection? If you have to take the job, try

volunteering. Anand, Jake, and Lynn created job opportunities by volunteering. Most importantly, find purpose in the other aspects of life.

In this chapter, I demonstrated that people leave the corporatized workplace because of “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1), or to prevent doing something that causes “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) to others. I argued that being too attuned (Ahmed, 2014) to the corporate Kool-Aid, the artificial urgency created in corporatized workplaces, the lack of integrity demonstrated by leaders, and being placed in a situation that conflicts with a person’s values and beliefs can inflict moral injury. In the next chapter, I examine the journey from the corporatized workplace to creating businesses viewed by participants as oriented to positive change.

Chapter 6: A Rite-of-Passage – From Alienation to Species Being

“If you want to find your way, you must be willing to become lost.

You must be willing to lose your way in order to find it.”

Bayo Akomolafe (Hemphill, 2021, m. 4:20)

On the surface, this research is about moving from one place—the corporatized workplace—to another—a “positive change” business. This movement was something that I anticipated would be a straight line, but that was the case for very few participants. On a deeper level, it is about transformation. It is possible to interpret the process of transformation through many lenses. Through the lens of Marx (2007 [1844]), it is a shift from *alienation* to *species being*. As discussed previously, alienation is a separation caused by capitalism. Ahmed (2010b) describes it as “one’s being has been stolen” (p. 167). Based on Marx’s (2007) description of species being as someone free to create the world and, in doing so, gain a sense of aliveness, I see species being as a state of wholeness and expansion. Chatterjee (2022) describes species being as an “emancipation” (p. 90) to a “truly natural” (p. 90) and social being. It is what emerges when alienation is “annihilated” (p. 90). Based on the work of Gibson-Graham (2006), I see species being as the opposite of alienation; alienation is degenerative, and species being is generative. Species being is the full and constantly transforming expression of what it means to be human (Chatterjee, 2022; Marx 2007). It expands collective consciousness through social interaction (Chatterjee, 2022). There is a spiritual aspect to species being (Chatterjee, 2022; Dyer-Witheford, 2004; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Glass, 1972; Marx, 2007 [1844]). This form of spirituality is “located in the world” (Glass, 1972, p. 258). Marx states, “man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature” (Dyer-Witheford, 2004, p. 6). Species being requires people to be embodied, sensuous, free beings (Marx, 2007 [1844]) who see nature as themselves and themselves as nature (Marx, 2007 [1844])¹³. To Marx (2000), sensuous means “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving – in short all the organs of his individual being...” (p. 45). Essentially, it is perceiving with your whole body. That level of perception builds people’s connection to nature and themselves.

¹³ To quote Marx directly: “That man’s physical and spiritual life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is part of nature” (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 74).

Species being is about action (Chatterjee, 2022; Dyer-Witheford, 2004; Glass, 1972; Marx, 2007 [1844]). Marx (2000 [1844]) refers to it as “cooperative action” (p. 67). Marx (2007 [1844]) envisioned it as the reorganising of labour to rehumanise the worker from the alienating effects of capitalism. Gibson-Graham (2006) rethink Marxism to launch their building of alternative economies, a species being action. Modern activism is species being action (Dyer-Witheford, 2004, Grant, 2005; Roelvink, 2013). Movements like Black Lives Matter (Chatterjee, 2022), the feminist movement (Dyer-Witheford, 2004; Grant, 2005), And the environmental movement (Roelvink, 2013) are all movements of species being. I would include in this list things like Occupy Wall Street, Mother Earth Water Walkers, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Through the feminist lens (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Naylor & Thayer, 2022; Sedgwick, 2003), the movement from the corporatized workplace to a business one views as oriented to positive change is a shift from the affective orientation of fear and paranoia created by the corporatized workplace to a place of acceptance, trust and possibility that the journey offers. Gibson-Graham (2006) describes it as a shift toward power, though I would use the term empowerment instead. To describe the making of that power, they turned to Nietzsche’s words of “self-artistry or self-overcoming” (p. 6) and Foucault’s words of “self-cultivation or care of self” (p. 6). bell hooks (2009) would describe it as the path to healing “the breaking down of the spirit” (p. 15) through “remembering myself” (p. 15), ultimately landing in self-integrity. She describes it further as “an awakening, of moving from trance to reality, of learning to be fully present” (p. 18). Knopp (2004) would label it a “quest for identity” (p. 122)—one of seeking wholeness, physical and emotional security, and the self. I see it as a journey toward wholeness and expansion. It is one where people become clear about who they are and what they stand for and act by that. It ends in a constant co-creation between the business and the self.

Anthropologically, the transformation is a rite-of-passage that involves separation, then transition through the liminal to a place of reintegration (V. Turner, 1969, 1974, 1977; van Gennep, 1960). Toko-pa Turner (2017) describes the three-part process of initiation slightly differently as (i) separating from false belonging, (ii) grieving the losses, (iii) actively engaging with your true values and “listening for the call to action” (p. 234). Toko-pa Turner (2017) defines “separating from false belonging” (p. 234) as understanding you were deceived. I see it as similar to the Marxist idea of

awakening to false consciousness—which is awakening to the source of your suffering. *Separating from false belonging* is equivalent to waking up to the falsehood offered by the Kool-Aid of the corporatized workplace. As Christine suggests, waking up to the Kool-Aid can feel like learning that Santa is not real, which stirs up lots of emotions. So Toko-pa Turner’s *grieving the losses* is a pause to feel the uncomfortable emotions that arose from the woundings of the corporatized workplace. Her *engaging with your true values* corresponds to bell hook’s (2009) act of “remembering myself” (p. 15). For many study participants, this was “reflexive and relational” (Knopp, 2004, p. 127). Many participants took time in nature and pursued spiritual practices like yoga, one spending time in a monastery. Turner’s (2017) *listening for the call to action* is connecting with your purpose and what you stand for in this life. Meade (2023) describes the rite-of-passage as a shift from one way of seeing and being in the world to another, landing in a place of deeper understanding. Wright (2015) would describe the journey as “an act of becoming” (p. 393), and a discovery of belonging.

The journey can also be seen as healing trauma or, as Anderson (2021) suggests, a “soul repair” (p.5). According to Levine (1997), trauma separates the soul from the body. Healing then happens through re-embodiment, which, according to Haines (2019), involves expanding the ability to be present with emotions and bodily sensations. Being attentive to emotions corresponds to Toko-pa Turner’s *grieving the losses*. Maté (2022) describes it as moving towards wholeness where the heart and mind align. To Bessel van der Kolk (2014), healing is a journey toward “owning yourself” (p. 205), both your body and your mind, by becoming calm, focused, present, alive, connected and honest with yourself. Haines’ (2019) definition of trauma refers to a betrayal of a sense of “safety, belonging, and/or dignity” (p. 74), which corresponds to Shay’s (2014) definition of moral injury. This betrayal is exactly what many participants experienced in the corporatized workplace (Chapters 4 and 5). In their recovery from the corporatized workplace, participants chose activities that provided safety, dignity, and belonging, like working with a coach, or training to be an executive coach or yoga teacher. What is interesting about many of the study participants is that they gravitated towards practices that integrate the mind, body, and spirit, such as yoga, meditation, being out in nature, qigong, stoicism, and the study of Sanskrit. The language participants use to describe their journeys reflects the spiritual nature of these activities. Not everyone described their transitions using spiritual language or did the challenging self-reflective work that transformation requires. Some were still on

their journey when I interviewed them. Whether the journey from the corporatized workplace to a so-called “positive change” business involved a spiritual component or not, the journeys seem to correspond to the components of a rite-of-passage.

A *rite-of-passage* is a ritual of transformation that involves the death of a former identity, life, and status with an invitation for rebirth (Carson, 1997; V. Turner, 1974). Like Alisa’s “I will self-destruct. I will self-combust... I will turn into flames” from Chapter 5. The rite-of-passage many participants travelled through was like their career choices—accidental. It was not the intentional right-of-passage that anthropologists study. No spiritual leader guiding the journey. To a certain extent, participants fell into the stages by following their curiosity. Some participants may not agree with my reference to their journey as being a right-of-passage. Yet their journeys from the corporatized workplace to a “positive change business” do roughly correspond to the three stages of a rite-of-passage.

In the separation phase of a rite-of-passage, a guide strips participants of their status and the structure of society, and they enter a community of equals. The guide then directs them through death to rebirth (Carson, 1997; V. Turner, 1974). Leaving the corporatized workplace involves giving up a corporate identity, life, and the status it bestows. Several participants used death metaphors to express what happened to them in the corporatized workplace. Marx’s alienation from self is a metaphorical death. The self-becoming a thing of Berardi (2009) is a loss of aliveness, becoming the walking dead, “too alive to die and too dead to live” (Han, p. 51). The loss of the identity and status of the corporatized workplace left many participants questioning who they were.

The transition is a liminal space of unknowing (Carson, 1997; V. Turner, 1974; van Gennep, 1960). Toko-pa Turner (2017) describes this as a space for grieving loss. bell hooks (2004b) also speaks of the need to grieve the “old self” (hooks, 2009b, p. 162) so the new self can emerge. Though bell hooks uses the term “old self,” in this chapter, I understand that she means the “false self” (p. 154) that boys are socialized to create. Anthropologists describe transition as central to rites-of-passage. Geographers see the liminal as a place of movement, transformation, and becoming (March, 2021). Bissel (2021) describes the liminal as a “destabilising threshold” (p. 144). Many participants felt that sense of destabilisation when they left their corporatized workplace. The liminal is the in-between, the neither here nor there (Beech, 2011; Carson, 1997; V. Turner, 1977). It is a place of ambiguity

(Beech, 2011; Carson, 1997; March, 2021; V. Turner, 1977), unsteadiness, and challenge (Katz, 1994). Arendt might describe it as a place of “worldlessness” (Topolski, 2015, p. 55), “rootlessness” (Topolski, 2015, p. 51), “uprootedness” (Topolski, 2015, p. 53) or feeling like we don’t belong in the world (Arendt, 2018; Topolski, 2015). As an invitation to transformation (Carson, 1997; March, 2021), it also opens possibilities (March, 2021). Beech (2011) describes the liminal as reconstructing one’s identity into something “meaningful for the individual and their community” (p. 287), which corresponds to Toko-pa Turner’s (2017) “actively engaging with your true values” (p. 234) and bell hooks’ (2009) “remembering myself” (p. 15). A few participants were still in the process of transformation. Charlotte suggested that being an entrepreneur is being perpetually in the liminal, which is something that Knopp (2004) claims to be true for an identity journey. Participants seem to co-create themselves with their business, each growing and changing together.

Victor Turner (1969, 1977) refers to *communitas* as important to the liminal phase. It is a coming together as a community of equals (V. Turner, 1969, 1977). In contrast to the hierarchical structure of the corporatized workplace, people are not sorted by roles or status in *communitas*. They are welcomed as their whole self into a community of other whole human beings (V. Turner, 1977). Forming *communitas* is like the approach Gibson-Graham (2006) took with their action research. Like Gibson-Graham’s (2006) work, *communitas* is a place of possibilities (V. Turner, 1977). In this society, there is no formal rite-of-passage for leaving the workplace, and, therefore, no formal *communitas*. However, participants found their own community of equals.

The final phase of the rite-of-passage is reintegration. There are two stages to reintegration. One is the reintegration of self, and the other is reintegration into society. The reintegration of self involves “engaging with your true values” (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234) and living in integrity, self-love, emotional awareness, and mutual connection that bell hooks (2004b) describes. Reintegrating with self corresponds to Marx’s species being. The point of reintegration into society depends on how people define it. It could be when they start acting—like volunteering or when they start to create a business. As mentioned previously several participants transitioned into a business doing exactly what they had done in the corporatized workplace. To reach species being requires them to create a business where they become a conscious being freely creating a world where “life engender[s] life” (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75). I also think that species being leaves people to question the types of

society in which they want to reintegrate. Not every initiate makes it through the passage (V. Turner, 1977; van Gennep, 1960) and not everyone I interviewed had completed their journey yet.

I have divided this chapter into three parts. In the first part, I examine the journey starting with how participants describe their journey and their state when entering the liminal. Then I argue that curiosity drives people through the liminal space in, which they find themselves. In the second part, I explore four different ways that participants experienced bell hooks' (2009) "remembering myself" (p. 15)— (i) through encounters that open space for possibilities, (ii) finding places of belonging, (iii) exploring "other possible worlds" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii), and (iv) a reparative reading of their experience in the corporatized workplace. I then examine how some participants reach species being, which I argue is the experience of "owning yourself" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205). That translates into completing their rite-of-passage by embracing a different way of being in the world.

6.1 The Journey

The people I interviewed were at different points along what many referred to as a journey. Paul who had left a retail management position, was considering retiring from his 25 years as a solopreneur. During that time, he organically transitioned from creating business plans for people into working with First Nations communities. After six years in the entrepreneurial space, initially as a leadership coach, then focusing on the future of work, James was considering returning to the corporatized workplace. He missed collaborating with people that the corporatized workplace offered him. This time, however, he was looking to work for a social enterprise. Charlotte had just hired her first employee after launching her clothing brand. Jennifer was considering her next steps after growing a successful consulting firm with her colleagues. Anand was running a not-for-profit and enjoying the creativity and connection it brought into his life. Essie had settled into a different way of being facilitating client transformations with horses. After spending years as a consultant doing what she had done in the corporatized workplace, Essie had "landed in the place where the horses and I are here for people who are open [pause] to figuring out their impact on the world." Sean, a serial entrepreneur and angel investor, was developing a new start-up in the digital health sector. Based on the stories I heard, entering the entrepreneurial space is about the constant evolution of the business and self.

Participants described their journeys on a much deeper level than leaving their corporatized workplace to eventually start a business they viewed as oriented towards positive change. Essie describes the journey as “a soul struggle.” Other participants described it as “a journey of slowly finding my way” (Jacob), “a deep inquiry into how is it I am creative” (Anne), “integrating body, mind, and spirit” (Kathleen), and “very introspective” (Paul). All of which align with the concept of a rite-of-passage and an identity quest. Like a rite-of-passage, it is “challenging ... with ups and downs” (Ibrahim), something that you can’t do alone (Kathleen, Ibrahim). It involves trust in the form of “leaps of faith...little steps... little experiments” (Calvin). That makes the journey iterative, based on trust and curiosity. Trust creates worlds (Berlant, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2006), hope (B. Anderson, 2006), optimism (Berlant, 2011), and care (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Gilligan, 2011; Lawson, 2007; Popke, 2006). Curiosity births the reparative (Sedgwick, 2003), nurtures possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and propels people forward (Gilligan, 2011). I would say curiosity is the intrinsic drive that moves people through the uprootedness of the liminal.

Paul describes moving from the corporatized workplace to self-employment as being “able to remove that mutedness... the blinders came off a bit... off my eyes, but also off my brain, because then I can start to see different ways of doing things.” I see this removing the mutedness and the blinders coming off as what Toko-pa Turner (2017) refers to as separating from false belonging (p. 284) and beginning the process of “remembering myself” (hooks, 2009, p. 15). It also describes the process that Gibson-Graham (2006) use in creating alternative economies. They “take the blinders off” by expanding the definition of the economy from the limiting version of capitalism. They work with people in a way that allows those people to begin to see and value where they are and what they know and do. When they see themselves differently, they start to “see different ways of doing things” (Paul). Paul’s words are a metaphor for his reparative process that moves people from the affective orientation of paranoia and fear to that of acceptance, trust, and possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006) or from the anxiety orientation of the corporatized workplace to an anxiety-free one.

Each participant’s journey is unique and depends on what they are willing to learn about themselves, what they are willing to let go of, how much they are willing to trust, and how much they are willing to transform. Not everyone I spoke to was willing to take the deeper journey of self-reflection, which can result in painful realisations. Some were still on their journey, others were only settling into a

different way of being, and others had a clear sense of self. Some did not enter a rite-of-passage because they already had clear sense of self and a different way of knowing. Essie describes the components of the journey in this way, “finding purpose, understanding your energy, what you’re passionate about. Being enough... Not having to prove anything to anyone. Being comfortable in my own skin in a different way...tap into spirituality and [the] energetic...our energy.” According to Essie then, there is an energetic, spiritual, affective, and embodied aspect to the journey of “owning yourself” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205).

6.1.1 Entering the Liminal – Start Where You Are¹⁴

The movement from the corporatized workplace is a displacement. It is a loss of a role with which many participants strongly identified and represents a loss of their place in society. This loss of a role and place undermines people’s sense of self and belonging and can cause anxiety and depression (Vandemark, 2007). It is entering the unknown, uncertainty, and uncomfortableness of the liminal. James describes the importance of the liminal when he says, “You can’t sort of lose your job or lose your career you’ve been in for 15 years, and then just move to the next thing. You need some way of being able to process that and deal with that.” According to James, the process is about “understanding who you are and all the different elements.” This suggests it is a time of “grieving the losses” (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234).

Participants entered the liminal in different affective states. For the most part, entering the liminal was accompanied by the affective disposition of melancholia rather than the paranoia and suspicion (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003) that they felt in the corporatized workplace. Several began their journey having felt the “breaking down of the spirit” (hooks, 2009, p. 15), needing to grieve the “old self”¹⁵ (hooks, 2009b, p. 162) and the losses (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234). As Gibson-Graham (2006) suggests, they each just started from where they were. For Mary, a burnt-out executive from the oil and gas industry, and Cynthia, who left a senior role in the civil service, the journey started in a state of pure exhaustion. There was nothing that they could do but rest and grieve their losses. bell

¹⁴ The language of Gibson-Graham (2006) and the starting point for facilitating the creation of alternative economies with communities.

¹⁵ Though bell hooks uses the term “old self,” I understand that she means the “false self” (p. 154) that boys are socialized to create.

hooks (2004b) speaks to the need to mourn the “false self” (hooks, 2004b, p. 162)—the identity people create to fit into the corporatized workplace. There is also the need to grieve their alienation from self, which according to Haines (2019), entails coming back to the body and feeling the pain. Mary and Cynthia took time to grieve the pain of their losses from the corporatized workplace. “Joanna Macy writes until we can grieve for our planet we cannot love it—grieving is a sign of spiritual health” (Kimmer, 2013, p. 237). This means until we grieve ourselves, we can’t love ourselves. Love is an affective state that opens people to possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2006). Therefore, grieving the “false self” (hooks, 2004b, p. 154) and the losses is an important step towards wholeness—towards “true belonging” (B. Brown, 2019, p. 2019) (see section 6.2.2).

After her initial excitement of accepting her severance package and checking off the to-do list Mary had created for herself, she crashed into a severe depression. “I think my body just finally gave in because it was allowed to sleep... I would just sit in bed all day. I, literally, had no idea of what my purpose was. I didn’t know what I needed to do.” In letting go of work and her habit of doing, Mary’s body was finally permitted to “say no” (Maté, 2003) and to recover through sleep. Mary having let go of who she thought she was in her corporate role and now having no idea of her purpose corresponds with Han’s (2015) definition of depression as failing to become yourself. Exhaustion impedes the body’s ability to affect and be affected and signals the need for recovery (Bissell, 2021). Without rest, there can be no recovery.

Mary seems to have started her journey lost and disorientated. That crippling exhaustion is a result of an achievement society (Han, 2015). Berlant (2011) points to the economy as normalising this exhaustion. According to Connor (2004), “exhaustion is not the defeat of the will, but the maniac, clenched persistence of the will into its very extinction” (p. 56). The symptoms of exhaustion can be physical, mental, or spiritual (Bissel, 2021). Mary demonstrated that maniac, clenched persistence in her corporate assignment “to make the impossible possible” (See Chapter 5) by working long hours and severe illness. This exhaustion is experienced in isolation and violently separates people from community (Han, 2015, p. 33). For Mary, it was retreating to her bed. Peter Handke (1994) speaks of a tiredness that “destroyed our power to speak, our souls” (p. 8). Mary shared, “I literally had no idea what my purpose was. I didn’t know what I needed to do”, which I see as a description of a tiredness that destroyed her power to speak her soul. This sense of exhaustion is a type of death (Bissel, 2021).

Deleuze suggests that “exhaustion is a necessary part of creation and transformation” (Bissell, 2021, p. 155). Therefore, without surrendering to this exhaustion, Mary could not affect the change needed to create something new in her life.

After receiving her severance, Cynthia was in a similar diminished state. The involuntary nature of her job loss had her “caught up in the shame.” A friend warned her not to look for a job right away:

You're exhausted. You have to get yourself back. You have to get your sense of self back...get your energy, get your perspective... if you go to any job interviews right now, they just smell that lack of confidence. It won't be worth it...and you're not going to feel good about yourself. And you don't want to put that out. You want to put the person that got you where you were, not the person that's feeling diminished right now.

This warning from a friend provided Cynthia with the instructions for healing her wound “get your sense of self back...get your energy, get your perspective,” and get your confidence back. Wait until you are “the person that got you where you were” then rejoin the workplace. I interpret this recommendation as an instruction to find the essence of yourself again. It is the direction toward “remembering myself” (hooks, 2009, p. 15) and Marx’s (2007) “essential-being” (p. 136). According to Marx, the essential being is embodied sensuous and their feelings and passion affirm who they are. Rather than requiring extrinsic affirmation of the workplace, people receive intrinsic affirmation of being themselves. It involves “engaging your true values (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234). What was missing from these instructions was the process to achieve that shift.

Izzy, who involuntarily left her role in the corporatized workplace, entered the liminal feeling diminished and resentful. When I asked her how long it took to shift out of that space, she answered, “Once I got out of my own head and stopped with the would've, should've, could have?... Not long at all.” Izzy’s comments suggests that it is not possible to think your way through the liminal. By dropping the would’ve, should’ve and could have, Izzy let go of the past and stories created from and about the past. She let go of those stories and entered the present moment. Being fully present is important in remembering yourself (bell hooks, 2009). Izzy’s shift to remembering who she was didn’t take long.

Others described the beginning of their journey as feeling lost, losing their way, losing themselves, falling apart, or feeling annihilated. Alisa describes feeling “a hyper nervous, hyper anxiety feeling of doing something wrong...I would look over my shoulder” after she left the corporatized workplace. Each of these accounts corresponds to what Anderson (2021) refers to as a “soul wound” (p. 5) (see Chapter 5). Like Mary, their soul wounds left them with an inability “to speak their soul” (Handke, 1994, p. 8). The inability to speak your soul can be seen as the feeling of being so exhausted, so extinguished, and so alienated from yourself that it is impossible to communicate who you are, what you need, or what you desire. It is like when you are in the process of falling asleep and someone asks you a question. You hear the question, but the effort it would take to answer is beyond your capacity in that moment. Participants completed the liminal in a car ride, a marathon, a coaching course, and yoga teacher training. At the other end of the spectrum, both Rita, CEO of a retirement home company, and Liz, in client services for a company that supported not-for-profit fundraising, entered the liminal with a deep sense of trust and a knowing that they would easily land on their feet.

6.1.2 Curiosity Drives the Journey

Curiosity propelled participants through the liminal. They get curious about their skills and the “red thread that has been consistent for me” (Cynthia). They wonder how their skills and gifts can serve others or put a dent into the bigger issues affecting individuals, society, and the world even in a small way (James). They start to follow their curiosity and “see where it leads me” (James) or consider questions like “What else is out there?” (Calvin) or “Why don’t we try this?” (Liz). These questions open people up to exploration. That exploration also turns to an inward journey with questions like “Who am I?” (Essie), “Who are you in this world?... What do you stand for?” (Jennifer). Essie describes leaving the corporatized workplace as “the transition from an I am to an I was.” The journey then became how to create a new “I am.” These questions are the start of seeking what bell hooks (2004b) refers to as wholeness through integrity. Antonsich (2010) claims that this question of “Who am I?” can’t be posed without also asking the question “Where do I belong?” The “Where do I belong?” question, though unspoken by those I interviewed, was an important aspect of their rite-of-passage, which will become apparent in the “Finding Belonging” section below. To be curious is to be open to possibilities (Gibson-Graham, 2006).

At times, that curiosity turns to self-doubt, temporarily shutting down the opening curiosity created in the first place. That self-doubt often emerged through the questions of others. Anand spoke about how the questions of others began to seep in after he gave his notice. “What are you doing? Nothing. What is nothing? How long you'll be doing nothing? I don't know.” The questioning can be self-induced. As participants moved along their journey, questions like “Is this the right path?” (Ibrahim) or “Did I make the right decision?” (James) emerged. Charlotte shared her doubt in this way: “I should probably find another job...every few weeks [I] would look for jobs.” Mary knew she wanted “to create an army of unshakeable people.” However, her self-doubt stepped in by saying, “Nah, that's not a business, that doesn't sound like a business to me,” and that had her “falling back into that corporate thing... continuously stepping into what feels safe and validated by society.”

Self-doubt got in the way of participants owning themselves or at least delayed the journey. Several experienced self-doubt as a pull to the security of a regular paycheck that the corporatized workplace offers. Mary described how her soul called her to forest therapy and she had questions about what other people think– “Will people think that I failed? Will people think that I gave up? Will people think I'm not useful?” Essie had similar thoughts when she moved towards her “positive change” business: “Sometimes I worry that... I've given up. That... it's just too much. It just takes too much energy. And so, I worry that I've given up... But then when... I'm involved in things that really capture my heart; I have all kinds of energy for them.”

Self-doubt kept participants in places that did not feed their souls or, put another way, did not feed their aliveness. This questioning of self represents a pull back to the status quo and the emotional landscape present in the very well-worn path of the corporatized workplace discussed in Chapter 4. The consequences are a shift back into the fear and anxiety that many felt in the corporatized workplace. It is the pull to the habitual that society has established, that endless race without a finish line that Jake describes in Chapter 4. It would seem that to take the entrepreneurial path requires that participants face not the “institutional habits” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102) that Ahmed describes but rather what I would label as “societal habits” that are not only embedded in the corporatized workplace but also embodied by people.

There are approaches to overcoming self-doubt. James suggests that there is a message within self-doubt: “We’re not regretting a previous decision. We were really just uncomfortable with the current situation or events.” Mary suggests something else, “excitement and anxiety biologically cause the same ... physical reaction... the same surge of chemicals, of hormones goes to your body.” Instead of allowing self-doubt to emerge, Mary sits with what she is accustomed to calling anxiety and invariably discovers it is excitement. Part of the journey is the ability to sit with the uncomfortableness of “the current situation” of self-doubt, uncertainty or not knowing instead of grasping for the familiar or the habitual.

6.2 The Liminal—A Journey to “Remembering Myself”¹⁶

To bell hooks (2009), healing her “breaking down of the spirit” (p. 15) was an act of “remembering myself” (p. 15). For bell hooks it was moving back to the Kentucky woods of her youth where she could reconnect with the land, her values, and her purpose in life and feel herself again. Anand similarly remembered himself. Though he did not return to his homeland, he immersed himself in its ancient language. In doing so he reconnected to his roots, values, purpose, and creativity. All of which were acts of remembering himself. In the language, Anand found happiness and joy and the inspiration to engage others in speaking it. He started a not-for-profit aimed at bringing life to a language that is no longer “in common practice.” Participants had the feeling of seeing themselves or remembering themselves in many ways in the stories they shared. In this section, I explore how encounters that open possibilities, finding belonging, exploring “other possible worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii), and developing a reparative reading of their corporatized workplace experience provided an opportunity for participants to see themselves, grow into owning themselves, and shift into different ways of being in the world.

This section details four types of remembering based on affect and feminist theory—encounters, belonging, exploring, and reparative stories. They were developed from Gibson-Graham’s (2006) approach to creating alternative economies. Encounters is based on Berlant’s (2011) theory of the encounter that opens people to possibilities (2011). Berlant sees an encounter as a moment of

¹⁶ bell hooks (2009, p. 15)

interruption where a space for possibility is opened. It is a moment of aliveness where it becomes possible that “the habits of a history might *not* be reproduced” (p. 44). I noticed that many participants had these types of encounters that shifted them into a space of other possibilities. Most participants found belonging in a community of people where they felt safe and supported. Their descriptions were reminiscent of the spaces that Gibson-Graham (2006) created when developing alternative economies. They created an affective orientation of love and curiosity where every voice was equally valued. It also represents the *communitas*, essential pieces of a rite-of-passage (V. Turner, 1969). Exploring “other possible worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii) comes from the experimentation that many participants embraced. Again, this is what Gibson-Graham’s approach was all about. Ahmed’s (2017) “*hap walk*” (p. 197) is also a form of exploration in which purpose can be found by just wandering using the senses and curiosity as a guide. Creating reparative stories is precisely what Gibson-Graham’s process was all about. They also represent an affective shift from paranoia to acceptance, trust, and possibility (Gibson-Graham, 2006) and from “self-protection against threat” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 13) to “self-expansion and growth” (p. 13). Several participants shared these types of stories.

6.2.1 Encounters that Open Possibilities

In the liminal, some participants experienced encounters that caused moments of interruption that opened space for disrupting “the habits of history” (Berlant, 2011, p. 44) and inviting the possibility of greater aliveness (Berlant, 2011). The best example of this is Paul, who ran a marathon. When he finished the marathon, he shifted into a state of euphoria. The race had shifted his affective state from paranoia, opening him to possibilities. When he was driving home with his wife after the race, after “the euphoria had diminished,” he turned to her and said, “I just ran a marathon... I can do anything!” His wife’s response was, “then why don’t you quit?” Though the marathon shifted Paul’s affective orientation, his wife’s question catalysed his openness to the practicality of the everyday—his desire to quit his job in retail. She asked Paul the question that opened the possibility of leaving his job. Without his wife’s question Paul could have just gone back to the ordinariness of life and be left with only the “memento of the memory” (Berlant, 2011, p. 42). Paul quit later that week. He quit without knowing what would come next, but he entered that unknown with trust because the marathon had taught him, he could do anything. Paul’s revelation that he could do anything was his moment of

“remembering myself” (hooks, 2009, p. 15). Without his wife to listen and respond to him, his self-realisation may not have manifested into anything. Running the marathon was a rite-of-passage or an initiation that contributed to the healing of his “soul wound” (Anderson, 2021, p. 5) caused by the dysfunction of his workplace.

Patricia also had an encounter that opened her to possibilities. It, too, was an encounter spurred by euphoria, just not hers. It was over the Christmas holidays. Her adult children were visiting from out of town, and they had a wonderful time celebrating with each other. Then after the three-week visit ended, Patricia had a realisation, “They [her children] were happy to go back to their other lives and I was not happy. And it really hit me hard.” Patricia needed to see the contrast between how she felt about going back to her work and how her children felt about going back to theirs for her to recognise just how unhappy she was. This is the point when Patricia awakened from false consciousness (Ahmed, 2010b) or false belonging (T. Turner, 2017). It was the moment that Patricia saw her own suffering and that her work was causing her unhappiness. The awakening had her turn toward what she loves—fitness. It got her curious to learn how to become a fitness instructor, which motivated her to get the certifications she needed to start her own business and leave her workplace.

Jennifer’s opening came from witnessing a colleague’s frustration caused by the corporatized workplace pressing against him. She and her colleagues had “seen the writing on the wall” that to continue to do the work they loved would mean that they would have to leave their corporatized workplace. Jennifer saw the opportunity to “pull the trigger on it” when, at an industry conference she was attending with a colleague, there was an incident that caused him to exclaim, “I can’t live like this anymore!” In that statement, Jennifer felt an opening, and an opportunity to pitch starting their own business. She describes it like this:

And it was just right for that. It was right for that to happen and by the time we got home. We had... a name for our company, and we decided who we were going to invite... and that was kind of the start of it.

The outburst was a moment of interruption of the ordinariness of life (Berlant, 2011) where Jennifer recognised the opportunity to “pull the trigger on” (Jennifer) starting their own business. On the way home they were able to co-create another world—a company that would put Jennifer and her

colleague “on the right side of history” (Jennifer). If Jennifer had not witnessed the outburst as an opening to “other possible worlds” (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii), the drive home would have been back to the ordinariness of the corporatized workplace rather than the space of creativity and aliveness that occurred.

6.2.2 Finding Belonging in the Liminal – *Communitas*

March (2021) describes an identity quest as a search for belonging by an insecure self. The journey of most of the study participants fits this description. Participants found belonging in various places like yoga teachers training, executive coaching training, a knitting circle, a community of coaches, nature, entrepreneurial spaces, fitness, immersion in their roots, a monastery, working with a coach, actively interrogating white privilege with others, and creating a business with others. It is these places of belonging that facilitated their healing from the harm inflicted by the corporatized workplace. They could shift their mental space, reconnect with themselves, feel part of something bigger, find their purpose and see and recognise their abilities. These places of belonging offered support and generosity where trust could emerge and safety and comfort experienced. They were places of deep connection, caring, creativity, and learning. In these spaces of belonging, participants found what Carol Lee Flinders identifies is needed to find wholeness—mutual connection, trust, love, generosity, openness, and playfulness (bell hooks, 2004b). They were spaces where they no longer had to perform to feel valued; they could just accept love and affirmation (2004b).

Several participants described the experience with words like “I found my tribe” or “I found my people.” As demonstrated in these words, there is a downside to places of belonging. There can be a line that defines who is in and who is out, creating an “us and them” dichotomy that can exclude others (Massey, 1993). I see these places of belonging that participants found as what anthropologist Victor Turner (1969, 1977) calls *communitas*. They form part of the liminal phase of a rite-of-passage. As Turner (1969, 1977) describes, participants were welcomed into these spaces by a community of whole beings as their whole self in these places. They were not sorted by roles or status. They entered a community of equals. As a result, they were able to let go of the protections that they created for themselves in the corporatized workplace and relax into themselves.

Belonging is something that many participants longed for in their corporatized workplaces. *Belonging* can be defined as that yearning to be included in something bigger than yourself while at the same time feeling free to be yourself (B. Brown, 2019; Huizinga & van Hoven, 2018). It is a dynamic process involving relationality and intimate connections (Bawaka Country et al., 2016; Curtis & Mee, 2012; Huizinga & van Hoven, 2018; Preece, 2020; Singh, 2017; S. Wright, 2015). The process of belonging shapes identities and facilitates co-becoming or evolving together. Block (2009) explains the process in this way “to belong is to act as an investor, owner, and creator of this place” (p. 3). This quote suggests belonging involves action, creativity, and a sense of responsibility for the place or the whole of which you are a part. Rather than a process, Toko-pa Turner (2017) sees belonging as a set of skills. Preece (2020) describes belonging as a practice, and that practice is negotiated. hooks (2009) describes it as conflicted, and Wright (2015) as messy. Belonging is situational and is influenced by political, personal, emotional, cultural, and societal factors (Curtis & Mee, 2012; Hooks, 2009; Huizinga & van Hoven, 2018; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; S. Wright, 2015). To belong is to feel at home, safe, secure, at ease, comfort, familiarity, and emotional attachment (Antonsich, 2010; hooks, 2009; Lähdesmäki et al., 2016; T. Turner, 2017). Finding belonging in the liminal space between leaving the corporatized workplace and starting a “positive change” business provided participants with a sense of safety and security. It invited participants to sink back into themselves.

Cynthia describes her experience of belonging in her executive coaching course in this way:

I actually had never felt like I fully belonged anywhere... It just was great. It was a huge relief to me, and I thought, you know what I can do this. I can do this...I felt the most intense feeling of openness... I didn't feel like I was having to watch my back. I felt like I got to show up as me and take it all in... I was just soaking it all in and it was so comfortable for me.

The executive coach training is *communitas*. People enter the space as equals, students without the role or status that they have or had in society. Finally, finding a place where she fully belongs is a “huge relief” to Cynthia. That sense of relief, no doubt, comes from not “having to watch my back.” Watching her back puts Cynthia in a state of hypervigilance, which takes energy to maintain. In that classroom space, Cynthia could let go of watching her back. It was a space that Cynthia felt safe. In

this place, with these people, the huge relief created an “intense feeling of openness.” Openness is an important element in transformation (Berlant, 2011; Gibson-Graham, 2006; hooks, 2004a) and speaks to *communitas*'s potentiality. *Communitas* created space for Cynthia to remember herself. She could show up authentically “as me” as the whole person she is in a community of other whole human beings just as Victor Turner (1969) describes. Ann described that space of belonging she found with a community of coaches as being where she “can really be my mature, open, and honest self.” Belonging creates a space for participants where they are freed to relax, remember who they are, and just be themselves.

Belonging facilitates people seeing themselves in others (Preece, 2020). Cynthia volunteered to be coached in front of the class during her executive coach training and that is when she saw herself. “I did it, and it was just being coached... It was just like [pause] magic. For me... and I just knew I can do this. This is me. This is me.” Others were able to see themselves in the *communitas* that they joined. During her 18-month stay in a monastery, Christina witnessed “people who weren’t on it [the treadmill, i.e., the constant churn of the corporatized workspace] and were perfectly happy in life,” and that made her realise that she too could leave the treadmill behind. Kathleen chose to work with a career counsellor to help her transition. Halfway through the process, she exclaimed to her counsellor, “I want to do what you do. I want to support people” because she was “just so blown away” by her experience with her career counsellor. The feeling of belonging sparked a moment of interruption (Berlant, 2011) in these women where they could recognise their potential. These spaces of belonging offered opportunities for participants to reconnect to themselves, see themselves, and know their path.

Alisa worked with a coach to reconnect with herself, and “that connection [with the coach], that’s how I healed, and that’s how I became what I would call self-solid.” “Self-solid” suggests rootedness. Antonsich (2010) claims to belong is to feel rooted. Working with a good coach is a relationship of deep listening and curiosity with the goal that a person feels seen, heard, and understood. According to van der Kolk (2014), a physiological change happens in the body when people feel “listened to and understood” (p. 234). Those changes create openings in the form of “ah-ha moments” (p. 234). Deeply listening to another opens space for “deep, contemplative attention” (Han, 2015, p. 13), and

that is transformative and reparative (Gibson-Graham, 2006), and it transformed Alisa into her “solid self.” *Exploring Other Possible Worlds*¹⁷

Exploration and experimentation were crucial to the shift from the corporatized workplace. Rather than experiencing moments of intense opening, this process is iterative and slow in comparison. It resembles what Ahmed (2017) calls a “hap walk” (p. 197). A *hap walk* is just wandering, sometimes in a way that may appear at first to be aimless. In the wandering, a sense of purpose arises from encounters along the way (Ahmed, 2017). For Ibrahim, the experimentation started with healing his body. He had health challenges from his time in the corporatized workplace and eventually discovered his symptoms were related to gut health. His health issues led him to explore the intersection between food and health. He began experimenting with his diet, which led him to a plant-based diet. His diet exploration sparked a desire in him to support other people not just with gut health but also with shifting them toward a more plant-based diet. He started to connect with people working on transforming the food system and found a place of belonging there. He started to explore the foods he might like to bring to market, starting with herbs and teas, then shifting to a plant-based drinkable yoghurt replacement. He was on the verge of launching his product when I interviewed him.

Calvin chose to leave his role as an engineer in the oil and gas industry because he anticipated that if he stayed, he would be “lulled into complacency.” This statement could be interpreted as Calvin anticipating his future alienation. He, therefore, left without needing to shift out of the affective orientation of paranoia and anxiety that other participants experienced in the corporatized workplace. However, he still embarked on an identity quest (Knopp, 2004, p. 122). His curiosity about what else was out there guided Calvin’s quest. Another way to phrase the question that guided him: Who else can I become? He began by travelling for a few months after he left his job. He then volunteered with a not-for-profit focused on housing because he “had an interest in community and community building” and the necessary construction skills. Then, he took a bike trip in South America, which led to a job offer to lead bike trips for youth back home. That’s when Calvin learned that he didn’t need a high-paying job to feel like he was making a difference. He started to see that he could leverage his

¹⁷ (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii)

energy background to do things that benefit society, and went on to a master's program in renewable energy so he could be "where the puck was going." He started a not-for-profit solar co-op, which morphed into a renewable energy investment cooperative. When I interviewed Calvin, he was again following his curiosity, moving provinces with his family to start a regenerative farm.

For others, experimentation came later. Veronica left her communications role in the oil and gas industry and stepped directly into her own consulting business doing what she had done in the corporatized workplace. A friend cautioned Veronica:

You can only leave an [oil & gas company name] once. In the sense that your value, the longer that you're away from it, diminishes. And so, the further you get away from that organisation the less value you are.

According to her friend, Veronica had a shelf life. The knowledge and skills she had acquired from working for a couple of oil and gas companies would lose their value. Her value only came from her association with the large oil and gas companies. It had nothing to do with her essence or essential being (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 136), which suggests in this society people are valued for their doing not their being.

Before hearing that warning, Veronica had no specific plans other than to take the summer off and then see if there was some consultancy work. The next week, she got phone calls and started working on small strategy and communications projects. When the price of crude dropped, her company shifted to working with universities and in the IT sector. Along the way, Veronica became interested in coaching and took an executive coaching course and then a yoga teacher training course because yoga supported her. Wanting to amplify her coaching business she shifted towards marrying leadership, coaching, and wellbeing using yoga and its philosophy as a guide. At the time I interviewed her, she had just established a partnership with her yoga instructor to offer leadership and wellness retreats to corporations.

Each of these stories demonstrates "free conscious activity" (Marx, 2007 [1844]; Santilli, 1973, p. 76; Wartenberg, 1982, p. 77), which is the basis of Marx's (2007) "species being" (p. 74). *Species being* defines what being human is about (Horgan, 2021). With the exploration, experimentation and

evolution towards their “positive change” business, many participants “affirm themselves... develop freely [their] physical and mental energy,” (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 72) and begin to feel like themselves in their work (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 72). Marx saw human beings as embodied and sensuous whose feelings and passions affirm their essential being (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 136). To Marx, passion is the creative driving force of human beings (van Ree, 2020). When those feelings and passions are turned towards practical activity *species being* or becoming yourself (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 136) is achieved. Horgan (2021) describes what it means to be human is to actively and creatively practice “world-creating activity” (p. 74). That world making is about “life engendering life” (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75), which most participants created with their business.

6.2.3 Creating Reparative Stories

A crucial step in the healing journey is for participants to create a reparative reading of what happened to them in the corporatized workplace. It was integral to Gibson-Graham’s (2006) process for creating alternative economies. To Cvetkovich (2007) the reparative reading is an affective act that involves the embodied, sensuous, free being described by Marx (2007 [1844]). It is rethinking the negative experience to avoid falling into paranoia (Maree & Wetherell, 2019). Creating a reparative narrative protects people’s mental health after trauma (Greenberg et al., 2020). One of the most emblematic experiences shared with me that illustrates this is Mary’s. Being in nature and being invited into that “deep, contemplative attention” (Han, 2015, p. 13) by a forest therapist that allowed Mary to clearly see herself. It shifted her out of depression.

Mary has a deep and intimate relationship with nature that started in her childhood. In nature, Mary finds a place of belonging that connects her to her senses, invites her back to the present moment, and makes her feel comfortable. All aspects that bell books (2009, p. 18) suggest are required for remembering self. After walking through the forest, Mary came across an area that was the site of a controlled burn and became curious about it. She explains her forest walk in this way:

Back there was this forest that looks beautiful, but it was choked, and it was ready and ripe for fire to happen... And here, this fire has happened, and all these little things are starting to grow. It was just beautiful... After a fire...they [the aspen trees] start to send up shoots and

that creates sort of scaffolding, the structure for everything else to start to grow...Everything is new. I wiped it clean, and I don't know what I'm going to grow.

This encounter opened space for Mary to see what happened to her in the corporatized workplace and to write a reparative story (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). Mary went on to interpret what she saw. She equated the forest to her time in the corporatized workplace, it was beautiful, but choked and ripe for a fire. She compared the controlled burn site to who she was at that moment, her burnt-out self. Hearing the explanation of how the forest recovers after a fire allowed Mary to see the possibility of her recovery and regrowth. She interpreted the roots of the aspen trees as her values. Like the roots of the aspen tree, her values were safe from the forest fire that had just burned through her body and her life.

Mary received a map of how to recover from the forest.

It's like, [Mary], you just need to sit with what matters most to you and just give it time to grow and then the other things will grow if you want to grow some tall trees, you have to have your scaffolding first. Just the clarity of how far I could see because those trees weren't there. And so, for me, it was just [pause] this incredible sense of ease and peacefulness.

What she heard from the forest was the clarity of vision her burnout provides. She understood she didn't have to push to make things happen as she had in the corporatized workplace. She just had to sit with what mattered to her. If she did that, other things would grow. She had the realisation if she wanted to grow something big in her life, she had to start by building scaffolding. Seeing herself in that way brought ease and peace to her. Mary's encounter with the controlled burn was an interruption (Berlant, 2011) to the walk she had been experiencing in the forest. That interruption stirred Mary to know what had happened to create this open space. That curiosity created a map to "other possible worlds" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii) and provided Mary with a reparative story to help her move forward.

Other participants' reparative stories were much simpler than Mary's. They were about sharing with me the gifts they had received from their experience in the corporatized workplace. For Christine, it was the gift of seeing people's struggles. Anand spoke about the gratitude he had that the company he

worked for brought him to Canada so that he “could find true happiness.” Being away from his homeland made him interested in diving into his roots and, specifically, the ancient language of his homeland. It is his curiosity about that language that motivated him to volunteer to engage others in his curiosity. He established a not-for-profit in Canada aimed at preserving the language and the wisdom that it offers to future generations without the company forcing him to decide whether to return home or not, that gifted him the opportunity to find true happiness. For Jake, it was recognising how important human connection was in his career and life. It spurred him to create a not-for-profit that encouraged people to connect and educate them on the health benefits of those connections. Not everyone shared a reparative story.

6.3 Reintegration – Species being as “Owning Yourself”¹⁸

Not everyone I interviewed owned themselves at the time of the interview. I borrowed the term “*owning yourself*” (p. 205) from Bessel van der Kolk (2014). It is a term he used as a way of describing what it is to recover from trauma. It is to be resilient, honest with yourself, fully alive in the moment, and to maintain a calm and focused mind and body. To me “owning yourself” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205) is “engaging with your true values” (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234) and beliefs, having the freedom to create and to make decisions, trusting yourself, and knowing that you have support. I think the ones who spoke passionately about what they were doing, who excitedly provided details about their businesses, how they were doing it, and how much they loved doing it, did own themselves. The way they passionately put a voice to what they were creating in the world felt to me like Marx’s (2007) description of *species being*— “it is life engendering life” (p. 75). Patricia spoke about her business this way: “I love what I do, and I had forgotten and maybe never even knew how happy— how much I love to go to work. How it invigorates me, how it challenges me, and I just love it.” From these words, it is impossible not to notice the aliveness that Patricia’s fitness business creates in her. It not only engendered life in her but also, in her clients as she creates experiences to improve their wellbeing.

¹⁸ From van der Kolk (2014)

Brene Brown's (2019) "true belonging" (p. 40) corresponds to the idea of "owning yourself" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205). Brown describes *true belonging* as belonging to yourself so profoundly that you can show up in integrity as your authentic self no matter where you are or with whom you are, where you show up authentically as yourself for the world to see. Christine shared, "Unless you can belong to yourself, which is, I think as you get more and more in the entrepreneurial place and in your own business, you realise that is really what it was all along." What I understand Christine is suggesting is that the entrepreneurial journey moves people towards true belonging. When she arrived in that place of belonging to herself, she understood that this was what it was about all along. Part of her mission in her coaching business is finding ways to help people belong to themselves.

To become yourself requires letting go. "It's letting go of this tightly held identity of who you think you are and letting ... the soulful you emerge, though, without the wanting" (Essie). Here Essie describes the shift from the alienation created by the corporatized workplace to *species being*. It is the undoing of all that the corporatized workplace has taught people to hold as precious— a title and the power, privilege, benefits, security, and all its entanglements. It requires sitting in the uncomfortableness of not knowing what "soulful you will emerge" or when it may emerge and being okay with that. The "without wanting" seems to be about allowing it to emerge rather than willing it into being. The "soulful you" can be interpreted as the embodied, sensuous, free being described by Marx (2007 [1844]) that embraces "both nature and his spiritual species property" (p. 76). To me, it is stepping out of the containment imposed by the corporatized workplace into the freedom of being and creating yourself and, in doing, that creating the world. Essie is speaking to the process of letting go of the "false self" (hooks, 2004b, p. 154) of the corporatized workplace where everything—values, purpose, roles, dreams, worthiness, rewards, success—was extrinsic to self and shifting towards an intrinsic drive. Being in a place of "not wanting" suggests a way that is different than the habitual speed and striving of the corporatized workplace (Chapter 4). It suggests a slow and embodied process of being present with self, an invitation to gently step out of all that society imposes upon you. To not force but to allow the soulful self to emerge.

"Owning yourself" (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205) is about being in integrity. Maté (Hübl & Maté, 2021) and hooks (2004b) both equate integrity to wholeness. Brene Brown (2019) refers to it as "belonging to yourself" (p. 40). bell hooks (2004b) used the words of Rabbi Harold Kushner to

describe integrity in this way “Integrity means being whole, unbroken, undivided. It describes a person who has united the different parts of his or her personality, so that there is no longer a split to the soul” (pp. 155–156). Integrity requires honesty, being responsible for your actions, and embodying the values of love, loyalty, and “to live at home on the earth” (hooks, 2009, p. 64). The practice of integrity involves the ability to critique yourself, the willingness to admit mistakes, the willingness to make amends when they have wronged others and to make reparations, and to forgive those who have trespassed against them (hooks, 2009, p. 122). To be in integrity requires “engaging with your true values” (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234).

Alisa explains integrity as “being in alignment and in harmony with yourself... the body knows... before your head.” This “harmony with self” seems to correspond with becoming attuned to self. Ahmed (2014) explains attunement as “to share emotions,” “learnings”, and “an orientation toward objects” (p. 223). The corporatized workplace disrupts some people’s attunement (Ahmed, 2014) with themselves. Alisa’s reference to both the body and mind in her definition of integrity suggests that to be in integrity requires a relationship between body and mind, between emotions and thought, to embrace all cognition, including all the senses. Connecting to all the senses is how I interpret Marx’s (2007) sensuous being. It suggests that integrity goes beyond the rational mind—the driver of the corporatized workforce.

According to Hardt (2007), affect involves both body and mind, and Ahmed (2014) sees it as involving reason and passion. Therefore, the separation of mind and body disrupts people’s ability to affect and be affected. According to Alisa, the body takes primacy over the mind in knowing whether there is attunement (Ahmed, 2014) to self. Psychiatrist and trauma specialist Bessel Van der Kolk (2014) argues that it is not possible to heal without “knowing what they know and feeling what they feel” (p. 27). He affirms the importance of reconstituting the mind/body connection. In participants’ roles in the corporatized workplace, their minds were supreme. The fast pace of most participants’ workplaces made being in their own bodies impossible, stifling their attempts for self-attunement.

True integrity is personal and embodied. As Kathleen’s business developed, she gave herself “permission to integrate all the body, mind, spirit” so she could step more fully into her authentic self. This means to become your authentic self is to fully step into integrity. The benefits of “owning

yourself” (van der Kolk, 2014, p. 205) are, James explains, “[being] more authentic...more comfortable with who I am...more comfortable with expressing my opinions” (James). Being authentic and being in integrity means being free to express yourself. Having that attunement (Ahmed, 2014) to self seems to empower people to affect and be affected much more profoundly.

Interestingly, so many participants in their reintegration process participated in practices that attune (Ahmed, 2014) the mind and the body, like yoga, meditation, being out in nature, qigong, stoicism, and the study of Sanskrit. There is a spiritual aspect to each of these practices, as well as embodiment and engagement with the senses. In essence, they re-engaged with the embodied, sensuous, free being (Marx, 2007 [1844]) that they are. It is like they instinctively understood the need to slow down and reconnect their body and their mind.

Being in harmony with yourself requires that you know yourself. Those participants who had completed the journey back to themselves could clearly define their values, purpose, clients, and the boundaries they had set for themselves and their businesses. Cynthia’s boundaries are about knowing her sweet spot, “I don’t love coaching young people...my sweet spots are people who are motivated... I don’t like to chase people.” She knows with whom she will and won’t work. Essie firmly says “no” to clients that don’t align with who she is. Ken only works “doing good work for good people with good people.” Setting boundaries is as Sean says, “knowing what you are prepared to sacrifice for it [being in integrity].” In other words, integrity means you can’t do everything for everybody: there are things to which you have to say “no.” Both Essie and Paul added that it is also sometimes not getting it right.

6.3.1 Embracing “a different way of being”¹⁹

The journey shifted many participants into a different way of being in the world, the end goal of a rite-of-passage (Meade, 2023). James said he now asks more questions and allows people to speak as he listens. Yoga teacher training made Jacob realise he was a poor leader in the corporatized workplace. He shifted his focus from “making a shit ton of money” to applying what he had learned about yoga philosophy to help corporations align their employees with the stated values laterally and

¹⁹ From Meade (2023)

horizontally throughout the company. The journey allowed Ann “to put more space and slow things down in my life and made it possible to do more socially oriented work at a different level.” Essie spoke about listening to her body more. If she needs a nap, she takes one. If she has a migraine, she rests. Essie said that before, she would have just overridden her body and gone to work. Alisa talks about living up to her values daily and has let go of judging herself.

Many embraced a different way of knowing. Kathleen spoke about her “energy yes” as a feeling of energy running up and down her spine, like tingles, and when it gets strong, she gets goosebumps. Izzie spoke about making decisions from her heart. When Essie gets a call from a potential client, she checks in with her body and does a full body scan, “if my guts say, don’t touch this with a 10-foot pole, I’ll say no, thank you very much. I’m not the right one for you. Whereas before that, I would have probably known that, but I would have still done the work.” She no longer disregards what her body tells her, which helps her maintain integrity.

Paul spoke about his “knower” located between his heart and head. He described it as “emotional knowledge.” His knower confirms when he is “doing the right thing for the right reasons... and you are not winning at somebody else’s expense, you’re collaborating, you know.” He explains the physical sensation as feeling “comfortable. You’re calm. You’re at peace and you know you’ve done the right things for the right reason.” These participants have reconnected body, mind, passion, and intellect (Ahmed, 2014; Hardt, 2007), which makes them more sensitive to affecting and being affected.

Several participants spoke about being “faith-based”, which I see as having deep trust that things will work out. Paul describes his faith or belief system as “it’s not coincidental whatever happens to us there’s a reason.” The days Alisa lives her values most “feel like magic,” and she explains the magic in this way:

A bird lands on the tree as I look outside. The email that I was hoping [for]... comes in right then. You know it is almost like everything is in complete harmony. I’m in harmony with myself. I’m in harmony with my environment. I’m in harmony with what I want. It manifests.

This explanation sounds like Alisa living from her authenticity and integrity. To be in integrity requires “actively engaging with your true values” (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234). It is a sense of attunement (Ahmed, 2014) to herself and her environment. It sounds like relaxing into something bigger than herself and knowing or trusting that things are as they should be. It is like finding her natural rhythm, her part in the symphony of life around her. When she is in that space, everything falls effortlessly together. Lynn explains her faith-based journey in this way:

I’m going to believe in me... I’ve got this... I am fantastic... It’s going to be great, and when people resonate with what I put out into the universe, and they connect with me to have a conversation, I—100 per cent— I’m like, okay, something’s happening here.

For Lynn, it is believing in herself and what she does. When she puts the fantastic energy that is her out into the world and when people connect with her there is a resonance, or attunement (Ahmed, 2014). Lynn is saying is that she sends out a frequency of who she is, those attuned to that frequency are drawn to work with her.

Being attuned to self, gave participants the ability to be at ease with uncertainty and embrace being vulnerable. Ibrahim puts it this way:

I’m much more at ease with the uncertainties... I have something to offer... I’m not afraid to be vulnerable... because I realise that you cannot know everything... you need others... [It’s] not the uncertainty of the journey, it’s the uncertainty about where you’re going... I know my bigger purpose... where I’m heading... you can deal with... your work challenges ... because, you know, that’s where you’re going and you’re at peace with that.

What makes Ibrahim more at ease with uncertainty is that he is confident that he has something to offer, he understands that he needs others, and he knows his purpose. Having a purpose allows him to navigate the challenges because he is at peace with where he is going. This ability to deal with “uncertainty, embody ambiguity, and straddle paradox” (p. 193) is what Toka-pa Turner (2017) claims the initiate learns by passing through an initiation. Those I interviewed who came to a place of owning themselves are clear about their purpose. Ibrahim’s purpose is to rethink the food industry and shift people towards plant-based diets. Christine’s is to transform the culture of the military.

Having a clear purpose gives people a guide out of the lost feeling many felt after leaving the corporatized workplace to enter the unknown.

Liz seemed to live in this faith-based way throughout her career. She left her position with a family-owned company that supported not-for-profits without a firm plan in place. Liz was someone who knows herself, what she wants, where she was going, and has clear boundaries around what she will or will not accept. She shifted roles and companies when she felt misaligned or out of resonance with a role she was playing, usually because something was missing or unfulfilling. Liz is confident the next right thing will be there for her if she quits. Liz is searching for fulfilment and knows that doesn't come by staying in a place that drains her aliveness. She also has lots of clarity about what she wants from life. I gleaned from the interview that Liz is part of a strong faith-based community where she finds support and encouragement. When I listened to her story, it was full of coincidences; things were falling into place for her because she had absolute trust that it would.

6.4 It's Hard to Shake the Conditioning of the Corporatized Workplace

Starting a “positive change” business does not mean stepping out of the dynamics of the corporatized workplace. Jennifer shared how the business culture she developed with colleagues was “an environment where people care about each other, and they check in as humans. You know, they don't have to be all busy all the time...People really stand up for each other and have each other's backs.” Nevertheless, there was a difference in how the owners interacted:

It's a bit hard to shake the conditioning of the corporate world... It's a bit hard to shake certain ways of being with each other that come out of that space and some of those ways of being can be very, I think harsh and selfish and maybe selfish is not so much as, like, individualistic. Like, individual, excess, success and achievement and overwork, of being valued, and it's almost like a corporate hangover... They keep operating as though we were a 50,000-person company and judging others for not working that way. Saying all sorts of nice things about work-life balance, but really placing a value on people who are workaholics. In a way that, quite frankly, men have more of an option to be once you start having kids in the mix.

Even when a business designs itself to be caring, people can still play the game because they are conditioned to play it. She also spoke about what pressed against her in managing a business she viewed as oriented to positive change. They were things like making payroll, being responsible for employees, keeping financial institutions happy, working hard, and balancing her personal life.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described the journey from the corporatized workplace to starting a business that participants felt was oriented to positive change. It is not a simple shift in the type of labour participants chose. It is a transformational shift. I have viewed the shift through the lenses of Marxism (Ahmed, 2010b; Marx, 2007 [1844]; van Ree, 2020; Wartenberg, 1982), feminism, particularly the work of Gibson-Graham (2006), bell hooks' (2009) concept of "remembering myself" (p. 15) to heal "the breaking spirit" (p. 15), Knopp's (2004) identity quest, and the anthropologic view of a rite-of-passage (T. Turner, 2017; V. Turner, 1969, 1974, 1977; van Gennep, 1960). I also viewed the shift through the lens of healing trauma (Haines, 2019; Levine, 1997; Maté & Maté, 2022; van der Kolk, 2014). I used affect and feminist theories to make sense of the journey.

The chapter focuses on the liminal, the in-between, which begins with physically or emotionally separating from the corporatized workplace. The point of separation is the moment a participant awoke to "false consciousness" (Ahmed, 2010b, p. 165), "false belonging" (T. Turner, 2017, p. 234), or from the "trance" (hooks, 2009, p. 18). Like the work of Gibson-Graham (2006), participants started where they were, and curiosity drove them forward. The journey through the liminal is introspective and involves little leaps of faith and little experiments. It is challenging. Participants experienced difficulties, yet along the journey, they had moments of remembering themselves through encounters that open possibilities, finding spaces of belonging, exploring "other possible worlds" (Gibson-Graham, 2006, p. xii) and creating reparative stories. Ultimately, many found species being (Marx, 2007 [1844]) what it means to be human (Horgan, 2021), living a life that engenders life (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75)—a place of owning themselves completely (van der Kolk, 2020) and it resulted in a different way of being. What holds participants back is holding onto regret for what happened in the corporatized workplace and not finding self-forgiveness. In essence, the journey is an affective shift from the paranoia and scarcity mindset of the corporatized workplace to

one of pleasure, hope, curiosity, connection, and possibilities (G. Brown et al., 2011; Cvetkovich, 2007; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Naylor & Thayer, 2022; Sedgwick, 2003).

Chapter 7: Conclusions

“Overcoming the patriarchy requires an internal cultural healing, the revitalization of traditions and the creation of new ones, the realization that a civilization based on love of life is far better option than one based on its destruction”
(Escobar, 2017, p. 14)

In this chapter, I will conclude this dissertation by first providing a summary of the research's key findings as they relate to the aims, objectives, and research questions outlined in Chapters 1 and 3. I then discuss the research's value and contribution and its limitations and conclude with recommendations for future research.

7.1 Summary of Key Findings

This study analysed the stories of people who left the corporatized workplace to start businesses they viewed as oriented to positive social and/or environmental change. It aimed first to determine what motivated participants to leave, then to identify the pathways they followed to start their businesses, and finally to identify what the stories say about the culture of the corporatized workplace. The study asked:

Why do people leave the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive environmental and/or social change?

To assess why participants left the corporatized workplace, I applied Ahmed's (2014) view of emotions as surfaces that delineate the individual from the social and examined what pressed against participants. The results indicate that most participants leave the corporatized workplace not specifically to start a “positive change” business. They leave because of what presses against them in the corporatized workplace at both the systemic and individual scale. As a result, many feel alienated (Ahmed, 2010b; Chatterjee, 2022; Horgan, 2021; Marx, 2007 [1844]; Swain, 2012) and like they lost pieces of themselves. That alienation drives them out of the workplace. Most of the participants embodied care ethics. However, participants who did not embody care were not inoculated from experiencing “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) and leaving the corporatized workplace.

Recovering from alienation requires a journey of transformation. Some participants begin that journey while they are in the corporatized workplace, while others start it after they have left. That transformational or healing journey is towards Marx's *species being* (Chatterjee, 2022, p. 96; Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75) and fully owning themselves (van der Kolk, 2014). The journey mimics the affective shift from fear and paranoia to acceptance and trust, which Gibson-Graham (2006) describes, and ultimately, to starting a business that they view as oriented to positive change. Schwartz (2012) would describe the shift as a movement from anxiety and self-preservation to anxiety-free self-expansion and growth.

This research addressed five objectives, which I discuss below.

7.1.1 Objective 1: Determine What Motivates People to Leave the Corporatized Workplace

The first objective was to determine what motivates people to leave the corporatized workplace to start “positive change” businesses. What motivated participants to leave was the pace of the corporatized workplace, its hierarchical structure, which promotes competition, and the incongruence between the stated culture or the Kool-Aid and the lived culture or the game. This incongruency causes alienation through the slow wounding (Joronen, 2021) of “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1), which is called moral distress in the healthcare field (Burstion & Tuckett, 2013; Morley, 2018; Prompahakul et al., 2021; Silverman et al., 2021) – when someone witnesses, acts, or fails to act when a situation conflicts with their moral code (J. Anderson, 2021; Phelps et al., 2021; Shay, 2014). The tension and conflict that results from standing for care and pushing against those who play the game resulted in participants questioning their way of being, becoming angry, frustrated, and confused, adding to the woundings.

On the scale of the individual, some of what pressed against participants appeared to be their expectations. Yet when examined more closely, these expectations revealed themselves to be social constructs of the factory (e.g., the corporatized workplace), which spill out to the rest of society (Chatterton & Pusey, 2020; Tronti, 1962). It was those societal beliefs and encounters with people who play the game that pressed against the participants and caused slow wounding (Joronen, 2021)

through “moral injury” (J. Anderson, p. 1). This slow wounding caused alienation from themselves, others in the workplace, the workplace itself, and their role within the workplace. Each encounter with a “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) accumulates until some participants felt like they were losing pieces of themselves. This sense of losing pieces of self aligns with the definition of trauma (Maté & Maté, 2022). That alienation or trauma causes the deterioration of their mental and physical health. Some participants chose to leave when they experienced behaviour that did not align with who they were. Those participants did not describe themselves as losing pieces of themselves, although they did experience alienating behaviours in their workplaces. The game is one of survival of the fittest. It seems to drive those who care out of the workplace perpetuating the game.

7.1.2 Objective 2: Determine the Role Emotion, Affect, and Care Play in Decisions to Leave

The research explains the role of emotion, affect, and care in the decision to leave. Emotion and affect have a substantial impact on participants' decision to leave. This is unsurprising because emotion is about movement (Ahmed, 2014) and so is leaving the workplace. People tend to turn towards things they are attuned to and turn away from those they are discordant with (Ahmed, 2010a). The game and the structure and ethos of the workplace create a sense of insecurity. That sense of insecurity creates an affective state of fear and paranoia (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Sedgwick, 2003). When participants pressed against the game, they experienced a range of emotions: shock, surprise, and disbelief, which morphed into confusion, frustration, disillusionment, indignation, anger, and rage. The pace of the workplace left many participants exhausted and a few bored. A few participants relived the emotions of the workplace while sharing their stories, making it apparent that the effects of the workplace linger in their bodies. Many were so affected by their workplaces that they felt diminished and began questioning themselves and their way of being in the world. The challenge of dealing with the game is that it is insidious and difficult to articulate, although deeply felt. The emotions the game creates as it breaks people down appear to the observer to be unacceptable behavioural changes. It, therefore, becomes easy to blame the individual who is outraged rather than the system that created the outrage. Those emotions being felt by those who care are so contrary to their way of being that they can leave the workplace feeling disappointed or ashamed. It takes time to recover from that.

The stories participants shared illustrate the importance of those who embody care ethics (those being successful being themselves) to the functioning of the corporatized workplace. They are the ones who make the workplace run effectively. They create high-performing teams, take time to train and mentor people, talk through conflict, give clear, honest, and compassionate feedback, create safety and belonging, and value and appreciate all voices. They strive to be good role models for others. They listen to understand and get curious about what motivates each member of their teams. Understanding how interconnected the company is, they make decisions for the benefit of the whole rather than themselves. They are the ones who serve up the Kool-Aid because they embody the care-based elements of its rhetoric, and many earnestly believe others embody it, too. When they discover others don't, it can be heart-wrenching. It can cause those who care to push for justice for others and the wellbeing of the workplace. That causes tension and conflict with those who play the game.

Those who play the game understand the value of those who care. The game players choose those who care to manage projects because they know the projects will run smoothly, and a smoothly run project means less effort for them. Those who play the game also understand how to extract value for their benefit from those who care. On a human level, because their worldviews are so different, those who play the game don't seem to understand what someone who embodies care expects. Participants who care expect reciprocity. They expect to receive the care they provide their teams from their superiors. Because of the Kool-Aid, they assume their leaders "have their back". They expect people within the workplace, especially those above them, to embody not just, as Missildine (2007) suggests, play the role of workplace values. When those who care don't experience that reciprocity and embodiment from their leaders, it feels like a betrayal, causes "moral injury" (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) and leaves them feeling insecure, unsafe, and wounded.

From the stories shared, I conclude that participants who care do have power, though they may not understand it as power. They are averse to the word because they equate it to the oppressive behaviours of power over. Those who care do not associate anything they do with power, influence maybe, but not power. They apply power with or power to (Naylor & Thayer, 2022) or Arendt's power of plurality (Arendt, 2018; Topolski, 2015). This power can't accumulate as it emerges when unique people come together in action. When those people scatter, the power disappears. This power is shared, boundless, and divisible without diminishing it. Those who care do not experience that as

power because it is separate from themselves, not something they can accumulate or own. It is something they create with their teams. They get things done by caring, and sometimes they can do the impossible. Those who play the game are interested in accumulating power and, therefore, do not understand the power of care. They see it as a threat, which causes them insecurity. That insecurity can result in them targeting those who care with the behaviours of the game.

It is evident from the research that care in the workplace alleviates alienation (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bartos & Ives, 2019; Gibson-Graham, 2006; Mountz et al., 2015). This research corroborates that. Care provided people safety and freedom to experiment, grow, and develop (Chapter 5). Without care in the workplace, participants were no longer able to fully express themselves or grow into who they were becoming and that led to fear, paranoia, and alienation. Participants who were caring leaders in the workplace did not feel alienated until they started to notice that their leaders had a different way of being. Those leaders did not have the backs of their subordinates; they played the game, which meant not caring about people because people are replaceable (Missildine, 2007). Even those at the top of the organisation, who are the gatekeepers that ensure the game continues, feel insecure, which creates an affective state of fear and paranoia. Fear and paranoia change people's personalities, which creates behaviours that reinforce the fear and paranoia within the workplace.

7.1.3 Objective 3: Evaluate How Stories About Leaving the Corporatized Workplace Adds to an Understanding of its Culture

The stories about leaving the corporate workplace add to our understanding of its culture. The research reveals that there is more to corporatized workplace culture than just the entanglement of power, culture, and identity as suggested by Schoenberger (1997). It involves the tension and conflicts between two worldviews and the incongruence between the Kool-Aid and the game. The Kool-Aid is explicit and is used to entice people to retain them in the workplace and attract people who care. The Kool-Aid is the first step in hijacking people's drive away from what intrinsically aligns with who they are and into the culture of extrinsic values, goals, and rewards of the corporatized workplace. This hijacking with extrinsic carrot dangling causes people to lose or ignore their internal guidance system. People can so align with the Kool-Aid of the organisation that they lose themselves in it. I am not suggesting that there are only two worldviews in corporatized

workplaces. Ibrahim described people who were not affected by the change in leadership that removed care from the workplace. Those people put their heads down seemingly unscathed and continued the work that focused upward in the hierarchy rather than downward to the communities served. As indicated in Chapter 2, the literature points to other survival games played in the workplace, like Bartleby's "I would prefer not to" (Han, 2015, p. 25; Ngai, 2005, p. 1), being reduced to the bare life of the *homines sacri* or the undead (Han, 2015), quiet quitting (Benchetrit, 2022; Formica & Sfodera, 2022; Newport, 2022), or mastering snark to survive the drudgery of the office whose only rule is don't offend anyone (Gregg, 2009). There are also pockets of care within organizations and some employees may never experience the incongruence between the game and the Kool-Aid. These other worldviews are not the focus of this research.

The game is in complete contrast to the Kool-Aid. It is based on self-preservation, which promotes competition (Missildine, 2007). Its sole rule is not to take things personally (Missildine, 2007). It is implicit and remains unseen by many. Being mentored in the rules of the game can cause someone who cares to become confused or even outraged by the grooming. The emotions arise because the game contrasts with who they are. They perceive it as suppressing their self-expression, creativity, and their way of being. Those who were successful being the embodiment of care could work for years without realising there was a game. Some understood there was a game but didn't understand the rules. When confronted with the reality of the game, they were shocked. It left them feeling like they were on a different planet and didn't belong. Awakening to the game caused them to feel disoriented, confused, frustrated, and angry. The game was key to driving them out of the workplace.

Through the research it is possible to see that the game pressed against some participants to the point that it effects their integrity. It is almost like the game intends to break people's integrity so that they become active players or at least accept it by not taking it personally (Missildine, 2007) and embracing the mantra "that's just business." It suggests that the workplace cultures described by participants can press against them to the extent that it can change their personalities. Participants provided stories of how some of the people who played the game in their workplaces exhibited toxic behaviours. Once they left that workplace, they became happier, which suggests that they, too, were affected by the culture of the corporatized workplace. There is also evidence that those who become successful in playing the game groom others to play. Failure to embrace the game prevents people

from moving into positions of power, thus creating a *care ceiling*. I see the care ceiling as like the “glass ceiling” that prevents women from progressing to positions of power or the “bamboo ceiling” that blocks East Asians from progressing.

As indicated in the introduction I define the care ceiling as *the invisible barrier to professional advancement for those people who embody ethics of care. The social and cultural norms of society and the workplace conflict with values embodied in ethics of care. That conflict creates alienation, slow wounding, and moral injury which result in those who care leaving the workplace. The effects of the care ceiling become more intense as a person moves up the hierarchical workplace, and it causes those who care to feel diminished and potentially leave the workplace.*²⁰ Rather than being identity based, the care ceiling is value-based. Those who care hold the values of benevolence and universality. Their motivation is the “enhancement of others and transcendence of self interest” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 9). The social and societal norms working against those who care is the game and the hierarchical structure of the corporatized workplace, which intensifies competition and, therefore, the game (Chapter 4). Based on Schwartz’s (2012) theory of basic values, the capitalist system and the game described by participants are self-enhancement values of achievement and power. Their motivations are “social superiority and esteem” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 9). These values are in direct opposition to those who embrace care. The care ceiling occurs when those who care press against those who play the game; those who play the game cause “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) to those who care. That causes them to lose their confidence, feel diminished, burnt out and leave (Chapter 5). This research supports the idea that the effect of the care ceiling intensifies as people move up the workplace hierarchy. The psychological violence that forms the care ceiling is likely rooted in the physical violence that birthed capitalism (Ahenakew, 2019; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Federici, 2004, 2018; Ghosh, 2021; Horgan, 2021; King, 2019; Marx, 1976 [1867]; Menakem, 2017; Regan, 2010) and in the continuing social norm of not valuing care (McDowell, 2000, 2004; C. Milligan & Wiles, 2010). That care ceiling prevents the transformation of the workplace from the

²⁰ Based on glass ceiling definitions (Cotter et al., 2001; Jackson & O’Callaghan, 2009; Taparia & Lenka, 2022; United States Department of Labor, 1991) from which I borrowed language.

affective state of anxiety, paranoia and fear created by the game to “anxiety-free” (Schwartz, 2012, p. 13) trust, acceptance, and possibilities created by care.

The challenge with transforming the corporatized workplace into one of care is not only that it rejects care. It is that the mechanism that causes that rejection—the game—is rooted in the violence that formed capitalism. The violence in this country’s workplaces may not be the physical violence enacted to birth capitalism, but its tactics cause slow woundings. The tactics include exclusion; stealing bodies to extract value; transforming people into things like a line item on a balance sheet; eliminating or diminishing those whose values and beliefs do not align with individual self-interest; commodifying people in order to obtain more—more money, more power, more privilege; and more social and political capital; enticing people with stories of care (Kool-Aid) to hijack their labour for purposes that do not align with who they are; creating atmospheres of fear and paranoia making people more easily controlled; pushing people to work harder in order to extract more value but not taking any responsibility for the consequences of that drive for efficiency has of the bodies and souls they subjugate. The self-interested values and beliefs of the game proselytized for centuries have become so embodied by the global north that shifting people to a care ethic is nearly impossible. The current employment situation in Canada makes it challenging for employers to fill vacancies (Statistics Canada, 2022b); the cost of worker disengagement to the global economy is US \$8.8 trillion (Gallup Inc., 2023). Burnout costs US \$322 billion (Bruce, 2019). The cost of burnout to the US healthcare system is nearly \$190 billion annually (Moss, 2019). With these costs and the current employment situation in Canada, it is surprising that the game remains so entrenched in corporatized workplaces.

Eliminating the care ceiling would require placing people in positions of power who embrace the values of ethics of care. Then, rewarding behaviours that demonstrate those values. Restructuring the gameboard to eliminate hierarchical structures is important. Based on the work of Gibson-Graham (2006) in building alternative economies and Laloux's (2016) work on teal organisations²¹, it is

²¹ A *teal organisation* uses self-managing teams, invites organisational members “to drop the mask, reclaim [their] inner wholeness, and bring all of who [they] are to work” (p.55), and rather than “trying to predict and control the future” (p. 55) members “are invited to listen and understand what the organization is drawn to become, where it naturally wants to do” (p. 55).

apparent neutralizing power structures and introducing self-managing teams build interconnection, a sense of mutual responsibility, spurs creative problem-solving, and creates a sense of belonging. Creating a workplace where people feel welcomed and appreciated for who they are and the skills they bring to the table eliminates the effect of the pressure to fit into a homogenous culture. Ideally, it would mean a shift in the capitalist system from a focus on profits to an equivalent focus on the wellbeing of people and the planet.

7.1.4 Objective 4: Determine How the Corporatized Workplace Affect Participants' Sense of Self

The research demonstrates that the corporatized workplace negatively affects participants' sense of self. For the lucky ones, it gave them a sense that something was missing or something else was out there for them. For others, it was being confronted with behaviour in the workplace that was not okay with them. They then left, for the most part, unscathed. For the unlucky, it was a complete disintegration of self—what Marx (Berardi, 2009; Marx, 2007 [1844]; Swain, 2012) would label as alienation and others would label trauma (Haines, 2019; Levine, 1997; Maté, 2003; Maté & Maté, 2022; van der Kolk, 2014). This research only examined people who left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive change. It did not examine people who stayed and may desperately like to quit. Asking those people why they stay would offer insights into the corporatized workplace, how it affects people's sense of self and perhaps uncover mechanisms for coping with the moral injury of staying in a workplace that people want to leave. This study only examined people who left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive social or environmental change. It does not interrogate why people stay in the corporatized workplace when they want to leave, what the HRM literature calls *intention to quit* (Afzal & Azmi, 2021; Rashid et al., 2018; Van Gramberg, 2019). Asking those who report they intend to quit about why they stay could provide more insight into the corporatized culture, its effects on workers' sense of self, and the coping mechanisms that they use in order to stay.

For some participants, the journey back to themselves started with exhaustion, depression, and the question: “Who am I?” That journey to fully owning themselves could be slow or an instant of opening to possibility, which made them believe in themselves. What appears to hold participants

back from fully owning themselves is regret or not having created a reparative story of their experience in the corporatized workplace. I see regret as a lack of self-forgiveness for their actions or behaviours in the workplace. To fully own yourself is to be in integrity. It is about being attuned (Ahmed, 2014) to your values and beliefs and following them. It is understanding that you can create your life your way. Owning yourself means knowing who you are and what is important to you and having clear boundaries about what you will accept and will not accept. It is also knowing that you will make mistakes, course correcting, and being okay with that.

7.1.5 Objective 5: To Understand the Pathways to Starting Businesses Oriented Toward “Positive Change”

The research explains the pathway to starting businesses oriented to “positive change.” When I began this research, I expected that those pathways would involve steps taken to gather the skills necessary to start a business oriented to positive change and that it would answer the call to action of Gibson-Graham et al. (2019) to “intervene and bring to light pathways that will steward our earth system” (p. 18). This research does answer that call to some extent, though in an unexpected way. I was surprised that participants were telling me about their healing journey from alienation to species being. It was a journey of, as bell hooks (2009) describes, “remembering myself” (p. 15) or rediscovering self (Chatterjee, 2022). In a sense, it was a journey to undo their corporatization. Once they had reclaimed enough of themselves, many participants launched into an upward spiral of self-development with their businesses. I think that co-creation is what Marx expressed with his notion of *species being* as a “free and conscious activity” (Marx, 2007 [1844]; Santilli, 1973, p. 76; Wartenberg, 1982, p. 77), where life begets life. Based on the stories shared with me, the pathways that will steward our earth systems are ones nurtured by people who put the long-term wellbeing of society and the planet above self interest, who know what is important to them, who have clear boundaries that delineate themselves from the social and clear limits about who and how they will serve. They are willing to stand for what they believe in and have the tough conversations to work through conflict. They are people who value difference, embody care ethics, are free from the affective and emotional dynamics of the corporatized workplace and have an ongoing practice of self-reflection. It is following the pathway established by Gibson-Graham (2006). First, start with yourself and then apply it to creating a business.

7.1.6 Personal Objective: To Understand My Experience in the Corporatized Workplace

I have learned from this experience that I have been pushing against a system that I have also embodied my whole life. In the workplace and in pursuit of my PhD, I experienced both an external and an internal conflict. I was drowning in a system that did not reflect who I am, a system that was not made for me, a system that pressured me to fit in. The system was created out of violence and still subtly can inflict pain. I was indoctrinated into the system starting from a very young age, and it became part of me. So, as I was pushing against the corporatized workplace, I was also pushing against parts of me. The harder I pushed against it externally, the more I took on the behaviours of that system. Though it looked like an external fight for survival, I was experiencing an internal battle to just be me.

The research transformed me. It made me realise how much of the system I had embodied. It revealed to me the internal struggle that I experienced and still experience between being the productive commodity that capitalism demands and the person I am who enjoys creating, wandering, noticing, and trusting. My trying to change the culture of the corporatized workplace was, in fact, me trying to make that company and everyone in it into me, which is exactly what they were doing to me. They were pressuring me to fit in, be one of the boys, and be happy doing it. At the same time, while I was imposing my values and beliefs on the company, I was deconstructing the indoctrination the men on the executive team received from a very young age, their masculinity and power. Erica Schoenberger (1997) taught me that executives' identities in the corporatized workplace are entangled with the company's identity and the power and privilege it bestows upon them. My tinkering with the organisational culture was tinkering with their identities, what made them comfortable, what gave them a sense of belonging, and what made them feel powerful. What makes them comfortable is in direct contrast to what makes me feel comfortable. I felt extraordinarily uncomfortable like I did not belong, and I eventually felt powerless. Either the workplace culture was made for them, or they were made (socialized) to fit the culture. That meant they didn't have to reflect on it or themselves. They were comfortable, and they wanted to remain comfortable. They wanted to be where they were. They worked for the seat at that table; I accidentally ended up there.

When I first read the words of Marx through the work of Sara Ahmed (2010b,) “the worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him, but to the object” (p. 166), I recognised its importance in answering the question why people leave the corporatized workplace. Now, I understand that what I put into the object was my true self. I wish I could say it was stolen from me, but it was not. I offered to that corporation my values and my worldview. My integrity became intertwined with the company’s integrity. I felt it deeply when they did not live up to my value system. Each person hired or promoted who did not understand that value system was like another knife in my back. Each misstep on the part of the company was another wounding. No wonder I felt the life force slowly draining out of me. Several people told me that I had left a legacy. They said it to make me feel good about what I had accomplished there. It did not. Applying Marxist theory, I understand why. I left a part of me there. Leaving a legacy means the company still extracts value from my labour, and I paid the price.

I now see the healing process as piece by piece, untangling the myth that capitalism has woven into my body. It is about remembering myself, opening myself to possibilities, finding belonging, exploring, and creating a reparative story. Perhaps this dissertation represents my reparative story. I am grateful to those I interviewed, to bell hooks, Berlant, Ahmed and Gibson-Graham for lighting the way forward.

7.1.7 Other Findings

Another finding from this research is the prominence that the body and embodiment play in healing from alienation, slow wounding, and moral injuries inflicted by the workplace. Although not an objective of the research, embodiment emerged as a theme. This theme is unsurprising, given that the research relies on emotion, affect, feminist, and Marxist theories and literature. The research also relies on the participants' and my own situated knowledge. Butcher (2012) indicates that these fields form part of the basis of embodied geography. Like me, many participants felt their alienation viscerally. To experience species being is to be a free, conscious, and sensuous being (Marx, 2007 [1844]). To Marx (2000 [1844]), sensuous means “seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being...” (p. 45). Essentially, it means perceiving with one's whole body. That level of perception builds people’s connection to the social, nature, and themselves (Roelvink, 2013). Applying this

Marxist view, the journey from the corporatized workplace to a business viewed as oriented to positive change is a movement from the disembodiment of alienation to the embodiment of a species being. However, it is more like a journey to untangle the myth of capitalism that is woven into bodies from a young age and creating a reparative story from which to move forward.

It is important to point out that most participants had at least one good experience in the corporatized workplace. Ibrahim's story in Chapter 5 is an example of this. When working for a caring boss who had his back, Ibrahim felt like he was making a difference. He felt like he had a purpose, that he had the freedom to experiment, that he was developing as a person and being challenged. For some, it was their first workplace. For others, their discontentment happened as a result of acquisitions, mergers, reorganisations, changes in supervisors or leadership, moving up within an organisation, or joining a new workplace that did not care about people. Then there was Calvin, who had nothing bad to say about any of his experiences in a multinational oil and gas company. However, it can be argued that due to its unique organisation, his workplace – creating “mini oil companies” or what Laloux (2016) would refer to as self-managing teams that built a sense of interdependence and mutual responsibility – the workplace was not fully corporatized.

7.2 Value and Contributions of the Research

This research contributes to the academic literature and provides practical applications in the workplace. In this section, I outline the research's academic and practical applications.

7.2.1 Academic Contributions

This research contributes to the understanding of the social relationships that exist within the corporatized workplace. By looking through the lens of care and applying affect theory to interrogate why people leave the corporatized workplace, this research went beyond the opaque description of those social relationships being full of tensions and conflicts offered by mainstream economic geographers (Peck, 2018; Scott, 2000; Sturgeon et al., 2008; Yeung, 2000, 2005a, 2005b). It examined those tensions and conflicts at the system's scale and the individual. At the scale of the system, it demonstrated that the structure and ethos of the workplace, the incongruence between the

Kool-Aid (stated culture) and the game (the lived culture), and the consequences of pushing up against the game or “institutional habits” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 102) by standing for the values espoused by the Kool-Aid cause those tensions and conflicts. On the scale of the individual, this research exposed the conflict and tension that occurs when an individual experiences alienation through slow wounding and moral injuries administered within the workplace.

This research was specifically designed to look through the lens of care and builds on the work of feminist economic geographers who use the care lens to examine the corporatized workplaces of academia (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Bartos, 2021; Bartos & Ives, 2019; Mountz et al., 2015). It examines the corporatized workplaces beyond the walls of academic institutions. Unlike the literature that examines academic workplaces, this research examines the corporatized workplace through the eyes of people who may have yet to be schooled in power and care ethics. Not understanding those dynamics left many participants without the tools to protect themselves from the effects of the game. Those in academia have tried to create paradoxical spaces (Bondi & Davidson, 2005; hooks, 2004a; G. Rose, 1993) of care and support to counter the hegemony of the dominant culture.

This research addresses the concept of fit by demonstrating how conflictual it can be. An individual may fit the stated culture (the Kool-Aid) but not understand that others see the Kool-Aid, as Missildine (2007) points out, as a role to play, not a way of being in the workplace. To truly fit is to meet the implicit rules of the game. That requires being schooled in them by someone who deems you an acceptable acolyte (Amis et al., 2020; McDowell, 1997, 2001) and the desire to be part of the game. Looking for fit is asking employees to adjust themselves to be accepted into a culture (B. Brown, 2019). Being denied the ability to express yourself because of the pressure to fit causes “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1). Fit is not what study participants desired. They longed for belonging.

This research contributes to Marxist literature on alienation and species being. It connects alienation to “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1), slow wounding, and trauma. Many think Marx’s view of alienation is antiquated and no longer relevant today. This research builds on the view of Swain (2012), Horgan (2021), and Chatterjee (2022) that alienation is relevant today and does apply to the modern workplace. Contrary to those who have criticized Marx’s concept of species being for its essentialism because Marx describes it as a natural essence of human beings, idealism because it is

seen as unrealistic (Swain, 2012), and perfectionism it represents the highest expression of being human (Harvey, 2018), this research adds to the literature that argues that the concept is applicable in today's context (Chatterjee, 2022; Roelvink, 2013). This research tracks the journey from alienation to species being. It demonstrates the pathways to becoming the social being that acts freely and consciously in a way where "life engender[s] life" (Marx, 2007 [1844], p. 75). It occurs by actively de-corporatizing the self so individuals re-discover (Chatterjee, 2022) and fully own themselves (van der Kolk, 2014).

By applying Ahmed's (2014) view of emotions as surfaces that delineate the individual from the social, I was able to demonstrate how the social of the corporatized workplace can press against that surface to the point that the integrity of that surface and the integrity of the individual can be compromised. I have added to the feminist literature on affect in the workplace. Other economic geographers look at how identities are created and maintained in the corporatized workplace and its effects of the workplace (Ey et al., 2017; S. Lee, 2018; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Schoenberger, 1994, 1997; Warren, 2016). In this research, I demonstrate how the corporatized workplace can violently deconstruct some people's sense of self. Others have studied the emotion and affect of racism, whiteness, and diversity work in university workplaces (Ahmed, 2012); care, affect, and emotion in academic work (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Mountz et al., 2015); the emotional work required to play the game of academics as a graduate student and teaching assistant at a university (Bartos & Ives, 2019), the emotional work required to create the affective atmosphere desired by a restaurant (Crang, 1994), how people use snark to affect an office workplace (Gregg, 2009), and the sense of betrayal and abandonment that is felt by workers and the community when a mine is closed (Pini et al., 2010). Though these examples describe what presses up against workers in various workplaces, they do not explicitly connect it to Sara Ahmed's theory of emotions as surfaces. They also haven't connected what is pressing against them to slow wounding caused by "moral injury" (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) and alienation. Seeing the social and the individual delineated by a surface, it is possible to visualize that the social can press against the individual to such an extent that the surface ruptures. What is left is the social aspect and the individual not knowing who they are anymore.

The research also adds to the HRM literature on why people leave work. The focus of HRM literature is on the needs of the organisation, not on the individual. This research examines the workplace from the perspective of a specific subset of individuals – those who have left to start businesses they believe are oriented to positive change. HRM literature is full of analysis of the cost to employers of employees leaving the workplace. Though not delving into the economic costs, it does reveal the varied mental, emotional, and physical costs to those participants who left their corporatized workplaces. It examines the workplace at both the systemic and individual levels. It finds that what drove participants out of the workplace was alienation caused by the slow wounding (Joronen, 2021) by “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1) at both scales. What is missing from the HRM literature is an assessment of how power dynamics within the workplace factor into employees' decision to leave. The HRM literature addresses power obliquely by examining gender and race but fails to unpack power at a micro or macro scale. This literature scrutinizes the systemic power structures of the corporatized workplace in the form of the Kool-Aid (the stated culture), the game (the lived culture), the gameboard (the structures of the workplace) and how they press against those who embody an ethics of care. The research found that when participants who embrace an ethics of care press up against those who play the game, the result is conflict and tension caused by the meeting of different value positions, resulting in moral injury. The system works through the tactics of individuals who play the game. Those tactics pressed against participants who cared and caused moral injury, resulting in slow woundings (Joronen, 2021) and alienation, causing participants to either quickly or slowly turn away from the corporatized workplace.

The approach to reporting my research findings is different from HRM's approach. They tend towards statistics and terminology, which is a way of depersonalising the information. Depersonalising alienates the person from the data, making the personal “a thing” and harder to remember. Stories bring to life the effects of the corporatized workplace in a personal way that can't be ignored. Stories make behaviours, actions, emotions and affects clear. My intention with this research was to clarify the dynamics of the corporatized workplace so they can't be ignored.

Finally, the methodology expands the possibilities for economic geographers to embrace different approaches to studying the workplace. Falconbridge (2012) emphasizes the importance of real-time data in economic analysis. Yeung (2003) recommends in-situ research when conducting economic

research. Traditionally, this is what economic geographers studying the workplace have done. They usually employ direct observation and interviews of people employed in the sectors of interest (Cockayne, 2018; S. Lee, 2019; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; Schoenberger, 1997). According to James (2006), this produces “temporally ‘thin’ data” (p. 298). My approach to interviewing people who have left the corporatized workplace is neither real-time nor in-situ. However, it has produced temporally thick data. It addresses a limitation of interviewing people still employed in the workplace of interest that Cockayne (2018) raises. He found participants hesitant to share about their experiences openly. Those I interviewed were quite open about their experiences in the corporatized workplace, the liminal space of having left either mentally or physically, and their journey to the businesses participants viewed as oriented to positive change.

Though I may have used a different approach, my research has addressed the “key feature of new economic geographies” (Yeung, 2003, p. 442). My research adds to an “understanding the social embeddedness of economic action” (p. 442) by describing the systemic factors that exist within the corporatized workplace: those being successful by being themselves, the gameboard, the Kool-Aid, and the game (Chapter 4). It “map[s] shifting identities of social actors” (p. 442). I mapped the shifting identities of social actors and explained those shifts. I mapped the changes in identities experienced by participants as they became alienated from the work, their colleagues, and themselves through the lens of affect, slow wounding, and “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1). I then focused on how participants reconstructed their new identities and moved themselves to own themselves (van der Kolk, 2014) or species being. My research also addresses Yeung’s final key feature: “exploring the role of material and discursive contexts in shaping economic behavior” (p. 442). Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation developed from exploring the material and discursive contexts that shaped the corporatized workplace.

7.2.2 Practical Applications

In a practical sense, these findings illustrate what those entering the workplace are, to borrow an expression from Sheryl Sandberg (2013), “leaning into” when working in the corporate workplace. Unlike the popular literature (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Kay & Shipman, 2018; Sandberg, 2013), this research examines the systemic dynamics of the workplace rather than placing responsibility onto the individual to change to fit. It provides clues about what is necessary to do that. From a systemic

perspective, ensuring that the lived culture aligns with the stated culture and that people hired, promoted, and rewarded act according to the stated culture is important. It is also important to consider adjusting the gameboard (Chapter 4) to flatten the hierarchy to create interconnected, self-directing teams. As demonstrated by teal organisations, that builds a sense of interdependence and mutual responsibility and create a workplace that is fluid and responsive to challenges (Laloux, 2016). The fluidity and responsiveness created through self-managing teams allow people to slow down and make effective (rather than focusing on efficient) decisions. That suggests the false “urgency, urgency, urgency” that is the mantra of the corporatized workplace could be dropped.

At the scale of the individual, it is important to know yourself. That starts with understanding your values, how they motivate you, and how they might put you at risk in the corporatized workplace. Following your values is important to maintain your integrity. As Sean suggests, know what you are willing to give up to maintain integrity. Also, remember that you may slip up, and that is okay. Slow down and listen to your body and intuition to know when to say “no.” Knowing what you want to create in your life, who you want to surround yourself with, and how you want to express yourself is important.

Recognising when working in the corporatized workplace does not align with that, and finding those things elsewhere in your life or in a different workplace. If you feel trapped or stuck, seek help and be curious about what is keeping you from moving forward. There is always a way out. When entering a workplace, know what you want from that work. Pay attention to when the workplace is not meeting your expectations and consider what needs to happen for your expectations to be met. It could be as easy as asking for what you want. If your expectations are met, write a new list of what you want from the workplace, or it may be time to look elsewhere for more challenges. Be aware that staying in a place that does not align with your values could cause “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1). Pay attention to what is pressing against you from your workplace and your life. If it gets too much, act.

This research supports the idea that a care ceiling exists in the corporatized workplace. Although care is important to the corporatized workplace's dynamics, its hierarchical structure and the competition it feeds reject those that embody care. The corporatized workplace uses care to extract value from people that benefit the bottom line. As suggested by many of the men in this research, care is not the sole domain of women. The shared stories also revealed that some women knew the rules and played

the game. We cannot address the systemic issues with the corporatized workplace by focusing only on getting women into positions of power. Systemic change in the workplace requires placing more people who embody a care ethic in those positions and changing what behaviours get rewarded.

This research provides insight into what is needed to retain and engage employees, which in this job market will be more challenging. As indicated in the introduction, many factors make the retention and engagement of employees a challenge. They include the low unemployment to job vacancy ratio (Statistics Canada, 2022b), high workplace stress, quiet quitting, loud quitting and burnout (Gallup Inc., 2023). That negatively impacts the bottom line and the economy (Bruce, 2019; Gallup Inc., 2023). The 2023 poll by Gallup Inc. indicates 47% of Canadian employees intend to leave the workplace, and most believe it is a good time to leave. What those employees are looking for is a more caring workplace. Like those who participated in this research, they desire freedom, open communication, fairness and respect, clear and strong guidance, the ability to learn and grow, and prioritising their wellbeing (Gallup & Workhuman, 2022). This research illuminated how the often-ignored systemic dynamics within the corporatized workplace play a significant role in why some leave.

There are many calls to create cultures that humanize the workplace (Bruce, 2019; Carucci, 2021; Gallup & Workhuman, 2022; Killick, 2023; D. Moore, 2022), yet that may be difficult to achieve without looking at the systemic problems identified in this research. The corporatized workplace based on self-interest, productivity, efficiency, and accumulation of power and wealth rejects those who care. Transforming that requires deconstructing the very foundational values of the capitalist system and that begins by recognising that there is a care ceiling in the workplace and that there are challenges in shifting the workplace towards ethics of care.

7.3 Limitations

I have identified seven main limitations to this research.

First, I could not assess how “positive change” businesses may function differently than the corporatized workplace. This inability was because almost two-thirds of the participants were solopreneurs, one-third of the participants had a coaching background, and six of the study participants were just in the process of launching their businesses, which left four operating

businesses with an active workplace culture to assess. All of this limited the quantity and diversity of the businesses, which could be examined in this research. However, I chose to focus on the journey towards a “positive change” business as defined by participants and not on the cultural characteristics of those businesses. Having so many coaches from various corporatized workplaces participate may also have been an advantage to this research. I designed my research question to look through the lens of care. I see coaches as more likely to embody ethics of care. However, I recognise some people who coach corporately that may focus on assisting people to play the game more effectively or who are unwilling to assist people with their desire to leave a company that is paying their fees (my personal experience). Having trained and certified as an executive coach, I was taught to listen with curiosity, to hold space without judgement, to create a space where the person you are coaching feels seen, heard, and understood, and to stand for the person that you are coaching, which means sometimes asking challenging questions. The coach training I took trained people to care. The participants who coached were interested in changing the culture of the corporatized workplace one person, team, or organisation at a time. The fact is that a third of those I interviewed were coaches who provided data that looked through the lens of care.

Second, because I was interested in the pathways to “positive change” businesses, when recruiting, I did not put any restrictions on when participants left the corporatized workplace. Participants left the corporatized workplace between 1991 and 2020, so comparing across these temporal contexts could be difficult. Most participants (24) left the corporatized workplace between 2009 to 2020. The stories shared by the participant who left her workplace in 2020 were very similar to those of those who left earlier. There are some differences. Laws have changed, so overt racism and sexism are not as present in the stories of those who left after 2009. A woman in management in the 1990s might have felt lonely and frustrated because of overt sexism and being the only woman in the room; the lack of women supporting women in the workplace wounded those who left after 2009. This was especially true when women leaders did not support their subordinates. Having longitudinal information about the corporatized workplace was also an advantage because it allowed me to see what was consistent in participants’ workplaces over that time—people diminishing others, moral conflicts, and organisations not living up to the Kool-Aid they served. The longitudinal information also allowed me to look at the journey from the corporatized workplace to a “positive change business” through

the eyes of participants just starting their businesses and participants contemplating their next steps (retirement and starting something new).

Third, I am curious about the difference between participants who left when they noticed behaviours that did not align with who they were and those who persisted in a workplace to the point they were losing pieces of themselves. There might have been a difference in the sensitivity of the surface that delineated the social from the individual. It would be interesting to research further what systemic or individual factors contribute to that difference.

Fourth, due to space constraints, I could not share a story in Chapter 5 of how the game can be applied solely toward one individual to push them out of the workplace. The actions can be subtle and unseen by others but are effective at diminishing someone to the point that their personality changes, and they begin to question themselves. The actions include excluding them, ignoring them, excessively monitoring their work performance to find problems, and being critical of their performance, disregarding their ideas, and engaging others in doing the same. They can result in someone deciding to leave voluntarily or shaking them up so much that their behaviour justifies firing them with cause. Either way, the result saves the bottom line by not having to pay severance to someone deemed no longer a fit.

Fifth, there was a theme of self-betrayal in the data that I could not fully examine. Participants voluntarily made decisions that put themselves in harm's way. Examples are staying in a role that diminishes them, choosing to join a company with a known toxic culture, accepting a role reporting to someone known to be a toxic leader, and accepting promotions that took them further away from the work they loved. I am curious about why some participants make these types of self-betraying decisions. Could people who care believe they can make the impossible possible because they have done it before? Is it that they think they are immune to the wounding of toxic leaders because they care, or is it because they care that they will be capable of changing a toxic leader or a toxic environment?

Sixth, this research is situational and partial. It focuses on a subset of people who left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive environmental and/or social change. Other people leave their workplaces for other reasons than uncovered in this research. My use of narrative inquiry also makes this research partial, situational, and therefore not generalizable (England, 1994; Haraway,

1988; Josselson & Hammack, 2021; McDowell, 1992; G. Rose, 1997). Regardless lessons can be learned from the research about the corporatized workplace and the journey toward a positive change business. Each participant who shared their story is one person with one perspective. I did not interview other people within the workplace to collect other perspectives. Sharing stories relies on memory and invokes the imagination (Jones, 2007). Each time a story is shared, the memory is invoked and the way the story unfolds changes (Simandan, 2019). The retelling of the story reflects who the person is in the moment of the telling (Riessman, 2008). It is important to remember that narrative truth is not *the* truth. It is a version of the truth, a truth of the storyteller based on their experience and their meaning-making.

Finally, my positionality affected this research from start to finish. My motivation for the research was to make sense of my own experience within the corporatized workplace, and that desire accompanied me in every decision made. My whiteness also affected all my decisions, starting with the wording of my research question, which did not consider the possibility of people joining other organisations working toward positive social or environmental change, like a social enterprise or a not-for-profit activist organisation. I used a white feminist view of care ethics without considering other care models from the global south. I also did not consider the fact that I may want a workplace that embraces that ethics of care; others may find it uncomfortable. The spaces I reached out to initially to recruit participants were all spaces I was familiar with and, therefore, were primarily spaces of whiteness, one being a space of femaleness. Not surprisingly, I had trouble recruiting people of colour, and not just because of the places I used to recruit. The whiteness of the research participants compounded the effects of my whiteness on the research. Very few spoke about race because, like me, they can be blind to its impacts. I, like many of the female participants, can talk openly about gender because we feel its effects. It is challenging and can be uncomfortable to speak about race. Even though I have educated myself on white supremacy, it is still difficult to see.

People of colour have so many reasons to mistrust researchers and, in particular, white researchers. Indigenous people, blacks and other people of colour have been and continue to be exploited, misrepresented, appropriated, silenced, and disappeared (Battel Lowman & Barker, 2015; Menakem, 2017; Milner, 2007; Ghosh, 2021) by both researchers and colonisers. Ceremonial artefacts, artefacts of the everyday, and bodies of these people have been stolen and placed in museums without

permission. These actions foster a lack of trust in colonial structures like universities and their researchers. In addition, I recruited and interviewed during the pandemic. The black population of Canada was affected by COVID at much higher rates than whites due to being “overrepresented in frontline jobs” (p. 112), choosing not to vaccinate because of their “mistrust of the healthcare system” (p. 112) and the inequities within the healthcare system due to structural racism (Olanlesi et al., 2024). The murder of George Floyd by Minnesota police officers and the actions of Black Lives Matter were still reverberating through the zeitgeist and my social media feeds. All are more pressing reasons for not responding to a request for their free labour for research. Lastly, the way I designed the study, using narrative inquiry and unstructured interviews, requires people to be vulnerable and exposed. Society daily makes Indigenous people of colour feel vulnerable and exposed.

7.4 Recommendations for Future Research

I have identified eight recommendations for further research.

The first would be to conduct further research to determine how widespread these workplace dynamics are. A different method, such as a well-designed survey, could assess a wider range of workplaces and a wider geographical spectrum. The survey could ask specific questions about the gameboard, the game, the Kool-Aid, care, “moral injury” (Anderson, 2021, p. 1), sense of self, and how participants feel about their workplace in general and each of these components. Given that the corporatized workplace builds on insecurity, researchers could design questions to determine how secure people feel in their workplace and the atmosphere of their workplace, on scales that attempt to measure the affective states of fear, paranoia, acceptance, and trust. Using the language used by the participants, such as “I feel like people have my back” and “I feel like I am on a different planet than others in the workplace,” would make the survey more approachable.

Another way to research this would be to expand the research question so that it is not focused solely on speaking to people who have left the corporatized workplace to start businesses oriented to positive change. The research question could be expanded to include people who have left to join businesses, not-for-profits, and social and environmental justice organisations. Expanding in this way could provide a different perspective on care as well as shed light on the corporatized culture and the shift towards caring organisations.

The second recommendation would be to interview those people who have stayed when they really would like to quit their role in the corporatized workplace. Their voices count and could provide other perspectives of corporatized culture, its effects on their sense of self, the emotional and affective geography of the corporatized workplace, why they stay, and the coping mechanisms required to stay. Interviewing those who don't leave but want to, could provide greater insight into the role of race, class, ability, sexual orientation, and family responsibilities play in preventing people from leaving their corporatized workplace.

A third recommendation to better understand the role of care in the workplace would be to look at organisations designed to approach the economy differently from the traditional, hierarchical, and bottom-line focus of the corporatized workplace. The research could determine how or if the dynamics of those workplaces differ from those described in this research. The research could identify the challenges and successes they have experienced using different business models to determine if they truly interrupt the workplace dynamics experienced by many of those who participated in this study. This research could explore the opportunities and challenges associated with different kinds of alternative business models. This could include companies like those who have been funded and supported by Coralus (formerly SheEO) whose economic system models the ecosystem and is based on sharing resources and nurturing radical generosity, trust, reciprocity, and mutual support (We Are Coralus, n.d.); companies that were formed through Shaun Loney's (2019) army of problem solvers who are focused on reconciliation and the "solutions economy" by applying indigenous values, community wellbeing and a long-term view; companies that have adopted the holacracy management model, which aims to replace the hierarchical structure of the corporatized workplace with a flattened circular structure of self-managing teams (HolacracyOne, 2022); B-Corporations that are third party certified to have "high social and environmental performance," are legally accountable to all their stakeholders not just shareholders, and are transparent about their performance (B Lab, 2023); teal organisations (Laloux, 2016); or social enterprises, which are for-profit businesses with a social mission; or businesses operated by charities or not-for-profits that are revenue generating (Government of Canada, 2019). This type of research could identify ways that the dynamics of the corporatized workplace could be interrupted to prevent the wounding that it causes.

A fourth recommendation would be to undertake more research to better understand the difference between participants who quickly left workplaces and those who stayed to the point of breaking apart. Understanding that difference will give people a better understanding of the steps they can take to protect themselves from severe alienation in the workplace. Part of this research could be looking at the acts of self-betrayal and why people make those choices rather than making different choices. The research could reverse the question that drove this study and ask why people stay in the corporatized workplace.

Fifth, from a practical sense, further research could focus on how to create training and educational programs. For workers, it could focus on what they are leaning into by choosing to work in the corporatized workplace. For workplaces, the focus could be on creating a culture that retains employees. For people who have left the workplace because of burnout, it could facilitate their recovery by developing a program that facilitates people's shift from alienation to species being. Educating workers on what they are potentially leaning into when they join the corporatized workplace allows them to make better choices for themselves and their careers. Given the current low unemployment-to-job vacancy ratio (Statistics Canada, 2022b) in Canada, it behoves employers to transform the culture of the corporatized workplace to retain talented employees. That means neutralising the game by introducing more care.

Sixth, research into how to build regenerative workplace cultures in the manner of Laloux (2016). This could be done through action research with a willing organisation or part of an organisation and applying Gibson-Graham's (2006, 2013) approach to creating alternative economies or by applying Otto Scharmer's (2018) Theory U.

Seventh, many participants spoke about trusting that things will happen for them, coincidences that happen for them in their lives after leaving the corporatized workplace and the flow they experience. It would be fascinating to research these types of mythical experiences through narrative inquiry.

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Appendix 1: List of “Positive Change” Businesses

- On-on-one coaching
- Engineering corporate culture
- Technology solutions for healthcare
- Aligning people within workplaces with the corporate values and making visible the relational connections that occur horizontally and vertically across organisations to ensure employees understand the web of connections that need to be nurtured to support the mission of the company
- Supporting people with their responsibilities by providing concierge services
- Solar Coop
- Renewable energy coop
- Coaching with horses
- Cultural change through coaching
- Environmental consulting
- Volunteering with various not-for-profits
- Social connection
- Forest therapy
- Not-for-profit seniors care
- Creativity and innovation consulting
- Working with newcomers to Canada
- Consulting on the future of work
- Wellness and leadership workshops
- Conflict coach and trainer

- Fitness
- Plant-based food manufacturing to shift people toward plant-based eating for personal and planetary wellness
- Consulting on the social impact that companies have on their employees and their communities
- Helping First Nations recover from historic wrongs
- Not-for-profit—food support in schools
- Training on social systems to create more effective organisations
- Not-for-profit aimed at preserving a language that is no longer spoken
- Career counselling the whole being (body, mind, emotions, and spirit)
- Women’s clothing designed to be “thoughtfully consumed” (eco-friendly and socially conscious)
- Help companies to truly unpack their “institutional habit” (Ahmed, 2012) to transform their corporatized culture

Appendix 2: My Story

I began my career in 1985 as an environmental officer in the public sector. I feel like one of the reasons I got the job was because I graduated from the same university my boss attended and because I responded to one of his interview questions with, “No, I don’t mind getting dirty.” I inspected industrial facilities to ensure they managed their hazardous waste in compliance with the law. My boss was a wonderful mentor, and he provided opportunities that others were not. It was during the days of affirmative action. I was one of two women in a technical role in the office. I quickly learned that because of my age and gender, I had to work harder to prove myself, claim my space, and be respected and taken seriously by the men in the office and the industry. I have many stories about being questioned and tested in my role because I was a young woman. I also think, at times, my gender was an asset. It was acceptable for me to ask the “dumb” questions. People seemed honest with me, perhaps because I was less threatening. I also looked at my role as assisting people with compliance rather than enforcement. England (1994) and McDowell (1992) speak to their ability to gain access to information because they are women. Regardless of my challenging experiences because of my age and gender, I loved my job and the people in my unit.

I spent about 12 years in government, handling varied roles and responsibilities and ending with some supervisory roles.

There was a six-month break when I left after being offered a position as a technical sales representative in the private sector. In sales, I felt it was about my appearance rather than my knowledge and capabilities. When one customer responded, “Oh, you don’t want to get yourself dirty,” when I asked to see the operations, I started to jokingly describe myself to my friends as a “waste whore.” I enjoyed the people I worked with, but the fact that the company burned solvents that could be recycled and did not recover energy conflicted with my values and beliefs. I felt like they wanted me to be someone I was not. I also felt the role lacked a meaningful purpose. As a result, I felt the life force start to drain from my body. I lasted less than a year and returned to a new role in the government workplace I had left. A few years after my return to government, things started to bother me. I began to feel like the Ministry was more about protecting the Minister than protecting the

environment. I like clear, honest communication, not the double-speak that seems to be used by more senior civil servants, and that has started to take a toll. I felt like the environmental laws stymied the creativity of responsible companies. The bureaucracy seemed to slow down decisions and stifle change. The government had changed, and I knew there were changes to come and that I may end up in a role doing something I did not enjoy.

A family-owned waste management and aggregate company offered an environmental coordinator position. From the outside looking in, I perceived the company as responsible and full of people who care. Many of my colleagues in government also thought the same way. I hadn't entered their offices before I realised they were not who I had perceived them to be. There was an atmosphere of fear; the company fired people for what seemed like no reason. People seemed to put on a happy face at work, yet there was a lack of camaraderie (unless it involved drinking or competing) and open communication. It was very different from the government workplaces I had experienced. It was a highly masculinized workplace, and there was pressure to fit in, to be one of the boys, to be happy, to play hard and drink hard. I would leave early from company events because of the flow of alcohol, and being completely outnumbered gender-wise made me feel unsafe. My government workplaces were diverse, so I was quite surprised by the whiteness of the company I had just joined. I was also naive to the privilege my whiteness bestowed upon me. I saw everything through the lens of gender.

From an environmental management perspective, the company was far from the standard I thought they were when I accepted the position. I reframed that lack by telling myself it presented a challenge and gave me lots to do. There was a natural tension in my role because I would have to say, "No, you can't do that without an approval," "No, that would put us out of compliance," and "Hey, you have to shape up your operations." I was there for four years when I quit in frustration that the company was not moving from just compliance to redesigning operations to be more sustainable. They offered me a leave of absence.

I sold my home and lived in Costa Rica for four months. I integrated myself into the community in the cloud forest of Monte Verde. It was the first place I felt I could be myself with no pressure to conform. I could be creative. I worked with a local artist, making pottery for her to sell to tourists. I took a modern dance class. The natural world surrounded me, and I discovered what it felt like to be

in the flow. I then moved to a yoga centre in Massachusetts and lived there for three months, during which time I participated in the spiritual lifestyle program. I was given free yoga classes and room and board in exchange for service. For me, it was cleaning bathrooms and making beds for the paying guests. I was surprised at how much I enjoyed cleaning bathrooms. I then spent a few weeks in Guatemala.

I returned to the company I had left with a different perspective, was given the title of director, reported to the president, and became part of the executive team. Eventually, I was given the title of vice-president. I was in a position of power and privilege but somehow oblivious to what that meant. I had never strived to be on the executive team. It just happened. Executive meetings were not what I expected them to be. I thought they would be more strategic in their orientation. Instead, it was reporting out mostly quite sanitized information about each division. The company's president at the time could hold the egos in the room in some harmony, and I adored working for him.

I created an environmental program infused with my values and belief system. It was based on understanding our interconnectedness—that we are the environment, and what we do to it, we do to ourselves. Stories were the instrument I used to create cultural change—aspirational stories about what other companies were doing for the environment and appreciative stories celebrating employees for what they were doing that put the company in right relationship with the environment. There was also empowering messaging acknowledging each employee's knowledge and ability to improve the company's environmental performance. The program allowed people to make a difference for the environment. I created an aspirational culture towards which to work. In doing so, I mixed the Kool-Aid and served it up. My motivation was to move the company towards what I had expected it was before I said “Yes” to their job offer. There was what seemed like instant buy-in at every level. People drank the Kool-Aid. They also actively co-created the culture, imagining and implementing ideas that made the company more sustainable. It surprised me. It was my Hail Mary. I would have left to live at an Ashram in India if it hadn't worked. Creating and implementing that program gave me a small window of feeling self-actualized as if I was making a difference and positively impacting the planet. It also gave me this false sense that I could make the company into what I had perceived it to be before accepting a position there.

An executive team member once advised me that I needed to understand that I have a lot of power in the company. Like Cynthia, I was quite dumbfounded by the comment. Looking back, I realise I actively worked to dismantle some of the power structures of the workplace, like lobbying to get rid of executive parking spaces, having the executive boardroom renamed and opened for the use of anyone who wanted to book it, using circles rather than boardroom tables in some meetings to facilitate the opportunity to hear all voices, and trying to minimise the amount of competition that happened within the organisation before realising that one was futile. I now understand that I was an “affect alien” (Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39; 2017, p. 68)—someone refusing to put on a happy face and just get along. I pushed against the “institutional will” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 26) embodied by the executive team. As I was pressing against them, they were pressing against me, willing me to fit the culture of that room. Being an “affect alien”(Ahmed, 2010a, p. 39), I became the source of the conflict.

Then things started to unravel. It started with the retirement of the president, whom I adored, which changed the executive team dynamics. I no longer saw it as a team but a competitive forum of shaming and one-upmanship. I lost an important person from my team to another division with no heads up. It took me time to find a replacement, and the company grew as I looked. I was never able to catch up. My energy started to drain out of my body. I felt a responsibility to be a role model for the younger women in the company. The company hired and rewarded people who acted contrary to the company's values. I wanted to leave. I asked for a coach. When I told the coach I wanted to leave, she told me I couldn't leave such a wonderful company. I decided to take a coaching course (paid for by the company) to coach myself. The course fed my soul. Next, I went on to do my master's degree in leadership (paid for by the company), hoping it would change me so I could navigate the executive team. I conducted an action research project using an appreciative inquiry approach to explore how a small group of women could influence corporate culture. The participant shared their stories of feeling recognised, affirmed, and celebrated for their unique contributions; none of their stories related to the workplace where we worked. Both trainings gave me something meaningful to do.

For years before quitting my job, I would say to myself, “I can't be here anymore.” I would cry on my way to work. Repeatedly, I would find myself in value conflicts with managers and the executive team. I became angry, argumentative, and combatant. I felt like I was fighting for my moral and physical integrity. What I was fighting for was the creation of the culture that I had expected when I

joined the company. As a result, I was losing pieces of myself. I became disengaged, disillusioned, and burnt out. I started interviewing women on how they dreamed the world into being to write a book. I felt isolated and isolated myself. I hated my behaviour but didn't know how to stop it. I was not functioning.

I felt like I had nowhere to go because the company I worked for was considered the best in the business. The final straw came after a long-term employee died. His death affected me deeply and made me realise I was killing myself staying there. That week, when I confronted the executive team about a compliance issue, there was again the brick wall of silence and secrecy. When my boss came in to chastise my behaviour, the words "I can't be here anymore" spilled from me. I gave them six weeks, then left. I joined the company as an enthusiastic, energized 33-year-old who was confident in herself. I left at 53 a burnt out, angry, frustrated, disengaged woman who hated herself.

Throughout my almost 20 years with the company, I was constantly self-medicating to treat my burnout. I travelled to places where the natural world could surround me. I took yoga teacher training and yoga therapy training. Looking back, I did these things because I was looking for things that fulfilled me creatively, allowed me to grow and develop, and provided me with community and the possibility of a way forward. When I left, I had every intention of starting a business. I made several false starts with that, but I could not make it happen. Without a sense of self or an understanding of what was important to me, action was impossible. I was privileged enough to afford to take time to figure out what happened to me. Being married helped greatly with that.

Looking back at what I know now, I realise I saw the other executives as the source of my suffering. I othered (Collard et al., 2015; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; McDowell, 2005; G. Rose, 1993) them. I wanted every employee to be seen, heard, and valued, but I had no capacity to apply that to the executives. I came to view them as the enemy. It was not until I read Carol Gilligan (2011) and bell hooks (2004b) that I understood that they were raised in a system that moulded them into the world of masculinity. It changed their relationship with themselves, their emotions, and others. I was schooled in care. I am now schooled by feminist geographers (Askins & Blazek, 2017; Collard et al., 2015; Collard & Dempsey, 2018; Gibson-Graham, 2006, 2011; Gibson-Graham et al., 2019; Katz, 1994; S. Lee, 2019; Massey, 1991, 1993, 2004; McDowell, 1997, 2001, 2005; O'Neill & Gibson-Graham,

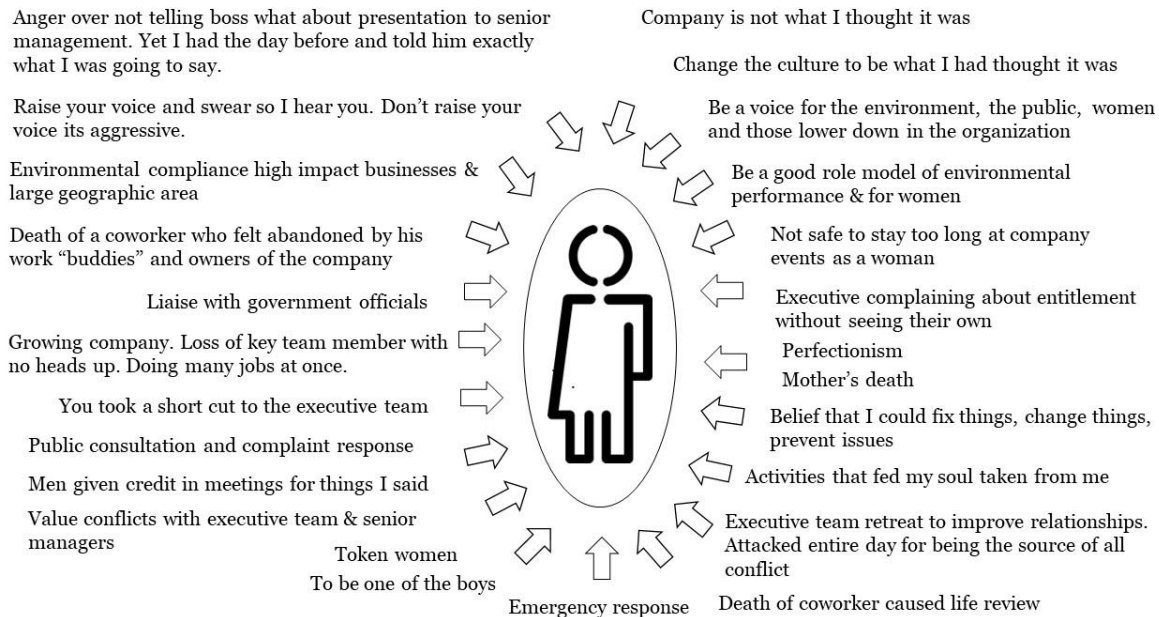
1999; Pini et al., 2010; Pini & Mayes, 2012; G. Rose, 1993, 1997; Schoenberger, 1994, 1997, 2001; Valentine, 2007, 2008; Valentine et al., 2014) who taught me to see power—in particular its insidiousness (G. Rose, 1997) and how it is implicated in the hidden (Harley, 1988; King, 2019). That knowledge provided a clearer understanding of my situation. What I labelled as sexism directed at me was just how the executives treated each other by taking action to compete, disempower, or diminish each other. The difference was that they had been schooled in the game (see Chapter 4) and knew not to take it personally. They put their behaviour down to “It’s just business.” In essence, the men on the executive team could not see the water because they were swimming in it. I, on the other hand, could feel the water was there but did not have the vocabulary to describe it adequately. All I knew was that I was drowning in it.

Appendix 3: Example Timeline Using My Career

Environmental Officer Provincial Government 2yrs	• Inspected industrial facilities • Male dominated workplace • Boss a great mentor • Affirmative action being introduced men were not happy • Age & gender meant working harder to prove self • Tested/challenged by some male colleagues and industrial reps
Technical Sale Rep Hazardous Waste Company Lasted < 1 year	• Well respected company with great safety standards • Enjoyed the people • Sales, not my thing • Value conflict solvent burned not recycled or heat recovered • Felt life force draining
Provincial Government again Various positions & locations 12 years	• Challenged and tested by male colleagues in one role • Had to work to earn their respect • About protecting the Minister, not the environment • Bureaucracy slowed down decisions & stifled change • Didn't like the doublespeak • Change in government that would mean job stagnation
Environmental Coordinator Waste & Aggregate Company 4 years	• Joined company because thought it was progressive & environmentally responsible • Not who they seemed to be • Atmosphere of fear • Lack of connection and open communication • Highly masculinized • Natural tension in the role • Quit in frustration offered leave of absence
Costa Rica 4 months	• Spanish lessons • Worked with a local artist making pottery • Felt a deep sense of belonging and flow
Yoga Centre 3 months	• Seva (selfless service)—cleaned bathrooms
Guatemala 6 weeks	• Nature • Spanish lessons
Waste Manage & Aggregate Company 15 years	• Changed approach • Small window of self-actualization & making a difference • Pressure to be one of the boys • Token woman • Subtly accused of shortcut to executive team • Wanted company to change company to be more caring • Actively deconstructed power structures • Saw executives as entitled, competitive, shame based

	• Hired coach— “you can’t leave such a great company” • Lost key team member without notice
Executive coaching training Concurrent	• Paid for by company • Beautifully supportive environment, which fed her soul
Master’s in leadership Concurrent	• Paid for my company • Change self to be able to make company more caring • Action research– how could women affect culture change? • Fed her soul
Waste Manage & Aggregate Company (cont.) 15 years	• Attempted cultural change based on integrity, care • Death of colleague reflected on own experiences • Realised did not share definitions of integrity and care • “I can’t be here anymore”
Pilgrimage • Anger, shame • No emotional or cognitive capacity	• Cognitive therapy retreat and courses • How to publish a book retreat • Coaching • Various how to start a business courses
PhD • Constant state of survival	• Somatic experience counselling, talk therapy, horse therapy, forest therapy • Chanting, meditation • Massage therapy, Acupuncture, Osteopathy, Chiropractor, energy work, physio • Nature, friends • Reading about trauma • Rituals • Father’s illness, death, estate management • Compression fractures • Addressing committee comments— “found my voice”

Appendix 4: My Impression Map



Appendix 5: Interview Information Letter

Lead Researcher
Alison Braithwaite, PhD Candidate
Department of Geography
University of Waterloo
ajbraith@uwaterloo.ca
xxx-xxx-xxxx
www.AlisonBraithwaite.com/research

The goal of the research is to explore the pathways people have followed from the traditional corporate workplace to start businesses oriented toward positive social/environmental change. **I am conducting the research to meet the requirements of Doctoral Studies at the University of Waterloo.**

Who is eligible for the study?

You are eligible to participate if you left a traditional corporate workplace in Canada to start a business oriented toward positive social/environmental change.

What will happen during the interview?

I am inviting you to a one on one interview that will take about **60-90 minutes** and will be conducted over video conferencing or telephone. The interview will be a conversation about your experience shifting from the corporate workplace to start a business. that aims to make positive change in the world. I will ask you to **share your story of shifting from** the traditional corporate workplace to starting a business. From your story I will be looking for

- Your experience in the corporate workplace that you left (company, culture, values, emotional environment, role, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, tension/conflicts within them/within the workplace, supports)
- Your experience of making the shift (supports, personal values, emotions, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, conflicts/tensions)
- Your experience in creating your business (culture, values, emotional environment, sense of self, sense of belonging/connection, conflicts/tensions, supports)

What is in it for you?

Risks? The risks of this research are not anticipated to be any more than what you would experience in day-to-day life.

Benefits? There are unlikely any direct benefits to you. Other than perhaps gaining some personal insight from sharing your story, there are likely no direct benefits to you. The shared stories people who have left traditional corporate workplaces in Canada to start businesses oriented toward positive change will:

- provide insight into pathways to creating more shifts of these shifts for others,
- identify the affective and emotional environments that support these shifts,
- look at a person's sense of self is affected by these shifts and
- how these shifts were supported/cared into being.

Your identity is confidential

I will keep your identity confidential. During the interview you will choose a pseudonym, the name you would like me to use for the research. The name of the company you work(ed) for will not be revealed. We can sometimes be identified by the stories we tell; however, I will obscure identifying details to help keep your identity confidential. I will use your anonymized responses to assist with publications and the anonymized interviews will be kept on my password-protected computer for at least 7 years.

The interview is being conducted over an online video conferencing system or over the phone. Just like if sitting in a café having a conversation, there is the chance for conversations to be intercepted by a third party.

Video call privacy:

When information is transmitted over the internet privacy cannot be guaranteed. This study will use the [Webex or Zoom choose one or the other] platform to collect data, which is an externally hosted cloud-based service. A link to their privacy policy is available here (<https://trustportal.cisco.com/c/dam/r/ctp/docs/privacydatasheet/collaboration/cisco-webex-meetings-privacy-data-sheet.pdf>). There is always a risk your responses may be intercepted by a third party (e.g., government agencies, hackers). University of Waterloo researchers will not collect or use internet protocol (IP) addresses or other information, which could link your participation to your computer or electronic device without first informing you.

Your participation is completely voluntary

- with your consent I will audio record the interview and take notes
- participation is completely voluntary

- share to the level you feel comfortable
- feel free to skip any question, you can still be in the study without answering all the questions
- you can stop at any time for any reason, there are no consequences to you if you for stopping
- if you do stop, I will ask you whether you would like your answers to that point to be included in the research or not.
- if you consent to including your answers to the point of stopping, I will include them in my research.
- If you do not consent to including those answers, I will delete the audio recording and the any notes I may have created.

If you decide to withdraw completely, I will erase the recording and delete all your data from my records. You can request your data be removed from the study up until **August 1, 2021**, as it is not possible to withdraw your data once papers and publications have been submitted to publisher. You may make that request by emailing me, Alison Braithwaite at ajbraith@uwaterloo.ca.

If you are interested on knowing the status of the research, I will post regular updates on the research at www.AlisonBraithwaite.com/research.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through a University of Waterloo Research Ethics Committee (ORE#42662). If you have questions for the Committee contact the Office of Research Ethics, at 1-519-888-4567 ext. 36005 or ore-ceo@uwaterloo.ca.

**Faculty
Advisors**

Dr. Daniel Cockayne

University of Waterloo

Department of Geography

Daniel.Cockayne@uwaterloo.ca

Dr. Nancy Worth

University of Waterloo

Department of Geography

NWorth@uwaterloo.ca

Appendix 6: Verbal Consent Log

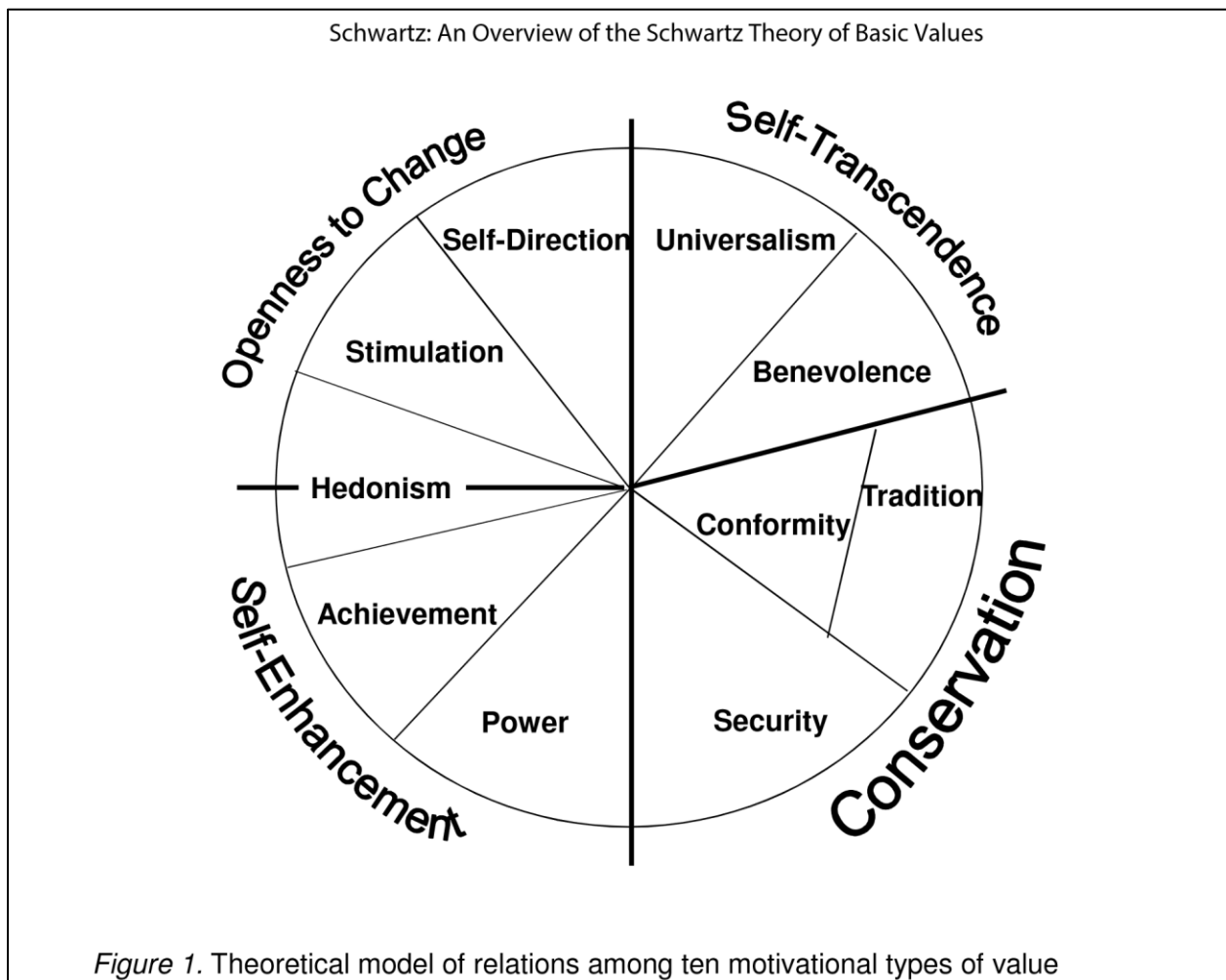
Unique ID number	Participant's name	Date	Consent to participate	Consent to audio record

Appendix 7: Schwartz's Theory of Basic Values Figures

This appendix provides two figures from Schwartz (2012). I have included them here to provide further background to the summary of his theory of basic values that I included in section 3.5.6 Personal values. The first figure (Figure A7-1) is an image of the basic values in his original circle format. The figure provides a visual representation of how the basic values are related. The second figure (Figure A7-2) provides what Schwartz calls the dynamic underpinnings of the universal value structure. It plots the values based on their social and personal focus and their corresponding motivations and affect.

Figure A7-1

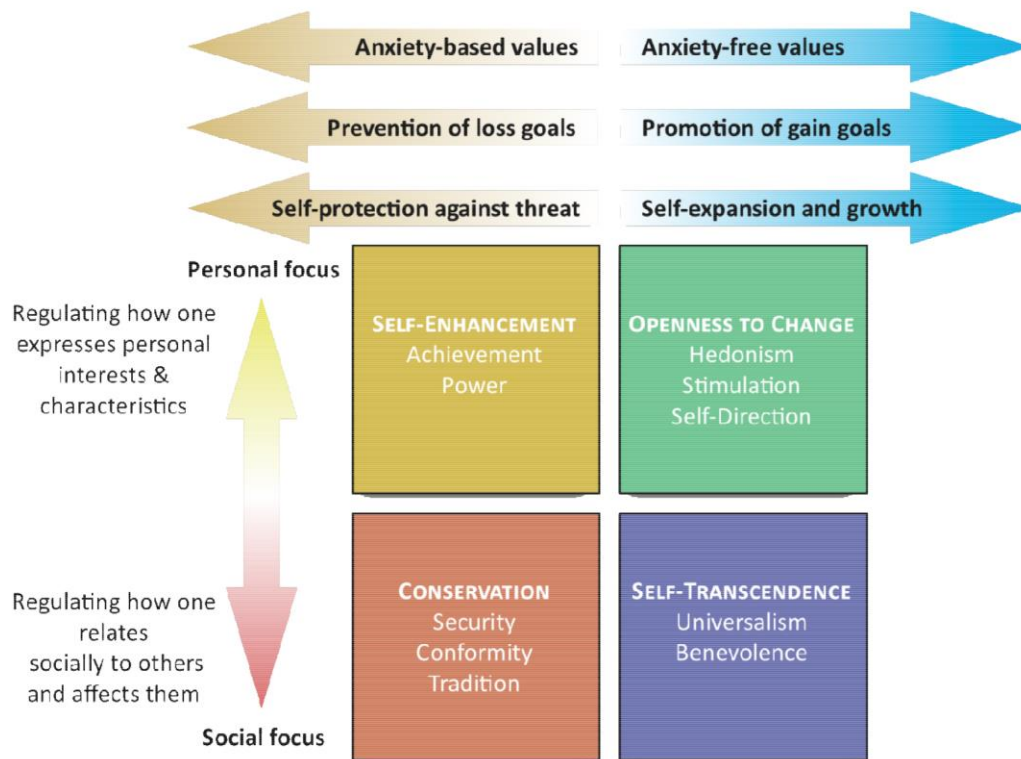
Schwartz's Model of Relations Among Ten Motivational Types of Values



(Schwartz, 2012, p. 9)

Figure A7-2

Dynamic Underpinnings of the Universal Value Structure



Adapted from: Schwartz, S. H. (2006). Les valeurs de base de la personne: Théorie, mesures et applications [Basic human values: Theory, measurement, and applications]. *Revue française de sociologie*, 42, 249-288.

Schwartz (2012, p. 13)