FROM PAYCHECK TO PINK SLIP: EXPLORING DISPLACED WORKERS' EXPERIENCES OF LIVING AND WORKING THROUGH A FACTORY CLOSURE

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the lived experiences of displaced workers during three factory closures in the Greater Toronto Area in 2019. The concurrent closure of these factories impacted nearly 3,000 direct workers, motivating this dissertation's investigation into how displaced workers both affect and are affected by closure processes in one of Canada's significant manufacturing regions. This study understands these closures as part of broader processes of deindustrialization and economic restructuring that have transformed manufacturing work and workers' lives.

Building on extensive scholarship documenting workers' experiences of deindustrialization, this study examines how contemporary displaced workers navigate factory closures in urban contexts, focusing on the period between closure announcement and final shutdown. Moving beyond purely structural analyses, this study contributes to understanding how displaced workers navigate this liminal space by examining their sense-making processes, emotional, behavioural, and affective responses, and subject formation during displacement.

Integrating feminist political economy and affect theory frameworks, I analyze in-depth interviews with 12 displaced workers to explore how they actively negotiate and respond to factory closures and closure processes. I organize their narratives into five thematic areas: first, how varied announcement practices operate as affective events that constitute displaced worker subjectivity and hierarchies of deservingness; second, how workers' affective responses circulate and attach to specific anchors during closure procedures; third, how workers are reconstituted as particular kinds of subjects through intensified gendered performances and

work ethic; fourth, how workers engage in both traditional and alternative forms of resistance; and fifth, how closure processes reconfigure temporal experiences of work.

Across these themes, I demonstrate how workers' social locations influence their experiences of displacement, while their collective responses both reproduce and challenge existing power relations. I argue that while factory closures disrupt workers' attachments and relationships, workers are reconstituted within intensified subject positions through familiar performances of gender and work ethic, while simultaneously constructing counter-narratives that reimagine manufacturing's future. I conclude by suggesting the need for more inclusive union organizing models that recognize diverse worker experiences of job displacement. This work has implications for unions, policymakers, and communities confronting similar industrial transitions.

Dedication

To the workers who have lost jobs yet maintain a vision of dignified work: your stories matter and disrupt the narratives and systems that normalize displacement and dispossession.

To my fellow adoptees and all youth in care: this is for us! May my academic achievement serve as an example of what is possible without obscuring the systems and trauma that make such journeys unnecessarily difficult.

To my family in all its expressions (and especially to my mom): your love made this possible and lives in these pages.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

CAW – Canadian Auto Workers
CERB – Canadian Emergency Response Benefit
EI – Employment Insurance
FPE – Feminist Political Economy
GTA – Greater Toronto Area
IRA – Industrial Reserve Army
ONDP – Ontario New Democratic Party
UBI – Universal Basic Income

Introduction

The Contemporary Crisis of Manufacturing in Ontario

Capital flight from Canada's industrial centers has persisted for decades, long after scholars began documenting North America's deindustrialization in the 1970s. In Toronto, Ontario, Canada, manufacturing workers face increasing precarity and displacement as the industrial sector contracts, despite the city's reputation as a thriving metropolis and economic hub. While Toronto is not conventionally categorized as part of the Rust Belt, the city continues to house nearly 10,000 manufacturing firms, directly employing approximately 230,000 workers (TWIG, 2021). This makes Toronto a critical site for examining broader transformations in manufacturing, as it functions both as an exception to, and an exemplar of, the challenges confronting industrial centers across North America.

Processes of capital mobility, economic restructuring, globalization, and deindustrialization have challenged the stability and future of manufacturing in cities like Toronto. In 2019 alone, Toronto experienced a net loss of 70 factories, affecting more than 2000 direct jobs (Toronto City Planning, 2020). These local patterns intersect with trade pressures that exacerbate industrial vulnerability. The tariffs imposed by U.S. President Trump in 2025—reaching 50 percent on steel and aluminum—represent an explicit attempt at U.S. reindustrialization, threatening the waged labour of tens of thousands of Canadian manufacturing workers. Between January and June 2025, at least 14 Ontario-based factories announced closure or mass layoffs across the textile, chemical, steel, and consumer goods sectors. The scale of displacement is even greater when considered alongside labour market data, with the Ontario government reporting 33,000 manufacturing job losses in April 2025

alone (Statistics Canada, 2025). The persistence of manufacturing decline in 2025 highlights the continued relevance of this research and affirms the urgency of ongoing inquiry into the futures of manufacturing work and workers.

Responses to these shifts have been fractured, even among unions with shared industrial roots. While United Auto Workers president Shawn Fain "applauded" the tariffs and the retreat of free trade (Booth-Singleton, 2025), Canada's Unifor staunchly opposed them. These fractured responses point to a labour movement struggling to develop coherent strategies for challenging capital mobility. As economists warn of further closures, workers' perspectives and sophisticated analyses of industrial change are vital for identifying the supports required to withstand recurrent waves of economic volatility, as well as for envisioning more just and sustainable futures.

Reworlding Ruins

Industrial workers have long confronted cycles of boom, collapse, and reorganization, each time piecing together new forms of work and life from the fragments of the old. Haraway's (2016) idea of *reworlding* captures this dual process of mourning and renewal, situating workers' responses to closure within a broader history of remaking futures from ruins. In her book, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016), Haraway proposes a transformative approach to disaster, one that challenges us to view ruins as a potential catalyst for creative and productive change. According to Haraway, we can repurpose the very concept of endings by converting the "dying" into the material by making it something else. Haraway (2016) writes:

> The idea that disaster will come is not new; disaster, indeed genocide and devastated home places, has already come, decades and centuries ago, and it has not stopped. The

> resurgence of peoples and of places is nurtured with ragged vitality in the teeth of such loss, mourning, memory, resilience, reinvention of what it means to be native, refusal to deny irreversible destruction, and refusal to disengage from living and dying well in presents and futures. (p. 86)

This process of "reworlding" or "world-making," as Haraway conceptualizes it, involves *active* engagement in reconstructing and reimagining our world in the aftermath of disruption, where impermanence is accepted as an opportunity for recreation. In this framework, we navigate the aftermath of destruction and upheaval through a dual process: by rebuilding our understanding of the world, carefully reassembling a new reality from the remnants of the old, while concurrently stretching our imagination to envision previously inconceivable alternatives. This relationship between reconstruction and creative reimagination forms the essence of Haraway's approach to change. Crucially, accepting impermanence does not resign us to passive acquiescence to inevitable outcomes. Instead, Haraway's recognition of impermanence is an invitation to continue constructing the narrative beyond apparent conclusions, viewing each moment of disruption as a gateway to renewal and reinvention.

Donna Haraway's insights regarding the persistence of disaster and the possibility of resurgence are particularly relevant when examining the "death" of factories. The closure of manufacturing plants represents a type of disaster within the industrial landscape. When a factory closes, not only does the machinery grind to a halt, but the very rhythm of living and working undergoes disassembly and transformation. In this context, "reworlding" becomes a vital lens through which to view factory closures not merely as an ending but as a starting point for reconstructing and reimagining the spaces and roles that will follow from what has been left behind. In this industrial ruin space, workers can creatively use remnants of the past to craft and experiment with possible new identities, relationships, narratives, and futures.

As Haraway's insights encourage us to confront disasters through reinvention, this study considers how workers find their way through the challenges and opportunities that arise in dying factories. This study considers workers' activities, interactions, and sense-making processes to uncover how displaced workers actively engage in remaking their work identities and relationships while simultaneously contending with the structural constraints of a changing industrial and labour market. This is an exploration of the reshaping of work and workers, whose stories serve as conduits for contemplating the potential inherent in the experience of disrupted work.

Historical Precedents: Past Reworldings and Their Lessons

Haraway's concept of 'reworlding ruins' finds compelling historical parallels in the interwar and post-World War periods of the 20th century. North America's industrial infrastructure bore the scars of wartime production, thus requiring reimagination and reconstruction in the post-war periods. Hastily converted factories were ill-suited for peacetime manufacturing; production lines optimized for wartime output required retooling for civilian goods; labour regulations that had been modified or relaxed to maximize production for the war effort left workers vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe conditions (Turk, 2017); an influx of returning soldiers struggled to find employment (Campbell, 2006); wage structures suppressed by wartime controls, failed to keep pace with rising living costs. The deteriorating working and living conditions in these post-war periods presented a sort of "ruins" that, while not of physical destruction, wreaked social and economic strain. In this context, workers, families, communities, and unions began to rebuild material infrastructure as well as reimagine social contracts and labour relations in the

post-war economy, setting the stage for significant labour movements that would reshape industrial work.

Workers' vision of a new social contract—one that would provide job security, fair wages, safe working conditions, and a voice in workplace decisions—fueled a wave of labour unrest that swept across North America during the interwar period. Intense labour militancy and class struggle contributed to waves of mass strikes and radical organizing. In Canada, the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 saw nearly 30,000 workers walk off their jobs in a show of solidarity and demand for collective bargaining rights. In the United States, movements in the 1930s like the Minneapolis Teamsters strikes, the Toledo Auto-Lite strike, and the San Francisco general strike demonstrated workers' capacity for sustained resistance against capital and state power (Barrington, 2023).

In the post-WWII era, the 1945 Ford strike in Windsor, Ontario, became a watershed moment in Canadian labour history. The 99-day strike, involving 17,000 workers, led to the landmark arbitration by Justice Ivan Rand of the Supreme Court of Canada. Rand's decision introduced the "Rand Formula," which established the principle of mandatory union dues for all employees in a unionized workplace, regardless of their union membership status. This formula significantly strengthened unions' financial stability and bargaining power, reshaping Canadian labour relations (Fudge & Tucker, 2001). Later that same year, over 2,000 workers at Stelco, Canada's largest steel producer in Hamilton, Ontario, went on strike for 81 days. The Stelco workers, represented by the United Steelworkers of America, fought for union recognition, a 40-hour work week, and improved wages. Their eventual victory not only secured these

demands but also contributed to the broader shift in labour relations that was occurring across the country.

These strikes, among others, were not merely reactions to immediate post-war conditions, but rather the culmination of workers' long-held aspirations for a fundamentally different relationship between labour and capital. This reconstructed labour relationship took the form of the "post-war compromise" aimed at nurturing a stable and cooperative "partnership" between labour, employers, and governments (Palmer, 2005). This period was defined by strong labour protections, such as the right to strike, union recognition, and the check-off of union dues. Empowered by the strength of collective bargaining agreements, workers not only achieved economic security but also forged a thriving middle class. Beyond financial stability, secure employment opportunities also served as a scaffolding upon which workers constructed their identities. They found purpose, belonging, and self-worth in their roles as workers. Thus, the post-war compromise exemplifies a successful reimagining and reconstruction of work that turned the ruins of an outdated industrial system into a foundation for prosperity and worker security.

While many manufacturing workers perceived the post-war compromise as a long-term promise, the post-war industrial boom proved to be fleeting and began to crumble as global economic forces shaped by neoliberalism reshaped the industrial landscape once more. Coinciding with globalization and the onset of increased capital mobility, corporations began to relocate their production to regions with lower labour costs and fewer regulatory constraints, leading to the unravelling of industrial facilities and manufacturing jobs in Canada. In Ontario's rust belt, abandoned factories serve as stark reminders of a bygone era. High and Lewis (2007)

documented these physical ruins in their study of Sturgeon Falls, Ontario, where the closure of the local paper mill left behind not just an empty industrial complex, but also a community grappling with the loss of its economic anchor. They describe how the abandoned mill became a powerful symbol of industrial decline, standing as a reminder of the community's lost prosperity and identity. But the ruins of Canada's industrial past are not just physical; they are also evident in the erosion of stable, well-paying blue-collar jobs, the weakening of unions, and the disruption of intergenerational patterns of employment that once defined many working-class communities. As workers continue to confront the "ruins" left by globalization, technological changes, and shifting economic paradigms and priorities, the post-war experience prompts us to consider how we might continue to reimagine and reconstruct our economic and social fabric. It challenges us to envision new forms of work, new social contracts, and new relationships between labour, capital, and the state that can address the needs of workers in our rapidly changing world.

The Established Literature on Manufacturing Decline

The interdisciplinary field of deindustrialization studies has generated substantial international scholarship examining the effects of factory closure and manufacturing job loss on displaced workers, their families, and communities. Pioneering works include Jahoda et al.'s (1933/1971) foundational study of unemployment, Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) *The Deindustrialization of America*, Dudley's (1994) *The End of the Line* on the Kenosha auto plant closure, Cowie and Heathcott's (2003) *Beyond the Ruins: The Meanings of Deindustrialization*, Linkon and Russo's (2002) on community identity in Youngstown, Walley's (2013) *Exit Zero* on South Chicago, Milkman's (1997) examination of former GM plant workers, and High's (2018) *One Job Town:*

Work, Memory, and Betrayal in Northern Ontario. These studies extend structural analyses of 'how' and 'why' factories close to consider the lived realities of industrial displacement. Across this body of research, several key problem areas and outcomes are well established. While I offer a more comprehensive review of this literature in Chapter 2, it is worth noting here that job displacement due to factory closure can have long-term and uneven economic and health consequences for workers as well as implications for union density and the labour movement. First, job displacement due to factory closures has long-term and uneven economic consequences: displaced workers often face lasting income reductions (Jacobson et al., 1993), with older, less-educated, and racialized workers disproportionately affected. Second, job loss produces significant health consequences for workers who experience the impact, including hypertension, stroke risk, sleep disruptions (Noelke & Avendano, 2015; Silva et al., 2021; Tian et al., 2018), depression, anxiety, and elevated suicide risk (Anaf et al., 2013; Classen & Dunn, 2012). These health impacts vary by gender and other social positions (Acevedo et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2017; Monsivais et al., 2015). Third, factory closure destabilize work/er[1] and community identities. Cowie and Heathcott (2003) describe deindustrialization as "the dissolution of culture…and the betrayal of [workers'] trust by those whose decisions shaped their fate" (p. 5). Research documents how displacement fractures social ties and erodes

[1] Throughout this dissertation, I differentiate between "occupational identity" and "work/er identity" as distinct but related sociological concepts. By occupational identity, I refer to how individuals understand themselves in relation to specific types of work, including the skills, knowledge, and communities associated with particular occupations (Ibarra, 1999). This contrasts with my use of "work/er identity" to capture both how individuals relate to work itself as an activity and meaning-making process (work identity) and how they understand themselves as part of a broader collective of labourers positioned within economic and power relations (worker identity) (Buroway, 1979). I strategically employ these terms in place of "professional identity" due to its implicit reinforcement of status hierarchies and social closures (Larson, 1979), except where I intentionally engage with this concept to analyze how participants use professional identity claims within specific contexts.

communal bonds, while also reshaping attachments to place, class, and nation (Strangleman, 2007; Walley, 2013). Finally, factory closures contribute to declining union density and power. As unionized jobs disappear, declining membership weakens unions' financial resources, bargaining capacity, and political influence (Dupuis et al., 2020).

The Contemporary Urban Gap

Although the scholarship on deindustrialization and job displacement is extensive, important gaps persist in our understanding of contemporary deindustrialization, particularly in the urban context. First, much of the literature is retrospective, concentrating on the major waves of deindustrialization in the 1970s through the 1990s. Fewer studies capture how workers experience closures in the present, as they navigate them in real time within the contemporary landscape of globalization, financialization, and ongoing economic volatility.

Second, there are notable geographic limitations. Studies of deindustrialization more often focus on single-industry communities, such as mine or mill towns, where, when their principal employer leaves town, they experience total economic devastation and struggle to recover. In contrast, there is comparatively little research on closures in large, economically diverse urban centers like Toronto. The presence of varied industries in such cities can obscure the persistence of manufacturing decline and the specific vulnerabilities of displaced workers within broader narratives of urban growth and prosperity.

Third, there are analytical gaps. Displaced workers are frequently treated as a homogenous category—an assumption reflected in many policy frameworks as well—with limited attention to how social locations shape experiences of closure and possibilities for resistance. Even critical scholarship from industrial sociology and labour studies has

undertheorized how closure processes materialize worker subjectivities or how displacement is felt and circulated amongst the worker body and bodies of workers in ways that are shaped by social positioning.

Research Aims, Objectives, and Questions

This study addresses the temporal, geographic, and analytical gaps identified in the literature by examining workers' experiences of factory closure in the GTA in 2019, thereby offering closer proximity to contemporary processes of deindustrialization and worker displacement within current economic conditions, social safety nets, and labour market realities in an urban metropolitan context. Building on the understanding that factory closures destabilize and often necessitate the reconfiguration of workers' identities, work processes, and relationships both within and beyond the factory setting, this dissertation investigates the closure of three factories as a lived experience of disaster and transformation, examining workers' struggles, reflections, and attempts at rebuilding and reinvention within industrial ruin spaces. This study considers workers' activities, interactions, and sense-making processes to understand how displaced workers both affect and are affected by factory closure and job displacement policies and procedures, actively engaging in remaking their work identities and relationships while simultaneously contending with the structural constraints of a changing industrial and labour market.

Overall, this study aims to inform more equitable and inclusive approaches to managing industrial change, supporting displaced workers, and reimagining the future of work in post-industrial urban contexts by elevating the perspectives and knowledges of displaced workers.

This study was motivated by three primary aims, each of which corresponds to a guiding research question.

The first aim is to capture and analyze how displaced workers describe and make sense of factory closure, recognizing their narratives as crucial perspectives in discussions of manufacturing decline. With this aim, I strive to detail workers' verbalizations of factory closure events and the meanings they ascribe to them, moving beyond factual events to understand how these closures resonate in workers' lives. Specifically, I aim to identify the events that workers highlight as particularly significant to their experience of displacement, paying particular attention to the evolution of their self-described emotional reactions and identities. This analysis seeks to identify emerging possibilities for transforming and reimagining work, life, and organizing from workers' experiences throughout the closure process.

The second aim focuses on investigating how displaced workers respond to an announced factory closure through their everyday activities and interactions, viewing these responses as expressions of agency that could reshape industrial practices and our understanding of job displacement and unemployment. Through this aim, I explore workers' relationships with ideas and with others that define their identities and identification with closure events. I seek to understand how individual experiences of closure coalesce into collective actions or inactions, recognizing these as insights that could inform more inclusive approaches to organizing during periods of industrial change. By examining how workers interact with and modify their attachments to ideas, objects, and others, I aim to reveal how these relationships both shape and are shaped by the experience of factory closure.

The third aim of this study is to consider how displaced workers' social identities and backgrounds influence their experiences and responses to factory closures, acknowledging that job displacement is not a one-size-fits-all experience but is influenced by intersecting factors. I seek to expose the underlying structures of privilege and marginalization that inform workers' experiences of factory closures. By examining how various intersecting social identities and backgrounds create unique experiences of job displacement, I aim to identify patterns of advantages and disadvantages. Importantly, this research approaches these diverse experiences not just as problems to be addressed, but as valuable perspectives that could inform a reimagining of both manufacturing work and unemployment itself.

Through these three interconnected aims, this dissertation is anchored in the following core research questions:

1) How do displaced workers describe and make sense of factory closures? What meaning(s) do workers assign to closure events? How do workers' emotions and identities evolve as they navigate factory closures?

2) How do displaced workers respond to and contest announced factory closures through: (i) their everyday activities and interactions; (ii) collective in/actions; (iii) interactions with and alterations to their attachments to ideas, objects, and others?

3) How do displaced workers' social locations influence their experiences of and responses to factory closures, and how do power dynamics in relation to workers' social location impact these experiences and responses?

Key Findings

I identified six central insights about how workers experience factory closure. First, announcement practices materialize displaced worker subjectivity. Workers are "hailed" (Althusser, 1970/2014) into particular subject positions—as threatening, peripheral, or invisible—through specific corporate and media practices that shape their subsequent responses and possibilities for action. Every worker interviewed spoke at great length about the announcement as a pivotal moment. Yet, existing scholarship has not thoroughly examined its role in initiating processes of emotional labour, othering, and sense-making among workers. Second, workers actively make meaning of closure events using embodied knowledge. Rather than passively receiving closure news, workers draw on their experiential understanding of work, economy, and place to construct sophisticated analyses of capital flight and government complicity. Third, displacement generates affective circulation. Emotions do not remain contained within individual workers but circulate through objects (severance packages, pension agreements, caution tape) and relationships, transforming as they move and accumulating different charges based on workers' social positions. Fourth, workers respond through multiple forms of resistance shaped by union context and social position. Resistance ranges from wildcat strikes to counter-narratives, but workers' participation is fundamentally shaped by intersecting positions of gender, tier status, seniority, and economic precarity that create distinct conflicts and possibilities. Fifth, workers maintain or intensify work identity performances. Despite displacement's destabilizing effects, workers demonstrate remarkable resilience in preserving their sense of self as workers, particularly around work ethic and gendered performances of industrial labour. Sixth, institutional power holders mobilize temporal control through

production and information acceleration and deceleration as a specific form of power. Companies and unions manipulate time through information control, creating temporal disruptions that complicate workers' ability to plan and respond collectively. This contemporaneous approach captures how the cadence of information dissemination and the pace of employment terminations actively shape workers' acceptance of the impending change as well as their capacity to envision post-closure futures.

Together, these findings establish that factory closures are social processes that unfold through time, are mediated by intersecting inequalities, and are suffused with affect. These insights highlight how workers experience both loss and possibility, and how closures reshape attachments, identities, and imagined futures.

Contribution to Research

While substantial scholarship exists on workers' experiences of industrial closure, this study's temporal proximity to contemporary deindustrialization processes and focus on urban rather than rural contexts addresses critical gaps in our understanding of how manufacturing decline continues to reshape workers' lives in major metropolitan centers. Given Toronto's position as a major metropolitan center with diverse economic sectors, this study provides important insights into how industrial workers experience closure when they are not the dominant employment base. Displaced urban manufacturing workers can be marginalized not only economically but culturally and politically within city centers that render industrial labour less visible.

To examine these contemporary urban experiences of closure, this study uniquely combines Feminist Political Economy (FPE) and Affect Theory frameworks to theorize agency

during factory closures as simultaneously constrained by structural conditions and expressed through embodied, collective affective practices. Unlike economistic approaches that reduce closures to financial metrics or medical/psychological studies that individualize workers' reactions, this theoretical synthesis explores how social and political processes intertwine with affective dimensions to influence workers' experiences across multiple dimensions of identity and social positioning. Specifically, this framework considers how institutional constraints (e.g., labour market policies, corporate governance) interact with workers' affective responses (e.g., anger, solidarity) to produce differentiated experiences based on gender, age, and class positions, among others.

Within this framework, this study introduces a novel analytical approach by examining affect circulation during factory closures. While existing studies such as Arena et al.'s (2022) work on the embodied experiences of unemployment have highlighted the importance of affective dimensions in job loss, and Strangleman's (2007) examination of nostalgia in deindustrialized communities acknowledges workers' emotional attachments to work and workplaces, neither explores how these affects move and transform throughout displacement processes or influence collective experiences. This study extends these insights by specifically tracing how affects circulate among workers, objects, and others during the closure process, establishing how emotional responses to job displacement operate as collective rather than merely individual experiences that shape both meaning-making and resistance practices.

Building on previous findings, this study also examines several specific aspects of factory closures that workers themselves identified as particularly significant. For instance, in the interviews for this study, every worker spoke at great length and in vivid detail about the

closure announcement, positioning it as a pivotal point in their displacement experience. While previous research on factory closures has acknowledged the announcement phase of factory closures, it has not thoroughly examined its impact on workers' experiences and responses. For example, Hansson and Wigblad (2006) examined how announcements affect workers' productivity, while Vickers and Parris (2007) briefly noted the influence of announcement methods on workers' initial reactions. However, these studies do not provide an analysis of how the announcement itself frames displaced workers or coordinates their responses. The present study addresses this gap by emphasizing the role of the closure announcement in initiating processes of emotional labour, "othering," and sense-making among workers.

In addition, this study contributes to the literature on worker resistance and solidarity (see, for example, Blyton & Jenkins, 2013; Gibbs & Kerr, 2022; Turner & O'Sullivan, 2013) by critically examining the tensions that can arise in solidarity-building efforts. Specifically, this study documents how decades of concession bargaining in collective agreements, which create tiered employment systems, shape differential experiences of factory closure. Displaced workers with varying wage scales, benefits, and seniority protections experience closure announcements, severance processes, and post-closure transitions differently, which complicate solidarity-building efforts. Less scholarly attention has been given to cases where solidarity is fractured or contested during factory closures, despite increasing structural factors creating uneven impacts that can divide workers' interests and responses. This study highlights the narratives of workers who find themselves at the margins of mass actions to suggest that their shifting affective connections and attachments also influence their participation in resistance activities. Workers' willingness to engage in collective action is shaped by structural

factors such as job market conditions and union resources, as well as their dynamic affective investments in particular relationships and conceptions of work and workplaces.

Positionality Statement

My personal experience as a corporate account manager with an Employee Assistance Program, which coincided with the 2008/09 stock market crash and subsequent economic recession, shapes my perspective on factory closures and motivates this critical examination of workers' experiences. During my eight-year tenure between 2005 and 2013, I managed a portfolio of largely manufacturing corporate customers. My responsibilities included visiting sites undergoing mass layoffs or closure, where I presented to workers and management teams on managing stress post-announcement. Nearly 15 years later, I still have vivid memories of the despondent faces I witnessed during these visits.

While ostensibly providing displaced workers with emotional support, I observed that companies frequently utilized Employee Assistance Programs as a management tool for "handling" workers' reactions during organizational changes. The presentations I delivered included slides coaching workers to develop personal strategies for "bouncing back" while entirely obscuring the conditions that necessitated such bouncing in the first place. I remain uneasy with the prevailing emphasis on equipping displaced workers with the tools to "cope" with impending job loss, an approach I find misdirected.

My Employee Assistance Program background initially oriented my research interests toward understanding the social organization of stress management during factory closures. However, as I discuss in more detail in the methodology chapter, workers' framings of their experiences ultimately guided the direction of this research. The current study, while not an

evaluation of Employee Assistance Programs or similar services, is inspired by my ongoing critique of the norms governing responses to workplace closures and my curiosity about workers' experiences within these frameworks. As I draft this dissertation, I am mindful of my own bias: the conviction that factory closures demand collective social responses rather than individual-level solutions. I contend that displaced workers could benefit the most from developing collective responses and resistance to workplace closures, which are otherwise portrayed as inevitable.

Definitions of Terms

To establish a clear understanding of the concepts central to this study, I offer the following list of key terms and their specific uses:

***Work*:** The concept of "work" remains in a state of conceptual struggle. A central sociological debate examines whether domestic labour, caregiving, emotional labour, and community-building activities qualify as 'legitimate' work despite their historical exclusion from economic accounting (Folbre, 2001; Waring, 1999). Restrictive definitions limit work to paid employment within formal labour markets, privileging activities that generate direct exchange value. More expansive interpretations emphasize the purposeful transformation of materials, information, or social conditions, focusing on effort expended rather than its market recognition (Sennett, 2008). Arendt (1958/2018) made an important philosophical distinction between 'labour' (activities that sustain biological life) and 'work' (activities that create durable objects that can outlast their creators), a conceptual separation that continues to influence the categorization of productive activity. The question of what counts as work matters as its

definition determines which activities receive social recognition, compensation, and protection through policy (Fraser, 2016; Weeks, 2011).

I adopt a feminist interpretation of "work," encompassing all effort-requiring activities, including and beyond paid employment. Effortful activities could include unpaid labour, such as caregiving, managing appointments, reading contracts, seeking information, and managing household finances. This definition deliberately extends beyond conventional market-based employment to recognize forms of labour historically rendered invisible by traditional economic frameworks. By challenging the artificial separation between "productive" and "reproductive" labour, I can better recognize and provide an accounting of the various activities with which displaced workers engage during factory closures.

***Power*:** Different sociological theoretical traditions emphasize different mechanisms and sources through which power shapes social relations. As a mechanism, theorists differently understand power as functioning through coercion, authority, negotiation, and/or discipline. These mechanisms draw on distinct sources of power: economic resources, institutional positions, and knowledge production.

One theoretical tradition locates power in material and economic relations, where control over capital and means of production enables the dominant class to dictate labour conditions and resource distribution. Developed through Marx's (1867/1978b) analysis of class domination, this materialist approach identifies economic coercion as the primary mechanism through which power operates in capitalist societies. While this perspective emphasizes structural constraints inherent in capitalism, Marx also recognized the role of class consciousness and collective agency in challenging these structures. Unlike purely voluntaristic

perspectives that overemphasize individual free will and choice while downplaying structural limitations, class-based analyses suggest that material control constitutes a fundamental source of power that significantly shapes, albeit does not wholly determine, individual and collective action.

Another theoretical approach frames power through the primary mechanisms of discourse and knowledge production. Developed through Foucault's (1977/1995) analysis of disciplinary society, this tradition considers how certain ways of thinking and speaking become accepted as truth while others are rendered unintelligible. Within this framework, power derives not from material resources but from the authority to establish epistemological frameworks that determine what counts as legitimate knowledge, including how reality should be interpreted. Crucially, Foucault understood power as productive insofar as it can create subjects, knowledges, and possibilities distributed throughout society rather than concentrated in centralized institutions. Discourse shapes how we understand social events by presenting specific interpretations as common sense rather than as contested perspectives.

A third tradition analyses power through cultural reproduction that legitimizes existing hierarchies. Advanced through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, this approach understands power as embedded in cultural practices that naturalize social hierarchies through mechanisms of consent rather than overt force. Dominant groups secure the participation of subordinate populations by establishing cultural leadership that frames particular interests as universal concerns. Media, educational institutions, and other cultural industries serve as crucial sources of power by distributing symbolic resources that make inequalities appear natural or inevitable. Unlike purely materialist traditions that emphasize economic coercion and

conflict, this perspective suggests that the ruling class secures authority by controlling cultural institutions that produce meanings and shape consciousness and identity. Significantly, Gramsci recognized that hegemony is never complete; hegemony requires constant maintenance through coercion and consent, contested through counter-hegemonic struggles.

In the context of factory closure, I conceptualize power through an interconnected theoretical framework that primarily emphasizes class relations while recognizing how power circulates through discourse and is reproduced through habitus. At the personal level, power involves the capacity of various actors such as management, labour unions, policy makers, and workers to influence decisions and outcomes within the structural constraints of capitalism. These constraints shape but do not determine the economic, social, and daily aspects of displaced workers' lives. Systemically, my analysis foregrounds how capitalist class structures establish material conditions that enable dominant groups to dictate labour conditions and resource distribution. Simultaneously, I attend to how these power relations are normalized, legitimized, and contested through discursive practices that present specific (and different) interpretations of factory closures that, at times, naturalize inequalities along the lines of gender, class, and age. This approach allows me to analyze how power operates not only through economic coercion but also through the diffuse mechanisms by which certain ways of understanding deindustrialization become accepted as truth that can become embodied in workers' lived experiences, routines, and internalized worldviews.

***Alienation*:** The most influential formulation of alienation emerged in Marx's early writings (1844/1977). In Marx's analysis, alienation represents a separation of workers from fundamental aspects of their humanity under capitalist production relations. This encompasses

four interrelated dimensions: alienation from the product of labour, from the labour process itself, from one's essential human nature, and from other humans (Ollman, 1976).

While Marx grounded alienation in material economic relations, subsequent theorists have expanded the concept. For example, Durkheim (1897/1951) reconceptualized alienation as "anomie"—a condition of normlessness arising from rapid social change and inadequate social integration. The Frankfurt School, particularly Marcuse (1964), extended alienation to encompass psychological and cultural dimensions, examining how consumer capitalism creates artificial needs that estrange individuals from authentic existence. Seeman (1959) operationalized alienation for empirical research, identifying distinct components: powerlessness, meaninglessness, normlessness, isolation, and self-estrangement.

For this study, I follow a primarily Marxist understanding of "alienation" as the structural disconnection workers experience from their labour within capitalist production, exacerbated by job loss. My definition encompasses workers' inability to direct their productive activities, define their relationships with others, and own the items produced by their labour. While I maintain this Marxist foundation, I also draw on Durkheimian insights to examine how workers experience normlessness when disconnected from the occupational communities that provided social integration and identity. This combined approach allows me to analyze both material and social dimensions of estrangement in deindustrialization contexts.

***Reworlding and World-making*:** Borrowing from Donna Haraway, "reworlding" and "world-making" challenge deterministic views of social change by emphasizing how subjects and communities actively and creatively shape and reconfigure their lived realities. Reworlding involves a tension between restoring lost worlds and creating entirely new ones. Other scholars

have expanded Haraway's conceptualization to examine how marginalized communities respond to crises (for example, see Tsing, 2015). Some scholars emphasize the discursive dimensions of world-making, focusing on how narratives and symbolic representations constitute alternate realities (Butler, 2016; Gibson-Graham, 2006), while others highlight material practices through which worlds are physically remade (Blaser, 2013; Povinelli, 2016).

I employ "reworlding" and "world-making" to examine how displaced workers and communities actively reimagine and rebuild their social, economic, and ecological relationships during factory closure. This framework helps me think through workers' responses as creative interventions that craft alternative futures, albeit within constrained circumstances.

***Identity*:** As a concept, identity has its foundations in psychology. While once thought of as a relatively stable core achievement of stage-based development (i.e., something one "has"), more contemporary psychological conceptualizations recognize identity as fluid (i.e., something one "does"), multiple, and continuously renegotiated. Sociological perspectives of identity range from structural approaches that emphasize how institutional arrangements and social positions constrain identity formation to interactionist views that understand the emergent nature of identity through everyday social encounters and role performances. Across both disciplines, contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes identity as simultaneously personal and social, shaped by both individual agency and broader power relations that determine which identities receive recognition and validation.

In this study, I approach identity as a fluid and evolving conception of self that workers actively negotiate through their interactions with others, ideas, and objects. This approach recognizes that displaced workers' understandings of themselves are not static but

continuously disrupted and reconstituted through their experiences, roles, and relationships during factory closure. This perspective considers both the constraints workers confront when occupational anchors become unavailable and the ways they might forge new self-understandings within changing work environments and contexts.

Subjectivity: While identity refers to workers' self-understanding and performance of particular roles, subjectivity encompasses the broader processes through which individuals are constituted as subjects within systems of power and knowledge. Classical liberal philosophy positioned subjectivity as autonomous rational agency, emphasizing individual free will and choice. This individualistic approach was fundamentally challenged by Marxist analysis, which examined how capitalist social relations shape worker consciousness and subjectivity through material conditions, where subjects develop either false consciousness that obscures their class interests or class consciousness that enables collective resistance (1867/1978b). Here, the primary mechanism of subject formation operates through material relations and ideological processes. Post-structuralist theory offered a different account of subject formation through Foucault's (1982) analysis of how subjectivity is produced through discursive practices and knowledge production rather than primarily economic relations. While sharing with Marxism the understanding that subjectivity is constructed rather than pre-given, Foucault emphasized how subjects are constituted through disciplinary practices and normalization procedures that operate through surveillance and self-regulation rather than through class position. In this framework, subjects are created through knowledge categories and disciplinary techniques. Contemporary feminist and critical theorists have further developed these insights, with

scholars such as Butler theorizing how subjects are formed through iterative performative practices that both subordinate individuals and create conditions for agency.

In this study, I distinguish between identity and subjectivity as related but distinct analytical concepts, drawing primarily from the Marxist-Feminist theoretical lineage to examine how material conditions fundamentally shape worker subjectivity during factory closures. I also borrow post-structuralist insights to analyze how normalization procedures complement economic mechanisms of subject formation. This distinction allows me to analyze both the structural forces that attempt to constitute workers as particular kinds of subjects during factory closures and their simultaneous engagement in identity work to maintain coherent self-narratives within those constraints.

***Affect*:** Similar to identity, affect has conceptual roots in psychology, particularly in early psychological theories dealing with emotion and feeling states as innate biological responses. Based on this tradition, affect has traditionally been operationalized as the observable expression of emotion or mood states. However, sociological and cultural studies engagements with affect have moved beyond behaviourist frameworks to foreground the body as a site of knowledge production. This scholarship increasingly recognizes affect as pre-cognitive embodied intensities that flow between bodies, objects, and physical environments, thereby challenging the notion that affective experiences are contained within discrete subjects.

In this study, I draw primarily from Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) understanding of affect as powerful moments of contact and interaction circulating between people, physical environments, and material objects during factory closure. These experiences often manifest as felt bodily sensations or atmospheric moods rather than clearly defined emotions. This

approach allows me to capture how workers' affective experiences shape their responses to displacement, their connections or attachments to ideas, objects, and others, and potential transformations during factory closure.

Chapter Structure and Descriptions

This dissertation is organized into six chapters, each exploring different aspects of factory closures and workers' experiences, from policy analysis to theoretical frameworks and empirical findings. In Chapter 1, "Framing Factory Closure Experiences and Outcomes: Theoretical Orientations," I outline the theoretical frameworks guiding this study. I begin by introducing FPE as a lens through which to examine power dynamics in working relations, exposing the often-obscured hierarchies that can shape workers' experiences of displacement and factory closures. Within this framework, I engage with the concept of intersectionality to consider how intersecting oppressions and privileges influence workers' job displacement experiences and outcomes. Building on this foundation, I then explore complementary theoretical approaches to power beyond FPE's structural analysis, including Foucault's theorization of power as diffuse and productive, operating through discourse and knowledge production. I also consider Bourdieu's ideas about how dominant narratives become embodied in people's everyday habits and outlooks, examining how specific ways of understanding job displacement due to factory closure become taken for granted and shape workers' experiences and responses to these events. I then shift the discussion to examine the possible utility of Affect Theory for revealing how workers both affect and are affected by factory closure. This theoretical approach positions affect as a social phenomenon shaped by interactions with objects and others, rather than as an internal trait or state. Following this, I explore how

identity (re)construction processes specific to gender and work ethic unfold in the context of job displacement, analyzing how workers negotiate their identities when factory closures disrupt traditional sources of gendered work identity. I explain how each of these theoretical frameworks can help us understand unemployment, deconstruct capitalist working relationships, and frame worker identity and agency, particularly during crises such as job displacement due to factory closures. I conclude the chapter by examining the relationship between affective scripts and workers' possibly evolving identities admist industrial changes.

In Chapter 2, "End of the Line: Plant Closure Policies, Procedures, and Outcomes," I synthesize the findings of relevant sociological literature for how job displacement (re)shapes workers' re-employment and economic prospects, sense of identity, and health outcomes. I then critically examine employment and labour policies in Ontario and Canada, dissecting how the policy mechanisms relevant to unemployment and/or mass layoffs can either soften or exacerbate the challenges of deindustrialization confronting manufacturing workers. Through this investigation of the literature, I argue that workers' experiences and outcomes of factory closure vary along lines of social differences, such as gender, race, age, class, and (dis)ability. Furthermore, I demonstrate how the sociopolitical economic context can exert a coordinating effect on workers' activities during and following factory closure. I conclude the chapter by considering the historical and contemporary strategies employed by workers and unions in response to factory closures and emphasizing the dynamics of power and resistance.

In Chapter 3, "Knowing Job Displacement: Epistemology, Methodology, and Methods for Studying Workers' Experiences of a Factory Closure," I bridge feminist principles from theory to epistemology and methodology. The chapter challenges conventional positivist understandings

of authority by examining how feminist standpoint epistemology reframes who has the expertise to "know" about job displacement due to factory closure. I then present the study's main objectives and research questions, establishing the foundation for my qualitative approach, which emphasizes diverse perspectives. I argue that incorporating multiple viewpoints yields a more comprehensive understanding of factory closures and their impacts. The chapter also details the data collection methods, including in-depth, semi-structured interviews and reflexive journaling, and the steps I undertake to analyze displaced workers' experiences while considering how these techniques address power dynamics in the research relationship.

Chapters 4 and 5 capture the findings and analysis of this study's empirical data, documenting displaced workers' various experiences of factory closure. The two analysis chapters are oriented toward distinct aspects of workers' responses. Chapter 4 examines workers' (re)actions to the announcements of factory closure, focusing on how workers *affect* closure procedures. Meanwhile, Chapter 5 focuses on how workers make sense of and are *affected by* the announcements. Together, these chapters provide an exploration of workers' affective, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses throughout the closure process.

Specifically, in Chapter 4, "'Those First Couple of Weeks Were When Things Got Really Tense:' Resisting Closures, (Re)Imagining Futures, and Recalibrating Ruptured Work-life Rhythms," I document the different announcement practices across the three sites involved in this study, analyzing how these practices socially construct displaced workers and coordinate their responses. Then I focus on workers' experiences of returning to work after the closure announcement, examining their agency, resistance, and adaptation. This chapter primarily

addresses the second research question on workers' collective actions and changing attachments to ideas, objects, and others. I explore unionized workers' resistance strategies, including wildcat strikes, slowdowns, and "sick-ins," which at times contain tensions in solidarity and inclusion. I argue that these tensions manifest as affective detachment from the union for some workers, challenging conventional narratives of labour unity. I then consider a critique offered by some workers of the absence of cross-network solidarity, positing that this shortcoming isolated workers within the union local by foreclosing opportunities for broader community coalitions. Central to the discussion is an examination of workers' counter-narratives that contest both corporate and union discourses, framing them as challenges to dominant power structures and capitalist logic. I conclude the chapter with an unexpected discussion of the temporal dimensions of closure procedures, arguing that workers experience temporal reconfigurations as both an acceleration and a deceleration of time. This temporal analysis shows how limited information can distort workers' perceptions of time and complicate their ability to plan during the closure.

In Chapter 5, "'It is Probably a Good Example of a Way Not to Handle a Crisis Situation:' Reactions, Rationalizations, and Reshaped Selves in the Shadow of a Plant Closure Announcement," I document displaced workers' interpretations and emotional reactions to the announcement of a factory closure. This chapter primarily responds to the first research question. I start by examining how workers make sense of the announced closure, including the meanings they attach to the events of the closure and the responsibilities they assign to the various actors involved. The chapter then considers the circulation of affects among workers, objects, and others. I argue that workers make sense of their affective experiences by

constructing an "other," which serves as a point of comparison for their own emotional responses. Furthermore, in this chapter, I contend that workers' sense of self, namely their work ethic and gender performances, demonstrate remarkable resilience in the face of job displacement, despite the emotionally disruptive and destabilizing nature of the factory closure experience.

I conclude with Chapter 6, "From Findings to Futures: A Discussion on Job Displacement Policies, Practices, and Research Prospects," in which I synthesize the study's insights and project them forward. I begin the chapter with workers' "final words," using their reflections as a springboard to explore potential paths for collective action and care. I then present policy recommendations for unions and governments[2] grounded in the study's findings. The discussion extends to resources for tending to displaced workers' well-being, addressing the often-overlooked emotional dimension of job displacement. The chapter concludes by proposing directions for future research on manufacturing work, displacement, and displaced workers and outlines a prospective pathway for scholars in this field.

[2] I deliberately omit recommendations for employers. While worker narratives could theoretically inform employer practices, this study intentionally redirects focus toward collective actors (unions and governments) as primary agents of worker protection and advocacy. This choice acknowledges the structural power imbalances inherent in employer-employee relations during factory closures, where corporate interests frequently supersede worker welfare despite earnest corporate social responsibility claims. Furthermore, several workers in this study consistently expressed skepticism about employers' willingness to prioritize their needs absent external pressure, suggesting that meaningful change requires intervention through organized labour and robust policy frameworks.

Chapter 1: Framing Factory Closure Experiences and Outcomes: Theoretical Orientations

Chapter Introduction

This chapter outlines the key theoretical perspectives I use to examine displaced workers' experiences of factory closure. Following academic convention, this chapter appears before the methods and findings sections; however, it is important to note that these theoretical frameworks were not predetermined guides for my research. Instead, they emerged organically through my immersion in both the literature and the data itself. Following a grounded theory methodology, I approached this study with an openness to let the data speak, allowing theoretical concepts to surface through iterative analysis rather than imposing existing frameworks at the outset. Therefore, the theories discussed in this chapter represent the conceptual tools that ultimately proved most useful for understanding my findings, though they were refined throughout the research process rather than established a priori. I present these theoretical frameworks at the beginning of this dissertation to provide readers with the necessary conceptual vocabulary to understand my subsequent analysis and enable a more coherent narrative that connects findings to broader theoretical conversations in the field.

The theoretical frameworks discussed throughout this chapter offer conceptual and analytical approaches that respond to and are informed by the research questions for this study. Simply stated, this study examines how an announcement of a mass layoff or factory closure affects displaced workers. That is, how do workers respond to and make sense of factory closure? In what ways do they resist or collaborate with closure processes? How does displacement shape their everyday interactions and identities, including their identity as a

worker? As with the theoretical frameworks themselves, these questions evolved iteratively throughout the research process, with each informing the development of the other.

The principal theoretical framework on which I ground this dissertation is FPE. I begin the chapter with an orienting discussion of FPE and the influence of Marxist scholarship therein. Marxist political economy has long been used as a lens through which to explain crises and conditions of un/employment into which labourers enter for survival under economic capitalism. Like Marxist Political Economy, FPE is interested in the dynamics of power within working conditions and labour relationships, including how workers can be alienated from the processes and outcomes of their labour. It also considers the possibilities for resistance. Building on this foundation, I then explore complementary theoretical approaches to power beyond FPE's structural analysis. Drawing from Foucault's theorization of power as diffuse and productive, operating through discourse and knowledge production, and Bourdieu's ideas about how these dominant narratives becomed embodied in people's everyday habits and outlooks, I examine how certain ways of understanding job loss due to factory closure become taken for granted and shape workers' experiences and responses to these events.

Under the umbrella of FPE, I focus on the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of social reproduction, reworlding, and intersectionality. I begin with an introduction to social reproduction as a framework for understanding and examining the tasks that go into sustaining life and (re)producing workers. In the context of job displacement, a social reproduction lens can shed light on displaced workers' im/material life-sustaining needs and the people, organizations, or communities who provide this necessary reproductive support. I then incorporate Haraway's (2016) concept of reworlding to examine how displaced workers actively

reshape their understandings of work, community, and identity during industrial change. This perspective acknowledges workers' agency in reconstructing what comes next out of the "ruins" of a factory closure, possibly reimagining labour relations and manufacturing practices. I follow this with a discussion of intersectional analysis in FPE, namely, how intersecting oppressions and privileges associated with identity concepts, such as gender, class, and immigration status, shape people's lives, including their experiences of job loss and outcomes of displacement.

I then turn to the theory of affective labour to describe how displaced workers *affect* and are *affected by* factory closures. The theory provides a window into the various affective encounters against which workers "brush" (Seigworth & Pedwell, 2023) and how workers mobilize their affects during factory closures. I begin the section with an overview of emotion and affect as forms of "immaterial" labour that contribute productive value to capital in both waged and social reproductive work. I explain how affect theory, unlike some psychological framings of emotion, argues that interactions between objects and others shape feelings.

I conclude the chapter by integrating elements of identity theory to consider how various events throughout a factory closure can affect workers' individual and social identities, including the groups to which they belong and their perceptions of being a "worker" while displaced. My dissertation builds on limited scholarship on the operation of affect and affective scripts during factory closures, particularly as it relates to shifting work-related identities under neoliberal capitalism.

Looking at Factory Closures through a Marxist-Feminist Political Economy Lens

Framing Unemployment

Of Karl Marx's many contributions to political economy, perhaps the most relevant to this dissertation is his theory of unemployment as a design feature of capitalism. Unlike a neoclassical explanation that describes the phenomenon as imperfections of the labour market, Marx (1847/1978a) argues that unemployment arises through the class relations particular to capitalism, and the commodification of labour power within capitalism. Specifically, as productivity "in established markets becomes very high [from] the increased use of sophisticated machinery, purchased with the profits already made…a rise in the organic composition of capital [follows, and] manufacturing unemployment rises" (Rigakos & Ergul, 2011, p. 337). According to Marx, some labourers are made relatively superfluous in this process, thereby creating a surplus "pool" of unemployed, available labourers—which he refers to as the Industrial Reserve Army (IRA)[3]. Even as labourers are pushed out of employment, they remain beholden and subordinate to capital owners within a capitalist system that requires workers to find a new "buyer" for their labour in order to survive. Marx (1847/1978b) asserts that displaced workers still:

[3] A small subset of social science research applies Marx's theory of IRA to explain contemporary employment precarity. Some of these studies document the continued existence and function of an IRA by noting labour market trends including high(er) rates of unemployment among certain groups of workers, such as youth . These studies additionally document the myriad institutions, including policing, that support the construction of a nimble pool of available workers (Prendergast, 2020; Rigakos & Ergul, 2011). For example, in interviews with unemployed youth, Prendergast (2020) observed "discipline by welfare stigma" wherein youth self-govern to "improve" their behaviours and attitudes wherever unemployment presents itself. However, there is some debate surrounding the application of IRA to account for labour market inequalities. Studies that solely apply the definition of IRA as a means of illustrating ongoing labour reserves, have come under criticism for abandoning an analysis of capitalism. Without including a class analysis as Marx intended, the question of subordination in capital accumulation is left unanswered (Harding, 1991; Smith, 1987).

> "belong to capital [even] before he has sold himself to the capitalist. His economic bondage is both at once mediated through, and concealed by, the periodic renewal of the act by which he sells himself, his change of masters, and the oscillations in the market-price of his labour" (p. 724).

Deconstructing Capitalist Working Relationships

Marxist theory clarifies the inherent conflicts between capital and labour that shape not only factory work but factory closure processes as well. Capitalists and labourers experience different levels of vulnerability from the work precarity endemic to capitalism. Incompatible interests between capital and labour show up as the precarity of one group (i.e., labourers) securing the stability of the other (i.e., capitalists). Marx (1847/1978a) tells us that the capitalist continuously vies to "reduce wages to their physical minimum, and to extend the working day to its physical maximum, while the working man constantly presses in the opposite direction" (p. 74). Referring to discrepancies in "modes of suffering," Scarry (1987) noted that work instability threatens workers' physical existence and fundamental life-making activities, such as their ability to secure food, shelter, and healthcare. The same risk does not extend to capitalists, who only suffer financial losses. To elaborate, capitalists experience losses primarily in financial terms rather than as threats to subsistence. While capitalists may experience stress or disappointment from financial losses, these impacts rarely compromise their personal subsistence, physical security, and daily life activities. Indeed, in cases of factory relocation to lower-wage regions, capitalists often enhance their wealth accumulation and financial security through reduced labour costs. This distinction reinforces Marx's analysis of the inherent power asymmetry in the capital-labour relationship, where workers must sell their labour power to survive. At the same time, capitalists only risk portions of their accumulated wealth and frequently leverage workers' vulnerability to increase their capital accumulation.

In addition to incompatible interests between capital and labour, Marx argued that capitalism transforms the relationship between workers and the products they produce until the creator ceases to be recognized as such. In earlier "primitive" states, people produced only enough artifacts (e.g., food, textiles, housing, etc.) to reproduce themselves. Namely, people used their bodies to make an object that they, in turn, used for sustenance to extend their bodily capacity and longevity. However, beginning with Feudalism and continuing under capitalism, nobles and capital owners, respectively, required people to produce beyond their subsistence, resulting in a dislocation or split from the original relationship between people and the products they created. As a result, we now have many people producing more products than is required for workers to reproduce themselves. Marx equates the difference between what people produce to reproduce themselves and what they produce beyond their subsistence as surplus value. Through capitalist class relations, which hinge on the commodification of workers' labour power, said surplus value makes up the "source of wealth for the bourgeoisie [capital owners], and the engine of the capitalist mode of production" (Rigakos & Ergul, 2011, p. 345). Through this process, workers are both alienated from their labour (as well as from themselves) and exploited by capitalists.

Resistance

While Marx highlights the structural constraints placed on workers by capitalism, he identifies explicitly the industrial proletariat as the revolutionary class capable of collective resistance against the bourgeois state (Mosk, 2021; Rigakos & Ergul, 2011). In the Communist Manifesto, Marx and Engels (1848/1964) argue that of "all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class" (p. 75), emphasizing that

this revolutionary potential is channelled most effectively through a political party that represents working-class interests. They include displaced workers within the proletariat's revolutionary potential, as their direct experience of capitalism's contradictions can sharpen class consciousness. Marx maintains that capitalism is itself an artifact/object made and remade out of human labour[4]. While capitalism can appear immutable—an inevitable endpoint in a long line of economic transformation—it instead reflects one of many possible structures for organizing the economic and political activities of society. Understanding capitalism as a social construction allows for the possibility of other "worlds" and ways of being to be constructed in its place. Indeed, at different times and in different places, capitalism takes various forms, a direct result of ongoing cooperation or contestation between humans. The vulnerability of capitalism reveals itself most clearly when workers begin to disobey or defy authority.

Marx and Engels theorized that as capitalism advances, the proletariat can develop class solidarity through their shared exploitation. As workers experience intensifying exploitation, they can recognize their shared interests, including across national boundaries. In Marx and Engels' vision, this would lead to an international workers' movement that would "raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class" and "win the battle of democracy" (p. 86). By concentrating workers in factories and urban centers, the bourgeoisie unintentionally creates the conditions for working-class organizing. They write that "with the development of industry,

[4] Much like the production of a chair, for example, Marx's theory of economic development locates historical change in the labour of workers. People actively engage in altering and producing their world by creating objects not previously outside their imaginations. Humans thus shape their own history (albeit under conditions not necessarily of their choosing) through interaction and bodily exertion, the labour and artifacts of which create humanity.

the proletariat not only increases in number; it becomes concentrated in greater masses, its strength grows, and it feels that strength more" (p. 77). The growing awareness of collective power among the proletariat presents a direct challenge to capitalist structures.

The process of workers recognizing their systemic exploitation and collective potential could "usher a series of international worker-led revolutions that would replace nation-states with a system of communist internationalism" (Mosk, 2021, p. 350). After all, workers are the "bedrock source of profit" (p. 351), and it is they, rather than an omnipotent economic system or evolutionary order, who construct, deconstruct, and can reconstruct history from any number of possible paths. This emphasis on worker agency is crucial for understanding how displaced workers might resist or transform the conditions of their displacement.

Utility of Marxist Theory in Contemporary Studies of Job Displacement

Marxist theory continues to offer valuable tools for analyzing worker resistance and activism in modern contexts of factory closure. Typically, resistance is assessed as labour militancy in the form of union membership, strikes, walkouts, etc. For example, Rigakos and Ergul (2011) found a statistically significant correlation between work interruptions, such as strikes and a reduction in exploitative wages, timing, and tempo of work conditions. Worker militancy can also take the form of workers struggling to enact protections, including legislative ones, against multi-national companies. For example, India's 2020-2021 farmers' protests demonstrated that organized resistance, even under repressive conditions, can yield tangible policy changes. Faced with laws that threatened to expose farmers to corporate exploitation, the movement mobilized tens of thousands of workers, supported by a national strike (Sorell, 2021). The sustained protests forced the government to repeal the controversial laws, showing that

persistent collective action can shape state policy directly. These examples of resistance demonstrate the utility of theories that explain how workers construct their worlds through their labour, bodies, and the relationships into which they enter. Workers consistently demonstrate attempts to redirect labour toward a reciprocal relationship between product and reproduction.

Feminist Contributions to Political Economy

Feminist political economy expands Marx's largely restrictive focus on waged work by considering other (often unwaged) effortful tasks that "produce" workers in the first place and sustain them during periods of displacement or unemployment. Retaining a focus on the material world, FPE expands Marxist class-based analysis to consider *who* performs which work roles, the ascribed value of different forms of labour, and the gendered segregation of work along classed lines (Pritlove et al., 2019). An FPE lens provides a way to examine workers' care, health, and other sustenance needs following displacement, to whom they turn for care, the scope of care practices available within different spheres and settings, and the people who provide said caring activities.

I use FPE as a guiding lens throughout this study to consider all of the "work" performed by displaced workers, their families, and community members that goes into sustaining, retraining and caring for displaced workers after a factory closure. Such effortful tasks could include activist work, family maintenance work, attending meetings and appointments, etc. In the following sections, I focus on two concepts under the FPE umbrella—namely, social reproductive labour and intersectionality—discussing how each might direct an investigation of displaced workers' needs and activities following factory closure.

Social Reproductive Theory of Labour

Waged labour under capitalism already receives criticism for failing to meet the sustenance needs of workers and their families adequately. Downward pressure on wages inherent in capitalism creates conditions whereby some workers are unable to purchase the products or services that they produce for consumption. For instance, many childcare workers and personal support workers struggle to afford quality childcare and eldercare for their own families. Instead, they might have to rely on informal care arrangements with family members, juggle work schedules, or sacrifice work hours to provide care themselves.

Feminists bring to the forefront a theory of "social reproductive labour" to account for the often invisible care work that sustains workers and communities, including during factory closures. While FPE gives equal weight to the production of goods and reproduction of labour power, they flip the script to focus first and foremost on the (re)production of workers necessary for the reproduction of the capitalist system. Bhattacharya (2017) notes that defining social reproduction is an ongoing project; she starts from Laslett and Brenner's (1989) useful demarcation of:

> the activities and attitudes, behaviours and emotions, and responsibilities and relationships directly involved in maintaining life, on a daily basis and intergenerationally. It involves various kinds of socially necessary work—mental, physical, and emotional—aimed at providing the historically and socially, as well as biologically, defined means for maintaining and reproducing the population. Among other things, social reproduction includes how food, clothing, and shelter are made available for immediate consumption, how the maintenance and socialization of children is accomplished, how care of the elderly and infirm is provided, and how sexuality is socially constructed. (p. 7)

Early feminist scholars and activists in the 1970s not only theorized about women's unpaid domestic work but also organized collective movements around these issues. For instance, in 1972, Selma James, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Brigitte Galtier, and Silvia Federici

launched the International Wages for Housework campaign. This campaign brought together women across different countries to demand recognition and compensation for domestic labour and to challenge the narrow focus on waged work in traditional labour movements. Federici was also involved in the New York Wages for Housework Committee, which engaged in collective actions of protest, consciousness-raising sessions, and public campaigns to highlight the economic value of women's unpaid work (Federici, 1975).

Contemporary economic systems still grapple with the challenge of adequately recognizing and supporting social reproductive labour. Policymakers and employers overlook or underestimate the needs of displaced workers, particularly pertaining to social reproduction. Many workers who lose their jobs require increased emotional support, healthcare, retraining, and other forms of care work. Yet, displacement policies and support systems rarely account for these expanded needs. As governments and employers increasingly shift the responsibility for meeting these expanded care needs onto individuals and families, understanding where and to whom social reproductive labour is provided becomes crucial for comprehending the full impacts of job displacement.

Where and by Whom Social Reproductive Labour is Provided

Social reproductive labour occurs across various spheres, traditionally divided among the state, the market, the community, and the household. Each sector plays a distinct role in ensuring the reproduction of the workforce and society. In the post-WWII era, the welfare state assumed a significant role in social reproduction, providing a range of services including public healthcare, education, childcare subsidies, unemployment insurance, and pensions. These state-provided services were deemed essential for maintaining a healthy, educated, and productive workforce.

Concurrently, the private sector offered supplementary services such as eldercare, primarily accessible to those with financial means. Beyond the state and market, Luxton and Bezanson (2006) remind us of the vital yet often overlooked role of community organizations and networks in sustaining social reproduction. Religious institutions, mutual aid groups, food banks, community-run safe injection sites, and local support groups, etc., provide various forms of care, often filling gaps left by state and market provisions. Like commodity production, the organization of reproductive labour across these spheres involves cooperation and conflict.

However, recent decades have witnessed a significant redistribution of these responsibilities, primarily driven by neoliberal policies and austerity measures. The retrenchment of the welfare state has led to a scaling back of many social programs and services. For instance, reforms to unemployment insurance in the 1990s tightened eligibility requirements and reduced benefit levels, leaving many displaced workers without access to this social safety net. In Ontario, the Harris government of the 1990s implemented drastic cuts to social assistance rates, reducing them by 21.6% and freezing them for years thereafter, which has had an enduring effect on low-income individuals and families (Wilson et al., 2009). These changes reflect the broader and continuing trend of downloading care responsibilities, often with disproportionate impacts on women and marginalized communities. As the state retreats from care responsibilities, it creates a vacuum increasingly filled by market-based solutions, leading to the commodification of many aspects of social reproduction (Armstrong & Braedley, 2013). Consequently, households have been compelled to shoulder a larger share of social reproductive labour, particularly those who cannot afford to purchase support services from the marketplace, disproportionately performed by women (Luxton & Bezanson, 2006).

The redistribution of care responsibilities is far from equitable across society. Socioeconomic factors such as class, gender, race, and immigration status influence a household's capacity to manage increased care demands. Higher-income families may have the means to purchase market-based care services, while lower-income families often must rely more heavily on unpaid family labour or forgo certain forms of care altogether (Evans, 1997). This stratification of access to care services threatens to exacerbate existing social inequalities.

Social Reproductive Labour Strain During Job Loss

Ruptures to employment and income exacerbate the burdens of social reproductive work necessary to care for affected workers and families. Instead of sufficient wages and income to purchase goods and services necessary for survival, more unwaged and often invisible labour is required to replenish the worker and sustain the family unit. Activities such as preparing meals at home instead of eating out, mending household items rather than replacing goods, and providing childcare or eldercare that might have previously been outsourced, now fall squarely on family members. Duffy, Corman, and Pupo (2015) document how families often engage in economic practices such as reducing consumption, seeking out free or low-cost alternatives, and relying on informal support networks to absorb the shock of job loss.

The gendered nature of this increased burden of social reproductive work during periods of job displacement cannot be overstated:

> […] Women occupy the front lines of changing family fortunes. They do this in three ways. First, women, as the traditional caregivers inside and outside family relations, are prime candidates to bear the emotional and physical care needs experienced within families by, for example, laid-off spouses, under/unemployed adult children, or aging senior family members. Second, as the primary linage between families and the consumer market, women shoulder the day-to-day budgeting and economies necessitated by insecure attachments to the labour force. Finally, it remains largely women who head the single-parent families who are particularly vulnerable to economic fragility. In sum, gender, complexly intersecting with

> race, age, immigrant status, economic moment, disability and so on, continues to mark critical fissures in our increasingly fragile families. (Duffy et al., 2015, p. 229)

Duffy et al.'s (2015) analysis stresses how job displacement not only intensifies the demands of social reproduction but also reinforces existing gender inequalities within households and society at large. The manifold ways in which women bear the brunt of economic instability resulting from job displacement, through increased caregiving, financial management, and heightened vulnerability as single parents, reveal the deeply gendered nature of the social reproduction squeeze.

The ability of displaced workers and their affected families to carry out these increased care requirements necessitates "slack resources" that many workers, particularly those enduring ongoing labour market volatility, simply do not possess as their material conditions deteriorate (Spyridakēs, 2013). The lack of a financial buffer can push vulnerable families to the brink, tipping households into poverty and social exclusion, particularly in households with a history of familial crisis. Moreover, the erosion of public services, as discussed earlier, means that families have fewer external resources to draw upon during times of crisis. The retreat of the welfare state has left many displaced workers without adequate unemployment benefits (McBride, 1992), retraining opportunities, or social services that could otherwise alleviate some of the burdens of social reproduction.

The psychological toll of job loss further compounds the strain on social reproduction during periods of non-employment. Increased stress, anxiety, and depression among displaced workers can lead to a greater need for mental health and emotional support and care, adding another layer to the already intensified care work (Brand, 2015). This emotional labour, often

invisible and unaccounted for in economic analyses, becomes a critical component of maintaining family well-being during periods of unemployment.

In this context, the concept of "social reproduction squeeze" becomes particularly relevant (Luxton & Bezanson, 2006). This squeeze occurs when the demands of social reproduction increase while the resources available to meet these demands decrease, creating a crisis point for many families facing job displacement. The long-term consequences of this squeeze can be severe, potentially leading to intergenerational transmission of poverty and disadvantage.

However, the strain on social reproduction during job loss can catalyze collective responses from affected workers and their communities. As individual households struggle to meet increased care demands with diminished resources, collective strategies can emerge. For instance, displaced workers might form mutual aid networks to share resources and labour, such as organizing community kitchens, childcare cooperatives, or skill-sharing initiatives. These collective efforts not only help to meet immediate needs but also build solidarity among affected workers. In some cases, such collective responses to social reproductive strain can evolve into more formalized organizing efforts, challenging both the conditions that led to job displacement and the inadequate support systems for displaced workers. For example, the Unemployed Workers Movement in Argentina, which emerged during the economic crisis of the early 2000s, organized collective kitchens and other mutual aid efforts that eventually became platforms for broader political actions (Motta & Nilsen, 2011).

This study focuses mainly on the emotional needs of displaced workers, examining how those needs are met (or not) and by whom. Specifically, I investigate what displaced workers

say about their emotional and mental health needs during job displacement, their sources of emotional support, and how this support is distributed among family members, colleagues and community networks, and formal systems or services, if any care is provided/received at all.

Applying an Intersectional Lens to Labour Strain

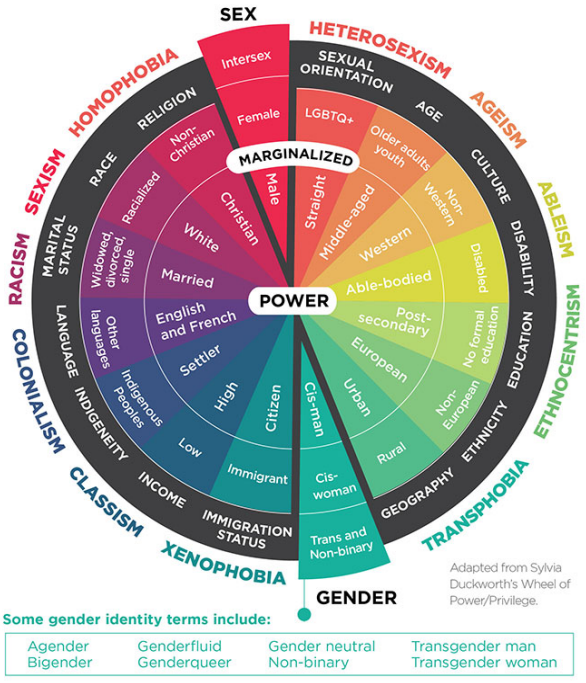
While every worker of a closing factory shares the common experience of displacement, an intersectional approach reveals how social identities shape workers' differential vulnerabilities to the impacts of factory closure. Displaced workers live with varying states of embodiment and consciousness (e.g., different physical, cognitive, and psychological capacities and illnesses), family structures, gender identities, levels of education, wealth, and other forms of differences that intersect with their experiences of employment and, in turn, displacement. Workers from the same identity "group" do not necessarily share uniform needs or experiences of discrimination during displacement. As Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) noted in her seminal article, both feminist and anti-racist scholarship and movements often fail to draw attention to the many ways black women were excluded from employment. Specifically, "black jobs" were available to black men and "women's jobs" were available to white women, but black women remained disenfranchised from workplace diversity efforts. Thus, the consideration of various identity groups without an analysis of identity as a relationship *between* people, histories, and institutions can inadvertently reinforce patterns of white feminism and patriarchy that afford certain workers' rights while diminishing the status of others.

Feminists have long taken up the question of whether to stress sameness among members of a group or to stress differences. An intersectional framework remedies the limitations of identity-specific analyses based on "sameness" within a group by desegregating

mono categories to examine how different forms of discrimination overlap to create unique and distinct kinds of burdens. Similar to a car at an intersection, certain workers can get "hit" by displacement from multiple directions of discrimination. Crenshaw (1991) discourages equating intersections with identities. She argues that differences are not problematic in and of themselves; instead, hierarchies create inequalities that can become problematic. Figure 1 is an example of a social identity wheel that importantly accounts for hierarchies within various social locations by magnifying the systems (e.g., sexism, racism, classism, etc.) that interact with social locations to produce inequalities.

Figure 1

Wheel of Power/Privilege



Note. From "Meet the Methods Series: Quantitative Intersectional Study Design and Primary Data Collection" by G. Bauer, 2021, *CIHR Institute of Gender and Health* (https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/52352.html). Copyright 2021 by CIHR.

In the context of job displacement, intersectionality challenges the notion of a universal "displaced worker" experience, highlighting instead the diversity of experiences and needs

within the workforce, including during job displacement. For instance, a young, racialized woman displaced from her job may confront compounded racial and gender biases and discrimination in seeking re-employment, while also potentially having less access to union support or professional networks. In contrast, an older white man, while possibly facing age discrimination, might benefit from longstanding professional connections and societal perceptions of authority or expertise.

Applying an intersectional lens to the study of job displacement due to factory closures prompts questions about how displacement policies and practices might inadvertently perpetuate or exacerbate existing forms of discrimination and privilege. Being reflexive about unequal experiences and outcomes of job displacement can point to strategic areas where and to whom time and resources should be allocated and focused. The failure to interrogate intersectionality shapes displacement policies and practices that reinforce hierarchies and limit our collective capacity to show up for particularly vulnerable and hard-hit workers and communities. This dissertation questions whether plant closure procedures are sensitive to class, race, gender, and other forms of difference.

The intersection of social locations not only shapes workers' experiences of discrimination but also influences their identity (re)construction processes following displacement. In the final section of this chapter, 'Forming Identity as a Worker,' I more deeply explore this connection by examining how intersectional factors affect workers' capacity for identity work and their attachments to work-related identities.

Applying a Reworlding Lens to Labour Strain and Industrial Change

Building on the intersectional approach to understanding labour strain, this FPE framework can be further enriched by incorporating Donna Haraway's concept of reworlding. While Haraway's work is not traditionally associated with political economy, it is firmly rooted in feminist theory and critically engages with capitalism. In her book, *Staying with the Trouble* (2016), Haraway proposes a way of thinking and acting that acknowledges the damage wrought by capitalist systems while refusing either to accept its inevitability or to abandon hope for better futures. She argues for "staying with the trouble," which involves remaining present to the entanglements of our current moment, including the ruins of capitalism, and working creatively within these constraints to forge new possibilities. Thus, this approach extends FPE's critique of capitalist systems and labour relations by suggesting that transformation can occur not by escaping capitalism, but by working with and through its contradictions and failures. Haraway's concept of "sympoiesis," or making-with, emphasizes the collaborative and ongoing nature of this world-remaking process, aligning with FPE's interest in collective action.

Haraway introduces the concept of reworlding as a practical framework for enacting transformative change. Reworlding, as conceptualized by Haraway, refers to the process of reimagining and reconstructing our social, economic, and ecological relationships in ways that challenge dominant narratives and power structures, including those perpetuated by capitalism. This concept goes beyond mere critique or resistance, emphasizing instead the active creation of new possibilities within and despite existing constraints. It involves a continual process of "making-with" that acknowledges our entanglements with various human

and non-human actors. Thus, like FPE, reworlding emphasizes workers' agency to challenge economic paradigms within oppressive systems.

Haraway's concept of reworlding offers a complementary perspective to existing sociological approaches for examining job displacement due to factory closures. Building on the rich tradition of analyzing workers' collective actions and organizing models, reworlding distinctively emphasizes the generative potential within moments of industrial ruins. In part, it frames alternative forms of organizing not just as responses to closure but as active processes of world-making where displaced workers might engage in collaborative efforts to reimagine industrial practices or community structures. For instance, Tsing's (2015) work on matsutake mushroom pickers demonstrates how precarious workers create new forms of community and economic relations in the ruins of industrial forestry, exemplifying reworlding in practice. In addition to acknowledging the transformative potential of collective actions, this perspective positions workers' storytelling as a transformative practice itself. Haraway's emphasis on "speculative fabulation" highlights how creating and sharing stories can reshape our understanding of possible futures.

In the context of job displacement, workers' narratives about their experiences become sites of contestation and reimagination, capable of influencing broader societal understandings of industrial decline and its impacts. For example, Meier's (2016) study of retired metalworkers in Nuremberg found that workers' narratives actively challenged official representations of the city's transformation from an industrial to service-based economy. While official narratives celebrated this shift as progress toward becoming a "city of academics," workers' stories emphasized the devaluation of their practical skills and knowledge, expressing nostalgia as a

critique of how their class identity and abilities were being marginalized. Through their storytelling, workers preserved memories of industrial work as skilled and dangerous, and envisioned possible futures where working-class knowledge remained vital to urban life.

Theorizing Power in the Context of Factory Closure

Building on the Marxist-Feminist Political Economy framework outlined above, this section expands the conceptualization of power beyond class relations to consider how power also operates through discourse, knowledge production, and embodied dispositions.

Power Through Discourse and Knowledge Production

Discourse and knowledge production function as crucial mechanisms through which power operates. Developed through Foucault's (1977/1995) analysis of disciplinary society, this tradition considers how certain ways of thinking and speaking become accepted as truth while others are rendered unintelligible. Within this framework, power derives from the authority to establish epistemological frameworks that determine what counts as legitimate knowledge.

This discursive dimension of power can shape how workers understand and experience factory closures. Dominant corporate narratives often frame plant closures as inevitable results of global forces, technological changes, or the need for increased efficiency (see, for example, Gibbs, 2021). These narratives typically emphasize the company's regret at having to make "difficult decisions," while simultaneously asserting that such choices are necessary for long-term survival or competitiveness. Such framing serves to present deindustrialization as an unavoidable outcome of economic progress rather than a result of specific policy choices or corporate strategies.

These discursive formations actively reinforce material power relations by making existing economic arrangements appear natural and inevitable, thereby limiting the imaginable alternatives and constraining resistance. Crucially, Foucault understood power as productive insofar as it can create subjects, knowledges, and possibilities distributed throughout society rather than concentrated in centralized institutions. In the context of factory closures, this productive aspect of power manifests in the construction of worker subjectivities, such as, for instance, positioning workers as responsible for their employability rather than questioning the structural conditions that produce their job insecurity.

Cultural Hegemony and Embodied Power

Power Through Consent. Cultural reproduction constitutes another mechanism through which power operates to legitimize existing social relations of production. Advanced through Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, this approach understands power as embedded in cultural practices that naturalize capitalist relations through mechanisms of consent rather than overt force. Dominant groups secure and maintain their position through economic and physical coercion as well as by controlling cultural institutions and processes that establish their particular interests as universal values.

In Gramsci's framework, while the threat of coercion remains, hegemonic control primarily operates through subtle means of persuasion and ideological influence embedded in educational systems, media, religious organizations, and popular culture (Carroll, 2007). That is to say, hegemony is not simply imposed from above but involves active participation from subordinate groups. People often internalize hegemonic ideas and reproduce them in their daily lives, even when these ideas may not serve their interests (Crehan, 2002). This is what

Gramsci referred to as the shaping of "common sense"—the uncritical and largely unconscious way in which people perceive the world around them. Through these channels, certain ways of thinking about society, the economy, and politics become naturalized and taken for granted (Apple et al., 2009). This creates a cultural and social environment in which the dominance of the ruling group appears inevitable and even beneficial to society as a whole (Lears, 1985).

This hegemonic dimension of power helps explain why workers might find it difficult to contest closure processes that ultimately harm their interests. Corporate narratives about the inevitability of deindustrialization, once established through the discursive mechanisms described above, become hegemonic when they invoke neoliberal ideas about individual responsibility, suggesting that workers should adapt to changing economic conditions rather than expecting job and wage security or company loyalty.

Power Through Counter-Hegemonic Narratives. However, Gramsci also emphasizes that hegemony is never complete or static. Instead, it is constantly contested and (re)negotiated (Hall, 1986). Subordinate groups can and do develop their own "counter-hegemonic" ideas and practices, challenging dominant narratives, and proposing alternative visions of society (Cox, 1983). Counter-hegemonic efforts by workers and unions, therefore, represent crucial sites of resistance and struggle, offering alternative interpretations of economic events. These efforts might include highlighting corporate profits and executive compensation to challenge claims of economic necessity, emphasizing the social and economic costs of factory closures to local communities, and proposing alternative economic models that prioritize worker and community well-being over shareholder value. The effectiveness of these

counterhegemonic narratives depends on their ability to gain broader visibility and resonance beyond affected workers and communities.

Borrowing from Gramsci, scholars have long recognized the importance of counter-hegemonic narratives in shaping the understanding of the impacts of factory closures and deindustrialization (see, for example, Bluestone & Harrison, 1982; Dunk, 2002; Linkon & Russo, 2002; Strangleman, 2017). These studies find that displaced workers' narratives often frame factory closures as resulting from corporate greed rather than inevitable market outcomes, while emphasizing the broader social costs of capital mobility and asserting the value of working-class experiences and knowledge. For example, Dunk (2002) found that pulp and paper mill workers in Northern Ontario attributed closures to mismanagement rather than to market forces, while Strangleman (2017) revealed how former UK miners used nostalgic narratives as critical tools to evaluate present conditions and imagine alternative futures. These counter-narratives serve not only to make sense of workers' experiences but also to contest the hegemonic framing of plant closures as neutral economic events, injecting considerations of morality, community, and worker rights into public discussions about economic change.

Moral Economy and Worker Narratives. The concept of morality often appears in workers' counterhegemonic narratives of factory closures. This invocation of moral considerations can be understood through E.P. Thompson's (1971) concept of the "moral economy." Thompson developed this idea in his study of 18th-century English food riots, arguing that widespread protests were often based on a shared understanding of the social rights and reciprocal obligations that people believed should govern economic relations. When these

implicit social contracts are violated, particularly by those seen as exploiting the community for profit, it could lead to collective action.

In the context of modern deindustrialization, High et al. (2017) examined displaced workers' narratives through the lens of Thompson's conceptualization of moral economies. Specifically, they documented how workers articulated the moral economies that critiqued corporate actions and asserted alternative values. Their narratives emphasized long-standing relationships between companies and communities, invoking ideas of social obligation that echo Thompson's findings in a different historical context. Workers frequently pointed to their years of loyalty and hard work, arguing that companies owe them more than just severance pay when closing plants. This claim resonates with Thompson's concept of a "popular consensus" about legitimate and illegitimate practices in economic relations. Just as 18th-century crowds believed merchants had obligations beyond maximizing profit, modern workers often believe that companies have responsibilities to their workforce and communities that extend beyond the formal employment contract. These moral economy narratives operate to highlight the broader social costs of plant closures, including the economic ripple effect on local businesses and housing markets, loss of community cohesion, and the impact on mental health and social issues, such as domestic violence. When companies fail to meet these perceived obligations, workers view them as a violation of legitimate economic practices. Such counter-narratives create space for imagining different economic futures and mobilizing resistance to factory closures.

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. Bourdieu's (1990) theory of practice complements Gramsci's analysis by illustrating how dominant ideas become internalized as embodied

dispositions (i.e., tendencies to perceive, think, and act in certain ways) that guide workers' perceptions and actions. Bourdieu develops a conceptual framework centered on the relationship between social structures and individual agency, including key concepts of field, capital, and habitus to explain how power operates through embodied experience. These conceptual tools help to explain how displaced workers could contest factory closures, but within constrained circumstances.

Bourdieu conceptualizes social space as organized into various 'fields,' or structured arenas with their own rules, schemes of domination, and legitimate opinions. Within these fields, workers face a range of possible actions, but their choices are not entirely "free." In the context of factory closures, the field includes the workplace itself, union spaces, government retraining programs, and community support networks, each with its own logic and power relations that shape what actions appear possible or impossible to displaced workers. The field of labour relations during a factory closure structures which resistance strategies appear legitimate and which demands seem reasonable or unreasonable.

The fields are sites where various forms of "capital" operate and are contested. Bourdieu distinguishes between economic capital (financial resources), cultural capital (knowledge, skills, qualifications), and social capital (networks, relationships, group memberships). During factory closures, workers' access to these different forms of capital significantly affects their ability to respond effectively. Specifically, workers with greater social capital through union connections may access better information about their rights, while those with recognized cultural capital in the form of transferable skills may navigate retraining

programs or secure reemployment more easily and successfully. The uneven distribution of capital shapes the power dynamics of displacement processes.

Habitus and Embodied Dispositions. Through his concept of "habitus," Bourdieu (1990) explores how social order becomes embedded in bodily practices and unconscious dispositions. Where Gramsci examines the cultural production of consent through institutions and ideologies, Bourdieu traces how this process becomes inscribed within individuals themselves. Bourdieu (1990) theorizes how institutions, such as unions, can act as structuring structures, shaping the "habitus" of workers while also being shaped by workers' actions. From this perspective, the structuring power of unions and their traditional activities compels certain forms of engagement from workers while (perhaps inadvertently) discouraging others. This structuring power can either expand or limit workers' perceived options during factory closure processes.

In factory closure contexts, workers' responses are shaped by the dialectical relationship between object structures (explicit rules and resources) and subjective dispositions (internalized understandings of appropriate responses). When workers perceive factory closures as inevitable consequences of global economic forces rather than as contestable political decisions, this perception demonstrates how hegemonic narratives become embodied as habitus without conscious recognition of their socially constructed nature.

Power as Multidimensional and Context-Specific

Factory closures illuminate the interconnections of these dimensions of power with particular clarity. Those who control production decisions create conditions where discourses about economic inevitability flourish. These discourses, when they become hegemonic, shape

workers' embodied dispositions, potentially undermine collective resistance, and reinforce material power relations. However, workers can transform these same interconnections into sites of resistance when they develop counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge dominant discourses and foster alternative embodied dispositions through, for example, collective organizing.

I conceptualize power in factory closure contexts through this interconnected theoretical framework that expands upon the class relations analyzed in the previous section. At the personal level, various actors, such as management, labour unions, policy makers, and workers, exercise power by influencing decisions and outcomes within capitalism's structural constraints. These constraints shape but do not determine the economic, social, and daily aspects of displaced workers' lives. Systematically, this theoretical framework recognizes the diffuse discursive mechanisms that establish certain understandings of deindustrialization as truth. In this study, I consider how different dimensions of power create a bounded field of possibilities within which workers navigate their experiences of displacement, rather than viewing workers as either completely determined by structural forces or entirely free to choose their responses.

Affect Theory

This dissertation also utilizes affect theory as a framework for examining how displaced workers *affect* and are *affected by* job displacement. While the previous section focused on how power operates through material relations, discourse, and embodied dispositions, affect theory provides a complementary lens centred on bodily intensities, material-affective encounters, and the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected in specific material contexts. An affective

lens provides a way of thinking about the co-constitutive relationship between material objects (e.g., a plant closure) and subjects (e.g., displaced workers), acknowledging how materiality carries affective force (Berlant, 2016). In combination with FPE, an affective lens expands the scope of social investigation by bringing attention to how workers' bodies are moved, oriented toward or away from particular futures, through their encounters with objects, environments, and others (Wetherell, 2012). Where FPE might focus on how capitalism (re)inscribes gender inequality and oppression, affect theory brings to the forefront the material-affective dimensions of power, exploitation, and resistance in economic relationships. That is, how structural forces manifest as embodied experience. Thus, integrating affect theory into FPE can enrich understanding of how structural forces become lived, felt experiences.

It can be challenging to articulate affect in language because it emerges through bodily and mental agitations rather than as a discrete thing (Wetherell, 2012). For ease of understanding, Seigworth attempts to synthesize the interrelated features of affect studies into three components (Martial Arts Studies, 2020), though different theorists emphasize and complicate these features in distinct ways. At first glance, affect appears to involve moments of encounter or contact, as bodies meet objects, environments, and other bodies, that generate intensities or shifts in bodies or collectives. Such intensities may manifest as sensations, impulses toward movement, heightened awareness, or shifts in receptivity before they crystallize into nameable emotions. The key point here is that such encounters represent transformations in potential, modifying what a body might do or become.

Following Deleuze and Guattari's understanding, not every encounter constitutes an "event" in the affective sense. True events are those that introduce genuine novelty, opening

possibilities previously unavailable or unimaginable, disrupting habitual patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. The consequence of affective encounters or events is their capacity to generate productive uncertainties that create spaces for creative problem-solving rather than producing chaos. For Gregg and Seigworth (2010), events specifically function as intensive becomings or moments that create qualitative transformation. They operate as ruptures that break the fabric of everyday experience, allowing new affects to emerge and circulate.

Different theoretical lineages within affect studies conceptualize these encounters in distinct ways. Ahmed's (2014) work, within a cultural politics tradition, argues that these moments of contact are fundamentally shaped by histories of association. Her theory of emotional economies engages with how bodies, signs, and objects become "sticky" with meaning through histories of association. For example, when examining how subjects "read" violence against women, Ahmed shows how these interpretations draw on sedimented meanings that precede the encounter itself, making certain readings seem natural or inevitable. Ahmed's intervention thus emphasizes how what might appear as immediate affective encounters are always already mediated by historical and social conditions that shape how bodies and objects become meaningful to each other. In contrast, theorists from the Spinoza-Deleuzian tradition, including Gregg and Seigworth, emphasize how these encounters can exceed historical determination by rupturing existing patterns, generating new and unexpected possibilities. In this study, I examine the factory closure announcement as precisely such an affective event that ruptures the ordinary flow of workplace life, altering possibilities and relations.

Building on this understanding of affective encounters, Seigworth identifies a second feature of affect: its fundamentally relational nature. Rather than residing within individual bodies or objects, affect emerges in the "in-between" spaces of bodies, objects, and environments. What becomes crucial is how these affective relations reconfigure entire fields of possibility or "regions of potential" (Massumi, 2002), modifying bodies' capacities to act and be acted upon. That is, affective encounters create the conditions where certain actions, thoughts, and connections become possible while others recede. In this study, workers' capacities shift through their changing relations with workplace routines, structures, and other bodies. The announcement modifies the entire field of relations that had constituted workers' ordinary ways of being in and moving through their workplace.

The third feature recognizes how affective events are embedded in wider fields of relationships. That is, affective events happen within broader systems of relationships that already exist, such as workplace rules, economic realities, cultural expectations, and physical spaces. These fields consist of real material conditions and social arrangements that make some responses easier and others harder. For example, in a factory setting, legal rules about strikes, the availability of jobs in the area, the layout of the building, and common beliefs about what "good workers" should do all create a field that influences how workers respond to a closure announcement. Theorists such as Clough (2008) examine how these fields shape what actions become possible or impossible in any given situation based upon the material conditions, social structures, and power relations that create boundaries around potential ways of moving and reacting. Together, these three features show affect as simultaneously involving meaningful

contact or encounters, relationality, and possibility within existing conditions, although not necessarily in this sequential order.

Drawing on these theoretical insights, this study examines: a) how workers interpret the factory closure announcement through historically accumulated meanings and associations, b) how their capacities for action emerge through relations with workplace structures, routines, and others and c) how their potential responses are shaped by broader social narratives and material conditions that enable certain forms of resistance while constraining others.

Demarcating Affect from Emotion in Labour

While some scholars interchange[5] affect with feelings and emotions (Ngai, 2005), there remains no clear consensus among theorists as to the distinction between emotion and affect. Some theorists argue that emotion refers to sociocultural expression while affect describes biological/physiological responses; others distinguish them by suggesting that emotion requires a subject (i.e., someone feeling it) while affect does not (Gorton, 2007). These theoretical distinctions matter because they inform understandings of people's capacity to manage their emotional experiences and expressions. This question of emotional management becomes particularly relevant when examining emotional labour in workplace settings.

[5] While affect theory per se is notably absent from social science research on job loss, the term affect/affectivity, and its synonymously used words, otherwise litters the job loss literature. Notably, competing and complementary terms such as feelings, emotions, moods, and affects create a "dizzying array" of definitions and practices "partly because these key terms…all feature in everyday colloquial speech and it can be quite difficult to develop and maintain more specific usages and distinctions" (Trigg, 2014, p. 5).

Building on these theoretical debates and distinctions between affect and emotion, sociological scholarship on emotion and emotional labour[6] reveals similarly varying perspectives on the degree of agency available to people to control their emotions and resultant behaviours. On one end of the spectrum, psychoanalytic perspectives, as famously developed by Freud (1957), emphasize the role of the unconscious in emotional life, suggesting that conscious control over emotions is limited by underlying psychological and biological drives. His theory of defence mechanisms suggests some capacity for psychological management of emotions, though often through unconscious processes. At another point on the spectrum, Goffman (1958) emphasizes the individual's capacity to strategically manage their self-presentation, arguing that people actively shape how others see them through social performances, though always within particular social contexts and constraints. Hochschild (2012) fits somewhere in the middle of the emotional-agency spectrum, recognizing a biological component of emotions while also suggesting that people can work to change the degree or quality of their emotions or feelings. She said emotional work can take the form of changes to workers' cognition (e.g., ideas), bodily experience (i.e., somatic sensations), or expression (i.e., gestures). Sometimes, through the presentation of a particular emotion, workers alter how they feel inside; at other times, workers' outward emotional display retains a discrepancy from their internal affective state.

[6] Arlie Hochschild famously theorized emotional labour to refer to the discrepancy between how a worker authentically feels and how they (are expected to) present themselves in workplace social interactions. While Hochschild focuses on the labour of emotion-management in customer-facing interactions, such as those of flight attendants or call centre workers, her theorization is applicable to numerous settings in which workers are expected to display or perform particular emotions to the benefit of the employer.

In this dissertation, I draw primarily on Hochschild's theorization of emotion management while also incorporating Goffman's dramaturgical perspective. Both approaches align with symbolic interactionism, which posits that emotion is socially constructed and governed by social rules, though they differ in how they conceptualize the relationship between these rules and internal emotional experiences. These "rules" establish expected norms around the extent, direction, and duration of feeling. In the context of factory closures, I consider which emotions displaced workers display and suppress across different "stages" of interaction. I note how emotion management differs across gendered lines, and consider how workers manage emotional expectations in various settings: the production line, union spaces, media, and home life. While Hochschild and Goffman differ in their views on emotional authenticity,[7] together they provide complementary tools for analyzing how workers manage their emotions within different social contexts.

While I consider theories of emotional management to examine how workers negotiate feeling rules—the socially prescribed norms about how individuals should feel and express emotions during factory closure—affect theory offers an additional analytical lens that enriches this analysis. Similar to symbolic interactionism, affect theorists share an interest in how individuals interact with their environments. However, affect theory's greater emphasis on bodily experiences that move us to produce change in the world provides a different perspective from symbolic interactionism's emphasis on meaning-making through social interaction. Therefore, while this dissertation recognizes displaced workers' emotional displays

[7] Goffman dramaturgical approach treats all social interactions as performance where we are always on a "stage," suggesting no "authentic" self behind the various roles. Differently, Hochschild argues that there is a distinction between genuine feeling and managed display, introducing concepts such as "surface acting" and "deep acting."

according to social rules and contexts, it also considers the less conscious dimensions of their experience, such as how workers are drawn toward or pushed away from certain objects, people, and organizations during the displacement process.

Affect in Marxist-Feminist Political Economy

The theoretical turn[8] toward affect reawakens foundational Marxist tenets about the body as a central means and site of production. Marxist political economy becomes "affective" in its account of the means of production, where the body of the worker co-acts with objects and others to shape the production process (McMahon, 2015). This co-action involves not just physical interaction but also the circulation of affects between bodies and objects in the workplace. Marx (1844/1977) directly undertakes the "affective capacity" (i.e., the capacity to affect and become affected) of bodies and objects when he writes that the product of their interaction "depends on the *nature of objects* and on the nature of the *essential power* corresponding to it" (emphasis Marx's). Here, Marx recognizes that production emerges from the specific relationship between the qualities or properties of objects (their "nature") and the corresponding human capacities or powers that engage with them. These "essential powers" include physical capabilities as well as sensuous, emotional, and social capacities that are activated in relation to particular objects and conditions of production. Understanding how production depends on both human abilities and material circumstances helps explain how affect operates within political economy.

[8] The mid-1990's saw a theoretical turn toward affect in the humanities and social sciences that revitalized and reworked psychologist Sylvan Tomkins' extensive writings on affect. This "affective turn" sparked new interest in the effects and powers of affect and its role in shaping body and identity (L. Berlant, 2016; Gorton, 2007).

Affect theory also deepens Marx's concept of alienation by showing how capitalism estranges workers from their physical labour as well as from these essential emotional and social powers. While Marx focused on workers' alienation from the material processes and products of their labour, feminist scholars like Hochschild demonstrate how capitalism also alienates workers from their emotional lives and affective capacities. This emotional alienation manifests particularly in the requirement for workers to manage their feelings to create observable displays that benefit their employer. Hochschild argues that emotional labour produces "an estrangement of the private self" (Altomonte, 2020, p. 10), as workers must suppress or transform their authentic emotional responses to meet workplace demands. Relatedly, Hardt and Negri (2009) argue that under contemporary capitalism, workers can become estranged from "their own capacities for thinking, loving, and caring when they are on the job" (p. 140), highlighting how alienation encompasses the full range of human affective capacities.

Drawing on this understanding of affective capacity and emotional alienation under capitalism, this study considers how management practices during factory closures demand particular forms of emotional labour from workers. Specifically, I examine how workers negotiate the tension between their authentic affective responses to displacement and institutional expectations (explicit or inferred) for "appropriate" emotional conduct during closure procedures. Consequently, I consider the loss of workers' material livelihoods as well as the constraints on their capacity to emotionally process and respond to this loss.

Utility of Affect Theory in Studies of Job Displacement

Affect theory helps trace how workers navigate changing conditions of precarity resulting from job displacement. Theorists like Laurent Berlant and Brian Massumi examine how affects circulate within and respond to transformations in contemporary capitalism. Berlant's (2011) work analyzes how people maintain attachments to fantasies of the good life even as the material conditions that might sustain these fantasies erode. They examine how affects mediate the experience of structural transformation. Through careful attention to aesthetic forms, Berlant shows how cultural texts capture the processes of adaptation to precarity and the wearing out of post-war social contracts. This approach suggests that examining displaced workers' productions, such as their writings, memes, and other textual artifacts, might reveal not just personal responses to job displacement but the broader affective processes of adjusting to workplace and economic restructuring as they unfold.

For affect theorists, affect is not neutral; it is a site of political struggle and reimagination. Marx analyzed how structural features of capitalism, like the IRA, shape workers' material conditions and possibilities for collective resistance; affect theory offers additional insights into how crisis moments can disrupt workers' emotional and bodily adaptations to capitalism. Berlant's analysis suggests that moments of crisis, such as job displacement, can disrupt the ordinary rhythms of adjustment to capitalism, potentially opening new affective pathways for political consciousness and collective response that complement Marx's emphasis on class-based solidarity. However, Berlant also cautions that such disruptions do not automatically lead to political reorganization, as workers often maintain attachments to existing fantasies of the good life even as the conditions supporting these fantasies erode.

Forming Identity as a Worker

As discussed in the 'Applying an Intersectional Lens' section, workers' social locations significantly influence their experiences of displacement. These intersectional factors also shape how workers (re)form their identities in response to factory closures. The following section considers theoretical frameworks of identity formation and reconstruction in the context of job displacement. Within this identity (re)construction framework, I consider concepts of work identity and identity work as key processes through which displaced workers maintain or reformulate their sense of self. I then examine how these identity processes intersect with gender performativity and hegemonic masculinity in industrial settings. Finally, I discuss how different social locations influence the uneven availability of identity work.

Theoretical Foundations of Identity Formation and Reconstruction

Evolution of Goffman to Contemporary Approaches. Sociologists have long understood identity (re)construction as a dynamic process shaped by social interactions and structures. This theoretical understanding has evolved alongside broader shifts in sociological thought. Goffman's (1958) dramaturgical approach[9] marked a decisive challenge to the prevailing view of identity as a fixed internal property of individuals. Instead, Goffman frames identity as performative and continuously negotiated through social interactions. The field then progressed to Bourdieu's (1977/1995) concept of habitus[10], which highlights how deeply

[9] Goffman's (1958) dramaturgical approach emphasized the role of individual agency in identity formation, arguing that people actively present different facets of themselves depending on the social context, much like actors on a stage.

[10] Bourdieu's (1977/1995) concept of habitus extended and complicated Goffman's ideas. While Goffman focused on the immediate, situational aspects of identity performance, Bourdieu's habitus contemplates the enduring dispositions that shape these performances. Habitus represents the internalized social structures, cultural norms, and past experiences that guide an individual's perceptions, behaviours, and self-presentation. In this way,

ingrained structural dispositions can influence identity formation. Giddens (1991) later introduced the notion of reflexive self-narratives[11], emphasizing how individuals actively construct their identities in response to rapidly changing social contexts. Building on this sociological foundation, contemporary scholars such as Harding (2020) have more recently introduced the concept of "material identities," highlighting the role of physical objects, spaces, and bodies in identity formation. This material turn challenges the primacy of discourse and social interaction in identity studies by considering how non-human actors actively participate in identity construction processes.

Identity theory provides yet another lens for understanding how workers experience and respond to job displacement due to factory closure. Much of the literature on job displacement recognizes that job loss can impact workers' sense of self and their relationship to work. Norris (2016) most thoroughly explores this relationship between job displacement and identity. She documents two types of identity work with which workers engage after losing their jobs: either shifting away from a work-related identity or sustaining a work-related identity. Her findings demonstrate the fluidity of social identity categories, which, rather than static entities, are vulnerable to reformation.

The production and reformation of identities occur through relations and encounters (Whitney, 2018) and do not simply comprise the attributes of the individual. Recounting Freud's

Bourdieu's work helps to explain *why* individuals perform certain identities in specific ways, bridging the gap between individual agency and social structure.

[11] Giddens (1991) argued that the reflexive nature of identity has become more pronounced in contemporary society. His concept of the 'reflexive project of the self' posits that individuals actively construct their self-narratives in response to rapidly changing social contexts, continuously reinterpreting their experiences and adjusting their life stories.

seminal work on the formation of group identities, Ahmed (2014) notes that social groups are formed "through their shared orientation towards an object" (p. 130), such as a workplace. Echoing this sentiment, in the study noted above, Norris (2016) concluded that displaced workers' identity work is the result of interactions with social institutions, such as family. For example, displaced workers are more likely to continue or repair their identification with work-related identities following interactions with family members or networking groups. Consequently, Norris argues that feedback from social institutions can either sustain or undermine an individual's identity as a "worker."

Identity Reconstruction After Job Displacement

The process of identity (re)construction following job displacement involves filling "identity voids" (Norris, 2016) left by severed work-based connections. Identity (re)construction can involve renegotiating one's relationship with work, exploring alternative identities, and reframing life stories to incorporate the experience of job loss (High, 2021; Norris, 2016). This reconstruction is not a singular event but an ongoing, active process of adjustment and experimentation (Wanberg, 2012) where individuals try on "provisional selves" (Ibarra, 1999) as they move through periods of unemployment, job searching, and potentially new employment. Some may even shift their primary identities away from work-related roles toward non-work roles, such as parent or community member, as a way of maintaining a sense of self in the absence of occupational identities (Norris, 2016). This ongoing identity work reflects the reflexive nature of occupational identity in contemporary society, where workers must constantly shape and reshape their self-concepts in response to transformations in their workplaces.

However, occupational identities often demonstrate remarkable resilience, persisting long after cutting formal ties to a workplace. Studies have shown that workers' sense of self often remains tethered to their former occupations (Strangleman, 2012). Workers may continue to define themselves in terms of their former occupations. Norris (2016) observes this phenomenon in her concept of "sustaining," where individuals attempt to maintain their work-related identities even after job loss by performing work-like activities, maintaining professional or occupational networks, or framing unemployment as a temporary interruption rather than a fundamental shift in identity. The persistence of occupational identity can serve both protective and constraining functions. It can provide a sense of continuity during periods of instability. On the other hand, it may hinder workers' adjustment to new circumstances or delimit their openness to alternative identities and career paths (Strangleman, 2012).

Worker Subjectivity in Neoliberal Capitalism

Writing about shifting worker subjectivity in the context of neoliberal capitalist states, Massumi (1992) suggests that class-based identity is now less likely to reflect a relationship between bodies and exploitation than it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Now:

> people no longer define themselves primarily by what they do for a living, but by what they love, what they eat or wear and where they go. This is not simply a ruse of power to prevent people from realizing their commonality. It is a real production of difference as a real dimension of people's lives. (p. 202)

This does not suggest that material disparities do not exist. Rather, Massumi is proposing that the codes that come to define a class category are in constant flux—always being recoded—which reshape subjectivities with work and class. Referring to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of deterritorialization, Massumi accounts for the potential of collective agency of "latitude" when he states that "the denizen of the neoconservative transnation state can invent new codes by

mixing and matching images" (p. 134). These movements occur along what he terms a "superabstract continuum"—a broader field of potential transformations in social space characterized by intensive multiplicities. In this way, he accounts for the ability of neoliberal capitalist states to affect individual worker identity as well as the potential for individual subjectivity to recode and affect class politics. Thus, subjectivity and identity are not subordinate to commodity relations with clear lines of causation. Instead, Massumi invites us to consider subjectivity as part of a broader process of "becoming," where it can "reinsert into states of things and begin to produce its own effects" (p. 201).

Work Ethic and the "Ideal Worker." The notion of an "ideal worker" stems from Joan Acker's (1990) influential work on gendered organizations. Acker argues that workplace structures and cultures, particularly in the context of late 20th-century capitalism, are built around an implicit image of a worker wholly dedicated to their job, unencumbered by the external responsibilities of family and domestic labour. This idealized worker is often implicitly male and able-minded/bodied. While Acker's concept emerged during the ascendancy of neoliberalism, it crystallizes longstanding gendered and classed assumptions about work and workers that predate her conceptualization. In a contemporary factory setting shaped by neoliberal policies, this ideal worker might be envisioned as a man who never misses a shift, consistently meets or exceeds production quotas, willingly works overtime without complaint, does not let personal issues affect performance, continuously upskills, adapts to changing technologies, and demonstrates unwavering loyalty to the company.

The work ethic, on the other hand, has deeper roots, most famously articulated in Weber's (1904/2001) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Weber claimed that

Calvinists deemed worldly success as a sign they were saved, leading them to embrace hard work and thrift as religious obligations. These ethos aligned with and propelled capitalist development. Weber posited that this Protestant ethic encouraged the rational pursuit of economic gain and the reinvestment of profits rather than consumption as a moral duty. Weber understood this ethic as becoming detached from its religious origins over time, evolving into a secular force that continued to drive capitalist expansion. Such secularization of the work ethic laid the groundwork for its later transformations, as it became internalized as a cultural value beyond its initial religious context.

In contemporary contexts, Weeks (2011) offers a critical re-examination of the work ethic, tracing its evolution from the Protestant ethic through an industrial ethic to a post-industrial ethic. Weeks argues that the Protestant ethic, with its emphasis on hard work as a calling and moral duty, evolved into an industrial ethic as capitalism matured. The industrial iteration of work ethics shifted focus from spiritual salvation to social mobility and consumer identity, promoting work as a means to participate in the emerging consumer society. The post-industrial ethic, which emerged in the late 20th century, further transformed the concept by emphasizing work as a site of personal fulfillment and self-realization.

Despite transformations to the initial work ethic as imagined by Weber, Weeks contends that each iteration continues to function as a form of governance, shaping workers' subjectivities and maintaining their "devotion to waged work, the elevation of work to the center of life, and the affirmation of work as an end in itself" (p. 46). Her reconceptualization demonstrates how a work ethic adapts to changing economic conditions while consistently reinforcing the centrality of work in individuals' lives and identities.

While distinct, the concepts of an ideal worker and work ethics intersect in important ways. An ideal worker embodies the work ethic taken to its logical extreme—a person whose entire life is oriented around their job. Both concepts reinforce the notion that an individual's worth is primarily determined by their labour market participation and productivity.

Attachment to Work Identity. While work-related identities are flexible, as found in Norris' and Massumi's work, Berlant (2011) is most curious about our continued attachments to identities that no longer serve our best interests. Why might workers facing continuous employment precarity and instability continue to identify with a work ethic[12] that imagines work as central to life? She coined the term "cruel optimism" to refer to someone's ongoing attachment to objects (e.g., fantasies about the "American dream") that were at one time sustaining but that now threaten their capacity to survive. Several fantasies common to workers fray under neoliberal capitalism, including upward mobility, social equality, job security, and relationships of reciprocity. Berlant suggests that attachment to fantasies tethers even those "drowning" in unfolding crises to a way of living within it. Displaced workers, she would argue, might comfort themselves with stories about beating the system as they continue to struggle for existence. Berlant proposes that examining affective activities provides a metric

[12] In "The Problem with Work" (2011), Kathi Weeks traces several historiacal transformations of the work ethic. The Protestant work ethic, originating in the 16th-17th centuries, emphasized work as a religious calling and moral duty, where diligent labour was viewed as a sign of salvation and divine favour. The industrial work ethic emerged in the 19th century, secularizing these values while emphasizing productivity, discipline, and self-denial. It positioned work as both an economic necessity and moral imperative for social order. The postindustrial work ethic, emerging in the late 20th century, shifted focus to work as a site of personal fulfillment and self-realization. This version emphasizes finding meaning, purpose, and identity through work, while also demanding workers' emotional and affective investment in their jobs. Weeks argues that each iteration, while different in its specific manifestations, serves to legitimize and naturalize capitalist work relations and demands for worker compliance.

for how workers manage the impact of the world on their sense of self, including the situations that they might deem deserving of some kind of continued optimism.

Studies of how displaced workers rebuild their work-related identities have emerged as a distinct focus within broader workplace identity research. For instance, Newman (1988) observed that many downsized middle-class workers continued to internalize the work ethic, leading to intense shame and self-blame when confronted with job loss. Similarly, Silva (2013) found that young working-class adults often clung to individualistic explanations for their economic struggles, despite structural barriers to their success. Sharone (2013) further documents how national contexts shape unemployed individuals' tendency to either internalize or externalize blame for job loss. Their findings highlight the hardiness of internalized work ethics, the persistence of which suggests that these beliefs serve not only as cultural norms but also as psychological coping mechanisms, allowing individuals to maintain a sense of agency and hope in otherwise disempowering circumstances.

Importantly, the internalization of work ethics and self-blame may manifest differently in contexts of mass layoffs and factory closures compared to individual job loss. When an entire workplace shuts down and everyone is simultaneously displaced, the structural nature of job loss becomes more evident, potentially mitigating individual self-blame. In such contexts, the collective experience could facilitate recognition of systemic forces rather than personal failure. However, as this dissertation will explore, workers may still maintain attachments to work ethics and occupational identities even when structural explanations are readily available. In Chapter 2, I discuss in more detail the sociological literature regarding displaced workers' work

identity, however, this theoretical framing establishes the possibility that even when “it’s not about you,” workers may continue carrying these work ethics and occupational identities.

Intersection of Gender and Work Identity

Gender Performativity in the Workplace. Drawing on Butler's (1990/2000) concept of gender performativity, the factory floor can be understood as a site where workers learn to “do gender” in ways that align with broader societal norms through daily rituals, interactions, and divisions of labour. Workers perform and embody gendered norms through various workplace practices and interactions: in the way they carry themselves, in the stories they share, in the risks they take, and through the hierarchies they establish. When repeated over time, these performances create stable gender identities within the workplace, even though they require constant re-enactment and reinforcement.

Hegemonic Masculinity in Factory Settings. In factory settings, gender performance takes distinct forms shaped by the dominance of hegemonic masculinity. As an idealized form of working-class masculinity, hegemonic masculinity is characterized by physical strength, technical competence, and stoicism, enacted through daily practices and interactions to legitimize men’s dominant position in social hierarchies (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This governing form of masculinity defines the parameters of acceptable behaviour and emotional expression for all workers, regardless of sex. That is, masculinity is not exclusively performed by men, nor do all men necessarily embody it. Rather, it operates as a set of norms and expectations that shape behaviours across genders. Workers may engage in masculinity by participating in traditionally male-coded social networks and behaviours (Paap, 2006; Salzinger, 2004). Simultaneously, other gender performances coexisted in these spaces. Some workers

might emphasize traits traditionally coded as feminine, such as interpersonal skills, attention to detail, or caretaking roles, often in support or administrative positions (Yodanis, 2000). Others may embody gender non-conforming performances, challenging binary expectations through their dress, behaviour, or work roles, although industrial environments often erect significant barriers to such expressions outside of the gender binary (Connell, 2010). These varied performance structures reinforce workplace hierarchies and power dynamics, privileging those who most convincingly embody hegemonic masculine traits. Factory closures thus disrupt the established arena of gender performance, forcing workers to confront the contingent nature of their gendered identity. As the familiar stage of the workplace disappears, workers must find alternative ways to perform, according to their gender.

Disruption of Gender Performance Through Job Displacement. Factory closures pose a particular challenge to workers who most closely align with hegemonic masculinity, often white, heterosexual, able-bodied men in positions of relative power or seniority. This demographic constitutes the dominant workforce in the three factories examined in this study. While not necessarily the exact breakdown in these companies, males represent approximately 80% of the machinery manufacturing workforce (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2025), while women account for only 30% of manufacturing workers overall. The male-dominated composition of these workplaces reinforces their function as sites where masculine identities are performed and validated. For these workers, job displacement represents the loss of a central “stage” for validating their masculine identities, posing a threat to their sense of self.

Studies have established that men who strongly adhere to traditional masculine norms experience higher levels of psychological distress and difficulty adapting to unemployment (Willott & Griffin, 2004). The loss of the workplace as a stage of masculine performance can contribute to workers' feelings of emasculation (Nixon, 2009). In contrast, women workers tend to maintain alternative spheres or "stages" for gender performance, such as the household or community, and therefore experience less disruption to their core gender identities during job displacement.

The crisis of masculine identity during job displacement often extends to family structures built around traditional gender roles (McDowell, 2002). The dismantling of industrial spaces where workers enact and perform working-class masculine identities forces (predominantly) men to potentially reconstruct their gendered selves on the less-than-familiar "stage" of the household (Broughton & Walton, 2006). As men struggle to assert their masculinity in a setting traditionally associated with femininity (Doucet, 2004), they can encounter resistance from their partners. In heteronormative relationships, women have long established gendered roles and spheres of influence within the domestic space, thus finding their routines and authority challenged by the increased presence of unemployed male partners (Rao, 2020). The 'intrusion' of an unemployed partner in the home can lead to conflicts over household management, childcare responsibilities, and decision-making processes that were previously more clearly delineated (Duffy et al., 2015). Thus, the household becomes a contested arena for gender performance, where both men and women must renegotiate their roles and identities in the absence of the structuring influence of industrial employment (Crompton, 1999). This renegotiation process can challenge long-held

assumptions about gender roles and often requires reimagining familial relationships and individual self-concept.

Uneven Access to Identity Work and Identity Work

Workers' social positions influence their identity work following job displacement. Seigworth offers a useful analogy of a dog walk to illustrate that affect is always experienced from a particular perspective, where there are various affective possibilities of an encounter. He notes that the kinds of intensities he experiences will be different from those of his dog, given both their different proximity to the ground as well as different interests, such as smells. The neighbourhood in which the walk takes place delimits a set of potentialities that they may or may not encounter, while the path they walk (sometimes directed by Seigworth and other times directed by his dog) represents the line of variation that determines the objects and possible intensities with which they will come into contact. Notably, their respective histories and memories of the neighbourhood and objects along the walk, can also open or foreclose possibilities for reacting to stimuli (Martial Arts Studies, 2020). Applied to a factory closure, workers' different positionalities, histories with employment and income (in)stability, involvement in union activities and union organizing, etc., can strengthen or deplete the intensity of their encounter with an announced factory closure and their attachments to particular work-related ideas, ideals, objects, and others.

From the premise that workers experiencing displacement will do so from different positionalities and histories with objects in factory closure-related encounters, Norris (2016) argues that identity work (i.e., moving toward or away from a particular object or other) is not equally available to everyone. She suggests that identity reformation is influenced by the

resources available to an individual. According to Norris, people with certain statuses, and/or greater access to social institutions, have better opportunities to successfully engage in identity work. Similarly, Berlant (2011) suggests that social statuses such as class operate at a level of subjectivity where "people born into unreliable worlds and unwelcoming environments have a different response to precarities than do people who presumed they would be protected" (p. 20). Their claim generates important questions about the positionalities for whom identity work is more available and the resources that can create freedom for workers to be generative about their work-related identities.

However, different points of view alone cannot entirely explain attachment to or identification with certain objects. An affective encounter might simply "seal" a particular other into a particular identity through repeated encounters with pre-existing affective scripts (Ahmed, 2014). For example, gender can function as an affective script that produces a hierarchy of socially normative affects and affective responses based on gender identities. In a workplace, for example, expressions of anger will be appraised by colleagues according to what is perceived as "reasonable" across different groupings of gender identities (e.g., men, women, trans, non-binary, gender non-conforming, etc.). Where:

> men's expressions of anger tend to be perceived as…a valid response to an angering situation rather than a reflection of personal instability; women's anger tends to be perceived less as a response to 'real events' and more as a reflection of us as 'more emotional.' (Whitney, 2018, p. 653)

Thus, workers' affective encounters with objects, their interactions with others, and the differing perspectives from which they arrive at encounters can intersect with discursive scripts related to gender, age, class, race, etc., to entrench particular identity codings and hierarchies. Social discourses and messages about globalization and capitalist expansion, "unskilled" labour,

unions, the imperative of work, and the responsibilities of displaced and/or unemployed persons, among other conceivable messages, can all "have a unique quality that is felt – it is a visceral, concentrated interaction…that is expressed, absorbed, and/or rejected verbally, emotionally, behaviorally, overly and covertly" (Cook, 2022, p. 47). Where cultural scripts about work and gender dictate a social privileging of paid labour, certain workers' experiences of displacement might be marked by feelings of shame, stigma, and identity loss. This dissertation seeks to uncover workers' felt and internalized experiences of taken-for-granted norms and practices related to closing a factory and laying off workers en masse.

Chapter Conclusion

This study is guided by a broad theoretical foundation of FPE and supported frameworks, including social reproduction, intersectionality, reworlding, affect, and identity. This theoretical and conceptual underpinning draws attention to the relations of power within and beyond the workplace that impact workers' experiences of job displacement. These theoretical framings argue that job displacement due to factory closure or mass layoff cannot be reduced to an economic event; instead, job displacement affects and is affected by intersecting social inequalities such as those related to gender, race, and class, as well as the circulation of workers' emotions and subjectivities throughout factory closure processes and interactions.

A common thread throughout this theoretical framework is the recognition of workers' agency amid structural constraints. Whether through class struggle, social reproductive labour, affective practices, or processes of reworlding, workers actively shape their experiences of work and displacement. This study, grounded in these theoretical perspectives, seeks to reveal how

workers exercise agency in responding to, resisting, and potentially transforming the conditions of their displacement.

In the next chapter, I discuss the methodological underpinnings of these theoretical concepts, including feminism, intersectionality, and affect. I describe how a feminist epistemological standpoint can facilitate an understanding of workers' job displacement experiences. I also outline the research design of the study, demonstrating how it operationalizes these theoretical insights to investigate the lived experiences of displaced workers in Toronto's manufacturing sector.

Chapter 2: End of the Line: Plant Closure Policies, Procedures, and Outcomes

In 1933, researchers of the Marienthal project examined the effects of mass unemployment due to factory closures on a community and its members (Jahoda et al., 1933/1971). Their pioneering sociological study chronicled changes in daily life in Marienthal, Austria, following the closure of the town's textile factory. The researchers found prolonged alterations in social relationships, community dynamics, and individual identities. They concluded that mass, long-term unemployment following a factory closure impacts displaced workers' psychological well-being due to the loss of work's manifest functions (e.g., income), as well as the disruption of its latent functions, such as time structure, status, and role identity.

Nearly a century later, researchers continue to corroborate the findings of early sociological studies in near-widespread agreement. Research spanning varied methodologies, theoretical approaches, and inquiries continues to confirm that mass job displacement affects workers' psychological and social well-being. However, agreement on general outcomes does not eliminate unresolved questions about the underlying mechanisms that drive similarities across different economic and institutional contexts. As such, the field of displacement studies continues to evolve, hosting debates about causality and the influence of various variables that differentiate workers' experiences, despite overarching similarities.

In this chapter, I synthesize the sociological research of factory closures and analyze their central themes, contentious issues, and emerging directions of study. In the first section, I examine what research tells us about workers' job displacement outcomes across three key thematic categories: re-employment and future income, identity, and health. Therein, I critically consider how workers' experiences and outcomes following job displacement can vary along

lines of social differences, including age, gender, race, class, (dis)ability, and education. This synthesis explores both broad social trends and their individual impacts as revealed by research.

In the second section of this chapter, I aim to contextualize displaced workers' experiences and outcomes within a sociopolitical framework, focusing principally on how state policies, corporate practices, and union and worker activities collectively shape displaced workers' outcomes. Initially, I review key employment and labour policies and programs specific to mass terminations, thinking through how they coordinate both corporate practices and workers' actions during a mass layoff or company closure. I conclude the section by noting the common resistance strategies employed by unions and workers in response to factory closures and deindustrialization more broadly.

Unpacking Displacement Outcomes: Variations in Re-employment Pathways for Displaced Workers

The broader outlook on re-employment outcomes for displaced manufacturing workers offers some optimism, with the majority of workers securing new employment within one year of displacement (Morissette & Qiu, 2021). The literature focusing on macro re-employment patterns shows that most displaced workers find new jobs in local industries, especially in areas with a high concentration of industries related to their previous employment. In such areas, local industries contribute to absorbing displaced workers through major investments that create new job opportunities and open new facilities. For instance, in their review of 143 food-production factory closures across Canada between 2006 and 2014, Sparling and LeGrow (2014) observed that 67 continuing factories committed to financial investments that expanded their

operations, and 63 food-producing factories opened over eight years in regions previously affected by closures. This suggests a certain elasticity in the manufacturing sector's ability to displace, but also absorb, workers in largely analogous positions. In fact, "for each job lost due to a plant closure only around 0.6-0.7 jobs are lost in the affected industry" (Jofre-Monseny et al., 2018, p. 175), indicating the creation of new jobs in the sector. Thus, reviewing broad-level re-employment patterns of displaced manufacturing workers reveals a kind of resilience within regional economic structures to adapt to industrial downturns and maintain low unemployment levels.

However, seemingly promising statistics on the overall re-employment success of displaced workers can operate to mask individual- and group-level disparities without sufficiently addressing the prevalent issues of under-employment and the variable quality of new jobs. With a net loss of manufacturing jobs, many displaced workers ultimately find employment opportunities in different sectors, such as the service and construction industries (Bernard, 2009). Deeper analyses of re-employment patterns uncover significant variance in speed and status, mirroring broader social arrangements and employment patterns. This variation becomes especially pronounced at the intersections of age, gender, and class, among other dimensions of difference, which serve as examples of how discrimination contributes to the re-employment trajectories of diverse groups.

While the literature often attributes re-employment outcomes to individual coping behaviours such as job search intensity (see, for example, Kinicki et al., 2000; Solove et al., 2015), ageism, sexism, and classism, for instance, surface as markers of societal value within the labour market, influencing the ease or difficulty with which displaced workers can (re)enter

the workforce. These forms of discrimination reflect systemic prejudices that influence hiring practices and perceptions of employability across demographics. For instance, older workers, particularly those over 50 years of age, encounter a labour market steeped in ageism that overshadows their extensive experiences and capabilities with stereotypes that question their adaptability and technological proficiency. In the manufacturing sector, where rapid technological changes are common, employers may perceive the skill set of older workers to be outdated. Meanwhile, the potential of younger workers is often viewed favorably by employers who associate them with adaptability and a quicker learning curve for new technologies, enabling them to find re-employment more quickly (Howland & Peterson, 1988). Similarly, sexism places displaced women and other gender minorities at a disadvantage, prolonging their search for re-employment due to the undervaluation of their work and the prioritization of men's perceived abilities. Classism also exacerbates these challenges for individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and/or those without financial reserves, compelling them to accept employment more quickly (Virick & McKee-Ryan, 2018), although often at the expense of their well-being and career progression and below their former rate (Ehlert, 2016). In contrast, displaced workers from more affluent backgrounds are afforded the luxury of time to search for work that is meaningful and relevant to their skill set, often securing positions with a higher rate of pay and status. Taken together, while some sectors demonstrate a capacity to absorb displaced workers, the re-employment process reflects broader economic and social stratifications that do not uniformly return displaced workers to quality positions or ones that match their career trajectory. The diversity in individual re-employment paths reflects broader employment trends rather than solely the skill and tenacity of individual workers. These

disparities reveal societal biases and structural inequalities that shape who can re-enter the workforce, at what speed and status, and the conditions of their re-employment.

Displaced Workers' Future Earnings

Job displacement often results in long-term wage penalties and increased economic vulnerability that can persist after re-employment. The financial trajectory of displaced workers is marked by immediate and enduring hardship. Studies such as that by Sales (1995) show escalating financial difficulties for workers who remain unemployed for longer than six months, with nearly all those unemployed for more than two years slipping into deep poverty. In such instances, the robustness and accessibility of government programs are critical to the survival of displaced workers, especially those without unemployment benefits. Family support also acts as a crucial wage stabilizer after job loss. Yet, even the added worker effect, where another household member's earnings offset potential income losses, often falls short of fully alleviating financial losses, especially in single-earner households (Ehlert, 2016).

Furthermore, financial challenges do not end with securing new employment opportunities. Displaced workers continue to experience significant reductions in earnings, with initial losses of between 30 and 40 percent (Couch & Placzek, 2010). While diminishing over time, this wage deficit persists, as evidenced by Voßemer (2019), who observed a remaining six percent hourly wage loss for more than five years post-displacement. The long-term financial impact of job displacement due to factory closures or mass layoffs is stark, with an ongoing wage penalty of up to 25 years after re-employment (Virick & McKee-Ryan, 2018). In other words, workers are unable to replenish their previous financial reserves, let alone increase their

reserves, as might be expected in cases of continuous employment with regular wage increases (Kinicki et al., 2000).

Repeated layoffs, coupled with progressively irregular employment relationships, account for reductions in displaced workers' future earnings. Once a worker is displaced from their job, they become increasingly susceptible to ongoing layoffs within a volatile industry and labour market (Ehlert, 2016; Fackler et al., 2019; VoBemer, 2019). Their earnings are also affected by the proliferation of low-wage and reduced-hours work contracts, which have replaced previously stable employment relationships (Krolikowski, 2017). Raposo et al. (2021) found that the movement of displaced workers into lower-paying job titles represents nearly 50 percent of their hourly wage losses; under-employment more broadly (including misallocation of skill and job downgrading and low-paying firms) makes up the additional share of earnings losses.

The enduring loss of income for displaced workers may also be influenced by changes in union membership status. The decline in unionized manufacturing jobs contributed to the notable decrease in Canada's unionization rate from 37.6% in 1981 to 28.7% in 2022 (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, 2022b). Notably, this decline was not uniform across genders, with unionization rates falling by 16 percentage points among men while remaining stable among women, reflecting the disproportionate impact of industrial restructuring on male-dominated sectors. Union membership traditionally offers several benefits, including higher wages, job security, and stronger workplace protection, compared to non-unionized positions. The loss of union status for many displaced workers, therefore, not only symbolizes a shift in employment but also a potential reduction in bargaining power for higher wages and

benefits. The pattern of protracted financial recovery illustrates not only the immediate economic impact of job loss but also the lasting financial setbacks initiated by displacement, leaving workers struggling to rebuild their financial reserves.

Unpacking Displacement Outcomes: (Re)Discovering Self In and Out of Work

> Unemployment erodes personal relationships and creates feelings of disorientation, despair, and worthlessness. And if money were the only concern of individuals, there would be no explanation for the…persons who worked at jobs that paid less than what they would earn if they quit and went on welfare. Nor can the imputation of purely economic motivations account for the answers to a question put to unemployed persons…When asked if they would work if they hit the lottery big, 87 percent said that they would still want to hold a job. (Rinehart, 1996, p. 6)

Although work is often viewed through the lens of economic necessity, Rinehart reminds us of its latent value in the formation and maintenance of both self and social identities, which are jeopardized during job displacement. This section discusses how work shapes our understanding of ourselves and our place in society, with an emphasis on the construction of worker and gender identities in both paid workplace and domestic settings. It will then investigate how losing a job can disturb these identities, leading to possible re-evaluation and reshaping of self-concept and role salience. This discussion aims to illustrate how the economic necessity of work, coupled with the societal valuation of employment, significantly influences individual self-perceptions and social status following job displacement, where disruptions to employment might impact personal and group identities and roles.

Crafting the Self: Work as a Sculptor of Identity

Individuals actively participate in the construction of their identities through a process of "identity work" (see, for example, Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The concept of identity work captures the ongoing efforts people make to build and maintain their self-perception.

Individuals can simultaneously hold multiple identities—such as being a professional, Black, father—that are ever present, but which they highlight or subdue based on the context. For example, someone might foreground their professional[13] self in the workplace, engage with their racial identity more actively in community groups and discussions, and prioritize their familial role at home. Such identities are not static but are in constant flux, evolving with new experiences. Continuous engagement in identity work allows individuals to refine and redefine their identities over time.

Employment provides an arena for individuals to create, present, and sustain their occupational and other identities. Workplaces provide some of the latent resources that can facilitate identity work, including: reflected appraisals, where individuals see themselves through the eyes of others (Grutterink & Meister, 2022); social comparisons, which allow individuals to gauge their abilities and achievements against those around them; and opportunities to demonstrate competence, which is critical for reinforcing one's sense of efficacy and value (Brown, 2015). Individuals regularly renegotiate their identities by integrating experiences and feedback from their work roles, workplaces, and colleagues into their self-concept. This ongoing identity (re)negotiation is essential for enabling individuals to maintain a

[13] The term "professional" is used in this dissertation with full awareness of its contested nature within sociology. Critical scholars have problematized the concept for its role in social closure (Larson, 1979; Abbott, 1988), embodiment of class and racial privilege (Acker, 1990), and function within neoliberal governance regimes (Evetts, 2009). Simultaneously, the concept retains analytical utility when examining occupational identity formation, as demonstrated in studies of collective identity and meaning-making (Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al., 2006). While I primarily use 'occupational' or 'work/er' identity in my analysis to avoid reinforcing status hierarchies, I also engage with participants' use of 'professional identity' as an empirical phenomenon worthy of critical examination. This approach aligns with Noordegraaf and Schinkel's (2011) "situated professionalism" that examines how professional practices and identities are negotiated within specific organizational and social contexts rather than assuming universal professional traits or uncritically valorizing professional status.

coherent sense of self amidst changing social landscapes, shifting economic conditions, and personal life transitions.

The construction of an occupational identity is commonly connected to archetypes of the perfect or "ideal" worker, which can vary across settings and roles. The 'ideal worker' model, as developed by Joan Acker (1990), outlines the prevailing societal standards that shape how individuals "ought to" conduct their work. Integral to this concept is the valorization of employee loyalty, which demands that individuals dedicate themselves to their work without external distractions from their personal lives (Davies & Frink, 2014; Williams, 2001). This model relies on the often invisible labour provided by a stay-at-home spouse (Johnson, 2022), which supports the worker in the paid workplace setting to remain wholly committed to their role. While some workers feel pressure to adhere to the ideal worker norm by investing long hours and even engaging in self-surveillance to avoid being perceived as not fully dedicated (Borgkvist et al., 2018), others may experience conflict and choose to conform only superficially while maintaining private deviations from this standard (Reid, 2015). In both instances, the ideal worker standard influences individuals' perceptions of their own work ethics and their attachment or commitment to this specific occupational identity.

Identity Implications of Gendered Labour

Workers' (re)constructions of their occupational identity also closely intersect with the prevailing gender archetypes. Normative occupational constructs, such as those of the "ideal worker" standard, are often predicated on the historical division of work and home into separate gendered domains. Paid occupational settings typically elevate traits traditionally associated with masculinity and maleness, such as competitiveness, risk-taking, rationality, and

emotional stoicism (Acker, 2006a; Connell, 2007). Conversely, in the domestic sphere, work is often imbued with characteristics traditionally associated with femininity, such as nurturing, emotional labour, multitasking, and care responsibilities. These contrasting gendered expectations of work in both paid workplace settings and domestic spheres encourage workers to mimic behaviours aligned with societal norms, perpetuating a dichotomy between masculine-coded occupational identities in wage labour and femininity-associated identities in domestic work.

The gendered arrangement of the "ideal worker" archetype systematically disadvantages individuals in occupational contexts who do not conform to its narrow criteria. This organizing structure subordinates groups such as women, who might have caregiving responsibilities; parents who seek work-life balance; older workers who may need reduced work hours; people with disabilities who require flexible schedules; and non-binary or gender non-conforming folx who face workplace biases for not meeting masculine standards. The archetype not only marginalizes these groups but also permeates the entire organizational culture through the creation of a work environment that rewards constant availability and prolonged working hours. This environment not only enforces stringent standards but also confers advantages on those who fit this narrow mould—typically, white men (Acker, 2006b). These advantages include greater access to power and authority within the organization, higher earnings potential, and more opportunities for career advancement. Given that such workplace benefits are aligned with traditional masculine traits, they perpetuate a gendered hierarchy in which shifts toward increased equality are often perceived by those benefitting from the current structures as a threat (Williams, 2001). Consequently, workplaces often (de)evolve into

arenas for “masculinity contests,” where adherence to masculine ideals and “proving” masculine identity to self and others becomes a measure of occupational worth (Ely & Kimmel, 2018).

Although the “ideal worker” model emphasizes traits typically associated with masculinity, such as uninterrupted career trajectories and availability for long work hours without personal interruptions, employers may regard women as “ideal workers” under gender-specific expectations. In these instances, “ideal” attributes for women might include compliance, obedience, and willingness to accept lower wages, emphasizing how the qualities of an ideal worker are gendered. This skewed valuation does little to disrupt the male-dominated hierarchy, but instead reinforces barriers to gender equality by ensuring that the traits rewarded by women do not challenge the existing masculine ideal (Davies & Frink, 2014).

Thus, despite an increasing number of women entering paid employment and occupying roles traditionally dominated by men, the fundamental dynamics of gender inequality continue to influence occupational identity and workplace hierarchies. Employment patterns following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic serve as a stark example of the enduring persistence of a gendered division of labour. Specifically, women’s workforce participation has been disproportionately hindered during the pandemic. In part, job segregation contributed to this outcome, as more women occupied roles in retail, hospitality, entertainment, and other customer-facing industries that closed during early waves of the pandemic; differently, men tended to occupy occupational roles more amenable to the shift to remote work. However, even in cases where both partners maintained work, women experienced more interruptions to

paid employment due to increasing childcare and/or eldercare responsibilities (Carli, 2020; Johnson, 2022).

Lost in Transition: Identity Disturbance Post-Displacement

When entire companies or industries collapse or exit a community, the identities of individuals crafted around these workplaces are threatened. In the absence of stabilizing employment structures, displaced workers can experience a state of liminality where their identities become ambiguous and subject to fluctuation (Daskalaki & Simosi, 2018; Garrett-Peters, 2009). As displaced workers reconcile changes in their occupational lives with their broader self-concept, they are often compelled to redefine their relationship with work. For example, a displaced worker facing downward mobility may feel disconnected from the meanings and values that they previously attached to work, which can prompt a shift from work as a core part of their identity to merely a means for financial survival (Koeber, 2002). Alternatively, some individuals will adopt an ideology of "career management" that frames job changes and periods of unemployment as normal and necessary, thus maintaining their pride and identity despite job displacement (Lane, 2009).

While the process of occupational identity renegotiation is primarily an individual endeavour, it also has a significant social dimension. Factory closures or mass layoffs can cultivate collective nostalgia among displaced workers for their former roles, relationships, and work environments. A shared sense of loss can forge a new collective identity that bonds individuals together, distinguishing them from those who have not experienced similar disruptions (Milligan, 2003). Additionally, affected communities extend this social dimension of identity work when they come together to organize cooperatives, initiate grassroots projects,

or develop social programs. These examples of collective action enable displaced workers and their communities to redefine their societal contributions apart from traditional employment structures (Daskalaki & Simosi, 2018).

The ability of displaced workers to preserve continuity in their self-concept may hinge on the centrality of their work role to their identity. Specifically, the more a displaced worker perceives themselves through a variety of attributes and assigns equal importance to their various identities, the less the event of job displacement disrupts their self-concept (Papa & Lancaster, 2016). However, the "ideal worker" standard can exacerbate identity disruption. Individuals who identify with the ideal worker ethic experience a significant reduction in life satisfaction when they lose their jobs, finding joblessness a particularly distressing event. This effect is intensified in communities where work is highly valued and central to social identity (Van Hoorn & Maseland, 2013).

While restrictive for all genders, the "ideal worker" norm uniquely disenfranchises men as job displacement not only challenges their occupational identity, but also engenders socially stigmatizing narratives that problematically equate job loss with a failure to conform to traditional gender norms. The masculinist linear career model limits men's ability to deviate from their traditional roles (Borgkvist et al., 2018). The loss of a job not only disrupts their role as a provider but can also prompt an identity crisis. de Guerre (2011) reflects:

> The idea of being the family provider was the measure, was the index of how well you were proving your masculinity. That you could support your family…was the key to manhood…And for men, it trumped all other goals. To fail in this, was to fail in life…So it makes it really hard on guys to lose a job. Because everything that's defined who they are suddenly vanishes…the man feels he's not a man anymore. [Whereas] if you interview a woman who's lost her job, she feels terrible, but she doesn't feel like she's not a woman anymore.

de Guerre's analysis indicates that men face the dual burden of losing their employment as well as a central pillar of their identity, which, taken together, challenges their capacity to preserve their self-image and social status. Differently, when women are displaced from their paid employment, it does not prompt the same degree of role realignment due to pre-established expectations about women's domestic roles[14]. Even with increasing responsibilities outside the home, women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010). While job displacement provides an opportunity to re-evaluate traditional gender roles, the foothold of the breadwinner ideal persists, compelling men to uphold the role of provider even amid financial hardship (Biese, 2020). That is, while men may assume more household responsibilities than usual, which could challenge conventional masculine and feminine ideals (Buzzanell & Turner, 2003), they tend to do so temporarily or in a supplementary role. Without fully integrating domestic and caring activities into their primary role, this approach leaves intact the traditional gender hierarchy within heteronormative families, where women continue to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibilities.

Temporal Disruption and Identity: How Changed Time Structure Affects Workers' Sense of Self. Companies' post-announcement practices created temporal contradictions that transformed workplace rhythms, as management simultaneously intensified production demands while restricting information flows about the closure process. The reshaping of

[14] This literature primarily examines heteronormative family structures. Limited studies suggest distinct experiences for non-normative relationship and family structures. For example, queer couples often distribute household labour more equitably and flexibly, potentially buffering identity disruption during job loss (Barrett, 2015).

temporal orders affects workers' experiences of time, often manifesting in feelings of temporal acceleration or deceleration (Rosa & Trejo-Mathys, 2013; Wajcman, 2020), heightened time pressure (Szollos, 2009), and shifts in how workers orient themselves toward the future (Mische, 2009; Tavory & Eliasoph, 2013), among other expressions. Such changes in temporal experience impact workers' engagement with their tasks and permeate workers' broader life rhythms and social relationships (Bluedorn, 2002), and fundamentally, their sense of identity.

The relationship between time structures and identity formation has deep theoretical roots. E.P. Thompson's seminal work, *Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism* (1967), provides a foundational analysis of how industrial capitalism's imposition of "clock time" replaced the "task-oriented" time of pre-industrial societies. This shift disciplined workers' bodies and shaped their self-conception as workers defined by punctuality, efficiency, and productive use of time. When job displacement disrupts these internalized time structures, workers lose a fundamental organizing principle of identity.

Building on Thompson's insights, scholars examining late capitalism's temporal orders highlight how modern work identities are increasingly bound to experiences of acceleration and flexibility. David Harvey's (1989) concept of "time-space compression" illuminates how capitalism's need for accelerated turnover time leads to a "compression" of temporal experiences across all aspects of social life (e.g., time seems to accelerate while our perception of distance shrinks due to faster travel and communication, etc.). Similarly, Braverman (1974) shows how precise measurement and control of time becomes a tool for increasing productivity and exerting managerial control. More recently, Maume and Purcell (2007) documented the intensification of work and increasing time pressures in the modern workplace, finding that

between 1977 and 1997, workers reported a sharp increase in the pace and intensity of their work. These analyses bridge our understanding of temporal orders, from the industrial capitalism that Thompson described to the increasingly globalized and technologically mediated orders of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In this context, a worker's identity becomes tied to occupation and specific temporal orientations and capacities therein.

Job displacement introduces another dimension to the temporal reconfiguration of work. In their classic study "Marienthal," Jahoda et al. (1933/1971) documented how unemployment led to an erosion of the time structure and a sense of purposelessness among workers. More recently, Rojeck (2004) observed how people without waged employment experience a "time surplus" that, paradoxically, often feels oppressive rather than liberating. These studies surface how loss of work also alters one's relationship with time, often leading to social and psychological disorientation.

When considered alongside the identity disturbances discussed previously, these temporal disruptions compound the challenge of maintaining continuity in self-concept after job loss. Displaced workers reconstruct their relationship with time itself, in addition to renegotiating their occupational and gender identities.

Unpacking Displacement Outcomes: Considering Health Impacts From Mental Strain to Physical Pain

Building on the established understanding that employment provides not only economic benefits but also fulfills crucial psychological and social functions, this section examines how the loss of these roles through job displacement impacts workers' health. There is a consensus in the literature that losing a job leads to a decline in both physical and mental health. Research

into mass layoffs provides an interesting exogenous entry into the health impacts of unemployment insofar as workers' characteristics and preceding health behaviours do not *cause* employment loss. That is, mass layoffs due to company closures do not discriminate based on workers' health, but instead impact "healthy" and "unhealthy" workers alike. This specific context has enabled scholars to effectively address the "chicken or egg" question of causality between employment loss and ill health, confirming that job displacement itself can catalyze physical and mental illness.

Researchers frequently discuss this health decline using medicalized frameworks of illness that focus on biochemical markers, symptomology, diagnostic criteria, and psychiatric classification. However, it is crucial to consider the subtleties of these outcomes. Specifically, which workers experience better or worse health following job loss? What socioeconomic or other intersecting factors shape the severity of health decline? How do individual coping mechanisms and community resources affect these trajectories? In this subsection, I compile a comprehensive overview of the health outcomes associated with job displacement before detailing how different circumstances and individual characteristics can contribute to varied health experiences among those affected by job displacement.

Losing More Than a Job: Declining Physical and Mental Health Following Job Displacement

Researchers have documented a range of adverse health outcomes associated with job displacement, including physical, physiological, and mental well-being. Job displacement is linked to an increase in critical physiological conditions, such as hypertension (Tian et al., 2018) and stroke (Noelke & Avendano, 2015), as well as to disruptions of basic physiological functions, such as sleep (Rathmann et al., 2016; Silva et al., 2021). Researchers have noted sex

differences in the physiological manifestations of such illnesses. Specifically, men are more likely to experience hypertension and associated heart disease (Acevedo et al., 2019), whereas women are more likely to experience weight gain and obesity following job loss (Monsivais et al., 2015).

Physiological symptoms following job displacement frequently co-occur with mental and emotional disturbances. Previous research has documented a significant increase in mental health issues among displaced workers, with depression and anxiety being the most common psychological symptoms (Anaf et al., 2013; Andreeva et al., 2015, 2017; BaticMujanovic et al., 2017; Yoon et al., 2017). These symptoms can lead to severe outcomes, such as increased suicidal ideation and a rise in suicide rates (Classen & Dunn, 2012; Kaspersen et al., 2016; Winant, 2019). Psychological health outcomes continue to differ according to gender. For example, men are more likely than women to experience intense grief (Climent-Rodríguez et al., 2019) and exhibit a higher propensity for suicidal ideation (Kim et al., 2017), which remains stable over time even after they find new employment. In contrast, women's mental health deteriorates with unemployment but improves to a level comparable to that of those who maintain their jobs once they secure new employment (Huijts et al., 2015; Janlert et al., 2015). Displaced workers' mental health challenges can be triggered or exacerbated by factors such as disruption to their daily routines, erosion of workplace social support, and stress of financial insecurity. These differences in mental health outcomes can also be influenced by gender norms that affect not only the willingness of workers to seek help but also the "believability" of their concerns and the types of support offered by healthcare workers, which can contribute to disparities in health maintenance and recovery post-job loss.

Physiological and psychological health outcomes are predominantly identified in the literature through large-scale self-report surveys, including those sourced from government censuses (Glavin & Young, 2017). Empirical evidence from biochemical tests substantiates these findings. Specifically, researchers have established significant correlations between job loss and elevated blood sugar levels linked to diabetes (Michaud et al., 2016), rising cortisol levels associated with stress and anxiety (Sumner & Gallagher, 2017), and heightened blood pressure linked to hypertension and cardiovascular diseases (Johansson et al., 2020). Researchers believe that such alterations in biochemical markers contribute at least partially to the increased mortality risks observed following job displacement (Bloemen et al., 2018; Browning & Heinesen, 2012; Eliason & Storrie, 2010; Michaud et al., 2016).

However, the well-documented health challenges linked to job displacement through predominantly quantitative research might not fully capture workers' experiences. Not all the impacts of job loss can be captured through medical or psychological measures alone. In conjunction with or in contrast to quantitative methods that proliferate the factory closure and job loss literature, workers' narratives can depict how their physiological symptoms and emotional experiences affect daily living and working. For instance, based on data from her dissertation research, Rao (2016) shared the narrative of a displaced worker living with chronic depression who reflected on their depressive thoughts after losing their job:

> I felt that I was damaged goods…not worth being scraped off somebody's shoe…There are people that teeter on the edge—and I think there's a lot of them. Something about unemployment throws them into the abyss…and I've experienced it myself. (p. 199-200)

The worker went on to describe how these depressive thoughts impacted their daily activities, such as lacking the energy for months to make dinner. Rao's use of narratives to explicate the

health experiences of displaced workers challenges the adequacy of conventional quantitative assessments for fully understanding the health outcomes of job displacement.

The Wellness Gap: Decoding Diverse Health Outcomes

While a plethora of evidence exists demonstrating that job loss produces ill health effects for displaced workers, not every worker's health deteriorates following job displacement. Why do some displaced workers experience dwindling health while other workers appear "resilient" in the face of job displacement? A subset of the literature on job loss investigates the possible individual and social determinants of health that can contribute to some workers staying well while others experience illness. Traditional health-related research has prioritized individual-level explanations for health outcomes, such as coping mechanisms, at the expense of societal-level factors, such as economic conditions, which can also drive health disparities. In my review of this literature, I critically question this individual-focused perspective.

The Role of Personal Agency in Explaining Health Disparities. In the context of job displacement, researchers most frequently seek to understand variations in health outcomes through the lens of individual-level characteristics and coping behaviours. The majority of studies adhere to an agreed-upon perspective that categorizes displaced workers into two archetypes, depending on their reaction to job loss. The first group is characterized by individuals who actively manage their situation by adopting a mindset of "mastery" and control, as schematized by Guimarães et al. (2010). The second group consists of those who take a fatalistic approach and view their circumstances as insurmountable. This classification suggests a fundamental division in how individuals perceive and respond to job loss, framing displaced

workers as active subjects who either escape their unemployment and any resulting illnesses or perpetuate job loss and (re)create health issues.

The various strategies that individuals use to deal with the stress of job loss are defined in the literature as their coping mechanisms. Some individuals may choose to adopt "problem-focused" or "adaptive" approaches, such as pursuing new job training. Workers with higher internal resources, such as self-confidence, are more likely to engage in problem-focused strategies (Mojtahedi et al., 2021; Solove et al., 2015) and experience lower incidences of depression, stress, and anxiety. Conversely, others may engage in "emotion-focused" behaviours aimed at distracting themselves from the stressor, such as increased substance use (Lim et al., 2016; Solove et al., 2015; Synard & Gazzola, 2019). Coping behaviours that fit into this category can exacerbate workers' negative affect (Navarro-Abal et al., 2018). Research indicates that displaced workers are more likely to adopt "emotion-focused" coping behaviours compared to those who are either currently employed or have previously experienced displacement (Airagnes et al., 2019; Golden & Perreira, 2015; Lazareva, 2020). For example, chronic drinking is more prevalent among displaced workers (de Goeij et al., 2017).

The classification of coping as either "adaptive" or "maladaptive" largely depends on whether the behaviour is thought to help the individual overcome or withdraw from job-related activities, including job search. That is, notions of "(mal)adaptive" coping behaviours following job displacement are simply social constructions of those activities that are directed toward (or not) the auspicious goal of re-employment. Displaced workers' willingness to "participate in the measures and systems set up to help them reintegrate into the working world" (Hentz, 2016, p. 18) is inextricably linked to their perceived ability to deter and overcome illness. This

categorization implies a normative judgement about the "correctness" of coping responses, which can shape societal perceptions of the displaced and/or unemployed and their health outcomes. While many researchers celebrate these outcomes as a demonstration of workers' agency in managing their re-employment and health prospects, there is a possible unintended consequence: this perspective tends to shift focus and responsibility for job loss outcomes onto displaced workers themselves, diverting attention from the workplace or the state as the instigator of workers' hardship.

Social Structures and Sickness. A smaller subset of the literature on the health outcomes of job loss and unemployment considers the social determinants of health that recaptures the institutional structures lost in individual-level explanations. These analyses largely regard workers' agency as interwoven with and constrained by structural forces such as labour market conditions and societal norms (Anaf et al., 2013; Synard & Gazzola, 2019). They argue that the specific nature of job loss, the characteristics of the economic and labour markets into which workers are thrust, and individual social differences significantly shape displaced workers' health disparities. By situating personal health behaviours within these broader structural contexts, this approach challenges the narrative that personal choice alone dictates the well-being of displaced workers.

The circumstances surrounding workers' displacement – be it through layoff, closure, or firing – significantly shape their subsequent health risks. Although company closures often signal employment insecurity in a particular industry, they appear to provide a reprieve from negative health outcomes. Research by Michaud et al. (2016) indicates that workers who lose their jobs due to company closures experience better health biomarkers than those who are

laid off or fired. This finding is consistent with observations by Buffel et al. (2017), who suggest that workers who lose their jobs because of company closure experience less depression and consume fewer medications than their counterparts who are unemployed without being displaced from a closing company. Such studies highlight the impacts of different types of job displacement on health behaviours and biomarkers, indicating that the context of a job can determine the immediate health outcomes for displaced workers.

The downsizing approach also appears to shape workers' health outcomes. According to Andreeva et al. (2017), rather than actual job loss, it is the way management implements organizational downsizing that determines health effects. The authors identified differences in workers' mental health between "reactive" and "strategic" downsizing, where the former includes compulsory redundancies and the latter redeploys workers within the company or incorporates layoffs into retirement planning (i.e., no one "loses" their job). Workers subjected to reactive downsizing experience higher levels of anxiety, depression, and emotional exhaustion than those involved in more strategic downsizing. This finding emphasizes the role of management in safeguarding or threatening employee well-being. Furthermore, some studies have indicated that the threat of displacement can be more distressing than job loss (Kim & von dem Knesebeck, 2015; Watson & Osberg, 2018). The anticipatory stress of potential job loss can create a state of constant vigilance and stress, disrupting sleep patterns and depleting an individual's internal mental resources, even before the actual loss of employment occurs. Overall, these studies demonstrate that the context of displacement, coupled with the downsizing method, can shape workers' health outcomes.

The possibility that workers' health fares better during a company closure compared to other forms of job loss may be attributed to the diminished social stigma associated with "unavoidable" unemployment. In instances where companies close, job loss is often regarded as an unavoidable consequence of broader economic conditions rather than an indication of individual performance, which consequently lessens the personal stigma attached to unemployment. This reduction in stigma may provide significant psychological relief and contribute to improved health outcomes. Studies such as those by Glavin and Young (2017) support this notion by demonstrating that in regions with high unemployment, job insecurity becomes a normalized, shared experience. The collective experience of job loss can offer psychological solace and alleviate stress responses that negatively impact health. Furthermore, financial and other support mechanisms that are commonly provided during company closures and in regions with higher unemployment, including more substantial severance packages, unemployment benefits, and access to psychological services, can cushion the initial shock of job loss by providing temporary stability (Glavin & Young, 2017). Thus, the interaction between reduced social stigma, the collective experience of job loss, and enhanced financial and psychological support systems can create an environment in which the health consequences of job displacement are mitigated during company closures compared to other circumstances where these elements may be lacking.

While reduced social stigma associated with company closures might initially mitigate some of the psychological impacts and other health risks typical of job loss, prolonged economic hardship and lack of employment opportunities during economic crises can otherwise contribute to health risks. For displaced workers, whose health deteriorates, the duration of

unemployment is a critical component in the development of physiological illness (Altweck et al., 2021; Stauder, 2019). Research such as that by Rathmann et al. (2016) shows that recessions correlated with increased youth unemployment lead to more frequent psychological health complaints, suggesting that economic downturns could aggravate the psychological impact of job loss beyond any mitigating effect of a shared unemployment experience. Pearlman (2015) further supports this finding by noting that ill health is exacerbated by higher unemployment rates at the time of displacement because limited job opportunities hinder employment and economic recovery. According to de Goeij et al. (2017), economic crises also intensify health-destructive behaviours, such as harmful drinking. Their findings suggest that broader economic instability may override the temporary protective effects of high unemployment areas by intensifying the stress of employment and economic insecurity over time.

The sometimes disparate findings across studies on the health outcomes of displaced workers suggest that while personal shame and stress, typically associated with unemployment, are initially lessened when job loss is a common experience, this protective factor can be overwhelmed by more persistent stresses such as financial instability and prolonged job search. These broader economic factors can exacerbate health-destructive behaviours and deteriorate mental health over time, suggesting that while stigma reduction is beneficial, it is not sufficient on its own to sustain health during economic crises. Furthermore, the more robust support or community solidarity available during company closures and/or in regions with high unemployment may, over time, become strained or less accessible as economic conditions worsen. Therefore, economic turmoil can contribute in the long term to health challenges, as

the initial relief provided by reduced stigma gradually gives way to the realities of limited support and resources. The relationship between economic and social conditions and workers' health outcomes illustrates the importance of not reducing social phenomena entirely to individual-level factors.

The predominant approach to studying workers' emotional responses to job displacement has focused on individual-level factors, particularly personal coping strategies. While this research yields valuable insights, I argue that it remains fundamentally limited in its explanatory power and potentially reinforces the problematic individualization of structural issues. By primarily examining personal characteristics and behaviours, this approach implicitly suggests that the burden of "resilience" in the context of job loss rests with the individual. I contend that this perspective not only fails to fully explain the varied health outcomes among displaced workers but also diverts attention from broader social and economic forces. Instead, I align myself with the subset of literature that emphasizes the social determinants of health, such as the nature of job loss, economic conditions, and societal norms.

Shaping the Unmaking: The Role of Policies and Protests in Factory Closures

In the second section of this chapter, I shift the focus to examining displaced workers' experiences and outcomes through a sociopolitical lens. In this section, I consider how state policies, common corporate procedures, and union and worker activities collectively influence factory closures. This analysis begins with a framing discussion of "deservedness" followed by a review of pertinent employment and labour policies in Ontario, Canada, specific to mass terminations. I consider how these policies interact with corporate procedures and how they, in turn, could affect workers' reactions. By exploring these dimensions, my goal is to spark a

conversation about how policy formulation, corporate decision-making, and union and worker activism affect the trajectory and impact of factory closures, which will become increasingly evident from the participant narratives presented later in this dissertation.

Legislative Landscapes: Steering Mass Employment Terminations and Industrial Transitions

State policies are not neutral. Policies are intimately intertwined with moral beliefs and concepts of "deservedness," which influence the distribution of government aid, including assistance for displaced workers. (Un)Employment policy frameworks can offer a remedy during large-scale job cuts by stabilizing communities impacted by industrial transitions and supporting displaced workers through (re)training, financial support, and social services. However, the effectiveness of these frameworks is challenged by the realities of implementation, political will, economic conditions, and unequal power dynamics between workers, politicians, and employers.

Constructing Deservedness in Unemployment Policies. The concept of deservedness in relation to government aid for displaced workers is rooted in ideological principles that delineate who is considered worthy and, therefore, eligible for assistance. In early 20th-century Canada, the 'logic of lesser eligibility' dictated that those receiving relief must be less comfortable than the lowest-paid workers to maintain the incentive to work (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018). This principle was evident during the Great Depression, when a surge in unemployment was met with basic biopolitical strategies aimed at ensuring the survival of workers during their period(s) of joblessness (McIntyre & Nast, 2011), as well as the imposition of stringent tests of willingness to work. For instance, the federal government established work camps in 1933, modelled after Victorian workhouse ideals, as a means to enforce this ideology.

Unmarried men over 16 were mandated to reside in these camps to receive relief, while married men had to undergo outdoor tests to discern their 'willingness to work' (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018). Until the "New Deal" reforms, work camps represented the only expansion of federal responsibility for unemployment relief.

The purpose of work camps during this period was to discourage dependence on relief programs by implementing a punitive approach towards the displaced and/or unemployed. Authorities believed that the establishment of camps could "rehabilitate" men demoralized by unemployment by providing structured work and sustenance. However, despite the harsh conditions and minimal wages of $0.20 per day in these camps (Struthers, 1979), the impact of encouraging men to re-enter the workforce was minimal due to the ongoing scarcity of available jobs. In fact, these camps not only failed to reduce the demand for relief but also led to increased unrest among workers (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018). Finding themselves still impoverished despite their hard labour, many workers protested for fairer treatment and more equitable relief policies, such as in the 1935 On-to-Ottawa Trek[15] (Struthers, 1979).

Historical punitive measures toward displaced workers marginalized those considered "excess" by the economic system, offering minimal support and harsh conditions instead of meaningful assistance. This legacy persists in contemporary policies that prioritize short-term unemployed workers who are likely to re-enter the workforce while imposing restrictive criteria

[15] The Relief Camp Workers' Union organized the 1935 On-to-Ottawa Trek as a protest against the deplorable working conditions in government work camps. Approximately 1,000 unemployed relief camp workers abandoned their posts and marched eastward from Vancouver toward Ottawa, the nation's capital, to present their grievances directly to Prime Minister Bennett. The union and protesters demanded improved living conditions, fair wages, and genuine employment opportunities rather than the relief camp system's forced labour (Brown, 1987). Although the trek did not reach Ottawa due to being halted by government orders resulting in confrontation with the police in Regina, Saskatchewan, it raised public awareness about the inadequacies of the relief camp system.

on those facing long-term unemployment. This, in turn, influences who can survive job displacement (Bartley, 2017).

Layoff Legislation: Critical Laws Shaping Displacement and Unemployment Benefits. Historical notions of deservedness in unemployment policies have not disappeared but rather evolved, manifesting in more subtle ways within contemporary legislative frameworks. In Ontario, Canada, the site of this study, federal and provincial acts jointly regulate job displacement, shaping society's current stance on who deserves protection and support during workforce disruptions. Table 1 outlines four key legislative frameworks that in/directly govern mass layoffs, job displacement, and unemployment. These frameworks include the Canada Labour Code and Employment Insurance Act at the federal level and the Employment Standards Act 2000 and Labour Relations Act 1995 at the provincial level. While ostensibly progressive, these acts still embed assumptions about workers' worth and employer rights. For instance, severance pay requirements and employment insurance eligibility parameters implicitly value longer-tenured employees over recent hires. Even as these laws aim to mitigate the impact of layoffs by recognizing at least some shared responsibility for displaced workers, they simultaneously normalize the process of workforce reduction, tacitly accepting it as an inevitable feature of our economic system. Thus, while contemporary legislation represents a more negotiated compromise between labour rights, corporate flexibility, and state intervention, it also perpetuates long-standing societal judgments about the nature of work, unemployment, and worker value.

Table 1

Government Legislation Organizing Mass Layoffs and Factory Closures in Ontario/Canada

Legislation	Requirements for Mass Layoff/Company Closure
Canada Labour Code	- Employers must give notice or pay in lieu of notice for group terminations (50 or more employees within 4 weeks). - Severance pay is required under certain conditions. - The code may require consultation with employee representatives and potentially the union in the event of a mass layoff. - Contains certain provisions that regulate strike activity.
Employment Insurance Act	- This act doesn't directly dictate requirements for employers during layoffs. - It provides income support to eligible workers who lose their job and are actively seeking employment. - Length of EI benefits varies based on factors such as regional unemployment rate and claimant's insurable hours of work.
Employment Standards Act 2000 (Ontario)	- Employers are required to provide notice or pay in lieu of notice for terminations, with the amount based on the length of employment. - For mass layoffs (50 or more employees), a higher level of notice is required in addition to providing notice to the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development - There are also rules about temporary layoffs which, if exceeded, can turn into a termination.
Labour Relations Act 1995 (Ontario)	- This act primarily governs the relationship between employers, employees, and unions. - In case of closures or layoffs, the act may influence the process of collective bargaining, especially in unionized workplaces. - Includes No-strike clauses that prohibit strikes during the term of a collective agreement

While detailing the history of each relevant policy is beyond the scope of this study, it is important to consider the ideological underpinnings of the 'flexicurity' framework that has gained prominence since the early 2000s. Flexicurity refers to labour market strategies that simultaneously aim to enhance flexibility and security in employment relations (Jørgensen & United Nations, 2009; Muffels et al., 2002; Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). For instance, flexicurity policies might facilitate easier hiring and firing processes for employers (flexibility) while

providing generous unemployment benefits to support workers transitioning between jobs (security) (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). The flexicurity approach subtly reframes notions of deservedness by emphasizing individual adaptability and continuous skill development as key determinants of employment security across advanced capitalist economies, including Canada (Burroni & Keune, 2011; Lewchuk, 2013).

Proponents of flexicurity strategies argue that they allow employers to respond swiftly to technological changes and competitive pressures while bolstering workers' security through training and transitional income support (Wilthagen & Tros, 2004). However, critics contend that flexicurity policies normalize precarity and shift the burden of adaptation to individuals (Burroni & Keune, 2011). Vosko (2016) notes that the rhetoric of flexibility and security can mask the erosion of labour protections and the offloading of risk onto workers, especially affecting vulnerable groups such as women, racialized workers, and recent immigrants.

In what follows, I provide additional details about the legislative requirements and impacts of three particular provisions that participants in this study identified as especially critical to shaping their experiences and well-being following their factory closure: income replacement (i.e., employment insurance), severance, and strike restrictions. Examining layoff and closure laws as part of flexicurity reveals that while these policies promise to protect both employers and workers, they typically favour employers, particularly when industries decline. I focus on how these policies demarcate lines of deservedness, examining their role in defining who is deemed worthy of support, who has a "right" to determine the terms of closure, and who has the power to persuade public discourse. This discussion considers not only the legal landscape but also "rights" more broadly as social, economic, and political power, including the

power to influence both the immediate context of factory closure and societal norms regarding labour relations and workers' welfare.

Limits of a Lifeline: Employment Insurance Boundaries. Displaced workers who find themselves unemployed while searching for new work *might* be eligible to receive a form of partial income replacement through Employment Insurance (EI). Established in 1940 with the passage of the (Un)Employment Insurance Act, EI became the cornerstone of Canada's social safety net. Pushed by rising unemployment rates and industrial labour militancy that demanded broader and more inclusive support mechanisms, the EI system continued to grow toward more universal expansion through 1971. At its peak, EI provided benefits coverage upward of 96% of wage/salary-earning workers[16]. However, under the guise of motivating unemployed individuals towards employment, successive austerity-driven governments have eroded the expansive reach of EI benefits (Canadian Labour Congress, 2018). After 1971, governments implemented a series of cuts that reduced the generosity of EI benefits, tightened eligibility requirements, and more closely tied benefit receipt to labour market participation.

The level of income support available to displaced workers varies according to several factors, such as the regional unemployment rate and the claimant's history of insurable employment hours. For instance, to accommodate the greater difficulty of finding employment in regions with higher unemployment rates, displaced workers need fewer insurable hours to qualify for EI benefits. More specifically, when the unemployment rate is above 13 percent, the minimum number of required insurable hours is 420. However, in regions with an

[16] The EI system was structured around traditional employment patterns typically associated with male breadwinners, creating significant coverage gaps for those in non-standard work arrangements. See Porter (2003) for a detailed analysis of the gender dimensions of structural inequities.

unemployment rate below six percent, this threshold increases to 700 insurable hours (Gunderson, 2013). This design may provide greater assistance where and when unemployment is more prevalent.

In addition to providing financial assistance, EI also shapes the broader experience of job displacement through its Employment Benefit and Support Measures. Introduced in the mid-1990s, these measures marked a shift from passive income maintenance to active labour market policies (Martin, 2015). This policy transformation aligned with the broader ascendancy of neoliberalism in Canadian economic and social policy during the 1990s. The neoliberal paradigm, which emphasized market solutions, fiscal restraint, and individual responsibility, significantly influenced labour market policy reforms during this period (McBride & Williams, 2001). The reframing of unemployment as primarily an individual rather than a structural problem led to policy solutions focused on enhancing "employability" and facilitating market adjustment rather than providing robust income security.

In contrast to passive income maintenance programs like EI, governments devised active labour market policies to reallocate labour to expanding firms, occupations, regions, and industries by providing job search assistance, retraining and upskilling assistance, mobility support, and wage supplements. Although such training programs often have a limited impact, some studies find a modest impact on earnings, especially for college and other academic upgrades. However, these impacts are not large enough to offset the earnings losses of long-tenure displaced workers.

The accessibility and robustness of EI program benefits can shape displaced workers' future employment trajectories and overall well-being. For example, the length of EI benefits

can affect the quality of future employer-employee matches (Farooq et al., 2020). In a study of EI benefit duration in the United States, Farooq and colleagues noted a decrease in the mismatch between workers' educational attainment and the educational requirements of their new jobs when the duration of EI benefit was extended by 53 weeks. Importantly, the effect was more pronounced for women, racialized, less educated, and older workers who "are more likely to be credit-constrained" (p. 3). This finding suggests that more generous EI allows marginalized groups of displaced workers to spend more time searching for jobs that match their skills and qualifications.

When Benefits Fall Short. Practically speaking, the Employment Insurance Act, established during the Fordist era of full-time, year-round employment, has not kept pace with the increasing precarity of modern work, resulting in strict eligibility criteria that disqualify a majority of unemployed workers from receiving benefits (Ferdosi, 2021). Now, an average of only 40% of unemployed workers are eligible to receive EI benefits, and in more populated urban centers like Toronto and the GTA, the average eligibility rate has dropped to as low as 20% (Unifor, 2021). This means that even workers who pay their unemployment insurance premiums can still be deemed ineligible to collect benefits. The disqualification of the majority of unemployed workers comes on the heels of persistent program retrenchment. For example, in 2001, the Canadian government introduced changes to tighten EI eligibility criteria, such as increasing the number of insurable hours for new entrants and re-entrants from 700 to 910 hours (Gunderson, 2013), particularly impacting immigrants, young workers, and women taking leave due to family responsibilities. Reforms continued even after the 2008 financial crisis, exacerbating the challenges faced by workers amidst widespread unemployment and company

closures across Ontario's 'rust belt'. For instance, in 2012, the Harper government required claimants to broaden their job search beyond their previous employment scope by accepting positions offering as low as 70% of their former wages (Day, 2013). Consequently, workers accustomed to higher earnings have been compelled to settle for significantly lower-paying jobs and consider employment in fields potentially unrelated to their expertise or educational background. If applicants failed to comply with these expanded criteria for job acceptance, they were classified as "unavailable for work," and therefore ineligible for benefits (Grundy & Laliberte Rudman, 2018). Simultaneously, EI introduced a categorization system that classified claimants based on their previous EI usage; "frequent claimants[17]" faced increased pressure to accept "any available" job. The 2012 program reforms also increased the number of insurable hours needed for subsequent claims. These stricter conditions for frequent claimants have adversely affected marginalized workers (Tranjan, 2024), including young workers, recent immigrants, women, and workers in nonstandard employment relationships.

The COVID-19 crisis exposed deficiencies in the accessibility of EI following decades of program cuts. When the COVID-19 pandemic triggered an onslaught of precarious and mass unemployment among the majoritized, the Canadian government temporarily reformed EI to significantly broaden eligibility. The adjustments made by the federal government during this period were significant departures from the norm and included lowering the eligibility requirement to 120 hours of insurable employment nationwide (Government of Canada, 2020). Additionally, Service Canada distributed the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) at a

[17] "Frequent claimants" qualify as those who have made three or more claims for regular or fishing benefits and received over 60 weeks of benefits in the past five years (Government of Canada, 2016)

universal rate of $500 per week to eligible Canadians impacted by COVID-19. While CERB received some criticism for abandoning already displaced or unemployed workers, including persons receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program (Pin et al., 2023), these changes transformed the EI system into a more inclusive safety net. The reforms pushed the system toward more equitable support for a broader segment of the workforce, extended needed material aid to those facing displacement and job insecurity who would have otherwise been excluded from EI benefits.

Reforming the Reforms: The Struggle for Adequate EI Supports. While temporary, adjustments made by the federal government to the EI system during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate the potential for more universal and inclusive support in safeguarding the well-being and social reproductive needs of the wider workforce. Yet, the subsequent retraction of CERB and re-tightening of EI eligibility parameters reveal an adherence to traditional notions of "deservedness," specifically returning to a more restrictive model that prioritizes conditional assistance and limits social protections to particular, temporarily unemployed groups of workers.

The return to a more conservative EI framework has sparked ongoing calls for EI reform. Central to these calls for reform is the need to increase the coverage, benefit levels, and duration of EI support. The push to incorporate gig workers, self-employed individuals, and those in precarious employment within the EI framework has been championed by both the Canadian Labour Congress—in its capacity as a national union central—and by individual labour unions. Relatedly, unions are advocating increasing EI benefit levels to 75% of insurable earnings (Government of Canada, 2022a). Current coverage of only 55% of insurable earnings is

often insufficient to meet basic living expenses. Raising coverage to at least 75% of insurable earnings would allow unemployed workers to maintain a reasonable standard of living. To this end, introducing a guaranteed benefit amount would ensure that even the lowest-paid workers receive adequate support, akin to the wide(r)spread availability and sufficiency of CERB, where benefits were more substantial than regular EI benefits.

Others advocate for universal basic income (UBI) as a solution to the limitations of the EI system. UBI provides unconditional financial support, decoupling survival from traditional employment (Blustein & Guarino, 2020). The premise of UBI relies on the idea that work does not need to be the only way that people can ensure their survival. By providing a steady income floor, UBI allows individuals to pursue education, training, and other caring and domestic work needs without immediate pressure to secure employment. However, labour unions caution that UBI could undermine the bargaining power of workers (King, 2020). They fear that employers might use UBI as an excuse to reduce wages and benefits, arguing that basic income compensates for these reductions. This could lead to a scenario in which workers are worse off and receive lower wages while still relying on UBI to meet their basic needs. To this end, UBI does not account for varying levels of need among different populations. For instance, individuals with disabilities might require more substantial support than what a basic income could offer. These calls for EI reform, coupled with concerns about certain funding models, highlight the need for careful consideration of marginalized workers and groups.

The Severance Ceiling

Having discussed the details and limitations of Employment Insurance, it is also pertinent to examine severance pay, as it pertains to supporting displaced workers during transitions. Under

both the Canada Labour Code and Ontario's Employment Standards Act 2000, severance policies cushion the immediate financial impact on *some* workers experiencing job loss and those who may or may not experience periods of unemployment. However, the method by which severance is calculated often reflects and reinforces existing inequities within the labour market, particularly those associated with tiered employment contracts.

Severance pay is a calculation based on the length of service and rate of pay with a company. Under the Canada Labour Code, covering federally regulated employees, eligible employees receive two days' wages for each full year of service, or five days' wages, whichever is greater. Ontario's ESA stipulates that employees are entitled to one week of severance pay per year of service if they have worked for the same employer for at least five years and the employer has a payroll of at least $2.5 million or is laying off 50 or more employees within a six-month period (King's Printer for Ontario, 2012). For mass layoffs, the Act prescribes a higher level of notice or compensation, calculated based on an employee's tenure. These minimum requirements ensure a basic level of financial security for workers as they transition between jobs.

Severance calculations tied to tenure and salary inherently advantage longer-term, higher-paid employees while disadvantaging those in more precarious, short-term, contractual, or lower-wage positions. The five-year threshold in Ontario is particularly burdensome and difficult for contract and temporary workers to attain, making them generally ineligible for severance pay under the ESA. In fact, the ESA stipulates minimum entitlements for notice and severance pay for indefinite employees, but such statutory protections do not generally apply to fixed-term contracts, unless terminated prematurely (Tucker & Stromdahl, 2017).

Additionally, many temporary contracts include termination clauses that limit severance pay to statutory minimums or exclude them altogether. The design of severance pay structures creates disparities in financial protection across different types of employment, disproportionately impacting marginalized groups who are more likely to occupy precarious employment and fixed-term positions.

Boundaries of Protest: Understanding Strike Restrictions

In addition to termination-specific legislation, other government acts can shape workers' experiences and behaviours during a mass layoff or company closure. For instance, legal constraints limit the scope of permissible collective actions for unionized workers, where workers and their unions historically engage in job actions (such as wildcat strikes and work slowdowns) to resist unfavourable working conditions and mass layoffs or company closures. The legal landscape in Canada is particularly stringent regarding strike activities, as highlighted by Atul Anand (n.d.). Central to these constraints in Ontario is the OLRA "no-strike" clause that effectively limits the scope of lawful strikes to specific conditions, such as a successful strike vote and the completion of statutory conciliation processes (Slinn, 2021). Introduced as part of the postwar labour settlement, this provision is part of a broader legislative framework aimed at maintaining industrial peace by limiting the ability of unionized workers to strike. Within this legal context, unionized workers are bound by unfair labour practice provisions that protect them during lawful strikes but also restrict their capacity for spontaneous collective actions during the term of a collective agreement (Tucker, 2020). Anand delineates unlawful strikes based on their failure to adhere to the legal stipulations of collective agreements or statutory provisions. The repercussions of engaging in such strikes are severe, involving disciplinary

actions and monetary penalties for each day of contravention. Non-unionized workers are technically freer to strike but lack statutory protection against employer retaliation.

Within this increasingly restrictive legal landscape, Canadian union responses to plant closures have evolved significantly since the 1970s. Once characterized by overt militancy, the tactics employed by unions had transformed into more 'stage-managed' defensive strategies by the 2000s, as Fairweather (2024) notes. The Canadian Auto Workers (CAW) union, known for its militant responses such as the 1980 occupation of the Houdaille bumper plant and the 1996 Northern Fabrication plant occupation at GM Oshawa (High, 2006), to name only two, has since shifted towards more defensive and institutional approaches. By the time of the 2018 GM Oshawa announcement, the union's response was largely channelled into filing grievances and organizing public boycott campaigns (Fairweather, 2024), as seen in the Save Oshawa GM campaign. This shift reflects broader trends within unions toward leveraging institutional and coalitional forms of power rather than direct action. The internal dynamics of unions, including the decline of organized left factions and changing material conditions under neoliberalism, have influenced this transformation. However, the spirit of rank-and-file militancy endures, as exemplified by spontaneous walkouts in response to immediate threats to livelihoods.

In the context of labour disputes, labour boards and tribunals possess extensive authority to issue cease-and-desist orders and resolve disputes related to unlawful strike activities. A pertinent example of this is the GM Oshawa strike in 2019, where the Ontario Labour Relations Board ruled against Unifor, the union representing workers (The Canadian Press, 2019). This decision came after Unifor organized a series of demonstrations and actions to protest GM's announcement not to allocate further products to the plant. Unifor's actions

were deemed unlawful by the Board because they did not conform to the legal requirements set out by the collective agreement and statutory provisions. The consequences of these actions included the cessation order as well as the potential for accumulating monetary penalties for any continued non-compliance. This case demonstrates the state's regulatory power in labour conflicts, often at the expense of workers' collective agency.

The regulation of unlawful strikes is part of a broader array of coercive measures employed by employers and the state to control labour activism. These measures include legal injunctions, statutory penalties, and disciplinary actions to suppress unauthorized collective actions. Evans et al.'s (2023) concept of "permanent exceptionalism" provides a broader context for understanding these coercive measures. While permanent exceptionalism refers to extraordinary legislative actions such as back-to-work legislation or essential worker designations, it also addresses the frequent use of legal interventions in lieu of union or worker consent to industrial peace (Smith, 2020; Tucker, 2020). The enforcement of regulations against unlawful strikes represents a facet of state coercion designed to uphold industrial stability, reinforcing economic priorities over labour rights. In this context, the evolving role of police and private security reflects these broader political interests. Employers increasingly rely on private security firms to manage access to facilities, protect property, and gather intelligence during strike activities (Deitch, 1984). The growing reliance on police and private security introduces additional tensions into labour disputes, as the presence of security can intimidate workers, suppressing their willingness to engage in militant actions (Hall & De Lint, 2003). Additionally, police and security interventions force unions to focus more on legal challenges and public relations campaigns to garner support. The intertwining of legal frameworks and state

interventions thus shapes the behaviours of displaced workers and their unions, often constraining their struggle for labour rights in the face of overwhelming economic power.

Worker Resistance Beyond Prescribed Boundaries in Canada and Beyond

Despite the postwar labour frameworks established across industrialized nations to channel labour conflict into institutionalized procedures, workers and unions have persistently engaged in various forms of resistance to factory closures beyond these prescribed boundaries. The purpose of this section is not to analyze policy frameworks themselves, but to establish how workers sometimes circumvent the constraints of their particular political environments to challenge factory closures. Historically, worker and labour strategies have spanned illegal strikes, factory occupations, broad mobilization efforts, legal challenges, narrative reframing, and the formation of strategic alliances.

***North American Resistance Under Constraint*.** Canadian unions have developed a repertoire of resistance tactics when confronting factory closures. While not the most common tactic, factory occupation tactics gained traction precisely when legal frameworks governing labour disputes were being systematically reformed to restrict worker militancy at the same time as trade liberalization, financialization, and shareholder value doctrines were changing the continent's industrial terrain. As deindustrialization accelerated during the 1980s, and conventional bargaining channels increasingly failed to protect workers facing sudden layoffs without adequate compensation, the CAW institutionalized such militant approaches, recording 32 workplace occupations over three decades, with nearly half specifically targeting employers who sought to avoid severance payments (Ross & Russell, 2018). These occupations succeeded in securing improved severance packages in nearly half of the documented actions, in addition

to delaying or reshaping closure decisions. In the case of the 2007 Collins & Aikman occupation, workers secured their severance within two days while inspiring concurrent solidarity strikes elsewhere.

Meanwhile, while the United Auto Workers' approach to factory restructuring unfolded within the same shifting North American industrial landscape of trade liberalization and financialization, the United Auto Workers followed a different strategy than their Canadian counterpart. For example, the approaches of the UAW at GM-Linden in the 1980s and Janesville in the 2000s follow a pattern of institutional accommodation rather than confrontation. At Linden, the local UAW negotiated a buyout program that facilitated workforce reduction. Janesville workers similarly pursued negotiation through established union channels, focusing narrowly on severance terms while accepting the inevitability of the closure. Arguably, this institutional approach reflected the UAW's declining leverage during a period of rapidly declining union density in American manufacturing.

***European Resistance: Gendered and Symbolic Politics*.** The Lee Jeans factory occupation in Scotland unfolded amidst Thatcherism's aggressive deindustrialization policies of the early 1980s, when manufacturing employment across the United Kingdom was being systematically dismantled through privatization and market liberalization. In this hostile climate, the predominantly female workforce developed resistance strategies to the factory closure that leveraged their gendered social position. These women workers mobilized kinship networks for material support, transforming the factory into a quasi-domestic space with cooking facilities and childcare arrangements. Their strategy successfully prevented the closure of the factory and achieved a management buyout (Robertson & Clark, 2019).

Two decades later, Spanish workers at La Monroe confronted factory closure by creating a broad coalition of support that included local community members and political representatives as counterweights to corporate power. Spain's deepening economic integration within the Eurozone[18] and increasing global trade exposure accelerated manufacturing outsourcing in the mid-2000s. In this context of deindustrialization, La Monroe workers departed from conventional concession-based labour responses focused on severance packages rather than preventing closures. Rejecting traditional union federation involvement, they directly mobilized these local community members in demonstrations of 10,000 supporters. Their most consequential strategic innovation came through cultivating a relationship with a member of the European Parliament whose connections brought the Commission's Vice President into negotiations with the corporate headquarters in the United States. After sustained resistance, the company reversed its decision and announced that the plant would reopen, albeit with approximately half the original workforce (Köhler & González Begega, 2018).

The Burberry workers' campaign in South Wales (2006-2007) reconstructed the meaning of factory closure itself. In the context of luxury brands shifting production to lower-cost regions, the workers in South Wales framed the closure as cultural heritage destruction rather than economic restructuring. This framing engaged moral economy arguments, amplified by media attention and celebrity endorsements (Blyton & Jenkins, 2012). Their campaign

[18] The Eurozone refers to the economic and monetary union of European Union member states that adopted the euro as their primary currency. The Eurozone establishes a shared monetary policy overseen by the European Central Bank. Member states develop deep economic integration and trade relations through the elimination of exchange rates.

effectively demonstrated how symbolic resources can partially counterbalance asymmetrical economic power, as they threatened Burberry's brand image and public reputation.

***Argentine Production Politics*.** Argentina's recovered factories movement emerged during the catastrophic economic and political crisis of 2001-2002, when neoliberal policies resulting in debt default, banking collapse, and mass unemployment created both urgent necessity and political space for worker resistance. Operating in a context where state legitimacy had eroded and traditional union structures proved inadequate, workers at factories like Zanón ceramics directly seized productive assets abandoned by fleeing capital (Azzellini, 2015; Ness, 2016). Workers physically occupied the plant while reimagining production processes, eliminating wage hierarchies, rotating management functions, and democratizing technical knowledge previously monopolized by specialists.

Common Elements in Resistance Strategies. Despite occurring in different geographical, temporal, and political-economic contexts spanning continents and decades, worker resistance movements share several common strategic elements. First, many campaigns move beyond traditional union negotiation frameworks focused solely on severance terms, to instead actively contest closure decisions themselves and refuse to accept corporate economic logic as inevitable.

Second, these resistance efforts often leverage resources specific to the historical and geographical moment, such as care networks and community supports, cultural or symbolic capital, or media. More impactful campaigns create broad-based coalitions that extend beyond the factory workforce to transform the closure from a private employment issue into a public matter of community concern. Scholars have emphasized the importance of expanded, cross-

network coalitions for amplifying the impact of worker mobilization. Tattersall (2011) argues that "community unionism," which involves strategic alliances between labour unions and other civil society organizations, can significantly enhance the power and legitimacy of workers' struggles.

Cross-network alliances also play a crucial role in bridging the gap between workers' immediate concerns and broader socioeconomic issues. For instance, Milkman's (2006) analysis of the Justice for Janitors campaign illustrates how the forging of partnerships between unions and churches, immigrant rights groups, and other community organizations allowed janitors to address immediate workplace issues like low wages and poor working conditions while simultaneously engaging in broader social concerns such as immigrant rights, racial justice, and economic inequality. The campaign framed the janitors' struggle as more than a labour dispute, but as a fight for dignity and social inclusion. This broader framing contributed to increased public support and political pressure that contributed to practical policy changes, such as the passage of ordinances protecting workers from wage theft.

The effectiveness of cross-network organizing is particularly evident in cases where traditional union structures may be weak or absent. Fine (2005) highlights how worker centers and other non-traditional labour organizations have become increasingly important in organizing precarious workers and building community-labour alliances. Rolf's (2016) analysis of the Fight for $15 movement provides a compelling example of this approach. In an industry where union density was extremely low and traditional organizing faced significant obstacles, the Fight for $15 campaign successfully mobilized fast-food workers and their allies through a combination of workplace actions, one-day strikes, social media campaigns, strategic

partnerships with civil rights organizations, and broader community engagement. Rolf documents how the movement quickly expanded beyond traditional union boundaries to include a wide array of low-wage workers, community organizations, and social justice groups. The result was a movement that sparked international conversation about income inequality and the nature of work in the modern economy, in addition to securing significant victories, including minimum wage increases to $15 or more in several provinces, states, and major cities.

Third, many resistance efforts strategically reframe closure narratives from management's framing of economic inevitability to one of threatening regional economic stability, economic policy contradictions, or destruction of local cultural heritage.

The varying outcomes across these cases and other un/successful resistance strategies reflect their distinct structural factors, such as the economic viability of the plant, union strength, the degree of community support, and the broader political and economic context. However, where workers remain confined within traditional institutional bargaining channels, outcomes generally favour management's closure plans. In contrast, where workers deploy broader strategies, they sometimes achieve concessions ranging from enhanced severance packages to modified or even reversed closure decisions.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter demonstrates the considerable economic, identity, and health impacts of factory closures on displaced workers. I am struck by how this phenomenon lays bare deep fault lines of inequality, where differential social locations along lines of class, race, gender, age, education, and family status shape workers' vastly different outcomes of job displacement. Specifically, the literature reveals a troubling trend of marginalized workers bearing the brunt

of the fallout from factory closures. Government policies ostensibly designed to provide a safety net are riddled with biases that mirror and reinforce social inequalities. Corporate actions, too, can compound the disadvantages faced by certain groups of workers. While there is a lack of evaluation of the impacts of different corporate closure procedures on displaced workers' well-being, there is some evidence to suggest that factors like the timing and communication of closures, severance packages, and support services all have an impact on workers' post-displacement outcomes.

Yet, workers' agency and resistance emerge as a powerful counterforce to inequality. Through collective actions such as strikes, factory occupations, bargaining, and negotiating for the preservation of jobs, workers and their unions can resist unfavourable conditions during industrial transitions while shifting some of the discourse to labour rights and corporate accountability.

Unfortunately, much of the existing literature on job displacement has centred on individual characteristics, such as cognitive framing and coping resources, as key factors in determining differential outcomes. This literature emphasizes individual "resilience" in overcoming the challenges posed by job loss and transition. However, studies of workers' resistance strategies offer a more comprehensive analytical framework by acknowledging how workers can actively shape displacement outcomes through organized responses, connecting individual experiences to broader structural power dynamics.

Despite the breadth and depth of insights provided by previous studies, gaps remain in our understanding of how displaced workers' experiences diverge along the lines of class, age, gender, race, and other social categorizations. There is also a need to study how displaced

workers relate to the ideas and objects of factory closures, including the processes of re-making their identities and lives post-closure.

The next chapter engages with the theoretical frameworks essential for understanding displaced workers' experiences of factory closure. Utilizing FPE, supported by critical Affect Theory, the chapter examines questions of power in shaping factory closure procedures and workers' responses. It also considers how the theory of intersectionality can be used to investigate job displacement from the perspective of various intersecting social locations. This framework provides opportunities for examining how overlapping social identities—such as gender, race, class, age, (dis)ability, education, family status, etc.—create unique modes of discrimination and privilege, influencing the experiences and outcomes of displaced workers. By integrating these frameworks, the chapter aims to distill a critical worker-oriented lens through which to understand the ways in which systemic inequalities couple with affective responses to shape the lived realities of those affected by job displacement due to factory closure.

Chapter 3: "Knowing" Job Displacement: Epistemology, Methodology, and Methods for Studying Workers' Experiences of a Factory Closure

Chapter Introduction

In this chapter, I provide an overview of feminist principles that serve as the foundational underpinnings for every stage of this study. A feminist epistemological and methodological framework centers on the perspectives of historically excluded and marginalized voices, such as those of displaced and unemployed persons, to create a more complete understanding of an event/reality. I begin by outlining the main objectives and research questions that drove my research study. Next, I detail how a distinctive feminist epistemology challenges traditional ideas about who can truly understand workers' experiences of a factory closure. Following this discussion, I consider how such a feminist epistemological perspective influences various aspects of the research process. Specifically, I reflect on important elements of the researcher-participant relationship, including power dynamics, navigating differing versions of reality, and recognizing emotions (both participants' and my own) as integral analytical components. As I conclude the chapter, I detail the qualitative methods that I use to collect data about workers' experiences during factory closure. I provide an overview of the sites and participants from whom I gather information and outline the steps I take to interpret the collected material. In doing so, I show how my methodological choices follow feminist principles by including diverse viewpoints to construct a more complete understanding of factory closures.

Research Questions and Study Objectives

This study examines the dialectical relationship between displaced workers and announcements of factory closure. Specifically, it considers how an announcement of a mass

layoff or factory closure affects displaced workers and, in turn, how displaced workers' actions and reactions affect closure processes. Focusing on three closing factories in the GTA, I examine how workers interpret, respond to, and experience factory closures through the lens of their social positioning and relationships. My investigation is guided by three primary objectives, each addressing a critical aspect of the displacement experience.

The first objective is to analyze workers' interpretive frameworks of factory closures. Specifically, I aim to capture and analyze how displaced workers describe and make sense of factory closure. To interpret the meanings workers ascribe to their experiences of displacement, I focus on the key events or pivotal moments in their displacement narratives. In analyzing workers' narratives, I pay particular attention to the evolution of their self-described emotional reactions and/or identities, recognizing that these experiences are dynamic.

My second objective is to describe how workers respond to factory closure announcements through their everyday activities and interactions. This investigation entails exploring the fluidity of workers' affiliations during the closure process, such as their evolving attachments to ideas (e.g, job security), objects (e.g., workspaces), and others (e.g., colleagues and union representation). By examining how workers interact with and modify their attachments to ideas, objects, and others, I aim to reveal how these relationships both shape and are shaped by the experience of factory closure. I also consider how individual experiences can coalesce into collective actions or inactions. By examining collective responses, I aim to understand how individual concerns translate into group activities and potentially influence the closure process.

The third objective of my study examines how displaced workers' social identities and backgrounds influence their experiences and responses to factory closures. This aim acknowledges that job displacement due to factory closure is not a one-size-fits-all experience but is influenced by intersecting factors. I focus on how the intersection of gender, race, age, disability, education, family status, and socioeconomic status creates varied experiences among displaced workers. In so doing, I aim to analyze specific patterns of advantages and disadvantages across different worker groups that inform workers' experiences of factory closures.

In pursuit of the above aims, my project is guided by three corresponding research questions:

1) How do displaced workers describe and make sense of factory closures? What meaning(s) do workers assign to closure events? How do workers' emotions and identities evolve as they navigate factory closures?

2) How do displaced workers respond to and contest announced factory closures through: (i) their everyday activities and interactions; (ii) collective in/actions; (iii) interactions with and alterations to their attachments to ideas, objects, and others?

3) How do displaced workers' social locations influence their experiences of and responses to factory closures, and how do power dynamics in relation to workers' social location impact these experiences and responses?

Epistemological Perspective

There is not one feminist epistemological perspective. However, feminist epistemological and methodological approaches broadly share the principles of being interpretive, critical, accepting

of partiality instead of universality in knowledge claims, and recognizing the centrality of gender and other positions of marginality in organizing the conditions of our lives. Below, I introduce one particular feminist epistemology—namely, the standpoint epistemological perspective. I begin by outlining key theoretical debates undergirding standpoint epistemology as well as naming the particular approach that I follow in this study. I continue by discussing what a standpoint epistemological perspective can tell us about the nature of knowledge, including: who can make knowledge claims; pathways to knowledge production; and how to reconcile competing knowledge claims.

What constitutes knowledge?

Within a positivist epistemological framework, knowledge consists of empirically verified facts and logical deductions that reveal "objective" truths about a single, discoverable reality (Park et al., 2020). This approach to inquiry assumes a separation between knower and known, emphasizing truth via "objective" observation while rejecting subjective ways of knowing. Researchers operating within a positivist paradigm assume that reality is "out there" to be discovered through rigorous testing and verification (Ormston et al., 2014). They deduce that knowledge produced through these observable forms of inquiry holds greater value than phenomena explained through interpretivist interventions.

Feminists critical of positivist epistemologies argue that knowledge creation practices adhering to the scientific method obfuscate the privileged point of view from which most scientific knowledge is produced—namely, the perspective of men and other socially advantageous positionalities (Code, 2014). Rather than knowledge production being value-free, feminist researchers assert that positivist interventions contribute to imbalances of power in

knowledge production and valuation when they presume and prioritize a masculine perspective. They argue that any scientific enterprise is guided by the questions of interest to the inquirers. Therefore, a lot of crucial information goes missing when knowledge production is restricted to particular viewpoints. Feminist epistemologists thereby question the value of an epistemological approach that presumes that the empirical interests and perspectives of one group (i.e., those belonging to the privileged race, class, gender, etc.) are in the interest of all groups. In contrast, they seek to locate the particular social positioning from which a knowledge claim emerges and behind which other viewpoints are hidden (Locher & Prügl, 2001; May, 2014).

Feminist epistemologies challenge the potential limits of knowledge generated from positivist interventions by broadening the definition of what counts as knowledge. Feminist epistemology acknowledges that individuals have unique knowledge from their own experiences, and that these subjective perspectives can contribute to a better understanding of reality (Kraus, 2005). According to feminist epistemology, knowledge must be recognized as socially constructed and situated within the context of particular communities (Collins, 2017). This is to say, knowledge is not simply a collection of neutral observations but instead is shaped by the experiences and perspectives of those involved in its production. Experiential insights could include personal narratives, emotions, and other subjective interpretations of events. But feminist epistemologists also recognize that the experiences of marginalized persons are not universal. Accordingly, they advocate for opening space for *diverse perspectives* from historically marginalized communities in knowledge production and valuation practices and

demand that researchers engage with how social categories such as gender impact whose voices are included and excluded in/from scientific inquiry (Harding, 1992).

Who Can Know?

Feminist standpoint epistemologists suggest that while everyone's experiences shape the way they view the world, people from marginalized positions are socially situated in ways that make it more possible for them to be aware of social problems and social ordering than their non-marginalized counterparts (Harding, 1997). Feminist standpoint epistemology recognizes that dominant knowledge systems, often shaped by patriarchy and colonialist ideologies, continue to exclude certain ways of knowing and knowledge holders such as women, people of colour, queer persons and people living with disabilities. Given their experiences of oppression and exclusion, feminist epistemology asserts that these marginalized groups have a unique perspective on the world that should be acknowledged as a valuable source of knowledge. A feminist epistemology argues that individuals and communities who occupy marginalized positions in society often have a more comprehensive understanding of the social world than their privileged counterparts (Kokushkin, 2014; de Sousa Santos et al., 2007). Stated differently, people and groups occupying marginalized social positions are better positioned to "objectively" understand certain aspects of the world than those from more privileged perspectives. It is important to note, however, that among feminist epistemologists, there remains considerable debate on this point. While some feminist scholars, such as Harding and Hartsock, strongly advocate that oppressed groups develop a more nuanced and critical perspective on societal power relations and reality precisely because they exist both within and outside of dominant social norms, others like Longino and Nelson have cautioned against

presuming automatic epistemic privilege based soley on social location. What many feminist scholars do agree upon is that marginalized positioning can provide persons with potentially less partial and distorted views of certain aspects of reality. That is to say, their experiences may offer them a unique *standpoint* from which to observe and understand social structures that are not readily visible or available to those in privileged positions. However, the realization of this potential advantage remains contingent upon various factors, including critical engagement with one's social position. This distinction between mere social location and achieved standpoint is fundamental to standpoint theory as articulated by Collins (2000) and Smith (1987), who emphasize that epistemic privilege emerges not automatically from identity but through the active process of developing critical consciousness about one's experiences within systems of oppression, often facilitated through collective knowledge production and political struggle against domination (Wylie, 2012; Intemann, 2010).

Although feminist epistemologists share the perspective that knowledge is limited and shaped by unique experiences, they can diverge in their thinking about *how* an individual or group develops a standpoint or unique viewpoint of reality. One construction of standpoint suggests that a person's positionality "endows the subject with a privileged access to truth" (Stoetzler & Yuval-Davis, 2002, p. 315). Most commonly found in first-wave standpoint theory, theorists in this camp share the viewpoint that members of marginalized groups have a distinct way of knowing the world, shaped by their social positioning, that can offer epistemic privilege. As such, differences between groups of people can be an epistemic resource. While this theory of standpoint does not deny that persons occupying privileged social positions can share a particular perspective or set of experiences, those at the top of social hierarchies are argued to

lose perspective of social reality, as they have little reason to challenge or interrogate gender (and other forms of) socialization and divisions of labour. Meanwhile, people at the bottom of social hierarchies have a particular and privileged view of social order and social problems.

The more currently accepted construction of how one acquires a standpoint honours knowledge as a collaborative process, not bestowed by social positioning alone but by dialogue between people from different social locations to arrive at a better understanding of the world (Harding, 1996; Hirschmarm, 1998). From this perspective of standpoint that emerges during second-wave standpoint theory, knowledge is not inherent to one's positionality but is *achieved* through political struggle. Epistemic knowledge is thus regarded by feminists in this camp as an achievement that individuals create by fighting for justice, having conversations with their communities, and reflecting on their own experiences of oppression and discrimination in the world. Yet, even this perspective emphasizes that achieving a standpoint is more likely for those from marginalized positions because of the political struggle inherent in those positions. That is to say, persons who experience oppressed social divisions owed to racism, sexism, ageism, etc., may have a unique perspective on how gender and race shape their experiences, including those of work and unemployment. In turn, their perspectives can contribute to knowledge and understanding of social inequity that can challenge dominant forms of thinking about social issues and solutions (Hirschmarm, 1998). Yet, unlike claims from folks in the previously mentioned camp, this perspective suggests that knowledge at marginalized social locations is just *different* rather than privileged.

This dissertation adopts the latter understanding of an epistemological standpoint accrued to members of marginalized groups through a dialogical relationship with people who

are differently situated[19]. According to this perspective, the process of approximating the truth of a factory closure will involve a back-and-forth exchange of ideas among people who have different knowledges, experiences, and perspectives. In other words, the pursuit of understanding experiences of a factory closure is a collaborative process, not one bestowed alone by social positioning. Yet, displaced workers have a particular advantageous vantage point of the events of factory work and closure, given their marginalized hierarchical positioning within the workplace and collective struggle against capitalist owners toward achieving sustainable work and workplace conditions. And, despite sharing a viewpoint of displacement, displaced workers also bring different perspectives of job loss from one another, given their individual agency, fluidity of identity, and differing experiences of gender and other positionalities. In other words, displaced workers bring a unique albeit ununified perspective to the study of factory closure, thereby generating an arguably more complete and accurate understanding of the event. By engaging in a dialogical process, participants and readers of this study can critically examine their own assumptions and ideas about work and working through workplace changes such as a company closure, while gaining a deeper understanding of the social and historical context in which their knowledges are produced.

[19] Marx's theorization of a shared class consciousness amongst the proletariat formed the first iteration of a theory of standpoint that continues to offer relevant insights for understanding the epistemological concerns of marginalized groups. A shared standpoint or identity amongst the proletariat or displaced workers, as is the case of this study, forms from their collective struggles and experiences against capital owners. Specifically, "even when based on pre-existing conditions or collectives…[collective identities are] created through a voracity of scales that enlarges the struggles from the local to the national and transnational" (de Sousa Santos et al., 2007, p. xlvi). Their material oppression serves as a potential goldmine of knowledge given their access to the privileged world and marginalized status that requires them to know things and develop skills that their "masters" do not possess. Consequently, they are endowed with unrecognized epistemology.

Contending with Competing Knowledge Claims

In cases of competing knowledge claims, feminist epistemology argues for prioritizing marginalized voices that have been historically excluded from traditional knowledge systems, recognizing that their unique perspectives and experiences are not only valid and valuable sources of knowledge but also contribute to a more complete understanding of events (Harding, 2009). This approach challenges the traditional epistemological hierarchy that privileges dominant forms of knowledge over others, thereby perpetuating systems of oppression. Feminist epistemologists argue that these hierarchies lead to partial perspectives of events and incomplete understandings of reality.

To navigate competing knowledge claims, feminists examine the impact of power dynamics in shaping which forms of knowledge are elevated and which are marginalized. They understand that knowledge is not created in a vacuum and, therefore, with an eye toward the social institutions and relationships in which knowledge is produced and circulated, they critically question from where knowledge is obtained, by whom, and for what purposes. By prioritizing the perspectives of historically excluded voices in knowledge production, feminist epistemologies seek to create better accounts of the world.

Epistemology in Action: Methodological Reflections

The goal of feminist research is to provide better accounts of the world by recognizing the ways power operates in the research context (Wilkinson, 1998). In the following subsections, I discuss key characteristics of feminist methodology and how it differs from traditional, positivist research methodologies. In particular, I discuss the importance of attending to power imbalances between the researcher and participants in the research relationship,

acknowledging the role of the researcher in co-constructing knowledge with participants, and incorporating diverse perspectives and experiences in the research process.

Power and oppression in the research relationship

One of the primary goals of feminist methodology is to challenge traditional power dynamics between researcher and participant found in studies employing a positivist research paradigm. A positivist paradigm regards human participants as passive objects or subjects of study, rather than as active collaborators in the research process (Heron & Reason, 2006). While researchers adopting a traditional, positivist approach might recognize the potential for power imbalances in the research relationship in the form of researcher bias, they otherwise presume the potential of controlling for these biases through rigorous scientific methods. In contrast, feminist methodology is premised on the notion that such biases cannot be eliminated, and therefore proposes alternative approaches to conducting research.

Feminist research starts from the premise that all research processes are relational, therein inviting the researcher to consider the kinds of relationships they want to co-create with participants and research objects (Ellingson & Sotirin, 2020). In research studies employing an interpretive paradigm, often used in conjunction with a feminist methodology, the relationship between researcher and participants is one of mutual collaboration and co-creation (Madsen & O'Mullan, 2018). In this paradigm, researchers regard participants as active agents who contribute to the research process by sharing their experiences, perspectives, and interpretations of the phenomena under investigation. The researcher's role is to facilitate co-creation by engaging in a dialogue with participants and using their insights to develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Unlike the positivist paradigm, which seeks

to control and manipulate the research environment to establish causal relationships, the constructivist paradigm recognizes that knowledge is constructed through social interaction and dialogue between individuals and shaped by the power dynamics of those involved. This means that participants and researchers are seen as equal partners in the research process, with both contributing to the co-construction of knowledge. Accordingly, researchers seek to establish a rapport with participants and create a safe environment in which they can share their experiences and perspectives freely.

In addition to their relationship with participants, researchers are also in a relationship with the intellectual work of other scholars and, in so doing, mitigate or perpetuate institutional power imbalances. Researchers employing feminist methodologies consider whose ideas are being carried forward in the construction of their scholarship, and the power dynamics that they might be unintentionally reproducing therein (Smith, 2006). Ideas from Black, Indigenous, queer, disabled and scholars from other marginalized social locations are continually excluded from academic discourses and publishing (Smith, 2006). This exclusion reinforces dominant narratives and institutional power imbalances that conflate knowledge with the ideas of white men, while silencing or marginalizing diverse perspectives and experiences. Citation choices can have material impacts on the professional development of scholars, where neoliberal academic institutions factor publication rates and impact factors into hiring decisions. Feminist methodology offers an avenue to counteract the exclusion of marginalized voices from academic discourses by actively seeking out and centring citations from Black women scholars and other voices relegated to the margins of knowledge production (Mott & Cockayne, 2017).

Reflexivity in research design, collection, and analysis

Situated knowledge demands that, instead of attempting to remove biases, researchers reflect on their role in shaping what can be known and how this impacts participants' lived experiences. Researchers presumably shape knowledge-generation processes by constructing research questions, arranging data collection materials, and organizing, analyzing, and communicating findings in accordance with their beliefs and perspectives about the topic and participants (Stein & Mankowski, 2004). Said differently, research findings are the synthesis of what participants say, coupled with what researchers ask and do with the resultant information. Thus, one way that feminist researchers reflect on their role in the research process is by naming their positionality, experiences, and beliefs about the study's participants and topic.

In the introductory chapter, I noted my connection to the topic of displacement due to factory closure, including my beliefs about culpability and responsibility for harms resulting from such actions. But self-reflexivity also invites the researcher to ask whether they are "insiders" or "outsiders" in the community from which their participants are selected. Feminist researchers consider how their insider/outsider status, and consequential power and oppression, fluctuate and crosscut different social groupings such as class, race, gender, and education (Acker, 2000). These reflexive practices enable the researcher to acknowledge how their positionality places them as possible beneficiaries of racial, abled, class and other forms of privilege that can impact their ability to "see" and understand the position of another and thereby limit the knowledge that emerges from the raw interview data that researchers fashion

into a narrative. The closer a researcher's position is to the community, the more the perceived possibility for shared expectations and power equity in the research relationship.

Reflection on my Status as an Outsider. While I dis/connect from participants according to multiple and fluctuating identities, including gender, race, class, education level, and dis/ability status, I am foremost an outsider relative to the study population of displaced factory workers. I have never worked in a factory, let alone been displaced from employment in a factory due to its closure. Accordingly, from the outset of participant recruitment, I was concerned about how factory workers would perceive my outsider status, potentially mistrusting me or my role within an academic institution. To minimize any initial uncertainty, in my initial outreach communication with potential participants, I mentioned previous iterations and sites of the *Women, Work, and Deindustrialization* project, for which these interviews would be an extension. Specifically, I let potential participants know that as part of the broader project, researchers previously conducted interviews with displaced workers from the John Deere factory in Welland, Ontario, and the Kellogg's factory in London, Ontario. In stating as much, I hoped participants would gain insight into not only our research agenda but also our stance in solidarity with displaced workers. Once potential participants expressed interest in learning more about the project or meeting for an interview, I provided them with an informed consent document that detailed the purpose of both the project and interview in accordance with York University's Ethics Review Board.

My status as an outsider relative to job displacement due to factory closure impacted my conversations with participants. Principally, based on my reading of the literature as well as having worked for several years with a counselling agency, I hold the bias that displaced

workers experience intense (dis)stress during a mass layoff or company closure. Accordingly, I asked questions about and redirected the conversation toward the topic of stress throughout the interviews. However, my focus on stress was not always in alignment with participants' expressions of stress. For example, in my first interview, I mentioned the word "stress" eleven times; more specifically, I asked questions which implied the presence of stress, such as, "How did you get support for your stress?" However, this participant only mentions stress five times and each time contextualizes stress in relation to job role rather than the company closure. For example, he notes that his "job can be stressful at times. Things didn't always work, it was all mechanical so things would break down." Additionally, several participants told me that they did not feel any stress related to the closure. A different participant suggested that he "never got stressed. I don't think I felt any stress whatsoever...I remained even-keel the whole time." Although by the end of our conversation, he, like a few other participants, revealed how surprisingly helpful it was to talk to someone about their experience of job displacement. Nevertheless, my assumption about living and working through a factory closure as a stressful experience influenced my role in directing the conversation and thus the possible knowledge that could be produced from the interviews.

This disconnect between my stress-focused assumptions and participants' actual narratives became a crucial methodological turning point in my research design. Recognizing that my predetermined focus on stress was not reflecting what workers themselves identified as central to their displacement experience, I made the decision to reshape my research questions during the data collection process. Rather than continuing to impose a stress-management framework, I allowed participants to foreground what they found most significant

about their closure experience, enabling the emergence of findings that might otherwise have remained obscured by my initial theoretical assumptions.

Family status is another way in which I am an outsider from many of the participants in this study. Specifically, I am a single woman without children, whereas many of my participants have children, and many are married. This, too, influenced the direction in which I took the conversation or responded to participants' stories. For example, one participant reflected on his concerns about minimizing the impact of his job loss on his child. Yet, as revealed in my response below, instead of following up on the topic of parenting during job loss, as initiated by the participant, I shifted the focus to his relationship with his partner (something about which I better understand):

> Participant: *He [my child] is in camp every summer, so it's those things. Are we going to be able to do it? And is he going to be resentful because of it, because he thinks we're punishing him? But again he's only 10 so I'm not like, "Oh no, daddy doesn't have a job now so I'm only making X amount of dollars," like I don't really want to tell him the financials either. I don't want to put that type of stress on a child. So I'm worried about those things. How do I navigate that properly so I'm not taking everything away from him but at the same time being mindful of what we can and can't do? I worry about him. Like in the end, I love my wife but my son is my main concern and always will be. So yeah.*
>
> Interviewer: *In terms of the family, a lot of workers will talk about how it can create conflict in marriages, for example, there will be more tension. Has that been your experience? Do you feel a different level of stress [in your marriage]?*

While I otherwise regard myself as an empathic interviewer, my status as an outsider to parenthood rendered it more difficult in the moment of the conversation for me to "see" and co-create with my participant a narrative or understanding of the added or different challenges that parents experience during job displacement. Differently, in earlier phases of the *Women, Work, and Deindustrialization* project, Duffy et al. (2015) who are themselves parents, were better positioned to identify familial changes associated with financial pressures due to job

displacement, such as the ways parents (principally women) re-think family budgeting with an emphasis on children's needs.

Reflection on my Status as an Insider

Again, while identities are fluctuating and multiple, I found it easier to recognize and understand in participants' stories any mention of gender oppression and/or disability, given my status as a cis-woman who has experienced mental health disability. Pertaining to the former, as a woman, I have experienced sexual harassment while employed in male-dominated settings and, as such, expect that other women workers are particularly vulnerable to harassment and discrimination from male colleagues. My own experiences led me to expect and look for similar patterns in participants' stories. By way of an example, in the following exchange with a female-identified participant, of her many remarks that I could possibly follow up on, I note a gendered element in their narrative which contributes to the flow of our conversation and the production of a co-constructed narrative about gender bias in the workplace.

> Participant: *I felt so assaulted from that situation, so I left. I found another job…I worked there for about a year and a half and I lost my job again…at one point there, [name] came up and screamed at me, I was ready to file for harassment but before that could even be done I was gone. Then I didn't have a job for nearly three years. Found out that a lot of people didn't seem to be responding to my resumé. However, it was interesting as [female-signifying name], I was getting no responses. I change my name on my resumé, within 48 hours I had three interviews lined up.*
>
> Interviewer: *So there is a gender piece.*
>
> Participant: *a gender piece, transphobic piece, take it whichever way you want. I just find it very interesting that neither my education or background changed but the name did change…my mother offered to try and get me in [at Plant C] again; they were hiring a lot of people, tonnes of return, they were kind of recycling people through the system. So what they were doing was they were laying people off and they were employing people. Some of the*

people they laid off didn't get their place back in the system, they had to reapply and get a lower standing in the union…

Interviewer: *You've mentioned a couple of examples of, it seems there is maybe a bit of tolerance for aggression, clearly there has been a gender bias during hiring and in the roles themselves. Can you talk about that culture of masculinity?*

Participant: *There is, there is…*

In addition, as a person with an anxiety disorder, I shared an insider status with a few participants who self-identified as struggling or having previously struggled with mental health issues. While my attention to stress, as stated earlier, might not necessarily have aligned with the experiences of all participants, I demonstrated a sort of insider status with those who did reflect on the emotional difficulty of the event. Given my connection to mental health disability, in retrospect, I was more attentive to prioritizing those parts of participants' conversations that suggested or mentioned a (mental) health-related injury. For example, Ellie mentioned having previous experiences with depression. Here, you can observe me circling back to this topic, which influences the direction of our exchange:

Interviewer: *Have you felt that any part of this process has, I don't like the word triggered, but triggered depression again?*

Participant: *Hmmm, I think definitely. Yeah. It's been a bit of a struggle but I think the part of the process that's triggered, that's caused me the most frustration, is the union's response…*

Interviewer: *Yes, that sense of disengagement, lack of control if you will, can contribute to something for sure.*

Participant: *Definitely and I'd say, like I said, fighting back, participating with [name of grassroots activist organization] has probably helped me more than what I know. But the last couple of weeks, there's just, I'm feeling a lot of anxiety and anger.*

Similarly, when Charlotte (pseudonym) shared that they had previously been hospitalized for mental health reasons, you can witness my engagement rather than deflection from the topic:

Participant: *I ended up going to the hospital because I [tried] to commit suicide…*

Interviewer: *After the announcement?*

Participant: *That was before the announcement, and then there was one afterwards. The one beforehand is simply [the result of] the way I was being treated at work and issues that were happening, things that were happening at work were literally driving me to the breaking point…*

Interviewer: *I'm sorry. When you were off work for mental health, what resources if any did the workplace offer? Did they offer any help?*

Participant: *No.*

Finally, I want to acknowledge that I share an insider status with many and quite likely all of the participants in this project, relative to race[20]. While I did attempt to maximize diversity during the recruitment phase (e.g., I contacted potential participants from different racial backgrounds as determined by their LinkedIn profile pictures), there remains a predominance of white workers in manufacturing settings, particularly in those with well-renumerated and unionized positions. Unfortunately, the majority of my recruitment communications did not culminate in interviews, with only white-presenting workers scheduling a meeting. Consequently, my conversations with participants notably excluded discussion of anti-racism and stories about the intersection of job displacement and race. In fact, only one participant directly mentioned the existence of racism in the plant and union spaces. Holvino (2010)

[20] The race of some participants remains unknown in cases where a) we did not meet for the interview in-person and b) where I could not confidently identify them on social media.

suggests that white privilege garners a certain comfortability for even women researchers to "collaborate" with white men, including participants. This pattern of excluding discussion about anti-racism and the intersection of job displacement and race in conversations with participants reflects a possible persistence of white privilege.

Intersectionality

In addition to acknowledging the influence of researcher positionality on study processes and findings, researchers employing feminist methodological principles also recognize that individuals differently experience the categories to which they belong, such as the categories of gender or even those of "unemployed" or "displaced worker." In the previous chapter, I wrote about intersectionality as a theoretical framework with roots in Black feminist thought. To recap, intersectionality considers how various forms of oppression, like racism, sexism, or classism, intersect and interact to produce cumulative disadvantages for individuals from different social categories (Yuval-Davis, 2007). Shields (2008) tells us that "social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another," where one category of identity "takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category" (p. 302). This emphasizes that we cannot understand any single aspect of identity in isolation. Instead, an intersectional methodology recognizes that individuals experience life through multiple and interconnected social identities (e.g., race, gender, sexuality) and oppressions (e.g., racism, sexism, heteronormativity etc.) that uniquely shape their understanding of the world. In the context of worker displacement due to factory closure, the construct of displacement or unemployment thus cannot be studied and understood in isolation from other systemic sources of oppression. Intersectionality invites us

to consider how various intersecting dimensions of oppression might contribute to the over-representation of certain positionalities in experiences of job displacement and/or its ill effects.

Incorporating an intersectional methodological framework in qualitative research requires paying attention to intersecting categories and analyzing how they shape experiences and perspectives. For instance, looking at the experience of factory closures solely through a class lens might overlook the particular challenges faced by, for example, precariously employed women, immigrant men with children, and others who face different forms of oppression. Intersectionality allows for the development of more comprehensive understandings of social phenomena through mapping the margins of these experiences and making the overlooked visible. Importantly, intersectionality need not depend on categorical comparison across identity groups. Intersectional analysis can manifest through a "set of engagements" (Cho et al., 2013) that examine how multiple social forces converge in unique lived experiences. This approach allows researchers to honour the complexity of individual social locations without artificially homogenizing experiences through rigid group-based comparisons.

Dissent and difference are key components of intersectional feminist research (Harcourt et al., 2016). To avoid creating the semblance of a unified and monolithic voice, feminist researchers actively recruit participants with diverse positionalities and consequently varied perspectives and expertise within any given identity category. Later, I outline the specific recruitment, data collection, and data analysis strategies with which I engage in an attempt to maximize gender, class, ability status and other forms of diversity in my study.

However, applying a robust intersectional lens to social research requires more than simply noting differences between individual experiences. Rice et al. (2019) argue that the increase in studies claiming an intersectional analysis has been met with a "whitening" and depoliticization of the concept as well as its history in black feminist imaginations. The authors suggest that intersectional social research only satisfies the intended aims of social justice and political change when it a) acknowledges the need for deep social transformation and b) moves beyond identarian politics to maintain awareness of privileges and oppressions.

While intersectionality guides my methodological approach throughout this study, the relatively small sample size presents both opportunities and constraints for analysis. Rather than adopting a 'categorical' approach (McCall, 2005) that might artificially homogenize experiences within identity groups, I employ an 'intracategorical' intersectional approach that acknowledges the utility of categories while remaining critical of rigid categorization. This approach allows for examining how various dimensions of identity uniquely interact within individual experiences while remaining attentive to broader structural patterns. As my analysis demonstrates in Chapters 4 and 5, class dimensions emerged as particularly salient in shaping workers' responses to job displacement, while other identity factors manifested in more individualized ways that resisted group-based generalization. This approach aligns with Crenshaw's (1991) understanding of intersectionality as examining neglected points of intersection rather than fixed identity categories. This study maintains intersectional integrity while avoiding methodological overreach through in-depth examination of individual narratives, rather than forcing categorical comparisons where sample size would not support them.

Grounded Theory as a Feminist Methodological Approach

This study employs grounded theory methodology, which aligns well with feminist epistemological principles in several important ways. Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later refined by Charmaz (2006), emphasizes generating theoretical insights inductively from data rather than approaching research with predetermined theoretical frameworks to be tested. This central tenet—that theory should be "grounded" in empirical data—resonates with feminist epistemology's emphasis on situated knowledge over researcher-imposed frameworks. Grounded theory foregrounds participant voices, experiences, and knowledges that may contest or transcend dominant theoretical paradigms, thereby mitigating the risk of inadvertently reproducing hegemonic interpretive structures through the premature application of established theoretical constructs.

Furthermore, grounded theory's iterative process of constant comparison between data, codes, and emerging theoretical categories creates opportunities for reflexivity throughout the research process. This iterative approach aligns with feminist methodology's commitment to ongoing reflection about how knowledge is constructed through the research process. As Olesen (2007) notes, feminist grounded theory acknowledges that the researcher's interpretation of data is shaped by their positionality, while simultaneously creating analytical space for participants' voices and experiences to guide theoretical development.

In this study, using grounded theory meant approaching workers' narratives without predetermined theoretical categories, allowing their experiences to guide the analytical process. While I was familiar with some of the literature on factory closures and unemployment before conducting interviews with displaced workers, I deliberately avoided imposing

frameworks during data collection and analysis. Instead, I remained open to unexpected themes and patterns in workers' accounts. The theoretical frameworks discussed in Chapter 1 also emerged as relevant analytical lenses through this grounded process, rather than as predetermined templates for data analysis.

Research Design

I began collecting data in May 2019, after receiving approval from the Research Ethics Board at York University[21]. Initially, approval was provided to the faculty member's project, within which my study is based. Subsequently, the Research Ethics Board also approved my study as a subset of that larger project (see Appendix A). I used two methods for collecting data: individual interviews and document analysis.

Sampling Frame and Strategy

Participants for my project included workers who were employed with a manufacturing plant at the time of an announced closure or mass layoff. This criterion was essential as the study focused on capturing workers' lived experiences of, and responses to, the announcement event

[21] The Research Ethics Board at York University required the anonymization of all corporate entities from which participants were recruited, a decision that imposed methodological constraints on this research. Anonymization of corporate entities impeded the integration of complementary primary sources such as union archives, corporate records, and contemporaneous media coverage that could have enriched the analytical framework, including comparative analysis, and provided crucial contextual depth.

Furthermore, extending confidentiality to corporations reveals troubling assumptions about who deserves protection in academic research. While ostensibly intended to protect participant confidentiality, corporations wield considerable economic and political power over workers' lives. Anonymizing corporate actors serves to shield them from scholarly scrutiny and public accountability. Ultimately, this anonymization proves incomplete in practice, as participant references to specific important events and actions (e.g., the 2008 government bailout of Plant B) renders certain case studies readily identifiable to informed readers.

itself and the subsequent workplace dynamics that unfolded in the factory environment thereafter. Workers who were not employed at the time of the announcement were excluded from participating in the study as they would be unable to a) provide firsthand accounts of the announcement event and their immediate reactions to it, b) offer comparative reflections on how workplace conditions and social relations changed before and after the closure announcement, and c) describe the evolving emotional and practical strategies they employed or developed throughout the closure process. Including only those employed during an announcement of factory closure or mass layoff ensured participants could provide rich, temporally-situated narratives about this critical transition. Additionally, the manufacturing plants had to be geographically located in the Greater Toronto Area, with a closing date in 2019. This geographic focus provides a concentrated analysis of industrial displacement within a specific urban context. While my dissertation does not directly compare geographical similarities and differences, this regional specificity contributes to earlier phases of the *Women, Work, and Deindustrialization* project, which previously examined factory closures in the Niagara region and Southwestern Ontario. Ultimately, participants were recruited from three manufacturing plants. The employment status of potential participants (e.g., indefinitely laid off, permanently laid off, relocated, employed by a different company, etc.) did not determine eligibility to participate in the study. Further, the position or role of the worker within the manufacturing plant (e.g., management, line worker, warehouse staff, etc.) did not determine eligibility to participate. Additionally, union status did not determine eligibility to participate, as I recruited participants from both unionized and non-unionized manufacturing plants. Instead,

participants simply shared the experience of having been displaced from a manufacturing plant due to plant closure. In total, I recruited 12 participants through purposive sampling.

Initially, I used a purposive sampling strategy to recruit participants for my study. As opposed to random sampling, purposive sampling involves contacting and selecting persons who meet a particular set of criteria or characteristics, which are aligned with the objectives of the study (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In this case, my purposive sampling specifically targeted workers who had been employed at one of the manufacturing plants in the GTA at the time of its announced closure in 2019. In turn, I recruited participants through snowball sampling. A snowball strategy involves current research participants identifying and recruiting other possible participants (Brewer & Miller, 2003). In this case, participants suggested and/or contacted coworkers whom they thought might be interested in speaking with me. In total, participants identified eight coworkers for possible participation in the study; of the potential eight participants, five responded to my request and agreed to an interview, but only three scheduled an interview.

Of the 12 participants, three were from one company (hereafter referred to as Plant A), six worked for a second company (Plant B), and three worked for a third company (Plant C). The resulting participant group reflected some diversity in terms of gender identity, family status, housing status, employment status, years with the company, and union status, as highlighted in Table 2.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

#	Participant Pseudonym	Gender Identity	Family Status	Housing Status	Company Pseudonym	Employment Status	Years with Company	Union Status

1	Roger	Man	Married with Children	Owns House	Plant A	Permanent Fulltime	6	No
2	Dominic	Man	Single	Lives with Parents	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime after 4 years	6	Yes
3	Samuel	Man	Married with Children	Owns House	Plant A	Temporary Fulltime	2	No
4	Henry	Man	Single	Owns House, lives alone	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime	22	Yes
5	Christopher	Man	Married	Owns House	Plant A	Permanent Fulltime	15	No
6	Ben	Man	Single	Owns House, lives with roommate	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime after 3 years	4	Yes
7	Travis	Man	Married with Adult Children	Owns House	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime	37	No
8	Ellie	Woman	Single	Owns House, lives alone	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime after 10 years	13	Yes
9	Sophia	Woman	Married	Owns House	Plant B	Permanent Fulltime after 3 years	8	Yes
10	Calvin	Man	Single	Sold House, Returned to Parents	Plant C	Permanent Fulltime	9	Yes
11	Louisa	Woman	Married	Owns House	Plant C	Unknown, Fulltime	8	Yes
12	Charlotte	Woman	Single	Unhoused/ Between Housing	Plant C	Temporary, Fulltime	3	Yes

Participant Demographics: Categories Within an Intracategorical Framework

I have adopted an intracategorical intersectional approach as described above, where the demographic chart presented here serves a distinct methodological purpose that aligns with this framework. As McCall (2005) articulates, intracategorical complexity recognizes categories

as useful analytical anchor points for understanding structural patterns of inequality. The demographic information presented functions as contextual coordinates that situate individual narratives within broader social structures. Rather than using these categories to make sweeping generalizations about homogenized group experiences, I provide this information to illustrate some of the particular combinations of social locations that shape each participant's unique lived experience and from which participants navigate displacement. As Rice et al. (2019) might suggest, acknowledging these social locations maintains awareness of privileges and oppressions without reducing analysis to identitarian politics.

Critical Reflections on Participant Diversity

It is important to note that while the sampling strategy aimed for diversity, the actual participant group may not fully represent all intersecting identities present in the affected manufacturing sites. For example, one limitation of this interview population is the lack of racialized minorities among the participants, although I cannot be certain as to the racial identities of the phone interview participants in particular.

The absence of visible racialized minorities in the participant group is a significant limitation that warrants consideration. Several factors may have contributed to this lack of representation. One possible factor is the use of LinkedIn for recruitment, which may have disproportionately excluded racialized blue-collar workers, who are less likely to engage with such platforms due to persistent discrimination in hiring practices. Racialized individuals may be reluctant to use LinkedIn because their photos and/or names can become targets for discrimination, potentially reducing their chances of being hired or contacted for opportunities. Additionally, as a white woman and academic identifiable through my LinkedIn photo, I

represent institutions that have historically marginalized and exploited racialized communities in research. In a society where white privilege persists and where white people continue to be the primary enactors and benefactors of racial discrimination, racialized workers may have viewed engaging with a white researcher as an unnecessary risk. Simultaneously, as a representative of academic institutions, I embody a history of research practices that have often marginalized and exploited racialized communities. At times, academic researchers have used research to pathologize communities or justify oppressive policies without providing tangible benefits, leading to "research fatigue[22]" among some racialized groups. The combination of individual racial privilege and institutional academic privilege likely created perceived barriers to participation. Ideally, this study would have hired as researchers members from the community of interest to mitigate power imbalances and reflect greater diversity of perspectives. However, the constraints of a self-funded PhD dissertation and an institutional expectation of independent research and analysis, precluded this approach. The impact of this limitation on study findings should be considered in the analysis and interpretation of results.

Recruitment Methods

Before recruiting participants, I contacted a union local for several manufacturing plants set to close in 2019. A union local can be an important gatekeeper to possible participants (Refslund, 2019) by providing access to membership lists, member contact information, and/or disseminating requests for participation to members through newsletters and general

[22] "…research fatigue can be said to occur when individuals and groups become tired of engaging with research and it can be identified by a demonstration of reluctance toward continuing engagement with an existing project, or a refusal to engage with any further research" (Clark, 2008, pp. 955–956)

membership meetings. However, despite three attempts by email, I did not receive a response to my request.

Consequently, I attempted to gain access to the community (i.e., workers in closing manufacturing plants) through my existing network. Specifically, I posted a question to my social media – namely, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter – asking if any of my followers had friends/contacts at two particular manufacturing facilities set to close. I received confirmation from five followers. Of those five followers, two agreed to send a recruitment letter to their contact(s). However, their contacts did not reach out to me about the project.

In turn, I directly contacted individual workers with an invitation to participate (see Appendix B). I was able to identify the names of displaced workers through two avenues. First, I read/watched news articles/clips related to announced plant closures in the GTA. Therein, I looked for any interviews with workers or references to specific employee names. Of the identified employees, I located 10 on social media and sent them a recruitment letter. Of those 10 displaced workers, four agreed to participate in the project. Second, and primarily, I relied on LinkedIn[23] to identify workers from specific manufacturing plants that were closing. Through LinkedIn, I was able to sort by company name and, from the populated list of workers,

[23] The recruitment of participants through LinkedIn introduces potential sampling bias that may have influenced the substantive findings of this study. Manufacturing workers are underrepresented on the platform relative to white-collar workers. LinkedIn's emphasis on professional networking and career advancement aligns more closely with knowledge-work career trajectories that may be less relevant to manufacturing roles traditionally characterized by local employment, seniority systems, and union-mediated advancement. Consequently, manufacturing workers who do maintain LinkedIn profiles likely differ systematically from their non-LinkedIn counterparts in ways that may be relevant to this study. Results may reflect the perspectives of a subset with particular demographic characteristics, educational backgrounds, technological access, or employment histories that led them to join a professional networking platform, rather than representing the range of responses to plant closure among manufacturing workers more broadly. These selection effects should be considered when interpreting findings and the representativeness of participant attitudes.

determine who was employed with the company at the time of the announced closure. Next, I sent direct messages to 95 workers across six different closing factories in the GTA. I made a conscious effort to contact people with seemingly diverse backgrounds and experiences, such as varied work roles, genders, races, and age ranges as inferred from their names, profile photos, stated years of education and work history. Through this approach, I aimed to capture a range of intersecting identities that could influence individuals' experiences of displacement. I received responses from 26 workers whom I contacted through LinkedIn; of these respondents, 10 indicated that they were not interested, while the other 16 expressed interest in the project. Of those who conveyed interest, seven did not respond to my subsequent attempts to set up a time to speak. Notably, I had interview dates scheduled for two additional participants at a fourth factory, but these coincided with the onset of COVID-19 lockdowns. In these early days of the pandemic, we decided to postpone the interview until we could meet in person. Ultimately, these interviews did not take place. Thus, despite systematic attempts to recruit through union locals, personal networks, news sources, and professional social media (i.e., LinkedIn), the final sample represents those workers who were both identifiable and willing to share their experiences during this sensitive transition period.

The final sample size of 12 participants proved sufficient for several methodological reasons. First, consistent with Charmaz's (2006) perspective on grounded theory, this study focused on "developing the range of relevant conceptual categories" and saturating those categories with rich evidence, rather than achieving a predetermined numerical threshold. Second, the empirical research by Guest et al. (2006) demonstrated that data saturation can be achieved with as few as six in-depth interviews for thematic analysis. In fact, their analysis

revealed that 80% of all themes were discoverable within the first six interviews, and 92% were identified within the first twelve interviews. Third, as described in greater detail below, my analytic approach borrowed from Denzin's (2012) "method of instances," where each interview was treated as "an occurrence which evidences the operation of a set of cultural understandings" (p. 23). This is to say, each individual interview is not just an isolated account but rather a window into the cultural frameworks and shared knowledge that shape how people interpret their experiences. When a displaced worker describes their experiences of factory closure, they are likely to draw on shared language and concepts that reflect broader cultural norms, values, and shared meanings.

Sources of Data

Participant Interviews

To collect workers' stories and situate them within broader social relations, I individually interviewed 12 displaced workers from three closing factories within the GTA. Participants were given the option to meet in person, online (e.g., Skype/Zoom), or over the phone; seven participants requested to meet in person, while five preferred a phone conversation. For the interviews that took place in person, six were held in coffee shops of their choosing, while one occurred in a library. I began each interview by reviewing and signing an informed consent form (see Appendix C). I received consent from every participant to audio-record the interview.

Throughout the interview, I referred to a semi-structured interview guide of open-ended questions (see Appendix D). Consistent with grounded theory methodology, the interview guide was designed to be exploratory, allowing participants' experiences and perspectives to emerge organically. Dr. Pupo designed the interview guide to cover several key

aspects of job displacement due to factory closure: the closure announcement, closure process, union agreement (where applicable), impacts of the closure, survival strategies, and future outlook. To this existing guide, I added 10 questions to more directly target workers' thoughts, feelings, and reactions at each stage of the closure. I deliberately worded questions in an open-ended way, such as "What was the atmosphere like in the plant following the announcement?" or "How would you describe your reaction to the closure?" rather than presupposing specific responses. Interviews ranged from 75 to 200 minutes in duration. After each interview, I transcribed the digitally recorded interview in verbatim form. This detailed transcription process supported the close reading and analysis necessary for grounded theory development, allowing me to identify emergent patterns and concepts directly from participants' accounts. In total, I transcribed 19 hours and 48 minutes of interview data.

Reflexive Journal

As noted above, feminist methodology emphasizes the role and necessary reflexivity of the researcher in knowledge generation practices. I maintained a field journal throughout the study to create a methodological consciousness of my research process and analysis (see, for example, Kelly & Gurr, 2020). In part, I documented the concrete activities of the project. More specifically, I used the journal to trace my assumptions, reactions to participants, and ideas or insights after each conversation. By recording and tracing the progression of my ideas, I was able to produce an audit trail containing non-verbal and embodied material, against which to qualify my interpretations of the interview data. Thus, the reflexive journal is a valuable tool for documenting the interview encounter as an *affective encounter* (Ayata et al., 2019), where I both affect and am affected by the interview participants as well as any contextual factors

before and after the conversation that impact my feelings, embodied emotions, and in turn my interpretation of the interview. And, while an analysis of the interview site and relationship is at best a secondary purpose of this study, maintaining a reflexive journal nevertheless establishes an "empirical ground" for inspecting affect's role in the research dynamic (p. 69).

Data Analysis

To examine displaced workers' lived experiences during factory closures, I employed a multi-theoretical framework to analyze their narratives, integrating FPE, affect theory, social reproductive labour, reworlding, and identity theory. Together, this analytical approach facilitated capturing the relationship between power dynamics, effects, emotions, identities, and resistance strategies during factory closures.

Coding Strategy

Coding is a common analytic strategy in qualitative research whereby the researcher interprets the data by organizing and labelling textual materials, such as interview transcripts, into themes (Mohajan & Mohajan, 2022). The purpose of coding is not to uncover some universal truth. Instead, coding is one strategy for critically interpreting or explaining displaced workers' experiences of a factory closure.

My analytic strategy involved a three-step process inspired by grounded theory. I began with open coding, reading individual transcripts to identify general patterns and themes in displaced workers' stories. This initial phase of organizing and labelling material into themes served as the foundation for my "codebook." Next, through axial coding, I engaged in repeated readings of the transcripts, refining, collapsing, and/or separating thematic categories as I compared individual interviews within and across the three sites/factories from which I

recruited participants. This process of (re)reading and (re)organizing the material continued until the point of saturation, where no new codes or themes emerged from the data. Finally, I conducted selective coding, drawing relationships between various codes and compiling them into central categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Emergence of Theoretical Frameworks from Field Data

My process of theoretical development unfolded organically through engagement with the interview data, rather than following a predetermined analytical plan. That is, I allowed workers' experiences to guide my theoretical engagement. This section details how the specific analytical puzzles that I encountered during coding led me to particular theoretical traditions that offered explanatory power.

Feminist Political Economy as Guiding Analytical Lens. Unlike the other theoretical frameworks in this analysis, FPE formed part of the study's initial analytical approach. As a reminder, the data for this study was collected as part of my supervisor's larger research project, which employed an FPE framework. Evidence of this framework can be found in the interview guide, for example, which sought to examine power dynamics and inequalities within job displacement due to factory closure processes.

While FPE influenced the project's initial framing, my analysis of workers' narratives deepened and complicated how scholars often apply this perspective to factory closures. Where conventional FPE approaches emphasize gendered divisions, my analysis of the data focused on configurations of advantage and disadvantage that could not be reduced to gender alone. This led me to develop a more intersectional application of FPE principles than initially anticipated in the research design. FPE proved valuable for its integration of productive and

reproductive spheres, and my analysis extended this integration beyond households and workplaces to encompass community networks that emerged during displacement.

Social Reproduction Theory. Throughout interviews, workers described emerging and established networks of care that sustained them during closure processes. One pattern that appeared was the reciprocal care between coworkers, with workers describing how they supported their crying colleagues on the line, made plans to go out for coffee, or shared information with colleagues to support their employment transition. Participants also described the important role of family and friends in offering emotional and material support. These care networks extended beyond personal connections to include service providers from whom displaced workers sought support, such as with resume writing assistance or accessing healthcare for stress and depression.

The prevalence and importance of these care practices in workers' narratives pointed me toward social reproduction theory, particularly Luxton and Benzason's (2006) analysis of how care work sustains workers and communities during periods of economic precarity. Their framework helped to make sense of how displacement reorganizes entire systems of care, such as shifting how families negotiate domestic responsibilities, the creation of new support systems, and the often increasing reliance on institutional services. Social reproduction theory captured these dimensions of displacement that conventional economic analysis overlooks but that workers consistently identified as part of their experiences.

Affective Dimensions Beyond Emotional Labour. Workers' narratives consistently included emotional elements of factory closures. Initially, I considered the theory of emotional labour to make sense of how workers managed and emoted their feelings during closure

processes. Workers were indeed performing emotional labour when they described actively managing their outward expression of feelings to meet workplace expectations. However, it became increasingly clear that this framework alone was inadequate for addressing broader emotional phenomena in the data.

Affect theory emerged as essential when I identified two distinct patterns that could not be explained by emotional labour alone. First, workers consistently described atmospheric qualities that permeated workplace spaces after closure announcements. These were not individual emotional responses but collective feeling states that seemingly saturated the physical environment. Workers detailed how, for example, union meetings contained an "air" of tension and anger. The concept of affective atmosphere helped conceptualize how these environmental qualities shaped workers' experiences as well as how feeling states could circulate throughout the workplace and between workers and objects.

Second, workers' narratives repeatedly centred around transformative moments where encounters with particular objects, ideas, or others altered their relationship to work, displacement, and others. For example, workers at Plant A mentioned caution tape marking off machinery during the closure announcement. Yet, this caution tape functioned as more than a prop in workers' stories; these objects were, in fact, pivotal points where workers' orientations and attachments shifted. Affect theory provided the conceptual tools for understanding how objects like caution tape could become charged with collective feeling, and how these emotional currents could transform workers' relationships to themselves and others during displacement.

Identity Work. Two distinct patterns in workers' narratives directed me toward identity theory. First, and somewhat surprisingly to me, workers consistently expressed ongoing pride and commitment to their work despite the impending closure. Even as their colleagues were let go and machinery was being dismantled around them, participants described maintaining exacting quality standards and professional ethics. This continued commitment to work quality, even as companies abandoned their commitment to workers, presented me with an analytical challenge. Norris's (2016) work on identity threats and maintenance provided a framework for how workers could develop strategies to preserve coherent self-narratives despite institutional abandonment.

Second, early in my interviews, I noticed workers' tendency to describe their experiences or responses in relation to others. Specifically, workers seemingly made sense of their own feelings and reactions by positioning themselves through comparison with colleagues. To make sense of these comparative self-constructions, I needed a theoretical framework that understood identity as fundamentally relational rather than fixed or intrinsic. Both social identity theory and symbolic interactionism accounted for different aspects of this relational work. Social identity theory explained how workers created self-concepts by establishing categories of people, actively distinguishing themselves from or aligning themselves with particular groups. Simultaneously, symbolic interactionism accounts for how workers construct identities through ongoing social interactions, negotiating meaning through conversations with others confronting similar circumstances.

Intersecting Vulnerabilities. No single social position adequately explained workers' different experiences of displacement. While I brought a feminist orientation to data analysis,

other circumstances or positionalities seemed to explain workers' different perceptions and responses to factory closure, than could be simply divided along gendered lines. For example, I noticed how parents and/or people who were married discussed entirely different considerations and constraints than people without children and/or who are single. Relatedly, workers experiencing chronic illnesses or injuries negotiated responses to closure announcements differently than their peers. As did workers experiencing housing instability, and so on. Their narratives also suggested how institutional supports or collective responses to closure announcements were frequently designed around assumptions of able-bodiedness, neurotypical mindedness, nuclear family arrangements, etc., that systematically disadvantaged those who did not conform to these norms. These patterns in the data directed me toward Crenshaw's (1991) intersectionality framework, which offered analytical tools to understand how multiple social positions create unique configurations of vulnerability.

Yet, with potentially just one or a few workers representing any particular combination of circumstances, creating stable comparison groups would have been artificial. This tension led me to adopt an intracategorical intersectionality approach. This framework allowed me to analyze how each worker's particular mix of circumstances shaped their options while still identifying patterns across experiences. Instead of forcing categorical comparison, I was able to trace how specific institutional arrangements privilege certain bodies and positionalities while making others vulnerable during displacement.

Reimagining Possibilities Within Industrial Decline. Without prompting, a few workers shared their ideas both for how the union could have approached the closure and their ideas for revitalizing manufacturing at large. These workers were actively theorizing paths not taken

as well as possible futures. This pattern required a theoretical framework that could account for imaginative practices within contexts of constraint. Haraway's (2016) concept of reworlding proved valuable precisely because it recognizes how future-oriented thinking functions within, not despite, difficult present circumstances. Rather than treating workers' speculative discussions as tangential to their displacement experiences, this theoretical lens acknowledged their importance as a critical engagement with economic possibilities.

What made Haraway's approach particularly useful was its refusal to romanticize either resistance or adaptation. Workers' alternative visions weren't utopian escapes but practical engagements with concrete possibilities embedded within existing conditions. Their critiques of union strategies in particular, or proposals for manufacturing renewal, represented serious theoretical work that deserved analytical attention. Reworlding as a conceptual framework legitimized these imaginative practices as meaningful responses to displacement rather than dismissing them as wishful thinking or disgruntled ramblings disconnected from material realities.

Operationalizing Theory in Data Analysis

Having identified these theoretical frameworks through my engagement with workers' narratives, the next methodological challenge involved systematically applying these perspectives to the data analysis process. This section details how I translated each theoretical framework into specific analytical strategies, developing coding approaches and interpretive lenses that allowed me to rigorously examine the data.

Operationalizing Feminist Political Economy. In operationalizing FPE, my analysis of workers' narratives was guided by the overarching question: "Who benefits from current

arrangements?" This query, as emphasized by Armstrong and Armstrong (2002), directed my examination of power dynamics and inequalities within economic structures and workplace relations. I systematically coded narratives for indicators of advantage, disadvantage, and the distribution of resources and decision-making power, situating individual experiences within their larger socio-economic contexts.

To analyze displaced workers' narratives through a FPE lens, I focused on identifying power imbalances and inequalities in the closure process. This involved examining workers' accounts for descriptions of how closure policies and practices affected different groups of workers. I paid particular attention to workers' depictions of interactions between themselves, management, unions, and other stakeholders, as well as any expressions of frustration, powerlessness, or advantage related to the closure. By coding for various forms of advantage and disadvantage, I could trace how closure processes impacted workers differently based on their particular configurations of social positioning.

Operationalizing Social Reproduction Theory. To analyze the care networks that emerged as significant in workers' narratives, I developed coding strategies that identified various dimensions of social reproduction. I carefully examined interview transcripts for discussions of the division of labour within households before and after displacement, changes in engagement with unpaid care work, and shifts in access to and reliance on state services. I paid particular attention to how displacement affected participants' ability to care for themselves and others, instances of relying on or providing community care, and impacts on relationships with family members and community networks. This analysis helped reveal the typically unseen labour of care that maintains workers and their communities during economic

disruptions. It also highlighted how this essential work is often unequally distributed, with particular impacts on already marginalized workers based on their gender and other social factors.

Operationalizing Intersectionality. To apply intracategorical intersectionality to the data, I developed an analytical approach that prioritized workers' articulations of their circumstances without imposing fixed identity markers. I traced how individual workers described their particular configurations of constraints, privileges, and vulnerabilities during factory closure, situating these experiences within broader social categories without reducing them to a homogenous group experience. Drawing on Cho et al.'s (2013) framework, this approach allowed me to identify patterns in how differential impacts were produced through institutional arrangements, social processes, and structures related to the factory closure. In practice, this involved coding for descriptions of closure processes (such as layoff procedures) that made certain positions more precarious than others.

Operationalizing Affect Theory. To analyze affect, I borrowed heavily from Berg et al.'s (2019) three-part process of "reading for affect," inspired by Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotion. First, I identified to whom or which "bodies" workers ascribed feelings and emotions in their narratives about plant closures. Second, I considered how these ascriptions of affect aligned workers with or against others, paying attention to words like "we" that indicate subject positioning. Finally, I examined the materiality of affect discourse, looking at how it was distributed through metaphors, slogans, and other linguistic devices. Additionally, following Ayata et al.'s (2019) approach, I considered the interview itself as an affective encounter,

reflecting on how the relational dynamic between researcher and participant shaped the production of knowledge.

Operationalizing Identity Theory. To analyze the identity work apparent in workers' narratives, I drew inspiration from Norris's (2016) framework, analyzing workers' narratives for indications of how they either shifted away from or sustained work-related identities. Relatedly, I considered how workers created self-concepts by establishing categories of people (e.g., "workers like me" versus "workers who behaved differently than me"). I paid attention to how interactions with social institutions, such as family or networking groups, influenced these identity processes.

Additionally, drawing on Massumi's (2015) analysis of how economic power operates through affective circuits and embodied potentials, I examined how workers' subjectivities were being potentially re-coded in the context of factory closure. I looked for how they negotiated the tensions between established work-based identities and emerging economic imperatives. For instance, I considered situations where workers' skills and know-how clashed with new expectations to be more "flexible" and "adaptable."

Operationalizing Reworlding. Finally, to analyze the speculative and imaginative dimensions of workers' narratives, I analyzed workers' narratives for instances of reimagining and reconstructing social, economic, and ecological relationships in the face of industrial decline. I looked for examples of workers developing new ways of responding to environmental and economic damage, engaging in collaborative efforts to reimagine industrial practices or community structures. I also considered how their storytelling itself functioned as a transformative practice by identifying narratives that contested dominant understandings of

industrial decline and contributed to reimagining the future of work and community. I paid particular attention to moments where workers described creating new possibilities within and despite existing constraints, showing ways of "staying with the trouble" and working creatively within the ruins of capitalism, rather than giving up or waiting for outside salvation.

Throughout this analysis, I integrated these theoretical frameworks to show how structural forces, individual experiences, and collective responses intersect during factory closure. By operationalizing these multiple theories on the same dataset, I attempted to uncover different but related parts of workers' experiences. This approach shows how theoretical ideas can be translated into concrete analytical strategies that help make sense of the lived realities of workers losing their jobs due to factory closure and figuring out what comes next.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined key principles of feminist epistemology and methodology that inform the design of my study about displaced workers' experiences of factory closure. Drawing from feminist standpoint epistemology, I emphasize the importance of centring marginalized voices and recognizing knowledge as socially constructed and situated. This approach challenges traditional positivist paradigms by acknowledging the role of power dynamics in shaping knowledge production and valuing experiential insights. Crucially, feminist epistemology connects personal experiences to political structures, recognizing individual accounts of displacement as embodied manifestations of broader socioeconomic and political processes. By examining how displaced workers' personal narratives reflect and respond to

larger political and economic systems, this methodology enables a more complete understanding of social phenomena.

Furthermore, I discussed key methodological considerations, including the need to address power imbalances in the researcher-participant relationship, the importance of reflexivity, and the value of incorporating intersectionality to understand how various forms of oppression intersect in workers' experiences. Feminist methodologies acknowledge that knowledge production is influenced by social norms and values, including those of the researcher. I detailed my research design, including sampling strategies, recruitment methods, and data collection techniques, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of my approach, particularly regarding participant diversity.

The chapter also provided an in-depth explanation of my data analysis process, which integrates and operationalizes multiple theoretical frameworks. I described how these frameworks emerged from the data and how I operationalized these theories in my coding and analysis to examine power dynamics, affective experiences, identity shifts, and workers' resistance and reimagining efforts in the context of factory closure.

In the next two chapters, I report the empirical findings of my conversations with participants for what they might reveal about the research questions for this study. Specifically, the upcoming chapter investigates workers' experiences of and responses to factory closure announcements.

Chapter 4: "Those First Couple of Weeks Were Where Things Got Really Tense:" Resisting Closures, (Re)imagining Futures, and Recalibrating Ruptured Worklife Rhythms

Chapter Introduction

This dissertation is concerned, in part, with how workers respond to announced factory closures, how workplace power dynamics influence their responses, and how their attachments to ideas, objects, and others shift during factory closures. I start this chapter at the beginning of the plant closure process, describing the announcement as remembered and retold by displaced workers. I examine how different announcement practices at three manufacturing plants structured the social environment of closure while constructing workers as "displaced." At Plant A, heightened security and controlled spaces framed workers as potential threats requiring surveillance. At Plant B, the media-first announcement strategy constituted workers as peripheral subjects, producing their subjectivity as external to corporate decision-making. At Plant C, the complete absence of formal communication relegated supplier company workers to the lowest tier of a corporate hierarchy, constructing them as peripheral to both the production process and closure considerations.

In the second section of this chapter, I consider workers' responses to these announcements, examining how some unite in solidarity while others become further alienated. Here, I pay particular attention to how workers exercise agency through various forms of resistance, from traditional labour actions to the creation of alternative grassroots movements and counter-narratives about manufacturing's future. I demonstrate how workers' responses represent strategic assertions of power, even while shaped by different announcement practices. Through this analysis, I trace how workers reconstruct their

attachments, building new solidarities while abandoning others, in response to both announcement practices and their collective actions.

In the third section of this chapter, I examine how the post-announcement period disrupts temporal dimensions of work through companies' contradictory acceleration of production and deceleration of information flow, creating distinct forms of work alienation specific to dying workplaces. Yet even as management's control over time and information creates new forms of alienation, I show how workers' embodied and institutional knowledges enable them to read and interpret workplace changes beyond official communication channels.

Throughout the chapter, I demonstrate how announcement practices do more than simply convey information about job loss—they actively shape social relations, worker subjectivity, and temporal experiences in ways that both enable and constrain worker agency. However, workers also actively reinterpret, challenge, and transform these practices, creating new possibilities for resistance and collective action.

The Announcement: Constructing the Displaced Worker

The three multinational companies associated with this study varied in their approaches to communicating factory closures to their workforce. While their strategies differed, the participants' descriptions of each announcement hint at a shared sense of alienation that resonates across these different locations. The central argument I put forth is that the event of a factory closure announcement structures both the social environment of the closure and the very subjectivity of workers as "displaced." As a reminder, my intent is not to establish the "objective" accuracy of the events of factory closures. Rather, I recognize that workers' narratives provide privileged insight into the effects of an announced factory closure on

workers' affects, actions, and attachments. While partial and positioned, these perspectives are epistemically valuable precisely because they emerge from workers' direct experiences of industrial restructuring that can show aspects of factory closures invisible from other standpoints.

"Everything Was Roped Off. There Was Security Everywhere": Security, Surveillance, and Worker Subjectivity at Plant A

The Securitized Announcement: Empirical Observations. To deliver the news that the plant would be shutting down within the year, Plant A convened its workers in a large warehouse meeting area, with extra security personnel stationed throughout the facility. Samuel, a contract line worker, remembers seeing a "posting [the day before] that there was going to be a meeting, a company-wide meeting [and] everyone was invited. Even those who were off shift were told to come in [and that] they would be paid." While some workers were suspicious of this pre-announcement posting, it was the presence of additional security guards and cordoned-off sections of the facility the next day that signalled to workers that something significant was about to happen. On the day of the announcement, Roger, a team lead on one of the lines, recalls the company:

> Shuffling probably 300 of us into our warehousing area with chairs set up and a podium…everything was roped off, and there was security everywhere. Then the announcement was given [by the President of Plant A Canada]…she said that we were producing more than we could sell.

Similarly, Samuel remembers that "the first indication that something was going [on] is there were more security guards and tape was set up so that people couldn't go into unauthorized areas; basically anywhere between the front door and meeting area" was taped off to separate workers from their work stations. He added the security guards:

> were like bouncers. They're not just like regular people with their walkie-talkies. They're big guys, so based on that people were speculating, Oh my God, here we go, something is happening." So, they all gathered us into the room and the president of the Canadian operation came up, made her announcement, and basically her announcement was kind of heartfelt, but everyone thought it was more heartless.

Although it was typical of Plant A to outsource security, Roger recalls that "these people I had never seen before," and Christopher specifically noticed "a guy toward the back entrance where normally there wasn't a guy. There were [also] a couple extra guys in the hall that you didn't recognize." It was the presence of these unfamiliar actors and objects in their work environment that disrupted the otherwise routine trajectory of a typical workday, which seemed most salient in the workers' memories of that significant moment.

After hearing about the increased security presence from two participants at Plant A and starting to recognize its emerging significance in workers' stories, I took the opportunity to ask a third participant from Plant A, a research and development worker, Christopher, his perspective on the company's decision to bolster security that day. Confirming my suspicion, he guessed that "there was a lot of concern that we were going to get, that people would do things to impact safety and things like that." However, Roger confirmed that "nobody was yelling or screaming or anything like that. It was just shock. Just purely shock…we were just there to listen and hopefully get answers…[but] even to this day it just doesn't make any sense."

As for the announcement itself, Roger remembers the president of Plant A telling workers that the Canadian plant was producing more product than they could sell. Samuel remembers being provided with a slightly different explanation; he thought that the GTA plant did "not have the volume to carry on with their projected growth." Accordingly, one of their

larger plants in the US was going to absorb the manufacturing of the Canadian product. A media statement quotes the president of one of the company's divisions as stating that Plant A was confronting an "increasingly challenging environment [of] dramatically changing consumer and retail landscapes" (Manufacturing Automation, 2018) as their impetus for closing. In their 2019 annual report, Plant A acknowledges the closure of "our manufacturing facility in Toronto, Ontario….to improve the operational efficiency of our…supply chain network in North America" ([Plant A] Company, 2019, p. 18).

Securitization, Affect, and Gendered Power Dynamics. The increased security presence at Plant A's closure announcement exemplifies what Buzan et al. (1998) term "securitization," a broader social trend of framing labour issues as security threats. Wacquant (2009) has well documented how security apparatuses increasingly target working-class populations with increased surveillance during periods of economic restructuring, based on classed assumptions about their potential for resistance. By augmenting the security personnel during the announcement, the company implicitly characterized or constructed workers as potential disruptors prone to incivility, sabotage, threats, and even violence (Vickers & Parris, 2010), creating an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. This (mis)characterization was seemingly used by management to fortify corporate spaces against the very workers who had, until then, been trusted members of the company. In turn, workers interpreted the increased security presence as evidence of management's distrust but also as a troubling signal that something significant was about to occur.

Crawford and Hutchinson's (2016) research on "everyday security" demonstrates how Ahmed's (2014) theory of affective economies, discussed in Chapter 1, can be productively

extended to understand workplace security dynamics. As a reminder, Ahmed understands emotions as social forces that can "stick" to and circulate between bodies and objects through repeated associations over time, gaining intensity through movement and exchange. Crawford and Hutchinson's work emphasizes how security measures provoke emotional responses that are "vital to political stability and social control, particularly in a context of uncertainty and insecurity" (p. 1196). They argue that security practices are never emotionally neutral but always produce "certain (often differentiated) impacts upon people and groups. In fact, this is precisely what they are designed to do" (p. 1186). Emotions such as fear, anxiety, and suspicion are central to security processes and experiences.

In the case of the announcement of factory closure at Plant A, participants' descriptions demonstrate how the unfamiliar security guards and physical barriers functioned as affectively charged bodies and sites where workers' emotions accumulated and circulated throughout the collective. When workers like Samuel noticed the "big guys" serving as security "like bouncers" and the unusual cordoned-off areas, these security measures and figures were not emotionally neutral entities. Rather, they arrived already "sticky" with accumulated emotional associations---sites that in broader social contexts signify control, authority, suspicion, and the anticipation of disorder. Samuel's comment about "people were speculating 'oh my God, here we go, something is happening" demonstrates Ahmed's understanding how how emotions also circulate, moving from the already-charged security presence to individual workers and then between workers through their shared observations and discussions, creating a communal affective state before any official announcement occurred.

However, instead of provoking the resistance that management seemingly anticipated, the security measures produced an affective dampening (Massumi, 2002). When affects circulate within structures that materially demonstrate workers' powerlessness through cordoned-off areas, restricted movement, and surveillance by security personnel, a paradoxical flattening effect can occur. The initial emotional intensities do not disappear but transform into different affective states characterized by withdrawal or numbing. As Christopher describes, workers were "just kind of mailing it in," reflecting precisely this state of withdrawal that emerged within, though not necessarily because of, the securitized environment. Whether this affective flattening arose from the presence of security, from broader conditions of powerlessness in the face of corporate decisions, or something else, remains unclear. What is evident is that within this power-saturated space, workers' dampened affect altered their capacities to act and feel.

This securitization intersects with and reinforces gendered and classed assumptions about manufacturing workers' propensity for disruptive or violent behaviour (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). By positioning the predominantly male and working-class workforce as potential security threats, the heightened security presence creates a form of classed and gendered surveillance that specifically targets and constrains expressions of working-class masculinity. This functions as a form of panopticon (Foucault, 1995), where workers internalize both surveillance and gendered expectations about "appropriate" emotional displays. The security presence thus creates a double bind: workers must simultaneously perform traditional masculine stoicism while also demonstrating they are not the aggressive, unruly subjects implied by the class-coded security measures. This emotional choreography is evident in

Roger's account that "nobody was yelling or screaming or anything like that." While Roger attributed this to genuine shock, workers' controlled responses could also reflect their navigation of what Hochschild (2012) terms "feeling rules"—in this case, rules shaped by both securitization and class-infected masculinity norms. Workers must perform emotional restraint to avoid confirming stereotypes about male working-class volatility, while also maintaining dignity through job displacement. The workers' carefully regulated emotional displays during the closure announcement demonstrate how security measures do more than control behaviour; they fundamentally reinforce class hierarchies and shape how working-class individuals can experience and express emotions during factory closures.

"CBC is saying the plant is going to close down": Media Disruption and Information Hierarchies at Plant B

Learning About Closure Through Media: Worker Experiences. Whether through deliberate strategy or unplanned leak, the announcement that Plant B would no longer be allocating product to the GTA facility (effectively closing the factory) leaked the night before an official press conference. Workers learned about the impending factory closure in news briefings on the Sunday evening before any official communication from the company or the union. Sophia's recollection is marked by vivid detail, as she describes learning about the factory closure in this unexpected and hostile channel:

> It was a Sunday night. My husband and I were sitting down to have sushi for dinner and there was a television on in the restaurant and my husband says, '[Plant B] is shutting down production,' and I just sort of laughed and said, 'Yeah, maybe one day.' And he goes, 'No, turn around and look at the TV.' So, that's how I found out and then I was on day shift that next day, the Monday, so we went into work, and everyone was just kind of in a daze. I think at that point most people had either seen it on the news or someone had called to tell them…it was really quiet, nobody was talking, we were all just like 'what do we do now? What happened?' And then after first break, so like we built [product] in that place for the

> first two hours of the shift that morning without having anyone say anything to us…and about first break the company said they were going to shut the line down at 10am and make an announcement even though we already knew what it was and we said 'nah, we're done' and we walked out!

Like Sophia, all the workers from the plant with whom I spoke similarly remember learning about the plant closure through the news the night before or from the onslaught of social media posts that followed. Similar to the sentiment in Sophia's story, other workers' descriptions evoke a quality of calm before the storm. Dominic shared:

> I was actually enjoying a casual Sunday evening and my dad casually messaged me, 'Oh, there's rumours about the plant closing,' and I was like, 'Ah, well, nothing new.' I carried on for a few minutes, but I opened the CBC app on my phone and scroll down and CBC was saying the plant is going to close down. So, yeah, that sort of knocked the wind right out of our sails to say nothing of my chest.

According to Travis, even senior management was unaware of the closure until the news leaked that Sunday night. He told me that "only shortly after the news media was making those announcements, were we [the management team] informed that there would be an announcement in the morning and we needed to gather immediately to go over it." Thus, the company ostensibly held their plans of closure under lock and key, even from management, who are otherwise typically forewarned and included in conversations and planning about the closure announcement and procedures (De Meuse & Marks, 2005; Pfeil et al., 2004).

The leaked media reports indicated that Plant B was expected to announce the closure of the GTA facility, and speculated that the decision was likely "part of a global restructuring of the company" (Freeman, 2018). This assertion was supported the next morning in the official statement from Plant B, where the company specified the following within the framework of neoliberal market logic:

> [Plant B] is continuing to take proactive steps to improve overall business performance including the reorganization of its global product development, the realignment of its manufacturing capacity and a reduction of salaried workforce…The actions we are taking today continue our transformation to be highly agile, resilient and profitable, while giving us the flexibility to invest…We recognize the need to stay in front of changing market conditions. ([*Plant B] Accelerates Transformation | [Plant B]*, 2018)

The CEO of Plant B went on to say that their restructuring is part of a larger commitment to "drive significant cost efficiencies" as well as a reaction to changing customer preferences that would see current products (such as those built at the GTA location) unallocated in the future.

Constructed Organizational Outsider. The physical distance between the announcement venue and the production floor materializes the conceptual distance between capital and labour, illustrating much about who matters in corporate decision-making. When Plant B chose a press conference over direct worker communication, they exposed the fundamental power asymmetry in contemporary capitalism: corporate executives can announce factory closures from anywhere precisely because their relationship to production is mediated through financial abstractions rather than physical labour. In contrast, workers remain bound to specific factories, neighbourhoods, and communities built around industrial employment. This rootedness was demonstrated when Plant B workers, despite having learned about the closure through Sunday night news reports, still showed up for their Monday morning shift on the production line. As Sophia mentioned, "…we built [product] in that place for the first two hours of the shift that morning without having anyone say anything to us." Workers continued to perform their labour even as they awaited official confirmation of their displacement. Only after the company announced the press conference for 10am did workers finally declare "nah, we're done" and walk out, asserting their agency against corporate disregard.

This spatial arrangement tells a story about value and worth. By staging their announcement for media and financial shareholders rather than workers, Plant B effectively created a hierarchy of corporate stakeholders with shareholders seemingly at the top. Such announcement strategies effectively construct workers as expendable rather than valued stakeholders deserving of direct communication (Dudley, 1994).

As I detail in the next section, the exclusion of workers from the closure announcement significantly impacted workplace relations in the days, weeks, and months to follow. Disseminating news of the closure through media or social media platforms before directly informing workers fueled their frustration and resentment over the lack of transparency. Workers' initial shock and disbelief following the news of the closure evolved into a broader sense of disillusionment and alienation, impacting both morale and productivity. Furthermore, as I will explore in the next chapter, this communication strategy contributed to an information vacuum, prompting collective uncertainty that workers sought to fill with informal discussions and speculation.

"It just kind of rippled down from Plant B to Plant C": Communication Voids and Hierarchies of Precarity

The Non-Announcement. The complete omission of a closure announcement at Plant C demonstrates how corporate restructuring processes can also create hierarchies of precarity by excluding supplier companies, institutionalizing supplier company workers as peripheral to both the production process and closure considerations. The closure of Plant C was simply insinuated by the announced closure of Plant B. Plant C operated inside the same factory despite being separate companies, providing logistics services directly to Plant B. I asked Louisa, a line worker

at Plant C, whether a separate meeting had ever been held for workers there to communicate the closure. Of the announcement, she explained:

> There wasn't a separate announcement. And how we found out in the plant was that the line [for Plant B]…immediately shut down. And the workers on the Plant B side began walking off the job. So, it was just kind of, you know, I mean they're walking around and they're not working. We were working. And we were told to continue working until such time that their union boss, their union chair, came out and made the announcement that…'We're out for the day, at least.' And we were told to basically do our last run of the line and then go home. So, it just kind of sort of rippled down from Plant B to Plant C and many were messaging back and forth on their phones.

Despite many supplier companies being represented by the same union local as Plant B, including in separate factories, neither the Plant B press conference nor the subsequent union press conference addressed the closure of additional factories until nearly a year after the announcement of Plant B. In light of the lack of direct communication, many workers at Plant C experienced heightened confusion that continued for many months. Charlotte suggested that workers at Plant C "didn't know when the plant was actually going to close…they never did give us a closing date. There was no actual information; it was simply 'we're closing.'"

Peripheral Subjects: Communication Practices and Vulnerability. The lack of direct communication to Plant C workers exemplifies how corporate restructuring can reproduce class hierarchies not only between capital and labour but within the working class itself. The complete omission of a formal announcement for Plant C workers reinforces divisions among workers that ultimately serve capital's interests. As a logistics provider to Plant B, Plant C occupied a structurally subordinate position in both the production process and the social relations of production, reflecting a tiered labour system where supplier workers experience heightened precarity.

The picture that the participants from Plant C paint is one of being "held hostage to the decisions and closure arrangements of Plant B," without the respect or forethought of receiving updates that were seemingly otherwise made available (albeit sparingly) to workers at Plant B. The data show that Plant C workers experienced a ripple effect of information, only indirectly learning about their situation. Despite supplying essential logistics services that facilitated Plant B's operation, Plant C workers were constructed as disposable through communicative erasure. The fact that even their shared union local failed to advocate for equitable information access demonstrates how labour organizations can, in turn, reproduce rather than challenge these hierarchies of precarity. As I discuss in subsequent sections, Plant C's systematic deprivation of knowledge inhibited workers' ability to plan their economic survival. Workers at Plant C remained dependent on Plant B's closure timeline and communication decisions, reinforcing their structural powerlessness. This communication vacuum, coupled with prolonged uncertainty about the closure date and contrasting sharply with the regular updates provided to Plant B workers inside the same building, positions Plant C workers as peripheral in the industrial ecosystem and union structure. Thus, while the exclusion of workers from Plant B at the press conference can be interpreted as positioning workers in a position of lesser significance than other stakeholders, the omission of Plant C entirely from communications served to establish a hierarchy among workers, with those at supplier companies relegated to the lowest stakeholder status. These organizational communication practices reproduce workplace hierarchies and shape workers' understanding of their position within labour relations (Golden & Jorgenson, 2023). The case demonstrates how communication practices, including non-communication, can contribute to maintaining conditions of vulnerability for

certain groups of workers. By establishing differentiated working-class experiences between Plant B and Plant C workers, management (and the union) effectively divided potential resistance along lines created by corporate structure.

Constructing the 'Displaced Worker' through Announcement Practices: A Conclusion

The closure announcement procedures at Plants A, B, and C offer a window into the structuring influence of significant social events for subject formation within capitalist systems. These announcements function as affective events that constitute displaced worker subjectivity through material practices that position workers within specific power relations. Through securitization at Plant A, media disruption at Plant B, and communicative erasure at Plant C, the "displaced worker" becomes a subject position constructed through institutional practices embedded with assumptions about class, gender, and worker value.

While the specific reasoning for their chosen announcement practices is unknown, presumably the divergent strategies employed by these three multinational corporations reflect deeper differences in their approaches to labour relations and risk management. Plant A's non-unionized status likely contributed to management's decision to communicate directly with workers, as no union existed to serve as an institutional mediator. However, combining this direct communication with heightened security suggests management viewed workers as potential threats requiring containment. In contrast, Plant B's choice to announce through a press conference, despite its unionized workforce and, thus, potential to coordinate with the union in the delivery of the news, suggests a calculated strategy to prioritize market shareholders. With $137 billion in North American revenue in 2019, the company's primary concern was financial markets rather than its workers. This approach positioned workers as less

valuable to the company than its shareholders, while effectively relying on union structures to manage the aftermath of their media communication. Most tellingly, Plant C's complete exclusion from formal announcement illustrates how supplier relationships create hierarchies of precarity that transcend even union representation. As a logistics provider operating inside Plant B to provide direct services to the company, Plant C's operations were inextricably linked to Plant B's continued functioning. Despite this direct operational dependency and the certainty that Plant C would close their GTA operations with Plant B, its workers were deemed too peripheral for direct communication or mention in any press conferences/releases. Even with nearly $500 million in EBITDA and shared union representation through the same local, supplier companies occupy such subordinate positions in production networks that their workers fall outside the scope of corporate stakeholder consideration.

Bourdieu's concept of "structural constructivism" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) is particularly relevant for understanding the influence of closure announcement procedures in creating durable dispositions that shape how workers understand themselves and their positions within industrial hierarchies. As Bourdieu (1977/1995) argued, social structures do not merely act on people but are internalized by individuals, shaping their perceptions, dispositions, and practices. While each announcement practice employed different mechanisms, they all reinforced power structures that positioned workers as potentially disruptive (Plant A), as external stakeholders of lesser value than shareholders (Plant B), or as peripheral to consideration altogether (Plant C). Across all three cases, the material practices through which these announcements were delivered served to constitute workers as subordinate subjects

within the closure process, shaping both their immediate reactions and their understanding of their place within industrial relations.

"You can slow an assembly line down a lot of ways without sabotaging the quality of the product": Workers' Organizational Responses to Factory Closures

Introduction: Patterns of Collective and Individual Action Across Plants

The ways workers responded to factory closure announcements varied across the three plants, reflecting their differing circumstances, access to information, and organizational structures. While the previous section examined how companies constructed worker subjectivity through their announcement practices, this section considers how workers exercise agency through direct resistance tactics in response to these announcements and closure practices. These forms of resistance, organized or otherwise, represent one dimension of worker agency during factory closure processes. In a later section, I also consider how workers' responses took the form of counter-hegemonic narratives that challenged company justifications and broader neoliberal assumptions about factory closures. While equally active forms of resistance, narrative contestation operated primarily through meaning-making and discourse rather than direct action.

The distinct forms and patterns of worker resistance across the three plants were shaped by factors including employment and economic precarity, union presence and membership, workplace solidarity, and workers' differential access to information and resources. This section examines these varying dynamics and their implications for workers' capacity to contest closure processes.

Coordinated Resistance at Plant B: From Walkouts to Slowdowns

When I spoke with workers from Plant B about that first Monday after the news broke, they painted a vivid picture of tension and uncertainty on the shop floor. Rumours had been circulating since Sunday night, with news reports suggesting that the factory would close. As the morning shift was in full swing, management held an off-site press conference confirming the worst: Plant B was slated to end production, effectively closing the factory.

Despite working on the Plant C side of the factory, Louisa remembered the union swiftly moving to channel workers' anger into organized resistance; after the announcement, "the union came in and said, like rah, rah 'we're gonna fight this and we're going to keep it from closing.' It was like an anger-fueled mob." The union's approach appeared to tap into workers' desire for action, transforming the "mob" into a more focused force.

The union's strategy involved an initial, seemingly unplanned strike action. As Dominic described it, "the union was whipping everybody up, saying, 'leave! Walk off the job! We're going to take strike action now!'" Dominic suggested that some of the more senior workers had "never seen it happen like that [before]." He theorized that the timing of the wildcat strike hinted at a deeper strategy. He speculated that the strike seemed to "diffuse people's tensions a little bit…it seemed like the union may have been helping corral [workers] to get out [and not] take it out on anybody [or] cause property damage."

In the weeks following the announcement and initial walk-out, workers at Plant B continued to engage in various forms of resistance that demonstrated their agency and solidarity. These actions ranged from subtle productivity slowdowns to overt demonstrations of dissent. Sophia admitted that "you can slow an assembly line down in a lot of ways without

sabotaging the quality of the product. There were a lot of little job actions…like, we didn't pump out 220 trucks a shift like they would have liked us to." This form of resistance, often referred to as "work-to-rule" or "slowdown," allows workers to effectively protest while still technically fulfilling their job requirements. Relatedly, Ellie recalled "at least one other sit-down in the plant and a few other minor labour shortages." Dominic added:

> People would tell their team leader or supervisor, 'I'm not feeling well. I don't think I can work. I should go to the nurse.' And people did that in mass numbers. There was one shift…where people were doing that in mass so the line went down for 10 minutes…Union reps had been going along [the line] saying, 'Hey, if they ask you to work, you are entirely within your right to say that you're sick and you can't work.'

These "wildcat" actions involve workers refusing to perform their duties and effectively halting production. A reduction in productivity through work-to-rule or wildcat actions serves as a reminder to bosses of the workers' essential role in the production process and their collective capacity and power to impact the company's bottom line.

Individual Responses at Plant A: Resistance Without Union Support

In contrast to the coordinated response at Plant B, the workers I interviewed at Plant A described a markedly different response to the closure announcement, beginning with management's immediate decision to send workers home for the next three days. Roger told me that workers "were given 3 days of mourning…They gave us the next 3 days off to kind of mull over everything." This management-imposed cooling-off period effectively prevented any immediate collective response from forming on-site. This strategy, combined with the heightened security presence described earlier, demonstrates how Plant A's management carefully controlled both the physical and temporal dimensions of the closure announcement to minimize resistance.

Without union representation and physically separated from their workplace, these workers developed more individualized coping strategies. Samuel observed how workers' responses varied by tenure and position when they eventually returned to work: "the lifers as I call them who have been there a long time, they felt that they are already…as far as the they can reach and so 'why would you even bother trying now that the place is closing? What have you got to look forward to now?'" This sense of resignation among long-term employees manifested in increased absenteeism and rushed use of remaining extended health benefits. Samuel explained: "A lot of people took time off. A lot of people were starting to use up their sick days and really take advantage of any benefit that the company extended."

I found it striking that sick days emerged as a form of protest in both plants, but with fundamentally different execution: Plant B's unionized workforce orchestrated coordinated "sick-ins" as a collective action, while Plant A's workers used their sick days in a fragmented and individualistic manner. Thus, the instinct to resist was present in both cases, but the absence of a union organization at Plant A resulted in a more isolated response to the crisis.

"If You Spoke Up, You Were the Nail, They Would Hammer You Into Place": Fragmented and Constrained Resistance at Plant C

Unlike the coordinated union response at Plant B or the individual response at Plant A, workers at Plant C found themselves in a uniquely constrained position from the moment of the closure announcement at Plant B. Returning to Louisa's comment about the closure announcement, she suggested that as workers on the Plant B side of the facility started to walk off the job on that fateful Monday morning, workers on the Plant C side were "told to continue working. We

were working," immediately establishing a power differential between Plant B workers and their supplier counterparts, despite being represented by the same union local.

Workers' initial responses more frequently reflected this perceived powerlessness rather than resistance. In the days and weeks following the closure announcement at Plant B, Louisa said of the workers at Plant C: "attendance plummeted…it plummeted even more [again] probably three months before the end." This absenteeism represented one of the few accessible forms of resistance available to Plant C workers. Of course, material resources determined which workers could exercise even this basic form of agency. Louisa acknowledged that this strategy was only available to those "who could afford it." However, there was also something different in the tone between the way participants from Plants A and B spoke of absenteeism, and how it was being discussed here. In the case of Plant C, rather than a form of protest, absenteeism seemed to reflect the practical realities of supplier workers' positions. Workers were leaving in pursuit of other work. Louisa said that "every day there were two or three people lower in seniority than myself dropping off, they just dropped, quit." Charlotte also recalled that workers "were all jumping ship. They were losing employees left, right, and center because [Plant C] was showing no loyalty to their employees. If you're not going to get severance or something why would you stay?" Thus, unlike at Plant B, where workers collectively withdrew their labour as a demonstration of power, Plant C workers' absences more often seemed to represent individual exit strategies from an increasingly uncertain situation.

Insofar as resistance was available to Plant C workers, job boundaries became a critical battleground inside the factory, with some workers refusing tasks they deemed outside their

responsibilities. Charlotte shared that she "tried to refuse [a task] because it wasn't even part of my job" but, consequently, was threatened by a supervisor with insubordination. Her resistance to job expansion reflects her attempt to maintain what little control remained over her work conditions as management pushed to extract maximum labour with minimal staffing before the closure. Relatedly, Charlotte refused to sign the severance package (and, therefore, foreclosed on receiving severance pay), as doing so would waive her right to file claims against the company. She said she "has no intention to sign." Her resistance to how corporations leverage economic vulnerability to eliminate future liability stands as one of the more direct challenges to power in the closure process. In this environment, where "if you spoke up, they would hammer you into place," resistance carries higher personal costs.

Challenges to Traditional Solidarity: Inclusion, Precarity, and Worker Divisions

"I need this job more than I need to fight the hand that feeds me": Tensions Within Union Solidarity

The union's militant response to the closure announcement at Plant B paradoxically reinforced forms of alienation. While the union's response mobilized many workers, my interviews revealed that its militant approach created unexpected divisions along lines of employment security and different embodiment/enmindment. In an attempt to create cohesive narratives and responses, they union inadvertently marginalized certain perspectives. This alienation manifested itself in several ways.

In my conversations with workers from Plant B, I found that as the union attempted to rally workers behind a unified strategy aimed at keeping the plant open, their strategies alienated significant segments of the workforce. Even workers who self-identified as "pro-

labour" and typically supportive of union causes expressed discomfort with and distanced themselves from what Louisa described as the "anger-fueled mob" that formed after the announcement.

The mass walkout of workers at Plant B after the announced closure might appear as evidence of solidarity, but Ben suggested that some workers' motivations to participate might have been due to peer pressure and an expectation to conform to union directives rather than genuine agreement. He stated:

> There was a lot of peer pressure to leave. Solidarity. Leave the rest to the union. And I kind of shuffled around and made myself scarce while the union people departed because I wanted to see what the announcement was [on the TV], and so myself and probably a dozen other people from our division ended up staying for the announcement…Some of them were new hires like me who were just not buying into the rhetoric of the union or not buying into the hype and I got to see who has the grit, you know, to stick it out and not kind of join the herd. That's how I viewed it anyway.

I noted similar hesitations among other precariously employed workers. Sophia and Dominic shared their hesitation about joining the wildcat strike, though they were reluctant to openly challenge the prevailing sentiment. Their concerns highlighted how the union's approach failed to address the vulnerability of workers with less secure employment status. Sophia explained that "some people were super pumped to be walking out, you know, a big middle finger to Plant B. There were [also] people [like] myself who were a little scared. [We] were worried that Plant B was going to say 'well, if you're going to walk out [then] you're done." Dominic was even more explicit about economic constraints shaping his response:

> living paycheck to paycheck right now and [I] can't afford to not work. So that was a bone of contention, in those first two weeks, because high seniority guys – and I don't mean to exclusively flag people with many years in the plant – guys who could afford to go on strike were saying 'hey why don't we go on strike?' That immediately divided all the people in the plant.

Workers also described how the union environment effectively silenced dissenting views. The pressure to conform to a particular emotional response – anger and defiance – left little room for those who might process the closure news differently or consider alternative responses. Ben recalled his experience of earlier union meetings: "there were a lot of people howling…and it was kind of an unpleasant atmosphere. Most of my peers felt the same way." This confrontational tone, commonly associated with labour groups and activism, seemed to alienate members who were uncomfortable with overt displays of anger or aggression. During the walkout itself, Dominic noticed that "those of us who were probably a bit more quiet and reserved didn't 'blow up' [emotionally]…You could see people in their early-, mid-, late-20s just lying low and just nodding their heads."

Their perspectives of the events that unfolded on those first days back to work frame the mass walkout of workers as a "field" of social pressure. Participation in the walkout became the dominant, legitimate response to the company's press conference announcement. However, workers' positions in this field varied, influenced by factors such as seniority, economic security, and alignment with union values. These positions affected workers' perceptions of possible actions and the associated costs or benefits.

The Roots of Worker Division: Two-Tier Contracts and Unfulfilled Promises

Through my interviews, I found that divisions around the union's tactics had deeper roots in previous experiences with concession bargaining. Ellie explained that any distrust among tier two workers toward the union emerged within the context of concession bargaining, where the union had made a compromise disproportionately affecting newer, more precarious workers.

The lack of trust in local union leadership, particularly among tier two workers, stemmed largely from unfulfilled promises of future wage parity. While the union had negotiated agreements that promised wage equalization after several years, the impending closure of the plant meant that these commitments would never materialize. Consequently, marginalized workers regarded the union as complicit in a system that perpetuates their disadvantage rather than as an effective advocate for their interests.

This history shaped workers' willingness to follow union leadership during the closure. Workers relegated to second-tier status had come to see the union as prioritizing the interests of more established workers over those in vulnerable positions. When segments of workers do not see their specific concerns reflected in union priorities or strategies, the union effectively establishes a disconnection between its organizational goals and the lived experiences of its most vulnerable members, thereby weakening its capacity for sustained collective action.

"We Rise Together; This is the Only Way": Alternative Forms of Worker Organizing and Resistance

What I found most compelling were the alternative forms of solidarity that emerged when traditional union strategies failed to address different needs and positions. Through my data collection, I found that some workers connected their struggles with broader social justice movements and community concerns. These cross-network alliances sought to bring together environmental groups, living wage movements, and other advocacy groups, recognizing that when factories close, communities confront multiple challenges simultaneously: pollution cleanup, health problems, housing costs, and racial inequities. By integrating these varied

perspectives and concerns, cross-network coalitions are better equipped to address both immediate job losses and the deeper work of rebuilding communities.

Missing Links: Workers' Perceptions of (Absent) Community-Union Alliances

Without prompting, a few participants noted the absence of strong community-labour alliances in response to the announced closure. Their critiques centered around how isolated, plant-based responses limited workers' capacity for resistance and collective action. Henry, who had participated in earlier labour struggles, articulated the importance of strong community ties in historical labour struggles, arguing that their apparent absence at this critical juncture left workers vulnerable to the full brunt of economic disruption:

> I'm not entirely sure that an action centre [in the plant] will get that happening/[better prepare workers]; you need community centers that don't just work with the people impacted. There are lots of people already looking for work and I almost think that we're not setting up community action centres to prepare people for [the closure] because they are in competition. And that's not good. So we're keeping people isolated from what they're going to need, with their families, and an understanding of what supports are already there…[whereas] in 2008/2009 when all of the jobs and layoffs occurred and the truck plant closed, we opened an action centre at the midtown mall in Oshawa and people came in and worked on their resumés, worked on skill sets, some people had been out of work for over 20 years.

The factories associated with this study established, to varying degrees, in-plant action centers to provide re-employment support and services to affected workers. While a few of the workers with whom I met had accessed resumé support from these established centers, some participants questioned the company's and/or union's decision to isolate these services from existing community resources. Their critique focused on the limitations of in-plant action centers and highlighted the missed opportunity to connect displaced workers with existing community resources, such as worker action centers. In their view, these community-based resources, which already engage with broader social issues and organizing efforts, could

potentially offer more comprehensive immediate support as well as sustained long-term pathways for worker advocacy and labour organizing.

Regarding the union's decision to team with the employer to create an action center onsite, Ellie added:

> I suppose that any type of action center response is good. [But] I'm a bit confused; so the action centre is actually for salaried employees and unionized employees so it's co-run by Plant B and Generic Private Sector Union, which is one of the reasons they said it couldn't be combined with the supplier units. The supplier units have to have their own action centers.

By establishing separate actions centers, the union effectively created silos that separated workers from other members in the same union local. This approach not only isolated different groups of job seekers but also stymied workers from meeting and networking with others facing similar circumstances. By limiting support to a single plant, the union arguably missed valuable opportunities for workers to share experiences, strategies, and resources across the broader industrial ecosystem, ultimately hindering the potential for collective action and solidarity to emerge in response to widespread closures.

Henry contrasted this isolation with historical examples of community solidarity:

> The strength of the community in one another is how we get through, the same way we got through long and bitter strikes in this city. People come together and support one another. You grow food; you share food; you sew clothes together; you do whatever you need to do and that's lost.

His observations suggest a latent potential for broader community solidarity, which remains largely untapped in the current context. However, he also suggests that the spirit of mutual support is not entirely lost, but rather dormant, waiting to be reawakened and channelled into effective collective action.

The disconnect between historical approaches to solidarity-building and the present reality of fragmented support systems is further evidenced by what some workers described as missed opportunities for building community coalitions. According to Ellie, a faction of rank-and-file members attempted but failed to persuade the union leadership to take more proactive steps in rallying the community:

> So there was organizing around trying to get them/[local union leadership] to do a rally for the supplier units, because there are more than 1700 people losing their jobs. 80-90% of them/[workers at supplier companies] are not pension-eligible and a lot of them are coming out of plants that already closed, like this isn't their first time around this stuff. So just trying to have a rally to get community support and to [generate] public pressure that these workers deserve fair treatment or fair severance—like the employment standards minimum isn't a fair severance and unions have to negotiate to get better for workers—and one way is creating public awareness. This was a missed opportunity to build in our community something that needed to be done.

Ellie's description of workers' unsuccessful attempts to organize community support for supplier plants demonstrates how institutional inertia can impede more inclusive solidarity. Her account suggests that some workers recognized the potential value of community connections even when institutional structures fail to prioritize these relationships.

From Isolation to Integration: Workers' Imaginations about Possible Futures of "Making Together"

The most encouraging development I encountered during the interviews was how workers' organizing efforts moved beyond traditional union frameworks to imagine and construct alternative futures for manufacturing that integrated environmental sustainability, community needs, and worker control. Despite rigid union leadership and strategies, workers sought to extend "life" beyond the perceived death of the plant by connecting with broader social movements to imagine alternative futures. A faction of workers at Plant B in particular formed

an alliance outside the union to (re)engage in activities more demonstrative of social unionism: community organizing, political campaigns, and environmental advocacy.

The most significant grassroots initiative that emerged in response to the announced closure of Plant B was the formation of group which, for purposes of participant confidentiality, I will hereafter refer to as "Grassroots Group A." Comprised of workers, retirees, community leaders, environmentalists, and labour and social justice advocates, this group seeks to reimagine the future of the factory by connecting issues of job security and environmental sustainability. As Ellie explained, members of this initiative drew inspiration from the growing popularity of the Green New Deal[24] and adapted its ideas to their specific context. She stated:

> The Green New Deal was just picking up popularity with Alexandria Cortez, so there was that happening and it seemed like it would be a good fit for what was going on here. So a number of us came together with the idea and have been steadily chipping away at trying to gain ground. The union has not actively supported this.

Thus, the Grassroots Group A initiative emerged as a local manifestation of a broader affective current, with workers translating the energy and ideas of the Green New Deal into a concrete response to their circumstances of impending plant closure. This process of translation and localization demonstrates how global ideas can take root in particular contexts, driven by the engagement of workers seeking new solutions to local problems. The lack of active support from their union, as Ellie indicates, potentially accelerates workers' affective turn

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[24] The Green New Deal was a comprehensive legislative proposal introduced in Congress in 2019 aimed at addressing climate change and economic inequality simultaneously. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez co-sponsored the resolution and, as the leading public advocate for the proposal, helped to shape its core framework, which called for transitioning the United States to 100% renewable energy and creating high-wage jobs in clean energy industries. The resolution did not pass Congress but influenced environmental legislation and policy discussions.

away from official union activities. As workers encounter resistance or indifference from their union, they seem more firmly attached to alternative ideas and organizing methods. This affective or attachment shift not only shaped the formation of Grassroots Group A but also reconfigured workers' relationships with their union and their understanding of labour activism.

The Grassroots Group A group engaged in various forms of political organizing to advance their vision of public ownership, "to save jobs, to protect manufacturing capacity, and to kick-start the transition to a green economy" (*About*, n.d.). One achievement Ellie spoke of was their success in influencing the Ontario New Democratic Party (ONDP) Convention:

> Grassroots Group A was able to get a resolution passed at the ONDP convention and that was a really interesting experience…I got elected to go as a delegate and there are probably seven or eight different resolutions that could have been put forward and they opted to go with one that was just calling on the government to give support to the workers. So we were able to get wording changed, asking them to support the workers in the community and something like bold new ideas. 'Be it resolved that the NDP stands with the people of Oshawa auto workers and auto workers across Ontario in calling on the provincial and federal governments to maintain the manufacturing capacity at the Oshawa facility and explore alternative forms of ownership including a new vision of a publicly owned facility that could produce green vehicles and any other produce that meets public need in order to face the climate crisis and transition to a green new economy.' Getting that language included about alternative forms of ownership…was really significant…Getting that passed has not translated into any real action yet but at least there is permission to try to pursue that.

By advocating for more ambitious language in the ONDP resolution, the group helped to redefine the scope of labour organizing and labour activism in response to the announced factory closure. Their success in including language about "alternative forms of ownership" and a "publicly owned facility that could produce green vehicles" demonstrates the capacity of grassroots labour movements to shape discourse and broader policy discussions, pushing established political parties toward more progressive positions. While the resolution has not

translated into concrete action, its passage provides a legitimizing framework for further advocacy and organizing around these ideas.

Building upon their political advocacy for alternative ownership structures, workers' narratives demonstrate a sophisticated reimagining of manufacturing that challenges conventional wisdom about both public ownership and environmental sustainability in industrial production. In a vein akin to the variety of speculative fiction that inhabits wounded lands and waters rather than utopian realms, displaced workers' imaginations about a possible future for manufacturing work frequently begin with abandoned factories, oppressed workers, and tired labour strategies. This starting point serves as a springboard for re-envisioning what could be built from this grim reality. With frustration, Ellie quips:

> The strategy that we have been employing to keep jobs in Ontario for the last 30 years has not been working effectively. So given that it isn't working, what are we actually doing to try to build an environment where we can have jobs, keep jobs, and not rely on corporations who are looking for the lowest possible cost denominators?

Similarly, Henry questions, "where is the conversation saying 'where does the industry go?' Then the community can go 'oh, we can help with this.'" Thus, more than simply willing the plant to remain open and for the status quo to continue, these participants wondered about a future in which workers and the surrounding community had a say in shaping the plant's trajectory, ensuring stable jobs in the process.

Instead of continuing the path of private ownership, some workers posit nationalizing Plant B as a possible path toward rebalancing the employment relationship. Ellie suggests that nationalization is not far-fetched when considering the current political context in which governments invest in corporations to save them from bankruptcy. Reflecting on the 2008 bailout for which Plant B received $10.2 billion, Ellie speculates that instead of:

> having a company that is extremely profitable [yet] are taking their capital and investment out and moving it to a jurisdiction that's cheaper [and who] don't pass on the savings to the consumer, [where] the only benefit is to Plant B and their shareholders…if [the government] had held onto [the shares] the government would have had a voice in the closure; they already had an ownership stake you know, so Grassroots Group A is saying government ownership isn't so ridiculous.

Therein, she takes a piece of the past – the government owning shares in the company – to envision a not-so-disparate future, wherein the government maintains (and even expands) its ownership share to serve the interests of workers instead of shareholders.

Related to a future for manufacturing in which workers determine the direction of production, some workers' stories seek to rebalance a relationship with the environment by building "green" jobs and commodities. Noting the unsustainability of current mass-production models, Henry noted:

> We seem to think that we want to produce like we did after World War II, and the world can't take that, so mass production is history. However, where the future goes is that you have a different way of providing transportation that has better social outcomes and better global outcomes for people. That, Canada can lead on.

He and other participants propose electric vehicles as a path forward to address both changing consumer preferences and the growing demand for a "Green New Deal." To this end, Louisa argues that Plant B:

> really needs to step up its game…they have to be open to electric cars, autonomous drivers. It's just the way that industry is going. I'm not sure whether the combustion engine is going to be null and void in five years and whether it's all going to be battery-powered…[but] I know that technology has moved forward quite significantly.

Remarkably, workers like Henry correctly anticipated Plant B's eventual turn toward electric vehicles. After the initial closure announcement, Plant B committed to building a test track across from its main GTA facility, which could save up to 300 jobs, to help develop autonomous and electric vehicles. And although the main plant reopened in 2021 to build

pickup trucks that are neither autonomous nor electric, Plant B completely retooled a factory in Ingersoll to manufacture fully electric delivery vans (*[Plant B] Opens Canada's First Full-Scale EV Plant to Build BrightDrop Zevo Fully Electric Delivery Vans*, n.d.).

While Plant B's shift toward electric and autonomous vehicles was presumably in motion before the announced closure, workers' persistent advocacy for alternative production possibilities likely influenced the company's decision to repurpose the facility during the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2020, Plant B announced it would retool the GTA facility to produce personal protective equipment, completing an order for 10 million face masks for the Government of Canada. Their pivot demonstrates the flexibility of the manufacturing facility as well as the validity of workers' arguments about the potential for public-oriented production.

Workers' narratives about electric vehicles and autonomous technology demonstrate their deep understanding of industry trends and their desire to actively shape the factory's future direction rather than passively accepting corporate decisions. This agency manifests in their ability to envision and articulate alternative futures for the factory that align with broader societal needs while maintaining job security.

Analysis: Structural Constraints and Worker Agency in Factory Closures

My research suggests that information asymmetries in factory closure announcements, coupled with structural positions such as employment precarity, union status, and institutional context, created distinct opportunity structures for different forms of resistance. These factors shaped how power operated during closure processes and how workers experienced and contested that power.

Institutional Constraints and the Transformation of Union Power

The formation of Grassroots Group A reflects how constraints on union action created space for alternative organizing. As postwar labour legislation increasingly regulated organizing, bargaining, and striking, unions became dependent on these legal frameworks to maintain their institutional position and dues base (Evans et al., 2023). This dependency fundamentally limits unions' ability to pursue more innovative or disruptive responses to factory closures. Within these constraints, workers develop alternative organizing forms to pursue strategies outside the union's willingness or legally prescribed channels. Social movement researchers have identified this pattern as common when workers perceive established institutions, such as unions, as compromised by legal or institutional limitations (Cloward & Piven, 1979; Graeber, 2009; Milkman, 2006).

Within this legal context, the union's initial militancy at Plant B, in the form of walkouts and illegal strikes, existed alongside its predominant focus on protecting member interests. While these tactics went beyond conventional business unionism's[25] emphasis on orderly collective bargaining, they still operated within a framework that prioritized immediate outcomes for current members without challenging broader structural conditions behind the factory closure. To this point, Ellie noted that the union "didn't involve membership in any of the planning or organizing…didn't involve the community…[and that] there was no political component to the campaign." A more transformative approach might have included questioning corporate mobility rights, pursuing transnational organizing with Mexican

[25] The business unionism model prioritizes collective bargaining and securing improved economic outcomes for members (Hyman, 2001)

autoworkers, or challenging private ownership models through worker buyout proposals. In fact, despite the local labour council, a retiree chapter of the local, and the membership of the local each putting forth and endorsing a resolution to nationalize the plant, the union, according to Ellie, “didn’t take an active role in promoting the idea.” Such strategies would contest capital’s fundamental power to make unilateral closure decisions.

Ross and Savage (2024) document the transformation of the union from “left-struggle-oriented” toward a more collaborative centrist political approach that embraces “policies it had eschewed and debated in the past, such as progressive competitiveness, calling for subsidizing employers, concessions, and so forth” (Rosenfeld, 2024). This shift toward more collaboration with employers and government reflects the union’s growing emphasis on pragmatic gains indicative of business unionism, while retaining elements of social unionism through public campaigns. Yet, by concentrating efforts on protecting the interests of the more established members at Plant B, the union alienated more vulnerable workers and undermined the opportunity to build a more inclusive movement that could challenge the impacts of deindustrialization.

Alienation from union structures can be understood through several theoretical frameworks. First, workers at Plant B experienced “frame alignment” issues—a mismatch between how workers view their situation and goals and how the union frames problems and solutions (Snow et al., 1986). If a union’s framing of problems and solutions does not resonate with some workers’ experiences, it can contribute to member disengagement. Second, the union’s actions undermined collective identity formation among diverse segments of the workforce. When unions fail to foster a shared sense of identity that encompasses all workers,

some may feel estranged or misrepresented (Polletta & Jasper, 2001). Exclusion from a collective identity is particularly salient in diverse workforces where union leadership might not recognize or address cultural and other demographic differences among their members. This was particularly evident among contract workers and those with less seniority at Plant B, who saw little reflection of their concerns in union priorities. Finally, as unions grow and become more institutionalized, as captured by Ross and Savage (2024), they may fall prey to the "iron law of oligarchy" (Michels, 1911/1968). This theory posits that, as organizations expand, they tend to become more bureaucratic and less responsive to rank-and-file members, potentially exacerbating feelings of alienation in the membership base. The resulting disconnect or distance between the union apparatus and some of its members can lead to the perception that the union no longer truly represents workers' interests. But it can also create fertile ground for alternative organizing observed in Grassroots Group A.

Workers with less job security and weaker integration into union structures calculated the risks of participation in collective resistance efforts differently. Ben's experience of the union's tactics as "peer pressure" not only led to his physical distancing from the union, as exemplified by his decision to "shuffle around and make myself scarce," but also signalled a rupture in his emotional investment. This rupture in emotional investment represents a break in the affective bond between the worker and the union that went beyond non-participation in union activities. His affective and effective detachment from the union suggests a deeper alienation from the union's goals and methods, potentially eroding his sense of belonging to the collective. I observed that such workers developed sustained skepticism toward union initiatives and reluctance to engage in future collective actions.

While it would be tempting to deduce from the data in this study that only workers with greater job security and seniority are willing to engage in militant union actions, other historical and contemporary evidence demonstrates that vulnerability often drives militancy. Many of the most vulnerable workers were at the forefront of a recent wave of labour movement militancy in the U.S. For example, the unionization of over 360 Starbucks stores and the grassroots organizing of 8,000 Amazon warehouse workers on Staten Island demonstrate that precarious employment often catalyzes collective action rather than acts as a deterrent (Minchin, 2024).

Rewriting the Script: Resisting Corporate Narrative and the Imperative of Closure

While the previous sections considered workers' direct actions and critically questioned notions of solidarity and opportunities for broader coalition-building, this section analyzes another dimension of worker resistance: the construction of counter-narratives. Workers actively constructed counter-narratives that challenged dominant corporate discourses about factory closures, demonstrating how contesting and reframing the meaning of these events became central to their resistance and ability to envision alternative futures. Drawing on Gramsci's (1995) concept of counter-hegemony, this theme considers how displaced workers, as subordinate groups, challenge dominant ideologies and power structures. In the context of deindustrialization and factory closures, I consider how counter-hegemonic narratives serve as a means for workers to contest the logic of capital and assert their interpretations of events.

Many of the workers in this study (particularly those in a unionized environment) created counter-hegemonic narratives in the wake of the factory closure announcement. Principally, through social media campaigns, public advertisements, and grassroots organizing, workers and union representatives sought to challenge the company's narrative and construct

alternative understandings of the closure and its implications. However, these efforts were not entirely unified; competing counter-narratives emerged that attended differently to local, national, and international concerns. The following analysis explores how these counter-narratives emerged, their key themes and strategies, and the tensions they sometimes created among workers and the labour movement.

Union Voices Against the Corporate Narrative

The union's social media campaign and public messaging strategies attempted to counter corporate narratives by reframing the closure through a nationalist lens that prioritized "Canadian jobs" over global corporate mobility, though this approach created tensions between local job protection and international worker solidarity [26]. While the union had previously expressed solidarity with Mexican autoworkers in other contexts, including through a joint statement with Mexican independent unions condemning North American Free Trade Agreement's labour provisions ([*Generic Private Sector Union] and Mexican Labour Lobby for Better NAFTA*, 2025), the "boycott Mexico" campaign represented a retreat to nationalist framing during factory closure crisis.

In January 2019, a little more than one month after the announced closure of Plant B, the union launched an online campaign in a seeming attempt to construct an alternative narrative to that of the company about the facts of the closure. While primarily focused on protecting members' jobs in the closure, the union simultaneously engaged in broader public

[26] Canadian left nationalism has deep roots in Canada's labour movement, emerging from neo-Marxist dependency theory that viewed national economic sovereignty as necessary for worker emancipation. Yet, as Nastovski (2021) argues, this approach creates inherent tensions in a global economy by reinforcing divisions between workers based on citizenship rather than challenging corporate mobility directly through transnational solidarity strategies.

discourse to challenge corporate power. Specifically, the union took to Twitter in part to respond to the company's "lies." What ensued was a "Twitter war" between the company and the union, each responding to the other's claims while attempting to garner the support of public opinion. For example, as shown in Figure 2, Plant B asserted that they were not moving production to Mexico and remained "fully committed to Canada."

Figure 2
Note: Company and union names have been blurred throughout to maintain confidentiality.

"Fact Checking" the Union

A few days later, the union responded (see Figure 3) to the "lie" by claiming instead that the company was "expanding production in Mexico" while putting "24,000 Canadians out of work," therein reframing the narrative around local job losses while debunking the idea that the company remains invested in Canada and "Canadian" workers.

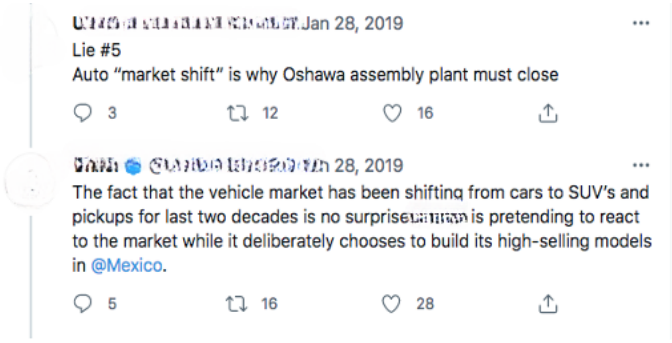
Figure 3
Note: Company and union names have been blurred throughout to maintain confidentiality.

Company "Lies"

Likewise, the union sought to discredit any company claims that the closure was caused by market shifts; in one tweet (see Figure 4), the union suggests that shifts in consumer preference have been of "no surprise" for decades and allege instead that the company is "pretending to react to the market" to deliberately build product in cheaper production locations.

Figure 4
Note: Company and union names have been blurred throughout to maintain confidentiality.

The Company Continues to Lie



The union continued to counter the company's narrative by producing two commercials, one of which aired during the Super Bowl, despite the company issuing a cease and desist letter (Fairweather, 2024). These commercials reminded viewers that Plant B received nearly $11 billion in government bailouts. Then, in a play on words, the commercial narrator suggests that the company is now "bailing on" Canada, a move they describe as "un-Canadian." In their second commercial that scaffolds off of this claim, the union invites the public to boycott any Plant B product specifically built in Mexico, using the slogan "if you want to sell here, build here." Simply put, the union was interested in protecting the jobs and interests of its local membership, which interferes with the choices of multinational corporations like Plant B, which frequently focuses on shareholder value.

However, this was not the first time that union activities targeted international workers to save jobs at the local plant. Despite a long history of activism within the union local dedicated to international solidarity (Fairweather, 2018), Ellie told me that the union's adherence to national rhetoric and strategy has otherwise been constant since 2009, when a portion of the plant closed, and that product line was moved to Mexico. With each successive round of bargaining, workers were pitted against their Mexican counterparts to compete for products. As an example of the constant threat of closure at Plant B, Ellie remembers seeing some workers adorn shirts from previous save-the-plant campaigns, simply "crossing out 2012 and putting on 2016 [or 2018]." Consequently, in each round of bargaining throughout the past decade, the union not only made concessions in a race toward the bottom but also favoured national solutions to the problems of multinational corporations. Reminiscent of their 2016 campaign, Henry said that following the announced closure in 2018, the union:

> was handing out t-shirts saying 'Canada didn't bail out Plant B for Mexico…' They had printed thousands. You hand out these shirts and what happens is there becomes a clash between internationalism, around the international conversation people start blaming Mexican workers [and] when they turn on their television they have a US President who is also doing the exact same thing and it's dangerous.

The hypocrisy was not lost on Henry, who noted that the union's national president has gone on record to say "no worker can make progress if any are being exploited," ([*Generic Private Sector Union] Celebrates Mexican Union Vote, Supports Mexican Autoworkers*, 2021) while effectively preparing to see workers in Mexico lose their jobs so long as jobs in the Global North are sheltered. Nevertheless, the union's campaign constructs Plant B not as an agile agent navigating erratic market economies but rather as failing to honour an assumed intrinsic commitment to its workers and communities.

The campaign's rhetoric introduces the idea of a "moral contract" that transcends conventional employment agreements. A moral contract is a relational concept (Greenbaum et al., 2011). Although any presumed obligation between parties exists in the "eye of the beholder," an individual worker arrives at the idea of an agreement only through the belief in "reciprocal exchange." In practice, while some workers at Plant B acknowledged that the latest collective agreement only negotiated product for 18 months, after which the company held no legal obligation to workers, others pointed to a sort of *quid pro quo* between workers and the company. Specifically, bargaining throughout the past decade was rife with concessions that workers accepted in good faith that they would receive future gains and/or continued contracts. In particular, at the recommendation of their union, many second-tiered workers accepted pay cuts in the form of increased wage progression (i.e., the amount of time in years that it takes to get to "full wage" for their role) with the promise of eventually arriving at full wage. Ellie commented:

> They had the bailout in 2009 and increased the wage progression to six years and then in 2012, and this is where things get really frustrating because in 2012 the company was profitable again, they dropped the starting wage to 60% and increased the wage progression to 10 years plus, so it actually takes 11 or 12 years to get to full wage.

Consequently, as Henry pointed out, "you have people who work across from each other doing the exact same work and they make $14 less on the hour." However, the promise of full wages was never realized when the company announced the closure only six years later, thus amounting to a moral violation in the minds of many workers.

Workers continue to perceive many of their companies' actions as being in breach of a moral contract. Any initial misgivings were exacerbated by the company's hiring and outsourcing practices immediately after the announcement. For example, at Plant A,

Christopher pointed out that "just after they let people go [in an initial round of mass layoffs] they hired a bunch of temp guys. So, these guys that have been asked to leave, they still know people who work there so they heard about it and it's just like 'come on guys.'" Samuel also mentioned that after the plant closed, the company ended up outsourcing the work to another Canadian company/facility. He said:

> They slowly started to migrate some of the product stuff over to some of the American counterparts, slowly started to remove some of the equipment and ship it off to where it was going to be used to produce that stuff…but the United States [to where the product line was being sent] was having trouble getting their lines set up, getting things ready to go…so in the end they ended up going to a co-packer here in Canada, so that kind of hurt people's feelings a bit because they felt like they were lied to.

Workers perceived a moral obligation on the part of the company to retain existing workers and maintain production within the plant for as long as both work and workers were needed. Instead, the company opted for cheaper labour and production costs even in the interim – or, as Henry put it, "clearing their liabilities on pensions and those who have helped them over the many years to make them the profitable corporation they are."

Contesting the Union's Narrative

Some workers' criticisms of the union's nationalist rhetoric prompted them to develop more inclusive counter-narratives that emphasized international solidarity and structural critique. While the union's campaign appeared to generate some online support, workers' responses to the campaign were sometimes critical. Many workers struggled with their union's strategy to boycott Mexico, as potentially fracturing the broader labour movement. Henry voiced his caution, emphasizing the importance of not deflecting blame to international counterparts, highlighting the impact of such narratives on solidarity:

> We're blaming them for taking our jobs; it has nothing to do with them. It's Plant B. Leave Mexico out of it. It's the greed of Plant B, it's the decision of Plant B to allocate assembly. It's a distraction…and what happens is there becomes a clash between internationalism…people start blaming Mexican workers…[and] when they turn on the television they have a US president who is also doing the exact same thing and it raises fear…that's very dangerous.

This sentiment resonated with those who believed that such narratives could lead to unnecessary divisions and hostility among workers across borders. Henry's viewpoint captures the tensions that arise as workers attempt to reconcile their frustrations with the closure and the need to maintain a sense of international unity.

In response to these concerns, some workers initiated a grassroots campaign with the slogan "better for all." This campaign aimed to present an alternative narrative that countered both the company's and the union's perspectives on the closure and the company's future direction of manufacturing work. The slogan encapsulated the aspiration to prioritize the interests of all workers, irrespective of whether Plant B continued its operations. This grassroots effort responded to the closure by uniting different groups, working toward solutions that could benefit everyone. These various narratives and campaigns show how individual motivations, union strategy, and broader labour movement trends shaped responses to the company closure.

Expanding the Frontlines of Dissent: Critical Lessons from Worker Solidarity and Organizing Against Factory Closure

The ways companies announced and managed their closures shaped but did not determine how workers organized their resistance, as workers strategically adapted union frameworks and created new forms of collective action in response to different closure practices. The emergence of parallel organizing spaces, such as Grassroots Group A alongside traditional union

activities, exemplifies this dialectical relationship. These alternative spaces selectively draw upon union organizing traditions while incorporating elements from environmental and social justice movements. As such, worker agency in crises operates not through complete autonomy from institutional structures but through creative reconfigurations of existing organizational forms and practices.

At Plant B, the union's established practices, rituals, and expectations, such as rallies, walkouts, and confrontational rhetoric, function as a structuring framework. This framework effectively shapes the range of socially sanctioned worker responses to the closure crisis, marginalizing those whose dispositions or circumstances incline them towards alternative modes or expressing dissent, grief, or uncertainty. While potent in orchestrating visible resistance, the union's structuring power simultaneously constrains the plurality of worker experiences and coping mechanisms.

The Politics of Differential Vulnerability

Synthesizing evidence across worker narratives shows how differences in vulnerability systematically shape the politics of resistance. The data suggest that worker responses to union calls for action do not neatly reflect individual preferences but rather map onto structural positions within the workforce. As a result, the possibilities for collective action are fundamentally shaped by workers' differential exposure to economic and social risk and job precarity. However, precarity does not directly suppress resistance. Rather, it can generate alternative forms of it. The emergence of more flexible, grassroots organizing approaches with which some of the vulnerable workers with whom I spoke were involved suggests that precarity might drive innovation in labour movement tactics and strategies.

Reimagining Solidarity: Theoretical Implications for Sociology of Work and Labour

Workers' varied responses to different closure announcements and practices contribute to theories of solidarity by demonstrating that effective collective action requires connecting workers with different forms of precarity, institutional power, and structural vulnerability. The evidence here suggests the need for what disability scholars term "crip solidarity" (Sins Invalid, 2016)—forms of collective action that recognize and build upon, rather than minimize, differences in worker positions, capacities, and needs. Thus, rather than viewing solidarity as a uniform state to be achieved, the data suggests treating it as a process of negotiating differences while maintaining collective purpose.

These patterns challenge us to move beyond both overly structural and overly individualistic accounts of worker resistance and responses to factory closures or job displacement. Instead, they raise critical questions about the nature of labour organizing in times of crisis: How can unions create spaces for a diversity of responses and perspectives while still maintaining a cohesive front? More pressingly, how can unions balance the need for decisive collective action with the varied positioning and needs of workers?

Ruptured Rhythms: The Temporal Reconfiguration of Work

Management's simultaneous acceleration of production and deceleration of information exemplifies how power operates through temporal control during factory closures. The data for this study reveals two significant insights about power and knowledge during organizational death. First, power operates through temporal contradictions between production demands and closure realities. Second, and perhaps more significantly, workers' embodied and

institutional knowledges enabled a form of affective reading that allowed them to detect and interpret workplace changes even when official narratives obscured them.

The data suggest a sometimes contradictory temporal experience, including instances of work acceleration and deceleration that vary based on workers' roles within the organization. Furthermore, the analysis examines how the erosion of social relationships, as coworkers depart, reshapes workers' relationships to time in the workplace. Finally, the data clarify how working within an information vacuum during the closure process can lead to temporal distortions, affecting workers' ability to orient themselves within the changing industrial landscape or plan for their futures. I interpret these findings through the broader lens of temporal reconfiguration, as imagined by the notable scholars above, to shed light on how workplace changes impact workers' experiences of time.

"Even after the closing [announcement], there was a huge hire": Desynchronization of Work Rhythms

Management's contradictory practices of ramping up production while preparing for closure created desynchronized work rhythms, as companies simultaneously laid off long-time workers while hiring temporary staff to meet accelerated production demands. Again, the companies associated with this study were not discontinuing their businesses altogether; rather, they were relocating or closing only certain job sites. Accordingly, Samuel said the company was "ramping up production because they [wanted] to stockpile their [product], as they try to contract other suppliers to produce it." Christopher added that the company was "so desperate to build inventory because they knew they were going to have supply constraints." So, after the

announcement of plant closure, workers were tackling immediate changes to their current jobs while simultaneously worrying about their future employment.

Companies' strategy to stockpile products before closing the plant took one of two forms: adding shifts to their schedule and/or hiring additional temporary workers. For example, at Plant A, management increased production capacity by reintroducing rotating or swing shifts for all line workers. Christopher insinuated that line workers responded to increases in work load in two ways: on the one hand, he said some workers were "smart about it" and looked at it as "overtime every week [which] will help when it comes to severance," whereas workers that he described as "a little bit more proud, they would take it out on their own team by not coming in" for extra or extended shifts.

Participants also described their workplaces as transforming into a revolving door for co-workers coming and going. The strategy of stockpiling products at Plants B and C primarily took the form of hiring blitzes. In part, companies were hiring additional workers to replace workers who were leaving before the closure. According to Louisa:

> Attendance plummeted right after the announcement, and even in the six months following the announcement…they just started dropping off, like just every day there was two or three people lower in seniority than myself dropping, just quit and walked out. So, Plant C was dealing with huge manpower issues…People just, you know, people just thought 'if you can afford it, screw it! I'm not going in tonight.'

Charlotte confirmed the "huge hire" at Plant C while "people were literally jumping ship left right and center…and a lot of the new hires during that time were jumping ship because they were showing no loyalty to their employees." Charlotte thus frames the chaos on the plant floor, of workers coming and going, as an inevitable consequence of the waning commitment the company demonstrated to its workers.

From Boardroom to Breakroom: Temporal Distortion of Information Flow

Management's strategic control of information after the closure announcement created temporal distortions that left workers unable to plan their futures, although workers developed strategies to interpret workplace changes. After the announced closure, the displaced workers with whom I spoke suggested that the company and union, where applicable, either cut off communication channels or provided irregular and inconsistent updates about the closure that kept workers confused and in the dark. In some cases, companies discontinued regular team meetings, which otherwise served as a platform for updating workers on production goals/issues, health and safety, and related topics. For example, Ben told me that the company used to hold "regular team meetings every other Wednesday, or the last Wednesday of the month, or something like that, but those were cancelled shortly after the announcement." Thus, when there was no longer a need for the company to hold meetings for production-related purposes, some companies opted to cut off the communication channel instead of transforming it into a space for collectively discussing closure.

At Plant A, team meetings continued, but Samuel expressed concern about the contradictory information:

> I think they tried to paint as nice a picture as possible for the employees so they would cover in the meetings all the production results and the efficiencies that we had done well, and then people would be like 'well, we're doing all this stuff great, why are you closing?' So it really left mixed feelings in people. And I think it added to the fact, to the more stubborn guys, that this can't possibly happen. 'Look how good we're doing!'

As such, even with the continuation of regular team meetings, the workers implied that the content therein continued as normal and did not reflect the pending closure of the plant or serve as a space to address the workers' concerns.

When I questioned whether the company or the union were instead providing workers with written updates, Ellie (whom I spoke with in December of 2019) explained that "they haven't done another information leaflet since the summer. So all this time through the closure there has been no information. People are dying for information." In other words, not only did verbal communication end with the discontinuation of team meetings, but other channels for exchanging information were not open. Charlotte suspected that ongoing negotiations between the union and company partly accounted for a rupture in the flow of information, where neither side had updates to share. Consequently, getting information about something as necessary and simple as the date of the closure was impossibly difficult for workers who were waiting "months, months, months, and months and they kept pushing the date back…because they had to wait another month to hear back from the other side but there was no good faith." The workers painted a proverbial picture of being cast aside or isolated from the company and union, where applicable, and officials deliberated over their futures behind closed doors.

Void of accurate information from the company or union, workers will attempt to fill in the blanks. Roger remembers:

> Things were happening around us and we weren't being told about it until the next town hall meeting [every three months]. Then unfortunately, that would lead to speculation and false hopes sometimes. I didn't like that. They should have put up a notice because we all read the board when we first punch in.

According to his description, there can be a disconnect for workers between what they are seeing happen and what they were being told is happening (i.e., nothing or very little). Thus, in

keeping with the concept of gaslighting[27], workers can be made to seem dramatic in their reactions to the changes that are happening around them when information is being withheld. In another example, Dominic insinuated that until the company provided information on severance packages, workers created a rumour mill. He remembers hearing "off-hand rumours of 'guys under five years are getting nothing,' then 'everyone is getting $80,000,' to 'no one is getting anything.'" Thus, an information vacuum created by management and union silence gets filled with contradictory speculations ranging from optimistic outlooks (e.g., "everyone is getting $80,000") to deeply pessimistic ("guys under five years are getting nothing").

Beyond rumours between workers, Ellie indicated that at times, the sources of conflicting information were the company and union officials. On the topic of continued plant operations, Ellie said that on the one hand you have "[company spokesperson] saying 'we have been firm about what we are doing and this is a transformation' and [on the other hand] [union spokesperson] saying 'well, you never know what can happen because they've idled plants before and brought product back.'" Thus, from her perspective, the company and union were saying "two very different things which I was not comfortable with at all." Understandably, workers described the timeframe between announcement and closure as "a headache [from which there was] no escape …that was pretty bad all the time and was just something that was not good to deal with." Even Travis, a member of the management team, recognized the negative psychological impact of omitting or delaying necessary information on workers. He poignantly reflected that:

[27] Gaslighting refers to a form of psychological manipulation where a person or entity makes someone question their perceptions or experiences. In workplace contexts, it can occur when management denies observable changes while withholding information.

> A lot of people wanted answers and they were looking for answers for a long time and I think the lack of information or the lack of answers continued for such a long period of time that that cloud hangs over. When you make an announcement and a year later you're still operating, that's very difficult for people. I'm glad it is a year later that we're still operating but it's hard because you, you change your emotions over that period of time and as you change it you need different help.

Beyond noting the consequences of the limited information available to displaced workers, his reflection also highlights that displaced workers' emotions and needs change throughout the closure process. Yet, as Travis suggests, the resources made available to workers do not reflect their changing informational, material, and emotional needs. To his last point about the difficulty of making decisions without the necessary resources, Ellie agrees that there are "some people who are regretting the decisions that they made but just the way it was rolled out, they didn't have enough information to make proper decisions."

Given ongoing rumours, misinformation, and delayed information, Samuel suggested that some workers struggled to accept the reality of the closure until they witnessed tangible material changes inside the plant. In the case of Plant A, the company moved office workers to a different building before the plant was shut down. According to Samuel:

> When the office staff moved out, that's when we really started to notice a change. That's when reality started to set in for people I guess…The offices moved, the plant has been sold to another company and, so I guess it was around then, people started to realize their pending doom was actually going to happen. That [took place] with only about four months to go.

Louisa echoed Samuel's sentiment regarding the significance of material changes as a signal to workers about the reality of the pending closure. She suggested that for some workers at Plant C, such tangible changes did not take place until their final day on the factory floor. On that day, she described a scene in which supervisors took away workers' security cards and escorted them out of the gate. Louisa thought that until these material changes took place, such as the

removal of equipment and belongings, workers hoped that operations would continue. She explained that the "last two hours of the shift is when things started to really sink in. And people were saying 'My God, this is actually happening. They're doing it; they're shutting down the plant'…That's I think when it really started to become real."

Their statements imply that, for plants that remain open after an announcement of closure, the continuation of work "as normal" can interfere with workers' understanding and integration of the closure into their psyche. Instead, workers accept the reality of the closure at different times by relating to and taking up information in different ways. For some workers, acceptance might have occurred at the point of the announcement. For workers like Dominic, acceptance occurs at the moment of learning about the specifics of severance. However, many other workers require additional information, such as through material changes to plant operations, including the removal of equipment, before the reality of the closure sinks in.

Unfortunately, beyond the announcement itself, workers described an organizational environment in which obtaining additional information about the closure was cumbersome at best. Displaced workers are left to search for answers in lieu of not receiving complete, accurate, and/or timely information from the company or union. While many workers passively wait for updates from the company, other workers actively seek responses to their questions through various networks and routes. As the participants in this study illustrate, seeking information requires knowing to whom to speak, where to look for material, how to interpret sometimes complicated legal documents, and a tremendous amount of persistence. Ellie provided me with several examples of her challenging attempts to get information, many of

which involved being (re)directed to different people who provided incomplete or inaccurate communication. On one occasion, she described:

> Asking information about benefits. So the benefits representative gave me information about what I'm entitled to after the plant closes, and then a week ago another person posted [on Facebook] contradictory information so instead of me being eligible for benefits for six weeks, I would be eligible for three weeks. And then I had to follow up and ask him 'Can you verify the information?' And he said 'My information is correct.' I said 'Well I was told by this person,' so then he has to go through it again and then he says, 'No, okay, the information you were given was correct and I'm sorry for the error.' So I don't think stuff like that is intentional, they're human and they're being overwhelmed with questions and stuff right now but it can be very challenging to get information.

While controlling the flow of information provides decision-makers with flexibility and prevents legal complications, this communication strategy often backfires as it fosters confusion, frustration, and mistrust among displaced workers in addition to delaying their ability to plan for the future. Decentralized information channels, such as social media, intensify workers' challenges with accessing accurate information.

The Paradox of Temporal Control During Factory Closures: Time, Information, and Power

Participants' narratives reveal a striking paradox: while production intensified the flow of information simultaneously slowed or stopped entirely. The acceleration of work alongside the deceleration of clear communication produces a distinct form of labour alienation specific to dying workplaces. In this case, workers become alienated from their ability to situate themselves temporally; that is, workers struggle to make sense of their present circumstances or plan effectively for their futures. Samuel's observation about workers continuing to achieve production targets while their plant was slated for closure exemplifies this temporal contradiction, where present achievement becomes disconnected from future security.

Workers' descriptions of temporal confusion demonstrate the affective dimensions of this paradox. The simultaneous acceleration and deceleration of workplace rhythms operates through affective "intervals" (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010), moments where established temporal patterns break down and generate new intensities. Workers described continuing familiar production routines while sensing impending disruption, creating an "in-between-ness" where bodies register temporal contradiction before conscious processing occurs. Roger's observation that "things were happening around us" despite official silence demonstrates how workers' embodied knowledge operates through temporal registers that exceed communication channels. This explains how workers maintained their interpretive capacity despite information manipulation: their bodies registered temporal disruption through accumulated workplace rhythms, enabling them to read workplace changes even when official narratives obscured them.

Yet workers' affective knowledge enabled them to sense and interpret workplace changes through means beyond official communication channels. In stable workplaces, workers develop sophisticated capacities to read their environment: they learn to interpret production schedules, anticipate workflow changes, and understand the meaning of various other workplace signals. When these established patterns fragment during closure, workers can become separated from the signals they previously learned to recognize. But workers like Samuel also demonstrated the capacity to identify a disconnect between management's narrative and the felt reality of workplace change, suggesting that affective literacy can sharpen during periods of change. Roger's observation about "things happening around us" demonstrates the ways bodies register changes in their environment before these changes are

formally articulated. Rather than becoming disoriented, workers maintained a certain capacity to read workplace signals through their accumulated bodily knowledge of “normal” rhythms and patterns. The evidence thus points to factory closure as a period where managerial (and even union) power operates through the manipulation of time and information, yet workers’ affective capacity to read and interpret these contradictions remains intact.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined how factory closure announcements and their aftermath actively construct the "displaced worker" through various institutional mechanisms while simultaneously shaping how workers experience and respond to their impending displacement. I analyzed the announcement practices of three different closing factories to show how they create distinct social environments that structure worker responses and shape their subjectivity. At Plant A, the deployment of security personnel and controlled spaces worked to constitute worker subjectivity by positioning workers as potential security threats, compelling them to regulate their emotional responses while reinforcing existing power hierarchies. At Plant B, the media-first announcement strategy manufactured distance between the company and its workers by positioning them as external stakeholders, though whether intentionally leaked or not, this strategy paradoxically enabled rapid worker mobilization. At Plant C, the complete absence of formal communication institutionalized a hierarchy of precarity where supplier company workers were constructed as peripheral to both the production process and closure considerations.

Yet workers were not passive recipients of these constructed identities. Their responses, ranging from traditional labour actions to grassroots organizing, demonstrated how worker

agency operates even within constraining institutional frameworks. These varying responses suggest that announcement practices and the resulting responses can simultaneously strengthen some attachments while severing others. While some workers found their union ties weakened by resistance strategies they interpreted as exclusionary or ineffective, they simultaneously developed stronger attachments to broader social justice causes that facilitated the forging of new solidarities.

The data also revealed the emergence of divisions in response to the closure announcement. While union campaigns often relied on confrontational tactics and nationalist rhetoric that privileged more secure workers, these approaches inadvertently alienated some precarious workers, quieter voices, and those seeking more inclusive forms of resistance. Some workers found themselves caught between economic necessity and expectations of militant solidarity, while others felt silenced by what they perceived as pressure to conform to particular emotional responses and forms of protest.

Yet rather than simply suppressing resistance, precarity and tensions between workers and leaders drove innovation in labour movement strategies. Workers developed alternative visions for manufacturing that connected worker interests across different employment statuses, international boundaries, and social movements while selectively drawing upon union organizing traditions. Their reimagining of solidarity—exemplified in the "better for all" campaign—demonstrates how crisis events can catalyze new forms of organizing that recognize and build upon worker differences rather than minimizing them. Effective labour movements succeed by acknowledging workers' different positions and needs while building connections across usual organizing divisions.

Alongside interpersonal divisions, temporal contradictions emerged in the post-announcement period that served as another pathway for power to operate. Workers simultaneously faced intensified production demands and an information vacuum about their futures. Yet even as companies attempted to control the closure narrative through selective communication, workers drew on their deep understanding of workplace rhythms and collective knowledge to make sense of unfolding changes. Their ability to read subtle shifts in workplace patterns demonstrates how workers maintained interpretive power even when denied official information.

Together, these findings demonstrate how factory closures emerge through an active dialogue between institutional practices and worker responses. While announcement procedures attempt to structure the closure process, workers continually reshape these dynamics through their interpretations, resistance efforts, and alternative visions. This dialectical relationship reveals closure not as a unidirectional process imposed on workers, but as a contested terrain where workers actively influence how deindustrialization unfolds.

Having examined workers' collective resistance strategies, I now turn to analyze how factory closures reconstruct workers' relationship to work itself. In Chapter 5, I investigate how workers make sense of closure announcements, process the emotional impacts, and maintain occupational identities even as their workplaces disappear. I find that workers commonly reject corporate narratives of market inevitability by drawing on their direct knowledge of factory operations and profitability. Yet even as workers challenge the logic of closure, effects generated by displacement circulate through social networks and reshape how workers understand themselves in relation to work. By examining these processes together, I conclude

that factory closures simultaneously disrupt and reinforce workers' fundamental attachments to occupational identity and traditional notions of work.

Chapter 5: "It Is Probably a Good Example of a Way Not to Handle a Crisis Situation:" Reactions, Rationalizations, and Reshaped Selves During Factory Closure

Chapter Introduction

This dissertation is also concerned with how factory closures reshape how workers understand themselves and their relationship to work. In this chapter, I examine how workers make sense of factory closures through three interconnected processes: sense-making, affect, and identity construction. I argue that factory closures reshape workers' relationship to work without transforming their fundamental attachments to occupational identity. While workers challenge corporate explanations for factory closures and develop new affective attachments through displacement, they maintain rather than abandon traditional performances of work identity.

In the first section, I analyze how workers decode meaning from closure announcements by drawing on their direct knowledge of factory operations, production demands, and profitability. Through examining how workers assign blame to corporate greed, union concessions, and government absence, I map how workers understand the hierarchical relationships between these institutions. I demonstrate how workers' sense-making processes reveal both their critique of and entanglement in contemporary manufacturing relations.

In the second section, I trace the circulation of affects through social networks during factory closure. I map the emotional circuits along which affects travel, arguing that they anchor to specific referents like pensions, workplace relationships, and occupational status. Through analyzing workers' narratives of emotional experience, I demonstrate how displacement generates distinct patterns of affect that move between individual, familial,

workplace and community spheres. I show how institutional supports fail to address these circulating affects, leaving workers to manage emotional impacts through informal networks.

In the final section, I consider how workers maintain occupational identities as their workplaces close. I analyze workers' continued performance of traditional work ethics and gender roles, mapping how they enact and perform these identities even as the "stage" of the workplace changes. Through investigating workers' adherence to idealized notions of work and masculinity, I demonstrate how occupational identities operate independently from employment relations. This analysis reveals how industrial change reshapes but does not fundamentally transform workers' relationship to work identity.

Decoding the Closure

Workers make sense of factory closure announcements through ongoing interpretive processes that draw upon both deliberate cognitive efforts and implicit embodied understandings to transform seemingly chaotic corporate decisions into meaningful social narratives. When a company announces that it is shutting down a factory or ceasing production, workers often find the news difficult to understand and it is disconnected from their day-to-day production experiences. As such, the announcement of a factory closure often triggers workers to try to make sense of an otherwise confusing situation by finding or creating order or meaning in what feels like chaos. Sense-making is both a cognitive and social process through which people attempt to plausibly interpret events (Weick, 1995). Organizational scholars generally agree that sense-making is an ongoing, retrospective process that continues as new information becomes available, which workers then use to reinterpret and refine their understanding over time (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In practice, workers' sense-making involves both deliberate

cognitive and social efforts to interpret events through social interactions and shared narratives (Brown et al., 2015), as well as implicit, embodied understandings and intensities[28] that are constantly in motion.

In the context of industrial change and factory closures, workers draw upon a range of cultural resources and shared experiences, including historical memories of labour struggles, local identities tied to the factory/industry, or broader narratives of globalization and economic change, to make sense of their situation and experiences. High's (2003) oral history of former steel workers in Youngstown and Pittsburgh illustrates how shared resources inform collective interpretations of plant closures and their aftermath. Specifically, High found that workers often drew on a "usable past" to make sense of plant closures, framing their experiences within a longer history of struggles against corporate power. This historical framing allows workers to maintain a sense of collective identity and purpose. Relatedly, in their seminal work on deindustrialization in the United States, Bluestone and Harrison (1982) determined that because corporate decision-making processes often remain opaque to workers, workers develop intricate theories about the "real" reasons behind closures, often implicating corporate

[28] Following Gregg and Seigworth's (2010) formulation of affect theory, "intensities" here refer to pre-cognitive forces that emerge through bodily encounters and circulate between workers and their environments. These intensities influence how workers corporeally experience and respond to an event before they can process it consciously. Intensities represent the immediate and often ineffable bodily reactions that precede and exceed cognitive meaning-making, operating in what Gregg and Seigworth describe as 'in-between-ness'. In the context of factory closures, workers' bodies register and transmit these affective charges through physical sensations (e.g., muscle tension, disorientation, etc.) that both exist within individual workers and circulate through group interactions, shared physical environments, and collective responses to organizational change. This in-between-ness manifests when a worker's anxious posture subtly influences colleagues nearby, when silence falls over a meeting room, or when factory spaces themselves feel different despite no physical change. These embodied experiences subsequently shape how workers understand their situation and what possibilities they can imagine going forward.

malfeasance. These alternative narratives serve not only to explain events but also to maintain a sense of dignity and agency in the face of seemingly impersonal economic forces.

Through social interactions, workers reconstruct and refine their understanding of factory closures and their experiences of displacement. In her analysis of working-class writings on economic restructuring, Linkon (2018) revealed how collective sense-making evolves over time. Her close reading of Hernadez's story, "Thanks to Abbie Wilson," demonstrates how workers use physical reenactments to share memories and interpretations. In this story, a former worker's performance of her old job in an empty factory space draws the attention of other workers who watch, recall, and reinterpret their own work histories. Linkon understands the author to be:

> Emphasiz[ing] the social significance of remembered work by constructing Abbie's actions as a performance that is valuable for other displaced workers, who begin coming to watch her re-enactment. Her actions activate and embody her memories…As her coworkers watch, Hernandez tells us, their individual and collective past is activated, made visible, embodied…They recall their informal worker-to-worker economy, 'when Peanut Man hawked hot roasteds all through the shift…'[…] Hernandez does not represent this as simple nostalgia. In remembering their work together, the workers engage in an internalized version of the kind of storytelling…that can lead workers to appreciate but also to better understand what they gained from work in addition to a paycheck. (pp 37-39)

Building on this idea of evolving interpretations of factory closures, Vicker's (2016) study of Australian car manufacturing plant closures shows how displaced workers construct meaning through shared narratives that evolve from initial optimism to disillusionment. Like Hernandez's workers, these executives engage in collective sense-making, but their interpretations follow a distinct trajectory from "The Good Times" through "The Reversal" to "Being Disposed Of." These studies collectively demonstrate that workers' sense-making of factory closures is a social process that evolves and is influenced by factors such as shared experiences and access to

information. Below, I build on this understanding by examining how the companies associated with the current study, the union, where applicable, and workers explain the closure differently.

Questioning Claims of Market Fate

Workers construct alternative explanations for factory closures through their experiential knowledge of productivity and profitability to position corporate narratives as deliberately manufactured justifications that mask underlying financial motivations. In candid terms, most of the workers with whom I spoke conveyed a distinct skepticism toward the explanations for closure put forth by their respective companies, dismissing them as disingenuous, "boilerplate" recited from a scripted statement, and even "bullshit." Crucially, however, workers differently believed the veracity of these announcements, with a substantial number of participants harbouring significant reservations, even perceiving the announcement as untrustworthy.

The origin of many workers' sense of incredulity in response to the announcement of their company's closure has its origins, at least in part, in the history of unverified related rumours. Past instances of conjecture that ultimately failed to materialize contributed to many workers doubting the authenticity of the present announcement. Illustratively, Louisa recounted that she had "been hearing stuff like that since 1999 when I began my career in the auto industry. And so, I was in shock [and] angry like anybody else…and [there] was a little bit of disbelief as well." Dominic remembers the rumours inside the plant in a similar way; even in his shorter tenure, Dominic overheard "people saying 'oh they're going to close the plant in 2 years, they're going to close the plant in 3 years.' People have been saying that for 5 years and they hadn't closed the plant yet." Although he went on to admit that "the rumours were never

this specific and are never talked about in the press." Plant A also bore witness to a recurrent cycle of speculation. Christopher highlighted that "every year or two somebody would come out saying 'the plant is going to close; the plant is going to close' so you've heard this so many times that when it actually did, yeah it was a bit of a shock."

Workers' skepticism also took shape against the backdrop of overarching company profitability and award-winning product success. Unlike companies that closed due to bankruptcy, the three plants from which I recruited participants remained financially viable in their own right, with the parent companies sustaining operations in locations outside Canada. The financial status of these plants created uncertainty among workers, who found it challenging to reconcile the decision to shut down a profitable establishment. For instance, Dominic stressed the demand for the products he contributed to manufacturing, asserting that they were "really selling and the plant has a history of high-quality vehicles." In agreement with his statement, Louisa contended that despite garnering accolades and exhibiting impressive numerical performance, the notion of the plants' closure seemed impossible, as she stated, "they can't be closing down…They're going to pull through…because they can't possibly take away plants that are so successful." Similarly, Samuel voiced reservations regarding the:

> contradicting information. I think they tried to paint as nice a picture as possible for the employees so they would [talk about] the production results and the efficiencies that we had done well, and then people would be like 'well, we're doing all this stuff great, why are you closing?' So, it really left mixed feelings in people. And I think it added to the fact that this can't possibly happen. 'Look how good we're doing!'

In other words, news of the plant closure posed a cognitive challenge for some workers who perceived the company's explanation as failing to meet the litmus test of conventional

"common sense," whereby a financially prosperous company would logically continue in its operations within the established framework.

Some workers also doubted the veracity of the announcement in the absence of more measured responses to changing labour and market demands, which could have circumvented workforce reductions. To illustrate, Louisa admitted:

> Expect[ing] concessions certainly…but we did not expect a complete shutdown…it's just unreal. It's not real. They're just playing a joke or they're wanting to try a different thing or it's a publicity stunt. I think a lot of people thought it was a publicity stunt.

Instead of a total shutdown, Roger conjectured that "shutting down a line…I don't want to see anybody lose their job but scale back production and see if that works." This line of thinking highlights that for displaced workers, the closure of the plant did not emerge as the most evident or imperative course of action. This perspective is shared by many who, as I have discussed, have advanced alternative strategies for the continued operation of factories.

Skepticism only served to stoke further speculation about the future in which the plant could continue to operate. Dominic, for instance, noted that the product from the line on which he worked was "really selling, and the plant has a history of high-quality vehicles. So there's been talk of possibly extending the truck line." He added, however, that his information about a possible product extension was not "an official word from the union or the corporation…but it seems to make a little bit of sense to me." Dominic's story captures how workers wrestle with mixed feelings about a closure announcement, especially when they cannot trust the scarce information they receive from management.

The Writing on the Wall

A subset of workers interpret factory closures through internalized market logics, demonstrating how neoliberal rationalities structure interpretive frameworks even among those directly impacted by corporate disinvestment. For workers who seem to share a "business sensibility," the announcement came as less of a surprise. While Samuel was sympathetic to his coworkers' plights, he was otherwise:

> Not surprised because, I mean, it's pretty common now. Manufacturing is slowly dissipating here in Canada in lieu of technology jobs and higher-level jobs that are more professionally based. So I wasn't surprised…the way their labour costs must work out, is probably very expensive. There are guys there working those 12-hour days, a lot of overtime, making $100,000 a year. In production, that's really high. So I'm assuming they're opting for a less expensive operation which is in the United States.

Ben also acquiesced that "it's pretty understandable why Plant B would want to move out of [the GTA]…we could probably lose half of the workforce and still maintain the same quality of product." Therein, Ben insinuates that high labour costs, in part due to an overinflated workforce, likely contributed to the closure. Even people outside the company, including friends of displaced workers, suggested that labour costs are too high in Canada for companies to remain competitive in a global marketplace. Roger told me that one of his friends "believed that we were getting paid just a ridiculous amount and said, 'well you can understand why you guys are closing; you are making X amount of dollars for making [product].'" These sentiments share a neoliberal vision of work and the economy that positions "greedy" workers and their unions, where applicable, as at least partially responsible for any mass exodus of companies to cheaper, more business-friendly environments.

Moreover, a subset of workers acknowledged changes in plant operations that they interpreted as potential harbingers of the impending closure announcement, even if they were

not in agreement with the necessity of this direction. Henry, actively engaged in union and labour movement organizing, suggested that for people like him "who follow the inside of the auto industry, [we] were fully aware that it had to happen, [it was] just [a matter of] when the announcement was going to be made that the plant would stop." He provides a detailed account of the last round of bargaining at Plant B, where the union and workers fought to retain any product allocation. During the negotiation, they managed to "keep the plant open for 18 months beyond what it would have been. So the plant we are at today was slated for a June 2018" closure. Reflecting on these antagonistic and arduous contract negotiations, Henry and some of his colleagues viewed their continued work as being on "borrowed time" and harboured legitimate doubts about the company's commitment to allocate any further product to the plant.

Charlotte from Plant C, too, discerned a pattern involving the company's employment practices that foreshadowed the impending closure announcement. Specifically, Charlotte noticed the company's decision to hire a significant number of temporary workers rather than offering permanent full-time employment, which led her to speculate about the company's intentions. She remarked, "Why were they hiring more temporary part-time workers than full-time employment? Because they knew they weren't going to stay there. There was a plan, there was a plan in place back in 2016 in terms of the plant shutdown." Similarly, Samuel, reflecting on his experience at Plant A, observed that he and his colleagues hired around that time were all in contract positions. He suggested, "I was on a contract, as were all of the employees who were hired around that date. I think they knew well in advance that this was a pending thing." Inherent in their accounts is the conviction that the companies possessed

knowledge of the impending closure long before the official announcement and were making strategic labour force and production changes that signified the plant's imminent closure.

Sharing "business sensibility" and/or observing a pattern of changes within the plant prior to the official announcement ostensibly offered a degree of psychological protection for these workers who expressed less initial shock than their counterparts. Workers who anticipated the closure due to discernible changes in employment and production practices appeared better equipped to receive the news. These workers appeared to amalgamate factory closure revelations with preceding information from observations of changing working conditions and interactions with union representatives and colleagues.

"Some people went as far as to say that it was because [company president] was part of Donald Trump's inner circle": How Workers Assign Responsibility for a Factory Closure

Workers assign blame for factory closures by constructing detailed accounts of how companies, unions, and governments interact and hold power. Attributing blame becomes not just a matter of identifying responsible parties, but of constructing coherent narratives that can bridge the gap between lived experience and abstract economic forces. In social psychology, Weiner's (1985) blame attribution theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals ascribe causes to negative outcomes or events, distinguishing between internal and external attributions, as well as stable and unstable factors. Sociologist Michèle Lamont's (2009) work on working-class men in the United States and France demonstrates how cultural repertoires and moral boundaries shaped how workers understand their social and economic positions. While not specifically focused on factory closures, her research shows how workers draw upon shared cultural frameworks to make sense of their experiences and construct dignity. Building on these

insights from social psychology and cultural sociology, blame attribution in factory closures can be understood as a collective endeavour.

Workers' construction of blame and responsibility for factory closures and mass layoffs has increasingly captured the attention of labour studies and industrial relations scholars. For instance, through extensive oral histories, Steven High (2021) demonstrates how displaced workers often construct narratives that implicate not just immediate corporate decision-makers but broader structural forces and historical patterns of labour exploitation. Similarly, Ruth Milkman's (1997) study of auto plant closures in California reveals how workers' attribution of blame is deeply influenced by their position within the labour process and their historical experiences of labour-management relations. Specifically, Milkman found that workers with a strong union tradition were more likely to attribute plant closures to corporate greed or mismanagement, whereas workers in companies with more protective, family-like management styles often struggled to understand why their seemingly caring employers would close the factory. Relatedly, Kathryn Marie Dudley's (1994) ethnographic work in a deindustrialized community in Wisconsin shows how displaced workers construct theories about the "real" reasons behind factory closures, often implicating shadowy global conspiracies or local political machinations. These narratives, while perhaps factually questionable, serve the important social and psychological function of allowing workers to maintain a sense of agency and identity, and possibly mobilize against overwhelming structural changes.

Building on this scholarly foundation, this study similarly found that participants engaged in blame attribution following the announcement of factory closure. While patterns of blame cannot always be neatly categorized, the following findings reveal that workers primarily

assign responsibility for the closure to three key entities: the company, union(s), and government. In the following sections, I discuss how workers construct and articulate these targets of blame while considering how their perspectives align and diverge from previous scholarly observations.

Setting aside workers' skepticism towards the content of the company's announcement, workers shared their perceptions of the factors driving the closure and their attributions of responsibility and blame for this outcome. While my interview guide primarily included questions about workers' experiences *after* the announcement of plant closure, I quickly came to realize that the workers wanted to tell me about what came *before* the announcement – the storied history between the company and its workers, unions, governments, and community. Therein, Ellie reminded me that a plant closure is "not a single event, but a long drawn-out event that's just ending." In other words, the closure does not start with the moment of an announcement; instead, the beginnings of a closure can be found in the details and tensions between pre-existing stakeholder relationships, to which displaced workers attribute varying responsibilities.

Company Responsibility. Workers position corporate greed as the primary mechanism of factory closure. Ultimately, workers agree "there is only one person to blame [for the closure] and that is the corporation." They frequently referred to corporate greed and "competitive contracts" as driving employment tensions and eventually the closure of the plant. Evidence of corporate greed was exemplified in Ellie and Henry's detailing of decades-long concession bargaining wherein the company would "leverage the threat of closure or withdrawing of product if they did not get what they call 'competitive deals.'" Using these

negotiation tactics, Ellie told me that Plant B has "been leaving [the GTA] for 15 years anyway. The 2012 negotiations did not result in [the company] hiring anybody; in the 2016 negotiations they did hire people but at the second tier, and they only negotiated an 18-month project." In other words, continuous rounds of concession bargaining did not result in stronger job security or compensation for workers; rather, competitive contracts provided the company with greater flexibility and resources to pursue its financial interests. Ellie concludes that these contracts "have not protected anybody except to take money out of our pocket and put it in the company's pocket [instead]."

The sting of competitive contracts was made all the more piercing to workers in the wake of a government bailout to Plant B in 2009. Despite receiving bailout monies in tens of billions of dollars, Ellie recalls Plant B:

> increased the wage progression to six years and then in 2012, and this is where things get really frustrating, because in 2012 the company was profitable again and they dropped the starting wage to 60% and increased the wage progression to 10 years plus, so it actually takes 11 or 12 years to get to full wage.

In light of increased wage progression and decreased job security during otherwise profitable periods, these workers argue that Plant B used the economic recession as a tool for renegotiating contracts, necessitating major labour and wage reductions under the guise of keeping the company from bankruptcy. Henry also added that the company reorganized production during this time by moving product lines to Mexico. Yet he cautions:

> We're blaming [Mexico] for taking our jobs, [but] it has nothing to do with them, it's Plant B. Leave Mexico out of it. It's the greed of Plant B; it's the decision of Plant B to allocate assembly... This is exactly how they are. You blame two people: you blame Mexicans and you blame the Canadian government. Which have nothing to do with how this decision was made.

Labour tensions resulting from austere contract negotiations contributed to a "pretty toxic work culture." While Ben acknowledges that the company may have experienced financial troubles, he also suggests that "Plant B management was pretty corrupt for a long time. I shouldn't say corrupt but mismanaged. Mismanaged monies and funds…management took advantage of workers for a long time."

Along with greed, displaced workers also identified innovation as another factor preceding closure. Christopher commented that to continuously find efficiencies, Plant A effectively improved their way out of jobs. He gave the analogy:

> So if we make 300 [product] a minute, if we can make 900 a minute that means for every eight hours you've gained an hour and if you do that enough times you can make the same amount in less time and when you have four large plants and they're all doing the same, you start to get to a point where you have too much and our sales were slipping.

Manufacturing companies readily adopt technologies that boost production and reduce labour needs. The irony is that the same companies can be slow to adopt other new technologies or retool their operations into new production lines, even when declining sales or excess capacity signal the need to adapt.

Displaced workers had detailed ideas for improving products and operations, based on their knowledge of working on the line and observing changes in the industry. However, according to the workers' descriptions, the companies were unresponsive to the ideas they believed could have preserved the operation of the plants. Speaking of a lack of productive change, Henry suggested that Plant B:

> seems to want to produce like we did after WW2, and the world can't take that. Mass production is history. But where the future goes is that you have a different way of providing transportation that has better social outcomes and better global outcomes for people.

Displaced workers questioned ongoing business strategies that did not consider the necessity of transitioning into a new, green economy. For this reason, they also attribute the closure to the inflexible ideas of management and ownership, which failed to innovate products that could secure employment at the plant for years and decades. Despite some differing explanations, displaced workers largely concluded that the company "shut the door on their own to maintain power" and, in doing so, as Samuel suggested, "betraying [workers] who had invested 30 and 40 years into the company."

Union Responsibility. Despite recognizing that responsibility for the plant closure rests with the company, workers also blame the union for decades of concession bargaining, which, in their view, ushered in job instability while undermining worker power. In theory, concession bargaining saves jobs in highly competitive markets (Cappelli, 1985); however, there does not appear to be a significant relationship between union concessions and deterring threats of relocation (S. Slinn, 2015). Workers in this study expressly connect the growth of concessions, such as tiered wage structures, to the generation of multiple classes of workers and the construction of employment vulnerability that the union claims to suppress. Ellie talked about "harbouring a fair bit of anger right now toward the union for their responsibility for second-tier workers." She questions the sustainability of a bargaining strategy that weakens workers' previously won gains, like:

> Equal pay for equal work. That battle was already won. Auto workers don't become increasingly valuable as they work for you longer. They get broken, they get cranky, they don't care if you want them to be working two jobs they're going to do their own job…So why would you let employers create a new division based on something completely arbitrary?

She provided the example of how, despite working full-time hours since 2006, she was not considered a full-time "seniority employee" with the union until 2016. Henry qualifies her experience by adding:

> From 2006 to 2016 they got no recognition of their service, of their seniority, of their grow-ins as they are called…we ratified an agreement to accept that those workers would be on a ten-year pay grid scale up to full wages after 10 years. Except the grid kept going and no one moved up it. So you know, looking back on that, knowing what that history was, those workers even after 20 years were never going to retain the full wage. So we've created a big problem.

He suggested that the union's cooperation with the company in creating a second tier of workers "certainly rattles a lot of confidence because for 10 years [workers] were convinced they had to accept this to get full-time employment eventually." However, their promise never materialized, and the company closed anyway.

The union presented contractual concessions to workers as part of a larger strategic plan. The union's endorsement of these concessions was premised on the assurance of future benefits and job preservation. However, when the company announced the end of product lines, thus triggering job loss, workers felt that the union's actions fundamentally contradicted their interests. This perceived moral breach by the union intensified a sense of betrayal and disillusionment among workers, contributing to increased hostility between the union and its members in the ensuing weeks, months, and years.

Even if not the direct cause of closure, the unionized workers with whom I spoke nevertheless identify concession bargaining as a serious point of rupture in their relationship with the union that created "the culture that got us to where we are." Henry describes that union culture as one of workers being "alienated from participation over the years…[with union

leaders] directing people what to do." Consequently, it is no longer necessarily the case that workers:

> will want to join a union [again] or even have confidence in a union based on what happened to them…people who have experienced this kind of inequity have realized that maybe the union wasn't always on our side, like these particular workers have always been second class…and even up to the closure there is nothing to ever bring those people together.

His point illustrates the consequences of segregating workers in employment contracts over the long run; despite possible short-term gains in employment, Henry cautions that concessions create problems for unions and the labour movement when workers grow skeptical of the interests their union supports.

Meanwhile, for workers like Ben, who already harboured some skepticism over the value of unions, witnessing their union "protect" seniority workers in contract negotiations and grievances did little to dissuade their distrust. Ben maintains that "people really should go out into the real world and let Darwinian natural selection play out a little bit more because the labour market has shifted dramatically since unions were justified." His sentiment emphasizes the broader disillusionment felt by some workers towards institutions, including unions, which they perceive as having failed to adapt to a changing work and labour landscape.

Consequently, displaced workers construe the role of the union in plant closures as either negligence or excessive intervention in protecting workers' interests. That is to say, displaced workers frame the unions' responsibility as a balance between either pushing the company away through excessive demands or failing to build a robust labour movement capable of benefiting all workers. Either way, this dual perspective towards the union's involvement in plant closure accentuates workers' desire for more effective labour representation.

Government Responsibility. Workers also blame government officials for enabling factory closures by refusing to intervene, citing past government bailouts as evidence of the state's capacity to save manufacturing when political will exists. Many workers expressed disappointment with what they perceived as a lack of government intervention and oversight in safeguarding their jobs and the local economy. Ellie remembers the premier, Doug Ford, making a statement akin to "the boat has left the dock," an utterance she interpreted as emblematic of prominent government figures choosing to distance themselves from taking meaningful action to address the impending closure and its ramifications. Similarly, speaking about the local MPP, Roger remembers workers "looking to him, 'are you able to step in and try to help? Because that's really one of the last main manufacturers in southern Etobicoke so you're losing this in your constituency so are you going to do something about this?'" Echoing this surprise and frustration from the same plant, Christopher highlighted the contrast between what he perceived as genuine empathy expressed by workers at local businesses and the fleeting response from local government representatives:

> What's interesting is if you're out and about around here, if you told them you work at Plant A, they'd be 'Oh it's a shame about the plant.' The local paper did regular snippets about it. But there wasn't a huge amount from our local politicians which was odd. There was an initial 'this is terrible blah blah blah' and *poof sound.* Flavour of the day, flavour of the hour for them. You get your regular update from your MPP and there was never any mention of it that I can remember seeing.

Workers' frustration was exacerbated when they recalled instances of government intervention during times of corporate financial distress. Every worker at Plant B mentioned the 2008 event where the federal government interfered to bail out the company, leaving them to question why similar measures were not taken to protect their livelihoods. Ellie eloquently captures this sentiment:

> There's been an absence of a political component to this and really the plant closure is almost entirely political. You have a company that's extremely profitable, this is a situation of capital flight as far as I'm concerned. They are taking their capital and investment out and moving it to a jurisdiction that's cheaper…And then there's the bailout money. They were bailed out $10.8 billion and our government managed to lose $3 billion on the deal by cashing in early. But if they held on to them the government would have had a voice in the closure, they already had an ownership stake so government ownership isn't so ridiculous and far-fetched.

The perception of government indifference contributed to workers' sense of isolation and vulnerability during factory closure, as they grappled with the notion that their interests were not protected by the institutions that were supposed to serve them.

Lessons from Workers' Sense-Making. This study's findings on workers' sense-making processes during factory closures offer important insights into how workers interpret industrial changes. One striking finding is the widespread skepticism workers expressed towards official closure explanations. This skepticism persisted even when companies framed closures using familiar neoliberal market logic and buzzwords of efficiency and flexibility. Workers' distrust of these narratives aligns with Bluestone and Harrison's (1982) observation that workers often develop alternative explanations for closures, particularly when corporate decision-making remains opaque.

However, the present study reveals additional particulars in workers' sense-making. The persistence of skepticism is rooted in several factors. First, the history of unverified rumours created a "cry wolf" effect, making workers less likely to believe official announcements. Second, workers perceived contradictions between the content of closure announcements and visible factory success or profitability, which fueled their disbelief. Third, many workers felt that companies had not adequately explored less drastic alternatives to full closure, leading them to question the necessity of a shutdown. Fourth, workers' broader economic worldviews and

knowledge of the industry influence their interpretations. Some workers with "business sensibility" were less surprised by the closure, indicating that sense-making is embedded in workers' larger understandings of economic trends and corporate behaviour, not just local plant conditions. These factors establish how workers' sense-making is shaped not only by immediate closure announcements but also by a longer history of organizational communication and performance, as well as broader economic and manufacturing trends. Consequently, effective communication around factory closure must engage seriously with workers' lived experiences and knowledge.

A second key implication is how workers' embodied knowledge of factory operations informs their sense-making. Workers' intimate knowledge of production processes, product demand, and plant efficiency provides them with an alternative epistemological basis for interpreting closure decisions. Even as factories began closure procedures, workers' sense-making processes remained deeply rooted in their work experiences and identities as skilled producers. This embodied knowledge often contradicts official narratives of market necessity, leading workers to seek alternative explanations. This embodied knowledge appears to play a crucial role in sustaining workers' collective identities and dignity in the face of job displacement. By asserting the value, demand, and quality of their work, workers contest narratives that may position them as economically redundant or inefficient.

Affective Responses in Times of Crisis

Workers experience factory closures not only as individual emotional events but through shared affective patterns that move between workers, family members, and community members. In the wake of a factory closure announcement, displaced workers find themselves

suspended in a liminal space—a transitional space of gradual disconnection from their job roles, colleagues, and the physical workplace—even as they remain tethered to these elements until the final day of operation. In this section, I examine the psychosocial dimensions of displaced workers' emotional journeys, exploring how they navigate the crisis of factory closure through processes of boundary work and identity (re)construction.

While the study's design did not lend itself to longitudinal tracking of individual-level changes in emotional responses, participants' collective narratives paint a picture of an emotional landscape that emerges during factory closure. Two significant facets of workers' affective experiences stand out: the relational nature of their emotions and the dynamic spectrum of their emotional responses. First, workers consistently framed their feelings in relation to others, highlighting the deeply social nature of emotional processing during times of crisis. I argue that this tendency towards "othering" becomes a key mechanism for making sense of their changing circumstances, as workers interpret their experiences in relation to their colleagues. Second, workers' emotional responses span a wide spectrum, from anger and grief to uncertainty and resolve. By tracing the trajectory of their emotional responses, I consider how workers' affective states serve as catalysts for their subsequent actions, guiding them towards or away from particular paths throughout the displacement process. This exploration attends to the often-overlooked affective labour that workers perform as they circumnavigate the uncertainties of job displacement amidst industrial change.

Making Sense of the Self Through the Lens of Others: Affective Othering in Times of Crisis

Edward Said's (1978) influential work, *Orientalism*, details how Western societies construct an imagined "Orient" as a way to define and assert their own cultural superiority. This process of

"othering," or defining oneself in relation to perceived differences from others, Said argued, is not merely a matter of individual attitudes but is embedded in the power structures and knowledge systems of colonial and post-colonial society. Crucially, Said demonstrated how Western academic disciplines created "objective" scholarly knowledge that served to exoticize and subordinate Eastern cultures while presenting the West as rational and superior. Later, Sara Ahmed (2014) further developed the concept of "othering" by examining how emotions shape social relations and boundary-drawing. Ahmed argues that emotions do not reside within individuals but circulate between bodies, objects, and signs, aligning some subjects while distancing them from those deemed "other." Ahmed suggests this process of affective othering is central to the formation of collective identities and the maintenance of social hierarchies. Ahmed examined how the emotion of hate "sticks" to certain bodies, such as those of immigrants and racialized others, marking them as threatening and undesirable. Thus, othering shapes the self-understanding of those who define themselves in opposition to others.

Within organizations, individuals engage in "boundary work" to distinguish themselves from perceived "others" to preserve their sense of self in the face of challenging circumstances (Leidner, 1993). Such boundary work can manifest through various markers of identity, such as gender, job roles, or seniority. Harding (2020) illustrates this in her analysis of business school attire, where the dress of female administrative staff not only served functional purposes but also arguably constituted them as women, in contrast to the predominantly male academic faculty. This gendered attire, Harding argues, "actively engaged in constituting the (invisible) male academics and thus the masculine business school, for the administrators' attire has

boundary-drawing capabilities: it divides the school into two domains, one male and one female, one subordinate to the other" (pp. 237-238).

Borrowing insights from scholarship on "othering," displaced workers are likely to construct their self-concept and interpret their experiences of job displacement in contradistinction to their colleagues, a process influenced by prevailing social hierarchies and cultural norms. For displaced workers, the process of "othering" through boundary work may serve as a coping mechanism, helping them pass through complicated emotions resulting from job displacement, through comparison and demarcating points of distinction to others. However, as Harding articulates, this process may also reflect and reinforce existing power hierarchies within the workplace, as the markers of identity used for boundary work are often shaped by broader social and organizational structures. In the following section, I note how these processes of boundary work and othering manifest in participants' narratives.

"There Were a few Guys That Were Quite Angry About it. I was Never Angry With it:" The Rhetoric of Differentiation in Displaced Worker Narratives

Displaced workers understand and express their emotional reactions to job displacement by constantly comparing themselves to their coworkers, using these comparisons to position themselves as handling the crisis differently or better than others. When I met with displaced workers, the announcement of the factory closure was nearly, if not more than, a year in their rear-view mirror. This temporal distance arguably attenuates the initial intensity of their feelings, creating a space for reflection and reinterpretation. Many participants exhibited a degree of detachment from the events of factory closure, often recounting their reactions and emotional states from the role of an observer rather than as deeply immersed individuals. This

distancing, whether a conscious strategy of emotional management or an unconscious mechanism of self-preservation, manifested in the way workers consistently framed their reflections in relation to the reactions of "others." However, it is important to acknowledge that this comparative framing may also have been influenced by the interview context itself, where participants might have felt implicitly prompted to position their experiences relative to others or to present themselves favourably to me as the researcher.

Throughout our conversations, participants frequently used comparisons to delineate their feelings or responses from their peers. In analyzing their narratives, I identified four primary categories of "othering," as shown in Table 3, that participants employed to make sense of their colleagues' emotional responses and, by extension, their own experiences of job displacement. These categories—direct contrast, distancing through disapproval, hierarchical positioning, and collective framing—represent how workers often define and understand their feelings and reactions through comparison, creating clear boundaries between themselves and others.

Table 3

Categories of Othering in Displaced Workers' Narratives

Category	Description of Narratives	Example
Direct contrast	• Use of "I" vs "they" language • Description of personal choices contrasted with others' • Explicit statements of difference	"a lot of the guys went out to drink. That wasn't me. That wasn't my thing to do." ~ Samuel
Distancing through disapproval	• Critical or judgmental language about others' actions • Moral evaluations of others' behaviours • Implicit self-positioning as different or better	"all across the plant, people have been stuffing paper towels in the toilets…pretty shitty thing to do. Quite literally." ~ Christopher

Hierarchical positioning	• Comparisons between different groups or individuals • References to social categories (e.g., seniority, family status) • Language implying some reactions are more valid	"he was a third generation employee and he was very mad about it…" ~ Ben
Collective framing	• Use of generalized terms like "people" or "employees" • Describes experiences without personal pronouns • Language creating a collective identity separate from individual experiences	"People had to make decisions and they felt very uncomfortable making those decisions…" ~ Travis

The first category, direct contrast, was evident in several accounts in which participants explicitly distinguished their actions from those of their colleagues. For instance, when asked about their immediate post-announcement actions, Samuel recalled, "A lot of the guys went out to drink. That wasn't me. That wasn't my thing to do." Similarly, Roger contrasted his behaviour with that of his coworkers, stating, "A bunch of coworkers said 'oh, let's go for a coffee and talk.' I just said 'nah' and walked home." The participants' reliance on social referencing, when confronted with a direct question regarding their individual actions, speaks to the fundamentally social nature of meaning-making and aligns with sociological understandings of the self as a reflexive project. Frequent references to others' actions could indicate a high level of attunement to the social dynamics of the workplace. By contextualizing their actions in relation to those of their colleagues, these workers engage in the process of negotiating their position within the social fabric of the workplace community, even as that community faces dissolution. Accessing memories of their own actions first through the recollection of others' behaviours could also be understood as a form of socially mediated autobiographical memory retrieval. In this context, collective experience serves as a scaffold for

individual memory reconstruction. Perhaps focusing on others' actions may serve as a cognitively accessible (i.e., emotionally safe and distant) point of reference from which to begin the reconstruction of a coherent self-concept and self-disclosure, following the disruptive event of job displacement.

Related to direct contrast, some participants differentiated and distanced themselves from others by using the language of disapproval or criticism. Christopher's description of property damage at Plant B exemplifies this approach: "all across the plant, people have been stuffing paper towels in the toilets…people have been doing a lot of damage to the bathrooms. Pretty shitty thing to do. Quite literally." By expressing disapproval of these reactions to the factory closure announcement, Christopher distanced himself from those engaging in destructive acts, positioning himself as morally distinct. This discursive distancing could support workers in preserving their occupational identity. By expressing disapproval of such actions, Christopher is reaffirming his commitment to workplace norms, even as the workplace ceases to exist. This strategy highlights how occupational identities can persist and potentially strengthen through comparison to perceived "unprofessional" conduct.

The third category, hierarchical positioning, appeared in narratives in which participants ranked different emotional responses to job displacement. Ben's account illustrates this strategy of comparing the responses of colleagues:

> I was good friends with, he was a third generation employee and he was very mad about it and he has a young family, his son was born three months before the announcement so he was pretty vocal about how upset he was but some of the other people were just "whatever," they are pretty numbed by their own drug use.

Ben's narrative exemplifies a form of othering that intersects with pre-existing social categories and moral evaluations. His account establishes a tacit affective hierarchy, where emotional

responses to job displacement are ranked and (de)legitimized based on perceived social worth and conformity to normative expectations. Specifically, the juxtaposition of the "third generation employee" with the numbed indifference of "other people" using drugs demonstrates boundary work where the former category is imbued with positive attributes—generational legacy, family responsibilities, and appropriate emotional expressivity—which serve to legitimize his anger as a socially sanctioned response. Conversely, the latter group is characterized by perceived emotional detachment attributed to substance use, effectively delegitimizing their affective response. This hierarchical positioning reflects broader societal values and norms, invoking "lay normativity" in everyday judgements (Sayer, 2005). Similar to distancing through disapproval, othering serves as a mechanism for establishing the moral superiority of one group over the negatively perceived members of another group.

Collective framing, the fourth category, was particularly evident in accounts that described job displacement through the lens of generalized people. Travis's narrative exemplifies this approach, using terms like "we," "employees," and "people" to create unified identities for management and displaced workers. For example, he stated,

> We asked employees to make decisions, 'Okay, are you going to sever your ties with [Plant B] and take your money or are you going to stay and hope that the business comes back?' Because remember we're not "closing," we're only "idling," so 'are you going to leave or are you going to stay? And if you stay and there's no employment over a 3-year period you'll get this, or you will get a package up front, or you will get…'

Followed by:

> People had to make decisions and they felt very uncomfortable making those decisions because you don't know what the future holds, you don't know what the future here holds, you don't know what opportunities are here, you don't, none of that was available and people are still having to make a decision. Difficult. Very difficult for them to do that.

This framing initially creates a clear boundary between management and workers, where 'we' (identifying himself with management) initiate actions to which workers respond. The workers, as decision-makers at an individual level, are tasked with navigating predefined options, such as selecting the severance option. Yet, as Travis shifts from using "we" to using "people" and "they," he constructs a generalized collective identity for the displaced workers, presenting them as a unified group facing shared challenges. By using plural nouns and pronouns, Travis emphasizes the communal nature of experience, albeit while separating and categorizing himself in another unified group (of managers). He spoke about the uncertainty, discomfort, and difficulty in decision-making that characterizes a group's experience of job displacement, presenting it as a collective struggle rather than a series of isolated personal challenges.

However, the process of othering in the context of job displacement also defies simplistic, reductive categorization. Aligning with Jenkins' (2014) concept of the "dialectic of identification," where social identity is continuously constructed through processes of simultaneous association and differentiation, participants' narratives often oscillate between both identification and distancing. For instance, Ellie's metaphorical description of workers "riding one wave after another. I don't think people have had a chance to get their feet under them," exemplifies this ambiguity. Similarly, Samuel's assertion that "people hadn't completely absorbed the reality of what was happening" further illustrates the speaker's ambiguous relationship to their utterance. By utilizing terms such as "workers" and "people," these participants maintain a sense of distinctiveness while acknowledging shared experiences. This ambiguity in othering could serve a dual function of allowing for an indirect acknowledgment of

personal emotional struggles while simultaneously maintaining a protective psychological distance from collective trauma.

Affective Circulation in Workers' Displacement Experiences

The emotional impact of industrial change is neither singular nor fixed. Despite the potential for an event to abruptly alter emotional states and disrupt established affective patterns, Walkerdine and Jimenez (2012) emphasized the importance of understanding job loss as a process rather than a single event, with emotional responses unfolding and transforming over extended periods. They argue that workers' affective experiences gradually reshape over time in the wake of industrial displacement.

Complementing this temporal perspective, the stress process model proposed by Pearlin et al. (1981) provides a framework for understanding the wide continuum of emotional responses to job displacement. This model posits that stressors, such as job loss, can lead to a range of outcomes depending on various mediating factors, including personal resources, social support, and coping strategies. These outcomes can range from minimal or no emotional impact to severe psychological distress. Although the temporal perspective provides a framework for understanding the overall trajectory of workers' emotional responses, the continuum approach reminds us of the heterogeneity of these experiences.

These temporal[29] and intensity-based perspectives can be synthesized through Sara Ahmed's (2014) view of emotions as circulating between bodies and signs. Ahmed posits that

[29] While a temporal perspective can share similarities with life stage sociological approaches, particularly in their emphasis on transitions and the influence of social factors, they differ in important ways. Unlike broader life stage models, data from the present study is specific to the experience of job displacement, occurs over a shorter timeframe, and focuses primarily on emotional circulation. Moreover, the fluidity and potential non-linearity of these stages, informed by Ahmed's concept of circulating emotions, contrasts with more rigid life stage models.

emotions are not static properties of individuals or objects, but rather dynamic forces that move and transform through social interactions and cultural contexts. In the context of job displacement, emotions such as anxiety, anger, and hope may circulate among displaced workers, their families, and the broader community, intensifying or shifting over time and varying in impact from one individual to another.

The data from the present study align with and extend these scholarly perspectives on the temporal dimensions and continuum of emotional intensities associated with emotional responses to crises, such as job displacement. Through an analysis of workers' narratives, I have identified two key findings related to the circulation of emotions in the context of factory closures. First, the data highlight distinct pathways through which emotions move and transform as they circulate within and among workers, their families, and the wider community. Second, the data identify specific affective objects and bodies that serve as anchors around which emotions circulate and to which they attach. These anchors range from physical factory spaces to abstract notions of financial security. In the following subsections, I present data to illustrate how emotions move between different spheres, from the individual to the broader community, and circulate around different material and conceptual anchors.

Circulation Pathways and Affective Anchors. Factory closures generate distinct affective patterns that move through four main pathways with affects anchoring to specific referents like pensions or workplace relationships as they circulate. As outlined in Table 4, these pathways and anchors serve not merely as conduits for feelings but also as constitutive forces in the production of social reality. Through these circuits and anchors of affect, workers actively and

collectively shape their perceptions, reconfigure social relationships, and catalyze new forms of action and resistance to job displacement.

Table 4

Emotional Circulation and Affective Anchoring During Factory Closures

Circulation Pathway	Primary Affective Anchors	Operational Definition	Example
Intrapersonal	- Financial Security - Purpose and Occupational Status	Expressions of conflicting emotions, internal turmoil; accounts of evolving personal perspectives on factory closure	"It was just a torrent of thinking…" Dominic
Familial	- Financial Security - Family Wellbeing and Lifestyle	Descriptions of family discussions about closure; accounts of changing family dynamics or roles; expressions of concern for family members' well-being; narratives of shared family coping strategies	"I was telling my two brothers and sister 'hey, dad might not be getting his pension. You need to talk to me." Dominic
Workplace	- The Workplace and Company - Coworker and Social Relationships	Accounts of collective emotional responses at work; descriptions of changed interactions with colleagues; expressions of concern for colleagues; narratives of shared coping among workers	"I see these guys more than I see my own family…and now I may never see them again." Roger
Community	- Coworker and Social Relationships - Purpose and Occupational Status	Expressions of concern for community-wide effects; accounts of changed community dynamics or atmosphere	"a lot of the people that work here don't necessarily live in this community. Had this closed 50 years ago, even 20 years ago, it probably would have been a little bit more boisterous."

Intrapersonal Circuits: Future and Financial Security. Workers' narratives of job displacement reveal an internal affective economy in which emotions accumulate and circulate

around specific financial referents. Within this circuit, I argue that workers' emotional responses crystallize around two primary affective anchors: financial (in)security and purpose/occupational status. These anchors become sites of ongoing affective labour, where workers continually negotiate and renegotiate their relationship to an increasingly uncertain economic reality. For instance, immediate anxieties about financial stability collide with and reshape workers' long-term aspirations and self-conceptualizations. Dominic illustrates this intrapersonal affective circulation:

> My father works at Plant B [too] and he was like "well we don't know if our pensions are secured" and that caused all sorts of issues to pop up…And I was like "oh shit, my mother hasn't worked in a number of years, so what are my parents going to do? This might be bad!" My thought was just "my father is 65 but he's probably got another 10 years of work in him if he's lucky but he's at retirement age so what are we going to do?" And a torrent of thinking, "okay, how are we going to work this? My parents' house is paid off but they just got new vehicles," so minor stuff suddenly became anxiety-inducing…it was just two weeks of "ughhhhhh."

In this context, the pension becomes what Ahmed (2014) terms a "sticky" object, accumulating affective weight as the worker repeatedly engages with it as a source of anxiety. The participant's "torrent of thinking" exemplifies how the intrapersonal circulation of emotions intensifies, in this case around financial security, transforming even "minor stuff" into sources of anxiety. Initially, as a symbol of future security, the pension becomes recharged with uncertainty, illustrating how affective objects can shift in emotional valence as circumstances change.

Concurrent with anxieties about financial security, workers grapple with threats to their sense of purpose and occupational status. While workers in more stable positions seemingly experience an initial shock more profoundly, second-tier workers accustomed to precarity still

find their affective experiences circulating issues of occupational status and recognition. As Ellie explained:

> Being the second tier worker, we have not had any job security...every layoff or any discipline has always been a threat of losing your job so how my response is compared to somebody who has been there for 30 years with job security is a little bit different...so I get really frustrated sometimes with people saying, "What are you going to do?" and I say, "The same thing the second tier workers have been doing for the last 10 years, find another job and survive." That's in the context of having been in an extremely insecure situation already…I'm not having the rug pulled out from under me…[but] it's extremely frustrating because they've dangled this carrot of full-time employment, progressing wages, pensions and benefits and that carrot just keeps moving away and now it's gone.

This account from Ellie suggests that precariously employed workers' reactions may not mirror the shock experienced by their longer-term, stably employed colleagues, but their affective experiences continue to circulate occupational status and recognition in a way that is coloured by their prolonged exposure to job insecurity. For second-tier workers, the impending closure does not represent a sudden rupture in their occupational narrative, nor does it create a clear "before" and "after" in terms of job security, but it does intensify the ongoing circulation of effects related to job insecurity. Ellie's metaphor of the "dangled carrot" captures the affective dimension of unfulfilled promises of occupational advancement and security.

The intrapersonal circulation of emotions is not static, but evolves, often beginning with a phase of disbelief that momentarily maintains the boundary between the known world of secure employment and the unknown future of job loss. Returning to Sophia's account shared earlier, her experience demonstrates the initial dismissiveness many workers exhibited when first learning about the factory closing. As she described: "My husband and I were sitting down to have sushi for dinner and there was a television on in the restaurant and my husband says 'Plant B is shutting down production' and I just sort of laughed and said 'yeah, maybe one day.'"

Her flippant laughter represents an attempt to reinforce the boundary between their present reality and impending future.

However, as the reality of job displacement intensifies, the intrapersonal circulation of emotions also intensifies, contributing to the manifestation of stress and anxiety. While he did not initially identify with the idea of experiencing "stress," Roger later admitted that he initially struggled with sleep disturbances. He said:

> The first night I was off, I woke up suddenly at like two o'clock in the morning and I was wide awake…So I went on my phone and…I noticed two other people that I work with were online as well and I messaged them and I was like, "Are you guys awake too?" and they were like, "Yeah, we can't sleep."

His account aligns with research attributing acute stressors, such as job loss or the threat of unemployment, to various sleep struggles (Åkerstedt et al., 2007). The bidirectional relationship between stress and sleep creates a potential cycle of increased distress, further intensifying the circulation of anxiety and uncertainty.

At the extreme end of the spectrum, some workers experience severe psychological distress. Charlotte courageously shared her struggle, stating that she attempted to "commit suicide before the announcement, and then there was one [attempt] after the announcement, too. The one beforehand was simply from the way I was being treated at work." Her narrative echoes research findings on cumulative stress, suggesting that prolonged exposure to workplace stressors can lower individuals' thresholds for coping with additional major stressors, such as job loss (Ganster & Rosen, 2013).

Gender and Intersecting Social Locations in Intrapersonal Affective Anchors. The data reveal gender differences in participants' accounts of affective responses to job displacement within intrapersonal circuits, though these were mediated by other social locations. For

example, while both men and women used various framing techniques, men more consistently engaged in boundary-drawing work that positioned themselves against collective reactions. Whereas when women like Ellie described their experiences, they more often situated personal reactions within broader collective contexts, such as referring to "second-tier workers" and shared experiences of insecurity. Even Charlotte's deeply personal narrative about her suicide attempts connects to structural workplace issues when she explicitly attributes her distress to "the way I was being treated at work."

Employment and economic security significantly mediated these gendered patterns in intrapersonal affective anchoring. For men like Dominic, financial security became the primary "sticky" object around which anxiety circulated. For women in precarious positions like Ellie, the affective anchor more often involved occupational status, with her frustration centring on the "dangled carrot" of full employment. These patterns suggest that gender shapes which intrapersonal anchors become most salient during displacement, with men's narratives gravitating toward immediate financial calculations while women's accounts more often emphasize relational and structural dimensions of job displacement, even in instances of shared economic insecurity.

Familial Circuits: Financial Security and Family Wellbeing. The affective experience of job displacement extends beyond the individual worker, circulating within family networks and reshaping domestic interactions. Within the familial circuit, I argue that emotions crystallize around the primary affective anchors of financial security and family well-being and lifestyle. These anchors become sites of collective emotional labour, where family units negotiate their shared future.

The circulation of affect within families often begins with the initial shock of the closure announcement, which quickly transforms the home into a space of shared anxiety and collective problem-solving. Dominic's worries about his parents' financial security quickly spread to incorporate his siblings, creating a network of familial emotional circulation:

> I was telling my two brothers and sister, "Hey, this is a thing. Dad might not be getting his pension. You need to talk to me." So we had a series of conversations, about three conversations with them that were therapeutic on some level, but also just mostly because we were venting, but also they need to know what's going on with my parents should the worst come to worst.

In this narrative, Dominic's anxiety, initially centred on his father's pension, circulates among family members. As an affective object, the pension accumulates emotional weight not just for Dominic but for the entire family unit. Their repeated conversations serve multiple affective functions: they act as conduits for circulating emotions, provide a therapeutic outlet for venting, and serve the practical purpose of preparing the family for potential financial challenges. Dominic's statement, "they need to know…should the worst come to worst," suggests a collective responsibility within the family unit, where siblings are brought into the orbit of parental financial concerns to process together. This circulation of information and emotion is not just about current anxieties, but also about anticipating and emotionally preparing for potential future scenarios. This forward-looking aspect of emotional circulation aligns with Ahmed's concept of the futurity of emotions, in which present feelings are shaped by anticipated future outcomes.

The familial circulation of affect around financial security often contributes to tangible lifestyle adjustments, as families collectively engage in "anticipatory austerity." For instance, Sophia recalls she and her husband "buckling down on getting some of our debt paid off and

eliminating some extra bills and, yeah, we stopped going for sushi dinners." Here, the circulation of financial anxiety within the family unit manifests in concrete behavioural changes. The cessation of sushi dinners becomes a symbolic act and affective performance of financial prudence in response to looming economic uncertainty.

Gendered divisions of financial labour can shape the circulation of anxiety. Roger admitted that he is "okay with money but frankly [my wife] is much better so I just leave it to her…and barely look at the accounts." As a result, his wife primarily bears the weight of financial anxiety. He continued:

> I'll be like "Why don't we just get that?" Like right now we're dealing with painters and the guy quoted us $1000 to do two rooms, and she was like "are you kidding me" and I'm like "well whatever, I don't really feel like searching around, let's just do it."

His experience is one of "affective offloading," where one family member—in this case, Roger's wife—becomes the primary vessel for containing and managing the family's financial anxieties. The impact of this uneven distribution becomes evident in negotiations around financial decisions. Roger's wife, burdened with the majority of the financial affective labour, adopts a strategy of heightened vigilance and cost-cutting. In contrast, Roger, somewhat insulated from the full weight of financial anxiety, maintains a more relaxed attitude towards spending. Their disparity in emotional engagement with financial matters highlights how the circulation of affect within families is not necessarily uniform but can be channelled and concentrated through particular family members. The person(s) shouldering the bulk of affective labour becomes a nexus for the family's collective anxieties, potentially intensifying their individual emotional circulation and burden.

The familial circulation of affect extends to broader anxieties about family well-being and lifestyle. For instance, Roger worries about his child's future opportunities, wondering, "Is he going to have the same opportunities to go on vacation every year? [To go to] camp every summer?" His concern describes how financial anxieties stemming from job displacement can permeate the parent-child relationship, where the child's future experiences become affective objects, charged with parental anxiety and aspirations for maintaining a certain quality of life. This tension between maintaining a family lifestyle and adapting to new financial realities illustrates how the familial circulation of affect around job displacement can reconfigure not just present circumstances but also future imaginaries.

***Gender and Intersecting Social Locations in Familial Circuits*.** The familial circulation of affect exhibited distinct gendered patterns in household responses to displacement. Traditional divisions of labour often determined who shouldered financial anxiety management. Roger's account of his wife monitoring accounts and researching prices while he remained detached exemplifies how women often absorb family financial stress even when men's employment is disrupted. Family structure further shapes these dynamics. Notably, men articulated intergenerational anxieties: adult sons like Domininc actively worry about their parents' security, while fathers like Roger expressed concerns about maintaining children's opportunities. These patterns suggest that gender intersects with family responsibilities to influence workers' affective experiences. Culturally-sanctioned expressions of masculine care, where concern about providing for family members represents a socially legitimate outlet for men's displacement anxieties, enable men to process emotional responses through the framework of family provision rather than personal vulnerability.

Workplace Circuits: The Company and Co-Worker Relationships. The workplace has also emerged as a critical site for affective circulation, where workers negotiate their shifting relationships with both the physical space of work and the social bonds forged within it. The announcement of factory closure transforms the workplace into an affective site charged with collective anxiety, disbelief, and defiance. Sophia's explanation captures the emotional mood of the work environment. She remembers going "into work, and everyone was just kind of in a daze. I think at that point most people had either seen it on the news or someone had called to tell them…it was really quiet, nobody was talking, we were all just like 'what do we do now?'" The shared quiet about which she speaks, far from signifying an absence of emotion, reflects an intense affective state in which shock, disbelief, and anxiety circulate among workers. In this moment, the shared emotional experience is so intense that it momentarily overwhelms normal workplace interactions. Subsequently, when workers collectively decide to walk out of the factory, the movement of bodies out of the workspace materializes the circulating emotions of defiance and solidarity, creating an affective community united in their opposition to factory closure.

The circulation of affect within the workplace also extends to workers' emotional engagement *with* the company. Charlotte's account of the company's response to worker deaths in the aftermath of the announcement illustrates how corporate in/actions become focal points for emotional responses:

> A lot of employees got screwed. Everybody was panicked. I was talking to somebody, I won't name this person's name, but there was one person who told me that things were so bad that there were a couple of people apparently, and this was not public knowledge, but there were a couple of people who apparently committed suicide [that] they were losing their jobs…There was nothing in the public record. It wasn't public. They didn't want people knowing of course. They [also] didn't want people knowing that the building that we worked

> in, the ceiling had not been repaired. We were driving trucks [indoors] through puddles. Plant B was not up-keeping the building. And Plant C couldn't do anything about it or they did nothing.

Charlotte poignantly links the physical deterioration of the workplace with workers' perceptions of corporate negligence and indifference toward workers' well-being. The unrepaired ceiling and flooded floors are not merely physical hazards, but also affective objects that circulate workers' feelings of betrayal and disposability. The company's silence on worker deaths further intensifies these negative affects, transforming the workplace into a site of not only economic but also emotional precarity.

The transformation of the workplace from a space of relative security to one of impending loss can also intensify workers' emotional attachment to their coworkers. For instance, Roger reflects on how he:

> …sees these guys more than I see my own family…and now I may never see them again. And that's a lot to take in. I don't even know if I've really dealt with it yet…some of the older people that are like 65 that I really enjoy working with, I may never even see them alive again. And that's a scary thought.

Through the lens of impending separation, co-worker relationships become emotionally charged for Roger, where looming job loss infuses otherwise everyday interactions with colleagues with bittersweet poignancy, transforming these relationships into emotionally charged connections that workers begin to mourn even as they continue to experience them.

Gender and Intersecting Social Locations in Workplace Circuits. In contrast to the intrapersonal and familial circuits, where gender more directly shaped workers' affective experiences, the workplace circuit data provides limited evidence for distinct gendered patterns. This is not to suggest that industrial workplaces are not saturated with gendered power imbalances and differential experiences. Rather, within the specific affective anchors

examined in this workplace circuit, the available data shows fewer distinct gender patterns than observed in other circuits. That is to say, both men and women expressed strong emotional connections to workplace relationships and shared similar responses to the announcement, such as shock and disbelief. While age emerges as potentially significant, evidenced in Roger's specific concern for older colleagues whom he "may never even see alive again," the immediate impact of loss appears to temporarily foreground collective experiences over gendered ones.

Community Circuits: Relationships and Status. The impacts of job displacement extend beyond factory walls, circulating through broader community networks and reshaping social relations. Within these community circuits, I argue that emotions crystallize around social relationships, as well as purpose and occupational status. These anchors have become sites where a wider community negotiates industrial change.

The circulation of affect within community spaces often begins with the collective processing of closure announcements, transforming local gathering places into sites of shared anxiety and solidarity. Ben has observed, "if you're out and about somewhere around here, not Starbucks, but if you're in one of the smaller places we go to across the street, if you told them you work at Plant A they'd be, 'oh it's a shame about the plant.'" Thus, these spaces can function as affective commons, where the experience of job displacement is acknowledged and validated through everyday interactions. The sympathetic responses Ben receives in these "smaller places" demonstrate how public spaces facilitate the circulation and amplification of collective emotions. Similarly, Louisa's experience of gathering with coworkers in public spaces after the closure announcement demonstrates how workers actively seek out and create affective commons:

> There's a group that I interact with outside of work…we go out to dinner and we've made a promise to one another as a group of eight that we do this once, if not twice, a month and stay in contact and try to make that effort…Even if we just go for coffee and just sit and talk and reminisce or not reminisce and talk about what we're going through and stuff like that, then we were able to stay in that tight-knit contact.

By gathering together in public, this group of workers participates in a collective affective practice that reinforces social bonds and creates a shared narrative and memories of the closure experience.

However, factory closures have struggled to maintain political attention. Ben described the initial outcry from the local MPP as "…odd. There was initially 'this is terrible blah blah blah' and then *poof sound* Flavour of the day. Flavour of the hour for them." The persistence of empathetic responses in smaller local spaces suggests that these sites may serve as crucial nodes for the ongoing circulation and processing of collective emotions. In contrast, the perceived indifference of political actors may contribute to feelings of abandonment among affected workers and community members. Roger wondered if this dynamic reflects changes in the geographic distribution of the workforce. He observed that "a lot of the people that work here don't necessarily live in this community. Had this closed 50 years ago, even 20 years ago, it probably would have been a little bit more boisterous because a lot of people lived where they worked." His insights suggest that the emotional impacts of the closure are now dispersed across a wider geographic area due to commuting patterns. This may contribute to the dilution of the collective emotional response within any single community, which also potentially explains the muted political reaction at Plant A in particular. The absence of a concentrated, localized workforce means that the affective charge of the closure spreads across multiple communities, making it more challenging to mobilize a response. This spatial reconfiguration

can also complicate efforts to create and maintain affective commons, where shared experiences can be processed collectively.

Concurrent with anxieties about changing social relationships, the community circulation of affect coalesces with issues of purpose and occupational status. The closure of a major employer can destabilize the collective sense of identity and purpose that the industry provided to the community. Ellie remembers when Plant B had:

> …a very strong footprint in Oshawa; [in the past] jobs were lost but…there were opportunities to come back. Right now I feel really angry at the loss to the community. These jobs are gone; individuals are being taken care of through pension buyout but the community is losing these jobs and that income and everything else.

Thus, this closure represents a more profound rupture in the community, unlike previous layoffs at the plant. Ellie's anger at the community's loss suggests that the factory closure impacts the collective identity of the community in ways that transcend individual financial security. Furthermore, the loss of "opportunities to come back" forces a reconfiguration of how the community potentially understands its relationship to industrial work and its economic future. This rupture in the community's industrial narrative could reshape attitudes toward work, education, and career aspirations, particularly among the younger generations.

Gender and Intersecting Social Locations in Community Circuits. The community circuit data suggests subtle gendered patterns in how workers conceptualized broader social impacts of factory closure, though the limited sample necessitates caution in this interpretation. Women's narratives emphasized the intentional maintenance of social bonds (e.g., "we've made a promise to one another as a group"), and Ellie's articulated anger focused on collective community loss beyond individual impacts. Men's accounts more frequently referenced

historical dimensions, comparing political responses across time and analyzing geographic changes in workforce distribution.

More significant than gender alone was the intersection of geographic location. Roger's observation about commuting patterns highlights how the spatial distribution of workers has transformed community responses compared to earlier plant closures, when "people lived where they worked." This geographic dimension shapes which workers have access to local "affective commons" where collective processing occurs.

Emotional Contagion and Its Consequences

The movement of affects between workers, family members, and community members during factory closure shapes how workers experience displacement, thus requiring a theoretical reconceptualization of job loss as inherently relational rather than individual. A key implication of this study is the deeply relational nature of workers' emotional responses to job displacement. Their consistent framing of feelings in relation to others highlights what Ahmed (2014) terms the "sociality of emotion." In this context, emotions do not simply reside within individuals or objects, but circulate between bodies, shaping social relations and collective identities. The circulation of emotions among displaced workers is a key feature of their affective experiences. In her seminal work, *The Body in Pain*, Scarry (1987) argues that psychological, like physical, pain always has a specific referent or object. In this study, a pension plan might become a referent for anxiety about financial security, or a long-term colleague might become a referent for feelings of loss and nostalgia. When a worker expresses concern about a colleague's well-being, they are both circulating emotions, such as empathy, and establishing that colleague as an emotional referent. Thus, as workers navigate an event such

as job displacement, their emotions attach to specific referents—objects, ideas, or others—that become focal points for their feelings.

The concept of emotional “stickiness,” as articulated by Ahmed (2014), proves particularly salient in understanding how certain objects accumulate affective weight over time. These sticky objects become anchors for collective anxiety, nostalgia, or hope, binding workers through shared emotional orientations. Moreover, the malleability of these emotional referents, as seen in shifting anxieties around pension security, aligns with Scarry’s notion that psychological pain can lessen “when imagination of bounty is near.”

Crucially, this study highlights how emotions function as “boundary-makers” (Ahmed, 2014), delineating the “inside” (i.e., what we perceive as familiar or belonging to us) from the “outside” (what we identify as foreign or separate from us). At the intrapersonal level, workers grapple with shifting boundaries between their past sense of occupational or work/er identity and an uncertain future. Or in the workplace itself, the shared experience of impending job displacement can create a collective emotional state distinct from those in the “outside world.” The moment of the walkout at Plant B also solidified the boundary between workers and management as well as between the old reality and the new present.

Thus, emotions create and reshape the social landscape. They define who "we" are in relation to the closure, what the factory space means now versus what it meant before, and how workers relate to each other in this new reality. This emotional reconfiguration evolves as workers move through different stages of the closure process. For instance, the initial shock and disbelief might nurture a sense of unity among workers, while later emotions such as resignation could lead to new divisions.

Theorizing Support Through Affective Circulation

Current institutional responses to factory closures reduce collective experiences to individual problems requiring individual solutions. Understanding how affects circulate and attach during factory closures exposes the limitations of traditional outplacement services, which operate through single channels rather than multiple pathways. Outplacement services operate from a model that frames job displacement primarily as a technical challenge of skills transfer and job search by primarily providing resumé writing assistance, interview preparation, and career counselling to individual workers. This individualistic framework misunderstands how displacement operates as a social process, with affects moving through collective circuits rather than remaining contained within individual workers.

The affective circuits mapped in this study demonstrate how affects travel between bodies, spaces, and institutions rather than remaining personal psychological states. When anxiety about financial security moves from individual workers through family networks and into community spaces, it transforms from an individual emotional response into what Ahmed (2014) terms "affective economies"—collective emotional states that accumulate force as they circulate. Traditional support services, focused on individual skill development, cannot address these collective emotional dynamics. The findings about how affects move and attach to specific referents suggest the need to reconceptualize displacement itself, not as a collection of individual job losses but as a rupture in collective affective infrastructure.

In this section, I document workers' accounts of the supports that were made available during factory closure, as well as their discussed limitations, to theorize how workers' needs

relate to their primary affective anchors and impact their engagement with various forms of assistance.

Workers' Experiences with Displacement Supports. Workers' narratives and experiences with displacement support services are marked by confusion, inconsistencies, and varying degrees of engagement. Across all three sites, workers acknowledged that outplacement supports were provided onsite to help workers update their resumés. A few of the workers I met accessed the provided resumé writing assistance, with generally positive outcomes. Christopher shared that he "talked at some length with one of the people from that [outplacement supports] group, which really helped when it came to writing my resumé and preparing for interviews…they could mould my resumé around the kind of job I wanted to do." Like Christopher's experience, the workers who engaged in these services largely found the services beneficial in translating their skills and experiences into new job opportunities.

At Plant B, these outplacement services were delivered through a dedicated Action Centre established through a partnership between the provincial government, Plant B of Canada, and Generic Private Sector Union. The province's Rapid Re-employment Training Service program specifically invested over $500,000 in the Centre to support the over 2,700 workers being displaced at Plant B. Workers at feeder/supplier companies were later provided with outplacement support people at a separate Independent Supplier Action Centre. The Action Centre at Plant B largely adopted a peer-led support model[30]. In labour contexts, peer

[30] The peer support model is premised on the therapeutic value of shared lived experience in helping relationships. Drawing from mutual aid theory, peer support challenges traditional hierarchical helping relationships by recognizing experiential knowledge as a valid form of expertise. Mead et al. (2001) define peer support as a system of giving and receiving help founded on key principles of respect, shared responsibility, and mutual agreement of what is helpful.

support programs emerge from union traditions of solidarity and collective care. The effectiveness of this model stems from what Katz and Bender (1976) identified as the dual benefits of peer support: practical assistance grounded in shared experience and the empowering effects of moving from "help-receiver" to "help-giver."

However, beyond resumé writing assistance, workers' awareness and understanding of available support were notably inconsistent and often unclear. Dominic remembered:

> talk of Plant B teaming up with one of the local colleges here to offer retraining of some sort and job skills. I don't know whatever came of that because they talked about it, said there was going to be some sort of web portal, and then I never heard about it again.

Relatedly, at Plant A, Roger was told "that companies were actually going to come in and talk to us. Like they were going to open a job fair. They told us that was going to happen, and it didn't. That would have been nice." The initial announcements of potential retraining programs and job fairs created a sense of hope and possibility for workers facing displacement. These promised supports became objects of attachment, representing potential pathways for future stability and employment. However, the subsequent lack of follow-through, or clear communication about the services they were provided, transformed these hopeful attachments into frustration and disappointment. Such discrepancies in communication and delivery of support can be interpreted as contributing to an atmosphere of mistrust and uncertainty.

Inconsistencies in workers' awareness of available support were particularly pronounced when considering the experiences of night shift workers. These workers remain largely disconnected or are altogether excluded from the support services and information provided during regular business hours. For instance, when I asked Roger whether the company brought counsellors onsite, he admitted that "maybe they did for the day [shift]; unfortunately,

if you're on nights sometimes we were, I guess you could say, overlooked. So I don't know for sure if they did or did not bring in some sort of counselling." The exclusion of night shift workers from support services and information creates a double burden: not only must they continue their regular labour under the stress of impending job displacement, but they also must expend additional, unrecognized labour to identify and access the very supports designed to aid in their transition. This differential access to support can unintentionally reinforce existing labour hierarchies. While shift alignment does not perfectly correlate with employment status, as temporary workers can be distributed across both day and night shifts, the intersection of shift timing with job security often compounds disadvantages. Workers who are assigned less desirable shifts typically have less seniority and job security. Day shift positions, generally preferred and often secured through seniority, provide better access to resources that help workers prepare for future employment. In contrast, night shift workers, who are often already marginalized within workplace structures, experience overlapping barriers in accessing these critical supports.

However, workers' challenges in accessing support extended beyond mere awareness. Even when services were offered and workers were aware of them, they faced barriers to access. Workers were reluctant to access support, particularly related to mental health, within the workplace environment. Their hesitation likely stemmed from concerns about stigma or perceived weakness among their colleagues. Additionally, despite being available onsite, these services require workers to engage outside of their regular work hours, creating an additional burden on already stressed workers. For instance, Dominic admitted that he should probably have accessed the available mental health services sooner, stating:

> I kept meaning to get around to it but some days when you are getting out of the plant you just want to go home…it seemed like a while there I was just sort of slogging through shifts and I was like 'do I really want to go wait a half hour to possibly see a therapist and then pretty much be on the plant site for another hour?' And I was like 'no, I just really want to go home.'

Dominic's experience of "slogging through shifts" suggests that the everyday act of working through factory closure becomes imbued with heaviness, a visceral embodiment of the affective toll of the closure process. His narrative demonstrates how support services, by remaining tethered to the workplace, fail to recognize how the factory itself becomes charged with negative affect during closure. In this context, on-site mental health or other services paradoxically become entangled in this web of negative affect. Rather than offering relief, they become another object associated with the very space and conditions that cause distress. Moreover, the desire to "just go home" can be read as an attempt to escape the intensified affective atmosphere of the closing plant. In this narrative, home becomes a contrasting affective space, potentially offering respite from the demands required both in continuing to be present at work and engaging with support services.

"I Think Mental Health is one of the key Pieces That is Entirely Missing From Here and From the Much Larger Conversation:" Gaps in Displacement Supports. Workers identified a significant gap in workplaces that addressed the mental health impacts of job displacement. Beyond the provision of mental health services (the availability and extent of which remain unclear), there appears to be a pervasive reluctance among management to acknowledge or openly discuss the mental health challenges that often accompany job displacement. For instance, when asked if he ever heard management talk about mental health in relation to the closure, Ben responded: "No. No absolutely not. Nope but they did say that there would be

counselling available." Management's reticence may stem from a fear of culpability or broader institutional discomfort in addressing the emotional toll of corporate decisions. As a result, workers were left largely unsupported in navigating the emotional aspects of their job displacement, with many not only unaware of available resources but also hesitant to engage with them due to the prevailing silence on mental health issues.

As a member of senior management, Travis offered some critical insight as well as reflection related to the timing and/or absence of key necessary support. On the one hand, he recognized the challenge for the company to preemptively arrange for support to be made available during the announcement. He said, "once the decision comes out, it becomes the scorched earth kind of thing and then you have to try to rebuild things quickly around what's left." However, he also expressed concern about the company's seeming lack of consideration, stating:

> It doesn't matter whether it's here in a manufacturing facility or whether you're talking about the cuts that a government does, they just kind of make those decisions. The ramifications to all of the groups and the people aren't really taken into consideration. There's no support for that. It's just, 'okay this is the decision, now you guys go deal with it.'…We have 10,000 people that actually supply parts in this province that are directly associated with this; it impacts not just us but every single one of those organizations as well, and you did it all like it was a second.

Travis's linguistic choice of "you" and "they" acts to subtly distance himself from decision-making processes, despite his senior role. However, his use of these pronouns also provides insight into responsibility and agency during factory closures. His use of "they" when referring to those who "just kind of make those decisions" constructs the corporation as an abstract entity, obscuring specific decision-makers. In contrast, his shift to "you" when describing the quick act of the announcement, assigns more direct agency to specific corporate actors. This

"you" doesn't include Travis himself, but rather addresses the corporate decision-makers more directly, emphasizing the impact of their actions.

Given the perceived shortcomings of formal outplacement support, some workers developed additional peer support systems to address gaps in available services. For instance, Henry brought forward his past experience of:

> …training people to be union counsellors, peer-to-peer counsellors… I do that in the workplace by going to different work sites on the breaks and lunchtimes…and I get people having conversations and then they communicate and ask me questions and then I'll follow up. So I'm building senses of how they support one another and what community supports are already existing and how they can find them.

Henry describes an organic, worker-led process that builds on existing relationships and knowledge.

However, workers' attempts to leverage their skills and experiences in the form of informal peer support were met with institutional resistance. This resistance reveals how formal support structures can misunderstand the collective nature of emotional processing during displacement, where workers naturally create affective circuits for managing shared trauma. Henry recounted a pattern of repeated rejection from union leadership:

> So I write to the local union and said, 'I can provide all of my skills to deliver these programs [on financial literacy].' Nothing. They will not do it…their response was basically 'not now.'… I contact them again the next month, 'No not interested.' Okay so this is a series of not preparing the community. Bizarre. But in reality it was two people who were the front of the campaign, have no experience in anything. And they alienated so many people from participation…they have always run from the top down directing people what to do and so people were reluctantly asking to participate because they are always told what to do not how can you help.

Thus, even when workers possess relevant experience and skills that could contribute to supporting their colleagues, institutional hierarchies can impede the development of organic peer-support networks. Henry's description of leadership as having "alienated so many people

from participation" suggests that union power structures may inhibit the circulation of support and resources among workers.

Rethinking Support Through Affective Circulation

Understanding factory closure through affective circulation reveals how emotional labour operates as central rather than peripheral to the displacement process. Workers jointly maintain affective circuits that enable the processing of shared trauma, develop informal support networks that recognize emotional needs, and construct collective narratives that make meaning from crisis. This collective emotional work suggests the need to recognize emotional labour as central to displacement.

Scarry's (1987) work on emotional referents provides a framework for understanding how these circuits operate. Just as Scarry shows how pain and distress attach to specific referents, this study finds that institutional responses to displacement themselves become charged with affect. Support services accumulate emotional associations through their connection to particular spaces, relationships, and power dynamics. When institutional hierarchies block peer support initiatives, for instance, the very mechanisms intended to provide relief become referents for workers' powerlessness.

This theoretical reframing explains why current support models fail. Services operating through single channels cannot address how emotions move between and accumulate across networks. By ignoring how support services themselves become charged with affect, institutions risk reproducing rather than alleviating workers' emotional distress. Effective support requires engaging with multiple circuits concurrently while remaining attentive to how effects move between and accumulate across these circuits. This has implications not just for

what services are offered but for who delivers them, where they are provided, when they begin and end, and how they interface with existing social networks and power structures.

Identity and Subjectivity (Re)Constitution: Integrating Displacement

While factory closures reshape workers' relationship to work, workers are reconstituted within intensified occupational subject positions rather than abandoning established relationships to work. Expanding on the discussion in Chapter Two, of work as a cornerstone of identity for many people, the workplace is a site where workers can perform various aspects of the self (Ibarra, 1999; Strangleman, 2012). This deep connection between work and identity is especially evident in industrial contexts, where occupational cultures and practices often shape workers' self-concepts over the years or even generations (High, 2021; Strangleman, 2012). Yet, as Sennett (1998) argued, "flexible capitalism" makes the maintenance of stable occupational identities increasingly difficult. Life-altering events, such as the announcement of a factory closure, have the potential to disrupt workers' sense of self and place in society. When workers learn that their workplace will be changing as a result of mass layoffs or company closures, they must incorporate job displacement and changing life circumstances into their understanding of themselves and others.

Building on the discussion of socioeconomic factors explored in Chapter Two, subject formation occurs within broader socioeconomic contexts that constitute the available positions workers can occupy. The shift toward more precarious, fluid, and uncertain work arrangements impacts how workers reconstruct their sense of self in relation to their work. Through extensive interviews with workers across various industries, Sennett (1998) found that the short-term, project-based nature of modern work, coupled with frequent job changes and the constant

need to adapt to new technologies and organizational structures, makes it difficult for workers to form coherent, long-term narratives about their working lives based on sustained purpose or achievements in their careers. This "corrosion of character" is not merely a personal challenge but a structural condition embedded in the contemporary labour market. Workers now navigate an employment market where loyalty and long-term commitment are often not rewarded, and where the skills and expertise that define their occupational identities may become obsolete. Such structural instability necessitates workers to develop more flexible self-concepts or risk-sustained disconnections between occupational identity and the realities of work.

In the following subsection, I discuss two central aspects of participants' identity (re)construction following the announcement of factory closure, drawing on insights from Goffman's performative approach, Bourdieu's concept of habitus, and Giddens' theory of reflexive self-narratives: namely, gender and work identities. Specifically, I consider the influence of workers' relationship to hegemonic masculinity and an "ideal" worker ethic, for shaping how they see themselves as providers for their families and workers following job displacement. The findings and analyses reveal how factory closures can challenge workers' understanding of and commitment to dominant social and cultural values, such as the Protestant or Industrial work ethic, and, therein, confront workers to reconsider and reconstruct their understanding of their place within their families and workplaces.

"I'm Trying to be That Strong, Silent Type": Gender Performance and Displacement

The disappearance of the factory as a primary stage for masculine performance intensifies rather than weakens workers' adherence to traditional gender roles, as they struggle to

maintain familiar identities during job displacement. As "good" blue-collar jobs disappear as part of deindustrialization, workers grapple with a dual crisis of employment and selfhood. Industrial workplaces have long served as "stages" for gender performance, providing workers with familiar scripts and roles.

In the following subsection, I examine how displaced workers perform their gendered identities during factory closures. Their narratives highlight how displaced workers negotiate, reinforce, and potentially transform their gender performativity in the liminal space between the announcement and the final day of factory closure.

Gendered Stages: The Persistence of Gender Performance During Job Displacement

Maintaining Masculinity in Workplace Spaces. Male workers respond to the crisis of job displacement by amplifying performances of stoicism and emotional control. Consistent with findings from research by Lamont (2000) and Sherman (2009), who found that men often work to preserve their masculine identity during job loss rather than redefine it, the data in this study demonstrate the persistence of traditional gendered norms and performances during job displacement. Evidence of this persistence can be found in workers' stoic reactions to closure announcements. For instance, Samuel admitted that:

> For the most part people were putting on a brave face. 'I'll survive this. This is no problem. I'll get a job anywhere' sort of thing. [But] you could hear it in their voice, the way their voice wavered. I think a lot of guys do that just in general, you know, put on a brave face. Maybe I did that a little bit too.

Samuel's observation of a collective "brave face" highlights how (predominantly male) workers strive to maintain a façade of resilience and control, even as their voices betray underlying anxiety. This performance requires considerable effort, yet simultaneously offers the comfort of meeting established expectations. Samuel normalizes this performance, including his own

participation in the behaviour, as an expected part of masculine identity and something "a lot of guys do." Likewise, Christopher concedes: "we're guys; we're hopeless. There is lots of chat messages but very little talking." His admission of feeling "malaise" that manifests as wanting "to be closed and away. Out of touch with people" demonstrates the contradictory nature of this dynamic; male workers expend effort to maintain emotional distance, yet the alternative of vulnerability appears more threatening or exhausting. This performative aspect of masculinity aligns with Nixon's (2009) findings that job loss can prompt workers to compensate for feelings of emasculation through exaggerated displays of stoicism.

The persistence of hegemonic masculine norms is further exemplified by how workers manage stress and health issues stemming from job displacement. When asked how he dealt with stress, Roger responded:

> I don't. I don't at all. I'm sure sometimes people who know me will look at me and know that something is going on [in my mind] and they just know to not bother [me] I guess…I don't lose my cool or anything like that. I guess it's a good trait but probably not a good one eventually.

Roger's response is particularly revealing of his internalization of masculine norms. His insistence on not outwardly expressing stress ("I don't lose my cool") aligns with the hegemonic masculine ideal of emotional control (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). While his acknowledgment that this tendency might not be "good…eventually" has hints of reflexivity, it does not translate into any actual change in behaviour. Relatedly, while Roger demonstrated vulnerability in sharing with me that once he arrived home after the announcement "I got emotional or upset or whatever but it was by myself, and I'm sure other people did too. Because I'm not an emotional guy by any means," the privacy of his emotional reaction reinforces the masculine norm of hiding emotions from others. Instead, his self-reflection

serves to highlight how workers continue to adhere to traditional gender norms, even when they recognize the potential negative consequences of doing so.

In addition to emotional stoicism and suppression, men primarily managed closure-related stress through substance use. Ben reported widespread "self-medication" at Plant B, estimating "between 50-55% of people there are self-medicating somehow. Or higher," with evidence of "drinking on the job" and "cannabis use on the job." Following the closure announcement, "a lot of people went out drinking," initiating a pattern that intensified over time. Ben admitted that after the announcement, "I started smoking and using cannabis more frequently," while noticing that his carpool companions now "want to go to the bar every night after work." In contrast, some men intentionally reduced consumption as a health-focused coping strategy. Christopher explained that he "markedly cut down. I went where I would maybe have 5-10 beers a week, I went to maybe 3-4 beers a month."

During the factory closure, spaces of collective resistance became explicitly masculine-coded arenas where combative expressions of anger and defiance were normalized, expected, and celebrated. As I argued in Chapter 4, union spaces often privilege certain expressions of resistance. Union meetings often become sites where traditionally masculine expressions of anger and aggression are not only allowed but regarded by the collective majority as the legitimate response to closure threats. As a reminder, Ben described these spaces as dominated by "a lot of people howling…it was kind of an unpleasant atmosphere." He went on to describe the post-announcement factory atmosphere as filled with "a lot of anger. A huge amount of anger…cursing…pretty serious threats," highlighting how masculine aggression became the normalized emotional response.

While protest and union spaces are predominantly coded as masculine environments, age intersects with gender to further shape how workers can participate in and influence collective resistance. Sophia commented that “it’s all the old school guys who’ve got 35 years [who] are all union reps and they’re out of touch.” Her statement suggests that masculine dominance might be preserved through patterns of leadership dominated by men with decades of seniority. This intersection of age and gender creates additional barriers for young women workers. Sophia’s desire to “be part of that crowd that [can] make a difference” suggests how gendered exclusion can operate alongside age-based status hierarchies, with older male perspectives often determining which issues and strategies deserve attention.

Maintaining Women-Coded Practices During Factory Closure. The data also show women maintaining certain female-coded practices throughout factory closures, particularly in forming support networks, establishing communication channels, and providing emotional labour. Women workers, more commonly than their men counterparts, established formal and informal support structures during factory closure. Regarding informal channels, Louisa was part of a group of women who agreed to meet “once if not twice a month, a group of eight of us, to go out and have dinner.” She explicitly frames these gatherings as emotional support systems: “if one of them is having a bad day, they’re able to message me or even call me…we will talk or drive, no matter how far it is to them,” noting that these connections function “almost like an extended family" and provide “a huge support” that “makes a huge difference in the day to day grind of looking for a job.” Women were also at the forefront of developing digital communication channels for displaced workers to share information and resources.

Sophia said that she “and one other girl are the admins on that [Facebook] group so we’ve kept that group open so we can chat.”

Some of these caring and supportive practices extended into formal volunteer roles, such as Louisa working for the action center established by the company and the union. While the purpose of the center was primarily to “help with [with] resumes and stuff, it’s turned out to be a support group.” Louisa deliberately incorporated emotional support by “strongly encouraging people to get out of their apartment or get out of their house…and even just sit and have a coffee [at the center].” She intentionally creates space for emotional processing, inviting workers to “sit and talk about your stress or whether you want to talk about how you’re feeling even now that the doors are definitely shut,” with the latter point acknowledging that disbelief circling the closure lasted a long time for many workers until the closure could no longer be denied. The extension of workplace sociality into new contexts helped to maintain women’s traditional caregiving roles.

Women also described different coping strategies from men. When describing stress management practices, Charlotte shared that she would “usually drive over to the lake…And just sit there and relax and take it in,” in addition to acknowledging that she sought out various health supports, including a therapist for her mental health. Louisa described her coping strategies as a combination of "stress eating” but also “volunteering at an animal shelter…and my other outlet is the gym.” Their practices exemplify feminine-coded coping strategies that emphasize emotional reflection, seeking and providing support, and engaging in nurturing activities that balance self-care with care for others. In contrast, as noted above, men tended to actively avoid help-seeking or “health-minded” practices.

Taken together, the data indicate that gender performances commonly intensify rather than dissolve during job displacement. Men maintain a masculine identity through stoic public performances that mask private emotional worlds, most commonly saving expressions of vulnerability for private moments in isolation. Coupled with social substance use, their coping strategies reflect socially sanctioned male behaviours that allow stress management without breaching norms of stoic self-reliance. Meanwhile, union spaces become arenas for masculine expressions of anger and aggression, with leadership dominated by older men who determine legitimate forms of resistance. In contrast, women maintain feminine performances through creating extensive support networks focused on communication that transform practical assistance into opportunities for emotional care.

Familial Reinforcement of Gender Expectations. Gender performance during job displacement is not confined to workers themselves. A broader cast of characters, including family members, reinforces gendered expectations of displaced workers. For example, Christopher's mother-in-law's reaction to factory closure could be perceived as pressuring him to conform to gendered norms in the family:

> My mother-in-law was beside herself that I was going to stay [in country of origin]. Like, 'no I'm not staying; I got a ticket home, why would I stay?' But the other reason I think she worries [is that]…she has this patriarchal thing where the husband earns the money and it's really important that you have a good job [as a man].

His mother-in-law's anxiety reflects her internalization of traditional gender norms in which masculine identity is tied to employment and financial provision. Her concern could constrain the possibility of a transformation of gender roles in Christopher's home by limiting the perceived options available to him during the displacement process.

The pressure for displaced workers to maintain traditional masculine roles as providers is further exemplified in Samuel's account of financial decision-making during unemployment. He admits that "when I'm not earning money it's hard to me to make financial decisions…We discuss how we're using our money for the betterment of the family but not necessarily what am I spending my money on or that sort of thing." While he does note his continued involvement in financial decisions regarding their daughter's education, Samuel's narrative otherwise speaks to the deeply ingrained gendered nature of the role of the financial provider and decision-making power. In this case, he feels that he should cede some financial decisions when he is not actively contributing income to the household.

In some cases, the pressure that family members place on workers to conform to gendered expectations can have significant consequences for their relationships. For instance, Calvin remembers one of his male colleagues, "in tears, telling me about how his wife was going to leave him…He's gotta make this money and he doesn't know how. None of those things were spoken about." The threat of relationship dissolution based on financial provision highlights how deeply entrenched gendered norms can be in some partnerships, creating pressure on workers to maintain their provider role, even when confronted with economic changes beyond their control. Collectively, these narratives demonstrate how workers' gender performance extends into and intersects with family patterns, potentially hindering adaptations to changing economic circumstances.

Gender Norm Suspension on a Grieving Factory Floor

While the predominant pattern in the data shows adherence to traditional gender norms during factory closure, the closure process also reveals places for permeability in gender

performance. This subsection considers instances where traditional gender boundaries become at least temporarily permeable in the period between the closure announcement and final shutdown. These moments of permeability do not necessarily constitute wholesale transformations in gender identity resulting from job loss. Instead, they indicate that variations in gender performance (that might be pre-existing) become pronounced during factory closures. As a disruptive event, the factory closure makes visible the conditional nature of gender performance that, perhaps, otherwise remains partially obscured by routine industrial practices.

The data indicate moments where male workers suspend expected emotional stoicism. The case mentioned above, where Calvin recalled one male colleague "in tears," is a particularly striking moment of gender permeability during factory closure. The tears themselves represent a momentary suspension of gender norms within the traditionally masculinized factory environment. This emotional expression emerges at the intersection of threatened male breadwinner/provider identity and instability, precisely where masculine performance is most at stake. The factory closure created conditions where this emotional expression became possible in ways that might otherwise be sanctioned under "normal" workplace operations. Yet, as Hochschild's (2012) research notes, such breaches in masculine stoicism are typically followed by compensatory behaviours that repair or rebalance gender identity. I do not know what behaviours followed for the worker in tears. But Hochschild's findings help to explain why these moments remain exceptional rather than transformative of overall gender patterns.

The data also indicate that some male workers defied expectations of masculine righteous anger when they resisted militant labour action. As a reminder from descriptions in

Chapter 4, where I wrote about worker resistance, Ben admitted to deliberately avoiding participation in the walkout following the closure announcement: "I shuffled around and made myself scarce while the union people departed." He also elaborated that he was "not buying into the rhetoric of the union or not buying into the hype." Dominic also resisted the urge to join the collective action of calling in sick en masse: "the supervisor comes back asking people if they can work, and I, I hate to be a coward but I told them 'yeah I can work,' and I kind of needed the money." Similar to my discussion above, about the entanglement of gender and age, here, gender and class collide. His use of "coward," a distinctly masculine-coded term of derision, demonstrates his internalization of gendered workplace expectations even as he chose to defy them. His defiance emerged at the intersection of gender and class, as he explains how workers with greater financial security were the ones primarily advocating for militant action: "the guys who could afford to go on strike were saying 'why don't we go on strike'...and obviously that then immediately divided the…working people in the plant." His choice suggests that class position can structure the possibilities for gender performance during the closure process, with economically vulnerable workers experiencing more constrained options for enacting traditional masculine resistance.

The data also demonstrate instances of women defying female-coded expectations of passivity and accommodation during factory closures. Given that women working on the factory floor in male-dominated manufacturing settings are already transgressing traditional gender boundaries simply through their occupational choice, instances of assertive performance during closure processes are likely extensions of pre-existing gender permeability rather than novel responses to job displacement. For example, Ellie's leadership in organizing

Grassroots Group A, when conventional union responses proved inadequate, extended into traditionally male-dominated political organizing spaces. In addition, Ellie directly challenged male union leadership at various times, including when she "sent a letter to the plant chair to say, ' Why are you saying this when the contract says that?'" These instances of leadership and confronting authority demonstrate how factory closures can create openings for women's existing (even if previously constrained) assertiveness and leadership capacities to come to the fore.

Additionally, as mentioned in Chapter 4, Charlotte refused unsafe work assignments despite explicit threats of insubordination, repeatedly filing formal complaints against her male managers through health and safety channels when conditions were dangerous. She also formally complained about harassment, where, despite needing time off work for mental health issues following the harassment, Charlotte stated that the institutional procedural findings were that "no harassment" had taken place. Nonetheless, Charlotte's formal resistance exemplifies how gender defiance intersects with institutional power. By lodging formal complaints, she directly challenged gendered expectations of acquiescence and deference to male authority. Her persistence in pursuing institutional remedies, despite the organization's eventual dismissal of her harassment claims, demonstrates both the structural limitations women can confront when challenging workplace power hierarchies and the personal agency exercised within these constraints.

Taken together, patterns of gender defiance or permeability during factory closure showcase how power and gender operate differently across male and female workers. Men's defiance manifests primarily through individual acts that sidestep rather than challenge

institutional authority, such as expressing emotions privately or quietly opting out of collective action, while at times apologizing for these deviations. This approach maintains existing power structures even as men temporarily suspend certain masculine expectations. Meanwhile, women's defiance often directly confronts power through organized resistance, formal complaints, and explicit challenges to leadership. Their actions represent attempts to transform workplace conditions and hierarchies.

"We Worked. We Did Our Job. We Came in Every Day. We Did What We Had to Do. We Weren't Going to be, I Guess You Could Say, Babies About It": The Displaced Go-Getter

Workers maintain and even intensify their attachment to idealized notions of productivity and professionalism during factory closures, performing their identities as "good workers" even as their relationship to the workplace dissolves. This theme considers the tension between workers' internalized notions of the "ideal worker" and "work ethic" and the lived realities of job displacement.

As established in Chapter 1, the work ethic functions fundamentally as a form of governance that shapes workers' subjectivities. While its manifestations have evolved from Weber's Protestant foundations through industrial and post-industrial iterations, its core function persists: maintaining workers' devotion to waged labour and elevating employment to the center of personal identity. Particularly significant for the following analysis is how this ethic establishes individual worth as primarily determined by labour market participation and productivity. The following data demonstrates how workers continue to measure themselves against these internalized standards, despite the structural collapse of their employment context.

Echoes of the Ideal Worker in Displaced Workers' Narratives. Despite facing imminent job loss, many participants' narratives contain evidence of persistent commitment to notions of the ideal worker and work ethic, reinforced through their performative actions and critical evaluation of others' adherence to professional standards. These findings can be broadly categorized into two main themes, each with several sub-themes, as illustrated in Table 5. Accordingly, I argue that workers are reconstituted as intensified occupational subjects during displacement. The threat to their economic position compels workers to constitute themselves more rigidly within idealized subject positions of productivity, quality, and professionalism.

Table 5

Manifestations of Work Ethic in Displaced Workers' Narratives

Category	Theme	Definition	Example Quote
Demonstrating Work Ethic Through Personal Thoughts and Actions	Pride and productivity in work	• Workers' commitment to maintaining high work standards and seeking recognition for their efforts	"We did our work. Our last year was one of our best years, believe it or not, it was efficiency-wise, right the first time-wise, all those sorts of things that we look for through the last X amount of years, we got our best result in the year that we were closing." ~ Roger
	Proactive skill development and resilience	• Workers' efforts to continue learning and adapting, even in the face of job loss	"People would be like 'why would you even bother trying?' It's not about the company anymore, it's about me." ~ Samuel
	Concern about loss of work identity and structure	• Workers' worries about losing the structure and purpose provided by work	"Without any focus, without anything to do with myself I kind of, I guess you could say, I lose a little bit of control. That's my only concern. [Work] is something that regulates my life." ~ Samuel
Demonstrating Commitment Through	Tension between individual work	• Workers' criticism of union or management	"The work ethic, and this is a theme that will keep coming up, the union work ethic was anti-, was opposite

Category	Theme	Definition	Example Quote
Critique of Others	ethic and institutional practices	practices that they see as conflicting with a strong work ethic	to how I had been working all my life which was self-employed and self-motivated and if I didn't work hard I didn't make money." ~ Ben
	Criticism of perceived poor work ethic in others	• Workers' negative judgments of colleagues they view as having a poor work ethic	"Some of [those with] seniority still maintain this mentality and attitude of you know 'we're trying to put out a good product here' but most people say 'not my job…' If there's something slightly askew that they could easily fix in order to do their job properly, they don't do it." ~ Ben

Pride and Productivity as Identity Anchors. Workers maintain deep attachment to notions of quality and productivity even as their employment becomes precarious. This persistence of occupational performance suggests that constituting oneself as a "good worker" serves as an affective anchor - a familiar subject position that provides stability during economic uncertainty (Gregg & Seigworth, 2010). Clear evidence of work identity as an affective anchor was present in Roger's narrative when he stated:

> We did our work, you know. Our last year was one of our best years, believe it or not, it was efficiency-wise, right the first time-wise, all those sorts of things that we look[ed] for through the last X amount of years. We got our best result in the year that we were closing. So I don't know if it was more 'well it is what it is' or just more *exaggerated sigh* and let's just do it... they wanted to finish with pride. We wanted to make sure that it wasn't, [that] we didn't finish on a sour note like people *pretends to pull out hair and put it in product* putting hair, you know what I mean, sabotaging, but there was nothing like that. Nothing…We want them to look back in 5 years and say 'we made an absolutely horrendous mistake by closing the Toronto plant.'

Roger's account indicates that workers might maintain high standards as a form of resistance to displacement. His narrative moves from describing performance metrics to explicitly rejecting sabotage, before culminating in the hope that this excellence will prove the

closure decision wrong. This progression emphasizes how worker identity remains tied to quality even when, perhaps especially, the institutional relationship deteriorates. The collective "we" in his account suggests that this commitment to quality functions as both individual work/er pride and collective proof of worker value. His explicit contrast between maintaining standards and potential sabotage emphasizes how attachment to ideal worker identity intensifies precisely when workers have the most reason to disengage. Thus, quality becomes not just a measure of work/er pride but a form of evidence that workers hope will haunt management's decision-making, suggesting that attachment to ideal worker identity can strengthen as a way to contest the logic of closure.

Proactive Development as Identity Maintenance. Some workers use skill acquisition as a way to maintain and evolve their worker identity. Samuel explained:

> I wanted to be able to learn as much as I could in the brief time I had left so I could use that as something that I'd have that experience to use... people would be like 'why would you even bother trying?' And it's not about the company anymore, it's about me... the lifers as I call them, who have been there a long time, they felt that they had already gone through the system, they're at the pinnacle and as far as they can reach, and so 'why would you even bother trying now that the place is closing, what have you got to look forward to now?' I would continue with those smaller details, you know, I would continue with all of the things that impress my bosses and someone would tap me on the shoulder and say, 'Hey, didn't you get the memo? Why are you doing that?'

Samuel's story illustrates how occupational identity can decouple from institutional attachment while maintaining its force as an organizing principle for behaviour and self-concept. His reframing of skill development from organizational benefit to personal investment—"it's not about the company anymore, it's about me"—demonstrates a conscious separation of occupational growth from institutional context. This separation suggests that workers can maintain and even intensify their attachment to idealized notions of continuous

improvement while simultaneously acknowledging the end of their organizational relationship. The skepticism Samuel encounters from "lifers" further highlights this distinction between institutional and occupational identity. Their question "why would you even bother trying?" suggests they view work/er development as meaningless without organizational context, whereas Samuel's persistence indicates a more portable conception of worker identity. His resistance to collectively enforced disengagement shows how individual attachment to professional ideals can strengthen precisely when organizational attachment weakens. That is, some workers will respond to job displacement by focusing on the transferable aspects of their work/er identity, using skill development as a bridge between current and future work selves.

Work Identity as Life Structure. Yet, the potential loss of work-based identity can create anxiety about life stability. Despite his ability to separate occupational identity and development from organizational attachment, Samuel nonetheless articulated concern about losing work's structuring benefits. He admitted that "without any focus, without anything to do with myself I kind of, I guess you could say, I lose a little bit of control. That's my only concern. It's something that regulates my life." His self-reflection demonstrates how work identity provides temporal and psychological structure. His language of "control" and "regulation" suggests that work serves as more than employment—it acts as a stabilizing force that orders experience and contains potentially chaotic elements of the self. When he describes how he "loses control" without focus, he is acknowledging not a hypothetical fear but a known experience of self-dissolution when structure weakens. Through this lens, constitution as a working subject appears driven by work's role in providing coherent subject positions that organize experience across time. Thus, the prospect of job displacement presents the challenge

of maintaining occupational identity while losing the organizational contexts that help regulate its expression in daily life.

Institutional Tensions and Identity Navigation. At times, workers' attachment to the ideal worker identity can come into conflict with institutional practices, particularly union norms. Not an uncommon criticism of unionized environments, Ben described the work ethic of his union as:

> …opposite to how I had been working all my life which was self-employed and self-motivated [where] if I didn't work hard I didn't make money. And then I wind up there and find myself in this opposite position where it's like 'don't work hard. Don't work harder than you have to and don't do more than they ask of you,' and I found it rather frustrating.

Ben frames his work ethic through a historical narrative of self-employment, positioning it as a deeply ingrained aspect of self rather than an organizational construct. His description of union norms as “anti” and “opposite” to his lifelong approach demonstrates the conflict between his individual and collective work orientations—it is not a disagreement about specific practices but a clash between competing orientations to work itself. While Ben characterizes the pressure he receives from others to not work so hard as frustrating, he maintains a stronger attachment to individual occupational identity in these instances where institutional prescriptions conflict with his core work values.

Critique as Identity Reinforcement. Workers often reinforce their own occupational identity through criticism of colleagues perceived as falling short of ideal standards. Continuing with his appraisal of his unionized colleagues, Ben perceived that:

> Some of the [workers with higher] seniority still maintain the mentality and attitude of 'we're trying to put out a good product here, don't let it go past [if it’s imperfect]' but most people say 'not my job.' Wash their hands of it. If there's something slightly askew that they could easily fix in order to do their job properly, they don't do it. They let the line go down

> they throw their hands in the air, they throw a big temper tantrum and it's so disheartening to see a 50-year-old person behave this way. It makes me side with the company more.

Ben's narrative operates to simultaneously comment on others and affirm his professional standards. His opening acknowledgment of workers who maintain quality standards sets up a moral contrast with those who abdicate responsibility. Ben's description of minor problems, something "slightly askew that could easily be fixed," emphasizes the voluntary nature of this disengagement, while his focus on age (e.g., "50-year-old person") suggests a violation of expected maturity and professional development.

Yet, Ben's critique also reveals how workers can internalize management perspectives on labour relations. His characterization of other workers setting boundaries around job responsibilities as "temper tantrums" rather than legitimate worker resistance demonstrates how occupational identity, shaped by the ideal worker norm, becomes entangled with management interests. The progression of his narrative from physical actions (e.g., "throw their hands in the air") to emotional characterization (e.g., "temper tantrum") to personal response (e.g., "disheartening") traces how others' perceived professional failures accumulate affective weight. Through this critique, Ben simultaneously distances himself from what he perceives as unprofessional behaviour while strengthening his identification with management-defined ideals of worker responsibility. This suggests that maintaining occupational identity during displacement involves potential cooption with management perspectives that individualize workplace relations and undermine collective worker interests and solidarity.

Unpacking Persistence: The Implications of Enduring Worker Identity and Gender Performances

The data demonstrates how factory closures reconstitute rather than dissolve established forms of worker subjectivity, suggesting that subjects are interpellated into particular positions through crisis rather than maintaining pre-existing identities. The examples of Samuel and his colleagues "putting on a brave face" and Roger's insistence on not outwardly expressing stress exemplify how workers are constituted as stoic masculine subjects precisely when their economic subjectivity is under threat. These performances of hegemonic masculinity persist because workers must reconstitute themselves as valuable, disciplined subjects when their position within production relations becomes precarious. Workers' continued attachment to occupational ideals through continued high performance, skill development, and critique of those who deviate from such standards represents an active process of subject reconstitution rather than identity maintenance necessarily. This persistence and even strengthening of particular subject positions during factory closure suggests that institutional destabilization prompts subjects to more rigidly occupy familiar positions within existing power relations.

While Norris's (2016) concept of "sustaining" suggests that displaced workers attempt to maintain their work-related identities through continued performance during/after job displacement, this study suggests a different process of active subject reconstitution during crisis. Where Norris found that displaced workers engaged in activities that allowed them to "preserve" occupational identities, the current study demonstrates how workers constitute themselves as particular kinds of subjects through performative practices that reproduce existing power relations rather than maintaining static self-concepts. Roger exemplifies this

process of subject reconstitution when he expresses his commitment to finishing with pride and maintaining quality standards. Therein, Roger reconstitutes himself as a valuable, disciplined subject despite institutional abandonment. His dedication to proving the company wrong through excellent performance represents an active process of self-formation within neoliberal rationalities of individual responsibility and market value. Moreover, his comment about the possibility that the company could change their mind reflects how subjects position themselves within existing power relations in anticipation of potential reintegration. Thus, rather than identity maintenance, workers actively reconstitute themselves as worthy of re-employment by intensifying their performance of disciplined productivity, even as their actual position within production dissolves.

Workers' continued work ethic during displacement exemplifies how subjects are constituted through neoliberal rationalities (Brown, 2015). Foucault's (1979/2008) notion of "homo economicus"—the human as "entrepreneur himself"—provides a foundation for understanding how factory closure operates as a moment of intensified subject formation. The threat of displacement compels workers to constitute themselves as self-investing, continuously improving subjects who remain valuable regardless of institutional context. Building on this concept, Rose (1990) argues that neoliberalism promotes a form of "governing through freedom," where social institutions and market forces encourage individuals to view themselves as autonomous, choosing, self-regulating subjects responsible for their economic successes or failures. The neoliberal subject is valued for its capacity to self-invest and enhance its human capital.

Viewed through this lens, displaced workers' unwavering commitment to productivity for their employers can be interpreted as active subject constitution. By maintaining high standards until the end, workers cultivate a personal brand of reliability and professionalism as an investment in their reputation and future employability. In the present study, neoliberal subjectivity manifests in workers' approaches to skill development and adaptation. For instance, Samuel stated that people would ask him, "Why would you even bother trying?" to which he responded, "It's not about the company anymore; it's about me." Even when facing unemployment, workers behave as if continuously auditioning for their economic value, reflecting what Binkley (2011) described as the neoliberal imperative to treat the self as a project to be optimized. Government policies promoting individual responsibility, corporate practices emphasizing personal flexibility, media narratives celebrating entrepreneurial success, and educational systems focusing on marketable skills all contribute to constructing the "field" of possible subject positions available to displaced workers, where self-regulation and market-oriented behaviour become normalized expectations.

The reconstitution of worker subjectivity operates through and alongside gender performance. For male workers, masculine self-reliance becomes entrepreneurial self-investment; masculine emotional control becomes professional resilience and self-management; and the masculine provider role gets redefined as maintaining individual responsibility for economic success across changing contexts. Women workers similarly maintain traditional gender performances during displacement. Women's formation of support networks, for example, reflects the continuation of established caregiving and relationship-maintenance work.

Thus, the data reveals how factory closures intensify rather than transform traditional gender performances. Displacement seemingly compels workers to anchor themselves more firmly within familiar gendered subject positions. For men, anchoring aligns with contemporary economic rationalities, while for women, it provides social and emotional continuity. Both represent forms of subject reconstitution that primarily reproduce rather than challenge existing gender hierarchies.

This persistence of gender performance during displacement can be understood through Bourdieu's (1977/1995) concept of habitus as an adaptive mechanism through which traditional dispositions are reconstituted. Habitus refers to durable, transposable dispositions that individuals acquire through prolonged exposure to particular social conditions. Bourdieu argues that habitus tends to generate practices and perceptions consistent with the conditions of its own production, even when these conditions change. Their habitus, formed in the context of stable industrial employment and traditional gender divisions, continues to guide their behaviours and self-perception during displacement. Even as workers face new economic realities, their habitus—their ingrained ways of thinking, feeling, and acting—adjusts slowly, if at all.

However, while the data primarily show persistence in traditional performances, there are subtle indications of identity transformation that warrant examination. For example, Roger's acknowledgement that his stoic approach might not be "good…eventually" hints at nascent reflexivity about gendered expectations. This moment of self-reflection suggests a potential crack in the façade of hegemonic masculinity, potentially opening space for questioning long-held assumptions about "appropriate" emotional responses to difficult events,

such as job loss. Similarly, Samuel expressed difficulty in making financial decisions when not earning money, pointing to a subtle shift in his perception of the gendered provider's role. While his discomfort does not indicate abandonment of the breadwinner ideal—the notion that financial provision confers decision-making power—its attachment to masculinity becomes more tenuous in his telling of financial decision-making in his household.

Also, despite the persistence of gender and work performances in the workplace as observed in this study, other research reports that workers tend to renegotiate gender roles in domestic settings following job displacement (Legerski & Cornwall, 2010; McDowell, 2003; Nixon, 2009). Industrial workplaces tend to create more rigidly codified habitus and expectations than home environments. This workplace-specific habitus is cultivated through a combination of explicit organizational protocols (e.g., safety protocols, job specifications) and implicit social norms (e.g., behaviour expectations in meetings, tacit rules governing interactions on the production line). The collective nature of the workplace further reinforces this habitus, as workers are compelled to adhere to established norms to preserve group cohesion and maintain their occupational identities (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In contrast, domestic settings may allow for more flexibility in gender performance given their comparatively less structured and formalized practices. This differential in the rigidity of habitus between workplace and domestic spheres could explain the observed variance in the malleability of gender performances across these contexts during job loss.

Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has examined how factory closures reshape worker subjectivity through interrelated processes of sense-making, affect circulation, and the maintenance of certain

subject positions. I demonstrated how job displacement generates new forms of consciousness while reinforcing established relationships to work by examining how workers made sense of, felt through, and identified within factory closure. I found that experiential knowledge enabled workers to construct explanations for factory closures that challenged corporate power.

Factory closure is a collective rather than individual experience, as demonstrated by the circulation of affects through social networks during closure procedures. By mapping how affects move between workers, family members, and community members, I demonstrate how they accumulate around and stick to specific referents like pensions and workplace relationships. Yet traditional outplacement supports operate through single channels (i.e., workplace-based, individually-focused) that fundamentally misalign with how displacement is experienced by workers. Consequently, workers fill in these institutional gaps through developing informal networks.

The persistence of occupational identities during closure holds particular theoretical significance. Rather than eroding worker subjectivity, displacement appears to intensify traditional performances of work ethic and gender identity through which workers constitute themselves as particular kinds of subjects. Workers maintain idealized notions of productivity and quality while performing stoic masculinity. This finding challenges assumptions that precarious employment necessarily fragments worker consciousness. Instead, I show how core elements of worker subjectivity remain remarkably durable even as institutional contexts dissolve.

In the concluding chapter, I synthesize the key thematic findings from this research and consider their implications for both theory and practice. Taken together, the evidence

demonstrates that while institutional arrangements establish the boundaries of closure processes and outcomes, workers actively reshape these parameters through resistance and meaning-making. Given workers' stated experiences and struggles, I then present targeted policy and practice recommendations for both governments and unions, focusing on how support systems can better serve marginalized workers. Then, after considering methodological limitations and future research directions, I return to workers' own words about job displacement due to factory closure, honouring their lived experiences and situated knowledge as vital contributions to understanding industrial change.

Chapter 6: From Findings to Futures: A Discussion on Job Displacement Policies, Practices, and Research Prospects

Chapter Introduction

I began this dissertation by drawing on Donna Haraway's framework for understanding disaster and resurgence, using her concept of "reworlding" as an entry point to examine how workers move through and (re)construct meaning within industrial ruins in the GTA's manufacturing sector. Through an investigation of three factory closures in 2019, the research demonstrates how workers actively engage in what Haraway terms "world-making" by transforming spaces of apparent devastation into sites where new possibilities might emerge through their stories and practices.

This dissertation considers three interconnected questions: how displaced workers describe and make sense of factory closures (including the meanings they assign to closure events and the evolution of their emotions and identities); how workers respond to announced closures through their everyday activities and interactions (with particular attention to how shared experiences shape collective actions and how workers modify their attachments to ideas, objects, and others); and how workers' social identities and backgrounds influence their experiences and responses (including the impact of workplace power dynamics).

Workers' narratives demonstrate how displaced workers across sites actively produce new social relations, material practices, forms of resistance, and ways of understanding industrial change. These productions differ according to workers' social locations, workplace conditions, and institutional structures. By recognizing workers' accounts as valuable empirical contributions that enrich understandings of contemporary industrial change. This research

reveals how their partial, historically specific standpoints offer vital counterpoints to dominant corporate and policy discourses about factory closure. Their narratives establish how workers' responses to job displacement depend on the specific mix of institutional power, government policies, and worker actions, and that unionized workplaces are better positioned to respond as a group.

In this concluding chapter, I synthesize the key thematic findings that emerged from workers' accounts of factory closure while considering their implications for both theory and practice. Rather than simply summarizing chapter findings, this synthesis examines how workers' narratives and practices during factory closure reflect the relationship between structural constraints and agentic possibilities. The policy and practical interventions that I suggest herein should be understood not as accommodations to inevitable closure but as tactical interventions in ongoing struggles over industrial futures. These interventions necessarily differ between unionized and non-unionized contexts, given how institutional structures shape both the immediate experience of displacement as well as the horizon of possible responses. Throughout the chapter, I maintain focus on how workers' theoretical contributions suggest possibilities for both immediate and material interventions and broader structural critique, recognizing that meaningful responses to industrial displacement must contend with existing institutional constraints. I conclude the chapter by addressing the study's limitations, suggesting future research directions, and returning to workers' unmediated reflections on navigating the tensions between endings and the ongoing work of crafting new beginnings.

From Factory Closures to Tariff Wars: Manufacturing Displacement in an Era of Economic Nationalism

Renewed trade conflicts and rising economic nationalism have further destabilized the manufacturing landscape that displaced workers navigated in 2019. As I revise this concluding chapter in 2025, the prescient analyses offered by participants appear remarkably relevant as Canadian policymakers respond to Trump's tariff policies and threats of industrial exodus. The sophisticated critiques that displaced workers developed regarding corporate welfare, government ownership, and international solidarity now speak directly to contemporary debates about industrial policy and economic sovereignty.

Workers like Ellie and Henry at Plant B had developed nuanced understandings of how government intervention during the 2008 bailout failed to secure long-term commitments from their employer. As Ellie observed, "[Plant B] was bailed out $10.8 billion and our government managed to lose $3 billion on the deal by cashing in early. But if they held on to them [the shares], the government would have had a voice in the closure, they already had an ownership stake." Her analysis anticipated the current dilemma facing Canadian industrial policy: how corporate welfare without ownership stakes merely subsidize capital flight to cheaper jurisdictions. Despite receiving massive public bailouts, Plant B pursued relocation strategies that ultimately led to closure, demonstrating the limitations of financial incentives absent structural control over corporate decision-making.

The current response to Trump's tariffs from the Carney government follows this same defensive strategy of corporate welfare. Tax incentives, investment credits, and liquidity provision may delay immediate factory closures but do little to secure long-term industrial

commitments to Canadian communities. Most workers in this study understood intuitively what policymakers seem reluctant to acknowledge: that corporations will pursue profit maximization regardless of public subsidies unless structural constraints limit their mobility. To date, CUPE is the only union to request that the federal government consider emergency nationalization for companies threatening to relocate nationally important operations to the U.S.—a demand that echoes displaced workers' insights that "government ownership isn't so ridiculous" given existing public investment in private manufacturing.

The current shift toward economic nationalism also parallels the deindustrialization debates of the 1970s, when concerns about Canada's economic dependence generated critical legislative changes, including severance pay requirements. However, workers in this study also identified the tensions inherent in nationalist responses to industrial change. Henry's critique of his union's closure campaign revealed how defensive nationalism can undermine international worker solidarity: "their campaign pitted Canadian workers against Mexican workers instead of attacking capital flight." His observation highlights a central challenge for contemporary labour organizing—how to defend Canadian workers' interests while maintaining solidarity across borders and avoiding the imperial logic that often underlies nationalist economic policies.

These workers' analyses suggest that the current moment of industrial uncertainty presents both dangers and possibilities. Their insights into the failures of corporate welfare, the potential for public ownership, and the limitations of nationalist frameworks provide crucial guidance for understanding how to respond to contemporary manufacturing threats in ways that center worker power rather than corporate interests. Their experiences of factory closure as sites of world-making and resistance offer alternative frameworks for approaching industrial

policy that move beyond the defensive strategies that have consistently failed displaced manufacturing workers.

Synthesis of Thematic Areas

While current debates about tariffs and economic nationalism unfold at the policy level, the lived experiences of workers at Plants A, B, and C reveal the micro-level processes through which industrial change actually occurs. In this section, I synthesize the study's findings around two core thematic areas that emerged from the research questions: how workers make sense of factory closures and how they respond to them. The third guiding research question regarding social identities and backgrounds shapes the analysis throughout both themes, as workers' intersectional experiences of privilege and discrimination fundamentally inform both their meaning-making processes and responses. Under the first theme, I synthesize how workers construct meaning through "affective othering" and emotional circulation. The second theme explores workers' responses to factory closures through the lens of transformative tensions, where workers navigate competing pressures between individual survival and collective solidarity. Throughout both sections, I consider how institutional structures and power dynamics shape workers' possibilities for action while also remaining attentive to how social locations and standpoints mediate their experiences of industrial change through differential precarity, vulnerability, agency, and power.

Making Sense of Factory Closures: Meaning-Making, Emotions, and Evolving Identities

This study suggests that factory closure announcements and subsequent information management serve as critical moments of subject formation that shape how workers interpret, process, and respond to these events. Companies' approaches to announcing closure—whether

through media channels, intimidating security presence, or exclusion of workers from direct communication—create immediate alienation while simultaneously constructing particular kinds of displaced worker subjects. Announcement practices actively produce worker subjectivities through various institutional mechanisms: the deployment of heightened security constructs workers as potentially dangerous subjects requiring surveillance and emotional regulation; leaked announcements and information hierarchies position certain workers as peripheral stakeholders in their displacement; and the complete absence of communication for supplier companies renders them as doubly invisible subjects, so peripheral to factory closure that they do not even warrant direct acknowledgement of their displacement. These workers must piece together their displacement narrative from speculation.

How workers make sense of closure announcements and processes varies based on their employment status, class, and prior experience with displacement and industrial change. Second-tier and temporary workers, who already confront employment precarity, were less surprised by closure announcements. Their experiences of constant uncertainty and threats of job displacement during contract negotiations affect their already tenuous relationship with their employment. Yet, even within similar employment categories, workers showed diverse interpretations of closure causes. Family status, and economic in/stability more broadly, intersected with employment status or precarity to shape their interpretations.

At the same time, displaced workers tend to make sense of closure announcements through one of two frames of logic (although these lenses are not mutually exclusive). Some workers interpret closure announcements through a "business sensibility" lens, viewing it as an extension of broader manufacturing trends, corporate practices, and market forces.

Tangentially, some workers point to observable changes in employment practices, such as the increased hiring of temporary workers or shifting production patterns, as signals that preceded closure. Workers who use this lens interpret closure announcements as confirmation of their existing concerns rather than unexpected developments. A second interpretive frame emerges from workers' direct knowledge of plant operations and success. Through this lens, workers struggle to reconcile closure decisions with their experience of high-performance metrics, quality standards and awards, and financial viability. Workers using this frame frequently question the necessity of closure and challenge corporate narratives about market-driven inevitability. These interpretive frames represent workers' attempts to apply forms of logic—either business logic, macro-level industry trends, or micro-level operational success—to understand decisions that otherwise defy rational explanation.

Depending on their interpretive framework, workers respond differently to corporate narratives that frame closures as market-driven decisions. Workers who view closure through their direct knowledge of factory operations and profitability more often contest these narratives, constructing alternative interpretations that challenge market-based explanations. Operational knowledge develops among line workers through their direct observations of production volumes, overtime scheduling patterns, and temporary worker hiring patterns. Many line workers also track publicly available company financial reports, share information through union meetings where applicable, and compare current conditions to previous downturns they have experienced, if they have enough seniority or years of service to develop this institutitonal knowledge. These workers frequently attribute closures to corporate greed, mismanagement, and violations of implicit moral contracts between companies and workers.

In contrast, workers who interpret closure through a business sensibility lens seemingly accept market-based explanations, viewing factory closures as an expected outcome of broader economic trends. These workers, often with more limited production history, frame closure decisions as understandable responses to high labour costs and global competition. Thus, different frameworks for understanding closure, shaped by workers' varied engagement with operational indicators and/or other intersecting factors such as economic stability, affect workers' conclusions and sense-making regarding why factories close.

In addition to interpretive frameworks, making sense of factory closure also involves affective and emotional dimensions; this study finds distinct patterns in the circulation of emotions and ongoing identity work during factory closure. Workers' emotional responses to factory closure operate through a system of circulating affects that "stick" to certain objects and flow between different spheres of life, rather than following predictable stages or linear progression. Specifically, the findings suggest that affects move between individual, familial, workplace, and community spheres, with emotions like anxiety and anger flowing across different domains of workers' lives. The findings show how affects can accumulate around specific anchors—objects, ideas, and relationships—that become focal points for emotional attachment. For instance, financial security, particularly pensions, emerges as a key affective anchor in individual and family spheres. Within the workplace, relationships with coworkers and the physical space of the factory serve as emotional anchors. The circulation and transformation of affects between these anchors unfold over time. For instance, anxiety about pension security can move from individual workers to their extended families, transforming family interactions and decision-making processes.

The circulation of affect through workers' lives occurs in parallel with how they maintain and even intensify aspects of their identities during factory closure. Workers engage in "affective othering"—actively differentiating themselves from colleagues through narratives of contrast, distancing, and hierarchical positioning—as they reconstruct and/or recommit to their sense of self during job displacement. When workers maintain high productivity or display stoicism in response to closure announcements, while also detaching and distancing themselves from colleagues they perceive as having poor work ethics, these performances serve as acts of meaning-making rather than mere psychological inertia. Rather than detaching from work, these deliberate performances seemingly sustain their identities as industrial producers despite the loss of their workplace "stage." Their intensified commitment to being "good workers," particularly among male workers who uphold gendered ideals such as emotional control, becomes a form of affective anchor, providing stability amid uncertainty while maintaining valuable professional capital. Even as workers acknowledge the potential costs of these performances, particularly regarding hegemonic masculine stoicism, they continue to engage in identity work that helps them maintain coherence with industrial workers. This persistence demonstrates how workers actively negotiate their identities during factory closures, balancing individual and collective experiences while attempting to maintain continuity, even as their stable industrial employment disappears.

These findings meaningfully extend the existing theoretical understanding of worker identity and sense-making during job displacement. By integrating Haraway's concept of "reworlding" with affect theory, this study offers a novel theoretical lens for understanding how workers actively reconstruct meaning and identity within dying industrial spaces. Workers

seemingly engage in creative acts of self-making and world-making that maintain continuity and generate new possibilities. Specific to identity (re)construction, the findings align with and extend existing theoretical work on the durability and intensification of occupational and work/er identities during industrial transformation (Dudley, 1994; Norris, 2016; Strangleman, 2012). However, this study's focus on affect circulation and "affective othering" provides new insights into *how* such identity persistence operates. This theoretical synthesis helps explain collective emotional economies, beyond individual psychological responses, that contribute to certain aspects of identity as enduring.

Individual and Collective Responses and Shifting Attachments in Factory Closures

Workers' responses to factory closure announcements reflect the relationship between institutional structures and worker agency in shaping closure processes and outcomes. A notable finding of this study is that workplace arrangements, particularly union infrastructure and employment status, establish parameters for worker action, while workers simultaneously transform these parameters through resistance and meaning-making practices.

Institutional arrangements shape the parameters of possible responses to factory closures. In particular, the presence or absence of unions in closing factories shapes the scope and nature of workers' responses. In unionized environments, histories of collective actions and inter-factory solidarity inform workers' more robust resistance. Union infrastructure provides established channels, scripts, and resources for coordinated responses, such as organized work slowdowns, directed walkouts, and the construction of counter-narratives and media campaigns that challenge corporate explanations of closure. Conversely, the absence of union infrastructure can result in individualized responses to factory closures, as workers lack

established mechanisms for collective action. While workers in these settings also reconfigure work-life patterns and create support networks, their practices tend toward individual coping strategies and informal support rather than collective resistance and mutual aid. While an individualized approach seemingly contributes to workers accepting closure more quickly, it also forecloses possibilities for collectively reimagining alternative industrial futures or challenging the broader logic of corporate decision-making. The contrast between unionized and non-unionized settings indicates that institutional structures shape the scope of worker responses, while workers determine how to utilize or circumvent available frameworks.

Employment status and workplace hierarchies further condition workers' engagement with resistance structures. At Plants B and C, precariously employed workers' heightened vulnerability to retaliation constrained their ability to participate in militant union actions. Coupled with unfulfilled contract promises, many of these workers were skeptical of their union's interest in or capacity to protect their interests and needs. Thus, while serving a coordinating function, union frameworks can fail to simultaneously account for differentiated risks across the workforce during crises.

Despite structural constraints, workers actively reshape closure processes through various forms of resistance and meaning-making. For instance, when union tactics conflict with workers' values or interests, they develop alternative frameworks to oppose industrial change. At Plant B, workers alienated by the union's nationalist rhetoric and centralized decision-making formed Grassroots Group A. This initiative reframes resistance through an internationalist lens that emphasizes cross-border solidarity and democratic control of production. Workers also directly contested union messaging that sought to boycott GM

vehicles built in Mexico, constructing counter-narratives that focused on corporate greed rather than on international competition. Even in non-unionized settings, where collective action proves more difficult, workers exercise agency through individual actions. At Plant A, workers strategically used their remaining benefits and sick days, albeit in a seemingly uncoordinated manner, as a form of protest. While these responses differ from organized resistance, they demonstrate how non-unionized workers actively choose when and how to disengage from work, even without formal structures for collective action. Thus, while institutional structures establish parameters for action during factory closures, workers' responses actively transform these parameters through both formal resistance and grassroots organizing. Their actions generate new possibilities for opposing industrial change, even as they operate within structural constraints.

Workers' attachments to ideas, objects, and relationships shift through their affective encounters during the closure process, further exemplifying how structural constraints and worker agency intersect through emotional and embodied experiences. At Plant B, workers' encounters with the union's nationalist rhetoric and centralized decision-making produced affective responses that not only altered their relationship to union structures but also generated new forms of attachment. These encounters—the circulation of nationalist messaging, experiences of exclusion from decision-making, and witnessing the marginalization of workers at supplier companies or international factories—created intensities that moved workers toward different objects of attachment. This affective movement manifested most powerfully in Grassroots Group A, where workers' negative encounters with traditional union frameworks led them to construct new emotional and political investments in public

ownership, environmental sustainability, and international solidarity. Their reorientation demonstrates how affective experiences during closure can prompt workers to reconstruct their attachments to institutional structures and, in turn, their responses to industrial change even within structural constraints.

These findings extend the existing research on worker resistance to factory closures in three ways. First, they demonstrate how union infrastructure provides the necessary conditions for workers to imagine and pursue collective alternatives, even when workers contest established union approaches. At Plant B, rank-and-file initiatives emerged alongside official union resistance, showing how unionized spaces enable future-oriented organizing. Second, the contrast between unionized and non-unionized settings and workers suggests that the absence of institutional structures can constrain the scope of worker responses and imaginations. Without union infrastructure, Plant A workers defaulted to individual coping strategies, lacking models and mechanisms for resistance. Third, the data show how workers' attachments to ideas, objects, and relationships shift through their daily encounters during closure, whether with union practices, workplace changes, or emerging initiatives. These evolving attachments shape how workers interpret and respond to closure, leading some to reconstruct collective identities beyond the traditional workplace and/or union frameworks. Thus, the data suggest that unions, despite any limitations, create vital conditions for workers to imagine alternatives—a necessary precursor for reworlding futures.

Policy and Practical Interventions

The architecture of displacement support systems often reproduces and amplifies existing patterns of workplace marginalization, whether state-administered severance packages or

traditional union-provided services. Current frameworks of resource distribution during factory closure, predicated on the duration of service and employment status, fail to account for how systemic barriers consistently relegate workers with intersecting marginalized identities to precarious, part-time, and lower-tier positions. This structural oppression, even if an oversight, manifests in state policy as well as in traditional labour organizing approaches that privilege full-time permanent workers. Even as worker centers and other alternative labour organizations emerge to address these gaps, both institutional and grassroots support systems still struggle to fully respond to how initial disadvantages compound through the closure process. This dynamic demands a reconceptualization of how both government policy and labour organizations approach factory closure and industrial change, with particular attention to how support structures might better serve those most vulnerable to displacement.

Government Policy

Rather than treating factory closures as discrete economic events requiring standardized responses, policy approaches must recognize these moments as critical junctures where existing patterns of marginalization can either be reinforced or deliberately disrupted, and the logic of capital mobility can be directly challenged through strategic state intervention.

Given the findings of this dissertation, government policy approaches should involve:

- Dismantling severance hierarchies to address systemic barriers and historical patterns of workplace marginalization
- Recognizing affective anchors in policy design to target material interventions
- Challenging corporate welfare through public ownership models that leverage public investment to gain democratic control over industrial decision-making

First, governments need to restructure severance legislation to account for how systemic barriers shape (un)employment patterns. Governments should eliminate employment status distinctions. The two-tiered system that relegated workers to precarious positions during employment becomes doubly punitive during closure. Policy changes could include establishing universal severance floors regardless of employment status, eliminating seniority-based calculations that institutionalize workplace marginalization, and requiring employers to address documented wage gaps through reparative payments that acknowledge historical discrimination.

Second, this study's findings on affect circulation reveal that emotions accumulate around specific material objects during factory closure, creating "affective anchors" that indicate where displacement creates the most vulnerability and where intervention becomes necessary. Rather than treating emotional responses as individual psychological phenomena, policy frameworks must recognize that affective anchors point to underlying material inequities that require targeted intervention. For example, when affects accumulate around tiered employment agreements, interventions should focus on employment equity and wage standardization. Similarly, when anxiety circulates around severance differentials based on employment status, this indicates the need for universal severance policies. By tracking where emotional intensity concentrates during closure processes, governments can identify the specific material conditions that require intervention rather than offering generalized support services that fail to address the structural sources of displacement anxiety.

Third, **t**he most urgent intervention involves moving beyond defensive subsidies toward emergency nationalization policies for companies threatening to close or relocate nationally

important operations. As Ellie's analysis of the bailout demonstrated, public investment without ownership stakes merely subsidizes capital flight. Rather than providing tax incentives and investment credits that fail to secure long-term commitments, governments must leverage public investment to gain democratic control over industrial decision-making. This includes establishing legal frameworks for automatic public acquisition when companies receiving public subsidies threaten closure, creating worker-community ownership models that prevent future capital flight, and implementing capital controls that restrict industrial relocation without community consent.

Union Policies and Procedures

Workers' frustration with their union during factory closure emerged as one of the more surprising findings of this study. Rather than challenging corporate practices that fragment worker solidarity, union responses seemingly reinforced the divisions that companies created through their announcement and closure processes. Workers like Ellie found themselves simultaneously inside and outside the union due to second-tier status, while workers like Dominic experienced conflicts between union loyalty and financial insecurity that traditional organizing approaches failed to address. These findings demonstrate that unions cannot simply default to established closure strategies that assume homogeneous worker interests, particularly when their own practices—from closed-door negotiations to nationalist rhetoric—can reproduce the very subject positions that companies use to divide workers.

Given the findings of this dissertation, union policy approaches should involve:

- Centring historically marginalized voices and experiences in union spaces, especially during the negotiation of collective and closure agreements
- Developing cross-workplace solidarity networks that transcend traditional bargaining unit boundaries
- Refusing corporate subject-making through counter-interpellation
- Organizing across intersecting vulnerabilities
- Attacking capital flight rather than international workers

First, labour organizations need to reimagine their bargaining and closure processes and protocols for how they intersect with and re-establish existing patterns of workplace marginalization. Traditional union approaches to negotiating closure agreements often take place through closed-door processes and prioritize seniority provisions and full-time status. The inequities institutionalized through two-tier collective agreements become doubly inscribed during closure, as workers previously relegated to lesser contractual status are again marginalized in displacement negotiations. Alternative approaches might include establishing worker consultation committees or open-door bargaining practices, developing weighted severance formulas that account for systemic barriers to accumulating seniority, creating transparent communication channels about negotiation progress, and implementing participatory processes in which workers can collectively develop bargaining priorities before negotiations begin.

Second, unions must move beyond conventional workplace boundaries to build solidarity and support across workplaces and communities affected by closures. Traditional union structures often dissolve once workplaces close, leaving workers isolated when collective

support becomes crucial. Unions must develop sustainable models to maintain worker connections and collective power beyond union affiliation and employment status. This might include ongoing mutual aid networks, creating spaces for sustained collective meaning-making, and developing new organizational forms that can support worker solidarity through extended periods of transition. Factory closures represent an opportunity for movement building that challenges the logic of exclusionary unionism that has contributed to labour's declining power, as well as broader perceptions of unions as self-interested institutions concerned only with their immediate membership.

Third, this study demonstrates that just as companies can interpellate workers into subject positions, such as the "threatening" displaced worker at Plant A, unions possess the same capacity for counter-interpellation. While Plant B's union attempted to refuse the "displaced worker" category by promising to keep the plant open, in other ways, it reinforced company-imposed categories such as the "peripheral" or "invisible" workers at Plant C and other supplier companies. Unions can develop practices that actively counter-interpellate workers into collective subjects capable of challenging closure. This requires analyzing how corporate practices fragment solidarity, particularly at the critical juncture of the closure announcement, where worker subjectivities are being actively constructed.

Fourth, the data in this study could suggest that union closure strategies are unsuccessful insofar as they fail to account for how intersecting social positions create qualitatively different experiences within the same workplace. Workers like Ellie exist simultaneously inside and outside the union. Her intersection of second-tier employment and union membership meant she could not experience job loss as "shock" like senior workers or as

"union betrayal" like tier-one workers expecting better protection. Instead, this qualitatively different position enabled her to critique union complicity in creating her material conditions, recognizing how the union had participated in establishing the very employment hierarchy that disadvantaged her during closure. This analysis partly contributed to why she sought out alternative solidarities and formed Grassroots Group A, which she and others imagined as more capable of responding to manufacturing challenges than was possible within existing union structures. Unions must leverage existing structures like standing committees for young workers, women, and workers with disabilities to transform closure organizing itself, developing strategies that organize across rather than despite intersecting vulnerabilities.

Finally, current economic nationalism around Trump's tariffs poses a threat to international labour solidarity. As Henry observed, unions risk defaulting to a strategy that "pits Canadian workers against Mexican workers instead of attacking capital flight," making it urgent that they develop explicitly internationalist responses. This requires building transnational organizing strategies against corporate mobility rather than accepting competition between national workforces.

Study Limitations

Several methodological and theoretical limitations of this study warrant careful consideration, particularly as they concern questions on knowledge production, materiality, and the temporality of factory closure and industrial change. Importantly, while this research considers how affect circulates through networks, its methodological tools may have inadvertently privileged certain forms of knowledge production while obscuring the materiality of these emotions. While retrospective interviews can be valuable for understanding meaning-making

processes, they can potentially miss how affect moves through material spaces, objects, and bodies. A more multimodal methodological approach that incorporates visual methods, spatial analysis, or participatory mapping may better capture the embodied routines and spatial practices of factory closures.

Moreover, although I attempted to gather diverse experiences about job displacement, white workers' stories dominated my research, reflecting the racial disparities common in unionized manufacturing environments. Thus, racialized experiences of industrial transformation remain obscured in this study, even within an approach that seeks to center marginalized voices.

Furthermore, the research design remained anchored in traditional researcher-participant relationships, which may have constrained my theoretical understanding of closure as a lived process. Although I used reflexive practices to help situate my position as an outsider relative to manufacturing work, there are radical methodological possibilities for further dismantling hierarchy in the research relationship. A fully participatory approach that, for example, hires displaced workers as co-investigators and analysts, might have generated different dimensions of how factory closures function and how resistance practices emerge through everyday interactions.

Directions for Future Research

This study opens several avenues for future investigations of factory closures and worker displacement, three of which I suggest here. First, while I initially approached this research by focusing on documenting displaced workers' experiences, their narratives demonstrated acts of imaginative world-making. Particularly, their stories of alternative industrial futures,

exemplified in initiatives like Grassroots Group A, suggest that moments of industrial rupture can serve as generative spaces where workers actively reconstruct not just their occupational identities, but their visions of what manufacturing could become. Accordingly, I propose a more intentional theoretical engagement with the worldmaking dimension of industrial displacement by examining how workers, or even union leaders, move beyond narratives of decline to actively imagine and materialize alternative manufacturing futures. While my research touches on this dynamic, future scholars should systematically examine how workers develop and mobilize transformative visions, particularly around environmental sustainability and democratic ownership. In pursuing this direction, arts-based methodologies such as digital storytelling could offer powerful vehicles for both generating and communicating these emergent worlds. Such approaches would not only capture the affective and imaginative components of workers' future-making practices but would also create spaces for collective meaning-making that could amplify and legitimize workers' alternative visions for manufacturing futures.

Drawing from my findings, I also call for a critical re-examination of existing outplacement and support services. While these support structures ostensibly aim to facilitate worker transitions, my research suggests the need to interrogate how we conceptualize, organize, and deliver support during industrial change. In this study, workers often remained unaware of the breadth of available services, suggesting gaps in how support systems are communicated and rolled out. Thus, even before assessing service efficacy, researchers must first interrogate the social organization of support itself, examining how services are selected, coordinated, and implemented. Moreover, my findings indicate that current support

frameworks remain deeply anchored in a reemployment paradigm that fails to recognize displacement as multi-dimensional. Future research must map how such support models emerge as legitimate responses to displacement and whose interests they ultimately serve. Toward this end, and aligned with a reworlding framework, future research might focus on how support services can be reimagined as spaces of collective healing and power-building. Scholars should examine how models align with or depart from workers' actual needs, aspirations, and meaning-making processes during factory closures. Such an analysis could inform the development of more equitable, emancipatory, and worker-centred support systems.

My research points to a third crucial avenue of investigation: examining how moments of industrial rupture might be reconceptualized as opportunities for renewed labour militancy and solidarity-building. While my findings indicate a concerning pattern of worker detachment from union structures and strategies during factory closure, the recent resurgence of militant labour organizing in the United States, particularly under Sean Fain's leadership of the United Auto Workers, offers compelling models for worker reengagement. Future scholarship should investigate how emerging forms of worker organizing—characterized by direct democracy, digital solidarity networks, and explicit class consciousness—might be adapted to the context of industrial transformation. This research direction demands careful attention to how worker militancy might be sustained and redirected during factory closures, rather than dissipating into individualized struggles for survival.

Workers' Final Message(s)

This dissertation concludes by returning to the unmediated voices of displaced workers and allowing their direct reflections to stand without academic interpretations. While academic

analysis can be useful for explaining patterns and structures, feminist methodological principles emphasize the importance of situated knowledge; thus, I step back here to privilege workers' articulations of what they want others to know about experiencing factory closure. These were their final words in the interview. Their words serve as both a fitting conclusion to this study and a reminder of why we must continue to center worker experiences in understanding industrial change.

Roger:

> I'm only dealing with it now, in the last 4 days. But I will say that people don't realize how much this really can affect a person—mentally, physically, whatever. It's tough. It is really really tough. Especially when you like [your job]. Those people that work there who really don't give a shit, they're like 'meh,' but for the ones like myself who cared and cared every day and loved it, it's tough. And, again, I haven't really dealt with it yet.

Dominic:

> [I want to] hammer on the feeling of unease from pretty much the leak of the closure up until the severance packages being nailed down. Because that was always there in the background, 'what are we doing with this? Are we getting something? What's going on?' So that underlying tension of just like, honestly the union having to negotiate on their back foot. But, just not knowing where things are at and how things might turn out and, therefore, imagining the worse and presuming, that was something I don't necessarily want to experience again. The plant is a rumour mill to begin with, so if you create a vacuum like that, all sorts of rumours run a mile. That was just a headache that I didn't really want to deal with…that was a persistent headache and just something that was not good to deal with.

Samuel:

> I started as a contract worker making a fairly low wage. The wage was not the issue; I just needed to keep busy. But as soon as the announcement was made and they laid off several contract workers and they decided to retain me they offered me a new wage, a significant raise…So I feel as though they really handled that well and that I had that opportunity to continue work improvement so I have absolutely no hard feelings about how things have gone. But I do understand why a lot of the other guys do. I come from a different kind of background than they do; these are old-fashioned guys who expected to stay there and work until they retire. I just did not come into this with that false feeling. I was prepared for any future.

Henry:

> I would like to see that the communities and unions or workers have much more honest conversation about where they're going. There's often fear that these kinds of conversations make people jump to conclusions and panic. The panic actually only occurs when you're not preparing for it. So the sooner you have the conversation and realistic conversation, the more prepared people will be. And I think, I want to be hopeful that something will change here.

Christopher:

> There was nothing untoward or huge surprises to me after they announced the closure, that came to pass or didn't come to pass. It was just a rather slow death. Keeping the guys who needed to be a bit more motivated was hard. 'Cause a lot of guys just kind of gave up and like, we need to keep this stuff going and they really couldn't see the point of it.

Ben:

> It's a complicated process. I feel like there's a lot of angles and a lot of things to consider during plant closures. But it's not hard to navigate, it's just the necessity of navigating it rather than just carrying on as usual.

Travis:

> I think the largest thing is the lack of resources for financial planning and for planning life events. Like the number of people that this is going to be a devastating financial hit to in a very short period is astronomical to me considering the fact that, in realistic terms, these individuals just like myself are at the upper middle class today and they will be, in some case, wiped out tomorrow or wiped out in the very near future. And that's frightening. We need to have some kind of help as far as changing the way that we look at how we teach people or counsel people toward life events and planning for life events. And I've seen the ramifications of what happens. This is going to become very difficult for a lot of relationships, because they don't have plans…people that have options are people that planned for options to be available to them…and then I look at people who don't see options available and it's going to be difficult for them and their relationships especially.

Ellie's final sentiment was shared earlier in this dissertation but bears repeating:

> There's been an absence of a political component to this and really the plant closure, as far as I'm concerned, is almost entirely political. You have a company that's extremely profitable, this is a situation of capital flight as far as I'm concerned. They are taking their capital and investment out and moving it to a jurisdiction that's cheaper. And, you know, labour costs are nothing, they are like 4-7% of the vehicle. They don't pass on the savings to

the customer; the only benefit is to Plant B and their shareholders. It frustrates me a lot too because people think of shareholders as a large faceless group of individuals and it's not. It's very concentrated wealth in a few hands and then there's the bailout money…Our government managed to lose three billion dollars on the deal by cashing in early. When would the shares ever be worth enough to cover the three billion even if they held on to them. But if they had held onto them the government would have had a voice in the closure, they already had an ownership stake.

Sophia:

Plant B was a big part of starting the labour movement in Canada. It shouldn't be forgotten…It's a huge blow to workers everywhere. Not just us. Not just the supplier plants. It's setting a precedent. So it is a huge blow to the labour movement in general…It still doesn't feel real to me. I think it is kind of starting to now because I've been off work for over a month so now it's kind of becoming real that I'm not going back. It's a grieving process.

Calvin:

It's a weird thing. You can try to do all the right you can but sometimes things just don't work out…There isn't anything at the end of the rainbow here. As I see people come and go that I know, I hope they're doing okay. We'll see in a couple of months. Some of the people won't [find another job]. Or never will. None of that is going to be told…Toward the end, the union just buckled. And maybe it's easy from the cheap seats but they/[the union] didn't want me to participate from day one…Why isn't anybody helping? Where is our union? Spending five million on a Superbowl ad.

Louisa:

You have to know who you are as a person and how you're going to handle a closure because everyone's different. Everyone handles stress differently. And you have to try and remain strong. If a closure is announced, I think you have to take it head on, you have to approach it head on a realize that this is happening. You need to learn how stress manifests itself within you. You've got to learn to take the anger with the sad with the upset with the health issues. You've got to realize, am I bored? Or am I hungry? Or do I really want to drink myself into a stupor? I felt like drinking myself into a stupor but I don't like alcohol enough to achieve that. So I'm learning to ride a motion/[wave] because there's a lot of it. You have to take the good with the bad and try and ride it out in the best possible way. You really need to look out and be an advocate for yourself and learn what works best for you and what's going to keep your stress level as low as it possibly can be.

Charlotte:

> I'm scarred for life. And I literally thought I've been through bad but this is one of the worst things I think I have ever seen. Growing up I always thought Plant B was a company I want to work for. And this new generation that was going to build cars for them is now on the street. So it's one of the worst closures I've ever been through.

Chapter Conclusion

This dissertation examines factory closures as liminal spaces where the dialectics of power and resistance unfold through workers' lived experiences. By centring displaced workers' narratives, this research reveals how closure processes simultaneously constrain and enable forms of agency—where workers actively engage in practices of world-making even as they negotiate structural forces that seek to coordinate their responses and experiences.

This study surfaces five critical dimensions of worker experience that demonstrate the relationship between structure and agency. First, closure announcements emerge as critical moments of subject formation, where institutional practices attempt to inscribe particular worker subjectivities while simultaneously opening spaces for alternative meaning-making. Second, the circulation of affects generates distinctive emotional economies that shape both how individuals handle factory closure as well as collective possibility. Third, workers engaged in various resistance practices ranging from traditional militant action to subtle forms of narrative contestation, informal information sharing, and collective meaning-making that challenged corporate framings of closure inevitability. These varied forms of resistance revealed some fractured lines in solidarity where collective action fragmented along interesting social identities and power relations, highlighting how different subject positions within the workplace create distinct orientations toward and capacities for contestation. Fourth, workers' persistent performance of established work ethics and gender roles suggests these practices serve as anchoring rituals that enable continuity through disruption. Finally, the temporal

reorganization triggered by closure—manifesting in disrupted information flows and communication patterns—reshapes workers' capacity to navigate job displacement.

This study advances theoretical understandings of job displacement by synthesizing FPE with Affect Theory to show how emotions move and transform through closure processes. Where foundational scholars like Bluestone and Harrison (1982) and Milkman (1997) documented the socioeconomic contours of deindustrialization, this research charts new theoretical territory by examining how structural constraints and worker agency co-constitute each other during industrial transformation. The findings show closure announcements as simultaneously structuring and generative moments, where institutional attempts to prescribe worker subjectivities paradoxically create spaces for active meaning-making and relationship reconstruction. Through careful attention to collective dynamics, this study demonstrates how affects circulate beyond individual psychological boundaries to shape both organized resistance and everyday practices. Crucially, the research's intersectional lens reveals how overlapping social identities create distinct pathways through displacement, from initial sense-making to engagement with resistance to imagining post-closure futures, highlighting how systems of power differently shape workers' capacity for agency and transformation.

Participants' stories suggest that employers, alongside the state at times, have shown a disinterest or an incapacity to address manufacturing decline in the GTA. Their silences and absences become powerful authors of a particular narrative about factory closures—one that normalizes corporate withdrawal and renders worker experiences peripheral to the story of economic change. Yet, as Haraway (2016) reminds us:

> It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell other stories with; it matters what knots knots knots, what thoughts think thought, what

> descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (p. 12)

The systematic institutional disengagement documented in this dissertation does not reflect a passive response to market forces, but actively constructs a world where corporate responsibility to place and community is rendered optional, where the social and personal costs of deindustrialization are naturalized as inevitable casualties of progress. However, workers' narratives and practices collected here tell a different story—one that refuses this inevitability and insists on the possibility of alternative futures. Their accounts inspire how factory closure can become a generative space for reimagining both individual identities and collective possibilities, even as they describe the human costs of institutional abandonment. In documenting these parallel narratives—of corporate withdrawal and worker world-making—this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how industrial transformation is fundamentally a contested process, shaped by questions of power, responsibility, and the right to author the story of change.

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

OFFICE OF RESEARCH ETHICS (ORE)
5th Floor, York Research Tower,
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Memo

To:	Norene Pupo, Sociology
From:	Alison M. Collins-Mrakas, Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor, Research Ethics
Issue Date:	Tue Apr 23 2019
Expiry Date:	Thu Apr 23 2020
RE:	**Workers, Deindustrialization and Community: Issues Following Plant Closures** **Certificate #: e2019-139**

I am writing to inform you that the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee has reviewed and approved the above project.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at: 416-736-5914 or via email at: acollins@yorku.ca.

Yours sincerely,

Alison M. Collins-Mrakas M.Sc., LLM
Sr. Manager and Policy Advisor,
Office of Research Ethics

Appendix B: Invitation to Participate

Re: Interview about the impact of plant closures on workers and their families

Hi [name],

My name is Lacey Croft and I am a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at York University. I am part of a research team that is studying the impact of plant closures and job displacement on workers and their families. The purpose of the project is to better understand workers' stress, struggles, and strategies for dealing with job loss.

We are speaking with workers from several closed/closing plants in the GTA who were employed with the company at the time of the announcement.

Would you be willing to talk about your experience of the closure? As a participant in the study, you will be asked to take part in a 60-90 minute, one-on-one interview that will be audiotaped and transcribed with your consent. We can meet in person or talk over the phone. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential. There will be an honorarium for your time.

If you would like to participate, or receive more information about the study, please do not hesitate to contact me directly at lcroft@yorku.ca. You may also contact the Principle Investigator of the study, Dr. Norene Pupo, via email at npupo@yorku.ca.

Thank you in advance for considering this request.

Kind regards,

Lacey

Appendix C: Informed Consent Document

Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies
York University
Department of Sociology

Workers, Deindustrialization and Community: Issues Following Plant Closures

Principal Investigator:
Norene Pupo
Professor
Department of Sociology
York University
(416) 736-2100 ext. 33310
npupo@yorku.ca

Co-investigator:
Lacey Croft
PhD Candidate
Department of Sociology
York University
lcroft@yorku.ca

Thank you for agreeing to participate in a study that explores workers' experiences of plant closures. We are interested in your experience with the closure and how it has affected you, your family, your co-workers, and your community. As mentioned in our initial invitation, the interview will last approximately 60 to 90 minutes. With your consent, the interview will be audio-taped and later transcribed.

Possible benefits of your participation include the opportunity to express your views on the plant closure you recently experienced/are experiencing. We hope that this research will inform policy and enhance programs within unions and the communities to assist displaced workers. There are no anticipated risks associated with your participation.

You will be asked questions on the plant closure and how it has affected you. Some people may feel uncomfortable talking about their experiences, their union (where applicable), their workplace, or their communities. There is no obligation to answer any questions that you consider invasive, offensive or inappropriate. Be assured that any information that you share in this interview will remain confidential. We guarantee that confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law. The research team will not release any information that can be traced back to you personally, nor will the research team release the name of the company you worked for in relation to anything you have said to us during the interview.

Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time and for any reason without penalty. You may terminate the interview at any time. If you decide to terminate the interview and withdraw from the study, we will immediately delete the interview file. If you withdraw from the study, your refusal to participate or decision not to answer any particular questions will not affect your relationship with the researchers, York University, or any other group associated with this project.

This research will be used by Lacey Croft in her PhD dissertation, and/or will be published in academic books and journals by Norene Pupo, and will be publicly accessible through university and public library systems. Results of this study may also be presented at conferences or in the media, and shared with workers, unions, and communities affected by plant closures. All written and recorded transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet in the lead researcher's office at York University. Access to the taped interviews will be restricted to the principal and co-investigator, the interviewer and the individual who transcribes the tapes. Names and identifiers will be stripped from the transcribed interviews. All files (electronic and print) will be identified only by number. The interviews will be secured until March 30, 2021 at which point all research materials, including files, letters, e-mails and transcripts will be confidentially shredded or permanently deleted.

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact the Principal or Co-Investigator by telephone or by e-mail (see contact information above). This research has been reviewed and approved by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board. The study conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, York Research Tower, York University (telephone 416-736-5914 or e-mail ore@yorku.ca).

CONSENT

I,_____ , consent to participate in the study, *Workers, Deindustrialization and Community, Phase 3: Issues Following Plant Closures,* conducted by Professor Norene Pupo and PhD Candidate Lacey Croft. I have understood the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____ **Date**
Participant

Signature _____ **Date**
Interviewer

☐ I consent to the audio-recording of my interview(s).

Appendix D: Semi-Structured Interview Guide

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE
WOMEN, DEINDUSTRIALIZATION AND COMMUNITY
PHASE 2:
WORKERS RESPOND TO PLANT CLOSURES

BACKGROUND

I'd like to start with a brief history of your employment.
When did you start working at (the closed plant) … ? How did you get the job there? Did you hold a variety of positions at the plant? What was your final position?

PLANT - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

If you had to describe what it's like to work at [factory] to a friend, what would you say?

Did you mainly work with males? Females? Or in a mixed group? How big was your immediate work group? Age range?

How would you describe the relationship between workers and management? What types of concerns did workers tend to have before the announcement?

CLOSURE ANNOUNCEMENT

At the time of the announcement, how long had you been working at the plant? Was your time at the plant continuous? Or was your time at the plant interrupted?

> If yes, probe: Layoffs? Pregnancy and child care? Returning to school? Other reasons?

At the time of the announcement, was your intention to otherwise continue working there? For how much longer do you think you would have stayed (until retirement)?

How did you learn that the plant was going to close?

> Probe: At a meeting? By Letter? By management or company president? By some other means (rumor mill)?

What was the official explanation for the closure? What do you think was the *real* story behind the closure?

Thinking back to the period before the closure announcement, were there signs or indications or rumors that the plant might close? If yes, what were they?

Sometimes during a major announcement of mass layoffs/closure, management will talk about the potential shock or stress that workers might feel – did they say anything about what reactions you might have, and what to do about them?

> Probe: Anything after the announcement? By direct supervisor? HR?

What was *your* immediate reaction to the news?
Probe: Feelings? Thoughts? Actions?

Who did you talk to immediately afterward?
Probe: Coworkers? Family?
What did you say? What did they say?

Over the next couple of days following the announcement, what kinds of concerns did you have? Did you discuss these concerns with anyone?
Probe: Partner? Close friend(s)? Parents? Extended Family? Adult children?
What have you had to do (or think you will need to do) to address those concerns?

Overall, how would you describe the reaction of your co-workers to the closure announcement?
Probe: Specific incidents/examples?
For people who seemed least concerned what did they do/say?
What did people say/do who seemed most upset?

Following the announcement, what was the atmosphere like in the plant?
How long were you able to stay on the job between the time of the announcement and your final day?
Was it a "business-as-usual" atmosphere?
Did you or other workers express your anger or resentment at work? If so, how?
Did you or other workers slow down the pace of work, or "work to rule"?
How did management react? Were workers disciplined for "acting out"?
What role, if any, did the union play on the shop floor?

Did you or others talk about feeling stress or worried? Did you/they receive any supports? If yes: From colleagues? Management?

CLOSURE PROCESS
Would you describe the process of the closure?
Was the closure staged? If yes, how did this work? Probe: by seniority? By department?
What was the role of the union during this process?

How were you given updates? What type of information did you receive? Are you satisfied with the amount and type of information that you received and how it was shared?

Altogether, from the time of the announcement to the last day of work, what was the most stressful part of the closure process?

Sometimes workplaces offer mental health supports during a closure. What resources existed for workers struggling with stress or mental health issues?

Probe: Access to counseling, onsite counseling, stress management workshops?
If yes probe: Who organized these supports? Did you access any of the services? Were they helpful? If not, why not?

What information or resources would you have needed to make the closure less stressful?

Are you satisfied with the closure agreement your union was able to negotiate?

Do you think that most workers are satisfied or not with the agreement?
In your opinion, did some groups of workers (older workers, males, females) benefit more from the closure agreement than others?
Or do you feel that the agreement was equally beneficial to all?

THE UNION AND THE AGREEMENT

Non-Unionized Workers

In unionized environments, the union would be responsible for negotiating the closure agreement. Without a union, how did workers give input into the final agreement?
Probe: who was involved? How did you submit ideas/concerns? How did workers react to receiving the closure agreement? Was it given all at once? Individually?

In your opinion, would it have been helpful to have a union? How do you think it would have changed the closure process (in terms of agreement or structure)?

Is it important to you, as you look for future work, that a workplace be unionized? Or does it matter?

Unionized workers

Some workers are very involved with their union and others are not. How involved were you with the union?

Probe: Did you attend meetings? Read union publications?

Did you hold a position in the union? If yes, what was the position and how long did you hold the position?

In general, what is your position on the roles of unions?

With the closure, are you concerned about the loss of your connection to your union? To your union brothers and sisters?

Is it important to you that you find another unionized job?

Do you think that there may have been steps the union might have taken to delay (or stop) the closure? Explain.

Thinking about the union's role after the announcement, are you satisfied that the union did everything possible to help the workers?

If yes, beyond negotiating the closure agreement, how did the union help the workers? Did the union talk about or get resources for workers struggling with stress and mental health issues?

If no, what more should the union have done to help the workers?

With plant closures, workers often worry about their pensions. Do you feel that the union took the necessary steps to protect your pensions?

How did the closure affect your benefits? What concerns do you have now about benefits?

What did the severance package mean for you?

Probe: Timing? Amount?

IMPACT OF CLOSURE

a) **Financial Concerns**

With closures, workers usually face financial difficulties and have expressed concerns over managing their finances and making the best decisions regarding their severance packages. If you had this difficulty, what steps did you take/are you taking to address your concerns?

Do you think your job loss will now affect how you will make financial decisions in the future?

Probe: How do you and your partner share in financial decisions? Are you worried that you will have less say in family and financial matters with your job loss?

If you had a large and unexpected financial expense--car repairs, dental work, new roof--would you be able to come up with the money quickly?

Probe: how and what would the impact be?

Would you have to take out a loan, sell something, postpone a holiday? Or do you feel that your savings are sufficient to "weather a storm?"

If you will be unable to locate employment in the next 6 months to a year, or have to take low-wage employment, would you be concerned about your financial dependency?

Since the closure, do you have new concerns regarding housing? Paying your mortgage? Are you committed to staying in the community?

When you think about your long-term financial future, how concerned are you about the long-term implications for yourself, your children and parents?

Will you receive your company pension? Probe: whole pension or partial pension? In what ways, if any, has your pension been affected by the closure?

Is retirement savings a concern for you?
If so, why?
If not, why not?

Are you planning for retirement? How?

Does your spouse/partner have a pension plan?

In general, how are you dealing with financial concerns since the closure?

b) **Family Relationships**

Do you feel that the closure has created tension within your family? Or has it brought you closer?

Is there anyone you look to for support within your family (or close circle of friends)? In what ways do your family or friends show their support?

c) **Workplace Relationships**

How have your co-workers dealt with the closure? Do you talk with them and share your stories?
Probe: Do you still get together with your co-workers?
Where/how do you communicate/meet? (in person or online?)

Has the closure served to strengthen your friendships? Or has the closure separated you from your co-workers?

d) **Community Involvement (Social Bonds)**

How did the community respond to the closure announcement?
What were the reactions of community leaders?
Did the community rally around those of you who lost your jobs? If yes, how? If not, why not?

Do you feel more or less connected within the community since the closure?
Probe: In what ways? Have you withdrawn from or joined activities in the community since the closure?

e) **Physical and Emotional Health**

Have you experienced any new physical health issues since the plant closure?

Have you experienced any additional stresses or anxiety following the plant closure?
Probe: Difficulty sleeping; issues with alcohol, smoking, etc.?
How have you dealt with this?

What are the different things you have been doing to manage stress/support your wellbeing?
Probe (both "positive" and "negative"): Exercise? Counselling? Smoking? Drinking?
Are you doing these more or less often than before the announcement?

Since the announcement, have you taken time off work for stress or mental health issues?

Have you accessed any resources outside of the workplace to help with your physical or emotional health?
If yes probe: which ones? Where did you learn about them? Did you have any difficulty accessing those supports?
If no: why not? Where/to whom would you go first if you needed support?

How has your health coverage changed with the closure?
Probe: Has the loss of health coverage affected you? How? (i.e, prescriptions, physiotherapy and other services, dental.)

SURVIVAL STRATEGIES

Was an Action Centre set up following the closure?
If so, what services were offered? And did you use them/are you using them?
Job searches and resumé help?
Help with EI applications?
Retraining?
If no, how are you managing?
Job search?
Retraining?

Have you been employed since the closure?
If so, where? Service sector? Manufacturing?
If service sector, are you looking to return to the manufacturing sector? Why or why not?
Is your new job unionized?

If you have considered relocating, where would you go?
Have any of your co-workers relocated?
If so, where?

About how many of your co-workers (Males? Females?) have found new jobs?
Are these jobs in the community?

Are some workers now commuting for work?

With regard to the workers who were successful in finding new jobs:
Are the new jobs in manufacturing?
Other than manufacturing, what kinds of jobs are workers finding?

Generally, how do the new jobs compare to the jobs they held at the plant?
Probe: Pay? Benefits? Unionized?

CLOSING
Is there anything we haven't talked about that you want to tell me about what it is like to go through a plant closure?

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