On Rules, Values, and the True Self: the Organizational Prevention and Permission of Authenticity in Highly Regulated Environments

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ABSTRACT

The concept of authenticity, or being true to the self, has received sustained interest and inquiry for centuries with a particular swell in recent years, as values-driven notions of sincerity, genuineness, and truth abound. Extant definitions of authenticity abound, although the idea that authenticity denotes alignment between one's individual prioritization and outward enactment of specific values—particularly when held values may contradict organizational regulations—remains overlooked. In an ethnographic study of a highly regulated service environment, the Registry of Motor Vehicles, I find that employees embedded in service roles experience values tensions of various types (service, humanity) which challenge their ability to adhere to personal and organizational values and expectations. These tensions are manifest during episodic work tasks, wherein the prioritization of particular forms of values (dignity versus efficiency) results in markedly different approaches for completing said tasks. Further, the tension that individuals may experience between their ability to enact individually prioritized values may result in transgressing regulations in favor of satisfying personal values, even to their detriment. This study offers several contributions to literature on authenticity and values, suggesting that various manifestations of the authentic self are possible in regulated environments which depend on the degree to which individuals experience tension between personal and perceived organizational values. Further, I suggest that, due to these possible (mis)alignments, organizations may either constrain or enable the enactment of an individual's authentic self.

Keywords: authenticity, values, felt authenticity, values conflicts, regulations, customer service interactions, emotional labor, inauthenticity

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[1] Informants' names have been masked with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

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Onward and upward!

PREFACE

The dissertation format allows for more space and flexibility than typical journal articles, for which I am grateful—and hopefully my committee members will forgive me and indulge my musings as I complete this program—but I hoped to offer some context which explains somewhat more why I am so committed to the concept of authenticity, and how and why this project is designed in a partially self-interested way to answer some of my own personal questions about the concept and its enactive application.

Prior to entering the doctoral program at Boston College, I became enamored by the concept of authenticity, which I understood as "being true to yourself", "being real", and "being honest". This was in large part due to what I would describe as an outgrowth from childhood insecurity wherein a lack of confidence often led me to exaggerate about accomplishments or bend to others' influence in an effort to gain friendship and support from others. My apparent response to this behavior was to swing the pendulum far to the other side, engaging in radical honesty and to turn inward to a perhaps excessive degree. Though others might reasonably conclude that this switch was an overcorrection, it certainly kindled my interests in being true and good for its own sake, and particularly stoked my desire to align my behavior with my values. What followed over the next 10 years was a gradual and iterating kind of experimentation with the concept of authenticity, and I sought to find a balance between honesty, genuineness, and sincerity, in pursuit of being my best self for the benefit of others.

Further, other interests presented a natural opportunity to explore the concept of being authentic, among these spending time as a missionary in Brazil and seeking to genuinely care for others without selfish desires, but most principally through a growing interest in performing in choirs and especially musicals. The stage is invoked in Goffman's classic treatise, *The*

Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (which book I became consumed by the summer after my first year at BC; I liken reading that book to a deliciously thick peanut butter smoothie, which is difficult to drink quickly), and thus questions related to the "reality" or "veracity" of a performance and the believability of my and others' portrayals became of principal interest. I spent time wondering what the audience thought of what I was doing, wondering whether critical reviews (even positive ones) were seeing things which I should change, and ultimately how my attempt to portray a particular character might be seen as more than just an extension of my own personality. I wondered about playing a particular role opposite a friend of mine, and the intrigue of the green room "back stage"—with its own kind of "front stage" that performers still put on, even while ostensibly resting or preparing to step onstage. A particularly intriguing experience came during the production of *Oklahoma!* just prior to entering the program at BC, where I played the lead role of Curly and my wife joined the cast as the dance captain. We enjoyed our experience and the opportunity to perform together, but the fleeting, ephemeral quality of performing with a particular group of people was and remains very challenging for me. I wondered if what we were doing in portraying a Golden Age musical was "real", or simply just an act. It felt real to me.

Continuing this story, as I began the doctoral program at BC, my wife and I had an experience which resonated deeply with my interests in being true to oneself. We visited the RMV three times, being unsuccessful the first two times and then finally preparing all necessary documents for the third time. I carried a strong negative bias toward the RMV (or the DMV outside of Massachusetts) and I certainly brought it with me into the center. During our transaction with a customer service representative on the third visit, it became clear that we were going to be able to receive our desired service and we began chatting in a more friendly manner with the person behind the counter. We then had an unexpectedly positive interaction with her, as my wife asked how

many times someone has asked to retake a license picture. The agent's eyes lit up as she told us about a person who had requested seven retakes, and we finished the transaction with a positive feeling. At the moment, it was as though I became aware of my bias against the RMV and its employees in an instant, and I felt what I interpreted as a spiritual prompting to learn more about this context and what it must be like to be authentic in such a context. I spoke with the manager, whose enthusiasm for my idea to perform an ethnographic study (mind you, prior to my having learned about how to conduct such a study) was unexpected and thrilling, and I engaged in a slow, laborious process to learn more about the RMV and ways in which I might make contributions to scholarly literatures. After years of embedding myself in the context and learning about various literatures, I am pleased to present what I have learned about authenticity, values, helping, compassion, and the restrictions which regulatory boundaries offer which have often surprised me.

My initial goal with this project was to pursue a concept which has continued to grow in my mind which relates to the idea of being true to oneself for others: connective authenticity. I have come to realize that the phenomenon I am most interested in is challenging to empirically elucidate and may require greater conceptual clarity, and so this project is pursuant to that goal of developing a theory of authenticity as not self-oriented, but other-oriented. It is my hope that this project helps to explain how and why pursuing authenticity can be a challenge in regulated environments, but also to show that it is possible and desirable.

For Kyla, Nora, and Emmett, and to my friends at the RMV:

May we find and be our truest selves, together.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Motivation for the Study

How do individuals manage being true to their values (or authentic) when held values may conflict, and further, how do individuals pursue being true to personal values while adhering to organizational regulations that may conflict with these values? The concept of authenticity has been studied for centuries and has been considered an important, values-laden, and socially desirable concept by scholars of various disciplines (Harter, 2002; Trilling, 1972). Authenticity refers to distinct concepts which generally connote truth or the pursuit of truth in opposition to falseness or counterfeit (Lehman et al., 2019). Specifically, felt authenticity suggests an experience of alignment between an individual's internal states, traits, and priorities and their external behaviors, whereas misalignment might be described as felt inauthenticity (Goffman, 1959; Hewlin, 2003; Kernis, 2003). Being true to oneself is a foundational tenet of humanist philosophy and positive psychology and is often described as resulting in an elevated and desirable way of living (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Rogers, 1959) and of working (Caza et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2009; Wood et al., 2008). Specifically, though authenticity has been considered in a variety of organizational contexts (Cha et al., 2019; Lemoine et al., 2019; Ryan & Ryan, 2019), the concept has been consistently applied in customer service, where sincere, truthful interactions are the foundation for organizational, employee, and customer satisfaction (Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013).

However, despite the popularity and societal appetite for authenticity, scholars have begun to uncover conceptual and empirical challenges associated with being authentic at work (Bailey & Levy, 2022; Hewlin et al., 2020; Ibarra, 2015; Pillemer, 2019; Taylor, 1992). For example, though authenticity is often described as a value-laden concept which assists in building bridges between

individuals (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Martinez et al., 2017)—such as in customer service interactions (Grandey et al., 2005; Pugh, 2001; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013)—others question whether being authentic might also take the form of less socially desirable behaviors which undermine these relationships (Chen, 2019; Gibson, 2018), or whether authenticity is needed in customer service interactions at all (Houston et al., 2018). Further, as organizations often constrain individuals to behave in specific ways, whether through normative expectations (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009, 2011; Kunda, 1992) or formal regulations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983), being true to oneself may also exist in tension with satisfying the requirements of one's job (Hewlin, 2003, 2009). Moreover, some have also questioned the nature of authenticity as a values-driven concept and whether the concept is worth further study due to its highly ambiguous nature (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Baumeister, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019).

The recent discussion on authenticity reveals tensions and opportunities for conceptual and empirical elaboration. First, the role of values in authenticity requires greater articulation. As authenticity is often defined as being true to the "self", the concept is often used by literatures and concepts which invoke *identity* (Caza et al., 2018; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013); thus, behaving in ways which are (in)consistent with one's identity is one way to examine authenticity (e.g., Creary et al., 2015; Roberts, 2005). Further, research which invokes the notion of authenticity or its absence also describes being true (or not) to *emotions*, suggesting that another way to examine authenticity is by considering how individuals align behaviors (or not) with what an individual feels (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2003). Finally, authenticity is often defined in terms of individuals being true to specific values (see Cha et al., 2019; Lehman et al., 2019), or the principles which guide how individuals lives their lives (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2012). Indeed, organizations and employees now seek more than ever to tether their cognition and behavior to

ostensibly moral, socially desirable, and generally benevolent principles, as they pursue radical improvement and change in response to societal crises (Amis & Greenwood, 2021). The importance of values continues to grow in management and organizations (Kraatz et al., 2020; Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2012), and understanding how individuals and organizations manage values commitments is critical to unpack what people deem important, how they make choices, and what they implicitly justify, prioritize, and proscribe in their words and actions. Given the role of values in demonstrating the core principles that people find desirable and important (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 1992), it appears critical to explore how and why individuals experience a sense of felt authenticity by examining their held values and how these shape behavior (i.e., enactment).

However, despite the growing importance of values in guiding individual and organizational behavior and the importance of knowing how individuals manage their values commitments, there remains a paucity of research which empirically examines how individuals manage being true to their values in a way that invites a sense of felt authenticity. Specifically, as a sense of felt authenticity has been shown to result from the behavioral enactment of one's held values (Kernis & Goldman, 2006), it is critical to examine how individuals experience the process of aligning values with behavior—as well as the prioritization of particular values over others. However, despite the importance of considering the link between making good on (i.e., acting in adherence to) one's value commitments, we currently overlook how and why individuals prioritize enacting specific moral values.

Second, the way in which individuals manage tensions between their held values and organizational regulations requires greater elaboration. Regulations, or prescriptive rules which govern organizational process and procedure (Perrow, 1986), require that individuals adhere to specific behaviors and often shapes how individuals experience and manage the desired identities,

emotions, and values of individuals embedded in them. Past work suggests that personal emotions or values may differ from those stipulated by organizational regulations (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Hewlin, 2003, 2009), and that the presence of these rules can exact an element of control over desired identities and behavior (Anteby, 2008; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011). Yet, it is possible that individuals whose personal values cohere with those of the organization's are less likely to experience tension between personal commitments and organizational regulations (Kristof-Brown & Guay, 2011). Thus, despite potential challenges that may arise from regulations which dissuade individuals from enacting values which they individually prioritize, it is also possible that highly regulated organizational environments may invite, enable, or augment the expression of individual authenticity due to their perceived alignment with an individual's held values. But, despite the role that regulations might play in how individuals experience a sense of felt authenticity, we yet overlook how individuals manage the enactment of values which may differ from those they personally prioritize, and how this shapes the experience of felt authenticity. Further, despite the implied relevance of the enactment of individually prioritized values in terms of felt authenticity—and the tension which individuals may experience if these values differ from regulatory mandates—we yet lack an empirical examination of whether and how individuals pursue felt authenticity while adhering to regulatory boundaries (for examples of inauthenticity in response to regulations, see Hewlin, 2003, 2009; cf. Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013).

This study aims to explore these empirical and theoretical opportunities by considering how individuals in a highly regulated environment manage being true to personal values while cognizant of the incessant pressures of organizational policies, structures, and regulations. To explore these tensions, I use a qualitative, inductive approach for data collection and analysis (Locke, 2001) to explore a highly regulated service environment—the Registry of Motor

Vehicles—in an ethnographic study of a single RMV location called CarTown[2]. Drawing from my grounded approach to data collection and analysis, I find that the experience of felt authenticity in a regulated service environment arises in response to how individuals navigate between two primary types of values (i.e., dignity and efficiency) as employees seek to serve customers, with whom they have a complex and dynamic relationship. I detail how CarTown employees pursue the enactment of dignity versus efficiency in situated work episodes, and show how regulations may enable or constrain the individual enactment of their held values in ways which foster a greater (or diminished) sense of authenticity, which depends on the perceived alignment with their personal values and organizational values. Finally, I delineate distinct forms of authenticity that emerge in regulated service environments as individuals prioritize self- versus other-oriented and person- versus task-based approaches to fulfilling work tasks.

Accordingly, I discuss how organizational regulations offer unique opportunities for alignment or misalignment with individual values in ways which are shaped by an individual's own values, as well as situational encounters between customers and employees. Thus, this study offers several contributions to organizational theory: that values play a varied but integral role in whether and how individuals experience authenticity, that regulations offer constraining and enabling forces toward the expression of authenticity, and that tensions between individual values and regulations may result in an experience of cognitive dissonance which leads individuals to pursue behaviors which are aligned with their held values—even to their detriment—and which restore them to a sense of felt authenticity.

Core Research Questions

[2] All informant and RMV location names have been replaced with pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

The initial purpose of this study was to explore how authenticity is experienced in service environments in which the customer service experience is more negative, and how individuals strive to be true to themselves in these situations. And, as commonly happens in inductive research, the focus of the study shifted and evolved over time as I embedded myself in the RMV and learned more about the context and what informants experience (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, my core research questions are: (1) How is authenticity experienced in highly regulated environments, and (2) How (if at all) do individuals pursue a sense of felt authenticity as they manage conflicts between personal values and regulations in highly regulated environments?

I rely on various literatures to provide a conceptual foundation for my emergent theorizing. Notably, research on authenticity is critical for exploring how individuals strive to be true to themselves at work (e.g., Caza et al., 2018; Cha et al., 2019; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), particularly situated in a customer service context (e.g., Grandey et al., 2005; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Relatedly, research on emotional labor (e.g., Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983) and compassion fatigue (e.g., Dutton & Workman, 2011) are literatures which are often used within the customer service context to explain how employees manage the often strenuous and depleting experience of helping customers, and which offer valuable insights related to the enactment of one's authentic self. Further, research on values is critical to understand how individuals describe their desires and guiding principles (e.g., Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2012), while the many examples of values tensions and conflicts from past research offers a backdrop against which to consider the disparities between individual and organizational priorities (e.g., Ashforth & 1993; Hewlin, 2003, 2009). Finally, research on organizational values (e.g., Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Kraatz et al., 2020) is helpful to illustrate possible ways in which individuals might experience tensions between their held values and organizational priorities and processes. These concepts help

to explain this research study, which focuses on the role of individuals but acknowledges the presence of other stakeholder groups (i.e., organizational leaders, customers) and various levels of the organizational hierarchy.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation is composed of seven chapters. In Chapter 2, I review the conceptual background for this study, providing a foundation on which to build my emergent theoretical insights. Specifically, I review literature on authenticity and related topics (e.g., emotional labor), values and values conflicts, and organizational regulations to connect how individuals might hold values which exist in tension (or agreement) with those they perceive of the organization. In Chapter 3, I outline my methodological assumptions and decisions relative to this study's research design—namely, an ethnographic exploration of the CarTown RMV between 2018 and 2023—and review the various data sources (e.g., ethnographic observation and field notes, interview data, archival data) and their triangulated purpose in informing the study's emergent storyline. I also review my grounded approach to data analysis, using a qualitative and inductive approach to illustrate how individuals manage a sense of authenticity in regulated environments.

Chapters 4 through 6 contain findings from this study, and these chapters ought to be interpreted as a three-part system, with each chapter adding upon what the previous chapter articulates. In Chapter 4, I offer an ethnographic description of CarTown and walk through the entire service process from start to finish, including customer and employee tasks and their dynamic interrelations. Namely, I describe the process through which customers prepare to receive services at CarTown, the regulated procedure which employees follow to process said customers, the various permutations which are possible when servicing each customer, and the conclusions of service and possible following events (e.g, customer reviews). This sets the stage for Chapter 5, in which I articulate the forms of values tensions which CarTown employees experience relative to

the expression of their work (i.e., dignity versus efficiency), as well as tensions which are present in how they view customers (i.e., as a source of fulfillment versus a source of threat). I articulate a model of values tensions which remains present in the background of each customer interaction. In Chapter 6, I use a theoretical process model to walk through how CarTown employees approach and complete work tasks, articulating the nature of using a dignity- versus efficiency-oriented approach in the completion of one's work. Further, I show how the presence of organizational regulations may permit or prevent individuals from enacting personally prioritized values, which may lead individuals to a sense of felt inauthenticity and exhaustion, as well as the various types of interactions which are possible in regulated service environments (i.e., transcendent, marginal, unsuccessful, distressing).

Finally, Chapter 7 discusses the implications of this study, suggests several specific contributions with theoretical and practical relevance to organizational studies, and offers a reflection on the study's shortcomings and possible future research opportunities. In summary, this study contributes to organizational research by specifying the role of values in felt authenticity, illustrating that individuals may struggle to enact values which are in conflict with each other, articulating the process through which individuals prioritize values, and how (mis)alignment between personal value prioritization and regulatory boundaries can elicit a sense of felt (in)authenticity. The findings from this study also suggest that, in support of the assertions of recent scholars, the experience of felt authenticity and the ways in which this phenomenon is behavioral manifested differs—depending on various contextual triggers, and the balancing of various values-oriented decisions (e.g., person-focused vs. task-focused, self-focused vs. other-focused). Overall, this study seeks to delineate different ways in which individuals experience

authenticity, and how unpacking the role of values is critical in understanding how and why individuals pursue felt authenticity at work.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL OVERVIEW

Defining Authenticity

The concept of the authenticity and the authentic self has existed for centuries, hearkening back at least as far as Greek philosophers such as Aristotle with a prominent feature in Polonius' famous line from *Hamlet*: "this above all—to thine own self be true". Since then, philosophers (Buber, 1937; Gergen, 2009; Trilling, 1972), sociologists (for a review, see Lehman et al., 2019; see also Carroll & Swaminathan, 2000; Fine, 2004; Goffman, 1959; McKendrick & Hannan, 2014), psychologists (for recent reviews, see Ryan & Ryan, 2019; see also Harter, 2002; Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Rogers, 1959), management scholars (Cha et al., 2019; Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra, 2015; Roberts et al., 2009; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), and others (e.g., poets, humanities scholars; Buber, 1937; Trilling, 1972) have explored the meaning, importance, and application of authenticity. Across these literatures, the concept of authenticity is used variously in different literatures to suggest similar but distinct things, such as the determination of and assignation to appropriate market categories (e.g., authentic Peruvian cuisine, authentic country music; for a review see Lehman et al., 2019). In all, the various utilizations of the term "authentic" or "authenticity" appear to refer to characteristics of a given entity (e.g., self, product, category) which make them "real" (Hopwood et al., 2021). Without these essential characteristics, a given product, category, or self would not be seen as real or appropriately classified—and would thus diminish its perceived value (van Gerven et al., 2019).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I rely most on Cha and colleagues' (2019: 634) broad definition of authenticity in terms of the concept of the "true self" or "authentic self", namely an "alignment between a person's internal sense of self and outward behavior". I also draw heavily from Kernis' (2003: 1) seminal definition, namely "the unobstructed operations of one's true, or

core, self in one's daily enterprise". This hearkens back to Goffman's (1959) notion of a *front stage*—where behaviors are tailored to the perceptions of external audiences (see also Bolino, 1999; Hewlin, 2003, 2009)—and a *back stage*—where behaviors lack such social tailoring in the "unrestrained" sense mentioned by Kernis (2003). In this way, Goffman might describe a person who invokes their back stage with others as invoking their authentic self.

Contemporary scholars have recently intensified their focus on authenticity, clarifying various of its underlying aspects. For example, Cha and colleagues (2019) break the concept down in terms of authenticity which is internally experienced (e.g., "I feel that I am being true to myself"; "I feel that I am living in alignment with my core values"), and externally perceived (e.g., "I feel that you are being true to yourself"; "I feel that you are living in alignment with your core values"), implicating the possibility that the way individuals see themselves may vary from the way in which others see them (e.g., Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Other work clarifies the determination of authenticity in terms of a category or grouping (i.e., authentic "to what"), suggesting that people, products, and places may be characterized as authentic based on the degree to which the subject adheres to said category (e.g., comparing a recording artist to the genre of classic country music; Lehman et al., 2019), as well as the ways in which authenticity supports individual autonomy and genuineness in interactions with others (Ryan & Ryan, 2018). Most recently, scholars of authenticity have begun to tackle progressively more nuanced questions, such as the process in which authenticity emerges in work interactions (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013; see also Grandey et al., 2005; Pugh, 2001), the strategies individuals use to be "true" to various jobs and roles (Caza et al., 2018), and the extent to which inauthenticity is ever possible (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019). Ultimately, though conceptualizations of authenticity vary (see Cha et al., 2019), the constant is that individuals who behaviorally manifest what they internally prioritize

(e.g., emotional states, beliefs, values) in a way which suggests autonomy, congruence, and genuine deliberacy (Ryan & Ryan, 2019) are described as experience a sense of felt authenticity, while those who behave in ways which vary from these priorities might be described as experiencing a sense of felt inauthenticity (Goffman, 1959; Hewlin, 2003; Kernis, 2003).

Authenticity in Organizations

The concept of authenticity has been linked to a variety of positive outcomes at the individual (e.g., self-esteem, work engagement; Kernis, 2003; Cable et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990; Leroy et al., 2013), dyadic or relational (e.g., deepened connections between people; Dutton, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), and organizational levels of analysis (e.g., perceived organizational [in]authenticity; Cording et al., 2014; Kovács et al., 2017; Marcinko, 2020; cf. Carlos & Lewis, 2017). It is beyond the scope of this work to list all outcomes related to authenticity, but recent papers describe various outcomes and related concepts across levels of analysis (see Cha et al., 2019; Lehman et al., 2019; Lemoine et al., 2019). Various organizational features have been described as shaping the manifestations and enactment of authenticity, such as managers using authenticity as a mechanism of normative control (Fleming & Sturdy, 2011) or as a socialization artifact to achieve greater organizational commitment (Cable et al., 2013). Though individuals may struggle to enact their authentic selves due to stigmatized identities or for possible sanctions for contradicting normative standards (Clair et al., 2005; Goffman, 1963; Mohr et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2003), the manifestation and enactment of an individual's authentic self is typically described in association with experiences of autonomy, stable self-esteem, and flourishing relationships (Deci & Ryan, 2014; Dutton, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Kernis, 2003; Rogers, 1959).

In all, though authors have recently begun to explore the bounded or potential negative impact of authenticity in the workplace (e.g., Bailey & Levy, 2021; Cha & Edmondson, 2006; David et al., 2021; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Kim et al., 2022; Marcinko, 2020; Pillemer,

2018; Tang, Brown, Zhang, & Owens, under review), the literature on authenticity generally considers how being authentic benefits individuals, leaders, subordinates, and organizations. However, one question that might reasonably be asked is: if authenticity is so desirable and beneficial, why is it so difficult for individuals to experience a sense of felt authenticity at work? One possible answer to this question is that pursuing authenticity at work may breach an implicit or explicit expectation that the organization, its leaders, or other members have of an individual, in ways which lead individuals to pursue outward behaviors which are in greater conformity with organizational expectations—but which may misalign with their internal priorities (e.g., Goffman, 1959; Hewlin, 2003). In this way, though the colloquial recommendation to "be authentic" at work may be well-meaning, the tensions present in how and why individuals struggle to experience a sense of felt authenticity is critical to examine.

In terms of how it is manifested in organizations, the concept of authenticity has been perhaps most studied in the context of leadership (i.e., authentic leadership), where authenticity has been depicted as a desirable characteristic of effective leaders (see Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Lemoine et al., 2019; Leroy et al., 2015; Walumbwa et al., 2008). In a more general sense, authenticity has been particularly emphasized in the context of the customer service interaction, where short engagement between customers and employees are mired by low autonomy (discretion) and high commitment (Houlihan, 2002) or threatened by uncontrollable factors such as customer volume (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988) and employee burnout due to high demands on emotional labor and regulation (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000, 2003; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983). Yagil and Medler-Liraz's (2013) work on transient authenticity is particularly helpful in explaining how authenticity emerges in these interactions and the benefits and costs associated with expressing authenticity. They show that the

salience of customer nonservice identity characteristics increases through idiosyncratic association and prototypical vulnerability displays, resulting in an increased sense of psychological autonomy and authentic behaviors—namely, behaviors imbued with honesty, personal endeavor performance, and interpersonal closeness. However, they also show that as employees engage authentically with customers—and particularly as the nature of the customer or organizational expectations are unmet—there are several costs for employees which make their work more challenging (i.e., loss of control, sense of disloyalty, social rejection). The authors suggested that "most employees in [their] sample associated authenticity with benevolent behaviors" and that they "did not have enough data to analyze situations in which employees experiencing authenticity departed from display rules by behaving negatively or even 'not positively enough' toward customers" (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013: 492); they also suggested that "customers may play a part in triggering authenticity…[trying] to create a perception of association between themselves and an employee or emphasize their vulnerability, especially when trying to gain special treatment" (p. 492). Further, the authors suggest that "direct supervisors and top management expect inauthentic behavior" and that managers often "viewed authentic behavior as contravening managerial expectations…yet little is known about managerial views on the subject" (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013: 492).

In this way, it is clear that there are various important questions relative to expressed authenticity in the customer service interaction, particularly as impacting the quality of connection therein. However, despite important insights on how individuals experience a sense of felt authenticity in work interactions, it is as yet unclear whether and how individuals manage the prioritization of particular values in their work, and whether these prioritizations carry implications for a sense of felt authenticity. Further, the presence of regulations are often thought to constrain

the likelihood that employees' sense of felt authenticity while performing customer service work, such that employees may feel unable to express particular facets of themselves while serving customers. For example, research on emotional regulation and emotional labor suggests that individuals may be required to display particular emotions as they perform work tasks (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; Hochschild, 1983), while other work on the service relationship (i.e., between customers and employees) suggests that role-based scripts prescribe specific actions for employees, regardless of personal values (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Temporary moments of personal association and extra-role connection have been identified as mechanisms for introducing a sense of transient authenticity into customer service work (see Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), but the reported experience of individuals in these work episodes referred to authenticity in a more general sense—rather than tying their behavior to specific values which they personally prioritize. In this way, the customer service interaction offers a powerful context to consider how individuals manage enacting specific values in their work.

Relatedly, literature on authenticity shows that a sense of authenticity is often experienced during moment of connection (i.e., interaction) with others, and that the "true self" is unlikely to be a monolithic entity but rather malleable and flexible to the needs of the situation and role (Caza et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2009). Specifically, the customer service context has been invoked to describe how invoking the authentic self can improve service outcomes for customers and employees by making one more authentic to the role they are playing (for a review, see Grandey & Gabriel, 2015; see also Hochschild, 1983; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Further, the authentic self has often been described as subject to constraints, such as normative ideologies and stigmas which may prevent individuals from revealing or experiencing a sense of authenticity in organizational contexts (Clair et al., 2005; Goffman, 1963; Hewlin, 2003; Hewlin et al., 2017;

Ryan & Ryan, 2019). However, despite the insinuation that distinct forms of interaction or interaction partners might elicit distinct forms of the authentic self, or that individuals might be feel constrained in the enactment of their authentic self, prior literature appears to overlook how and why different forms of the authentic self might be elicited in interactive moments between customers and employees, as well as features of organizational life which shape the enactment of the authentic self. In concert, past research suggests the possibility that authenticity is not a monolithic entity as some believe (cf. Harter, 2002; Rogers, 1959), but rather a dynamic, shifting, and flexible entity which is shaped by situational determinants. For example, Caza and colleagues (2018) show that individuals who work multiple jobs experience a sense of authenticity differently in each job, in a way which is supporting in a process of authentication. Roberts and colleagues (2009) also describe the authentication process, suggesting that the role of others is a critical determinant for the type of authenticity that is felt by individuals. Others have recently argued that being authentic is more dynamic, complex, and relational than simply adhering to one true self (Hewlin et al., 2020; Ibarra, 2015; Martinez et al., 2017). And, given the significance of these insights in articulating some of the various situational and contextual inputs to a sense of felt authenticity, exploring the possibility that individuals simultaneously hold various values-driven motives for behavior remains an empirical opportunity worthy of exploration.

Further, though authenticity has often invoked the concept of moral values (Harter, 2002; Taylor, 1992)—or, values which emphasize a normative perspective of defining behaviors as right or wrong (see Newman et al., 2014)—the link between these concepts has been made without explicit empirical investigation. Scholars have often alluded to authenticity as having moral roots, suggesting that a sense of felt authenticity is not just meaningful and desirable (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004), but that behaving in a way that is

ostensibly inauthentic is deceitful, selfish, or harmful (Trilling, 1973). Goffman (1959) described the notion of revealing one's *back stage* as perhaps an overly optimistic ideal, suggesting the challenge of presenting oneself to others and the evaluative problems inherent in being authentic. Indeed, research which invokes the concepts of impression management and self-monitoring suggest that individuals may behave in ways that are ostensibly inauthentic to demonstrate competency and legitimacy to potential evaluators (Bolino, 1999, 2001; Snyder, 1979). And yet, other research suggests that the suppression of the authentic self, though somewhat natural and instinctual in our social world (Goffman, 1959; cf. Taylor, 1992), may result in a strong desire to be known by others as individuals know themselves to be (i.e., self-verification; Swann Jr., 1983) and, hence, engage in behaviors (e.g., disruptive disclosures; Gibson, 2018) which reveal one's authentic self to others. Indeed, research about LGBTQ+ individuals and others who experience stigmatized identities suggests the challenge of outwardly living in ways which are discrepant with personal values and priorities (Martinez et al., 2017; Ryan & Ryan, 2019), and hence the pursuit of authenticity is not just deemed as a mechanism through which to bolster individual self-esteem or well-being, but as a fundamental, moral right which all individuals deserve to enact. And yet, despite historical mentions of the value-orientedness of authenticity, we yet lack an empirical examination as to the role of guiding moral principles which individuals prioritize as they complete their work tasks.

In all, though authenticity is likely to emerge through an emergent sense of associative closeness and expressed vulnerability, and though this may result in closeness which resembles high-quality connection, there remain many questions about how authenticity in this interaction shapes the resulting connection in brief organizational interactions. Other scholars have considered how infusing authenticity into these interactions manifests itself (e.g., "service with a smile" by

employees) and how these more positive experiences might improve customer experience and subsequent ratings (Grandey et al., 2005; Hochschild, 1983; Pugh, 2001; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). However, in some workplaces, authenticity may not be sufficient nor even fully desired by the organization (Houston et al., 2018). Further, as the way that those who express authenticity are perceived by others in organizations (e.g., as irritating or inappropriate; Tang et al., under review) continues to be explored by management scholars (e.g., Carroll & Kovacs, 2021; Cheshin et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2022; Ryan & Ryan, 2019; Tang et al., 2023), the way in which authenticity plays out in organizational interactions—particularly in short-term, customer engagements—appears more relevant and important than ever.

Related Concepts. Notions of authenticity (e.g., aligning behavior with internal motives, sincerity) are also relevant to other concepts studied by management scholars, and the differences between these concepts have been described (see Cha et al., 2019; Hewlin, 2003). For example, the concept of *emotional labor* considers the emotions that individuals are asked to portray at work which may or may not genuine (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983; see also Hewlin, 2003). Specifically, portraying emotions which may differ from one's felt emotions may result in a sense of felt inauthenticity, and though the sincerity of an individual's surface or deep acting may be questioned (Grandey, 2003; Hewlin, 2003), a greater sense of felt authenticity can result from utilizing a specific mechanism (i.e., deep acting) to align one's personal interests with the portrayed emotion within the prescribed service script. Similarly, research on *self-monitoring* (Snyder, 1979) and *impression management* (Bolino, 1999; Goffman, 1959; Turnley & Bolino, 2001) describe how individuals tailor their behavior to their contexts to optimize the way they are perceived by others. Individuals may tailor their behavior to suit contextual needs, such as hiding a stigmatized identity (Clair et al., 2005), and in this way authenticity might be described as

aligning one's behavior with specific held identities (see also Caza et al., 2018). Finally, research on *façades of conformity* describes how individuals behave as though they endorse a given workplace principle, though they may internally disagree with it (Hewlin, 2003, 2009; Hewlin et al., 2017). Similarly to research on self-monitoring and impression management, individuals who use façades of conformity could be described as being inauthentic (i.e., their behavior belies their held values; Hewlin, 2003), this is more accurately a poignant example of a lack of authenticity. Relatedly, research on *self-concordance*, or "the pursuit of goals aligned with one's values" (Edmondson & Cha, 2006: 58) also appears similar to authenticity, as pursuing work which aligns with one's held values might appear to elicit a sense of felt authenticity. However, the distinction between self-concordance and felt authenticity is that, whereas self-concordance emphasizes the alignment between one's values and the selection of one's job, felt authenticity is described as resulting from behaving in a way which is consistent with internal priorities, qualities, and states (e.g., emotions, identities, values).

Though these concepts are related to the study of authenticity, they have distinct meanings. For example, emotional labor and emotional display rules in general have been described as "contextual antecedents of authenticity" (Cha et al., 2019: 646) and as having similar outcomes to authenticity (e.g., well-being (p. 647), but the distinction with emotional labor is on the emotional strain associated with the prescription of specific behaviors which carry emotional weight (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). For other examples, consider research on self-monitoring and impression management, which refer to how individuals adjust their behavior to tailor how they are perceived by others. Several studies suggest that such tailoring could evoke a sense of felt inauthenticity (Bolino, 1999; Goffman, 1959), but these studies often examine how individuals change their behavior, rather than the aspects and manifestations of the "true self" (Kernis, 2003).

Thus, research on authenticity has concepts in its nomological net which are relevant to the functioning of individuals and organizations (for a review, see Cha et al., 2019).

However, despite the importance of describing authenticity in terms of behavioral adherence to particular held values, we yet lack empirical evidence which substantiates this claim and overlook how and why discrepancies or alignments with held values are consequential for felt authenticity. For example, the concept of façades of conformity (Hewlin, 2003) offers perhaps the strongest conceptual case of a concept related to (in)authenticity which invokes a possible conflict between a person's values and the values they perceive of their organization, leading them to suppress their behavior in favor of behaviors which are more normatively appropriate. Further, Hewlin (2009: 740) measures of façades of conformity using items such as "I suppress personal values that are different from those of the organization", or "I behave in a manner that reflects the organization's value system even though it is inconsistent with my personal values". This measure is convincing in illustrating *that* an individual has chosen to behave in ways which may be inconsistent with their held values, depicting the degree to which an individual respondent sees their own behavior as (in)consistent with their held values in favor of perceived organizational values. And yet, despite the promising insights that this research stream offers—namely, that individuals often do conform to organizational values and behave in ways which conflict with held values—the specific ways (i.e., how and why) in which individuals depart from their held values remains overlooked in this area.

Moreover, other concepts such as authentic leadership (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Leroy et al., 2015; Walumbwa et al., 2008), authentic functioning (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006), and authentic personality (Harter, 2002; Wood et al., 2008) all measure varying aspects which relate to aligning one's behavior with their values (see Cha et al., 2019: 636-639). However, and

importantly, though the degree to which an individual (i.e., person, employee, leader) evaluates their behavior (or the behavior of others, in the case of authentic leadership) as being consistent with held values, these conceptualizations only report *that* an individual reports an alignment between held values and behavior—as opposed to explaining *how* and *why* individuals behave, think about, and make choices relative to the enactment of specific held values. In this way, this study intends to address a theoretical and empirical opportunity to explore how individuals manage the enactment of their held values, as pertaining to their pursued sense of felt authenticity at work.

The Varied Nature and Impact of Felt Authenticity

This section uses a broader historical perspective to review a broader swath of research which has considered the nature and impact of felt authenticity (see Harter, 2002; Taylor, 1992; Trilling, 1973). Researchers from various disciplines have argued about the experience of felt authenticity and what it produces in social relationships, and their discussions are important to consider when seeking to better understand what a sense of felt authenticity signifies. Thus, this section is divided into two segments which not only review relevant literature as to the nature and impact of felt authenticity, but which also seed the significance of the findings which emerged in this study (see Chapters 5-6): first, felt authenticity as socially desirable and beneficial, and second, felt authenticity as socially negligible or detrimental.

Felt Authenticity as Socially Desirable or Beneficial. The experience of felt authenticity as currently conceived might be best portrayed as an intrapersonal quality that, when exercised in interpersonal situations, is engaging, socially desirable, and promotes high-quality connection (Kernis, 2003; Trilling, 1972; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Authenticity has often been described as a moral, ethical, and value-laden concept which "conveys a variety of different meanings, although most often (but not necessarily) these bear some positive correlation with interpretations of "real" or "genuine" or any of a host of synonyms" (in Carroll & Kovács, 2021: 2; citing Trilling,

1972; Kovács, 2019). Indeed, the invitation to be true to oneself has been described as not simply a possible way of living, but as answering a "moral imperative" (Wood et al., 2008: 385; citing Harter, 2002) wherein the true self is normatively desired as superior to a false representation of oneself (Taylor, 1992) as individuals seek to "[become] that self which one truly is" (Kierkegaard, 1941: 29).

Arguably two of the strongest contributions to our understanding of authenticity came in the latter half of the 20th century by the authors Lionel Trilling (1972) and Charles Taylor (1992), whose respective books—*Sincerity and Authenticity* and *The Ethics of Authenticity*—have exacted huge influence on scholars from that time forth. Trilling (1972) provides a historical, literature-based perspective on the usage and meaning of the word authenticity, describing its roots as related to the concept of sincerity. Ultimately, he describes authenticity as having signified an earnestness and realness which decayed over centuries, as sincerity became something which required explicit statement in social interaction as opposed to implicit in it and as society became more obsessed with the growing sophistication and sophistry of edgy individuals in popular media of the day. For example, characters like Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (1666) and *Tartuffe* or Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew* (1805) explore characters who are unabashedly straightforward in their pursuit of pleasure and debauchery (e.g., the protagonist of *Le Misanthrope*) in opposition to the ostensibly more scrupulous characters (e.g., Molière's Alceste) who were "not celebrated but questioned and teased" by their readers (Trilling, 1972: 17). Relatedly, in Rousseau's *Confessions* (Rousseau, 1782), the author expresses deep emotions regarding his many misgiving and innermost vagaries which run contrary to his explicit religious beliefs. However, though the painful vulnerability and openness which Rousseau uses to describe his innermost immoral desires, other authors appear eager to endorse the Epicurean sensibilities of pursuing pleasure and gratification over pain and

forbearance. In this way, Trilling (1972) shows how the manifestation of authenticity originated as a desire to pursue Platonic ideals and eventually grew to expressing oneself unabashedly, in unrestrained fashion (see also Kernis, 2003), in ways which were closer to succumbing to one's innermost urges, as others suggested (e.g., Freud). Though sincerity and authenticity were often invoked to express one's desire to live a moral, good life, the concept had shifted over time to signify the pursuit of an individual's own whims, which Trilling laments.

Relatedly, picking up the proverbial baton, Taylor (1992) continued the conversation about the inherent morality of authenticity. He begins by describing what he views as three malaises—or "features of our contemporary culture and society that people experience as a loss or a decline, even as our civilization 'develops'" (Taylor, 1992: 1)—namely, individualism (characterized by a self-absorptive focus and social permissiveness bordering indifferent apathy), instrumental reason (characterized by the pursuit of maximum efficiency and high rationality), and "soft despotism" which signifies a loss of freedom (characterized by the populous' subjection to informal, normative control by governmental and interpersonal pressures; Tocqueville, 1835). He embarks on a discussion of the growing relativism in modern society which, in his view, manifests itself in terms of a self-centered "moral laxity" (Taylor, 1992: 16) pursuit of what one deems best using the guise of "being authentic" instead of a morally laden concept which is absolute and unyielding. Though Taylor does not take an expressly religious perspective, his description of the authenticity as moral subjectivism "not grounded in reason…just adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them" (18) has a distinctly religious or pious bent, with a specific goal: to help people connect with each other, rather than be divided by an overly individualistic ontology. Concerning the inherent morality in authenticity, he said:

> I think that authenticity should be taken seriously as a moral ideal. I differ also from the various middle positions, which hold that there are some good things in this culture (like

> greater freedom for the individual), but that these come at the expense of certain dangers (like a weakening of the sense of citizenship), so that one's best policy is to find the ideal point of trade-off between ad vantages and costs. The picture I am offering is rather that of an ideal that has degraded but that is very worthwhile in itself, and indeed, I would like to say, unrepudiable by moderns. So what we need is neither root-and-branch condemnation nor uncritical praise; and not a carefully balanced trade-off. What we need is a work of retrieval, through which this ideal can help us restore our practice. To go along with this, you have to believe three things, all controversial: (1) that authenticity is a valid ideal; (2) that you can argue in reason about ideals and about the conformity of practices to these ideals; and (3) that these arguments can make a difference. (pp. 22-23)

Later, he adds:

> I have argued that there is a tension between the underlying ethical ideals and the ways these come to be reflected in people's lives, and this means that a systematic cultural pessimism is as misguided as a global cultural optimism. Rather, we face a continuing struggle to realize higher and fuller modes of authenticity against the resistance of the flatter and shallower forms. (p. 94)

Thus, even as Taylor (1992) offers a critical perspective on society's interpretation of authenticity, he suggests that it is possible and desirable to pursue a "higher and fuller mode of authenticity" which "transcend the self" (p. 14), "facilitate social change" (p. 58), and which allows individuals in society to "create a common understanding" (p. 119) by increasing our "dependence on others" (p. 48). In this way, rather than "[distancing] us from our relations to others" (p. 44), the enactment of the authentic self is intended to offer "as a moral principle or ideal must offer some view on how the individual should live with others" (p. 45)—and thus, the authentic self is not only desirable, but it helps us engage more meaningfully with others.

Two more recent contributions to literature on authenticity which have exerted similarly powerful influence come from the field of psychology in the form of Susan Harter's (2002) chapter in the *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, and Michael Kernis' (2003) article on authenticity as a driver of optimal self-esteem. Harter (2002) offers yet another historical perspective which considers the necessity of invoking the authentic self for optimal functioning. Though she focuses on the need for individuals (especially adolescents) to pursue authenticity for individual-level

outcomes (e.g., well-being, happiness, reduced anxiety), these outcomes play out in relation with others and in various organizational contexts (e.g., schools, families, relationships). She further asserts that authenticity is critical in adult relationships as individuals pursue interdependence with others as opposed to independence, further suggesting the importance of relating with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Gergen, 1991, 2009; James, 1950; Rogers, 1959). Importantly, she cautions against the perils of being "too authentic", and that there may be "liabilities associated with too much authenticity" in terms of social relationships (Harter, 2002, p. 391). She elaborates, citing Lerner (1993: 391):

> [Lerner] observes, however, that "in the name of 'truth,' we may hurt friends and family members, escalate anxiety nonproductively, disregard the different reality of the other person, and generally move the situation from bad to worse" (p. 15)…that much of what parades as truth-telling can actually involve "an unproductive effort to change, convince, or convert another person, rather than an attempt to clarify our own selves".

Harter's (2002) insights were based on her experience as a therapist and focused on psychological processes through which authenticity might improve individual and interpersonal life. Similarly, Kernis (2003) offered his view on how an optimal sense of individual self-esteem might be achieved (i.e., by being authentic), and what composed the concept. He describes the role of self-esteem as central to individual life as "a central component of individuals' daily experience [which] refers to the way that people feel about themselves…and affects their ongoing transactions with their environment and the people they encounter in it" (Kernis, 2003, p. 1). He clarifies that high self-esteem may be the obvious goal, but that a the most optimal and desirable form is one which secure and not fragile and thus resistant to social scrutiny or life adversity. He proposes this form of "genuine" self-esteem as evidence of a person who lives authentically, and that those with high and secure self-esteem might "expect differences to emerge in their ratings of relationship quality and satisfaction" (p. 12). He introduces optimal self-esteem as having these components:

> Optimal self-esteem involves favorable feelings of self-worth that arise naturally from successfully dealing with life challenges; the operation of one's core, true, authentic self as a source of input to behavioral choices; and relationships in which one is valued for who one is and not for what one achieves. It is characterized by the relative absence of defensiveness, that is, being willing to divulge negative behaviors or self-aspects in the absence of excessively strong desires to be liked by others…is characterized by favorable implicit feelings of self-worth that stem from positive experiences involving one's actions, contextual factors, and inter- personal relationships. On the other hand, it is characterized by minimal if any dependence upon specific outcomes or achievements (it is not contingent), and its contextual component does not exhibit substantial fluctuations (it is stable). (p. 13)

He concludes that authenticity as a concept is uniquely able to facilitate this optimal sense of self-esteem, characterizing it as "reflecting the unobstructed operation of one's true, or core, self in one's daily enterprise" (p. 13) and defining it in terms of four components: awareness, unbiased processing, action, and relational orientation. Accordingly, he describes authenticity as facilitating what he describes as *intersubjectivity*, or "a state of connection and mutual understanding that emerges during interaction with another person" (p. 13; citing Hoyle et al., 1999, pp. 31–32), and as "an ongoing process that occurs on several different levels and that promotes both greater differentiation and greater integration of the self" (p. 17). Thus, though Harter (2002) and Kernis (2003) describe authenticity as an individual-level construct with important psychological outcomes (e.g., well-being), it is depicted as having strong implications for connecting with others in organizational contexts, which is seen as both socially desirable and positively impactful.

Furthermore, the work of management scholars has followed this trend, examining the various relational benefits that authenticity elicits at work (e.g., Eagly, 2005; Martinez et al., 2017; Tang et al., 2023). Indeed, the presence of authenticity in work interactions is described as having a transformative power to invite greater depth and connection than would otherwise be possible (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Garrett, 2017; Stephens et al., 2012). For example, interactions and relationships between coworkers or close colleagues which are characterized by the mutual

expression of authentic selves might be described as closer and more intimate (Reis & Shaver, 1988), whereas those with customers or those not within one's immediate working circle might expect more superficial, scripted interactions (Hochschild, 1983; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994; Victorino et al., 2008, 2012). Though even scripted or otherwise constrained interactions with customers may be imbued with greater authenticity (i.e., deep as opposed to surface acting; Grandey, 2003; Grandey et al., 2005), the point remains that interactions between known others are typically considered as more holistic, engrossing, and indeed more human (Dutton & Ragins, 2017). In a similar vein, contextual and structural features of an organization can strongly shape the degree to which authenticity is expressed (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff et al., 2011; Grandey, 2000; Fleming & Study, 2011), such that individuals who are structured to interact regularly and closely (e.g., self-governing teams; Barker, 1993) might be characterized as experiencing more opportunities for intimate interactions (Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Rouse, 2020) while workplaces which are characterized by segmented, distributed work roles (e.g., customer service centers; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013) may be more likely to invite scripted or superficial interactions.

In all, though authenticity is a complex concept which is often paradoxical and difficult to pin down (Cha et al., 2019; Ibarra, 2015), it has been described for many centuries and in recent decades as a manifestation of an individual's inner moral virtuousness which is evidence of an "examined life", as Socrates put it (Reeve, 1989). Further, concepts such as personal engagement (Kahn, 1990), disclosure (Gibson, 2018), vulnerability (Brown, 2012), mutuality (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Dutton & Ragins, 2017; Garrett, 2017), and intimacy (Cordova & Scott, 2001; Prager, 1995; Reis & Shaver, 1988; Rouse, 2020) invoke authenticity to suggest that being open, honest, and reasonably transparent about one's perceived intentions allow for greater connection

and engagement with others. In this way, as authenticity is often depicted as a moral and engaging intrapersonal concept which bolsters their sense of self-esteem, and whereas inauthenticity may elicit feelings of immorality (Gino et al., 2015; Wei et al., 2021), it stands to reason that scholars ought to consider its inherent practical (Frankfurt, 2009) and ethical appeal (Bauer, 2017) and that individuals ought to pursue a greater sense of felt authenticity at work.

Felt Authenticity as Socially Negligible or Detrimental. Though the application of authenticity has historically been described as a moral, desirable, and socially beneficial, various scholars have come to describe authenticity as having to do more with alignment between beliefs and actions than having an ethical or moral undertone (e.g., Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Pfeffer, 2016; Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006; Shamir & Eilam, 2005; Sparrowe, 2005). Further, various scholars have suggested that there are inherent issues with focusing on authenticity in the workplace (Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Baumeister, 2019; van Gerven et al., 2019), and the growing interest in the pursuit and enactment of positive, virtuous behaviors in the workplace has led to a mounting consensus as to the concept's ethical underpinnings (Dutton, 2003; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Thus, though scholars do not agree that authenticity is or is not inherently a value-laden construct, a growing body of researchers as well as laypeople describe it as a departure from disingenuousness or insincerity (Christy et al., 2017; De Freitas et al., 2017; Strohminger et al., 2017; Strohminger & Nichols, 2014) which facilitates connecting with others (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Gergen, 2009; Stephens et al., 2012).

However, using an even stronger stance, some scholars contend that the enactment and endorsement of authenticity in the workplace could be potential immoral, socially damaging, or generally undesirable. Though authenticity as a concept suggests a sense of genuineness, realness, and/or sincerity, and though these concepts are generally described as socially desirable, the way

in which authenticity is manifest in organizations may lead individuals to evaluate manifestations of the authentic self as misguided, inappropriate, or otherwise undesirable. Various scholars have suggested that being authentic may come with interpersonal costs (Carroll, 2015; Pillemer, 2019; Tang et al., 2019; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). One particularly influential paper is by Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019), who tackle various conceptual challenges they perceive with the concept of authenticity. For example, they suggest that, as individuals are characterized by various selves, motives, and urges which may be contradictory and need not be exclusively positive, to endorse authenticity would be to invite individuals to sleep in when they are tired (even if it makes them late for work), to speak directly against something they disagree with (even if it harms a social relationship), or to engage in more unscrupulous behaviors (even if they defy successful social operations or human decency). Relatedly, Feldman (2015), echoes Taylor's (1992) assertion of an overly individualized self and suggest that a more reasonable version of authenticity employs a form of restraint as negative elements of the self may manifest in ways which harm others.

More specifically, authenticity in this more "negative" vein has often been described as manifesting as a form of "over-authenticity" (see Harter, 2002) in which individuals seek to "tell it like it is" (e.g., Ashcraft, 2001; Kruml & Geddes, 2000; Rosenblum et al., 2020; Spicer, 2013), which interactions can be straining, disruptive, or damaging for social relationships (Gibson, 2018; Methot et al., 2016; Methot et al., 2017; Methot et al., 2021; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018). In this way, employing candor or bluntness through the lens of striving to be authentic might be experienced by others as emotionally taxing (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993; Wharton & Erickson, 1993) or abrasive (Gill & Sypher, 2010; Gutek et al., 2002; Guy et al., 2010; Tasselli & Kilduff, 2018; Weingart et al., 2015), in ways which are likely to damage connection between people. However, though this more "negative" view of authenticity has been alluded to (e.g., Ibarra, 2015;

Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019; Pillemer, 2019), and specifically in the context of workplace interactions (e.g., Gibson, 2018; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), it remains to be seen whether and how expressions of authenticity which are less socially desirable shape, impact, and create experiences of varying connection quality in organizations. After all, high-quality connections are characterized by a *range* of emotionality, not expressly positive, enjoyable, or pleasant ones (Stephens et al., 2012). In this way, authenticity might also be described as consisting in behaviors, practices, and manifestations which are candid or direct, and which may be deemed inappropriate or undesirable for a given organizational context.

Ultimately, following the work of scholars such as Trilling, Taylor, Harter, and Kernis, the concept of authenticity has continued to grow in popularity in recent years (Hewlin et al., 2020; Ibarra, 2015), but its widespread appeal has also attracted the conceptual and practical scrutiny of various scholars who intend to establish clear boundaries around what authenticity is and what it is not (e.g., Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Baumeister, 2019; Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019). In this vein, authenticity is similar to yet distinct from various values-laden concepts (e.g., honesty, integrity). For example, the concept of honesty entails the degree to which an individual is perceived as telling the truth (Murphy, 1993). The presence of "being real" or "truthful" is implicated in authenticity (Hopwood et al., 2021), and a person who is truthful could certainly be described as being authentic provided they value being honest (Kernis & Goldman, 2006); indeed, leaders who are honest are generally described as being ethical, and the concept of authenticity arguably has deep ethical roots (Brown et al., 2005; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). However, honesty has more to do with the attributed veracity of one's words, rather than the alignment of their values and behaviors. Relatedly, the concept of integrity describes the degree to which individuals engage in "principled behavior" (Brown et al., 2005: 118), even when not in the presence of others

(Goffman, 1959); certainly, the two concepts both invoke the idea of behavioral consistency. However, a distinction between authenticity and integrity is that, whereas integrity emphasizes consistency between behavior which takes place in the presence of others as well as when one is alone, authenticity considers the consistency between one's internal states, traits, or experiences and their observable behavior (see Cha et al., 2019). Moreover, though authenticity may be described as a set of behaviors which are inherently principled, some argue that even unscrupulous acts may be classified as authentic (Jongman-Sereno & Leary, 2019).

In all, these definitional clashes result in many wondering whether being authentic is a realistic, practical, or even desirable recommendation for people at work. Centuries of writing on the topic suggest that that the pursuit of felt authenticity is predominantly positive, socially desirable, and beneficial for individuals and organizations, and yet a growing number of concerns about the concept and its application have raised concern as to whether the experience of authenticity is as positive and beneficial as should be believed. A concerned reader might ask which form of felt authenticity is most accurate—socially desirable, or undesirable? Ultimately, the argument about authenticity being socially desirable or undesirable, beneficial or detrimental appears to evoke comparisons to other phenomena, such as the appeal and perceived social desirability and benevolence of political parties. For example, in his book *The Righteous Mind,* Jonathan Haidt (2012) explains that liberal and conservative American citizens—who often vilify, dehumanize, and excoriate those of the other group in public political discourse—both make the choice to participate in a given political party because of specific values which each party deems especially important. Those on the liberal side often cite the importance of values like openness to change and acceptance of differences, while those on the conservative side cite the importance of values like loyalty and honor. In this way, though the concept of authenticity might be described

as moral, immoral, or amoral, the way in which the concept is understood depends on the values used to interpret the concept and its meaning. Given this, it becomes important to motivate why the study of values is so critical for understanding the concept of authenticity.

On Authenticity and Values

The previous sections regarding the positive, prosocial, or socially desirable meaning of authenticity—as well as the potential negative, antisocial, or socially undesirable meaning—may seem on its face paradoxical or confusing. Indeed, this confusion is what has led various scholars to consider the concept worthy of critique or even dismissal (e.g., Alvesson & Einola, 2019; Baumeister, 2019). Fortunately, following the insightful suggestions of past researchers (e.g., Caza et al., 2018; Ibarra, 2015; Roberts et al., 2009), using a values-based approach to understanding felt authenticity is helpful for disentangling how individuals manage being true to themselves at work. Indeed, Cha and colleagues (2019: 656) recognize that "researchers have often measured authenticity using Likert-type survey measures", but exploring the "more nuanced or creative approaches that may individuals to be authentic" might lead scholars to consider other ways or "different meanings" (Lehman et al., 2019: 29) of authenticity as pursued by individuals at work. Thus, it is now critical to unpack the role of authenticity in terms of enacting specific values which have vastly different behavioral enactments and, hence, would be likely to fostering varying experiences of felt authenticity.

As mentioned previously, the experience of authenticity has often been described as resulting from adhering to particular emotions or identities, and being true to particular values has been included in definitions of authenticity (see Cha et al., 2019; Lehman et al., 2019); however, we yet lack empirical exploration of how individuals manage authenticity in terms of being true to held values. The scholarly study of values which guide individual behavior is long and storied, and is a central facet of social science (Rokeach, 1973). Though values are inherently ambiguous and

our pursuit to comprehend them is "a never-ending process" (Rokeach, 2008: ix), the study of values nonetheless continues today in sociological (Richardson, 1990; Rokeach, 2008; Zelizer, 2018), psychological (Schwartz, 2006, 2012; Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987), and organizational studies (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Kraatz & Flores, 2015; Kraatz et al., 2010; Kraatz et al., 2020). Briefly defined, values are principles which describe "what is important to us in life" (Schwartz, 2012: 3), and which guide human behavior. Though values are described as varying somewhat between cultures (Inglehart et al., 1998; Rokeach, 1973), and though individuals carry values which may be idiosyncratic and different from cultural values (Schwartz, 2011), extant work suggests that values represent unifying and even universal principles that hold weight despite context or culture (Schwartz, 1994, 2012).

Schwartz (2012: 3-4) outlined a list of ten universal values which represent the various "beliefs", "desirable goals", and "standards of criteria" which are "ordered by importance" and organized by "relative importance". These values are depicted in circumplex form, and are shown as conceptually akin to some values, while different from others. For example, values which relate to "self-transcendence" emphasize the positive treatment of one's ingroup ("benevolence") and of humankind more generally ("universalism"); and, depicted on the opposite end of the circumplex, values which relate to "self-enhancement" emphasize accruing personal influence and status ("power") or demonstrating one's competency relative to others' ("achievement"). While Schwartz (2012: 9) states that combinations values are possible (e.g., power and achievement; benevolence and tradition), he says that "some values conflict with one another" and that "individuals and groups have different value 'priorities' or 'hierarchies'" (p. 3). In this way, each individual carries particular values which represent their beliefs and desirable goals which guide

their ensuing behaviors, and individuals experience intrapersonal conflict between differing individual motivations and desires.

Accordingly, we return back to the discussion of values with respect to authenticity. The role of values in representing the substance of what individuals are "true to" (Lehman et al., 2019: 26) has appeared in scholarly work for some time, as scholars describe authenticity "in terms of a system of self-values" (Erickson, 1995: 123). The concept of authenticity carries its values-laden nature in extended behavioral applications, such as in the context of leadership (e.g., Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Bishop, 2013; George et al., 2007; George, 2010; Lemoine et al., 2019; Leroy et al., 2012, 2015). Some scholars recognized that specific values play a role in how leaders lead and interact with others (e.g., Michie & Gooty, 2005; Wood et al., 2008), but the ways in which individuals managing the enactment of held values remains overlooked in organizational literature. In this way, individuals who behave in ways which are aligned with their held values (i.e., those which they personally prioritize in their lives) are led to experience a sense of felt authenticity, while individuals whose behavioral values enactments differ from their values commitments might be described as experiencing a sense of felt inauthenticity. In this way, the behavioral enactment of one's values does not *equal* authenticity, but instead leads to a sense of felt authenticity.

Further, the presence of various values which are inherently in conflict presents challenges to being authentic. Just as the presence of multiple emotions simultaneously (e.g., ambivalence; Ashforth et al., 2014) or the possibility of a single person being described in terms of multiple identities (Ramarajan, 2014), individuals may hold multiple values which they prioritize—and which conflict with each other (Schwartz, 2012). The presence of values conflicts in organizations is rich and broad (see Chan & Hedden, 2021; Wright et al., 2017), though focusing on how individuals manage values conflicts allows greater specificity relative to the management of the

authentic self. For example, Garrett, Fetzer, and Brown (under review) delineate how NFL athletes seek to adhere to values which are inherently antagonistic in a highly commodified organization (i.e., economic vs. humanistic) and how individuals manage this tension. For another, Hewlin and colleagues (2017) describe how individuals portray a façade of conformity when they perceive their leader to have high integrity, suggesting that the suppression of personal values in favor of those which the organization endorses is more likely. Even so, though past work is helpful in showing that individuals do experience intrapersonal conflicts between discrepant values, the process through which individuals choose to prioritize enacting values which they deem personally important over those which the organization stipulates (i.e., via regulations) remains overlooked. Another area which considers this is the concept of taboo trade-offs, in which values which are ostensibly moral come into contradiction with those that are perceived to be immoral or socially undesirable (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). In this literature, a choice between seemingly good, moral behaviors and those which oppose them is deemed "taboo or outrageous" (Tetlock et al., 2017: 96), and the ensuing hypocrisy—or even the thought of pursuing actions which contradict these sacred values—can be seen as damning and deserving of social punishment (Tetlock, 2003) and result in moral quandaries (Tetlock et al., 2017;. These "normative intuitions about the integrity, even sanctity, of certain relationships and…values" (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997: 255) show that transgressing such expectations is implicitly frowned upon or prohibited, but that the ultimate framing of these trade-offs (e.g., as relational, as acceptable; McGraw & Tetlock, 2005) allows individuals to pursue the enactment of values which are mundane (Kraatz et al., 2010) or even hotly contested within organizations (Brown et al., in progress).

Moreover, other concepts may be helpful in unpacking the notion of managing one's enactment of specific held values are authenticity work and values work. Though both values work

and authenticity work generally refer to organizational-level processes through which organizations come to practice particular values (Gehman et al., 2013; Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015; Wright et al., 2017) or make claims regarding the authenticity of their products or services (Demetry, 2019; Lehman et al., 2019; Voronov et al., 2022), they overlook how individuals manage the enactment of particular values over others, as well as how the sense of felt authenticity which being true to one value over another might differ (cf. Brown et al., in progress). Relatedly, research on topics such as organizational hybridity (Besharov & Mitzinneck, 2020; Smith & Besharov, 2019), hybrid organizations (Battilana & Dorado, 2010; Jay, 2013), or organizations which hold varying or contradictory identities (e.g, Glynn, 2000; Golden-Biddle & Rao, 1997; Pratt, 2016; Pratt & Corley, 2007) suggest that tensions may exist within organizations based on implicit or explicit commitments to ways of operation or guiding priorities, which is often a principal role of organizational values (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Bourne et al., 2019). Further, individuals who pursue the enactment of specific values within organizations which operate in consistent tension with themselves due to these varying or hybrid commitments may find that the enactment of specific values is highly complex, and may be structurally or interpersonally punishable depending on regulated organizational procedures and systems (Brown et al., in progress). In this way, though the role of values tensions in organizations is certainly present in a variety of ways, the ways in which individuals prioritize the enactment of particular held values remains critically important as scholars seek to understand how individuals respond to these tensions in ways which help them pursue a sense of felt authenticity.

Authenticity in Regulated Environments

This discussion about the nature of authenticity and its conceptual underpinnings is helpful in considering the nature of the concept, but the application and enactment of authenticity takes place in the world—not in the mind or on paper. And, practically speaking, authenticity as manifest

in work interactions necessarily take place in organizations which exert overt (i.e., regulations) and covert pressures (i.e., cultural/normative forces) on organizational members. These pressures are varied, though they vary in terms of how they constrain or enable an individual in selecting the values which they will choose to behaviorally prioritize—and the ensuing sense of felt authenticity which may (or may not) emerge from that enactment. Though the presence of organizational constraints on authenticity has been alluded to by other scholars (e.g., Cha et al., 2019; Fleming & Sturdy, 2011; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), it is imperative that management scholars consider how an organizational context shapes how individuals pursue a sense of authenticity. Specifically, it is critical to empirically explore how an organizational environment might constrain or even enable an individual's ability to enact their held values in a way which evokes a sense of felt (in)authenticity, and to articulate the mechanisms through which this takes place.

One way to conceptualize the presence of constraint within organizations is to consider the rules or regulations which govern organizational behavior. By *regulations*, I mean organizational policies and procedures which stipulate the behavior, process, and general comportment of members in a broad sense. Given that organizations *en masse* are subject to regulations, exploring how individuals pursue a sense of felt authenticity in regulated environments offers insight into how individuals might experience tensions between what they individually prioritize (i.e., their held values) and what their organizations and work roles require of them (i.e., regulations). The notion of regulations is as old as organizational studies itself, hearkening back to and likely before Weber's bureaucracy (1922), Barnard's executive coordination (1938), or Gouldner's committee (1954), referring generally to the explicit systems set in place by organizations to facilitate communication, emphasize collaboration, and ultimately to accomplish work as effectively as possible (Scott & Davis, 2007). In short, those who are embedded in such regulated environments

are faced with dilemmas which are often values-oriented (e.g., prioritizing desired activities over those specified in one's job description).

The relationship between regulations and values is clearest when considering the role of organizational values in guiding organizational behavior. Organizations can and do espouse particular values, which come to serve as a guiding compass for how the organization, its members, and its leaders can and ought to behave (Bourne & Jenkins, 2013; Kabanoff et al., 1995). Further, the role of formally espoused values is unique, as it represents a specific focus for the organization in a way that instantiates their emergent organizational structure and design (Bourne et al., 2019; Perkmann & Spicer, 2014). Though individual interpretations of organizationally espoused values may differ from those of organizational leaders (Brown et al., in progress), and though espoused values typically represent the values of top management and leaders (Bansal, 2003), the ensuing regulations that govern the structure and process of the organization are in large part manifestations of the values which are seen as highly desirable within the organization.

On the one hand, organizational environments which are highly regulated may be likely to constrain the enactment of authenticity. Organizations may employ specific regulations which require specific emotional display rules (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). In these environments, though organizational leaders may stipulate that employees greet customers "with a smile" (Grandey et al., 2005), these expressed emotions may differ from those felt by individuals (Hewlin, 2003, 2009) and, thus, even the stipulation that employees "be authentic" may carry explicit regulatory as well as implicit, normative weight (Fleming & Sturdy, 2009, 2011). Further, normative expectations for behavior may invite the invocation of specific identities which are seen as desirable (e.g., the dutiful employee) which exert further control on employees striving to be authentic (Anteby, 2008). For another example, organizations may utilize specific structures which

render the enactment of the authentic self difficult or even impossible. Specifically, structuring an individual's work to pursue maximum efficiency amid high work volume such that their work tasks are sequential with little to no break may ensure, due to the challenges associated with emotional labor (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003), and may even invite or structure customer aggression or recalcitrant behaviors (Grandey et al., 2004a), which constrains about emotional display rules are likely to invite further strain in ways which employees deem unfair (Grandey & Fisk, 2004b). In organizations wherein specific values are practiced yet other values are incentivized or structured, employees may express ambivalent indifference about the overt commitment to these values or oppose them as they deem them irrelevant to their work (Brown et al., in progress; Oreg et al., 2018). In this way, regulatory decisions may constrain the enactment of the authentic self in ways which damage connection between individuals.

On the other hand, organizational environments which are highly regulated may also be likely to enable or facilitate the enactment of authenticity, such that experiencing authenticity is seen as desirable, beneficial, and important for organizational success. Highly regulated environments often employ a heavy emphasis on an economic ethos, pursuing maximum efficiency in an attempt to manage and control the working process as stringently as possible (Scott, 1995; Scott & Davis, 2007), which circumstances can be dehumanizing for those embedded in them (Marx, 1867). However, research shows that, in spite of these heavily regulated environments, individuals can exercise agency in their work as they seek to connect with others, even as decisions are constrained by organizational policies (March & Simon, 1958; Simon, 1997). For example, recent work by Garrett, Fetzer, and Brown (under review) shows that NFL athletes are subject to league-wide regulations (e.g., player costs, trading players, contract negotiations) that lead them to feeling commodified in a way that is disenchanting and dehumanizing. However,

the authors found that players cooperate in highly relational ways to overcome tensions stemming from commodification to achieve greater alignment with humanistic pursuits (e.g., enjoyment of competition, fulfillment in camaraderie).

Moreover, organizations may structure the enactment of specific values (e.g., connection, cooperation) into their operations, infusing organizational structures with an explicit focus on relationships and people (Gittell et al., 2010; Gittell & Douglass, 2012; Thomas et al., 2018). Furthermore, organizations which regulate specific behaviors and processes which consistently conflict with individual values and priorities may find that the latent tensions between what individuals prioritize and what the organization stipulates places individuals in situations where they feel out of balance with their held values (Hewlin, 2003, 2009) and thus choose to act in ways which promotes a sense of equilibrium to personal values (Heider, 1958) and which manifests greater self-verification (Swann Jr., 1983). Thus, organizations which hold specific policies and regulations which are ostensibly at odds with individual values may unwittingly invite more opportunities for their members to pursue authenticity as they seek to act against the possible dissonance elicited by acting against one's values (Hewlin, 2003, 2009). However, despite the importance of exploring how organizations may both enable and constrain individual authenticity, extant literature appears to overlook the processes through which this takes place, as well as the mechanisms and triggers which explain how individuals manage and respond to these tensions. This addresses the invitation of Cha and colleagues (2019: 656) to pursue "a deeper understanding of more nuanced or creative approaches that may enable individuals to be authentic, even in the face of contextual constraints", regulations being a salient and important contextual constraint.

In summary, past research on felt authenticity in organizational contexts describes the concept as aligning one's internal states with external manifestations, often invoking though not

necessarily exploring the role of values to explain how individuals pursue a sense of alignment between their held values and behaviors. Further, given the complex and varied way in which felt authenticity has been described in terms of its inherent social (un)desirability and (im)morality, and given specific held values differ widely in terms of their behavioral enactment, it is clear that further research is needed to investigate ways in which felt authenticity is experienced at work and the tensions that individuals manage to pursue it. Finally, as felt authenticity has clear implications for workplace interactions (e.g., the customer service interaction), and as these interactions often take place in organizational environments which are highly regulated, it is important to understand how individuals manage being true to internal, personal states (e.g., values) while also adhering to external, organizational mandates (i.e., regulations). Given the centrality of values in guiding individual and organizational operation, it stands to reason that researchers might consider how individuals pursue a sense of felt authenticity (i.e., held values) while also hearkening to regulations (i.e., organizational values); however, past research has yet overlooked how individuals manage these tensions. This study intends to address this theoretical oversight, offering a richer and deeper explanation of how and why individuals pursue authenticity at work.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS, DATA, AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Research Approach, Context, and Method

Research Approach

This study carries assumptions about the nature of reality and research which are important to elucidate. Rather than assuming a single, unwavering truth that can be found if empirically examined and which insights can be applied in general fashion to other contexts (i.e., maxims of the positivist paradigm and ontology), this study assumes that the interpretations of individuals (i.e., both informants and researchers) offer multiple understandings and experiences which are instructive for addressing a research question; in short, this study assumes an interpretive ontology (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Further, the empirical means through which interpretive research questions might be addressed relate to diving deeply into the lived experiences of individuals in a given context, and exploring social dynamics in ways that embrace their biases, interpretations, and assumptions—and, indeed, to codify and articulate these so that the external world may better understand them (Spradley, 1979, 1980; Van Maanen, 2011).

With these fundamental assumptions in mind, I sought to investigate my research questions using a qualitative and inductive approach to data collection in the pursuit of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The research questions and insights which initiated this study (e.g., how is a more negative form of authenticity experienced at work; how, if at all, are authenticity and high-quality connections experienced at work) morphed and adjusted significantly as the study progressed, following an inductive approach to data collection and analysis in the neoclassical traditions of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Locke, 2001). Qualitative and inductive methods are most appropriate when the pursuit of novel theorizing is paramount, when considering questions related to “how” and “why” as opposed to “how much”, and when a rich exploration of a phenomenon is required to address empirical and theoretical inconsistencies and oversights

(Creswell, 2003; Langley, 1999; Locke, 2001; Pratt & Bonaccio, 2016). Further, qualitative and inductive studies utilize triangulation and thick description to offer a complex but rich articulation of complex social processes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Rosen, 1991; Van Maanen, 2011).

Research Context & Phenomena of Interest

Accordingly, this study draws from insights in various literatures to carefully and deeply explore a research context in which phenomena of interest are likely to be present (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2003). Drawing from insights from prior literature on elements of the authentic self, I searched for a research context in which customer service interactions are present in ways which might elicit different invocations of the authentic self stemming from encountering varying emotions and experiences (e.g., boredom, frustration, excitement), the salience of distinct identities (e.g., worker, colleague, supervisor), and—most importantly—the invocation and behavioral enactment of specific values (e.g., treating others well, doing one's best) which individuals report as representing their true self, all in an organizational environment which is highly regulated and which theoretically offers constraints around the enactment of the true self.

Thus, after weighing the theoretical and phenomenological motivations of this study, I decided to select the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV[3]) as my research context, specifically exploring the experiences of the various employee roles and their ability to be true to their values while adhering to regulations over which they hold little to no control. Further, given the popular societal ubiquity and relative infamousness of the RMV as a place characterized by apathetic workers, heavy bureaucracy, and frustration, and following helpful empirical illustration from past research (e.g., Grandey et al., 2005; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), the RMV presented an ideal

[3] The RMV is the Massachusetts equivalent of the DMV, which is its name in the rest of the United States.

case (and even, extreme; Pettigrew, 1998) in which to explore the experience of authenticity situated in regulated organizational environments (Yin, 2003).

Research Method

To explore the aforementioned theoretical and phenomenological tensions, I perceived that I would require a heavy level of familiarity with RMV processes, roles, and work tasks to depict employees experiences with accuracy, depth, and—of particular import in this oft-stigmatized context—tact. Thus, to achieve the level of familiarity required to disentangle the complexities of this regulated work environment, and given my interest in seeking to deeply understand the world of the RMV, I decided on an ethnographic approach to data collection (Rosen, 1991; Spradley, 1979, 1980; Van Maanen, 2011). Ethnographic methods allow the researcher to become an instrument of data collection, which is driven completely through growing and consistent levels of rapport and trust with organizational members (Feldman et al., 2004). Specifically, to optimize balance between deeply embedded access to employee perspectives and the flexibility required to iteratively analyze emergent insights—as well as maintaining personal and professional demands and the resources and access required for such an immersive study—I opted for a non-participative exploration of a single RMV location, which I will refer to in this study as "CarTown". I visited three other RMV locations to verify that emergent insights were not simply an artifact of one location, but focusing on one location allowed me to build the rapport necessary for gathering data and digging beneath the surface with informants and an intimate familiarity with the mundane aspects of the work (Feldman et al., 2004; Spradley, 1979). For a more comprehensive ethnographic delineation of CarTown and its processes, see Chapter 4.

Data Collection

This study entails an ethnographic study of a single RMV location in Massachusetts, and relies on various data sources to provide triangulated evidence of my findings. Triangulation is

essential in ethnographic work to offer as comprehensive and rich a description of the research context and informants as possible (Creswell, 2003).Overall, the number of employees at CarTown varied across the course of this study, but, after tracking the names of each person at CarTown, 15 of 18 RMV employees (i.e., customer service representatives, road test operators, managers; 83%) and 13 of 14 guards (92%) participated as informants in this study, as well as two RMV administrators. In total, there were 31 informants for this study, of which 55% were RMV employees, 39% were guards[4], and 6% were administrators. Table 1 provides a summary of the data collected, each form of which I will elucidate below, and Table 2 provides a breakdown of each data type across each informant.

Non-Participant Observation & Field Notes

The primary data source for this study is non-participant observation and field notes, which were taken throughout the study. Data collection began in 2018 and, after the COVID-19 pandemic interrupted in-person visits to the center, I resumed data collection in 2021 and continued visits to the center regularly until 2023. In all, though preliminary visits took place between 2018 and 2019, the majority of visits to CarTown took place between 2021 and 2023. The purpose of these observations and notes were to offer a window into the CarTown informants and RMV processes, while allowing for unanticipated and unplanned events to color my understanding of CarTown employees and their work. I began with observations and field notes at a high level, using "grand tours" to depict details of location, the informants, and the RMV process (Spradley, 1980). As time went on, I relied on more focused "mini tours" to address phenomena of interest (e.g., interactions between customers, employee scripts in helping customers) or to describe notable events (e.g., a

[4] The number of guards is somewhat exaggerated, as they tended to work at CarTown less than a year before being reassigned, fired, or find other work. For example, at the end of data collection in spring 2023, the longest-term guards (e.g., Bradshaw, Jean Carlos) had worked at CarTown for just over 2 and 1 years, respectively, whereas many of their former colleagues had departed.

customer making a scene by threatening employees). Typically, my time was spent at one of several locations within the CarTown center: near the entrance, seated close to the security guards; standing near the customer service desk; or seated in one of the many seats for customers in front of the service counters.

Gaining access and support from CarTown employees and managers proved consistently challenging throughout the course of this project. For example, my initial champion (i.e., the former manager of CarTown; ca. 2018-2019) expressed considerable excitement about the project and willingness to rally RMV employees and resources to further this project. However, due to the interruption of the COVID-19 pandemic and other personal complications, this manager transferred to another location just as data collection resumed after the center's reopening in summer of 2021. I was thus forced to build relationships one at a time with individuals at various levels of the organization (e.g., administration, middle management, employees) after she left to convince them that I was not a governmental "spy", nor did I have ulterior motive in conducting the study other than to learn about their work and experiences. As the study progressed, I learned that various "spies" or governmental agents had sometimes been assigned to CarTown as discrete evaluators, legitimating some individuals' distrust of me and my presence.

Further, one critical use of observational data and field notes was in observing interactions at CarTown: between customers and employees, between customers, between employees, and between employees and managers. Witnessing situated, live employee interactions with customers proved critical in helping me understand topics of relevance to both parties, common challenges in addressing customer challenges, disentangling the protocol for answering questions, and other situations; I even was asked by informants (e.g., guards) to assist in helping customers as my

experience at and knowledge of CarTown grew[5]. In all, I observed thousands of interactions[6] at CarTown and took note of hundreds of conversations of various kinds. RMV employees were aware of my role as a researcher, and this dynamic often elicited various reactions—some humorous (e.g., "Did you get that?" after something happened in the center), some less so (e.g., employees walking quickly by as I typed on my laptop); I remained aware of these tensions throughout my time in the field and the degree to which they might influence informants' behavior (Wolcott, 1994). I also recorded my reactions to these events as thoroughly as I could and sought to pursue depth and honesty throughout the note-taking process, particularly in anonymizing interactions of non-consenting individuals (e.g., customers) and in pursuing exactness in transcribing interactions of consenting informants. The depth of observation I was able to gather helped me to learn about informants' tendencies and preferences, offering a deeper level of familiarity and embeddedness than would otherwise be possible (Rosen, 1991).

The observational field notes were aggregated on a private, password-protected document, which I most frequently contributed to on my computer but often utilized an app version of the document to dictate notes and reflections. The general tone of field notes is to emphasize description rather than assumption, and I used various notations to differentiate between empirically demonstrable elements (e.g., relative volume of voice, number of people in the center) and those layered with personal inferences (e.g., customer background, employee mood). I also captured various reflective memos throughout the field notes, which helped me make sense of data

[5] For example, guards would often ask me to watch the door and talk with customers while they discussed something with the manager or helped a customer. For another example, customer service representatives would request my help in assisting customers who only spoke Portuguese as a translator, given my familiarity with the language.

[6] Though I did not take note of every single interaction I observed, I developed a conservative estimate of the total interactions observed based on daily customer flow (i.e., between 300 and 450 a day), my typical physical posts in the center (e.g., close to the door where customers enter, near the customer service counter), and my high level of engagement while at these posts, I observed between 200-250 interactions per visit. Thus, during over 60 visits across 5 years, I estimate that I observed between 12,000-15,000 interactions between customers and employees at CarTown.

and emergent phenomena (Goulding, 2001; Spradley, 1979). In total, I completed 300 hours across 62 data collection visits during a five-year period between 2018 and 2023, and my field notes document (double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) totaled 407 pages. In the field notes document, I also captured pictures of important RMV documentation, physical attributes of the center, and memorable moments (e.g., the morning rush). For more descriptive detail about the nature and purpose of the observational data and field notes, see Table 1; for an example of details (e.g., pictures, excerpts) from the observational field notes, see Appendix 2.

Ethnographic Conversations

Spending a considerable amount of time at CarTown gave me extensive opportunities to engage with informants, although the ability to extract data from these engagements proved challenging. For one, informants were often skittish at the sight of a recording device (e.g., phone) and, upon being asked to be recorded or be interviewed, might refuse to talk or simply leave. For another, informants being more formally asked to share their perspectives were prone to adjusting their behavior or language sufficiently to appear intelligent or, as was often the case, were insecure about the degree they were seen as competent or whether they would be opened up to sanctions from RMV administrators. Throughout the study, however, the strength of my individual relationships with employees and our mutual trust in each other alleviated these concerns from the vast majority of employees. Further, CarTown employees were not forced to comply with the study and were more often than not busy with their work tasks, meaning that finding the time and place to capture interviews difficult. Perhaps most importantly, the nature of the work at the RMV is helping-oriented and requires a substantial amount of energy from employees, meaning that to participate in the study usually took the form of interviews during lunch breaks, in the evening, or on the weekends. Many informants were willing to be interviewed despite these challenges, but

many became too distracted or exhausted to follow through fully on their generosity. These tensions made traditional interviews and transcription a less viable strategy (Feldman et al., 2004).

Fortunately, repeated visits to CarTown revealed that employees engage in work which is highly episodic, which allows natural breaks between helping customers. In this way, the use of situated, observational data as opposed to prioritizing interview data became a strength, as my gradual embeddedness in the context allowed me to observe informants' experiences firsthand and *in vivo*, as opposed to hearing about their experiences after the fact in interviews. Though CarTown employees were less able to participate in formal interviews, they proved to be quite willing and able to engage with me during more informal interactions in between these work episodes. Drawing from past research which describes the utility of these ethnographic conversations (Pine & Mazmanian, 2017), as well as the classical role of emergent and unplanned interviews in ethnographic research (Spradley, 1979, 1980; for examples, see Lok & de Rond, 2013; de Rond & Lok, 2016), the use of ethnographic conversations offered a powerful method to engage in various topics with informants. These conversations ranged in topic from general (e.g., how an employee felt about RMV administration) to more granular (e.g., how an employee felt about a new RMV policy) and helped me to pursue the "thick description" or "tales of the field" required in ethnographic work (Lincoln & Guba 1985; Van Maanen, 2011).

Ethnographic conversations lasted between five and 60 minutes in length, with the majority being between five and 15 minutes. Recording these conversations took iterative practice, but, whether they were initiated by me or by an informant, I would typically return to my computer quickly after to record as much detail as possible about what had happened, using direct, *in vivo* quotes wherever possible and attempting to accurately depict the informants' worlds in their own terms (Charmaz, 2006). Alternatively, I often used the phone-based app on my phone to dictate

my notes following such conversations; these dictations were done outside of the CarTown center, typically elsewhere in or outside of the shopping mall or at the nearby retail store. In total, I recorded 88 ethnographic conversations across 27 informants; for more detail, see Table 1.

Formal Interview Data

Interview data are essential to capture informants' perspectives about their values, how they understand the concept of authenticity, and how they approach and understand their work (Seidman, 1998). I utilized various forms of interview data in this study, which I detail below.

Values Interviews & Follow-Ups. This study's focus on authenticity required that I utilize a methodological solution to establish a "values baseline" for informants to determine the morals and values of greatest importance to informants. Without a careful and thorough understanding of each informant's values, it would be impossible for any researcher to make conclusions about when and why individuals might experience a sense of felt authenticity, which is critically important to this study. As a solution to this epistemological challenge, I opted to use short form interviews to gauge the values and guiding principles which informants prioritize in their lives, and at work. Values interviews varied somewhat in their execution[7], but they largely consisted in conversations between 30 and 60 minutes in length wherein informants would discuss the moral values or principles which guide their lives. Specifically, I relied on the values circumplex of universal values developed by Schwartz (2012) as a reference, carefully studying the circumplex and the descriptions of particular values (e.g., benevolence, power, security) prior to conducting values interviews. I began each values interview by introducing Schwartz and his work on values as guiding principles which shape how we live life, following this by asking them what values or

[7] Some values interviews—particularly those with guards and road test operators, with whom I was able to secure more focused time—were conducted separately from semi-structured interviews, while others—typically those with managers and customer service representatives—were conducted in conjunction with the semi-structured interviews. I categorize both forms as "formal" due to their structure and focus on their personal values.

principles they deemed most important in their lives. Some informants struggled to answer these questions, inviting me to offer real-world examples based on Schwartz' ten dimensions to assist their response. As informants shared specific principles (respecting people, taking care of my family), I sought to paraphrase and relate their comments back to Schwartz' model to invite further commentary. After I provided a Schwartzian perspective on each of their declared values[8] (e.g., "What you just said sounds like the value of benevolence, which is…"), I asked informants to rank their values in order of priority or greatest importance to them. I also asked informants to consider the degree to which their held values were different outside of work, and whether the prioritization of their values differed in work and non-work contexts. In total, I gathered 17 values interviews across 17 informants; see Table 1 for more details about values interviews.

The values interviews were particularly helpful in offering a window into informants' hearts and minds, and they offered another unique and poignant methodological strategy, which I entitle *values interview follow-ups*. Using the informants' values interviews as a baseline, it them became possible to more accurately ascertain the level of congruence between their declared held values and their behaviors. Accordingly, when combined with observations, it became possible to check in with certain employees following salient work interactions regarding the degree to which they felt they were able to be true to their values in that specific interaction and moment. Whereas more traditional interviewing tactics offer the chance to examine an informant's reflections on experiences in the past, these situated interviews relying on a foundation of previous interviews allowed me to co-construct and develop a greater understanding of a given informant's behavioral

[8] A careful reader might examine the ensuing findings chapters and wonder why the dimensions there are not couched in Schwartzian terms (e.g., universalism, benevolence). Ultimately, though my preparation for the values interviews was extensive in familiarizing myself with the content and application of each of the ten universal values identified by Schwartz (1992, 2012), the ways in which informants would describe their values often bled into various combinations of values, making them somewhat impractical to cleanly categorize. For this reason, I opted to follow the language of informants (e.g., respect, humanity, efficiency) in capturing the essence of their intended interpretations of their held values (Charmaz, 2006), rather than superimposing the Schwartzian framework.

adherence to their held values, and to discuss these alignments—or, more importantly, discrepancies—with informants moments after taking place. This allowed me to explore the emotions, cognitions, and salient themes with informants *in situ*, offering a unique and poignant reflective opportunity for the real-time experiences of informants' sense of authenticity. These conversation were recorded in a similar fashion to ethnographic conversations, where I would engage in conversation with informants following a notable interaction (e.g., saliently positive or negative interactions) and then quickly record their reflections in my field notes; alternatively, I was able to record and transcribe some of these conversations with consenting informants. In total, I gathered 10 values interview follow-ups across 4 informants; see Table 1 for more details.

Semi-Structured Interviews. The abundance of observational data and informal interview data was encouraging, but ultimately these did not minimize the need to dive into informants' perspectives in a more formalized way. I thus opted to gather semi-structured interviews, as these provide a balance of granting the researcher some phenomenological and conceptual structure while retaining adaptability to themes which emerge during the interview (Whyte, 1984). I sought determinedly to listen to informants and explore their interests, trains of thought, and to define concepts which were unclear to me (Charmaz, 2006; Douglas, 1976). I relied on observational hours and ethnographic conversations to inform my interview protocol, which I gradually iterated as novel insights emerged throughout the data collection process (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Spradley, 1979). For example, after some time in the field I began to notice that the interplay between individual and perceptions of the organization's values might mean that organizational structures, rules, or policies (what I refer to as regulations) might introduce tensions that individuals may seek to overcome to pursue felt authenticity. I incorporated these insights into my interview protocol and sought to support my observations with my informants' perspectives (Boje,

2001). For example, I noticed during observational hours that the role of the center manager on how employees conducted their work was more significant than I previously expected. Given that a key recommended direction for research on authenticity is to explore the role of managerial influence of authenticity (Cha et al., 2019), I added this question to the interview protocol and theoretically sampled insights from several center managers. I gradually added other questions in response to emerging insights gained from various data sources; for details about the iterations of interview protocols, see Appendix 1. Insights gleaned from semi-structured interviews were essential to unpack elements which emerged during observations and ethnographic conversations, such as how informants approached serving customers and examples where they felt that they were untrue to their values. In total, I conducted 27 semi-structured interviews across 15 informants; several informants agreed to be interviewed multiple times to address elements which emerged throughout the course of the study. For more details about interview data, see Table 1.

Archival Data

Early in the data collection process, I realized that my understanding of CarTown as an organization and the regulated process customers and employees follow to obtain desired services and products for customers would be improved as I gathered other sources of data. To provide further triangulating evidence for my understanding of how customers and employees ex RMV experience, I sought to gather more data about the customer perspective through unobtrusive means (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988). At the onset of this project, my assumption was that customer reviews about the RMV would be resoundingly negative (e.g., 1 or 2 stars) due to its negative societal reputation. However, I was surprised to see that customer reviews of CarTown (ca. 2019) were bimodally split between 1- and 5-star reviews, with many reviews expressing somewhat extreme customer perspectives of their RMV experience. Accordingly, to deepen my

understanding of the contents of the customer experience at the RMV, I collected 100 customer Google reviews of the CarTown location (ca. 2019) to examine what customers perceive of the RMV and to examine recurring themes. As one salient theme which emerged during data collection was the importance and constant threat of negative customer reviews of various forms (e.g., written complaint, Yelp, Google, speaking in-person to a manager). I also gathered documents and took pictures of CarTown, relevant posters, and of the website, to better familiarize myself with the RMV and the process through which customers are assisted by employees, to paint the most accurate picture of CarTown as possible (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These data offer greater confidence in understanding how customers experience the RMV, the oft extreme quality customer reviews notwithstanding. For more detail about the archival data, see Table 1 and Appendix 2.

Data Analysis

Following the traditional foundations of the production of grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), data analysis took place in an ongoing and iterative sense during the data collection process. Using the general framework of constant comparison and the analytical tools or "moves" (Grodal et al., 2021) of theoretical memoing, modeling, and data interrogation (de Rond & Lok, 2016), I utilized a highly interpretive approach to data analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser, 1992). I began the analytical process by familiarizing myself with field notes and interview data at a high level to consider possible emergent themes to focus on during formal coding (Goulding, 2001); this process took place while I was still engaged in data collection. I also developed contact summary sheets for each informant and descriptive tables to codify specific features of each individual, to identify key players and their relative contributions to the study and, similarly, to detect any emerging patterns which might inform coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994); for more details about informants, see Tables 1-2.

Further, prior to engaging in formal analysis and during data collection, I prepared memos during and following each data gathering visit to CarTown (Locke, 2001). Specifically, after completing an ethnographic conversation, I would unpack how the conversation was related to emergent themes in the data and how this might relate to notable theoretical contributions. For example, following an ethnographic conversation with David in which he talked about the role of regulations but in not adhering to them so strictly, I prepared a memo about how theories of relational coordination (Gittell & Douglass, 2012) or values work (Gehman et al., 2013) might apply in helping David and others make sense of their values and coordinate how they might be enacted in their work. Accordingly, these memos were used to relate insights from the field to explore important themes, and helped to make sense of the overarching conceptual storyline. I drew primarily from observational and also interview data to develop several conceptual figures depicting various processual elements at play in the emergent story (Langley & Abdallah, 2015; Locke, 2001); through many iterations, these figures became Figures 1-4. In this way, I relied on ethnographic conversations primarily to develop my understanding of various contextual factors to be aware of at CarTown (e.g., specific regulations, the process of assisting customers), and opted to focus my formal coding on semi-structured interview data as the other data sources were largely captured in my own voice and terminology, and my goal was to learn to represent the informants' world as accurately as possible (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, I engaged with ethnographic conversations using memos to make sense of emerging insights throughout the data collection process, deciding to prioritize the exploration and coding of the more structured data sources.

I began the formal coding process by performing *open coding* on the semi-structured interview and values interview data, using the qualitative coding software NVivo. Using a line-by-line approach, I moved through these data with the intent to create codes which closely

represented informants' perspectives, most often in their own words. For example, upon reading a passage in which an informant a story helping a frustrated customer, I created the code "f--- you and the violation". I also completed open coding on the sample of customer reviews, creating high-level codes which described the overall emotional timbre of each review. As I completed open coding, my focus on these *in vivo* codes (i.e., terms and concepts which are important to and used by informants) would reveal subtleties which informants find meaningful and which illustrate their worldviews (Charmaz, 2006). In this way, open coding was a critical analytical step for understanding informants' perspectives in their own terms, and I made use of various strategies in pursuit of a rich and compelling theoretical story (Pratt et al., 2020), which I outline below.

I performed open coding on batches of 5-6 interviews at a time, upon which I utilized axial coding to trim, combine, shuffle, cut, and otherwise organize codes in meaningful clusters to assist in making sense of the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). This process took several rounds across several months, and though I continued to create new codes throughout open coding to represent novel themes, I noted that many themes represented in my illustrations of the emergent theoretical and process models neared theoretical saturation while others lacked robust empirical clarity. For example, I note in Figure 3 that employees engaged in a customer service transaction might switch their approach mid-transaction, but as open coding wore on I realized that this concept was mostly borne from my personal embeddedness in the context and required greater empirical support and elucidation. Thus, I pursued a theoretical sampling strategy of various data sources (e.g., ethnographic conversations, semi-structured interviews) in pursuit of these emergent themes which required greater elucidation (Locke, 2001). Specifically, I sought out ethnographic conversations and interview data with informants to answer specific questions for which I did not yet have a clear, grounded answer, such as how and why employees might decide to switch their

service approach during a transaction. I pursued this abductive strategy between data collection and analysis throughout the iterative analytical process (see Harrison & Rouse, 2014).

Throughout the open coding process, I utilized axial coding to situate codes in terms of meaningful clusters and organize data in terms of first- (i.e., more grounded in informants' terms and ideas) and second-order codes (i.e., more abstracted and conceptual; Strauss & Corbin, 1997). As I completed open coding of semi-structured interview data, I moved to *focused coding*, wherein I carefully examined the dynamic interplays between codes and their associated phenomena to reveal important tensions, paradoxes, meanings, and differences (Charmaz, 2006). Many of these emerged in this process, such as the distinction between informants' perceptions of the RMV's values and priorities and their own declared values and priorities. Others included the ways in which customers described how they helped customers. For many informants, helping customers was akin to processing them as quickly as possible to save them time and to help them move on with their lives; for others, helping customers was more akin to treating the person well, talking with them, spending time with them, laughing with them, and experiencing a sense of connection with them. Though many informants found these challenges to be resolvable, they described the challenge of pursuing high efficiency amidst a steady flow of customers while also treating customers with respect and common decency. This led me to depict one of the primary tensions employees face in their work in terms of prioritizing *dignity values* versus *efficiency values*. Further, the role of the customer was suggested as complex: customers provide the opportunity for employees to serve others, most customer interactions were deemed as positive, and thus their presence is appreciated by most employees. However, the potential for customers to inflict emotional turmoil on employees and potentially face being sanctioned by the RMV due to a negative customer review also led employees to describe customers as a source of threat. These

tensions are critical to understanding how RMV employees manage various tensions which are often paradoxical in scope and enactment (Smith & Lewis, 2011).

Finally, many informants described personal challenges they had endured early in life or even currently, and how importantly they valued respecting others and also receiving respect from others. Many referred to this as "the golden rule", and a dual definition of dignity values emerged from the data: respecting others, and helping others. This dual emphasis remained constant across informants of all demographics, roles, and levels of experience. Additionally, many informants also felt that regulatory boundaries often made respecting others and being respected challenging, as customers might be irritated as they unsuccessfully navigated RMV bureaucracy and take out their frustrations on employees. In these situations, many employees often justified "breaking the rules" or navigating around regulatory boundaries to offer customers service to satisfy their desire to help and respect customers. Thus, using focused coding allowed me to break down how informants engage in episodic work that is draining and which leads them to prioritize the enactment of values (e.g., those they perceived as RMV values) which may or may not align with those they prioritize (e.g., those which they declared as important to them individually).

As I engaged in focused coding, I also utilized *theoretical coding* to attempt to synthesize my grounded findings with insights from organizational literatures (Charmaz, 2006). For example, the transgressing of personal values led many informants to experience considerable dissonance, which they described as uncomfortable and, for some informants who experienced this on a regular basis, led them to seek to exit the organization in favor of an organization which would allow them to enact personal values. However, and importantly, informants resoundingly agreed that if a customer were to breach fundamental expectation to be respected by others and disrespect them, they would feel wholly justified in adhering to regulatory boundaries to deny service to such

customers. Further, many customers described customers who were in particular need (e.g., the elderly, immigrants) as deserving an extra measure of respect and helping than typical customers, intensifying their desire to see these customers served. And, in many instances, informants who found themselves unable to help the customers to the extent or in the way they might prefer often reported considerable frustration with regulations which prevented them from helping these needy customers how they wished to. Thus, I was led to the insight that organizational regulations can deter individuals from being authentic, aligning with existing findings in the literature (e.g., Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). However, I also saw that the values systems of various employees appeared to be more aligned with the efficiency values often attributed to RMV administrators and the organization at large. In these cases, adhering to regulations even when a customer may not be able to receive help did not elicit such dissonance, and employees were able to maintain a high volume of customer service in accordance with their held values. Thus, the organization and its regulations might be described as enabling, supporting, or facilitating the enactment of the authentic self for individuals whose values are aligned with those they perceive of the organization. In short, theoretical coding allowed me to connect the grounded findings which emerged during data analysis to extant literature in ways which situated this project's contributions (Glaser, 1992; Locke, 2001).

As I engaged in focused and theoretical coding, I iteratively adjusted the theoretical models and also began to compile stories focusing on specific elements of my emergent theorizing. Accordingly, I compiled stories from the field notes and interview data that resembled these elements and considered the extent to which the conceptual illustrations matched the phenomena in the data. For example, I found that informants sought to be true to personal values in their work, but that various elements (e.g., type of communication used, orientation toward problems) varied

in notable ways. As I compiled stories from observational and interview data and examined them against each other (Charmaz, 2006), these explorations allowed me to delineate the various forms of authenticity which emerged and, subsequently, flesh out the values tension model (Figure 2), the episodic work task model (Figure 3), and the circumplex of various authenticity manifestations in highly regulated environments (Figure 4). The resulting figures describe the values tensions which informants experience and unpack how and why organizational regulations can both enable and constrain the experience of felt authenticity for individuals.

Overall, the process to data collection and analysis was highly iterative and abductive between interpretation of data, gathering of new data, and examining patterns between existing data (Locke, 2001). Taking in the various types of data together, one aggregating insight which emerged was regarding the extent to which organizations support or constrain the enactment of the authentic self in regulated environments. Accordingly, I laid out the data in terms of four primary sections: a thick description of the RMV process, with corresponding ethnographic detail about informants, roles, and services (Chapter 4); a delineation of various values tensions which RMV employees manage in their work (Chapter 5); and an episodic model which delineates how and why employees might opt to enact one form of values (e.g., dignity) over another (e.g., efficiency), and the various forms of authenticity that result from repeated episodes (Chapter 6).

Methodological Reflection

This projects represents my first foray into an ethnographic approach to data collection, and thus I encountered innumerable opportunities to learn and grow. These experience were often challenging and sometimes distressing, but overall the opportunity to engage with RMV staff and learn about their work from the inside was worth the stretch. As one example of this often paradoxical challenge, I was not able to convince every CarTown employee of my sincere desire to learn from them, but many employees were extraordinarily generous with their time and

insights; I treasure these relationships. Further, navigating the balance between friendly association, true caring, and appropriate distance with informants proved an unexpectedly difficult challenge throughout the duration of this project. My gradual increase in familiarity with the CarTown center and its employees resulted in many wonderful opportunities for personal association and friendship, particularly amongst the guards and various customer service employees However, finding ways to remain impartial in the face of challenging, distressing, or sometimes dangerous circumstances were unexpected in terms of their intensity and regularity. Further, though the research design was intentionally non-participative, as my knowledge of the RMV and its procedures increased, CarTown employees—from security guards to managers—began to solicit my help with increasing regularity, ranging from speaking to customers at the door to live translation for Portuguese-speakers to filling out forms for nervous customers to serving as a witness of events at the center (e.g., writing a report of an unruly customer). Importantly, CarTown management stated early on that I was not permitted to interact with customers to respect the privacy of their personal information. I sought strict adherence to this rule and maintained the role as a covert observer, and yet customers also increasingly came to ask me questions about their desired RMV products and services, some of which I became able to answer and others which required turning over to employees. Thus, though my decision to not participate as an RMV employee was made intentionally, the lines between refraining from and leaning into participation blurred over time in ways which were challenging and illuminating. As the primary goal of this study is to accurately depict the world of the RMV from informants' own perspectives, these tensions and opportunities helped me challenge my own assumptions about the RMV and the lives and experiences of CarTown employees (Feldman et al., 2008), and reflecting back on the challenges has led me to appreciate the personal growth I perceive I have experienced as well.

CHAPTER 4: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC INTRODUCTION OF THE CARTOWN RMV

Purpose of the RMV, Role in Society, and Reputation

The Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV)[9] is a government-run agency in the United States whose purpose is to provide vehicular licensure and related services to local citizens. At a general level, RMV processes and products are ubiquitous and, though each location has a distinct flavor based on their local socioeconomic status and demography, as well as the management style of the center manager, each offers similar products and services for U.S. citizens—or for prospective citizens seeking official documentation. Specifically, these projects and services are registering a vehicle, obtaining or renewing a driver's license, transferring a vehicle's title, taking a driver's test to earn one's license or to retain one's license, depositing old license plates, and receiving other governmental identification (e.g., REAL ID, passport cards), among other, less common services[10]. In short, every Massachusetts citizen (and, by extension, all U.S. citizens) must visit the RMV with some regularity to perform and receive specific services to operate in society.

The importance of RMV products and services is immense, as official documentation plays a vital societal role in many granular ways. For example, individuals in pursuit of work are more than likely required to receive a background checks and display official identification (e.g., a driver's license or passport). For another, conducting the purchase of various types (e.g., alcohol, airfare tickets, a car, a home) or other performing other vital social functions (e.g., setting up a bank account, signing up for and/or using a debit or credit card, writing a check, enrolling in school, applying for a loan, getting married) all require official documentation. Moreover, the United States in particular carries a history of viewing the automobile as a symbol of "wealth,

[9] The term "RMV" is used exclusively in the state of Massachusetts; the national equivalent in the United States is the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV).

[10] For a full list of RMV products and services, please visit the RMV website (https://www.mass.gov/rmv).

leisure, and freedom" for those who drive them (Gartman, 2004: 172). One administrator described the heartbreak of informing elderly drivers that their license will be revoked:

> You have to be able to stop, really think about it. If I'm in a situation where I'm telling a person who's been driving for 60 years, people do not realize how devastating it is for a person to hand in a credential and accept that they are no longer fit to drive. It's the reaction I've seen to that is so heartbreaking because in theory you see, that you hear it in their voice, you see it in their eyes, they take it as this is my final piece of freedom. Now I am completely dependent and they really struggle with that and they really fight it. But sometimes I'm sorry I have to have that uncomfortable conversation, "You just have been deemed unfit to drive. You have every right to challenge it and contest it. As a taxpayer you have every right to what you want to defend yourself accordingly, but based on your physician's recommendation, you're no longer fit to drive." And a lot of people really take that... I've heard people say, "Then what purpose do I serve now?" (SS 18, Admin)

Given the desirability and importance of these services, it is perhaps no surprise that the RMV—a state government-run entity with scarcely any competition[11]—often faces harsh criticism and stigma for how customers are treated there. After all, customers have little to no recourse for receiving these important services, and thus RMV administrators might justifiably relax organizational expectations of high customer service as the customer must return and comply with RMV regulations. One administrator described the unique position that the RMV has in society:

> If you went to any business in the world and you were to tell them we'll use something elementary, say you went to a pizza shop, and you told them, "Let me tell you how your business is going to be." You'll guarantee sell every single pizza every day. And you will, every day, when you open have a line around the corner, what business in the open market wouldn't become a little laid back because you're talking not only do you have to come here, it is utter guaranteed business. So it's like for us to go above and beyond and provide service in an industry where theoretically and factually, we do not have to, we're actually far better providers than our private sector peers because the reason their service is so superior is because they're vying for position. We're giving service just because we want to give a good experience. But if you want to go on straight economics, we're going to have the business, whether the service is amazing or horrifying. (SS 2, Admin)

Thus, administrators are aware of how customers see the RMV, and, contrary to public opinion, RMV managers are similarly focused on the "extra customer service that we offer [customers]

[11] Signs at the RMV point employees to an alternative service, AAA, which also assists customers in obtaining drivers licenses. CarTown managers said that the RMV is by far the most common provider of drivers licenses in MA.

here" (SS 1). However, common media depictions of the RMV and its employees as lazy, apathetic, or uncaring[12]—and RMV employees are aware of these stereotypes. One informant said:

> RMV is not really innocent themselves. They have their times where people are stressed out. You know what I mean? Or some people don't want to come to work or they're tired of doing the job that they've been doing for the last 20, 15 years. You know what I mean? And then I'm pretty sure everybody knows the RMV is not the best place to be. Everybody dislikes going to the RMV. You never find someone, "Oh, I love coming here." You know what I mean? It's not like a candy store. It's the exact opposite. It's okay. I can't complain. (SS 4, Guard)

Curiously, though the RMV carries a stigma which employees believe exists only in stereotype ("I think the registry, we fall into that unfortunate…you have to be scared of clowns. You have to hate to go into the dentist. You have to hate the RMV. It's not even are you basing it off of anything... they're coming in with the expectation of disappointment…they're already coming in dragging their feet." SS 3, Admin), customers often rate their experience at the RMV in quite a bimodal sense. In Google reviews across Massachusetts from the year 2019, various locations demonstrated a similar pattern: many five-star ratings (which often emphasized the surprise of positive treatment by employees or a quicker-than-expected wait time), and many one-star reviews (which often emphasized the frustration accompanying the navigation of RMV bureaucracy and, in particular, receiving cold or callous treatment from customers). One example of a five-star review reads:

> "I wouldn't have gotten my license if the lady wasn't very patient and helpful. I forgot her name but she is [racial description] and she even stayed for 15 more minutes after the RMV closed to help me get the driving license after she was helping for 30-40 minutes. Great lady! Also, they have computers and printers, which is great, the DMV in Morgantown, WV, didn't have that." (CR 84)

On the other hand, a one-star review from this time period might read similar to this:

> I've been to this RMV 7 times in the last 6 months, each time I am told the paperwork I have is wrong and given new forms only to be told those are wrong when I return. If you are planning on going to this RMV might I suggest some more pleasurable activities like

[12] Consider examples from popular media which describe the DMV and its employees as painfully inefficient sloths (the Disney movie *Zootopia*), characterized by robotic drones with no feeling (Episode xx from *That 70s Show*), or as a "scary, frustrating, or dangerous place" (*Ned at the DMV*).

> eating glass, putting your hand in a garbage disposal, or licking a ceiling fan. I'm considering adopting an Amish lifestyle rejecting motor vehicles entirely just to avoid this establishment. My only hope is that someday I have the opportunity to waste hours of their time the way they have mine. I wish them the worst in their future endeavors, please go literally anywhere else." (CR 23)

Accordingly, despite the heavy importance of the RMV and its services to Massachusetts citizens, the organization and its employees often suffer from a poor reputation which, though it may be largely founded in stereotype, is often reinforced by employees (e.g., "Don't get me wrong, everybody has bad days. Even I come in there sometimes cranky as hell." SS 10) which may be likely to invite future negative customer reviews.

Regulations at the RMV

One aspect of CarTown which emerged as important early in this study was the role of regulations, or specific rules, policies, and guidelines which employees are asked to adhere to in their work. There are various elements at CarTown which guide how employees do their jobs, and these regulations might be clustered into three groups: bureaucratic, prescriptive, and proscriptive.

The *bureaucratic* element of regulations is present in how the RMV is organized, such as the required preparation for service and resource allocation. *Preparation for service* entails specific elements such as setting appointments for certain (though not all) services, as well as the paperwork customers require to successfully receive their desired services; this paperwork might be described as "proofs" (e.g., of identity, of address, of citizenship) for which customers offer specific credentials (e.g., driver's license, utility bill, passport or birth certificate), or "forms" used by the RMV to process customers for their services. *Resource allocation* refers to how RMV administrators distribute available employees across the various centers. Nearly all CarTown employees had worked at other RMV locations prior to settling down and employees expressed frustration with how the CarTown location was not allocated the necessary resources (e.g.,

employee numbers) to cope with the high number of customers to serve. Center managers do have some discretion over how to distribute personnel across the needed roles (e.g., customer service, greeter, supervisor) and how the center operates (e.g., admitting walk-ins for particular services), and supervisors also have discretion to depart from conventional workflow as they see fit.

The *prescriptive* element of regulations is present in how and the degree to which CarTown employees are encouraged to perform specific tasks, such as the mandated workflow, quotas, and self-care. *Mandated workflow* dictates the customer service process from start to finish, and both customers and CarTown employees are encouraged to follow this process to reach a successful conclusion to a customer's visit. CarTown employees may circumvent this process, but they are open to center- or registry-level sanctions if they do so in a way that disrupts the customer experience (e.g., receiving a formal write-up, reassignment, being fired). One core function of those who work in customer service is the use of escalation, in which dissatisfied customers are transferred to work with a supervisor or manager; escalations are common at CarTown, taking place regularly throughout any given day. Also related to the mandated workflow process is the use of *quotas*, which take the form of timers for each transaction. For a typical registration transaction, employees are allotted 10 minutes to process the customer and may receive negative evaluations from RMV management if they exceed this number regularly; the CarTown manager also receives a fair share of pressure from the "higher-ups" (EC 33) or "powers that be" (SS 1) to adhere to this benchmark. Finally, *mandated self-care* refers to the breaks that CarTown employees are permitted—but also required—to take on a regular basis. These breaks vary in duration and frequency depending on the role; CSRs take two breaks of 20 minutes a day in addition to an hour lunch break, which is staggered throughout the afternoon; guards take one 20-minute break and an hour lunch break; managers take breaks when they can.

Conversely, the *proscriptive* element of regulations is present in how and the degree to which employees are discouraged from performing specific tasks, such as breaching customer privacy, behaving unprofessionally and wasting resources. *Breaching customer privacy* refers to instances in which a customer's personal information is available for employees to see and the employee, without the specific task-required permission to do so, looks at the documents and possibly offers counsel as to how to proceed. Security guards are particularly susceptible to this proscriptive element. *Behaving unprofessionally* refers to breaking standards of behavior which are reasonably ubiquitous across contexts, such as exhibiting poor personal hygiene and grooming, using poor posture (e.g., slouching in one's chair), or being inattentive to a customer's needs (e.g., spending time on one's phone). *Wasting resources* generally refers to the frivolous misuse of RMV property, artifacts, or products (e.g., pens, forms, documents)—and especially time, when not taking a mandated break. Each of these regulatory elements are included in their training manuals, and these are reinforced by coworkers who assume a training role in their socialization.

In all, though regulations offer structure for CarTown employees as they perform their various work tasks, and though they recognize the need to "keep things organized" (SS 20), many often feel that the various forms of regulations introduce problems for their work which they struggle to resolve and expectations which they struggle to meet.

CarTown and the RMV Process

General Description. The CarTown RMV center is located in the center of a quiet, "L"-shaped mall adjacent to various retail stores. Regardless of the time of day, one can hear soft rock or pop music of various decades playing in the background of the mall's hallways, and listening carefully reveals a repeating daily lineup which changes from day to day. The retail stores are the busiest parts of the mall, but CarTown—newly refurbished with a long, glass wall, which enables

looking in and out from every angle—holds its own as a busy, bustling place. In comparison to other RMVs across the state, CarTown processes the second most behind only CarCity (known as the "flagship" of RMVs in the state), with between 350 and 500 customers receiving service daily. The mall itself is rather nondescript and dingy and the renovated space sparkles by comparison. And, somewhat ironically, the bright décor of CarTown often stands in stark juxtaposition to the temperament of its guests, who often appear nervous, frustrated, confused, and on-edge. For illustrative pictures of CarTown, refer to Appendix 2.

Clientele. Although its proximity to upscale suburban areas leads many employees to think of CarTown customers as "entitled" ("There's a guy coming in from [City], who's paying $500,000 just on his sales tax for his vehicle, to register his 7th Bentley." SS 5, Guard), there is a variety of clientele which cuts across racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and cultural boundaries. There are often customers at CarTown who speak languages other than English, and many who hardly speak English at all; there are customers who dress in clothing which appears expensive and luxurious, and others who are dressed more casually; some customers appear stressed and express verbal frustration upon being turned away, while others simply shrug and thank employees for their time. Customers at CarTown look, sound, and act in distinct ways, though they might be broadly described in as four kinds which cut across demographic boundaries: the focused (those of stoic temperament set on receiving service as quickly as possible), the friendly (those of cheery temperament who converse with employees), the fearful (those of anxious temperament who express worry about not being successful in their transaction), and the angry (those of irritated temperament who express frustrations to and about employees).

Overall, customer reviews of the CarTown location suggest that customer "expect to wait" (CR 97) and navigate "the system" (CR 8), but they want to be treated with decency and respect. One review describes this thusly:

> Well, at the front door, there is a old lady (nice), she checked all my legal documents and tell me what to do, I was very appreciate, This location is effective and fast but rude rude rude, I went to No. 11 , a young, long hair, [race] lady was extremely rude, she stared at me when I come, she said mean words like I am ridiculous all the time and yelled at me. She asked me to pass her all my documents and I asked which one first? Do you want my online application first she rolling her eyes . OMG, I cannot say this place suck, cuz a old lady offer her best services ever. But this mean lady ruin everything. If you do not want hear any mean words, rolling mean eyes , keep away from here. Worst place ever." (CR 3)

Thus, though CarTown customers en masse appear to expect that their transactions will take some time and that they be confused about paperwork or regulations, they appear most likely to leave negative customer reviews if they encounter disrespectful interactions with RMV employees.

Preparatory Tasks. Depicting the process through which CarTown customers receive service from employees is surprisingly complex, and begins prior to arriving at the physical location. Figure 1 details this process as a flow chart, with the various groups (customers, employees), conditionalities, and optional paths to successfully (or unsuccessfully) receive the desired service. Prior to arriving at the center, a customer realizes their need for a particular service; based on my observations of thousands of customer interactions at CarTown, one common theme which describes this trigger is noticing that one's license or registration is either about to expire or already expired, which unsurprisingly colors the customer's temperament and behavior when they eventually arrive at CarTown.

Upon deciding the service they need, the customer may need to make an appointment for a particular service, which is accomplished by visiting the RMV website (mass.gov/rmv). The RMV's web-heavy approach to serving customers enables them to set appointments for customers online and offers information about how to obtain their desired service, though rules and

regulations surrounding how the RMV operates change with some regularity. For example, in recent years the RMV has adjusted the kinds of services that are available to walk-ins (customers without an appointment), meaning that customers often display some level of confusion about whether they need an appointment, how they might schedule an appointment, whether they have completed their appointment registration, or whether they have checked in successfully for their appointment on their phones. This happens most amongst those who struggle with technology (e.g., the elderly), but also affects customers at a general level, and customers often ask guards or CSR to speak with their supervisor or manager to answer their question or receive a desired service.

The site is mostly navigable and comprehensive in its delineation of RMV services and process, though to outsiders this is often a daunting task and difficult to digest (see Appendix 2 for images of the RMV website). Further, one vital function of the website is to illustrate the preparation customers must perform prior to receiving their desired service, which largely entails proofs (e.g., address, car ownership, auto insurance, birth certificate, citizenship) and various forms which need to be filled out (e.g., I90, RTA, return appointment form). Upon completing (or not completing) these essential steps, customers arrive at the center, typically having made some form of personal or professional sacrifice (e.g., obtaining childcare, postponing meetings, coming during a break) and nearly always would prefer to be somewhere else:

> A young, female customer walked briskly by and said "all these f***in people…I wanna smack all these f***in representatives before I leave". She walked swiftly out the door and out of the mall. (FN, p. 401)

Thus, after doing (or not doing) various preparatory tasks, a customer arrives at CarTown.

Pre-Service Tasks. At the beginning of the day, customers sit at one of the various benches outside the center and then busily shuffle toward the door, forming the lines for which the RMV is so commonly known. Waiting is a common thing at the RMV, and CarTown is no exception,

but there is a common procedure through which customers are processed (see Figure 1). There are various entrances for employees to CarTown but only one for customers, and they are greeted by between one and three security guards who stand watch at the door[13].

The guards are employed by an external security company which is contracted by the state, and their primary role is both to "observe and report" (SS 6, Guard) and to protect the center, its employees, and customers. Guards consist of almost exclusively young men in their twenties and thirties of varying racial and cultural backgrounds, and most speak a second language[14]. The security contract changed companies during the course of this study, and currently (ca. 2023) the guards wear grey uniforms, dark slacks, tactical boots, and guns in their holsters, visible for customers to see. Though the guards' appearance is often "intimidating" to customers, the guards are aware of this and are more often than not friendly and helpful, if a little bored or tired from standing all day. A customer entering the mall at CarTown might see a group of guards chatting and joking together, often in another language (e.g., Spanish), as well as hear them make an announcement or address customer questions. However, though guards are not formally employed by the RMV, their integration into the center's operations, culture, and camaraderie is noticeable and seamless. Guards are present in every aspect of the center's operation, and though other RMV employees (particularly managers) may disagree in how best to integrate guards into the workflow (e.g., I learned that managers at some locations have guards remain nearly silent and merely observe, while others have guards take a much more active and vocal role in helping customers),

[13] On rarer occasions, the manager will usher in customers at the door at various times of the day. This function is most commonly filled by security guards at Cartown, though they are directed in their efforts by the center manager.

[14] Spanish is the most common language at CarTown other than English, and many guards and RMV employees regularly converse in Spanish throughout the day. Other languages (e.g., Portuguese, Mandarin Chinese, French, Russian) are also commonly heard at CarTown amongst customers and employees, and the center itself has been described as a melting pot of "many minds and many cultures (SS 14, Guard). Further, the RMV offers services in 34 languages on its website and regularly processes customers in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, depending on the language abilities of RMV staff.

they are nonetheless part of the team at CarTown. Further, despite not being RMV employees, they abide by specific regulations from multiple agencies—from their employer, and from the RMV. Specifically, guards are regulated in their dress (neat and polished) and decorum (respectful but decisive) by the insurance agency, and are instructed to report incidents and other salient events to the agency; similarly, they adhere to RMV regulations in terms of the forms they are allowed (e.g., information fact sheets; see Appendix B) and not allowed to give to customers (e.g., formal RMV documents), the information they are encouraged to or forbidden from sharing (e.g., when or where the next available appointment is), and, of special importance to RMV managers, standards of appropriate behavior. At CarTown, these revolved around embodying high standards of customer service, including appropriate dress, behavior, language, and interaction with customers, but while also not attempting to help customers outside of their purview.

Guards[15] at CarTown play the role of greeter, and each customer interacts with a guard prior to entering the center and attempts to determine the purpose of their visit ("Excuse me, [miss/sir], what are you here for today?"). Customers with appointments (e.g., for renewing or receiving a driver's license) are asked to wait outside until their appointment time[16], at which point they are invited in (e.g., "Can I have my 11:30 appointments, please? 11:30!") and sent down the "Green Line" (also known as "Ready to Go") on the right side of the long line for those with appointments; this line is divided by a hip-high wall with small stanchions. Alternatively, walk-ins (e.g., for registering a car or title to their name; these services do not require an appointment)

[15] Informants gave various labels for this role, (e.g., "security officer", "security guard", "armed detention officer", "armed security officer", "security contractor"), but the label they used most commonly amongst themselves and between CarTown employees was "guard" or, less commonly, "security". These terms will be used synonymously throughout this study, though the grounded term "guard" is foregrounded.

[16] Customers with appointments also have the option of checking into the RMV on their phones, which an estimated 1-5% of customers do. Most customers at CarTown do not check in, but those who do typically show evidence of their check-in and are invited to sit in the common waiting area inside the center.

are asked to wait outside the center during busy times, or else they are sent down the "Orange Line" (also known as "Customer Service"), the left side of the long line. Depending on the busyness of a given time, a customer might not wait at all or for an hour in the orange line, and, depending on their request, may complete their desired service within 5 to 10 minutes or be asked to return to the center later to complete it. Customers in the green line typically wait between 0 and 5 minutes to receive their ticket and move to the main seating area, where they will await their meeting with a customer service representative (CSR) to process their request. Customers often express considerable confusion about how long they will have to wait (e.g, "What's the wait?", "About how long is the wait, would you guess?"), why the green and orange lines move at such different paces (e.g., "Wait, so *they* can go in?"), and whether they can bypass the wait in some way (e.g., "Any way I could just sneak in a bit early?").

One of the most important and salient aspects of CarTown and the RMV as a whole is the ubiquity of paperwork. Customer must prepare the appropriate RMV paperwork (e.g., forms of various names) and proofs (e.g., address or insurance, birth certificate, passport) to receive their desired service, and observing customers fidgeting with or examining (and reexamining) their paperwork is among the most common sights at CarTown. Customers often have questions about their paperwork and, as guards are generally their first point of contact[17], customers often engage in conversation with guards, RMV employees, or even (though less commonly) other customers about their paperwork and desired service. Some customers are particularly direct and will often pull out their paperwork or phone to show guards what they have. This practice is problematic for

[17] This is most commonly the case, although in previous times when CarTown has not been under-staffed, they have made use of a "greeter", who sat at the kiosk just inside the center, welcomed customers, and verified that they had the appropriate preparation (e.g., paperwork, proofs, forms) for their desired service. Various informants described the vital role of greeters and suggested that CarTown runs much more efficiently with them (e.g., SS 7, Guard; SS 9, Manager; SS 11, CSR).

guards for several reasons. Firstly, guards are not official CarTown employees and are thus restricted in the ways in which they can offer assistance to customers; specifically, looking at a customer's documents is described as an invasion of personal privacy and can result in reassignment to another RMV location or termination if caught on the various cameras throughout the center[18]. Secondly, guards interact with hundreds of people every day and, regardless of the emotional timbre of the ensuing conversation or personal qualities of the customer, engaging in interactions with customers is often repetitive and fatiguing. Thirdly, customers who attempt to discuss their situation with guards take extra time away from helping other customers which, especially during busy periods, can create pile-ups of customers near the door who mildly clamor for service. Finally, guards as employees of a third party contractor may not know the answer to a customer's question or, importantly, may not have the means by which to address them. Accordingly, experienced guards can and often do help customers answer their questions, but a common practice when customers are "telling you their life story" (SS 10, CSR 1) is to direct them toward the orange (customer service) line so that a CarTown employee may answer their question. This attempt to curry favor with employees is used as a kind of humanization tactic, which rather frequently backfires as guards and other RMV employees are accustomed to individuals vying for special treatment. Indeed, customers sometimes get upset if they are told that they will not be able to receive their desired service, and this can result in escalation to a manager or, in more extreme cases, asking (or coercing) the customer to leave the premises[19]. However, the perceived dire need of some customers (e.g., immigrants, the elderly) serve as a mechanism through which a sense of

[18] Cameras are carefully monitored by members of the guards' administrative staff, such as the guard's supervisors. Guards on duty often receive calls from these monitors who ask questions about their behavior and reprimand them.

[19] These incidents are more common than one might expect, and they do cause an interesting stir within the center; customers look at each other wide-eyed, employees chatter about what just happened, and sometimes an unruly customer remains nearby to offer strong, vocal criticisms of CarTown and its employees regarding their experience.

compassion is triggered within employees, shaping their ensuing interactions (see Chapter 6). In all, the ubiquity of paperwork serves as an indicator to customers and employees that the RMV is a highly regulated environment, effectively shaping and constricting the type of experience they will have there—and, by association, directing how they will interact with each other and a felt sense of personal expression there.

After customers with appointments have received a ticket, they move to the large waiting area inside the center and sit in one of the hundreds of chairs before one of the 20 CSR counters, which stretch along the entire far side of the center. Above the counters are television screens which display the numbers of the customers being served, which is displayed in large letters when it is the customer's turn to be served and accompanied by a female voice over the intercom (e.g., "Now serving…Q…five hundred and fifty eight…at counter number…18"). After hearing their ticket number, customers proceed to the appointed counter and are assisted by a CSR. Customer numbers are not always processed in the exact order, and each service has a distinct "letter" before the customer's assigned ticket number[20]. Two of the screens display customer ticket numbers, and the other two display a running crawl of local and national news updates. Behind the rows of chairs, there is a large counter adjacent to the customer service line supplied with pens, two computers and two printers (which sometimes work and sometimes do not), and marketing which advertises organ donation; customers often stand at the counter and fill out their paperwork, look up information on the computers, use the printers, or stand with their backs to the counter while waiting. All around the center are various placards and signs, ranging in topics from paperwork

[20] R and L are the most common letters (R: Registration; L: License); other letters are less common but have a specific connotation (Q: comeback letter; B: same-day registration; D: previously suspended patron).

one might need, invitations to receive service at AAA, and, importantly, recommending that customers visit the RMV website prior to their visit.

Customer Service Tasks. After waiting for often up to an hour or two and after hearing their number called, the customer will walk to the announced counter and begin their service transaction with a CSR. There are four levels of CSR amongst CarTown employees: one, for entry-level employees who process registrations; two, for employees with some experience who manage and oversee the center's finances and end-of-day pick-up from the "money guy"; three, for supervisory employees who are tasked with assisting other CSRs; and four, for the assistant manager who has extensive Registry knowledge and can make managerial decisions in the manager's absence. CSR 1 is the most common designation, and the level of experience between them varies (see Table 1). Further, there are several CSR supervisors at CarTown, an assistant manager, and a center manager[21], who took over for the previous manager in late 2022.

Upon receiving a customer at their counter, the CSR determines the desired service and evaluates their paperwork relative to their service request. If they have not brought the correct paperwork, the regulated response is to explain what the customer lacks, offer them a solution, and then invite the customer to return when they have the information they need. However, and importantly, some CSRs bypass this step and instead search for alternative ways of completing the customer's request which, though not the "primary way" of helping customers (SS 20), it is still permissible to "work within the system" (SS 8) and may result in the customer receiving their

[21] The center manager's role is generally to oversee the center and its operations, distribute the employees, deal with escalated cases, and offer evaluation and training for employees who need it. Supervisors and the assistant manager also assist with escalated cases, as well as special cases at the Registry (e.g., regular visits from individuals representing "Business to Business" or B2B transactions, such as car salespeople), but the proverbial buck stops with the manager, who has discretion over how the center operates. There are myriad decisions that the managers and supervisors must make, but at CarTown they generally assist the CSRs in performing their work, often sitting at a counter and processing customers or, in the case of the manager or assistant manager, roaming throughout the center and answering customer questions. The CarTown managers also have regular meetings and trainings with RMV administrators and may or may not be present on a given day if another center in the area is in need.

desired service. Customers which are unable to receive their service may also react poorly (e.g., become angry, shout at the employee) or request help from a supervisor or manager, inviting an escalation; these interactions typically end with the manager explaining that "I can't help you" and that the customer needs to return another day. Alternatively, if the customer has brought the correct paperwork, they are processed by the CSR, receive the desired service, and leave CarTown.

Energy and Fatigue. As an episode ends and employees prepares for the next one, there is usually (though not always) a small buffer period. Employees chat with other, check their phones, look at their computer, run a brief errand, or take a break. Ultimately, the nature of the episode which just finished has a lingering effect—particularly those which entail powerful emotional experiences, both positive episodes (i.e., transcendent) and negative (i.e., distressing)—and this lingering psychoemotional impact of the work task episode remains, and often bleeds into the next episode. On the one hand, transcendent or even marginal episodes imply a successful resolution and, generally, the presence of positive emotions, increased vitality, or engagement. Accordingly, the salience of dignity values is increased for the employee at that time, such that the employee may be likely to prioritize dignity in the following interaction. For example, after experiencing a transcendent episode, one security guard said, "it changed my whole day after that…I had energy" (SS 24); another said. Sandro described how he approaches these poignant moments:

> Let's try to find a way to make your life comfortable anyways. What do you do? You take the tea. What's your story? Tell me your life. Tell me a little bit about yourself. You would be surprised how willing. And that's what stuck to me about a comment you made earlier. While we are two complete strangers, people will dive into telling me their whole life story probably more than loved ones. I'm just a temporary easement. I'm going to assist them. But they're not going to run into me again. So I've had people tell me their whole life story. And I was like, "Wow. You really just told me everything." Oh, thanks man. I've had people cry on the phone. I've had people cry in person. I've had customers be, "Do you mind if I hug you?" Of course. Come on. Bring it in. That's what you need. At the end of the day, I'm here to serve the public. What am I going to say? (SS 3)

On the other hand, unsuccessful or distressing episodes suggest an unsuccessful resolution and the experience of mildly or severely negative emotions, exhaustion, or burnout. Thus, the salience of efficiency values is increased for the employee at that time, meaning that these are likely to be prioritized in the next transaction. I observed many times in which guards, CSRs, managers, or road test operators received negative treatment from customers and, following these interactions, appeared deflated and less likely to help future customers. Further, various employees and guards in particular found working at the RMV to be fatiguing, opting to leave for a different job. Jorge described his decision to leave CarTown:

> Well, one of the reasons why my decision to leave, it wasn't because of the work. I know I got offered a better job and get higher paid. But I felt like I was mentally being drained, due to the fact that I'm the type of person, I like to help people. I felt like I couldn't help people there. We turn somebody away sometimes, well not turn somebody away, but people, how can I phrase this? People would get upset when they couldn't get the services done, needed. I felt like, it wasn't nothing that we were doing wrong, it just felt like a lack of resources that we had, staffing and that played all a big part in it. (SS 7)

Overall, as CarTown employees seek to help customers, they iterate through this episodic model repeatedly—day by day, week by week—making conscious but largely non-conscious choices about which values to prioritize which may or may not align with their held values, and which may exist in tension with regulatory mandates.

Helping customers takes its toll on employees, and regular breaks from serving customers is an important organizational routine—particularly given the challenging and draining nature of customer interactions at CarTown. Though one might wonder if having armed guards and plexiglass barriers at each counter is a necessary precaution, angry, aggressive, threatening, and even violent customer behaviors are not uncommon occurrences. To deal with these stresses, many employees walk throughout the mall to nearby retail stores, sometimes to buy something, sometimes with another employee, and sometimes just to walk in silence. Other employees retire

to their cars or outside for a break, and others still chat with each other or collapse inward into their phones or field calls from others. Though each RMV employee has had difficult run-ins with customers, they generally appear engaged and report a strong desire to help them, particularly those in greatest need—which they typically identify as the elderly, those with small children, and immigrants, all of whom struggle most at the RMV. Many RMV employees came from backgrounds which were challenging in various forms; some experience physical disability, while others endured abusive relationships or offered incredible and lasting service to others, often to their own detriment. Many initially viewed working at the RMV as a short-term option and ended up staying for many years, while others sought it out as a way to receive a reliable paycheck and insurance. CarTown employees are also unionized, which offers protection and a limit on the amount they must work; union representation at the center adds another layer of complication for the local manager. Overall, employees remain at the RMV for various reasons, ranging from a desire to spend time with colleagues or receive a reliable pension, but also to offer service to the general public and interact with people of various walks of life.

Two other factions of the CarTown location are the testing areas: the road test operators, who test customers on their driving pursuant to receiving a driver's license, and the examination area, where customers (i.e., typically younger customers in pursuit of a learner's permit) take a written test. Customers who come to perform their road test drive their cars to the rear of the mall and wait beside an orange cone for an operator to help them, whereupon they must pass the driving test—composed of performing specific maneuvers required to safely operate a vehicle (e.g., a three-point turn, a parallel park, hand signals indicating turns). Road test operators have a separate room to the right of the customer service counters and are in and out of the center throughout the day in between their engagements with customers. While any customer at CarTown might

complete their transaction unsuccessfully, failing a road test appears to kindle a particular kind of wrath, meaning that road test operatives must manage customers who are frustrated, angry, or even hostile. Occasionally, even customers who have passed a road test may come back in to verify that they passed. Alternatively, those who come for a written test go to a private room on the far side of the center, where a guard stands watch outside.

Customers leave CarTown in a variety of moods (frustrated, irritated, pleased) and for one of two reasons: they were able to accomplish what they came for, or they did not. Most customers at CarTown are positive ("I get one out of every, like 27, 30 people who are negative. So overall, they come in there and of course they have their previous experiences. Everyone brings their baggage of experiences, right?" SS 1, Manager), and most customers leave in unceremonious manner regardless of their transaction status. Customer reviews suggest that if a customer's expectations are met in an unremarkable way, they are less than likely to leave a review and, if they do, it is likely to be between two and four stars. On the other hand customers whose expectations are exceeded by experiencing a short wait time, experience low confusion about the RMV process, and especially receiving positive treatment from employees are likely to leave positive (five-star) reviews. Further, customers whose expectations were not met due to a long wait, heavy confusion about the RMV process, and especially receiving disrespectful or otherwise negative treatment from employees are likely to leave low (one-star) reviews. While employees who receive positive reviews may receive positive evaluations for positive customer reviews, negative reviews are open to investigation by the RMV administration and, particularly for security guards, are likely to result in reassignment or even termination.

Overall, the CarTown RMV offers a service which, though often difficult to receive and administer, is a vital service for all citizens.

CHAPTER 5: VALUES TENSIONS IN REGULATED SERVICE ENVIRONMENTS

The customer service process at CarTown is often perplexing. At a high level, employees expressed a powerful desire to work in ways which adhered to their personal values, which they described as resulting in a sense of felt authenticity; however, they also acknowledged that the presence of RMV rules and regulations often prevented them from serving customers in ways that they found most personally important and meaningful; I will unpack this process further in Chapter 6. Further, as informants shed light on this central tension between individual values and regulatory mandates, it became clear that the values and expectations of individual employees were often at odds with those they perceived of the RMV as an organization, which expectations were explicitly manifest in rules and regulations. Specifically, though CarTown employees reported values which ranged in their emphasis (e.g., showing respect, processing customers quickly, taking care of their health), two subordinate tensions surfaced which illustrate how individual values and expectations are often at odds with those which they ascribe to (i.e., perceive of) the organization: namely, how employees viewed customers as both a source of fulfillment and threat, and how employees sought to serve customers with dignity but also while processing them with efficiency. I observed that CarTown employees often struggled to navigate these tensions, and I often heard them state that what they felt was important to them was often quite different from what they perceived of the organization. Ultimately, these tensions presented challenges for employees which shaped their ensuing pursuit of a sense of felt authenticity as they strove to enact specific values. To better articulate these tensions, I developed a conceptual model to show the process RMV employees engage in to manage values-oriented tensions in pursuit of felt authenticity (see Figure 2).

Solicitation of Service. The central starting point in the work of RMV employees to offer service is the customer's solicitation of service. Customers desire various products and services

and pursue them in various ways, but generally this process culminates in the customer arriving at CarTown, speaking with guards, and getting into line (see Chapter 4). As employees begin their engagement with customers, the process in which they balance various service-related tensions begins. I was surprised to find that experiences of the solicitation of service at CarTown are broad and diverse. On the one hand, moments characterized by kindness, personal connection, and positive emotions are not simply present, they are plentiful. One example of a positive customer interaction might be described thusly:

> A woman seated nearby began a conversation with Jackson [a security guard], and we found out that she's from Toronto and needs to get some information from the social security office. Jackson listened to her and, opening his own phone, said that she'd probably need to get to the closest social security office. He looked up the information she needed ("the [city] office") and she thanked him repeatedly for helping her. He went to go get the paper printed, and after he brought it in she thanked him again. He was smiling as he returned to help her. (FN 384)

As a whole, CarTown employees cherish and value helping and respecting others—and this desire is contagious, spreading amongst employees and even to myself as a researcher. I participated in various opportunities to help a customer at CarTown, such as this one:

> I overheard a woman speaking Portuguese to Rubino, who clearly didn't understand what she was saying but who had sent her into the customer service line. I let him know that I speak Portuguese, and I approached her and asked how I could help. She said that she's here for a friend who's sick (*"ela está enferma…"*) and whose registration needs to be renewed; the friend can't be here to do it herself because she's not well. She was wondering if she'd be able to renew the registration on her behalf, and I obviously didn't know. Rubino also didn't know what to do, so we waited to chat with Juanmarco. She looked worried, and she expressed that she didn't speak English and didn't want to have to wait in line if she didn't have to ("*sei que terei que entrar na fila*…"). Juanmarco was working with another customer, but eventually he was able to hear the situation and confirmed that she should be fine. She asked if she had to wait outside, and I said she could just go into the customer service line inside. I also let her know that I would be around if and when she needed translation, as she said she doesn't speak English. She said thanks and then continued in the line. About 20 minutes later, she arrived to the front of the line and I went up to help her address her situation with Orlando. She said her name is Maria and I introduced myself. Orlando listened to her situation, looked it up on the computer, and said that her friend would need to pay a fine in Holliston before being able to renew the registration. I explained the situation, and she thanked me before she left. (FN 385)

The number of opportunities to help others at CarTown is immense, and some customers are aware of this and express their gratitude for the CarTown staff and their willingness to help:

> A man seated near me said that he's been coming to the RMV here for 16 years or so. He said that the new location is really beautiful, "people are nice…they seem to really want to help", and overall he felt good about the center. He said that his only complaint is that they only have one person (or a few people) working on registrations, which he gathered from the TV. (FN 398)

On the other hand, despite the many positive experiences employees have in serving customers, spending time at CarTown also reveals that it is replete with negative experiences to a fascinating degree. One typical experience involves a customer who causes a scene while under the influence:

> Drunk guy came in and caused a ruckus. Never a dull moment. He entered the registry and said to me, "Man, you're too young to get your permit" (I said, "I know"). He stood in line for a bit, smelling of booze and holding alcohol in a Target bag; he addressed other customers and generally talked by himself. After a bit, he went outside and talked with the security guards. Finally, he stood outside the registry and was screaming. I didn't document the whole conversation, but Orlando, Bradshaw, Jackson, and Marco were all gathered to usher him out. When he was approached, he began screaming (and the entire registry shook with the sound of his voice), "I've gotta use the f***in computer…I'm not comin' the f*** back out here…I can't come the f*** back here, it's two hours away…man, f*** you! …that's bulls***." Then he walked away, with essentially the entire center watching him leave. The fallout from the conversation was quite something, with conversation quickly emerging back into the center after he left. (FN 136)

In this way, though many CarTown employees appreciate the chance to serve "the public" (SS 14), serving the public often takes the form of tolerating unwanted verbal assaults and the disruptive, aggressive, or disrespectful behavior of others—and thus, customers represent both an opportunity for service, but also the possibility of a negative experience. These challenges are augmented by a mandated service quota by RMV administrators ("we have 10 minutes to get you in and out" SS 1) and the sheer volume of customers, who file in even during "the whole lunch hour" in a way which invites the question, "how are we being taken care of as employees?" (SS 21). Annette elaborated on the volume of out-of-state license transfers, which are particularly time-consuming:

> So at our particular site, we get the most out-of-states in Massachusetts, but it impacts us being able to service everyone like we should be able to service them. There's some sites we only get three, four people a day. On average we get 40 plus. But when it was really crazy, we were getting like 80, especially around in August. That's when everyone's coming in before school? So different times of the year, we see the ebbs and flows and they keep track of it. But nothing has been done. We still have to service those people and it pushes back times for having to serve the next 10. So it's different everyday. We could get 10 out states, a license and registration. Or we can get 60. (SS 1)

In this way, the high volume yet unpredictable nature of customer volume adds another layer of tension for CarTown employees to manage. Further, as RMV services are highly consequential, customers will often go to great lengths to obtain special treatment in ways which leave employees feeling frustrated. David, a road test operator, talked about the challenges of wanting to help people who try to take advantage of an employee's kindness while adhering to RMV regulations:

> David entered the conversation a bit later and, looking over at me, dropped into an experience almost immediately about how "no good deed goes unpunished". He talked about a woman, an "Armenian doctor" who "shoulda known better" who had something wrong with her test, failed, and then started yelling at him. He talked about how frustrating it is to try and "stick your neck out" for someone but then to see that they take advantage. I could see how frustrated he was by the experience; he's not usually this worked up. He said that working with people like this makes him "want to take a sick day". Later, he contrasted the experience with the "Armenian doctor" lady to a "Jamaican guy" who was nice, even though he was turned away. He said that the guy was planning on going to Jamaica and Miami and was understanding even though he wasn't going to be passed. He said, "why can't everyone be like that guy?" Bradshaw agreed. As we talked further and as we moved into the road test office, he mentioned how George needs to show up on time and how busy it's been for them recently. Even later, he approached…and told me that there's another guy who showed up late for an appointment, just sitting there, and that he won't be able to help them. He said "it's exhausting" to try and "bend over backwards" for people when they won't work with the system, but he also said that RMV management needs to recognize that CarTown is already over-busy. He said that he'll "do 24 in a day" [administer 24 drivers tests] but he knows that the average for road test operators at the other centers is closer to 5 or 10 a day. He wonders why they don't give him the help that they need, when they so often draw from CarTown to help out the other centers. I asked him what it feels like when he tries to help people and he can't, and he said "it's exhausting. Makes you not want to come back in the next day". (EC 66)

The phrase "no deed goes unpunished" evokes a poignant concept described independently and in different ways by various CarTown employees: that despite their desires to help customers and

adhere to regulations, they often described themselves as "stuck" (FN 123; SS 4), "f***ed" (VI-F 6), or that "your hands are tied" (EC, 66), which many employees respond to by concluding "it is what it is" (SS 7; EC 75). One metaphor came to my mind which captures some of this tension:

> I indicated to David (and later to Jackson and Marco) a metaphor that describes what it's like to work at the RMV: standing in the ocean. When you're standing on the ocean shore, near the shore break, you're buffeted by waves which are seemingly unending - boom, boom, bam. At the RMV, you're "receiving" other peoples' emotions at every minute of the day. This is absolutely exhausting, whether the emotions are negative (which you might expect) or even positive. David indicated his agreement with this, suggesting that it's sometimes even more exhausting to deal with peoples' positive emotions, that they don't want to hear your life's story. (EC 15)

Thus, CarTown employees carry specific desires which they intend to enact in the course of their work, but they often experience tensions which makes the satisfying of these desires challenging and often paradoxical; Figure 2 describes these tensions, each of which I detail below.

Customer Tension. The first tension which CarTown employees experience is a *customer tension*, or that customers are simultaneously viewed as a source of fulfillment as well as a source of threat. Nearly every CarTown employee expressed a strong desire to serve and help customers, which was also described in idiosyncratic ways. Generally, informants said that "it feels good to help people" (SS 5, 7) and that helping often takes the form of "making someone's life easier" or "making someone happy" (SS 23). The value of helping and serving customers is similar to dignity as these relate to fundamental beliefs that people deserve to be treated well, which appeared to stem from the value of benevolence or universalism; these values dictate that individual ought to treat others well—within one's ingroup, or with any person they encounter, respectively. While the nature of their work tasks also require them to help others, informants also independently reported the importance of helping others in their values interviews. In this way, helping others might be described as stemming from the responsibilities associated with their work role, but also as originating from their held values.

Moreover, and importantly, informants described helping and respecting others as distinct concepts in that, whereas dignity was seen as a fundamental human right which fulfilled more general, humanistic needs (e.g., pursuing connection with customers, seeking to be treated well by people), serving and helping others was seen as a specific way to improve their life in a way that filled more specific, instrumental needs (e.g., getting one's license renewed, completing one's errands). Serving and helping thus took the form of improving customer lives in specific ways, which employees found fulfilling. Arielle, a CSR of over 20 years at CarTown, described the practicality of helping:

> I love helping people. if I can do anything possible, I will. ...That's me, as an individual person. A disabled person, instead of telling them just to call it in, 'Sir, give me that application and I will scan it into the system and fax it in and give you a copy'…I'll do that for them. If you need something, the fastest thing is to help them out so they can get it taken care of. There are other people who won't do that. (SS 23)

In this way, Arielle described helping people as a specific way to assist someone toward a desired goal, in a way that might prevent them from having to make a return appointment. Similarly, Annette differentiated between her desire to respect and help others:

> So I think me being my authentic self is respect. So one of the things that I do go in and say every single time, so when I used to go on and make the announcements is like I value and I respect your time. I value and respect you. Basically, I'm letting them know. So let us get through this. Let us partner up and get through this situation, right? Because everybody needs to get in and out and I'm going to tell you the best way for us to get you there because I know you all have lives and have things to do…let's work together. (SS 9)

Annette's desire to help and serve others thus led her to collaboratively work with customers to find solutions to their problems, which she described as important and fulfilling to her. Seeking to help customers solve their problems often required creative solutions, and RMV employees often felt that they needed to circumvent regulations to help a customer. Clair described one such situation when she departed from regulations to help a customer:

> So we have guidelines for different things that we have to do there, different transactions and stuff. If we can find a different way to do something, then we'll try to do that, as long as it's under the guidelines of what we can provide the customer with. Okay, let me give an example because I know that's a confusing for me to say. Today, a lady was registering a car. She had two RTA forms. One had the correct mailing address but didn't have her residential address on it, but she had two copies of it, one from the dealership and one from her insurance. The one from the insurance had both the mailing address and the residential, so I used that one and the one from the dealer because that has the signature. Instead of just using the front page with the mailing address and it didn't have the correct address for the one from the dealer, we used just the second page that had the signature and then the other two pages from the insurance that had all of her information. We need certain things, but there's loopholes of where they'll take it this way if we do it this and this way. (SS 20)

Further, many informants expressed a desire to serve customers who are in search of someone to help them. Hazel, a CSR, elaborated on this desire to serve customers, describing her desire to "pay it forward" after having endured many challenging situations in her life:

> Because I've been in those situations where I've been denied so many things. Growing up as a kid, I've done a lot of stupid things with driving fast, losing my license, getting speeding tickets. So going through what I went through, I understand. I have compassion to the people that come in and I need help, help me please. Because that's pretty much all the registry is. Give me questions and answers, help me figure out what I'm doing wrong. But you've got to look at it as not intense, but everybody hates it because it's always a bad rep….I like having that one customer in front of me leave going, thank you so very much and happy. *So it's…it's kind of a challenge that you see every day, of what can I do to turn you around?* Yeah. Oh yeah. (SS 10; interviewer words italicized)

Annette, the former manager of CarTown, similarly described how serving customers could help to change customers' perspectives about the RMV:

> I know this sounds so corny and cliché…but knowing that the RMV in the past has had a bad rap…pretty much nationwide? If I get the opportunity to change your mind by giving you extra 30 seconds of loving, whether that is, "Hey, I see you came from Minnesota, Minnesota", or say something's funny or whatever, or, "Oh, you might want to take a picture of that Hawaii license because you're going to have to depart with that, sorry". Or if you're coming from New York, I'll give you a few jibs or jabs about, "You can come to the winner's circle now because I know you guys haven't won a championship in a while". I get it, I get it. So those little clips. And also the kids, try to engage the kids to make them feel better about taking a permit test and ask them about school. And if they hit a sport and if they're super nervous, I give them advice, like insider advice, so to speak. They think it's insider, but it's not really. And I give them like, listen, give some insider advice, 25 question 25 minutes. You're not sure, skip it. Don't worry about it. You might not even

> need it to pass. You only need 18. I just try to soothe them so to speak, so they're not in there all wound up ready to take this test. (SS 1)

In this way, many informants felt that serving customers allowed them to complete their work tasks in a way that they found fulfilling and meaningful.

Further, employees describe their work at the registry as *filling a vital societal role* for the common citizen. Many CarTown employees have a challenging or disadvantaged background (e.g., disability, abuse, unstable homes) and lack elevated educational or vocational opportunities, but they see their work as supporting proper societal functioning. For example, David described the RMV's role of keeping Massachusetts roadways safe, and his personal role in supporting this:

> Met up with David in his office, and like most days he started chatting about his life and college football…and he launched into a conversation about something that happened recently: a man with a Massachusetts license was recently acquitted of seven counts of manslaughter (he had hit seven Marines with his truck while inebriated) after serving three years in prison. David said that this was something I absolutely needed to include in the analysis, and I pushed him to explain a bit more about why this was so important. He said that the man had previously had his license suspended because of a DUI, but that apparently it had gotten "lost in the shuffle". David felt that there was no way this guy should've gone through the system, and he said that the registrar - a really bright woman who apparently is always on the radio and other media talking with people - had been fired because of it. It was a big, national story, and though the driver was acquitted it became a huge problem. David has talked multiple times about "putting 8 pounds of apples in a 10-pound bag", and he said that things like this create big problems for the RMV. …David said that he's encountered many people on "the spectrum" and that sometimes they're really good, "laser-focused", and that others "...you know", shouldn't get a license. …I saw him go outside and offer a few instructions to people who had just arrived for their driver's test, and he indicated to me afterward that he didn't think they would have what they needed (i.e., a Rhode Island insurance statement for the car with a RI license plate). He also said that, because of all the issues (including the one he mentioned), it's easier to just follow the rules exactly as they are written. … Looks like some of the tension inherent in trying to give people licenses - you're trying to keep the general public safe. (EC 15)

CarTown employees like David often expressed that their work was geared toward "[keeping] the general public safe", which they felt served an important societal function. Other employees suggested that "just [guiding] them through what they need to do…makes everything smoother" (SS 14), while an administrator suggested that the RMV is very compassionate to the needs of the

public" (SS 18). In this way, serving customers represented a way through which to fulfill an important societal role, which they found important and meaningful. However, at the same time, CarTown employees who hold this aspirational ideal about their work are also prone to speak negatively about customers and express frustration about them. Jackson, a guard, said that he became frustrated with how CarTown employees talked about customers amongst themselves:

> In the morning, before people [customers] would come in, you'd hear, they'd [employees] be like, "Oh, these f***ing people are back. They're so stupid." Whatever it may be. They're already pissed. The doors haven't even opened. And there's a sense of, "Oh, these people are back. Look at them. Look at them lining up early." Yeah, no s*** they're lining up, it's the RMV. (SS 5)

Speaking negatively about and viewing customers in a negative light appear to be manifestations of a second element of service tensions: that CarTown employees also see *customers as* a *source of threat*. Though employees at CarTown do enjoy helping customers in general, the nature of the work is highly repetitive and often fatiguing, which threatens to undermine the level of customer service they might offer. Chris, a CSR, described the challenge of the work being so repetitious:

> I try not to get aggravated…little by little you get aggravated…because it's very repetitive. I feel like I'm telling the same thing over and over again. And sometimes I just don't want to. There were some days when I just want to hit the record button and be like, here you go. Because it seems like it's the same speech. (SS 11)

My own experience at CarTown suggests that the sense of fatigue that comes from working with customers could partially be due to the importance of the RMV's services and also because it is a face-to-face interaction (e.g., "Those are the more complex ones…when it comes to a person"; SS 12), and this fatigue often resulted in employees struggling to live up to their own values for serving customers well. Further, the ongoing challenging of being short-staffed was identified as augmenting the fatigue CarTown employees feel. Consuela, the assistant manager, talked about the fatigue she and her colleagues feel from serving customers:

> It's just past 9am on a Thursday…Consuela appeared to be a bit agitated and quite tired, and she spoke with the guards near the door, all in a group. She said that they were only going to be able to help 20 walk-ins and that "I only have nine clerks today", so "we are prioritizing appointments". She called over to Dawn (who was at register number 17) and asked her to come over. …She then, with an exasperated look, muttered that Dawn still hadn't come over and she called over to her again ("Didn't I say something?"). Dawn then said "sorry!" and came quickly over. At that point, Consuela went over the rules again, reclarifying that they were going to prioritize people with appointments and only take 20 walk-ins. …Her expression and tone again seemed exhausted and a bit exasperated. I quietly asked Consuela if she was doing all right, and her expression and demeanor changed slightly as she said, rubbing her eyes with her hands, "I have a headache…I'm exhausted". I asked if she had a vacation coming up and she mentioned that she had just had a bit of time off, and even a sick day or two. I said that I hoped that she would get better soon, and she laughed slightly and walked back to her office. A little while later, Consuela walked by again and I asked about there being only nine clerks. She offhandedly mentioned that "everyone's tired" and kept on walking. (EC 30)

In this way, serving customers is often highly fatiguing for employees, which, as employees may perceive that "they [customers] don't care…they only care about themselves"; EC 75), leads employees to see customers as a threat to their energy and well-being, and in turn threatens their willingness and ability to adhere to their service-oriented values.

Further, informants shared that negative customer reviews have considerable power over CarTown employees, such that employees who receive them are likely to receive sanctions and even run the risk of reassignment or termination. The possibility that customers might leave a negative review instills a sense of ambiguity in the minds of RMV employees, such that they may feel a sense of apprehension as they prepare to serve customers. This is particularly true amongst guards, who are not official CarTown employees and often feel replaceable by their supervisors. I observed several guards who were written up for their behavior, and several were fired while others were reassigned. I documented one poignant example of the power of negative customer reviews:

> The center was absolutely *slammed* when I arrived this morning; I saw Bradshaw and Juanmarco and we said our hellos. When I asked how things were going, the first thing that Bradshaw said was "Marco's gone." I was shocked. Bradshaw explained that Marco had had a "serious allegation" levied against him in the form of a customer complaint and that he had been reassigned to work for the TSA closer to his house. He said it was a "win-

> win", but I could see in his eyes that this was quite serious. When I asked him if he'd tell me what happened, I saw the supervisor light turn on in his visage, and he said, "no way". He walked outside the center to manage the line. I had a feeling that Juanmarco would be willing to tell me more about Marco's situation. He said that the situation happened yesterday but that he was at [a different RMV] location. Apparently Marco had been flirting with a girl that he thought was older, and the mother wrote up a two-page complaint to the organization to have him removed. The girl was 14, and she was apparently carrying coffee to her mom. Marco had started talking with her and, as she walked past, Juanmarco said that he made a motion with his arm and hand similar to the motion of smacking someone's behind in a sexual manner. The mother saw this and wrote it up, and Juanmarco said that the major (one of the leaders at [security company]) came in later that day to escort Marco off the premises. He won't be returning to work here anymore. Jackson came by and added a few details. He was here yesterday, and he said with an uncharacteristically somber expression that he's surprised he wasn't fired, too. He said that he didn't hear what Marco had said, but that apparently the girl had later been in tears outside the center. The mother had apparently caused quite a scene outside the center, confronting Marco in a raised voice and angrily chastising him for what he apparently said to her daughter. (EC 25)

Following a Schwartzian perspective on values, it might be reasonable to conclude that, in this instance, Marco had sought to enact the value of stimulation, which is akin to the pursuit of novelty, personal interest, and pleasure, and the inappropriateness of these actions led to interpersonal (i.e., the mother) and organizational (i.e., the RMV) sanctions. Moreover, though official CarTown employees are less likely to be reassigned or fired than guards due to their membership in a labor union, other employees are also open to criticisms from customers, who may leave negative feedback in various forms: online (e.g., Google or Yelp reviews), on paper (e.g., complaint letters), or in-person (e.g., speaking with the manager about an employee). The nature of this perceived threat had less to do with the notion that employees could not be authentic in these interaction, and the role of regulations did not appear to instigate this perceived threat; however, the nature of the customer-employee dynamic impacted how customers and employees interacted with each other, and the values that might be prioritized when interacting with them (see Chapter 6). Consider what George and David (road test employees) said about negative reviews:

> The idea of "bridging the gap" is what George talked about last time and I still find that to be incredibly important…The gist of the conversation was how difficult it is to try and be

> a good person, meaning to be helpful and to give good customer service, while also being beholden to regulation and rules and stipulations that are outside their control. Plus, David said a phrase which made George last in my eyebrows raise: "no good deed goes unpunished". he mentioned how trying to help people and stick your neck out for them can be a natural desire, but that there are so many situations in which trying to help somebody out can result in significant blowback for them. We talked about a few examples. First, George mentioned a guy who came in who reeked of marijuana, and he didn't know what to do. He said that he was trying to pretend like he couldn't smell anything, but that felt really stupid. Second, David talked about A young kid who asked his mom to adjust his seat for him. He said that, in these situations, you just look at the situation and throw off your hands, wondering what you were supposed to do. Do you help the person knowing that they are probably not going to pass, or do you help them and then wait for them to explode when they find out they can't get what they want? That's why he offered that phrase, "no good deed goes unpunished". (EC 6)

Furthermore, instances of customers serving as threats were prone to emerge at unexpected times, which left employees on-edge and wondering whether and how to interact with customers. For example, I observed an instance in which Jackson—a guard with a noticeably vocal, energetic, and outspoken temperament—helped a customer above and beyond what was required:

> A woman seated nearby began a conversation with Jackson, and we found out that she's from Toronto and needs to get some information from the social security office. Jackson listened to her and, opening his phone, said that she'd probably need to get to the closest social security office. He helped her and she thanked him repeatedly for helping her. He went to go get the paper printed, and after he brought it in she thanked him again. He was smiling as he returned to help her.

However, despite Jackson's positive treatment of this customer, a challenging series of events unfolded immediately thereafter with Jackson in which helping customers became difficult:

> At the same time this was happening, a young woman and young man (who had been here for quite some time already) were laughing and joking around rather visibly and vibrantly, out in the open. One RMV employee described their behavior as "offensive", while Dawn likened it to "incest"; I personally would describe it as distracting and somewhat irritating. Jackson was standing nearby and apparently thought that they had been talking about him, or that they were making fun of him. He puffed out his chest and put his shoulders back as he spoke with them, asking what was so funny. They both stared at Jackson, indicating that it was just "brother and sister stuff", and that "no one's looking at you". Jackson backed away. He "didn't swear", and as he later said, "the cameras got it". Later, the girl approached me, asking if I work here and indicated that she'd like to speak with the head of security. I told her with whom she could speak and she thanked me. Later, she spoke with Juanmarco and later Bradshaw, indicating that she had a grievance to file against

> Jackson for his interaction with her and her brother. Bradshaw left and spoke with Jackson, and Jackson later got off the phone with one of their superiors. I observed both interactions (they happened only feet away from me, and away from each other), and I can confidently say that what happened between them was quite minor and innocuous. I said as much to Juanmarco (who replied with an exasperated look and said, "*por eso no hablo con los customers*" ["that's why I don't talk with customers"]) and to Bradshaw (who said something very similar, and that the customer has the right to file complaints. Bradshaw told Jackson that he needed to settle down, and Juanmarco told him he needed to not talk with customers. Jackson was bouncing between humor and anger, and indicated that "I'm not gonna change for nobody—not you, not them. I'm gonna be me." He said that "I'm not gonna help anyone anymore…not gonna talk with anyone". His body language changed dramatically after this incident, more slouched and with a softer, but still somewhat harsh bent in the tone of his voice. As I observed him interacting with customers afterward, his interactions were short and somewhat curt in nature ("I already told you, the manager's coming", "please wait outside") - and much less expressive, friendly, and animated than they typically are. Jackson asked if I would serve as a witness for this incident, and I agreed. (EC 26)

In this way, even after helping customers in a highly positive way, and Jackson's defensive behavior notwithstanding, interacting with and striving to help customers is often laden with risks. Moreover, CarTown employees have reason to see customers as a threat, which adds tension to how they ought to understand and interact with customers. Further, this tension between viewing customers as both fulfillment and threat adds challenging ambiguity to how employees cognitively appraise customers and prepare to serve them, complicating their ensuing actions to serve them. Thus, customer tension results in employees feeling paradoxically hopeful and grateful to serve customers—but also to distance themselves from them to avoid the emotional labor needed to successfully serve them.

Service Tension. The different ways of viewing customers (i.e., as threat, as fulfillment) provides some palpable tension for CarTown employees, but the most central tension that employees struggle to navigate is between prioritizing dignity and efficiency in their work tasks. Herein, *service tension* refers to the tension employees experience between serving customers in ways which prioritize their humanity and dignity, and serving customers with efficiency and in

large quantities; specifically, service tensions are composed of two forms of values—dignity values and efficiency values—and each of which was emphasized by informants as playing a critical role in serving customers and in preserving the functioning of CarTown.

Concerning *dignity values*—which I define as values oriented toward treating others with benevolence, kindness, and decency—informants emphasized two aspects when asked about the values and principles that guide how they live their lives and perform their work. The first element they emphasized was showing respect for others, which they defined as treating people well, with kindness, and finding value in others. Annette described this form of respect in this way:

> Respect is the minimum. Is the minimum. Right? Because everyone deserves it, whether... there's certain situations where people try to tell me about someone prior to me meeting them. Nope. I want to learn. And my situation might be different than your situation. So I feel like everyone deserves that common courtesy of respect. Now you have the opportunity to change my mind. Right? But the minimum is respect. A mutual respect. I respect you, you respect me, respect our ideologies. You know what I'm saying? I don't have to agree with what your stance is, but you know what? I'm going to be open to listen because maybe there's something I can learn in what you're saying, you know what I'm saying? There's maybe a new way I can see something. You know what I'm saying? That I never have before. My experiences, my life has allowed me to see things through a certain view. Right? But that doesn't mean I shouldn't be open to learning something from a different perspective. I feel like I respect each other's visions, ideologies, experiences, and that's just the minimum. (SS 8)

In this way, respect is often described as "the minimum" which results in "[listening"], "learning", and seeing things "from a different perspective". Respect as a value might refer to various aspects of human values, but informants generally described respect as a fundamental right that all people are entitled to. In this way, respect might symbolize a blending of the Schwartzian values of benevolence (i.e., treating people with whom one is close contact well), universalism (i.e., seeking to treat all people well), and conformity (i.e., the inhibition of impulses which might negatively affect others). Further, informants described respect as stemming from a fundamental right that

humans have to be treated well, which they saw as "the right thing to do" (SS 14). Nathan described this fundamental right to treat people with respect:

> I was raised Catholic and obviously those values, but I think for everyone, despite your religion or whatnot, it's just that instinct you have of what's right and wrong. Unless you totally grew up in a place where it was totally lawful and you had no one in your life teaching you any sense of morality or values, I think most people have a basic understanding that there are certain things that if you do, you know it'll feel wrong to do versus the right thing to do. (SS 17)

Other informants also emphasized that "we're all human" (SS 11) and, relatedly, people are inherently good and deserve common decency. Claire, a CSR, described her desire to treat others with respect due to this supposition:

> I definitely try to treat people how I would like to be treated with respect and with kindness and try to help them as best that I can, if I can help them at all…Letting people know that you hear them, to empathize with them so that you can try to help them if you can. That's a big thing. (SS 20)

In this way, the experience of empathy for customers due to their perceived needs or inherent humanity led them to seek to treat that customer with dignity. Importantly, though every CarTown employee described the importance of respecting others in some way, many informants also made it clear that they expected to be respected by customers—and that being treated with disrespect would change the nature of their interaction with that customer. Further, employees noted that being disrespected would justify treating customers poorly or speaking negatively of them, but only in extreme cases. Generally, employees expressed that being disrespected by a customer would justify not "going the extra mile" (SS 1, 5) for customers. For example, Claire described how a breach of respect affects how she helps customers:

> I treat people with respect because I want respect as well. I treat people how I want to be treated. That's how I've always done that. …People walk into the registry with the mindset of, "Okay, I'm trying to argue with you. You're not telling me what I want to hear, so I'm going to argue with you. I'm going to make a scene, I'm going to be upset." I kind of talk to them. If they're upset, I know they're just frustrated. I will try my best to talk with them. But if they're giving me attitude because they've already started with attitude, then I'm

> going to tell them what they need to do to get serviced or they need to make an appointment. I'm not going to bend over backwards to be helpful if you're being rude. (SS 16)

In all, informants described the importance of respecting others in many ways, and, though the forms of respecting others differed by person—for example, respecting others by listening to them (SS 2, 3), by imagining how they might want to be treated (SS 4, 9, 13), by making them laugh (SS 10, 27), by saying something kind or complementary (SS 1, 8), or by minding their delivery when giving difficult news (SS 22)—CarTown employees strongly value respect in their work.

Moreover, informants also described the enactment of dignity values in their work in terms of *seeing humanity in customers*. Many informants expressed that, though customers are across the proverbial counter from them, "we are human beings…we're humans" (SS 3)—and this commonality deserves awareness and recognition from employees. Marco, a security guard, described an experience where he sought to see others' humanity even while being treated poorly:

> I could give you something recent. Yesterday, I had a lady standing in the line, me and him get here. It was just me and him. Open the door at about 8:19, 8:20. Very early. On his word, on the manager's word. Just check in, seeing who has an appointment or status letter. If they do, we have them take a seat, for now. Cause yesterday was senior day. So anybody 65 and older, they come in behind appointments, mandatory, right? Have them also take a seat because you don't elderly be sitting... standing up for a long period of time, obviously. Right? And there was just one lady in line, she said she was not moving. I tried to get her off the line to have her take her seat. I knew that she was older than 65. He tried, the manager came out and tried, and she would not budge. Yes. She would not budge. She cussed us all out. She said, she's not moving.
>
> *What do you do?*
> At this point, I step out and I talk to the manager. I'm like, "Hey, do you think we should even allow her in fully? You know? Cause I don't like how her attitude is. I don't need her going inside in front of 10 or five other people in front of our coworkers here and causing a big scene. These are the things that I think about doing my job for so long. Especially a customer service job. I don't think about the firearm on my right side, or whatever I carry, I just think about me being a human being. How would I want to be treated. I want to treat people as I want people to treat others and myself. So when she acted out, I immediately pulled him to the side and said, "Hey, do you think we should she still send her down the line?" He eventually got her to sit down and cool down before nine o'clock and then he walked with her down. Yeah.

> *So she needed some time to like...*
> Cool down. Yeah. I think it's because she probably got here early in the morning and has been standing there since probably the morning. So in her mind she's like, no I'm not stepping out of line cause if I step out of line...it's probably happens to her RMV, where they come in and clear it and then she ends up in the back and not being able to get the service. So now it's disturbing. It's very disturbing. If that makes sense. (SS 6)

In this experience, Marco "[didn't] her how her attitude [was]" and pondered whether the customer might cause problems for he and his colleagues, but he nonetheless sought to engage in perspective taking to consider the human needs of this customer. The ability to see customers' humanity came particularly easily for customers who were seen as having a salient hardship or need. Nathan, a guard, described this belief to see the humanity of those in need:

> My thing was, if someone had a disability or someone was in a situation like that, I would try to go and tell the cashier, "Hey, this person, they need it." Or whatever the situation might be, we would extend helpfulness. Because obviously, the main role of the state, is to assist the citizens of the state. I didn't necessarily make discretionary calls on my own, but I thought there were certain populations that needed a little extra help than others. I mean, if it varied from someone... We would have people who just got out of jail, they need an ID, they're struggling to get a job, struggling to get a birth certificate. …I understand that everyone's obviously equally deserving of an opportunity to receive that service, but some people just don't understand it. Whether it's a language barrier, some type of mental illness, whatever it may be. (SS 5)

In this way, identifying individuals with a specific, observable challenge such as a "language barrier" or "mental illness" led employees like Nathan to make "discretionary calls" in light of the customer's observed needs. For many employees, this involved perspective taking which led them to consider whether and how to assist the customer given their challenges. Angelica described this experience in this way:

> A lot of these immigrants, I don't even want to call them that, but a lot of the people with immigration status situations, they're nervous to come in here. I put myself in their shoes. Because I come from an immigrant family, so I know how nervous they are to come in here. For me to turn around and give them a hard time. Why? If I know where I come from, if it was my mother there, if it was my father, if it was my anyone. Why would I want to give them a hard time, and talk to them very condescending? Why not help this person?

> They are trying to better themselves. They are here for a reason, they're here because whatever. I know that the main reason anyone comes to this country is to better themselves and better their family. So why am I going to make it that much more difficult for them to have a better life? (SS 12)

Further, others such as Chris, a CSR, took this notion a step further by suggesting that customers who portray themselves as above another customer or employee because of their elevated status relinquish this claim to have their humanity recognized:

> Some people think they're entitled no matter what you do for them. Just because of who they are sometimes or maybe what they've done in their life. I've had people come up to me and tell me, "Oh I'm a doctor, why should I wait in line?" Kind of thing. So, I kind of don't like that, just because you're a doctor and whatever you do, you're not more important than somebody that takes off the garbage. And great, you have an important job, great. You went to school, great. But don't be like, oh because I'm so and so. I shouldn't have to wait. No. I mean, help people that need it. I like the fact that they'll help a disabled person that can't maybe stand in line. If they let us know someone's got an issue, I'd want to try to help them. Not just because I'm disabled, but if you get an old person... Someday, that could be your mother, your grandmother, your father, your grand... I don't know. You help the young, you help the old. It's just the way it should be. (SS 11)

Chris also said that this described the challenge of working with customers who often fail to acknowledge the hard work that he and his colleagues do—but trying to not "lose your humanity" in the process (SS 11; also SS 2). In all, employees reported that enacting dignity values in their work often required them to consider the humanity of all persons involved, and how they might want to be treated if they were in their position.

Importantly, when asked about how they might prioritize their own personal values, most CarTown employees emphasized the relative importance of respecting others and recognizing their humanity, suggesting that as a whole they place a premium on treating others well while seeking to solve their problems. Specifically, the prioritization of dignity values typically leads CarTown employees to adhere to RMV regulations in spirit, but to follow personalized procedures and prioritize the needs of people over strict adherence to said regulations. I observed instances in

which employees who described helping and respecting others as highly important to them would often depart from scripted norms of serving customers; for example:

> Dawn and Bradshaw were helping a man (named Adam) who apparently didn't have an appointment. He waited patiently in the disabled seats and they looked into his situation after Arielle had told him to have a seat. Dawn came by and said that they looked for his name (and the name of his boss, who had scheduled the appointment) and that they couldn't find him ("we found two other Adams, but they're not you - and no Cindy"). Bradshaw came out a moment later and said that they found him, and indicated that he was to return at 3pm and that they'd take care of him. Adam looked grateful and thanked them for helping him ("thank you…thank you"). (FN 384)

In all, CarTown employees are strongly committed to expressing dignity values, which values they described as those which they prioritized most highly.

The enactment of dignity values was often described in tension with *efficiency values,* or the desire to process customers quickly and manage a high service volume. From a Schwartzian perspective, efficiency values might align with various values, particularly achievement (i.e., demonstrating competence based on specific social standards), security (i.e., preserving the harmony and stability of society), and power to an extent (i.e., the monopolization or control over resources), as the RMV is the keeper for specific services with limited recourse; however, the focus on working quickly muddies these distinctions somewhat. Specifically, informants described their felt need to help people "as quickly as I can" (SS 15) and that working in this way helped to "[speed] up the process" (SS 5). For example, Sandro said that, while it is nice to help customers, it is not needed or helpful to prolong the transaction inordinately:

> If you know the percentage of people throughout the day that you're going to have to do, but if it's with every single person that comes up to your counter, are you now using that as a crutch? Are you now such a strong believer of that, that you're not budgeting? But you can get a customer information and point them in the direction, only that two to three minutes max, you don't need to add 20 minutes. (SS 18)

Relatedly, many informants felt that "losing some of the efficiency" (SS 11) might result in an increased wait time for customers, which they recognize as a key customer challenge. Annette described her desire as a manager to not have inefficient employees slow down the service process:

> Do we want someone like that taking up space for seven and a half hours who's really slow? Who would maybe process 10, 15? Or do we want someone like Lynette who could process 70, 80 plus on that same bench? …But like I said, I would definitely play to her strengths and just like I said, processing wasn't, she could do it, she was just super slow and we didn't have time for that. We didn't have time for that. (SS 9)

Moreover, various informants felt that prioritizing one customer's needs over another's is unfair to other customers, and that adhering to regulated scripts in an efficient way helped not only to maintain a high service volume, but also to emphasize the value of equality in their work. Nathan described this in a poignant way:

> I think the efficiency would speak for itself, as far as just people seeing the clerks doing their job and people moving through the lines. I think the inequity kind of falls on random procedures at RMVs. In the morning, when they would take some walk-ins quick, before the people with the nine o'clock appointment. Why are the walk-ins getting in first, before the nine o'clocks? They just used to take 15 [customers from the walk-in line], quick, from 8:30 to nine. Why are they... Why are you telling the nine o'clocks to wait, when these other people walked in? (SS 5)

Importantly, many CarTown employees felt that, while working efficiently was a priority for them, pursuing efficiency was often most aligned with what they perceived as the organizational values and expectations of the RMV and its administration. That is, informants said that following regulated procedures and prioritizing economic needs were common elements of RMV administrators, and that, while they individually valued wanted to help people quickly, this was most emphasized as a regulatory expectation of RMV as an organization. Further, informants often expressed that their desire to treat customers with dignity often contradicted their ability to process customers efficiently. Relatedly, informants described RMV management as focused on money and numbers, while caring comparably less about employees; Liliana described it in this way:

> They don't really care. I mean, they have their policies…but I don't feel like the heads or upper management, they don't really care. They just treat us like a number. They don't really care. We're completely understaffed for months. They should've been, they were supposed to start hiring months ago and they have not done it. And we actually had our appointment were even higher than what they were now, they're still wanting to do walk-ins. Before we had walk-ins, not only for reg but for license, as well. …And it came to a point where we were all just tired. (SS 21)

Similarly, Chris felt that RMV management as far more interested in processing as many people as possible as opposed to helping customers who are in need:

> I think some of them are [all about the money]…I think there should be a way, so as not to embarrass an individual that might not have the finances to get something done. They should be able to maybe do it over the phone or something, and put something in their file that maybe we can waive fees for some people…that are going through a hardship. (SS 11)

In all, though many CarTown employees felt that the RMV "make it competitive between employees" (SS 10) due to their strong emphasis on efficiency and numbers, employees of various types, temperaments, and tenure expressed the desire to process customers quickly.

Interestingly, though at face value pursuing dignity and efficiency might appear to be in tension or even contradictory, many informants felt that respecting and helping others is often most easily accomplished by processing people quickly and effectively—though informants disagreed as to how this might be accomplished. For some, balancing the desire to treat others with dignity and process them efficiently came down to solving their problems as thoroughly as possible, even if the service eclipsed regulated service quota times to a slight degree. Specifically, informants recognized that these interactions might last "just a bit longer" (SS 15), they also felt that "an extra 10 minutes isn't too much" (SS 12) and that they would prefer to "save the customer time" (SS 7, 9, 16, 23) and prevent the customer from having to return. Angelica gave a specific example in which, even if helping a customer takes longer than the RMV might endorse, she does it anyway rather than turn the customer away:

> I don't abide by it. I'm sorry, I don't abide by it. Because if I know that example again, the immigration people with the immigration statuses. They come in with their employment authorization. I know it's expired, but you have a letter showing me that immigration gave you that your employment authorization card is extended for another 540 days. Yes, we are supposed to use that letter. Why can't you use it? But then you have everybody else here because of the constrictions that the registry enforces. Oh well, no that's not the document we accept. Yes it is. Why can't you accept it? Tell me a reason why I can't accept it. Guess what? Let me scan it and we'll see what happens. I'll scan the document and then I'll reach out to the proper department and guess what? It works. Why are you going to turn somebody away if you know that you could just… I think it has a lot to do with the rules and regulations. People just think rules and regulations, you're not doing anything illegal. I'm not doing anything illegal because God knows I'm not going to federal. No, but why not try to help the person? Why have a person come back 6, 7, 8 times? Why? (SS 12)

Alternatively, some informants felt strongly that processing people effectively and with respect does not require an exorbitant amount of time, but requires unique skill and depth of knowledge about how to serve RMV customers. Hazel described this balanced approach in this way:

> I mean, don't get me wrong, I don't like... Yes, I do have high numbers…I've been hearing I've got great customer service. I love the little pedestals that they put me on. But it's not about the pedestals. I just like to do my job. A lot of people at the registry hated me and disliked the way that I worked, because it's not about numbers. It really to me isn't. But yes, the numbers are there. It's just about getting your job done and getting people in and out without the anger and the bull and just having a good experience at the registry is what I like to do every day. But it is a numbers game. It really is. Get them in and get them out. It's all about that. It's not about, can you help someone? Can you not help someone? Can you talk to them? Can you not talk to them? (SS 10)

In this way, Hazel suggests that having "high numbers" and utilizing "great customer service" are not incommensurate with each other, indicating that "it's about getting your job done and getting people in and out…and just having a good experience". This view would seemingly suggest that the values tension between dignity and efficiency is less important and weaker than the previous findings might lead one to believe. However, while Hazel and others (e.g., Juanmarco, Sandro, Rowan) expressed the opinion that a more balanced approach (i.e., which employed both dignity and efficiency) was possible, my time at CarTown taught me that these individuals are uniquely skilled in processing people quickly while interpersonally treating them well, and also possess a

unique amount of knowledge about RMV regulations. These skills and knowledge were most noticeable in higher-stress work episodes, such as customers who needed to be de-escalated, and not all employees were up to this task. Sandro, an administrator who had won awards for customer service, described a principle which guided how he performed de-escalations:

> Meet me in the middle. And you would be surprised that those few words have deescalated so many situations because it now puts the mirror in front of the person. Maybe I'm being unrealistic and no one's ever going to say, "No, I refuse." "Okay then if you know you refuse, now you've given me no room to maneuver. You've given me no room to do anything, so let's just go by the letter of the law." I mean we're going to go by the law regardless, I'm not going to break the law but there's some luxuries I'm afforded as a member of senior leadership that I could do to help you. But if you don't meet me in the middle, I'm not going to volunteer for you to tell me, "No," to my face. I will work with you if you work with me. (SS 18)

Sandro described various instances in which the principle of "meet me in the middle" was an effective way to meet customers concerns efficiently, but while also treating the customer well and showing great respect for them. In general, though a balanced approach between dignity and efficiency was possible, the majority of informants appeared to perform their work tasks in ways which aligned with one approach or the other. This often led to misunderstandings between employees, who might criticize each other for their approach (e.g., Bradford described being accused of being a "chatty Cathy" by Orlando; EC 76). In this way, the tension between dignity and efficiency was resolvable through a tremendous amount of individual skill and knowledge, but ultimately employees struggle to balance the two values as they complete their work tasks.

In all, CarTown employees experience various values-oriented tensions in their work, which largely stem from viewing the customers simultaneously as sources of threat and fulfillment, and from striving to serve customers with dignity but also as efficiently as possible. Furthermore, many informants felt that RMV regulations (e.g., scripted interactions, mandated quotas, time pressure) introduced tensions for how to help customers in ways which often pressured them to

help and respect customers in ways different from what they would individually prefer. However, despite these tensions, CarTown employees can and do find ways to strike the balance in ways which allows them to align their work with their individual values and expectations.

In short, the individual pursuit of felt authenticity at CarTown means implicitly recognizing the tensions that are present between discrete values which might be enacted, and then striving to balance these tensions as they perform their work. These tensions are typically experienced at the affective level, such that employees are not consciously aware nor articulate the challenge of balancing dignity versus efficiency, or seeing customers as a source of fulfillment or threat. In this way, the gradual and ongoing drain of their psychosocial resources resembles insights from emotional labor and compassion fatigue, where depletion of specific resources (e.g., emotional expression, compassion) are limited. In the next chapter, I articulate how these values tensions are manifest in the work of employees, how they opt to enact specific values over others, and how these enactments may result in a sense of felt (in)authenticity through the mechanism of value-regulation alignment.

CHAPTER 6: VALUES PRIORITIZATION, PERMISSION, & PREVENTION

The values tensions that employees at CarTown feel are instantiated by the presence of customers, and regardless of the contents or duration of each episode, I observed that the way in which CarTown employees approach opportunities to serve customers might be framed in terms of a balancing act between the values tensions outlined in Chapter 5. That is, employees believe that customers deserve to be treated with dignity but also efficiently, and that, while customer interactions are typically positive and fulfilling, they also hold the possibility of threat, discomfort, and fatigue. Overall, the way in which employees come to prioritize the enactment of particular forms of values (e.g., efficiency versus dignity) appeared to relate to the kind of service that a customer requested and the ensuing approach that the employee might utilize to complete their work tasks. Importantly, upon prioritizing a value to enact, informants described the possibility that RMV regulations permitted or prevented them from enacting their desired values, and that this *value-regulation (mis)alignment*—or, a sense of (mis)alignment between an individual's desired value enactment and regulated work processes—served as a mechanism for promoting a sense of felt (in)authenticity. Further, CarTown employees expressed that a sense of felt inauthenticity often served as a powerful motivator for them to depart from regulatory stipulations in favor of behaviors which better represented the enactment of their held values—and which they described as resulting in a sense of felt authenticity.

In summary, this chapter makes a more explicit connection between an individual's held values and a sense of felt authenticity, specifying a process through which employees situated in regulated service environments a) prioritize the enactment of particular values, b) which values may be permissible or prevented by regulatory mandates. Figure 3 details the theoretical process of values enactment prioritization, permission, and prevention.

Values Enactment Prioritization

Preparing to Complete Work Task. At the beginning of every work episode at CarTown, there is a preparatory process which takes place more implicitly than explicitly, and often so rapidly (e.g., a guard's interaction might only last 10 seconds) that employees are scarcely conscious of it. First, employees attempt to quickly assess the *degree of customer need*. As they elaborated on helping customers in interviews and ethnographic conversations, informants agreed that, while they generally found helping customers gratifying, they were particularly sensitive to those that struggle at the RMV and expressed a strong desire to help them. Though informants identified various groups that they perceive to be in great need (e.g., parents with young children, individuals with clear mental health issues), the majority of informants focused on two specific groups: the elderly, and immigrants. Arielle, who herself is nearly 80 years old (but tenacious and energetic as anyone living), talked about some of the challenges the elderly face at the RMV:

> I feel so bad for seniors. They used to come in on Wednesdays without any appointments, now they have to have appointments. It was hard for them ("What do you mean? I don't need an appointment!"), they would argue, and that took a while for them to realize. Then they narrowed their hours down to 9 to 10am, saying it's so unfair. The registry…if you're not here to help people, why would you discriminate against older people who don't have computers…and rely on us to help them out? Why won't you just help them out? (SS 23[22])

Similarly, I discussed with Jorge how immigrants struggle at the RMV:

> *I've never been an immigrant in the United States, but I've lived in other countries and I know that…getting your identification is important, but it is not the only problem you are working on, right? You are figuring out a thousand things, all at once.*
>
> You got your hands tied. You can't do nothing. It's literally just like, "I'm sorry. Try back tomorrow." I've seen one guy come, one week, the first week that I was there. On the 14th day, he got through, of coming back. 14 days of coming to the Motor Vehicle. That's a long time. That requires a lot of time. Like I'm pretty sure, I'm sure this man did not have a job, because if he did, he got fired for it. For calling out all those days. Every morning, this man would show up, every day. I go out there at 7:30am. This man would be the first person in line. That's a lot. That is a lot. …Then he'll come every Wednesday and I tell

[22] Arlene requested that I not record this interview, but permitted me to take notes while she spoke; hence, the form of this interview is slightly different than typical SS interviews.

> him, "Don't come up." Like I said, if there was a problem with the language barrier, don't come on a Wednesday. He wouldn't understand don't come on Wednesday, until they told him, "Come see us at this time, so we can help you out." (SS 7; italics used to indicate interviewer comments)

Though these and other groups struggle with the RMV process in distinct ways (e.g., trouble with using technology, navigating language barriers), employees deem them worthy of "that extra step" (SS 14) in their efforts to help them resolve their issues—and others are deemed less so. This appears consistent with findings on compassion in organizations, where individuals who are perceived as enduring hardships or challenges might elicit a compassionate or helpful response from others.

Second, CarTown employees use their contextual clues about the customer (e.g., dress, size of group, temperament, perceived mood and personality, country of origin, language spoken) to assess the degree to which they have a personal association with a given customer. Drawing from the concept of liking, employees appear predisposed toward getting along with and also feeling a desire to help specific groups of customers which vary depending on demographic characteristics and personal background. For example, several guards (e.g., Jorge, Juanmarco, Rubino) are from the Dominican Republic and speak Spanish as their first language. While these particular guards were uniquely effective and helpful to customers and general, they also described (and I observed that they had) a "soft spot" (SS 5) for people who were like them (e.g., Spanish speakers), or for whom they had a particular affinity (e.g., customers who reminded them of beloved relatives). One guard described how he appraises customer interactions, and the role of personal association:

> People come in. I don't know. It just something about the energy or the. Or the environment. When, when they come to the door, you can treat somebody, somebody different. And then as soon as somebody else comes with a different energy in a different environment, you can feel it. You start getting a little bit attached to like their life and they start like reminiscing about like venting about their life, about the situation. And you get like a little bit relate to what's going on. So sometimes I end up switching. I end up wanting to help out more because. I've probably been in this situation. I've been in that state. So

> it's hard. I can't understand how they feel. But some of the people I just. I just go with the policy rules. I just send them to customer service. Some people do go out of my way and help them out. Like, I'll find them. I'll send them ready to go, and then I'll tell them. I'll help them fill out an application that I'm not supposed to a form that because they don't understand it. There's elderly that come in. Reminds me of my grandma. I barely speak to my grandma now. My families are in the argument, so I really don't see my grandma. Interviewee: [00:01:52] So when I see elderly that needs help, that doesn't speak English, it, it brings a soft spot on me because it's like I have a grandma, but I really can't reach out to my grandma because my family's a little bit in an argument right now. So it hurts me because like, I wish me helping all these elderly that speak Spanish could be my grandma. Why? I want to have a conversation the way I have with these other leads that come in with my grandma serving. So it's just something that brings out like a soft spot in me that that wants to go out of be on to help out that person. (SS 24)

Similarly, I observed that employees had varying "soft spots" (VI-F 5) which led them to serving customers in an elevated way—and not just guards. For example, I observed and various informants somewhat wryly suggested that Orlando, the CarTown manager, has a soft spot for "hot" or "attractive women" and will let them in and help them over helping others because it makes him feel better (EC 20). In this way, prior to the beginning of each work task, employees across roles seek to "take [the customer's] temperature" (SS 27) by quickly appraising the degree of the customer's need and the degree to which they have personal association with that customer.

It is critical to note that, while an employee helping a customer due to having a "soft spot" for them might be deemed unfair—and, in fact, some informants (e.g., Jackson) spoke strongly against the practice of fellow employees simply helping people who they liked—informants described the process through which they evaluate the needs of customers much more holistically and, importantly, through an equity-based lens. That is, rather than simply helping customers due to a perceived similarity or common identity, CarTown employees sought to help individuals who they perceived deserved or merited that help most. Informants readily acknowledged that they were likely to help customers of certain groups (e.g., immigrants, those with trouble speaking English, the elderly) as deserving extra help above a more typical customer. In fact, I asked

informants repeatedly about the possible ingratiation that customers would engage in to endear themselves to employees in pursuit of "special treatment" (e.g., "everybody seems to want special treatment"; EC 23), and they spoke strongly against this practice (e.g., "I hate when people do s*** like that"; EC 63). Instead, a commitment to values such as benevolence, tradition, and security—which informants referenced in their values interviews—led CarTown employees to help customers who they perceived deserved to be helped because of an apparent disadvantage, invoking an equity-based value which shaped their actions.

Additionally, in the background of every interaction are values and expectations that CarTown employees carry with them, and which shape how they perform their work tasks; these are divided into organizational and personal values and expectations. Regarding organizational values, employees were aware of RMV regulations (e.g., service quotas, required paperwork, RMV bureaucracy/process) which they sought to meet in their customer interactions. Hazel described the need to uphold RMV expectations of behavior:

> I stick by the rules when it comes to paperwork, when it comes to documentation, when it comes to taking a picture. No honey, no selfie—look straight at the camera. I mean, I can be a pain in the a**, but rules are rules and I don't want to get audited. I don't want to lose my job. I like working. I like my job. So they, can't you just bend it a little bit? No, not for you, not for my family, not for…no. You can go do what you're supposed to do and do it legally. But I'm not going to be one of those women that are going to do whatever I can to make everybody happy like that. I'm going to follow the rules. (SS 10)

Informants often complained about RMV processes, but they also recognized that the RMV "wants to keep things organized" (SS 20) and that, while opinions matter, they are "not compensated for what you personally believe" (SS 18). Liliana described this need to do focus on doing her job:

> I just come to work, do what I had to do and then just leave. I don't try to do anything extra or be anything extra. I know my job title. There's people here that sometimes being a CSR-1 or a CSR-2, they try to act like supervisors. I leave that job to the supervisors. I don't get paid extra for that. I come in, do my job, what I can do, I do it, what I can't, put them in a supervisor's queue, speak to a supervisor, let them deal with the rest. (SS 21)

Another common value cited amongst employees was the desire to treat people equally. Jackson elaborated on how prioritizing equality shaped how he sought to help customers:

> My mom used to say basically, "Assumptions make an a** of you and me." You know what I mean? You can't assume you're going to get in and assume that everybody's going to fold to your needs. And that's another thing. A lot of people feel the need, they break down their story, [think] they're more important than everybody else. And that's where I fall into the equality. I'm equal, equal as can be. Just because you're going through it and your license has been suspended for two years, what about this person whose license has been suspended for five days? You know what I mean? I'm not just going to let you cut because you waited longer and she's here before. You know what I mean? She has an appointment. (SS 4)

While informants mentioned various values which they prioritized in their lives and work (e.g., taking care of oneself, maintaining a healthy body, seeking novelty), they emphasized the importance of dignity and efficiency values, which informants prioritized to varying relative degrees. Importantly, though informants expressed strong commitment to values associated with both dignity and efficiency, and while the strong majority of informants described the most important (i.e., prioritized) values in their lives as aligning with dignity values, other informants' values were more clearly aligned with efficiency values. Hazel described the importance to her of not wasting too much time talking with customers, and how some colleagues differ in this:

> They talk too much to their customers. It's too much for me. I can't do 20 minute transactions. I can't. I don't want to sit there and talk about vacationing or why did you buy a boat? Who's the boat for? No. Thank you for buying the boat. How much you buy the boat for? What could I put it down for? I like just getting my job done. They like to sit around and talk all day. I can't do that. I can't. (SS 10)

Relatedly, I observed and informants described that every CarTown employee has a distinct style or approach in handling customers. For example, Hazel, with her fiery red hair and an equally fiery personality, loves to "make people laugh" but to process them "as quickly as possible" (SS 10); Rowan, a supervisor with a beautifully resonant voice and friendly personality, has a reputation as the consummate deescalator; Taye, a security guard of considerable height (6'8") but kind

temperament prefers to help customers while sitting down, because he is aware that his height can intimidate people (EC 86); Bradshaw, a former security guard supervisor and current CSR, enjoys addressing customers as they approach his counter in a friendly way—but is very comfortable being incredibly direct when needed, particularly with coworkers. The various styles of performing work tasks can create conflicts between employees. For example, Lamarr, a newer security guard who has a noticeably quiet voice, has been criticized by Rubino, a more experienced guard, for not talking loud enough (EC 77). However, for the most part, employees recognize that "everyone doesn't do it the way I do it" (SS 15) and, though they may disagree with how their coworkers do things (e.g., my colleagues talk too much; SS 10, 21), employees use their own personal style when completing work tasks.

The result of the preparatory process suggests various possible approaches that customers might use in performing their work tasks. For example, employees who perceive a customer as highly needy or with whom they have deep association are particularly likely to enact dignity values, and seek to help and respect these individuals. Similarly, individuals who opt to prioritize their personal values—which, as previously mentioned, are most commonly described as dignity values—are likely to decide to enact dignity values as they help customers. Alternatively, customers who are perceived as less needy or for whom they feel less association are likely to invite enacting efficiency values, which thus prioritizes the fulfillment of perceived organizational values. Importantly, as some individuals at CarTown (e.g., Liliana, Rowan, Hazel, Orlando, Consuela, Arielle) also prioritize efficiency values, prioritizing personal values may also take the form of enacting efficiency values. However, as most informants clearly articulated that their most highly prioritized values aligned with dignity values, enacting dignity values most commonly represents prioritizing personal values.

Prioritizing Dignity or Efficiency Values. Ultimately, employees at CarTown finish their preparations and begin to serve customers by choosing to prioritize the enactment of dignity or efficiency values in their work. Employees may opt to *enact dignity values* as they complete work tasks, which generally revolves around "treating other well" (SS 16), "seeking to meet their needs" (SS 2, 3) or "feel comfortable" (SS 1, 6), and generally "wishing to see everyone succeed" (SS 4, 7). As I observed CarTown employees prioritize dignity values, it was clear that they enjoyed these interactions and felt more positively about their work while in them. For example, one informant describes how it feels to help people:

> At another RMV location I worked, I helped a lot of people and, like, just guide them through them what they need to do. And a lot of times people are happy you know, like, "Oh, thank you for the help," and then that just makes everything so much smoother and kind of makes you feel good you know when you're helping people. (SS 14)

One important distinction that emerged with the enactment of dignity values was the perceived need to utilize an *extraordinary approach* in the performance of their work task. Specifically, CarTown employees described the importance of individual crafting of regulated scripts and the use of engaging communication in these interactions. For example, I observed that guards, rather than sticking to a regulated script (e.g., "What are you here for today?") and then pointing them to the correct location (e.g., "Down the green line, Ready to Go"), often customized their language slightly depending on the person and situation of a particular interaction; joking with customers at times, answering brief questions about services, or generally adjusting the regulated script to match their own style. In this way, guards sought to help customers in a way which they deemed effective, but which also treated customers with respect.

Alternatively, employees may opt to enact efficiency values as they complete work tasks, which generally revolves around "following the rules" (SS 2, 4), "giving the same speech" (SS 11), and generally getting people processed "as fast as possible" (SS 12, 19). This orientation

appeared to be driven by the perceived need to utilize a *routine approach* in their work. As I observed CarTown employees prioritize efficiency values, the speed of service was certainly higher, though the types of interactions generally appeared less vibrant and engaging; employees engaging in these episodes might be described as enduring scripted interactions. Jackson described the experience of performing these kinds of interactions:

> Most of the time, the people who are nice, I keep my same demeanor. So once they realize it's not working, that's when they resort to going on straight to mean. They'll be like, "Oh, why aren't you letting me in? There's nobody in line. Now you're being rude to me. That's not right. This is ridiculous." And it's like, I'm just doing my job. That's how I think the interactions are. (SS 4)

Further, an important distinction that emerged with the enactment of efficiency values was the adherence to regulated scripts and using clear communication in these interactions. For example, I observed the center manager serve a customer while enacting efficiency values:

> A customer appeared frustrated when asking about his inability to complete his registration without an appointment; Orlando had asked him to go from the "Ready to Go" line to the customer service line. . He expressed his frustration("What am I supposed to do?!"), and said "I'm caught in the middle of this". Orlando said, "I understand that, but 55 other people are in the same boat." The man asked, "what is waiting in the other line going to do for me?" to which Orlando replied, "I'll see if you have the right documents, and we'll see if we can get you taken care of here or if you need a ticket". The man said "ok" and went to wait in the customer service line. (FN 238)

Importantly, upon enacting dignity or efficiency values, I observed various situations in which employees embedded in the work episode might opt to switch their approach, effectively engaging in an intra-service values reprioritization. These switches happened most commonly in response to three key triggers: encountering regulatory boundaries, encountering disrespectful behavior, and encountering unexpected humanity. Employees who opted to enact dignity values in assisting customers might find during the course of the interaction that they found themselves unable to help the customer as thoroughly or in the way that they might have preferred. Though informants of various roles expressed this frustration, this tension was felt especially poignantly by the guards,

who, as they are not official RMV employees, are more regulated and therefore limited in their ability to help customers. Jorge described an example of encountering regulatory boundaries, which led him to quit his job:

> Well, let me see. I grew up in an environment where, I wouldn't say, I grew up in a retail environment. As I told you, my father used to own a business, [a corner store]. That's a form of customer service, so it's like, even though they were coming in, purchasing things, you were still interacting with people. It was a process, people interacting with everybody and just talking. Small conversations. Here, it was yes or no type of thing. "Yes, you can do it. No, you can't." Yeah, you'd spark a little small talk there and sometimes it wasn't the best talk, since I was usually de-escalating. But I just felt like, "All right, if you want to help somebody out, you should generally want to do it, correct?" But sometimes when you're forcing your hand to say no, that's when the issue starts. That's when I was like, "Okay, I wish I could help this person out." There were elderly people that would come and be dropped off by their ride. The only day they can do it. I know it's hard to schedule a ride to get to the [RMV]. They're like, "But this is the only day I can do it." [I felt] sorry at the situation. (SS 7)

In this way, employees might be described as encountering regulatory boundaries which pushed them to a different course of action than they intended or preferred. Similarly, various employees emphasized the importance to them of receiving respect from customers, clarifying that a lack of respect from customers would result in the employees' disengagement from them. Angelica, a CSR, described how she prepares to deal with customers who are disrespectful:

> I mean, as much…I had this one lady she said, "I pray to God every morning, give my thanks to God and tell him, 'God, I know I'm going to get cussed out today. But just continue to bless me on a great day.'" It's true. I know I'm getting cussed out today, but one person's not going to ruin me helping somebody. Again, like I said in the beginning, unless you're beyond disrespectful to me, I am going to try to help you. The minute you're disrespectful to me, I don't care, I shut off. …I think most people have seen me whenever ... It probably happened a handful of times. If you're disrespectful, that's it, no. If I'm over here bending over, like bending my arm for you and you're going to [do that], no. (SS 12)

In this way, though employees expect that most interactions with customers are positive, employees are prepared to "shut them off" (SS 5) if customers are disrespectful, such that they opt to prioritize efficiency values over dignity values in their work.

Alternatively, employees who opted to enact efficiency values in assisting customers might also find customers to be uniquely respectful or respectable, and thus might be inclined to adjust to prioritizing dignity values. I observed various instances in which an employee began an interaction in a highly scripted manner who then departed from that script to assist the customer in a more engaged, personalized way. One such example of this phenomenon might look like this:

> A friendly older woman with a mask on spoke with Juanmarco several times today, first trying to make an appointment ("I got the letter in the mail…it's not 'til February but I wanted to be sure") and then finally going to the customer service desk. Juanmarco helped her get the paper to try and make an appointment, and after struggling with it for about 30 minutes outside the center, she asked (in a rather friendly, patient way, in my opinion) if there was anything else that they could do. Juanmarco pointed her to the customer service desk and she was appreciative ("thank you so much!"). About an hour or so later, she came back through the door but before she left she asked if she could mention Juanmarco's name because he helped her. He said that she didn't need to worry about it and just to mention Claire's name (who had helped her at the customer service desk; "She really helped me out"), but the customer insisted that Juanmarco had also helped her as well, saying "you have some kindness in you…that makes all the difference". She thanked them again and left the center. (FN 327)

In this way, employees might be described as encountering unexpected humanity in a way which led them to prioritize dignity over efficiency.

Values Enactment Permission and Prevention

Informants shared that, as they pursued the completion of their work tasks, they felt that RMV regulations sometimes *permitted their desired value enactment*. I observed that many CarTown employees were able to align their personal values with RMV regulations. Perhaps unsurprisingly, employees who prioritized efficiency values—and were thus aligned with the expectations they perceived from RMV administrators—expressed that they felt that their behavior aligned with their held values on a consistent basis. Rowan shared his perspectives on feeling an alignment between his desired values and RMV regulations:

> Basically, what I see it as is they gave me guidelines that I have to stay within. All right. Cool. Because anything outside of that, I'm not protected by the state because that's my own feelings, that's how I feel about something. If I stick to their guidelines and work

> within those, then I know I'm doing my job as they want me to do my job not as how the customer wants me to do my job. Because at the end of the day, I'm still being paid by the state but they do give me leeway to make some decisions myself and sign off on things that might not necessarily be exactly to their word but are within the spirit of what they're trying to say. (SS 15)

In this way, RMV regulations are seen as "guidelines that I have to stay within", specifying the process and content of employee interactions with customers. Further, though Rowan's role as a supervisor permitted him "leeway to make some decisions myself", he retained a level of autonomy in the performance of his work that allowed him to experience a greater ability to enact one of his held values, namely keeping the center in working order. Moreover, various informants felt that they were able to be true to dignity values even with the restrictions of RMV regulations. For example, Annette, the former CarTown manager, shared how she respected others:

> When I'm talking with a customer, we govern from a set of rules. So there's a set of rules that in order for you to get from A to B, right? That I need for us to accomplish. So I think me being my authentic self is respect. So one of the things that I do go in and say every single time, so when I used to go on and make the announcements is like I value and I respect your time. I value and respect you. Basically, I'm letting them know. So let us get through this. Let us partner up and get through this situation, right? Because everybody needs to get in and out and I'm going to tell you the best way for us to get you there because I know you all have lives and have things to do so let's work together. (SS 9)

Annette expressed that the "set of rules" governing her behavior represented a kind of foundation on which she could build to enact her desired held value (i.e., "me being my authentic self is respect"), and that she wove the enactment of this value into the way she performed her work. In this way, Annette learned to align the enactment of her held values with the required behaviors of regulations, in a way which helped her feel that her held values were supported by organizational expectations. Further, the cognitive contentment that emerged from individuals being able to enact their held values resulted in sense of felt authenticity. For example, in her values interview, Liliana described the values which the felt aligned with a sense of felt authenticity for her:

> I just come to work, do what I had to do and then just leave. I don't try to do anything extra or be anything extra. I know my job title. There's people here that sometimes being a CSR-1 or a CSR-2, they try to act like supervisors. I leave that job to the supervisors. I don't get paid extra for that. I come in, do my job, what I can do, I do it, what I can't, put them in a supervisor's queue, speak to a supervisor, let them deal with the best. (VI 10)

In this way, Leydi's values resembled a focus on performing her job effectively, without "[doing] anything extra" or, as she specified later, worrying about the "gossip" or "popularity contest" that sometimes occurs between employees. Later, when asked if RMV regulations ever prevented her from enacting her held values and feeling a sense of felt authenticity, she said:

> No. …I mean, when you work for a company, you have to go by their policy. I feel like sometimes what you want to do, it shouldn't be a question because you're working for a company so you have to do what they want for their company. And like I said, as long... I come in and I just do what my job title requires me to do. That's it. (SS 18)

Thus, as Leydi's held values were focused on performing her job and then returning home to be with her family, she felt that adhering to RMV regulations did not result in her feeling a sense of felt inauthenticity, but rather felt supported in the pursuit of her held values. Other employees described experiences of helping customers in ways which regulations supported, which emerged from aligning their behavior with their held values. In her values interview, Hazel described her held values in this way to describe the principles which guide how she lives her life:

> So I take every single day as an opportunity to either make one person laugh with me, one person hug me, and one person just to be completely happy within themselves because of me. Those are what I like to do every day. (VI 11)

In this way, Hazel's held values resemble benevolence or universalism, manifesting her desire to connect with others. Relatedly, Hazel shared a memorable experience in helping a customer who was going through a difficult time to "be completely happy…because of me":

> There was a blind woman with a service dog crying because nobody would help her. Not one person would help her. Nathan wasn't there, Bradshaw wasn't there, it was just newbies. And I grabbed her a chair out of the permit room, sat her down, got the dog some water, and 15 minutes later that blind woman got a Mass ID. And then she was allowed, she got to do a job. She was trying to find a job. I don't know what the job was, but that

> was the best 15 minutes of my entire shift. I felt she got something, I got something. She held my hand thanking me with tears. And that was the best day of my life. (SS 10)

In Hazel's perspective, her desired actions of "[grabbing the customer] a chair" and helping them were not proscribed by organizational rules, and her held value of experiencing a sense of connection with others and helping them allowing her to have a transcendent experience in which she felt energized and fulfilled, and aligned with her sense of felt authenticity.

Conversely, many informants described their frustrations with not being able to help people the way they want to, feeling that *regulations prevented their desired values enactment.* For example, David, a road test operator, shared some of the challenges he experiences in adhering to RMV regulations and how this makes helping customers difficult when trying to be true to his values—namely, "being courteous", "integrity", and particularly "responsibility" (VI 4):

> David said. "it's exhausting" to try and "bend over backwards" for people when they won't work with the system, but he also said that RMV management needs to recognize that CarTown is already over-busy. He said that he'll "do 24 in a day" (i.e., administer 24 drivers tests) but he knows that the average for road test operators at the other centers is closer to 5 or 10 a day. He wonders why they don't give him the help that they need, when they so often draw from CarTown to help out the other centers. I asked him what it feels like when he tries to help people and he can't, and he said "it's exhausting. Makes you not want to come back in the next day". (EC 66)

In this way, David felt that the regulation to assist every customer with a road test appointment without the intervention of RMV administrators to offer more resources (e.g., hire other road test operators) resulted in him not being able to assist customers in the way he wanted, as well as being "exhausting". Similarly, Rubino described this tension and the distress he felt that regulations prevented him from being true to his held values—namely, respect, working hard, and treating other people well (VI 7):

> I feel like the rules of the RMV is s***, full s***, because it's basically making us look like s***, so at the end of the day. Because now we got to be a**holes to people that we literally don't know from a hole in the wall. They're going to come in thinking they're going to get service and we have to be a**holes, we got to follow their rules. But we can't

> accept appointment, we can't accept walk-ins for license. You know how hard it is for people nowadays to get licenses done and all that. So now we got to listen to the government. Now we got to be a**holes to people that this is not a job to be a**holes to people. Our job is to protect people, not be a**holes to people. So yeah, to your question, yeah the rules here are a**, I wish they could change that and everybody gets serviced, but I can't make the power to do that. Everybody just needs to make a change here or something because this is out of control. (SS 13)

In this way, the cognitive dissonance that emerges from individuals being unable to enact their prioritized values resulted in sense of felt inauthenticity, which employees describe as contributing to feelings of exhaustion and burnout. Thus, these and other informants at CarTown felt that the presence of RMV regulations both permitted them and also prevented them from enacting their held values, promoting a sense of felt (in)authenticity (see Table 3 for more examples).

Importantly, many informants expressed that the experience of felt inauthenticity resulted in a degree of cognitive dissonance that led them to adjust their behavior, effectively *departing from regulations* to serve customers in a way they deemed most appropriate and desirable. Chris described how he feels when regulations prevent him from helping people in the way he wants to:

> I think I take that home more so than most people. I feel bad. Yeah. I kind of carry that more so than most people. That's something that I'm working on…I'm trying not to do that. Yeah. But I'm trying not to carry... I'm trying to convince my brain that it's not always my fault. Do you know what I mean? Even though I know it's not, sometimes in my head. You know what I mean? And I don't always think about it in that moment. I might think about something two weeks after about a situation. You know what I mean? About a situation, then I'll think about it, and then I'll think about it. And so that's something I'm trying to get over, not to carry that kind of thing. (SS 11)

Chris and others described a lingering sense of cognitive and emotional turmoil which was introduced due to regulatory boundaries preventing their ability to act. Hazel similarly described her frustration in being unable to perform her preferred course of action:

> Oh God. This Puerto Rican couple came in and they were registering vehicles. I just started doing registrations and the girl clearly did not have an ounce of English in her, but the husband was very adamant that he wanted these two cars registered. Come to find out both cars were stolen. I had to go to security—I'm calling Bradshaw, I'm calling Nathan, I'm calling everybody over because he's escalating and escalating. I'm going to kill you.

> You're a b****, da da da. And he just kept escalating. They escorted him out. The poor woman sat there crying. I was more concerned about the poor woman. So I'm taking care of the poor woman. And then he comes in, snatches her and they leave and she gets smacked out in the hallway. Yeah, Bradshaw took care of it amazingly. Nathan kept checking on me for the rest of the day. I was shaking because I wanted to pull the bouncer routine and go across the counter and be like, "All right, I'm taking you outside. We're not having this in here." But I couldn't do that. I have plastic in front of me and I'm literally just standing there. I wanted to fix it and I couldn't fix it. It sucked. It absolutely sucked. The girl crying, him going off on me. It was just a really bad day. (SS 10)

In this way, the palpable sense of dissonance between one's desired behavior and behaviors allowed by regulations led many informants to think of creative ways to transgress regulatory boundaries in favor of enacting their personally prioritized values. Various informants said that they understood that choosing to depart from regulations or "break the rules" (SS 15) could result in being sanctioned by the RMV or even fired; this was particularly true amongst security guards who are not official RMV employees. Jorge, who ultimately decided to leave CarTown as he felt that he was unable to help people in the way he wanted, described how he pursued being true to his values (i.e., to help people and treat them well) in response to regulatory boundaries:

> I know I'm not supposed to, but I used to do little things that would try to contribute to helping. Like for instance, there are people that just had questions. …It's not like I had a lot of general knowledge, but the little bit that I did pick up, to be able to, "What is that you need?" "I just need information." "But what is it? Let me see if I could help you out." They was like, "I just want to know, what do I need to insure a vehicle?" "All right. That I can tell you. You don't have to wait in this line." That's one less person that they have to deal with. Same thing where people, "Oh about my license is expired." In all technicality, I shouldn't even be touching people's information. "Give me your license." Boom. Go to the back. So whatever I can do to pull people out of that line, I used to do it. Anything. Simple or, "Let me just look at your documents. What are you missing? You're missing something. They're not going to see you today regardless. Go get this from your insurance." See, so I used to filter out the line almost, every single day, just even if it was 10 people that I got rid of. That was at least 10 people that they didn't have to service. [Talking with] people like, "Okay, you're missing this form to get that [service]." As you know, I forgot what you needed. Two proofs of residence, a birth certificate…that's how I used to filter them out. Just try to get rid of as many people as I can and tell them, "This is what you're missing, this is what you need." Because that way, they don't have to wait an hour and a half to be turned away. I guess that's where people's frustration comes in. (SS 7)

In this way, not only did Jorge pursue actions that he knew to be against regulations and which could place his job in jeopardy, but he did so as he believed these actions to be in favor of helping the customer. Importantly, though guards faced more imminent risks for transgressing regulations (e.g., getting reassigned to another location, getting fired), and though I observed the reassignment and firing of several guards for breaking RMV rules, employees across different roles at CarTown described a similar desire to depart from regulated service scripts in favor of those they personally prioritized. When asked whether RMV regulations might restrict her behavior, Angelica said:

> It does happen. Yes, that's a 100% true statement, but I don't abide by it. I'm sorry, I don't abide by it. Because if I know, [for example], the immigration people with the immigration statuses. They come in with their employment authorization. I know it's expired, but you have a letter showing me that immigration gave you that your employment authorization card is extended for another 540 days. Yes, we are supposed to use that letter. Why can't you use it? But then you have everybody else here because of the constrictions that the registry enforces. Oh well, no that's not the document we accept. Yes it is. Why can't you accept it? Tell me a reason why I can't accept it. Guess what? Let me scan it and we'll see what happens. I'll scan the document and then I'll reach out to the proper department and guess what? It works. Why are you going to turn somebody away if you know that you could just… I guess people that act like that are the people that's been here the most. But then again you got the new people too that are like that. I think it has a lot to do with the rules and regulations. People just think rules and regulations, you're not doing anything illegal. I'm not doing anything illegal because God knows I'm not going to federal. No, but why not try to help the person? Why have a person come back 6, 7, 8 times? Why? (SS 12)

Similarly to Jorge's conclusion, Angelica felt that working to find creative solutions to customer problems was not only in greater alignment with their personal values, but also served the customer's benefit; this sentiment was also expressed by managers (e.g., "I can maybe learn is there's some way that I can work within the RMV regulation [and] bureaucracy to solve the problem in a creative way"; SS 18) and road test operators (e.g., "David specifically mentioned that, if it were December 24, he might just look at [a customer who had failed] and say "merry Christmas" and let her pass. But, he specifically emphasized that being lenient to one person opens the floodgates of trying to help everyone, which you simply can't do." EC 23). Thus, in response

to a sense of cognitive dissonance between one's values and regulated behaviors, informants pursued a restoration of their felt authenticity by searching for actions that may be "unofficial" or "secondary" (SS 20) but still working "within the system" (SS 8, 11) to serve customers well.

Overall, the process through which employees assist customers with their various tasks is complex, dynamic, and often repetitious and challenging. To address the never-ending influx of customers and the regulatory demands of the RMV, CarTown employees rely on serving employees in ways which typify dignity and efficiency—and, much to the contradiction of common societal stereotypes, in ways which are often highly other-oriented, generous, self-sacrificing, and gracious. Ultimately, the process of values prioritization and enactment occurs in tandem with the governing logics of organizational regulations, such that the way in which individuals perform their work tasks—which stems from their held values and specific situational triggers (i.e., determining an individual's need and one's personal association with them)—are (mis)aligned with regulations, reflecting a concept which I term value-regulation (mis)alignment. Individuals who prioritize the enactment of values which are permitted by regulations experience an alignment between their held values and regulations in a way which enables a sense of felt authenticity. Further, those whose values-driven actions are not supported by regulations experience a misalignment with regulations, in a way which alters and potentially stifles their behavior. Importantly, the ensuing dissonance that these individuals experience is significant, and, driven by a need to experience self-verification and a balanced sense of self, they may engage in behaviors which are not officially sanctioned by regulations—or even those which overtly contradict them—in ways which may lead them to incur organizational punishments (e.g., being reprimanded, reassigned, terminated).

In all, contrary to the notion that regulations restrict the behavior of individuals such that their enactment of held values is curtailed in ways which diminish a sense of felt authenticity, I found that a growing sense of cognitive dissonance related to the juxtaposition of individuals' values and regulated behaviors led employees to creatively and proactively seek to behave in ways which aligned with their held values, which often contradicted regulations. Further, employees at CarTown were highly aware of their decisions to transgress RMV rules and regulations, suggesting that their pursuit of behaviors which were aligned with their held values was both deliberate and unapologetic, as they found these behaviors to be inherently worth pursuing above what they perceived of the behaviors expected of them by RMV administrators. Thus, despite the often overwhelming pressure to adhere to regulations to preserve one's employment and to serve organizational ends (e.g., serving as many customers as possible), employees and managers alike found ways to adhere to their held values even as they sought to toe the line with RMV regulations, often experiencing a palpable sense of felt authenticity—even in this highly regulated and stereotypically sterile, mundane, and negative environment.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION OF CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS, & CONCLUSION

This study depicts the complex nature of authenticity in regulated environments, showing values-oriented tensions employees experience while serving customers and the lengths to which they go to help them—even at personal cost—in ways which align with their held values. Further, evidence from this exploration of CarTown illuminates how service-oriented organizations which utilize regulations to guide customer and employee behavior simultaneously constrains and enables the enactment of employee authenticity, due to perceived alignments with organizational values—or, interestingly, due to gradually-growing sense of cognitive dissonance elicited by being unable to adhere to personal values due to regulatory constraints. Overall, these findings offer theoretical and practical contributions to organizational studies—specifically, to the authenticity and values literatures—which I outline below.

The Role of Values in Authenticity. First, this study offers an exploration of the role of values in being authentic. Past research suggests that adherence to one's felt emotions or salient identities invites a sense of felt authenticity (see Cha et al., 2019), while also implying a connection between a person's values and their behaviors. Though past work describes authenticity in terms of the connection between values and behavior (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Wood et al., 2008; cf. Hewlin, 2009), this work appears to explain the presence of values relative to authenticity only in a definitional sense—namely, that individuals who behave in ways which are true to their values experience authenticity (Kernis, 2003), while those who stray from held values experience a sense of inauthenticity (Hewlin, 2003, 2009). This is a helpful conceptual illustration of the connection between values and being authentic, but the lack of specificity on this topic (e.g., true to which values, or which behaviors?) suggests an unrealistically uniform interpretation of how being authentic takes place in organizational environments. This study in no means answers every

question about the role of values (personal and organizational) in being authentic, but the depiction of values conflicts of various kinds and the prioritization of one set of values over another (e.g., dignity vs. efficiency; see Figures 2 and 3) suggests not only *that* individuals strive to be true to personal values in organizational contexts, but also *how* they navigate tensions as they seek to satisfy personal and organizational goals and expectations. Specifically, I show that the presence of organizational regulations offers a stimulus for what I term values-regulation misalignment, inducing a sense of cognitive dissonance that, in extreme cases, leads individuals to knowingly transgress regulations in favor of the enactment of their held values. Further, I show that, while individuals in regulated service environments are likely to hold values which align with both dignity and efficiency, the tension they experience in response to regulatory boundaries (i.e., values-regulation misalignment) is most likely to be present as individuals are unable to enact the value of dignity in their work. Given the importance of more benevolent, humanistic values in social functioning (Rokeach, 1973; Schwartz, 2012), breaching this fundamental expectation would seemingly elicit greater dissonance and more momentous response than being unable to be as efficient or economically focused as individuals who prioritize these values would like them to be (Garrett et al., under review). In this way, the role of regulations in instantiating these tensions is critical in understanding how and why individuals experience a sense of felt authenticity at work.

Relatedly, the nature of particular forms of values offers a potential answer to a particularly difficult question regarding the nature of authenticity which was posed by Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019: 137): namely, "whether inauthenticity is possible". The authors describe how the complexities associated with being authentic are often interconnected and difficult to disentangle, such that labeling a particular form of human experience as authentic (e.g., honesty, benevolence, realness; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013) might exist in tension with another element of humanity

(e.g., ambition, achievement, pursuit of satisfaction; Caza et al., 2018). Jongman-Sereno and Leary (2019) ask specifically whether a person who stays in bed instead of waking up for work is a) being true to aspects of the self which prioritize self-care or b) being untrue to aspects of the self which prioritize diligence and discipline. Invoking the concept of values more explicitly with regard to authenticity allows individuals to describe being authentic in terms of enacting particular values, each value manifesting specific behavioral forms and representing goals and desires which differ in important ways (Schwartz, 2012). For example, to address Jongman-Sereno and Leary's (2019) parabolic question using a values-driven approach to understanding being true to the self, we might simply presume that the individual who prioritizes sleep over waking up is choosing to prioritize a value which is oriented toward hedonism or pleasure, while the individual who wakes despite a soporific atmosphere enacts a value oriented toward achievement or self-direction. I use the word "simply" sarcastically, as the attribution of the person's behavior might be explained variously and perhaps infinitely (e.g., sleeping to procrastinate work in which one is nervous to fail; waking up to care for a child in need; Carroll, 2015). However, the empirical and conceptual application of values into authenticity which this study offers represents an attempt to further couch the manifestation of an individual's true self in terms of one of many possible motives for behavior (Schwartz, 1994), which depend on the desired process and goals an individual prioritizes (Rokeach, 1973). Further, the operationalization of values in authenticity also serves to increase the complexity and precision of an individual's willingness and ability to satisfy individual and organizational goals. Though attributional challenges will always exist for individuals and organizations (Cha & Edmondson, 2006; Trilling, 1972), depicting an individual's behaviors in terms of prioritizing specific values—which may or may not align with those the organization

prioritizes (Brown et al., in progress)—offers a rough but reasonable calculus for individuals and organizations to consider the impetus for specific actions.

In this way, in response to Jongman-Sereno and Leary's (2019) poignant question, I posit that felt inauthenticity is likely *not* possible, as that what scholars have to come to associate with felt inauthenticity is akin to enacting a value which one does not prioritize or declare as important to them. A principal assumption of this statement is that individuals are likely unaware of how their behaviors align with particular values, and, importantly, that certain values are much more socially desirable and benevolent in their enactment (e.g., benevolence, universalism) than others (e.g., stimulation, power). Though this assertion may open a Pandora's Box of questions related to the concept of felt (in) authenticity, coming to more explicitly associate individual behavior with the enactment of specific values appears to be a critical way to understand how an individual's behavior might be described as authentic.

Relatedly, one aspect of the findings which emerged during this study but which felt somewhat out of place from the overall storyline was the role of declared or explicit versus undeclared or tacit values. During values interviews and when otherwise discussing values with informants, CarTown employees as a whole were remarkably thoughtful about what they prioritized in their lives and how they approached their work. However, my close association with many informants and opportunity to observe them after learning about their declared values allowed me to observe how their behavior aligned with these values. Importantly, I observed that, while many informants did generally align their behavior with the values they reported in their interviews, I observed numerous instances in which informants behaved in ways which were markedly discrepant from what they described as important to them. For example, Marco and Jackson were among the more thoughtful and conscientious informants for this study and they

each shared that respecting others was highly important to them. However, both Marco and Jackson were later sanctioned by the RMV for engaging in behaviors which others identified as not just disrespectful, but also potentially problematic. By invoking a Schwartzian perspective on values, Marco and Jackson had chosen to enact values which were deemed inappropriate; Marco's favored stimulation over benevolence (a declared value of his) in sexually suggestive behaviors, whereas Jackson's favored self-direction or power as he favored adherence to his personal code of conduct and comportment (i.e., speaking harshly and angrily to customers) instead of being respectful and treating others with equality (a declared value of his).

In this way, we might conclude that Marco or Jackson's behaviors were not entirely inauthentic even as they behaved disrespectfully, but rather that they had sought to enact values which were tacit, undeclared, and lying beneath the surface. Indeed, classical authors on authenticity invoked the writings of Freud and other psychoanalysts who suggested the presence of the conscious, rational mind (the "ego") and the unconscious, irrational mind (the "id"; Trilling, 1972; citing Freud, 1961). Similarly, Taylor (1992) suggested that culture plays a strong influence on individuals relative to their pursuit of authenticity, such that individuals desire strong social belonging and attractiveness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Further, as the forms of work which CarTown employees engage in is often emotionally draining and compromising, the depletion of one's energy and resources may elicit enactment of values which are self-protective or self-serving to help the individual to return to a sense of intra-social homeostasis (Heider, 1958).

This appears to illuminate a previously unrecognized feature of authenticity work: that as individuals pursue authenticity in situated work obligations which may be characterized by strain or fatigue (Hochschild, 1983; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), the enactment of socially desirable aspects of the self may deteriorate as an individual finds themselves so compromised. Thus, it

might be reasonable to suggest that individuals behave in ways which adhere to values both *declared* and *undeclared*—though individuals may lack awareness of these non-declared, less rational, and perhaps baser or less socially-desirable values and their behavioral manifestations (Kernis, 2003; Chon & Sitkin, 2021). Ultimately, it appears that this might serve as another explanation to Jongman-Sereno and Leary's (2019) penetrating question: that individuals who behave in ways which are ostensibly disconnected from their held values are perhaps opting to enact a value which they are not consciously aware of, likely due to its perceived social undesirability (Bailey & Levy, 2022).

Further, the concepts of emotional labor and compassion fatigue remained recurring themes throughout this project, and the nature of these literatures—namely, that individuals have specific cognitive-emotional reservoirs that are depleted over time—led to what I consider an important insight: that individuals are likely to experience a kind of *inauthenticity fatigue* as they behave in ways which are ostensibly contradictory with their held values. For example, I often spoke with guards about their "energy levels", and they described that, while the nature of their work was often fatiguing (e.g., interacting with many customers a day, being on their feet for hours at a time), it became clear that for several of them (e.g., Jorge, Rubino) that behaving in ways which prevented them from being true to their held values was deeply frustrating and draining, such that they began to disengage from their work. Indeed, Hewlin's (2003, 2009) work on façades of conformity suggests that the experience of pretending to conform to the expectations of the organization is distressing, suggesting that an individual is suppressing their authentic self—as opposed to allowing to be "unrestrained", as Kernis (2003) mentions. In this way, behaving in a way which varies from one's held values presents a different kind of cognitive-emotional depletion which elicits an uncomfortable sense of values-based cognitive dissonance. Past research suggests

a possible nexus between cognitive dissonance and behaving against one's held values (e.g., Manz et al., 2005), with another possible construct being "ethical dissonance" (Thompson, 1997). Further, following balance theory (Heider, 1958), individuals might seek to overcome this values-based dissonance by behaving in ways which align with their held values. Thus, by more explicitly considering the role of values in authenticity, we may come to understand not only how individuals pursue a sense of felt authenticity, but more specifically why they pursue it in the first place. Future work might consider inauthenticity fatigue by considering how and why and when individuals decide to depart from a previously condoned way of operation in favor of actions which are more explicitly aligned with their held values.

The Varied Experience of Felt Authenticity. Second, though the experience of felt authenticity has often been described as aligning with positive, benevolent, and moral-oriented definitions of authenticity from the past (Gergen, 1991, 2009; James, 1950; Rogers, 1959), this study suggests that manifestations of felt authenticity and their associated experiences are distinct and may be elicited by specific triggers, which future work would do well to further explore. As individuals pursue the prioritization of a dignity-focused approach, the experience of authenticity may resemble traditional notions of authenticity, typified by elements of high-quality connection (e.g., expressive communication, reciprocity, range of emotions; Dutton & Heaphy, 2003). Notably, interactions of these forms take place most commonly when employees are willing to use more time, which may not always be possible for service interactions (see Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988), but the experiences of each form are distinct; consideration is critical when employees seek to focus on the customer's acute problem, which is manifest by a regulatory boundary (i.e., sympathetic authenticity), whereas expressiveness and playfulness are manifest in an approach which the employee finds personally enjoyable and meaningful (i.e., relational authenticity; see

also Garrett, 2017; Garrett et al., under review; Gergen, 2009). The pursuit of problem-solving remains paramount, though the manner in which this is executed is less exigent and more expressive.

Alternatively, when an efficiency-focused focus is prioritized, the role of time is paramount, though employees are either resolving customer concerns in routine manner (i.e., functional authenticity) or, due to the exhaustion of personal resources (e.g., energy, compassion), in an attempt to distance themselves from a customer and their problems as quickly as possible. Perhaps the most notable feature of the experience of authenticity when prioritizing efficiency values is the forms of communication which are used. Generally, the forms of communication are less expressive and lack the range required in a high-quality connection, in ways which may be disruptive for the ensuing connection quality (Dutton, 2003) but which remains intently focused on serving the customer effectively. This suggests that, while even individuals invoking defensive authenticity may attempt to rapidly distance themselves from customers, their actions remain geared toward the customer's eventual success. This is distinct from functional authenticity, which—as it relies on the presence of routine, straightforward tasks—is performed with particular speed in ways which many informants described as meaningful and important. That is, though an efficiency-oriented approach might suggest a lack of the "human touch" (Subramony et al., 2021) in a customer service interaction, it is possible that employees personally prioritize efficiency values and, hence, experience a deep sense of authenticity by performing their work tasks quickly.

Further, though helping and respecting others were most often described by informants as aligned with dignity values, many informants at CarTown expressed that saving a customer's time by processing them quickly represented a uniquely important way for them to help, as they recognized that customers often endured mild or significant hardships to process a transaction at

the RMV (e.g., taking time off work, navigating RMV regulations). In this way, though processing customers quickly may most obviously take the form of a task-oriented focus and suggest a cold, heartless encounter, various employees felt that a speedy transaction represented a deep form of respect which they believed would benefit the customer even more than an extended conversation with them. For example, one guard described the importance of being "an a**hole with respect", sharing that often the most important and effective way to help a customer was to curtly and quickly direct them to what they lacked and how they might succeed in a future RMV transaction. Though this strategy might contravene what might be seen as desirable in typical customer service interactions (e.g., friendly service, expressing sympathy; Hochschild, 1983), I observed on many occasions that customers who were treated in this way responded positively as they ostensibly detected the employee's intent to save them time and help them. Though this form of combining ostensibly contradictory service elements in one (i.e., an a**hole + respectful) appears to fit the criteria of engaged authenticity, the differences between these two communication styles (tailored vs. clear/ direct) and their typical duration (quick vs. less quick) suggests that the two forms are distinct. In short, it appears that the distinction between a dignity- and efficiency-oriented approach to serving customers is not so sharp as might be expected.

Finally, the experience of engaged authenticity is perhaps most significant as it represents the mutual satisfying of dignity and efficiency, focusing on fulfilling the task while treating the person with requisite respect. This form of authenticity is perhaps most obvious as a prescription for customer service-oriented jobs, as the employee's goal is to not simply resolve the customer's problem but essentially to remove it from existence—that is, remove it from the consciousness of the customer such that it is completely and satisfactorily addressed. This approach attempts to balance the time demands of the service role and generally does so effectively, though finding

loopholes or engaging in de-escalation may warrant more time used. As those who tap into a sense of engaged authenticity are likely to experience an increase in vitality and engagement, it stands to reason that this approach would be depicted as most desirable of the forms mentioned. However, as the triggers for this form are specific (e.g., high perceived need, de-escalation), it would be unwise to expect every transaction to require and call for an engaged approach; though informants reported these interactions as uniquely energizing, I also observed how even the repeated experience of positive, engaging interactions are draining for CarTown employees. This aligns with research on compassion fatigue, suggesting that even positive helping moments when aggregated can become exhausting (Dutton & Workman, 2011; Figley, 2002). Indeed, after having observed thousands of interactions at CarTown with the same employees, and particularly after coming to know these employees well and developing friendships with them, it became clear to be that managing values tensions (e.g., between dignity and efficiency) is increasingly fatiguing over time, and ultimately renders the hierarchy of their held values more salient as well. Specifically, I noted that after repeated customers had solicited services from guards who were unable to help them, their behavior became increasingly fatigued and their body language surprisingly heavy for performing such simple tasks (e.g., “Head to customer service on the left”). Observing these interactions leads me to believe that repeated encounters with values tensions over time renders individuals more likely to engage in behaviors which adhere to their held values, particularly those which they most highly prioritize.

Thus, when situated within a regulated service environment, employees manage a series of values and expectations which are oriented in various directions. Responding to requests to add needed complexity to our understanding of the experience of felt authenticity (Cha et al., 2019),

this study suggests that various forms of the authentic self are manifest in these environments, each of which focuses on specific aspects of the task and the person to serve.

Organizational Prevention and Permission of Authenticity. Finally, this study contributes to organizational literature by articulating mechanisms through which organizations unwittingly enable and constrain the enactment of individual's authenticity. Past research has considered that normative pressures can exact controlling influence on individuals such that individuals feel compelled to be authentic (Fleming & Spicer, 2011), while the elicitation of the authentic self in the socialization process has been shown to increase an individual's willingness and ability to do so (Cable et al., 2013). Further, while (mis)alignments between individual and organizational priorities and values have been explored elsewhere (e.g., Brown et al., in progress; Cable & Judge, 1996; Hewlin, 2003, 2009; Kristof, 1996; Malhotra et al., 2021; O'Reilly et al., 1991; Wright et al., 2017), the efforts that the organization engages in to foster or create these (mis)alignments yet remains overlooked. Specifically, the boundaries that regulatory guidelines place on individual behaviors represent a structured, formal representation of the organization's attempts to shape individual behaviors (Scott & Davis, 2007), as opposed to a more normative, culture one (Anteby, 2008; Kunda, 1992).

On one hand, regulatory boundaries offer an enabling influence for individual authentic expression for those individuals who perceive organizational values and expectations to be aligned with their own (Posner, 1992, 2010). In this study, employees often expressed a sense of security and confidence as they adhered to regulatory demands, and described feeling supported in their pursuit of particular values that they highly prioritized; these individuals typically were those for whom efficiency values were ranked highly. In this way, the presence of regulations which shape employee behavior was not seen as constraining their emotions or identities (cf. Ashforth &

Humphrey, 1993), but rather supporting these—and particularly supporting their held values—and thus the organization might be seen as enabling the enactment of individual authenticity for some.

On the other hand, regulations were resoundingly interpreted as constraints by informants, who often expressed that these guidelines directly contradicted their held values and desired course of action. The sense of cognitive dissonance elicited by behaving in ways which run against one's held values is palpable and powerful (Festinger, 1962), and the motive to express one's held values in response to this tension represents a shift toward intrapersonal equilibrium (Heider, 1958). One of the primary ways in which authenticity is described is as a fundamental building block for individual self-esteem, and behaving in ways which are incongruent with personal beliefs can be distressing (Kernis, 2003), regardless of how successfully one performs their work role or task (Goffman, 1959; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Individuals who feel this intrapersonal tension may experience a sense of *values discrepancy fatigue*, which might be considered essentially a more specific version of cognitive dissonance in which the experience of going against one's held values proves increasingly unbearable (see Dobson, 2020; Hewlin, 2003; Yagil, 2020), and the ensuing behaviors by an individual weathering this tension may snap back toward the prioritization of individual values over those which regulations stipulate. Importantly, this reaction is surprising as some individuals appear to prioritize the enactment of their personal values over keeping their jobs, which would seemingly run contrary to prevailing notions of needs and behavior; that is, rather than pursuing a sense of self-fulfillment after achieving the security of a job (Maslow, 1943), individuals might opt to act in ways which could place that job in jeopardy in favor of adherence to personal values—or exit the organization in pursuit of one that supports one's held values. Given the growing importance of values in modern life (Amis & Greenwood, 2020; Kraatz et al., 2020),

it is critical to understand how and why individuals make choices relative to their personal values, particularly how these values might align with organizational values (Brown et al., under review).

Thus, this study adds additional clarity to explaining how and why individuals are enabled and constrained in the enactment of their authentic selves, delineating these in terms of supporting or preventing the enactment of individual values due to regulatory boundaries, and showing a deeper look into the desired means and ends which individuals pursue at work (Rokeach, 1973) as they strive to align personally valued principles with their behaviors (Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Limitations and Future Directions

This study has several limitations which invite future contributions. First, as this is an ethnographic study of a single RMV location, the ability to generalize from these findings is limited. The strength of organizational ethnography is depth and detail (Rosen, 1991), and the use of single cases as opposed to multiple similarly emphasizes richness over transferability across contexts (Yin, 2003; cf. Eisenhardt, 1989). However, utilizing analytic generality permits the extension of these findings to other contexts which are characterized by similar phenomena and tensions (e.g., regulated service environments; see Chan & Anteby, 2016; Yin, 2014). Further, future research might utilize a multiple case approach to consider how service employees across contexts pursue the enactment of their personal values as well as the demands of their work roles (see Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013).

Second, though this study relies on various data sources which triangulate the grounded storyline (Locke, 2001), further studies would benefit from improved access to *in situ* perspectives on authenticity. My level of embeddedness at CarTown and time spent with informants during and after live interactions with customers presented many opportunities for data collection, but RMV employees were generally too busy to formally participate in a research study (e.g., be interviewed) or were hesitant to do so (e.g., worried that they might get in trouble). I found that security guards

and road test employees were among the best informants to converse with during the work day, but creative researchers might pursue contexts in which breaks between sessions are possible and wherein employees can reflect on the degree to which they are being true to their held values. Further, as my champion (Annette) departed shortly after the study began, I had to develop my own personal connections with CarTown staff rather than rely on overt administrative support, and in many cases wondered if my involvement was actually getting in the employees' way. These insights taught me much about navigating access (Feldman et al., 2004), but an ideal study would leverage administrative support as well as growing rapport and trust with informants on the ground.

Third, the values which informants reported in this regulated service context could differ from those prioritized by individuals situated in different work contexts. For example, while dignity and efficiency appear to be the primary values at play at CarTown, work contexts which prioritize individual achievement (e.g., investment banking, sales), require substantial skill and learning due to rigorous professional preparation (e.g., specialized surgeons, special operations officer), or the accrual of personal influence (e.g., social media influencers, politicians), to name a few, might prioritize markedly different means and ends and thus favor the enactment of certain values over others (Rokeach, 1973). Though the universality of all forms of values is likely across various work contexts (Schwartz, 2012), future research might consider the individually held and organizationally espoused values of different work contexts which ostensibly prioritize values which are distinct from dignity and efficiency, respectively.

Fourth, prior research calls for an exploration into the role of management on authenticity (Cha et al., 2019). Though I gathered data from several leaders regarding this topic, the data sample was too limited to be carefully considered in this study and much research needs doing to uncover the role managers play in shaping individual authenticity. The patterns which emerged on this

topic did relate to existing patterns in this story (e.g., respecting and helping subordinates, helping them do their best to serve customers, trusting them to do their work effectively), but further research would be helpful to more fully consider this topic.

Fifth, qualitative and inductive research offers specific strengths and weaknesses which ought to be supported by quantitative and deductive research. Specifically, I induced various hypotheses from the data in this study (see Figure 4). During my time at CarTown, I sought to capture constructs and organizational concepts in my field notes which appeared relevant to the emerging story. For example, one particularly relevant question that entered my mind was whether and how individuals might come to act against organizational regulations, what might motivate these actions, and if certain individuals might be able to avoid overtly transgressing regulations by "working within the system", or to "work with the system you have", which are both *in vivo* quotes used by informants. Accordingly, drawing from my emergent findings and analysis, I began to hypothesize that individuals might first *cognitively* deviate from organizational regulations, similar to how Hewlin (2003) describes individuals who behave in ways which conform to organizational expectations—though they internally may not agree with them. This might be one approach by which to consider the cognitive dissonance that individuals expressed in behaving in ways which were against their held values, though they avoided organizational sanction. Another step forward might be to *behaviorally deviate* from regulatory expectations, although these behaviors are likely to result in organizational sanctions (see Chapter 6). Finally, employees who are uniquely skilled in working with people and knowledgeable about RMV regulations might learn to engage in *job crafting*, developing creative solutions to a customer's problem which are within the boundaries of RMV bureaucracy. Though these grounded hypotheses exist outside the scope of the current study, each model relates to concepts which emerged as important during my analysis (i.e.,

organizational sanctions, job satisfaction, negative emotions, burnout, organizational exit) and which might be tested to demonstrate the downstream implications of values (mis)alignment on the experience of felt authenticity and related work outcomes. The models describe differing individual responses to a perceived misalignment with organizational values—namely, cognitive deviation, where individuals mentally deviate from organizational values but continue to adhere to regulations (Hewlin, 2003); behavioral deviation, where individuals transgress organizational regulations; and job crafting, where individuals find ways to personalize their satisfying of regulations in ways which adhere to individual values. These hypothesized downstream effects represent one way to make use of qualitative insights in ways which are concretized by deductive testing (Pratt, 2008).

Conclusion

Authenticity is a complex concept which remains elusive to define and prescribe, but the difficulty of pursuing truth, realness, genuineness, and sincerity ought not suggest that its careful study be abandoned. As stated in the preface, this study serves to demonstrate how the enactment of individual authenticity exists not just for self-interested purposes—worthy as these may be—but ultimately to foster connection between people. CarTown and its employees reveal that, even in an ostensibly dull or lifeless job, light exists and humanity can thrive—though the barriers to experiencing these special moments are significant and many. It is my hope that this study can illuminate the possibility of *connective authenticity*—a form of wholeness which invites humanity, sincerity, and the pursuit of truth, for the benefit of others and the self. In this way, we might follow Polonius' charge to be true—for others, as well as ourselves:

> *This above all: to thine own self be true,*
> *And it must follow, as the night the day,*
> *Thou canst not then be false to any [one].*

TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1: Summary of Data Collected

Observational Data	
Observational Hours	
Total	292 hours *(2018 - 2023)*
	Duration: 1-10 hours; most took place during regular business hours (9am-5pm)
	62 visits during the study period; 0 visits March 2020 - September 2021 (Pandemic)
	Purpose: Become immersed in the context, build rapport with informants, and develop deep knowledge of bureaucratic processes and regulations.
Field Notes (FN[1])	
Total	408 pages
	Recorded on a word processing document; 12 pt. font, double-spaced
	Purpose: Capture observed topics of interest, as well as pictures, reflections, and memos intended to unpack and understand the context.
Interview Data	
Ethnographic Conversations (EC)	
Total	88 *(with 27 informants)*
	Duration: 5-60 minutes; majority 10-20 minutes
	Content: Interacted with informants regarding specific topics/insights; recorded a log of our conversations afterward in field notes document.
	Purpose: Deepen rapport with informants, address specific questions about their work and/or various social dynamics (operations of the center, gossip, etc.).
Semi-Structured Interviews (SI)	
Total	27 *(with 15 informants)*
	Duration: 20 minutes - 2 hours; majority 40-60 minutes
	Content: Discussed elements of informants' work (e.g., serving customers, connecting with colleagues); interviews were recorded and professionally transcribed.
	Purpose: Explore questions and dynamics revealed from observational data and ethnographic conversations, and address topics related to research questions.
Values Interviews (VI)	
Total	17 *(with 17 informants)*
	Duration: 20 minutes - 1 hour; majority ~20 minutes

Content: Discussed informants' personal values (beliefs/principles which guide their lives) and their relative prioritization, using Schwartz' (2012) circumplex as a reference.
Purpose: Gain an understanding of informants' declared values and personal priorities as a baseline proxy for the values which compose their "true self".

Values Interviews Follow-Ups (VIF)

Total 10 *(with 4 informants)*

Duration: 5-30 minutes; majority ~10 minutes
Content: Discussed informants' behavior, emotions, and insights related to work tasks which had just taken place, comparing their felt authenticity to their declared values.

Purpose: Open a window into how individuals manage being true to personal values in the moment, instead of through reflection after the moment has passed.

Archival Data

Customer Reviews (CR)

Total 100

Content: 1- and 5-star (50 each) customer reviews (Google) of the CarTown RMV during the time of this study (ca. 2019).

Purpose: Articulate customer perspectives on their RMV experiences; illustrate the power of customers in firing/reassigning employees.

Notes

1. Each data type uses a specific notation for ease of interpretation in the Findings chapters (e.g., Field Notes = FN), and is assigned a specific corresponding number: a page number for Field Notes (e.g., FN 11) or a unique identifier for Interview (e.g., SS 15; VI-F 6) and Archival Data (e.g., CR 6).

Table 2: Summary of Informants

Name[1]	Location	Role	Tenure *(Yrs.)*	EC[2]	SS 1	SS 2	SS 3	VI	VI-F
Annette**	CarTown	Manager	5	x	x	x	x	x	
Angelica	CarTown	CSR[3]	6		x			x	
Arielle*	CarTown	CSR	22	x	x			x	
Bradshaw*	CarTown	Guard, CSR	2	x	x				
Chris	CarTown	CSR	22	x	x			x	
Consuela	CarTown	Assistant Manager	25	x					
Claire	CarTown	CSR	3	x	x	x		x	
David*	CarTown	Road Test	16	x				x	
Grayson	CarTown	Guard	1	x					
George	CarTown	Road Test	1.5	x					
Hazel	CarTown	CSR	3		x			x	
Juanmarco*	CarTown	Guard	2	x				x	x
Jorge	CarTown	Guard	1	x	x	x		x	x
Jackson*	CarTown	Guard	1	x	x	x		x	x
Leah M.	CarTown	CSR	22	x					
Lamarr	CarTown	Guard	0.5	x					
Liliana	CarTown	CSR	3	x	x	x		x	
Leonardo	CarTown	CSR	5	x					
Madeline	CarTown	CSR	23	x					
Marco	CarTown	Guard	1	x	x			x	
Maicon	CarTown	Guard	0.5	x					
Nathan	CarTown	Guard	1		x	x		x	
Orlando	CarTown	Manager	1	x					
Rubino*	CarTown	Guard	1	x	x	x		x	x
Rowan	CarTown	Supervisor	8	x	x				
Sandro*	CarCity	Admin	2		x	x	x		
Scott	CarCity	Admin	1	x					
Shabazz	CarTown	Guard	0.5	x	x			x	
Shauntelle	CarTown	CSR	5	x					
Taye	CarTown	Guard	0.25	x				x	
Theo	CarTown	Guard	1	x	x			x	

Notes

1. Informant names and location names are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality.

2. EC: Ethnographic Conversation; SS: Semi-Structured Interview (SS1: First Interview; SS2, SS3: Follow-up Interviews); VI: Values Interview; VI-F: Values Interview Follow-Up (see Table 1).

3. CSR: Customer Service Representative

Name: Key Informant; Name**: Champion / Gatekeeper*

Table 3: Additional Examples of Informant Held Values and Felt Authenticity.

Informant	*Held Value*	*Excerpts from Values Interview*	*Example of Regulation*	*Role of Regulation*	*Example of Felt (In)Authenticity* [1]
Jackson *(Guard)*	Safety	"Being aware, you've gotta pay attention…watching over customers and employees, I've gotta be on my toes"	Security guards must wear their uniform	Permission	Oh yeah. You got to wear that [a bulletproof vest]. I mean, you don't need it in CarTown. ...I mean, I wore it because I'm cautious, but I mean, yeah, you have to wear it vested. It looks more intimidating. (SS 22)
	Equality	"Everybody should have a fair chance."	Customers need to wait in line before receiving service	Permission	A lot of people feel the need, they break down their story, they're more important than everybody else. And that's where I fall into the equality. I'm equal, equal as can be. Just because you're going through it and your license has been suspended for two years, what about this person whose license has been suspended for five days? You know what I mean? I'm not just going to let you cut because you waited longer and she's here before. You know what I mean? (SS 4)
	Respect	"The way you respond to them…[remaining] respectful, cordial…their animosity drops"	Guards must not answer questions about a customer's paperwork	Prevention	A woman seated nearby began a conversation with Jackson, and we found out that she's from Toronto and needs to get some information from the social security office. Jackson listened to her and, opening his phone, said that she'd probably need to get to the closest social security office. He helped her and she thanked him repeatedly for helping her. He went to go get the paper printed, and after he brought it in she thanked him again. He was smiling as he returned to help her. (EC 26)
David *(Road Test)*	Responsibility	"Every day trying to present yourself in a proper manner…prepare yourself day in and day out…you take the job seriously."	Employees must arrive at the center on time	Permission	I could see how frustrated he was by the experience; he's not usually this worked up. … As we talked further and as we moved into the road test office, he mentioned how [a coworker] needs to show up on time and how busy it's been for them recently. (EC 66)
	Integrity	"If you're honest and you're doing your job… be as personal as you can be, but you can't take things personally…You're gonna fail some people…and I'm good with that."	Enforce road test rules by failing customers who do not pass the test	Permission	A guy came into the center and was holding a piece of paper, which I learned was the driver's test which he had just failed. He came in asking to speak with David, and David came [and] said in a rather loud voice (with nearly 20 customers in the immediate vicinity) that "you ran two red lights, you turned left on a red. And that's my fault? This is what we deal with"...he said, "you want to report me? Go ahead - you'll be helping me." He said to the rest of the people around, "this is what we deal with on a daily basis". (FN 317-318)
	Health	"If you're not great to yourself…you're not gonna be good for others. When you're working on yourself…it's not just for yourself."	Road test operators must perform as many road tests as there are customers	Prevention	David described how he hasn't taken a sick day in over 16 years at the center and over 16,000 road tests, but he said he was denied for a day off which he attempted to request two weeks in advance. He was visibly frustrated when describing this situation, saying that it certainly does not help employees want to do their best. (EC 4)
Claire *(CSR)*	Respect	"I definitely try to treat people how I would like to be treated with respect and with kindness."	Deescalating customers who are frustrated	Permission	Letting people know that you hear them, to empathize with them so that you can try to help them. ...We've had training on it because lots of people think that the people that work at the RMV aren't empathetic. We are, but to an extent. We have a job to do. We have guidelines to follow...we're not trying to be mean, but we do have a procedure that we have to follow. (SS 20)
	Family & Friends	"I try to make sure they're all good and I know they reciprocate the same kind of care to me."	Work effectively with colleagues	Permission	I like my team that I work with. I requested when I was hired to work at CarTown because I wanted to work over there to be closer to my parents at the time. I mean, I like working with everybody there. We're a good team and we work well together. ....I like that at CarTown that we do try to help each other out. (SS 20)
	Connection	"I chit chat with customers. I try to be myself with them, be open with them…when they're not being difficult, people are easy to talk to."	Requiring an appointment for certain services	Prevention	I feel like sometimes when it comes to how they manage us and the guidelines that they put in place, it's kind of dumb. It makes our job more difficult for no reason. But that's the state for you. They do that all the time...telling people about making the appointments that they can't get service that day, but people make a scene, people argue with you. And we have people coming from other branches when other branches tell them, "Oh yeah, they told me to come here." No. (SS 16)
Annette *(Manager)*	Respect	"While I'm at work...I mean, I'm going to give you respect at the minimum. is definitely needed. You're going through whatever, good, bad or indifferent and you made it here."	Treat customers with respect	Permission	People come to this from that community and they've been recommended on Yelp and otherwise to come here, if they ever need to go to a site, come here. They're going to respect your whole person. And I pride myself on having that here. (SS 1)
	Honesty	"Truth, by everyone being able to be honest. There's been situations where people weren't honest with me... I live by that."	Managers give feedback or correction to subordinates when needed	Permission	So the truth is big for me, because I've had so many people lie to me, and I don't work well with that. Even if it's a bad situation at work or my employees, obviously just come and talk to me. I have open-door policy. Just come and talk to me. Whatever it is, how bad it is. (SS 8)
	Growth	"I try to find value in every situation, even if it's a bad situation. …it's a learning lesson."	Employees who are not performing well receive negative performance reviews or may be fired	Prevention	If we can play to your strengths...you'll have a great review. ...[But] once the technology came over, they were trying to get these people to retire. ...If you all want to take that fight over ageism, discrimination, go ahead. ...If you want me to be the advocate for your ideologies, I won't. That's where I draw the line. ... I used to tell my big boss, "Let me know how it works out. I don't agree. I want to make sure that's on record, I don't agree with you all trying to push them out." (SS 9)

1. Examples of felt inauthenticity are denoted by a darker, gray box in the table.

Figure 1: Flow Chart of the Service Process at the CarTown RMV

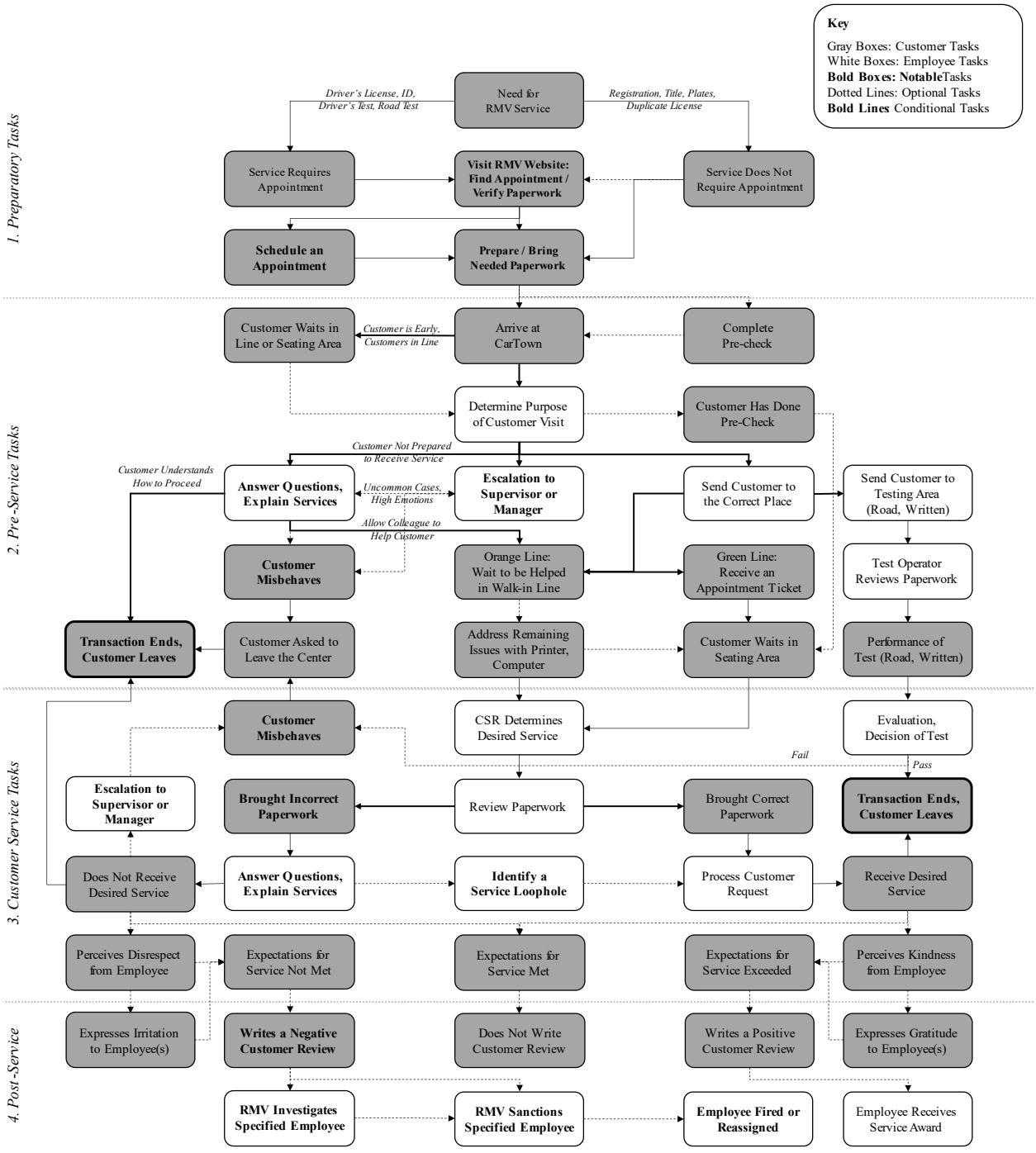


Figure 2: Model of Values Tensions in Regulated Service Environments

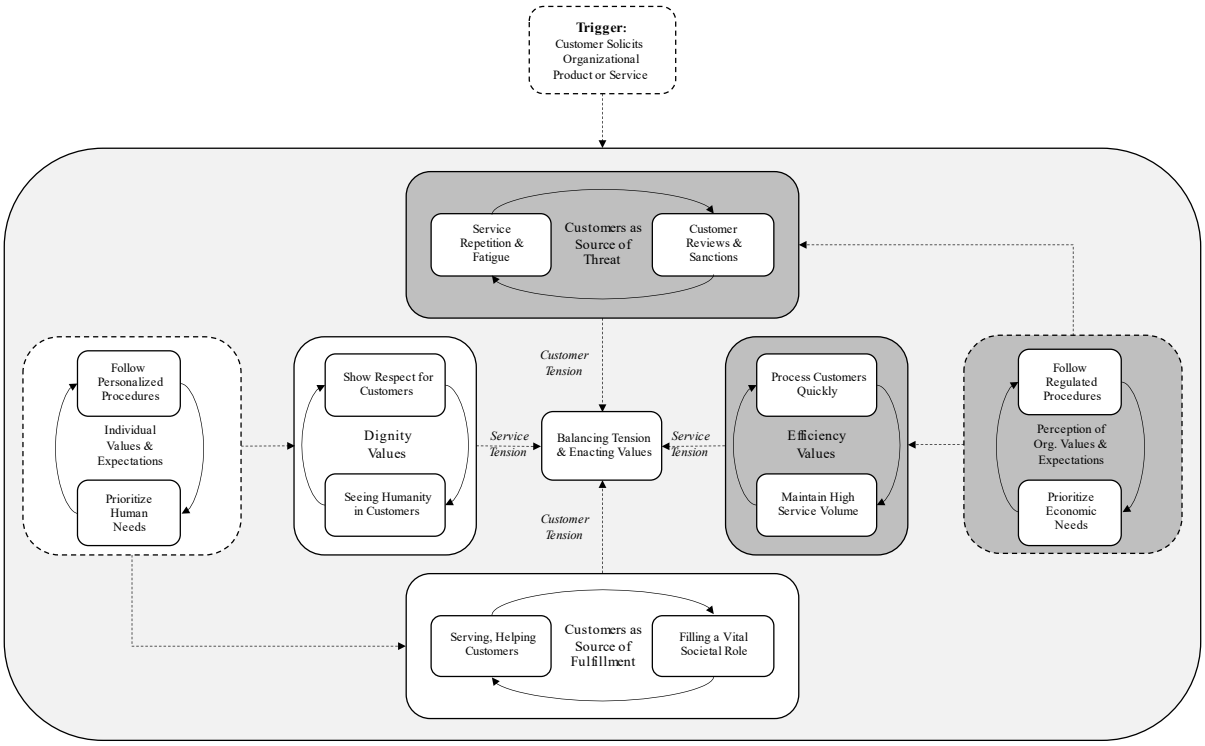


Figure 3: Theoretical Model of Values Enactment Prioritization, Permission, and Prevention

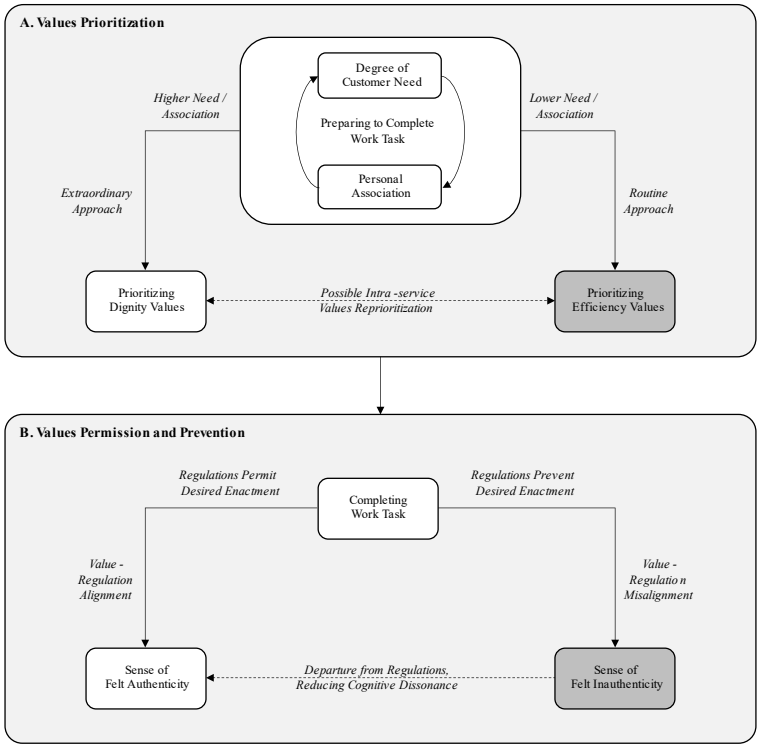
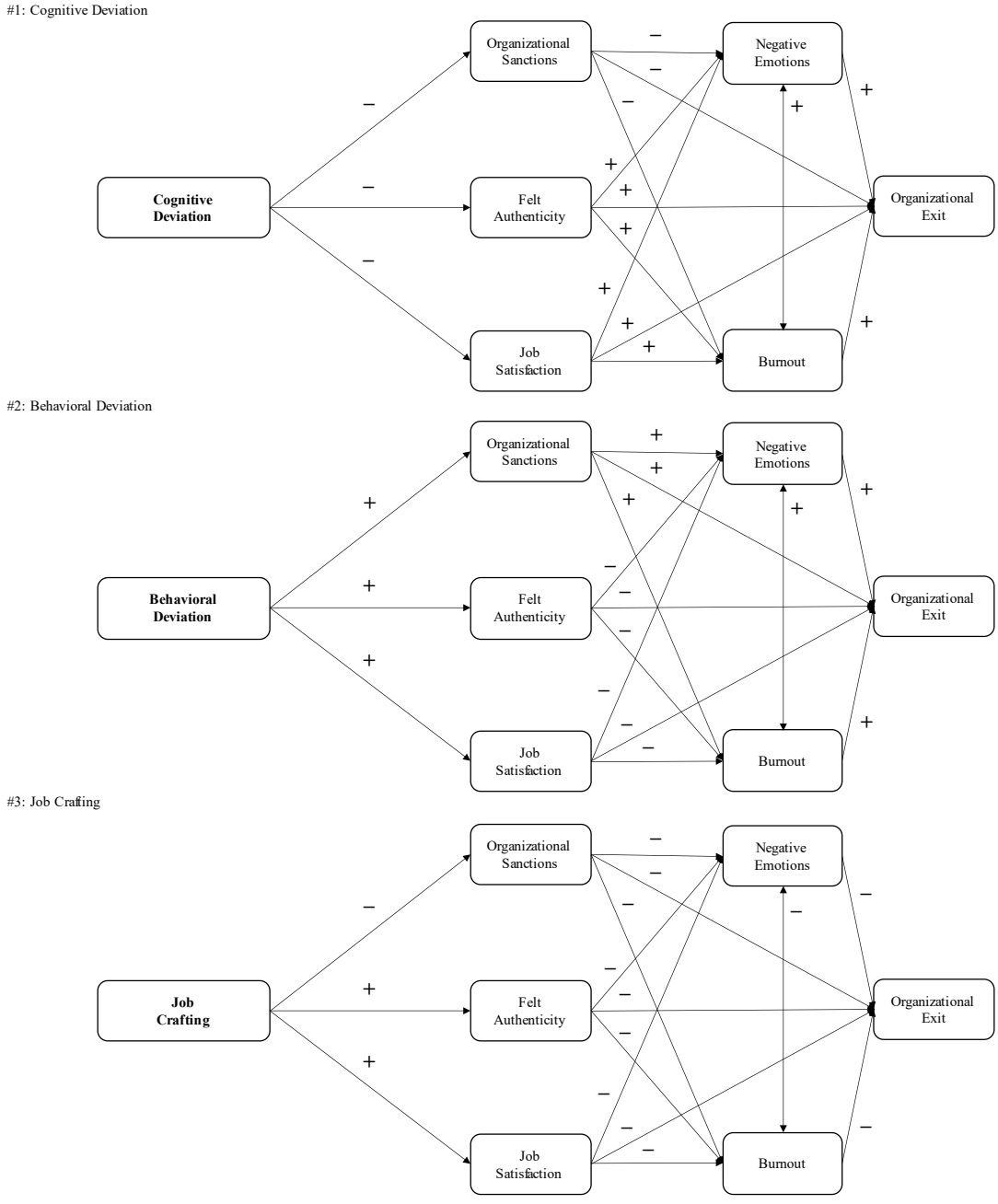


Figure 4: Hypothesized Impact of Values (Mis)Alignment Pathways on Felt Authenticity



APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Guiding Research Question Preamble

Understanding how one's sense of their authentic self is cultivated through interactions with others is an important phenomenon for management and organizations.

Literature on authenticity tends to focus on outcomes related to the self, with some recent work considering the role of others in being and feeling "true to the self", with these moments typically being described as occurring during moments of positive connection with close others. However, classical notions of authenticity tend to consider the production of the "true self" as necessary social and relational, and that the "true self" is discovered more than simply known.

Authenticity is not just about the self as *situated in* proximity to others, nor is it simply *associated with* felt or actual connection with others. Rather, one's sense of their "true self" may be deepened not only through positive interactions with known others, but also potentially through superficial, bureaucratic, and task-oriented interactions which may be more negative in affective valence.

This ethnographic dissertation of the local RMV seeks to show how (if at all) knowledge about one's authentic self emerges through interactions with others – which interactions may take place between known others (coworkers, subordinates/superiors) or previously unknown others (customers). Further, these self-relevant interactional episodes may foster positive affective experiences or negative ones, but the constant is the role of connection with others in coming to understand one's true values and how best to conscientiously enact them.

I intend to utilize inductive analytic techniques to produce grounded theory about how individuals come to know themselves through interactions with others, and the mechanisms through which this takes place.

Protocol Principles

As I will be utilizing an inductive, qualitative approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), this interview protocol will continue to evolve as patterns emerge during data collection (Glaser, 1992).

Possible questions for the protocol should include things about:

- The context or location
- The work or work tasks
- The work roles and how they are related to each other

Then I should move into:

- Content-specific questions
- Tensions or unexpected patterns
- Unsolved mysteries and points of theoretical relevance

Protocol #1: Getting to know the place, the work, and interactions + introducing authenticity

0. **Demographics** *(1 minute)*
    a. Tell me a bit about you.
        i. Gender: Which gender do you identify as?
        ii. Role: What is your current job title?
        iii. Tenure: How long (in years and months) have you worked at the RMV?
        iv. (Optional) Location: Which location of the RMV do you work at?

1. **The Place and the Work** *(5-10 minutes)*
    a. Tell me about the RMV and your journey to working here.
        i. Briefly, how and when did you start working at the RMV?
        ii. What's it like to work here? Could you briefly describe a typical work day?
        iii. What (if anything) do you like about working here? What do you dislike?
            1. *Is there anything unexpected about the RMV that I might not guess?*
        iv. Why do you stay at the RMV?

2. **The Interactions** *(15-20 minutes)*
    a. One thing that I'm particularly interested in is what it's like to interact with people at the RMV. We'll start by talking about interactions with customers, then we'll talk about interactions with coworkers.

    b. Tell me a bit about your interactions with your customers.
        i. How does a typical customer interaction go? What do you talk about?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think about RMV customers?*
        ii. What (if any) are some typical challenges in interacting with customers?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think customers think about you?*
        iii. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely positive", what feelings do you typically associate with customer interactions? Could you explain your answer?

    c. Tell me a bit about your interactions with your coworkers or supervisors.
        i. How does a typical coworker interaction go? What do you talk about?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think about your coworkers?*
        ii. What (if any) are some typical challenges you experience with coworkers?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think your colleagues think about you?*
        iii. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely positive" and 1 being "extremely negative", what feelings do you typically associate with colleague interactions? Could you explain your answer?

3. **Authenticity at Work** *(20-45 minutes)*
    a. One of the things I'm most interested in is how people can be "true to themselves" (or authentic) at work. I'm curious about your insights on this topic.
        i. How would you define being "true to yourself" or "authentic" at work?
            1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely important" and 1 being "extremely unimportant", how important to you is "being yourself" at work? Why, or why not?
        ii. Do you feel like you can be yourself at the RMV? How and why, or how and why not?
            1. *What (if anything) stops you from being yourself at work?*

    b. Another thing I'm specifically interested in is how people can be authentic during interactions with others at work. I'm also curious about your insights here, as well as specific stories or examples which come to mind.
        i. For a moment, let's focus on interactions with your customers.
            1. Do you feel like you can be yourself with customers? How so, if at all?
                a. *Do you feel like you can be yourself in a positive interaction with a customer? Why, or why not?*
        ii. Now, let's focus on interactions with your colleagues.
            1. Do you feel like you can be yourself with your coworkers? How so, if at all?
                a. *Do you feel like you can be yourself in a positive interaction with a coworker? Why, or why not?*
                b. *Do you feel like you can be yourself in a negative interaction with a coworker? Why, or why not?*
        iii. What (if anything) have you learned about yourself in your work interactions?
    c. Is there something else about "being yourself", "being real", "being genuine", or "being authentic" in your job that I didn't ask, that you feel I should know more about?

Protocol #2: Getting to know the place and work, and interactions + introducing authenticity

0. **Demographics** *(1 minute)*
    a. Tell me a bit about you.
        i. Gender: Which gender do you identify as?
        ii. Role: What is your current job title?
        iii. Tenure: How long (in years and months) have you worked at the RMV?
        iv. (Optional) Location: Which location of the RMV do you work at?

1. **The Place and the Work** *(5-10 minutes)*
    a. Tell me about the RMV and your journey to working here.
        i. Briefly, how and when did you start working at the RMV?
        ii. What's it like to work here? Could you briefly describe a typical work day?
            1. *I've noticed that most of (if not nearly all) the RMV employees are women. Does this mean anything to you? Any insights on this?*
        iii. What (if anything) do you like about working here? What do you dislike?
            1. *Is there anything unexpected about the RMV that I might not guess?*

2. **The Interactions** *(15-20 minutes)*
    a. One thing that I'm particularly interested in is what it's like to interact with people at the RMV. We'll start by talking about interactions with customers, then we'll talk about interactions with coworkers.

    b. Tell me a bit about your interactions with your customers.
        i. How does a typical customer interaction go? What do you talk about?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think about RMV customers?*
            2. *Do customers ever try to "win you over"? If so, how do they do so?*
                a. *Do you ever try to win your customers over? If so, how do you do so?*
                b. *How, if at all, do these moments of ingratiation shape your interaction with that person?*
        ii. What (if any) are some typical challenges in interacting with customers?
            1. *What (if anything) do you think customers think about you?*
        iii. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely positive", what feelings do you typically associate with customer interactions? Could you explain your answer?
        iv. Management: What are your thoughts about RMV customers?
            1. How do you "manage" the customer experience?
                a. *What changes, if any, would you make to the customer experience?*

c. Tell me a bit about your interactions with your coworkers or supervisors.
    i. How does a typical coworker interaction go? What do you talk about?
        1. What (if anything) do you think about your coworkers?
    ii. What (if any) are some typical challenges you experience with coworkers?
        1. What (if anything) do you think your colleagues think about you?
    iii. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely positive" and 1 being "extremely negative", what feelings do you typically associate with colleague interactions? Could you explain your answer?

3. **Authenticity at Work** *(20-45 minutes)*

a. One of the things I'm most interested in is how people can be "true to themselves" (or authentic) at work. I'm curious about your insights on this topic.
    i. How would you define being "true to yourself" or "authentic" at work?
        1. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being "extremely important" and 1 being "extremely unimportant", how important to you is "being yourself" at work? Why, or why not?
    ii. Do you feel like you can be yourself at the RMV? How and why, or how and why not?
        1. What (if anything) stops you from being yourself at work?
    iii. Management: what role does authenticity play
        1. For you?
        2. For the organization?
        3. For your subordinates / colleagues?
        4. For RMV customers?

b. Another thing I'm specifically interested in is how people can be authentic during interactions with others at work. I'm also curious about your insights here, as well as specific stories or examples which come to mind.
    i. For a moment, let's focus on interactions with your customers.
        1. Do you feel like you can be yourself with customers? How so, if at all?
            a. Do you feel like you can be yourself in a positive interaction with a customer? Why, or why not?
            b. Do you ever have negative interactions with customers? How, if at all, do you feel like you are being yourself in these moments?
                i. How often would you say these interactions happen? Why, if at all, do you think they happen?
                ii. Have you ever lost your patience with customers? What happened? How, if at all, would you describe your efforts to "be real" in those moments?

c. Have you had experiences with customers in which you tried to help them well, but they rejected your help? How, if at all, would you describe your efforts to "be real" in those moments?

ii. Now, let's focus on interactions with your colleagues.

1. Do you feel like you can be yourself with your coworkers? How so, if at all?

a. Do you ever have negative interactions with your coworkers? Why, if at all, do you think they happen? How, if at all, do you feel like you are being yourself in these moments?

iii. What (if anything) have you learned about yourself in your work interactions?

c. Is there something else about "being yourself", "being real", "being genuine", or "being authentic" in your job that I didn't ask, that you feel I should know more about?

i. Ask Sandro: Annette mentioned that you've talked about feeling as though you've "lost yourself" with winning awards, getting promoted. Thoughts about that?

Protocol #3: Focusing on Connective Authenticity as Direct and Engaging (Follow-up interviews)

0. **Demographics** *(1 minute)*
    a. Tell me a bit about you.
        i. Gender: Which gender do you identify as?
        ii. Role: What is your current job title?
        iii. Tenure: How long (in years and months) have you worked at the RMV?
        iv. (Optional) Location: Which location of the RMV do you work at?

1. **Authenticity in Work Interactions**
    b. I'd love to hear your perspective on a few topics related to authenticity (or "being yourself") during interactions at work.
        v. How would you define being "true to yourself" or "authentic" at work?
            1. *Follow-up: it appears that you've described authenticity as* ***moral/immoral/amoral****. Could you say more about that?*
        vi. How (if at all) are you "true to yourself" when you interact with customers?
            2. *Follow-up: it appears that you've described authenticity as* ***engaging****. Could you say more about that?*
            3. *Follow-up: it appears that you've described authenticity as* ***directness****. Could you say more about that?*
            4. *Another kind?*
        vii. How (if at all) do RMV regulations impact the way you express your "true self"?
            5. *Follow-up: Do regulations help or hinder your ability to be authentic at work? How so?*

Protocol #4: Values Baseline Interview (Conducted once with each relevant employee)

0. **Demographics** *(1 minute)*
    a. Tell me a bit about you.
        i. Gender: Which gender do you identify as?
        ii. Role: What is your current job title?
        iii. Tenure: How long (in years and months) have you worked at the RMV?

1. **Values Baseline** *(5-10 minutes)*
    b. First, we're going to talk a bit about what is most important to you in your life—your guiding values and beliefs.
        i. What is most important to you in your life? Name 3-5 specific principles or things that are most important to you and which guide how you live your life.
            1. Follow-up: So you're saying that ___, ___, and ___ are most important in your life? Anything else?

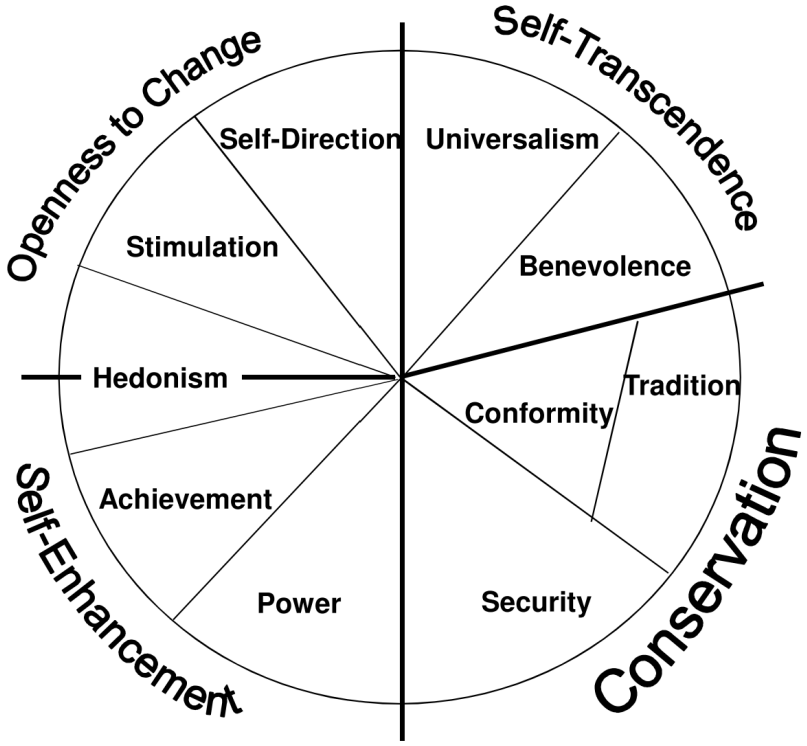


Figure 1. Theoretical model of relations among ten motivational types of value

2. Shalom Schwartz is an Israeli researcher who specializes in human values. From what you told me, it seems that you hold the following as your most cherished values (relate them to below). Does that sound accurate?
    a. Self-direction
        i. Independent thought and action—choosing, creating, exploring
    b. Stimulation
        i. Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life
    c. Hedonism
        i. Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself
    d. Achievement
        i. Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
    e. Power
        i. Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
    f. Security
        i. Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self
    g. Conformity
        i. Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
    h. Tradition
        i. Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides
    i. Benevolence
        i. Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group')
    j. Universalism / Spirituality
        i. Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.

c. Let's talk about how you would order the importance of these values.
    ii. Following Schwartz (2012), you said that your values are ____. How would you put those in order, from most to least important?
        1. Follow-up: So you'd prioritize your values in this order? Anything you'd add about that?

d. Next, we're going to talk about your guiding values at work.
    iii. Which values and principles, if any, are most important to you at work?
        1. Follow-up: So you're saying that ___, ___, and ___ are most important in your work? Anything else?

2. From what you told me, it seems that you hold the following as your most cherished values (relate them to below). Does that sound accurate?
    a. Self-direction
        i. Independent thought and action--choosing, creating, exploring
    b. Stimulation
        i. Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life
    c. Hedonism
        i. Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself
    d. Achievement
        i. Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
    e. Power
        i. Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people and resources
    f. Security
        i. Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self
    g. Conformity
        i. Restraint of actions, inclinations, and impulses likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations or norms
    h. Tradition
        i. Respect, commitment, and acceptance of the customs and ideas that one's culture or religion provides
    i. Benevolence
        i. Preserving and enhancing the welfare of those with whom one is in frequent personal contact (the 'in-group')
    j. Universalism / Spirituality
        i. Understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature.
3. How, if at all, are these different from your first answer?

e. Now let's talk about a few examples
    iv. Tell me about a time within the last week/month which is a good illustration of being true to your values. What happened?
    v. Tell me about a time in which you weren't able to be true to your values. What happened?

Protocol #5: Values Follow-ups (Conducted *in situ* after conversations)

0. **Identifiers**
    a. Go back into the data and quickly look up this person's values profile and prioritization.

1. **Values Check-In** *(however long is appropriate/possible)*
    b. Tell me a bit about that. Did you feel like you were able to be true to your values in that interaction?
        i. Why? Why not?
    c. What comes to your mind in an interaction like that?

Protocol #6: Interview with Administration

0. **General Questions**
    a. Tell me about your job. What functions at the RMV does it serve?
    b. What are some other important jobs in the RMV administration? What do they do?

1. **Organizational Rules, Regulations, and Values**
    a. What are some of the overarching goals of the RMV?
    b. Does the RMV have "core values", or guiding principles which they ask employees to live by?
    c. I've heard that RMV rules and policies change frequently. Is this true from your perspective, and why or why not?
    d. I've heard that RMV management stipulates that RMV transactions should take a specific amount of time (e.g., 10 minutes). What do you think of this policy?
    e. What are your goals for RMV employees?
    f. What are your biggest struggles with RMV employees *en masse*?
        i. What role do unions play at the RMV?

2. **Managing Authenticity**
    a. One concept which has become particularly important in modern management is authenticity, or being true to one's values.
        i. What perspective (if any) does RMV management have on employees being authentic, or true to their values?
        ii. Sometimes employees may be asked to do things that go against their values. What do you think about this?
        iii. How do you manage employees in a way that promotes greater authenticity, even as they strive to adhere to RMV regulations?

Protocol #7: When (in)authenticity happens and why

0. **Demographics** *(1 minute)*
    f. Tell me a bit about you.
        i. Gender: Which gender do you identify as?
        ii. Role: What is your current job title?
        iii. Tenure: How long (in years and months) have you worked at the RMV?
        iv. Brief: Journey to the RMV?
            1. Bradshaw: differences with the job?

1. **Values Baseline** *(5-10 minutes)*
    g. First, we're going to talk a bit about what is most important to you in your life—your guiding values and beliefs.
        v. What is most important to you in your life? Name 3-5 specific principles or things that are most important to you and which guide how you live your life.
            1. Follow-up: So you're saying that ___, ___, and ___ are most important in your life? Anything else?

2. **Authenticity at the RMV**
    a. How, if at all, are you able to be true to your values or authentic at work?
        i. Any examples come to mind?
    b. When, if ever, do you feel that you are unable to be true to your values or authentic at work?
        i. Any examples come to mind?
    c. One of the puzzles I've been struggling with is whether and how a regulated organization like the RMV enables or constrains an individual's ability to be true to their values.
        i. What are your thoughts about this? How, if at all, does the RMV constrain or enable your ability to be true to your values?
    d. Interactions and energy in processing customers
        i. When it goes sideways?
        ii. When it ends really well

Appendix B: Observational Field Notes Excerpts

Example of Field Notes

pp. 67-69

I got into the center around opening time today and was greeted by a new security guard and an older woman I've seen here before, who asked why I was here. I was a bit worried, as I've been relying heavily on my relationship with Annette and especially with Bradshaw, the head security guard, to secure reliable access.

I was able to speak with Consuela, whose title I can't really remember (she's the assistant manager) but I believe she's the interim center manager. She actually came out to chat with me, which I really appreciated, and we talked for a while about the center and what I might be able to do. She asked how my family is doing, and was kind enough to remember asking about the kids. She mentioned that Yolanda (the district manager) said that I had not yet received permission to conduct interviews, and I'm learning that working with the RMV employee union is complicated - as well as the "higher ups" in the RMV bureaucracy. Apparently they receive lots of different directions with great regularity, which Consuela mentioned have happened so much in her 25-year career here (long time) that she as a middle manager (she didn't say this, but I'm including it as it's accurate) doesn't always know what to do. We discussed that this would be a really challenging thing to deal with. She also mentioned that I'm able to wander the center and walk around as I make observations, but that due to union regulations I won't be able to approach the counter because there may be sensitive customer information there; makes perfect sense. I tried really hard to keep it together, but this was hard news to receive.

Introduced myself to Michelle, she's been here for 22 years! Incredible; both she and Consuela have been here over 20 years. She's definitely seen a lot around here. She seems like a really good person to know and learn from. She also laughs quite a lot and seems to have a great sense of humor. It feels a bit weird to be getting to know people like this, one at a time, but it also feels like the only way that really makes sense. Earning trust is a process.

Arielle (the older woman from before; she's also been here about 20 years; incredible! She said lots of people have been here for a long time. She also said that she worked for Polaroid for 25 years before that; quite the double career!) said she wanted to grab a stick of gum; maybe I could find out her brand and get some for her? But again, I don't want to be seen (or actually be) purely transactional - such a tough balance to strike.

After lunch (12pm - 1pm; they start turning away walk-ins at 11:30am), there was a huge rush. Crazy! Probably 50-100 people who all came in at the same time. I see many more people in the "Customer Service" line (they don't have appointments) than the "Ready to Go" line (they have appointments which they made prior to coming to the center).

Example of an Ethnographic Conversation

Ethnographic Conversation 34: Juanmarco

Another bomb was dropped on me after sitting down at my seat. Rubino asked me how the weekend had gone and we chatted for a bit about that. He then mentioned that things were going to be changing soon, as the security contradict at the RMV is switching from ISA to Allied (Rubino said, “Man I thought you woulda known!”). I know that the bidding war between the two companies has been ongoing for a while, and Rubino said that it just happened this week. This is his second week and he sounded a bit surprised and possibly a bit nervous. Apparently ISA is really understaffed and “don’t have enough people” to man all the different stations at the RMV statewide. Now all the guards will either have to reapply to Allied to remain in CarTown, or else they’ll be reassigned to another ISA post. Jorge mentioned that “it’s not that hard of a process”, and he reminded me that he currently works for Allied on the weekend (the guy works like a friggin machine). Allied pays better and has a better insurance package (“Blue Cross Blue Shield”), but Jorge wondered if they will be offering overtime. He said that if you can rely on 10-15 hours of overtime then it makes the lower pay at ISA worth it. He emphasized that Allied is definitely “loaded”, and that they have enough money and personnel to take care of the contract better - but he’s actually going to be starting a different job before then anyway.

I am not all that surprised, based on what I know about the two companies, but I admit that I am a bit worried about the project and what this change will mean. I wonder if they’ll be as friendly with me or if the working environment and experiences of the guards will be so different that I won’t be able to do what I need to do to finish the project. But, I suppose I need to trust that things will be ok, and have faith and work hard.

Example of a Values Interview

Notes from Values Interview 4: David

- Family -
- Health and welfare
    - "If you're not great to yourself…you're not gonna be good for others to an extent. When you're working on yourself…it's not just for yourself"
- Being courteous
- Showing up on time
- Be honest with whoever you're dealing with
- Discipline
- Community "it's important to fit in"
    - "You're gonna fail some people from CarTown…and I'm good with that"
- "Every day trying to present yourself in a proper manner…you gotta be on…prepare yourself day in and day out…you take the job seriously, because it is. - it's a hard job,
- Integrity
    - "Where else would they have let him have three bumps?"
    - "It's the hardest thing in the world, isn't it? You can't take things personally…you know that if you're honest and you're doing your job… 'hey look…the last thing I'm trying to do is to keep you from your goal.' You want to be as personal as you can be, but you can't take things personally…it's a fine line."
    - "Once you show that weakness…you've gotta be careful. If you get too "la dee da", you gotta be careful…empathy and weakness, it's a fine line sometimes."

Clarifying

- Responsibility
    - Showing up on time, being prepared, "day in and day out…your work becomes who you are. I'm the road test guy."
    - Self-direction x
- Integrity
    - Conformity
- Community
    - Tradition, Benevolence

Examples of a Customer Review (Archival Data)

Review #2 (1-star)

> I definitely go for 0 stars if I have the choice! Rudest people I have ever met and helpless staff and most ridiculous policy! If your license expired and you would like to renew your license with initial OPT EAD card then don't waste your time here. The policy of 12-months lawful presence remaining is extremely ridiculous and the staff have no knowledge about it at all. Then how are we supposed to drive with initial OPT? Please go to other states for help. They will provide a temporary license for 120 days to wait the EAD card and renew the licenses once the card is valid, which is reasonable and efficient.

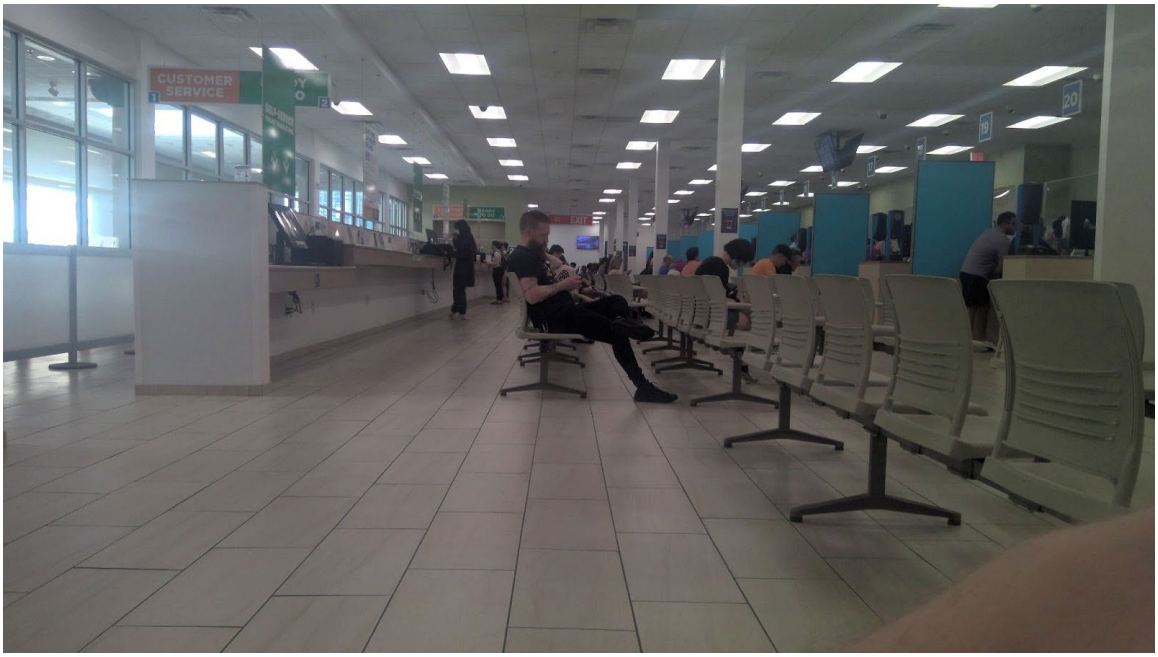
Review #58 (5-star)

> I was in and out in 30 min, and that's never happened to me at a DMV before (I literally once had to wait 5 hours at a different DMV). They were professional and efficient, and shout-out to the lady that helped me. She was lovely. Fill out your application online if you can. Hand your stuff to the lady waiting at the door. She'll give you your ticket, and you have a seat. I dunno why there are so many negative reviews. Maybe they've implemented better changes recently."

Example of CarTown Pictures

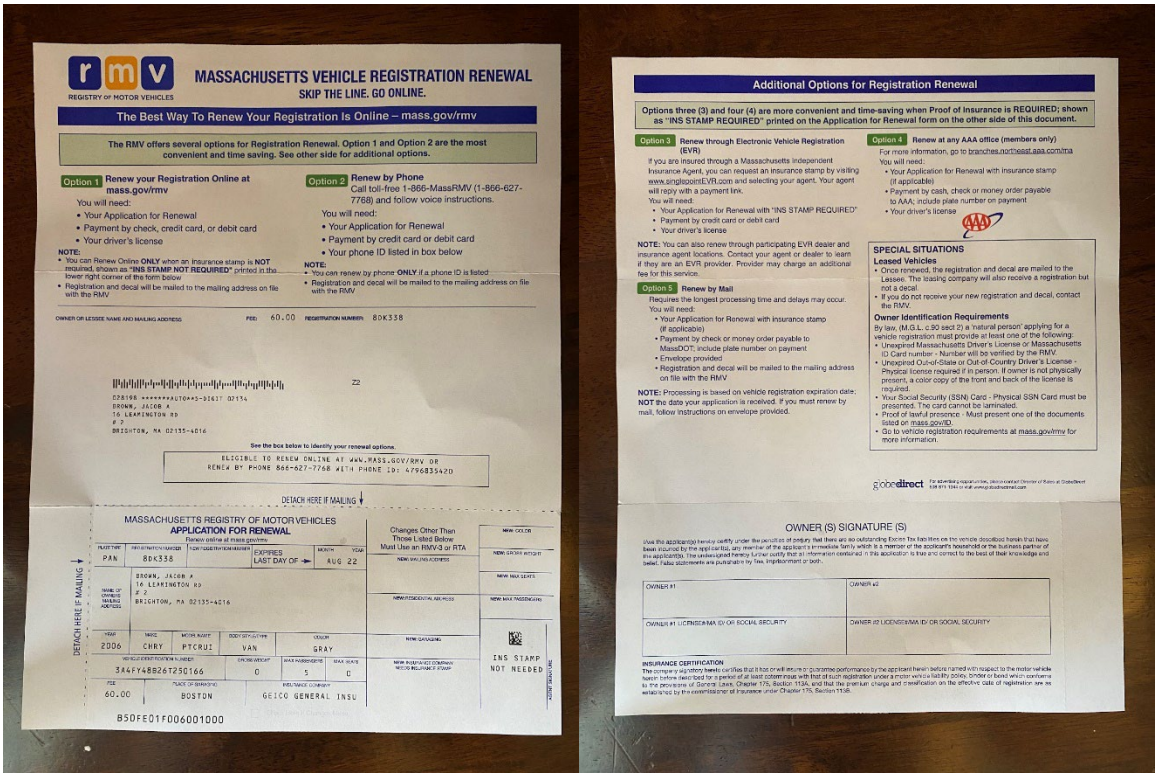
Outside CarTown

Inside CarTown

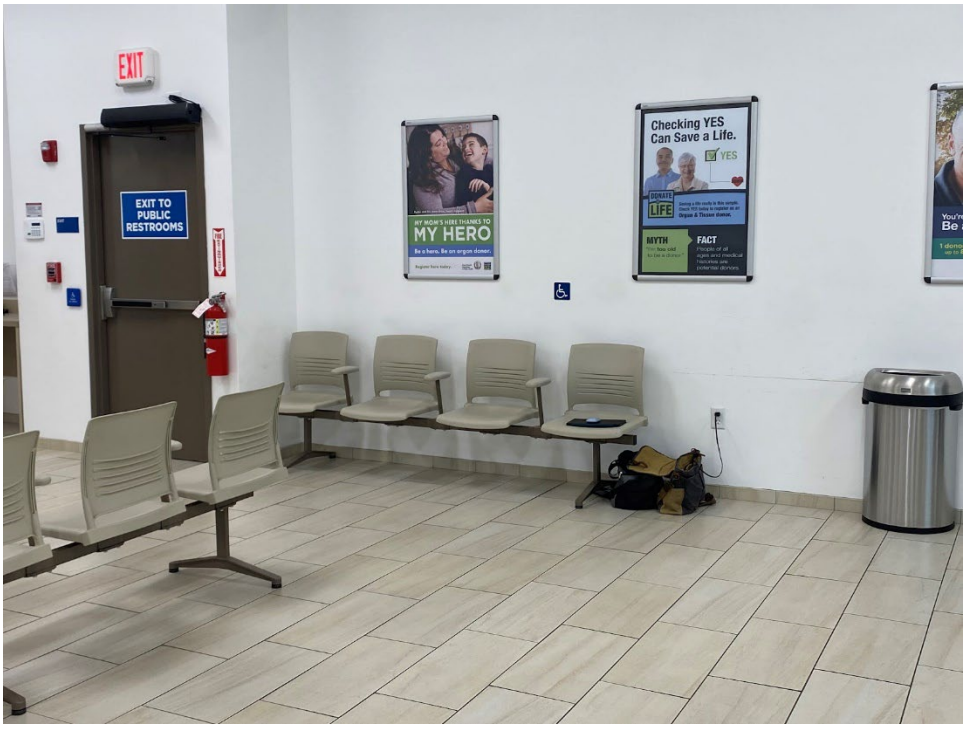


Service Counters and Road Test Area

Registration Renewal (Front, Back)



Primary Data Collection Spot

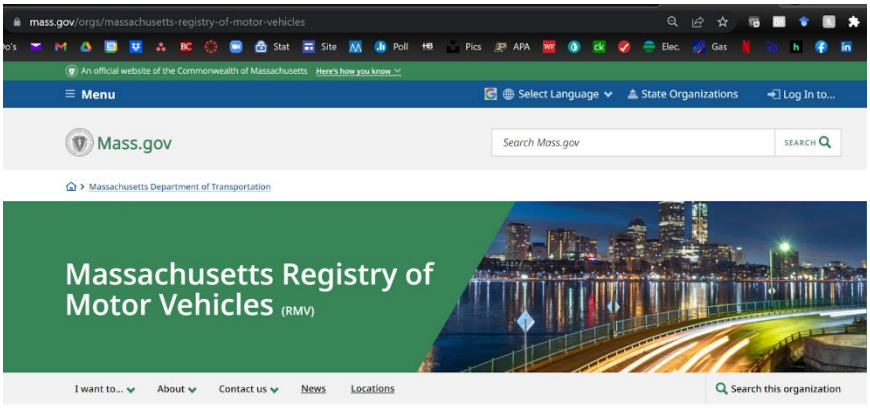


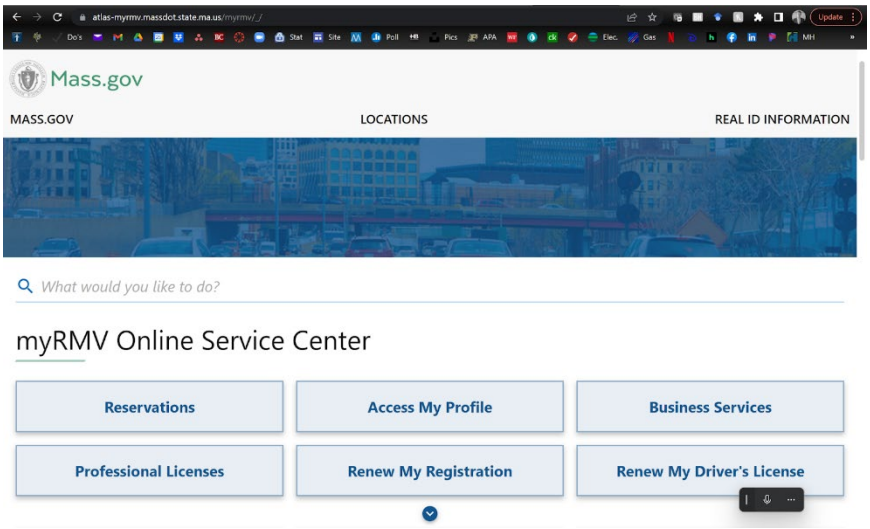
Customer Service Line from Outside

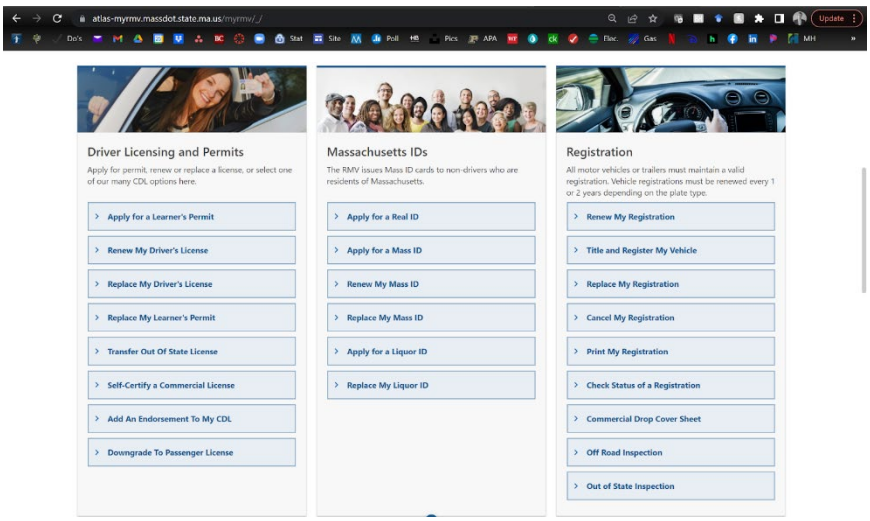
Line Outside CarTown

Ticket Screen

RMV Website (Landing Page, Services Pages)

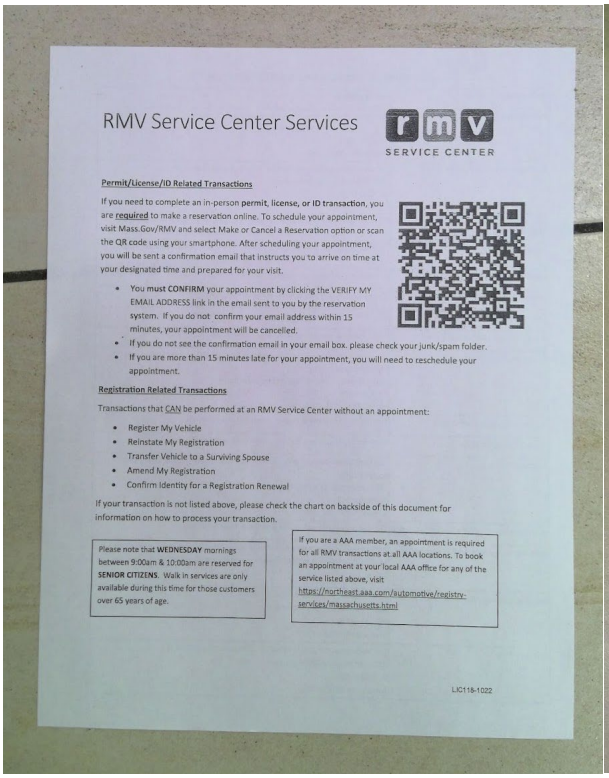






Customer Service Counters (Empty)

Customer Service Form (Front, Back)



RMV Service Center Services

rmv SERVICE CENTER

Permit/License/ID Related Transactions

If you need to complete an in-person **permit, license, or ID transaction**, you are **required** to make a reservation online. To schedule your appointment, visit Mass.Gov/RMV and select Make or Cancel a Reservation option or scan the QR code using your smartphone. After scheduling your appointment, you will be sent a confirmation email that instructs you to arrive on time at your designated time and prepared for your visit.

- You **must CONFIRM** your appointment by clicking the VERIFY MY EMAIL ADDRESS link in the email sent to you by the reservation system. If you do not confirm your email address within 15 minutes, your appointment will be cancelled.
- If you do not see the confirmation email in your email box, please check your junk/spam folder.
- If you are more than 15 minutes late for your appointment, you will need to reschedule your appointment.

Registration Related Transactions

Transactions that CAN be performed at an RMV Service Center without an appointment:

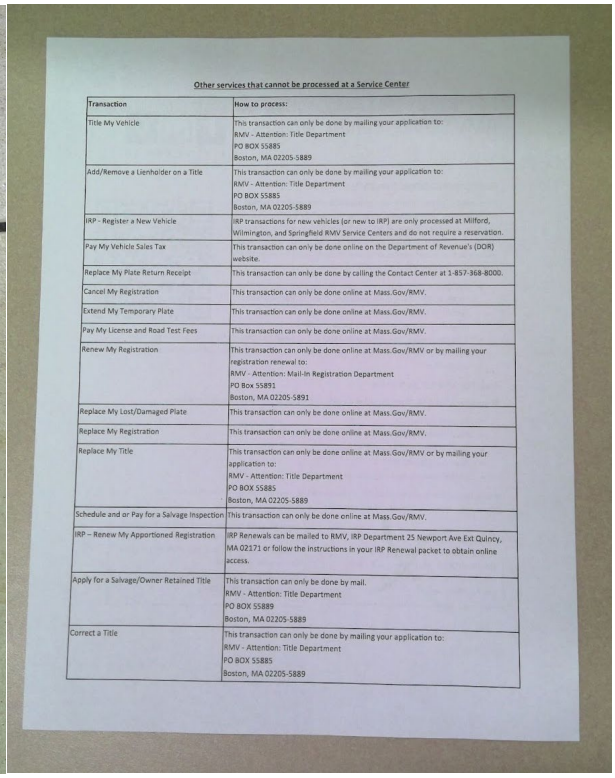
- Register My Vehicle
- Reinstate My Registration
- Transfer Vehicle to a Surviving Spouse
- Amend My Registration
- Confirm Identity for a Registration Renewal

If your transaction is not listed above, please check the chart on backside of this document for information on how to process your transaction.

Please note that **WEDNESDAY** mornings between 9:00am & 10:00am are reserved for **SENIOR CITIZENS**. Walk in services are only available during this time for those customers over 65 years of age.

If you are a AAA member, an appointment is required for all RMV transactions at all AAA locations. To book an appointment at your local AAA office for any of the service listed above, visit https://northeast.aaa.com/automotive/registry-services/massachusetts.html

LIC118-1022



Other services that cannot be processed at a Service Center

Transaction	How to process:
Title My Vehicle	This transaction can only be done by mailing your application to: RMV - Attention: Title Department PO BOX 55885 Boston, MA 02205-5889
Add/Remove a Lienholder on a Title	This transaction can only be done by mailing your application to: RMV - Attention: Title Department PO BOX 55885 Boston, MA 02205-5889
IRP – Register a New Vehicle	IRP transactions for new vehicles (or new to IRP) are only processed at Milford, Wilmington, and Springfield RMV Service Centers and do not require a reservation.
Pay My Vehicle Sales Tax	This transaction can only be done online on the Department of Revenue's (DOR) website.
Replace My Plate Return Receipt	This transaction can only be done by calling the Contact Center at 1-857-368-8000.
Cancel My Registration	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
Extend My Temporary Plate	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
Pay My License and Road Test Fees	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
Renew My Registration	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV or by mailing your registration renewal to: RMV - Attention: Mail-In Registration Department PO Box 55891 Boston, MA 02205-5891
Replace My Lost/Damaged Plate	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
Replace My Registration	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
Replace My Title	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV or by mailing your application to: RMV - Attention: Title Department PO BOX 55885 Boston, MA 02205-5889
Schedule and or Pay for a Salvage Inspection	This transaction can only be done online at Mass.Gov/RMV.
IRP – Renew My Apportioned Registration	IRP Renewals can be mailed to RMV, IRP Department 25 Newport Ave Ext Quincy, MA 02171 or follow the instructions in your IRP Renewal packet to obtain online access.
Apply for a Salvage/Owner Retained Title	This transaction can only be done by mail. RMV - Attention: Title Department PO BOX 55889 Boston, MA 02205-5889
Correct a Title	This transaction can only be done by mailing your application to: RMV - Attention: Title Department PO BOX 55885 Boston, MA 02205-5889

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