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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT:  
LIVING AND WORKING AS A TRUCKER

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO  
THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

PROGRAM IN SOCIOLOGY

BY

CASSANDRA A. LIVELY

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2010

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For my parents

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## ABSTRACT

This project examines the work and personal lives of truck drivers. Using data from fieldwork at a Midwestern trucking company, along with interviews with 38 drivers, dispatchers, company management and spouses and partners of drivers, I explore the questions: Thirty years out from deregulation, how are drivers' lives affected by the economic state of the industry? How do drivers and unions interact with public policy and company regulations that shape their on-the-job autonomy and their own and others' safety on the road? What are the dynamics of the industry around race, gender and sexuality? How does working in a high-stress, long-hours occupation affect the family and personal lives of drivers?

Using a grounded theory approach to guide interviews and analyze data, I find that as destructive competition between trucking firms has led to a race to the bottom, drivers' career paths have been shaped by firms closing and restructuring, union trucking jobs have disappeared, wages have declined and autonomy has decreased. Competing interests of drivers, trucking companies, industry groups, unions and regulators have created an environment where safety often loses out to economic concerns. Women and people of color have increasingly entered the industry and often face resistance from some of their fellow workers. At the same time the industry has been transformed by deregulation, American family life has also undergone tectonic shifts, with changing expectations for women and men. In an occupation defined by long hours, drivers

struggle to make meaningful contributions at home, and their efforts are shaped by expectations that are still gendered.

I argue that moving forward, trucking companies, industry groups, unions and drivers, strongly guided by regulators, must be concerned with reducing destructive competition. In order to attract and retain qualified drivers, companies must think about work/life balance for their employees. Unions must be more proactive in addressing the concerns of all their workers, not allowing solidarity to be disrupted by divide and conquer politics around race and gender. In an economic environment that continues to be shaped by deregulation, this research has broad implications across industry.

## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

This study focuses on the economic condition of the trucking industry over the past thirty years and examines how deregulation has affected the daily lives of the drivers in my research. My work, based on observation and interviews with drivers, spouses and partners of drivers, dispatchers and company management, seeks to understand drivers' work and personal lives in the context of the changing trucking industry. I have used a grounded theory approach in this project, allowing participants to guide my focus. I did not set out to test a specific hypothesis, and without rigid structure, I was able to follow up on issues that were important to drivers and allow them to expand or focus my work.

However, I did have several central questions regarding the lives of the drivers in my study, including: Thirty years out from deregulation, how are the drivers' lives affected by the current economic state of the industry? How do drivers and their unions interact with public policy and company regulations that shape their on-the-job autonomy and their own and others' safety on the road? How do the drivers experience industry dynamics around race, gender and sexuality? How do these dynamics shape the experiences of drivers who are not white and male? How does working in a high-stress, long-hours occupation affect the family and personal lives of drivers? Looking for the answers to these and other questions, I worked to gain an understanding of how drivers negotiate the demands presented by a working life spent behind the wheel of a truck

and how the drivers I interviewed balance those demands with those of their personal and family lives.

Chapter Two begins with an exploration of the methodology used in this project. Over the course of five years, I completed approximately 32 hours of observation at a mid-sized trucking company located in a small Midwestern city. I also conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 38 respondents, ranging from drivers (23), to dispatchers (3), to a company executive (1), to the spouses and partners of drivers (11). Doing observation prior to interviewing helped me to better understand the context of drivers' work lives and to shape my interview questions. Interviewing dispatchers, a company executive and drivers' significant others in addition to the drivers themselves helped me to better understand the perspectives of other players in the trucking industry as well as in drivers' personal lives.

In Chapter Three, I address the question: thirty years out from deregulation, how are drivers' lives affected by the current economic state of the industry? I begin by looking at how and why people become truck drivers, and how their lives have been shaped by economic change and the deregulation of the trucking industry. Having interviewed drivers with as many as fifty years of experience through drivers with as few as three years has given me the ability to see some of these changes as they've played out in individual lives. I also examine how drivers have responded to those economic changes, including union involvement. My work in this area is significantly influenced by the work of Michael Belzer, who wrote Sweatshops on Wheels in 2000. Belzer argues that historically sweatshop conditions have existed in the presence of "three conditions of

work – low wages, long hours and unsafe and unsanitary working conditions” – and that these conditions have applied to the trucking industry in the wake of deregulation (Belzer 2000:7). Belzer looked at these issues from a quantitative, industry-wide vantage point, whereas I seek to understand them qualitatively, as drivers experience them.

Several other researchers have written about the work experiences of truck drivers, including their struggles with management and the day-to-day problems inherent in the occupation (Ouellet 1993, Day 1996). Many other studies have explored the changes in the trucking industry after deregulation in the early 1980s (Robyn 1987; Belzer 2000; Belman and Monaco 2001; Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005). The works of Ouellet and Day are among the very few to address issues in trucking through qualitative methods such as interviews and fieldwork. Their work stands out from other research, which has primarily focused on quantitative analysis of the industry and its economic health, by helping us understand how individual drivers experience their work lives.

Deregulation of the industry has also been an important focus in trucking research. Prior to the Motor Carrier Act of 1980, the Interstate Commerce Commission approved the establishment of all new trucking companies and controlled truck routes, cargo and rates (Horwitz 1986). Dismantling this licensing system was intended to open the market to new carriers, but instead brought on a flurry of trucking bankruptcies. Individual truckers saw their earnings drop by 21% between 1973 and 1995, and while the average trucker earns a borderline middle-class income, he or she does so only by working an average of 65.7 hours per week (Belman and Monaco 2001; Belzer 2000).

Drivers earn lower wages for longer hours and must deal with more inexperienced drivers on the road (Belzer 2000). For drivers paid by the load and for owner-operators, who own their trucks, one of the few benefits of deregulation has been the decrease in “deadheading” – hauling back an empty truck due to the lack of an appropriate license to carry another type of freight (Day 1996).

In Chapter Four, I move beyond strictly economic changes to the industry to look at issues of time, safety and worker control. How do the drivers and unions interact with public policy and company regulations that shape their on-the-job autonomy and their own and others’ safety on the road? Over the past thirty years, drivers have seen changes in the rules governing their work hours and companies have introduced a variety of technologies that help them to better keep an eye on their employees. Each of these issues has a tremendous effect on the daily lives of drivers. This research also will be an important contribution to the growing literature on time as it relates to the workplace (Fuchs Epstein and Kalleberg 2001; Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Kelly and Moen 2007; Roberts 2008; Thompson and Bunderson 2001; Wright et. al. 2008). While some research argues that it is professional workers who are increasingly expected to work longer and longer hours (Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Moe and Shandy 2010), drivers have *always* faced time pressures, with over-the-road drivers reporting an average of 65.7 hours of work per week (Belzer 2000). In today’s 24/7 economy, it’s increasingly common for working-class families to have jobs with little flexibility and those that require “temporal diversity” – the kind of non-standard hours that truckers are used to working (Presser 2004).

In Chapter Five, I consider another area in which the industry has seen change. In addition to the economic effects wrought by deregulation, there have also been demographic changes in the trucking workforce. For example, from 1975 through 2000, women grew from 1% of drivers working for for-hire companies (as opposed to in-house, for companies like Wal-Mart), to 4.4%. During that same period, African-American drivers went from 7.2% to 12.6% of drivers, and Latino drivers from 4% to 10% (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005). The trucking industry, which has traditionally been dominated by white men but is slowly becoming more diverse, provides a useful case study of gender, race and ethnicity, class and sexual orientation at work. In this chapter, I explore these demographic changes through the eyes of the drivers and their experiences. For the drivers I interviewed and observed, race, gender, and sexual orientation have a profound affect on the social organization of the workplace and how they experience their work.

In Chapter Six I examine drivers' struggle to strike a work-life balance. How does working in a high-stress, long-hours occupation affect the family and personal lives of the drivers? My research adds to knowledge of blue-collar occupations in general, and specifically to the occupation of trucking, as it relates to these issues. I have previously discussed qualitative research that has focused on the work experiences of truckers (Ouellet 1994, Day 1996) and other works that have addressed the changes in the trucking industry after deregulation in the early 1980s (Robyn 1987; Belzer 2000; Belman and Monaco 2001). This existing research, however, does not focus on how the work of trucking affects other parts of their lives. While drivers are concerned with



maximizing their on-the-job autonomy and improving their day-to-day routines, they are also concerned with human issues facing any employee – paying their bills, interacting with their families and friends, and making time for hobbies and other interests. While existing research acknowledges the deeply gendered nature of trucking, this aspect of the work has not been fully explored, particularly in qualitative research. My work will add to previous studies in a unique way not only because I am emphasizing gender, but also because I intend to get a broader picture of the lives of drivers, not focused only in the workplace. This is important in terms of understanding drivers' lives in context, recognizing that work and life are not separate spheres but instead overlap and interplay (Jang 2009; Kelly and Moen 2007). In a country of increasingly over-worked people (Schor 1993), we have much to learn from how drivers negotiate a demanding schedule while also trying to find time for family, housework, and leisure.

For drivers with spouses and children, I also investigate the extent to which drivers are able to work together with their family members to strike a balance that includes time for childcare, household tasks, nurturing and sustaining their partnership and other familial relationships, and finding time for leisure. I also consider the lives of drivers without spouses and children – their struggle to find time for building relationships and friendships, to care for other family members, to complete household tasks and to participate in hobbies and leisure pursuits on their own is underestimated and often ignored.

Conducting interviews with spouses and partners and asking drivers questions about issues in their family and personal lives acknowledges the full lives led by drivers,

and this has been a fruitful area of inquiry. The trucking industry is a perfect case study for what happens to workers' personal and family lives in our "race to the bottom" economy (Belzer 2000). My research illuminates some of the implications of the industry's deregulation, thirty years out, by looking at the micro-level, daily experiences of drivers, including what happens when their shift is over. Some of these changes have been beneficial or neutral in their outcomes, and others have had disastrous impacts on individual drivers, companies and families.

The discussion in Chapter Six is also important in terms of exploring how gender and sexuality translates from a traditionally masculine, blue-collar workplace, into drivers' homes. Interviews with spouses and partners of drivers have provided an interesting comparison case for how gender may operate similarly or differently at home for drivers than it does in the workplace.

Chapter Seven attempts to pull together the varied strings of drivers' lives and their implications for the future of trucking, looking at the peril and promise in the direction policy and industry are moving in.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### METHODS

I completed research in two stages. The first was between 2002 and 2004 and consisted of four months of bi-weekly (approximately 32 hours total) observation in the “driver’s room” of a mid-sized trucking company located in a small Midwestern city. Throughout the text I will use the name Midwestern Trucking to refer to this company. During that time, I also completed a total of twenty-one interviews with thirteen drivers (four women, nine men), three dispatchers, the wives of three drivers, the live-in boyfriend of a fourth, and one company executive. Most of the drivers worked for Midwestern Trucking, but the four women drivers I interviewed during this period worked for other nearby non-union trucking companies. One male driver worked for a local union company. I located these additional respondents through snowball sampling.

The company where I observed employed approximately 150 drivers and had both over the road and local routes. My observations at Midwestern Trucking took place during a unionization drive, allowing me to discuss this process further with drivers during interviews. I have a relative who previously worked at Midwestern Trucking, and this eased my initial contact with the company’s management. I was allowed free access to the driver’s room, a place where drivers congregate before and after their daily deliveries. It was a busy area, and allowed me to hear conversations between drivers, between drivers and dispatchers, and between drivers and members of management.

*Table One: Selected Demographic Characteristics of Driver Interviewees*

<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Race/ Ethnicity</i>	<i>Years Experience</i>	<i>Union Member</i>	<i>Relationship Status</i>	<i>Children</i>
Amy	48	White	5	Yes	Divorced/Lives with Partner	None
Brenda	37	White	10	No	Divorced/Lives with Partner	2
Daniel	40	White	20	Yes	Married	3
Ed	66	White	40	No	Married	2
Harold	67	White	50	No	Married	6
Harry	59	White	36	Yes	Married	2
Gary	44	African American	20	Yes	Married	3
Janice	58	White	20	No	Divorced	1
Jeff	49	White	7	No	Married	None
John	41	White	14	Yes	Married	1
Juan	34	Latino	4	Yes	Married	2
Kevin	62	White	40	Yes	Married	2
Marshall	46	White	28	No	Married	2
Melinda	53	White	3	Yes	Married	5
Michael	46	White	27	Yes	Married	2
Mitchell	56	White	35	Yes	Divorced	3
Nathan	36	White	15	No	Married	2
Pamela	36	White	6	No	Divorced	2
Rochelle	45	White	17	No	Lives with Partner	1
Sam	34	White	3	No	Divorced	1
Shawn	43	White	19	No	Divorced	2
Thomas	36	White	20	Yes	Single	None
Todd	43	White	20	No	Married	2

The second stage of my research began when I attended a meeting of a union local in a large Midwestern city in May 2007. This particular meeting attracted a particularly large number of union members, as the local was holding elections, and I was able to interview nine of these drivers, plus one other found through snowball sampling. The second round of interviewing yielded two more women drivers, eight more men

drivers, and seven more spouses and partners, for a total of 38 interviews. The second round of interviews took place between June and November 2007.

Through the completion of in-depth interviews, as well as non-participant observation research, I used a grounded theory approach to understanding the lives of truckers. I began by asking about broad categories relating to drivers' work and personal lives, and continued based on the answers that I was given. As part of this method, I was careful to use "how" and not "why" questions, so as not to put participants on the defensive and make it more likely that I would elicit a specific story, rather than a general explanation. In order to gain a deeper understanding of participants work and personal lives, whenever possible I encouraged them to walk me through a particular day from the past week, rather than allowing them to gloss over their daily routines with generalities. Using grounded theory allowed me to pursue additional questions as they arose from participant observation and interviews and was well suited to my research, given that it is generally applied to qualitative research not appropriate for methods of hypothesis testing (Charmaz 2001).

For example, one of my original expectations for this research regarded drivers' participation in household labor. I was interested in the home lives of drivers, and I expected to find that men drivers were minimally involved in household cleaning and raising their children. But as I conducted interviews with both drivers and spouses, I found that this expectation was, if not completely incorrect, in need of serious revision. Many of the men were involved to a greater extent than I had expected with the work of keeping their homes clean and raising their children – even more so if their wives were

employed in a traditionally “pink-collar” job. Many of these men tended to describe their relationships to the “second shift” of housework and childcare as a partnership. In contrast, men whose wives stayed home or those who worked in similar blue-collar jobs did not participate as much as the other men, and many were unapologetic that their level of household participation was low. If I had stuck closely to my initial suspicions and analyzed without using grounded theory, I may have never found the nuances between those men who do a significant portion of household work, and those who do not. Sticking narrowly to a pre-determined hypothesis is often limiting in this type of qualitative research – in this case, I might not have asked nearly as many questions about this part of their lives.

Based on my experiences with listening to my father talk about the frustrations of driving, I also had expected to find that drivers were universally unhappy with their work lives for a number of reasons (the pay, the benefits, the state and federal regulations). Instead, I have at least as many pages of interviews in which drivers describe the positive and satisfying aspects of their work. From my interview data, it is clear that many drivers feel a sense of pride in their competence in operating such large machinery. Many of the drivers also spoke about how they had always been fascinated by the trucks themselves. Thomas, whose father and grandfather were also truckers, explained:

Oh, when I was a kid, I thought it was neat, the trucks and whatnot. Going out on the road with the family in the car or whatever on a trip – basically what I did was sit back and identify each truck – we’d come up behind a truck to pass it, and I could tell what kind of truck it was by looking at the side of it. I was fascinated by the trucks themselves.... I’ve driven a lot of different trucks... the best truck is one that I once owned. A ’91 Kenworth,

W900L. That was a sweet truck. I loved that truck. You want power, to be able to pull a steep grade. And for those that do run over the road, and get out west they can get out and stretch their legs, you'd want a big motor where you can run with the big dogs, so to speak.

When drivers have equipment that is comfortable, powerful and commands respect on the road, they seem to be most positive about their trucking experiences.

Drivers also talked about appreciating the experiences they have had in over the road driving (when they are away from home for several days to several weeks at a time) – getting to see vast stretches of the country in a way they never would have without trucking. After explaining that over the road driving is sometimes as tedious as local driving, Sam explained all of the things he was able to do and see while doing over the road driving.

Couple weeks before I quit RB, I uh, took a load up by Albany, New York. And on my way there, I just happened to stop off in Cooperstown, the Baseball Hall of Fame. Spent a lot of money at Cooperstown, I'm a big baseball fan! That was neat. Over the road, the coolest things I did, Cooperstown that was way cool. When I was in New Jersey, Camden, New Jersey, just across the river from Philadelphia is the USS New Jersey, a WWII battleship. And they have docks down there that you can go to.

Without romanticizing over the road driving (which many drivers find problematic for many reasons), Sam went on at length about all the things he had been able to see while he was over the road. Most drivers expressed some variant of this when asked “what do you like about trucking?”, and frequently answers to this question were at least as long as the answers to “what do you least enjoy about trucking?” From my experience of listening to my father talk about trucking, I can't remember ever hearing much about the

positive aspects. This is probably what led to my original assumption that most of the drivers would be pretty unhappy with their work. As Charmaz points out, the categories that arise from grounded theory analysis do not necessarily “inhere in the data” – they are a part of the process of interaction between the researcher and participant (2001). My openness to listening to what came out of the interviews led me to explore a number of the positive aspects of trucking in more depth, and the drivers, based on open-ended questions, steered me in a more fruitful direction than the one I started out with.

However, I wonder if I wouldn't have heard even more from drivers about the occasional joys of being over the road if they hadn't known I was a driver's daughter. Lawrence Ouellet, who served as a member of the committee for this research, pointed out that he often felt he couldn't discuss his enjoyment of being over the road with his family, feeling that they both didn't understand and might take it as an insult that he enjoyed an aspect of his work that kept him away from home for long stretches.

The data I have about the work lives of truckers would have been impossible to collect through structured surveys, and if I had not used grounded theory analysis in my work, the survey questions I would have asked would not have addressed many of the issues of importance to the drivers. The rapport that often develops in a conversation allows people to remember things they thought they had forgotten, and articulate ideas they have never examined aloud, or with another person. I believe they are particularly of value to people who are often silenced due to gender, racial, or class inequality, and I think social science is at its most powerful when people can hear the voices of others and when researchers allow their research to be shaped by the insights of their participants.



My sampling approach was theoretical, meaning that I over-sampled from salient categories of drivers – women in particular – in order to be able to better answer research questions about differing experiences of men and women in the industry. With theoretical sampling, the goal is not a probability sample. If that were the case, I would likely have only interviewed one or two women at most. Instead, the goal is to gain a better understanding of all parts of a particular topic or phenomenon – even those aspects that appear less frequently (Glaser & Strauss 1967). In addition to over-sampling women, I also paid special attention to recruiting drivers from minority ethnic and racial groups. I was less successful here, interviewing only one African-American male driver and one Latino male driver out of thirty-eight interviews conducted. At Midwestern, there was only one African-American driver, and he was unwilling to be interviewed. The rest of the drivers were Caucasian. At the union meeting where I found most of the interviewees for the second half of my research, only two of the drivers of color I approached were willing to be interviewed. Gary, the only African-American driver I interviewed, expressed that due to a certain amount of racism he had experienced at his company, he preferred to be pretty low key within his company and in terms of his interactions with management. He explained:

Just like managers, they talk to each other, “Oh, you gotta watch that guy, because he’ll do that,” or, “you gotta watch that guy, because he’ll say that or he’ll work things this way.” So you don’t want to start that, so you just leave it alone. At least I do. And that way when this guy leaves, and this [other] guy steps in, maybe I’ll have a better chance of just starting all over from scratch, without someone over here having input into, you know, “Watch Gary.”

Given that many of the Caucasian drivers I interviewed expressed concern that their companies might find out about their participation in my research, or be able to attribute quotes to them, I speculate that this fear might be even sharper for drivers of color. It's notable that of all my interviewees, Gary was the driver most concerned with the possibility that he could be identified, even calling me after the interview to verify my procedures for keeping identities confidential.

Interviews in both stages of the research were semi-structured, and lasted between one and two hours. I began by asking drivers about their experiences working in the trucking industry and eventually moved to asking about how their career has affected their home lives, and how they negotiate the work/family balance. Though basic categories such as daily work routines, interactions with co-workers and management, safety, autonomy, pay and benefits, work/life balance and family/household work were covered in each interview, the details were unique to each participant as I followed up on themes they raised. Some of the drivers had over 40 years of experience in trucking, and those drivers were able to paint a fascinating longitudinal picture of driving over that time period. Others were newer to trucking, some with five or fewer years of experience, and so those drivers had their own unique perspective on the industry. Some drivers talked about their family and personal lives fluently and with ease, while others seemed uncomfortable with this topic and struggled to articulate their thoughts around these more personal issues.

The kind of in-depth, conversational interviewing that I used has several benefits. Individual interviews, with opportunities for elaboration and clarification, allowed me to

elicit richly detailed responses unattainable with survey research methods (Weiss 1995).

At the same time, since in-depth interviewing is extremely time-intensive, it was not possible to interview a large, generalizable sample of drivers. I was able, however, to identify many distinct patterns and processes that begin to paint a broader picture of the lives of truck drivers.

My father was a truck driver, so having grown up in a “trucking” household, I believe I was able to get at some of the issues most important to the drivers, both in interview questions and in terms of my insight into the events I observed. Midwestern is also a nearly all-white company, so my Caucasian background allowed me to blend in. At the same time, I do not personally have any trucking experience, and came to Midwestern Trucking as a woman researcher in a mostly-male environment.

As a woman researcher in an environment dominated by men, I struggled with the drivers’ gender-based boundary heightening, particularly during my observations. Drivers constantly reminded themselves - and me - that when I visited the driver’s room, there was a “lady in the room.” This meant that they would carry on as usual, but after a curse word or lewd joke, my presence would need to be acknowledged, and a pseudo-apology made. “Oops, I forgot there was a lady in the room,” became the explanation of choice whenever a “slip” of this nature was made. This allowed the men a way to demonstrate that their cultural rules are the primary ones in play in the driver’s room. In a sense I was a “token” (Kanter 1977) and my presence, as well as the presence of the one female driver at Midwestern Trucking, in the driver’s room was an interruption – and possibly a challenge – to the masculine norms of trucking.

My status as a twenty-something woman allowed my presence as a researcher to appear non-threatening to the drivers and to the company's management during my period of observation. Drivers tended to characterize my reasons for observing the driver's room in two ways. Some drivers viewed me as a pseudo-daughter, talking with me about their college-aged sons and daughters, or referring to my research as "my little report." Others spoke about me in ways that objectified me as a "trucker groupie," probably at Midwestern Trucking in search of a date, rather than recognizing my role as a researcher.

Because some drivers saw me as a pseudo-daughter, they were able to express to their views at length, even in a climate of unionization, where opinions are often controversial or sensitive. After all, I was only there to do a "little report" about trucking. The following fieldnote excerpt from a conversation with Mark, a talkative driver in his early-forties, exemplified this characterization of my presence at Midwestern:

Well, I'll tell you one thing. Everything you ever use or buy was once on a truck. These paper clips [he held up a couple paper clips in his hand], that coat you're wearing. Without trucking, America stops. [Mark turned to his paperwork for a couple minutes and then went to leave.] Well, I'll see you later. I hope I contributed something to your little report.

When we met, Mark had asked if I was the person "studying" the drivers. While being "studied" could potentially be threatening, my gender, youth and small stature allowed Mark to characterize my research as a harmless schoolgirl's "little report" – something not worth worrying about. So when the drivers referred to my research as a little report, it wasn't meant to be condescending or malicious; it simply framed my intrusion into the driver's room as non-threatening. Other drivers preferred to see my research as the

efforts of a female trucker groupie – that I would be more concerned with meeting and dating the manly men of trucking than with doing legitimate research. Younger drivers – those too young to be my father – were more likely to treat me in this manner.

This type of assessment was not limited to the drivers, and so perhaps may be a feature of the atmosphere at Midwestern Trucking. The owner, Billy, characterized my research into the second category as well. During my first visit to Midwestern, Billy was not interested in asking about my research. Instead, he questioned me about my personal life, asking if I “had a boyfriend”, and how serious my relationship was. He didn’t ask me about my research pursuits, but rather my marriage prospects. There seemed to be a default assumption here that as a young woman, I was not likely to be engaged in “real” academic work (as would a man in the same situation). The culture of this particular company seemed to encourage a very traditional view of the role of women, perhaps exacerbated by the fact that there was only one woman employed as a driver.

Neither the “pseudo-daughter” nor “trucker groupie” characterization is threatening to the drivers or to the management. The drivers were able to continue expressing themselves as they had before, without worrying about a researcher “spying” on them, and management didn’t have to worry about me making any disparaging observations about the company or stirring up the drivers during a unionization drive. I believe this worked to my advantage in terms of getting honest responses and reactions from the drivers.

The atmosphere during interviews was different. At my suggestion, wives or partners were frequently present and participating. In these situations, nearly every driver

seemed to relate to me as a “pseudo-daughter.” I did tell all interview subjects that my father is a truck driver, and I believe this helped them to be at ease around me. It also probably encouraged the “pseudo-daughter” view of me, but I also think this helped, in terms of making me non-threatening and easy to talk to. It also helped me in terms of analysis, and it was interesting to compare and contrast the drivers’ perspectives to views and experiences I have heard about from my father. I found myself relating to many of the situations described by drivers, ranging from the need of families to rearrange their schedules to ensure the driver gets enough sleep, to the pain and sense of missing out that drivers felt when they were away from their families for long periods of time.

At the same time, given that I have a family member who previously worked in the repair shop at Midwestern, some drivers who knew this family member might have been reluctant to be interviewed or to share their honest views with me. As I mentioned earlier, it may have made drivers reluctant to be completely honest with me about some issues they felt might have been touchy for me, due to my father working as a driver. Also, because of my experiences with my father, I came into this research with my own views - views that have been shaped by my experiences with him. I think the primary way this may have affected my research is through a kind of over-confidence – the potential to assume I understood something, based on my previous experiences, when really the situation I was encountering was something different. I tried to keep this possibility in the forefront of my mind at all times, and to continue to ask questions even when I thought I knew the answers. At times, this led to drivers looking at me funny –

thinking my questions were a little silly coming from someone who should know. By the same token, I am sure there were times when I didn't go as deep as I should have.

In some cases, it was more difficult to get drivers to elaborate on their daily lives because they thought that I already knew how things worked, but I think this is where my gender became helpful, rather than a hindrance. While some drivers assumed I had more information than the average person, my feeling is others assumed that I needed to have things explained in detail. In my interview with Sam, for example, he was explaining how to distribute the trailer's weight in order to stay in line with the Department of Transportation's regulations. "Has anyone ever explained the tandems to you?" he asked. I responded that "Yes, but it's still somewhat confusing," so that he would continue. As it turned out, he drew a detailed picture for me, and the way I had understood the process before was wrong! So I learned to try to stay away from assuming that I know what people are talking about – if they were willing to explain it to me, I wanted them to.

Another challenge for me, particularly during the interview process, was attempting to encourage and create a safe space for working-class men to express their emotions to a young female researcher whom they did not know. For my participants, a seeming desire to adhere to the tenets of hegemonic masculinity sometimes colored entire interviews. Sam, a driver in his mid-thirties with three years of trucking experience was telling me about how he named his cat, George:

No, not really, I just couldn't think of any other cool names. Actually George, his name was Sunshine, and ok, well, I'm a pretty heterosexual male, and having a cat named Sunshine just wasn't fitting.

In a situation that has nothing to do with sexuality, this driver found a way to highlight his heterosexual orientation.

Perhaps because of a desire to highlight a hegemonic masculine identity, expressing emotion during interviews was quite difficult for my interviewees. Many of the participants seemed reluctant or unable to do this. Others would quite briefly become visibly emotional – expressing what they were feeling more by the looks in their eyes or their body language – but quickly compose themselves and attempt to end the conversation about the emotional topic. This happened most frequently when men drivers were discussing their feeling that they may have missed out on important moments in the lives of their children due to their demanding work schedules.

I did a lot of thinking about how to get around this problem. In their article “Interviewing Men,” Michael Schwalbe and Michelle Wolkomir suggest a number of ways to get around this problem. They recommend that the interviewer “emphasize risk, the taking of which is consistent with signifying a masculine self” (2003:64). They argue that framing questions around risk-taking behavior provides a safe way for men to talk about fear, sadness or other “unmanly” emotions that they might otherwise be unwilling or unable to talk about. While I think Woldomir & Schwalbe’s technique may be an efficient way to get men to open up, I can’t help but feel that it is a little disingenuous (crossing farther over into manipulation than I am comfortable with) and so I have been reluctant to use it.

More effective, I have found, is their suggestion to use the experiences of other men to allow them freer expression (2003). For the men I interview, it becomes easier to



talk about things if they know that other men (truckers like themselves) have had similar feelings about the topic at hand. For example, in this interview excerpt I asked Shawn, a driver in his early forties who had been divorced for several years, “How did the long hours and other aspects of trucking affect your marriage?” Shawn, who drove regionally (short-hop) but worked fifteen-hour days, answered, “It just cut our nights way short. I had to try to get to bed early. I was just lucky not to have to go over the road.” Although I proceeded to try, it was difficult to get him to say any more. And Shawn was a driver with whom I had a particular rapport – he is close friends with my relative who had worked at Midwestern. With questions phrased like those above, I still had little luck getting drivers to open up about emotional issues.

In contrast, when I used the suggestion to frame questions using the experiences of other men and asked the question “Lots of the drivers I’ve interviewed have told me how emotionally and physically difficult it is to do over the road driving, and how hard it is on relationships. What has your experience been like?” – I got a much better response. For example, Jeff, who is in his forties and had been married for seven years, said:

Over the road is good for some people. But it gets awfully lonely. Especially when you come into town, and you see you friends having a good time. I remember coming into town, pick up the wife, and go over to some friends house. We’d be drinking, carrying on, having a good time, and then it would be like, “well, I have to leave Sunday morning, so I have to get home and go to bed.” I really didn’t like that.... I think truck driving really destroys relationships. Not unless the kids are grown and the wife likes going with, does the traveling. But being a driver, I always got lonely out on the road, really lonely. The stress level on the road is really intense sometimes. I never did tolerate it too well.

While this question could be considered leading, the answer it elicited is much richer in detail and it seemed to encourage this driver to openly discuss the emotional strain of over the road driving. This could be due simply to a personality difference – some men are certainly more emotionally expressive than others – but the phrasing of the question makes talking about potentially “un-masculine” feelings less threatening.

One of the things that was most exciting for me in this research was the opportunity it provided drivers, dispatchers and their families to give voice to their experiences, in their own words. They were able to confront stereotypes about drivers, and explain the choices that they made in a way that allows them authority over their own stories. Truckers are a particularly humble group of people. During the times that I have approached truckers for interviews, their first response tends to be “why would you want to interview truck drivers?” It was difficult to get past this initial feeling they had of wondering why someone wants to interview them, but once the interviews start, the drivers often seemed to realize how interesting and important their jobs are, and thought about how impressive it is to a lot of people that they are able to control eighty-thousand pound trucks.

As many others have pointed out (Rubin 1976; Seidman 1998; Weiss 1994), interviewing is not only useful to the researcher, but the participant as well. Many research participants are grateful to have someone actively listen to their stories and care about what they have to say. After one interview, long-time trucker Harold told me, “wow...I’ve never had the opportunity to sit down and think about – talk about these experiences.” This process may be especially enjoyable for working-class people,

America's "silent majority" (Rubin 1976). These are people with less power to make their voices heard and their experiences understood. In many working-class families – especially truck-driving families – the hours may be so long and tiring that the drivers don't have the time or desire to talk about their work lives with even their families (who are often equally busy), but many have remarked to me that it is enjoyable for them to have set aside an hour or two to talk with me about it. It has also been enjoyable for me to think about and reflect on their insights, and to write my dissertation with their help.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### BEING A TRUCKER IN A CHANGING INDUSTRY

Becoming a truck driver was an attractive job option for many of the drivers I interviewed because it is an occupation available to workers without high levels of education. Companies often provide on-the-job training, or friends and relatives sometimes train newcomers, so that barriers to entry are comparatively low (Ouellet 1993). Prospective drivers also see trucking as an occupation that offers other benefits – adventure, independence, and the thrill of being able to competently operate an 80,000-pound vehicle. It’s also hard work – traffic, weather, negotiating relationships with dispatchers and dock workers, increasing worker surveillance (see Chapter Four), and declining pay all make life more difficult for drivers. The trucking industry has been buffeted by many economic changes since deregulation in the 1980’s – changes that continue today as the industry consolidates. Most of these changes have not been favorable for individual workers. In this chapter I examine the state of today’s trucking industry and how it has been affected by larger economic issues such as deindustrialization, globalization and deregulation. After presenting an overview of economic changes in the trucking industry over the past 30 years, I look at how workers get into the trucking industry, and current wage conditions for drivers. I also look at unions – how drivers benefit from membership, how they take on leadership roles, and how they work to organize their fellow workers.

### Deindustrialization, Globalization and Deregulation

In this section, I explore the development of global economies and the ramifications of these changes for workers broadly, and then specifically for truckers. Trucking is a valuable case study in that while trucking jobs cannot be outsourced to workers in other countries, the structure of the industry has been shaped by the demands of the global economy – including the development of multinational corporations that demand rock-bottom pricing from suppliers and distributors. Marxist theory speaks to this phenomenon and has much to say that is relevant to the development of and changes to the global economy over the past thirty years.

Marx used comparative historical methods to develop his theory of “epochs” – how human societies have moved from communal hunting and gathering, to tribal arrangements, to feudalism and finally to Capitalism. He saw these shifts in the way production was organized as a natural progression that would eventually lead to Communism, after the fall of Capitalism. Marx saw the rise of social inequality as it had evolved throughout the previous epochs, and looked at how it was evolving under Capitalism, with the formation of the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production) and the proletariat (the workers). While Marx would have considered even management and highly skilled white-collar workers with plenty of autonomy as being part of the proletariat (given that they do not own the means of production), in many ways this categorization over-simplifies developments in the modern economy (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1977).

For Marx, ideas about class underlie much of the condition of modernity. Pre-modern societies typically lacked the level of social inequality that developed during the time Marx was writing. One of the most distinctive characteristics of modernity for Marx was this gap between the rich and poor. The development of private ownership of vast factories and other modes of production were central to the creation of, for Marx, the two classes of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which are destined to be in constant conflict. The bourgeoisie aim to make as much money as possible, which they must do by exploiting the labor power of the proletariat. In response, the proletariat strives to avoid exploitation by the capitalist classes and seek self-determination and a more equal distribution of resources.

One of the most important outcomes of globalization has been the movement of production of many goods from countries like the United States that have some forms of worker protection, such as minimum wages, safety laws and environmental regulations, to developing nations with very few laws regulating workplace conditions. U.S. corporations like the Gap and Nike have moved all of their production work to countries where labor costs are much cheaper than in the United States, and environmental regulations more lax. This leaves U.S. workers for these corporations with either relatively highly paid positions that require an extensive educational background (e.g., positions in marketing departments, where these companies work to “build their brand”), or low-skilled sales jobs in their stores that pay wages at or close to the minimum. This pattern is typical of a post-industrial economy, where increasingly there are only very good jobs and very bad jobs – with little in between (Newman 1988).

When corporations move their production overseas, they do not build their own factories or hire their own workforces. If they handled their own operations overseas, there is a possibility that they might have to answer to charges of unfair treatment or bad working conditions. However, if these corporations merely hire subcontractors to produce their shoes, apparel and other goods, then they can claim innocence when charges of bad practices arise. In No Logo, Naomi Klein argues that the actual production process is declining in significance. What becomes truly important is brand image, and “building the brand” (2002). These brand-building jobs remain in the United States, where marketers and researchers devote their time to figuring out what kind of advertising and image will create brand loyalty. Companies often scout trends in urban, African-American neighborhoods, exploiting trends in “cool” to sell their brands (Klein 2002). Essentially, these companies are no longer selling products – they are selling an image and a way of life. That brand image becomes much more important for a company like The Gap than the actual apparel that they produce.

Nike provides a perfect example of the kind of mentality that this separation of brand from product creates. Eight thousand workers, primarily in the United States, develop their “brand image” while production falls to 75,000 subcontracted workers, primarily in Indonesia, who are paid as little as fifteen cents per hour (Korten 2001). Nike’s general manager in Indonesia sums up the indifference expressed by executives about the conditions of production when he admits that he has no idea about the details of recent labor problems in Indonesian plants. He explains, “I don’t know that I need to know. It’s not within our scope to investigate” (Korten 2001:115).

Marx believed the process of a race to the bottom in terms of wages and labor costs is characteristic of “late Capitalism.” That is, huge corporations become so obsessed with competition, with lowering wages and labor costs as much as possible, that they become almost paranoid in their search for the cheapest labor and the highest profits. Truckers and trucking companies face this situation as large corporations press for lower and lower costs, including the costs required to bring product to their stores (Belzer 2000).

The past thirty years have not only seen major shifts in the way goods and services are produced and delivered in countries around the world, but also the elimination of industrial jobs that had traditionally been stable, well-paid positions for U.S. workers. As early as the 1970s, the U.S. started to see a redistribution of industrial production to countries in Western Europe and Japan. This first such shift in industrial production happened in the steel industry (Bensman and Lynch 1988), and was the beginning of a process of deindustrialization that fundamentally changed the way our domestic economy was organized. The United States lost many manufacturing jobs (especially in industries like steel, automobiles and aircraft) while adding more low-paying, service sector jobs. Many women saw the earnings potential of their husbands begin to decline, and went to work at some of the new service jobs (Johnson 2002). Another important outcome of these changes was the rise of a “transnational corporate class” of international capitalists who sought to improve conditions for their conglomerates and whose influence over politics and government policies has grown exponentially in the past thirty years (Sklair 1995).



These early changes gave way to an even more broad-scale reorganization of the domestic economy. The implementation of new workplace technologies further eliminated jobs and now the loss of jobs increasingly spread to mid-level managers (Newman 1988). This “downsizing” was devastating to many workers, but quite profitable for large corporations. Jim Owens, an executive for Caterpillar, Inc. (headquartered in my hometown of Peoria, Illinois, where many jobs have been lost), was quite pleased with the consequences of these technological changes, explaining “we’ve almost doubled our production since the mid-1980’s” (Schaeffer 2003), a time period during which Caterpillar’s workforce declined from 90,000 to only 54,000 (Schaeffer 2003). This was not a great period of time for the workers who had lost their jobs.

Another early symptom of economic globalization in the United States was the deregulation of American industries, including telecommunications, banking, air travel, intercity busing and trucking. Regulation of these industries was originally implemented to safeguard the public interest. Previously, logic held that since Capitalists naturally act to maximize their own profit (often without regard to other factors), they could not adequately see to the best interests of their industry (Horwitz 1988; Belzer 2000). Industry oversight was something that government would be better suited for.

As industrial production began to move overseas, however, American industry responded. Companies argued that with stringent government regulation, competition suffered and they were not able to deliver the best product to their consumers. If government regulators would only back off, they complained, the forces of the market would improve production and distribution, and ultimately lead to better service and

more consumer satisfaction (Horwitz 1988; Belzer 2000). In short, everyone would win! For proponents of deregulation, market forces would be a better determinant of prices and other rules than would the government. Unfortunately, that has not been the case for industries that were deregulated.

During the 1980s, two major industries that experienced deregulation were telecommunications (primarily the “Bell” system) and trucking (previously under the oversight of the Interstate Commerce Commission). Telecommunications is an instructive example of the process of deregulation in the United States. The deregulation of telephone communication and radio and television broadcasting represented a shift away from concern with stability and social equity to an emphasis on market controls and economic efficiency (Horwitz 1988). In recent controversies over relaxation of FCC rules regarding broadcasting, we saw public outcry as people increasingly realize that their primary sources of information are coming from a concentrated group of media corporations. This process extends even to developing countries, where the “hegemon” country can exert its cultural influence on economically struggling areas, through advertising and broadcasting (Sklair 1995). For Marx, this arrangement in the “superstructure” (cultural aspects) of society is based on the way the “base” (relations of production) is organized – into a group of haves and a group of have-nots.

The bike messenger industry provides another comparative case study regarding regulation – this one of an industry that has never been regulated, and which bears a number of striking similarities to the trucking industry. Bike messengers experience the same pressures to “hustle” – earning more money for more deliveries made – they are

subject to a dispatching system leading to an emergent process of assigning runs, and they have a complicated “role constellation” which can lead to role conflicts (for bike messengers, this includes geographic relationships, the risk inherent in maneuvering a bicycle through heavy urban traffic related to their potential to earn more money, relationships with their company and the company’s clients and relationships with police – strikingly similar to the roles played by truckers) (Stewart 2004).

With employees operating mostly “backstage”, Stewart argues, “messengers’ freedom from having to perform in scripted ways could be a de-facto trade-off that maintains the stability of the industry’s non-standard employment structures” (164; 2004). This coincides with one of the things truckers like most about their jobs – feeling like the “last of the cowboys”, away from direct supervision of management. In trucking, this feeling is a benefit that is in decline with increasing use of GPS and other forms of technological monitoring of employees (see chapter 4).

Many of the problems faced by messengers are out of their control (weather, uncooperative building personnel, elevator problems, etc.). The bike messenger industry is made up mostly of owner-operators, responsible for their own equipment. There is a complete lack of salary protections and a price war in which the never-ending race to lower rates and acquire clients is harmful not only employees but to companies and the industry as a whole (Stewart 2004). This is an instructive example of what trucking (and, in many ways, our entire economy) is moving towards. Because bike messengering has no history of regulation and its employees are non-standard and flexible, weak ties exist between employers and employees. These types of arrangements are associated with

little to no worker protection and benefits, and are becoming increasingly common (Kalleberg 2000). This is the picture of what a purely deregulated industry looks like.

The trucking industry, while similar to bike messengering in a number of ways, is also different because of its history of regulation. Like communications, banking and air travel, it represents a shift away from stability and towards the volatility of market forces (to the detriment of workers and the benefit of the capitalist classes). Deregulation of the industry has had a profound effect on the work lives of truckers, who have seen sharp declines in real wages and in job security. The Motor Carrier Regulatory and Reform Act of 1980 (more commonly referred to as the Motor Carrier Act, or MCA) fundamentally changed the trucking industry. Prior to this federal legislation, the trucking industry was regulated by the Interstate Commerce Commission. The ICC set routes and rates, and controlled the entry of new firms into the marketplace. After the industry was deregulated, the number of trucking firms increased as new carriers entered the market. In theory, the entry of these new firms would increase competition, but as Belzer argues in Sweatshops on Wheels, what ensued has been a race to the bottom in the truest sense (2000). Firms undercut each other to the point that they were unable to remain in business. The trucking industry has followed a pattern similar to that of the airlines. After deregulation, there was an initial period where competition did, in fact, increase, and new firms were able to set up shop. However, competitive forces became destructive, leading companies to sharp rate cuts that led to wages hovering at subsistence levels (Belzer 2000). Without effective government regulation, these unsustainable changes led to industry consolidation, and the number of trucking firms has since

decreased sharply (Belzer 2000). The unionized segments of both trucking and air travel industries, unable to compete with some of the most aggressive rate cuts, have been hit particularly hard.

Winners of the deregulation lottery have primarily been high volume shippers and large, non-union, truckload (TL) carriers such as JB Hunt and Werner. Losers have been small union firms, particularly those not located in large urban areas where there are historic bases of support for unions. A few large union firms have survived and done well, led by the primarily less-than-truckload (LTL) carriers Yellow and Roadway, which recently merged, creating YRC. The picture is blurrier when it comes to drivers who are owner operators, or small operations with only two or three trucks. With deregulation, these drivers and businesses became harder to “locate, supervise, train and monitor”, creating safety issues in an environment where competitive pressures often lead drivers to work longer and longer hours (Belzer 2000). Kevin, who has 40 years of driving experience, also sees another winner:

Huge corporations, the giant shippers, the GEs, the General Motors, Ford, Toyota, people like this. Because number one, when they ship, they ship thousands of shipments a day, with all these different companies, but they don't pay like the ma and pop places. They might hold your money for ninety days, and only big companies like Yellow, Roadway, they're letting them do that, but yet, I deliver to these little mom and pop factories and little storefronts, and [his employer] gives them no mercy with the freight bills. If they don't have established credit with them, and pay on time, they cut them off, and you pay on delivery. They don't have the volume, and they're not gonna let these little companies hold their money for ninety days like they do these huge conglomerates. It's an advantage that the little guy just can't get from these big freight companies.

Deregulation was a recurring topic in my interviews with drivers, and Ed, the retired driver who is now teaching, gave a particularly cogent description of what has happened in the industry over the past thirty years, from the perspective of a driver.

Deregulation came in, [and] you could charge anything you wanted and you could run anywhere you wanted to. Anyone that bought a truck was classified a trucking company. And that was – figuratively speaking, the downfall of the trucking industry, per se. Because a lot of union carriers went out of business, a lot of non-union carriers came in business, it's just the way life was. They had certain routes they could run before, and you couldn't deviate from those routes. If you wanted to go to a different state or anything like that, you had to file in front of the ICC to get rights to run in there, or you had to buy a trucking company that would run in that state. Now, figuratively speaking, you can run anywhere you want to.

When I asked Ed how deregulation had affected him personally, he related a story about a company where he had been working for twenty years.

Affected me personally - in 1985 I lost a job because of deregulation. [Company name] was owned by one man, it was a family business. I think in '82 when deregulation came in there, he seen the handwriting on the wall, what was gonna happen, and he sold it. When he sold it to [large company], out of Ohio, they sort of, what do you want to say - took the money and run, figuratively speaking. And they took it for tax purposes probably, whatever they could get out of it and everything and then basically in 1985 it just finally closed up. But we used to - we had 55 men and in '85 we only had 5 men left.

The experience of firms quickly changing ownership and then closing was a common one, particularly during the 1980s. Many of the drivers I interviewed found themselves bouncing from employer to employer, trying to find a stable position. Jobs were plentiful, as there were many new firms, but because times were so tumultuous and undercutting was so common, it was difficult for both new and old businesses to establish

a toehold. Michael, a driver who now works for a large unionized trucking firm, described his experience, and how as the industry started to consolidate again, he ended up at his current employer:

Yeah, deregulation, the effects of deregulation were still going on. So, I seen a layoff comin', so a friend of mine told me to go to this company called [company name]. So I took that job. I worked there for three years. Good outfit. Good money. Uh, at that time, they got shaky. Everything started – every private carrier that I worked for. All the personal carriers that were like, somebody's dad owned, they uh, they all went out of business. So I worked there, and after they started to lay people off, I saw it comin'. But I left there, and I went to [company name]. It was an old outfit. You'll still see their trailers sittin' in lots. It was a good company, and I worked there for about two years until they just tanked. We came into work one day and they were gone. So the next day, I started at [his current employer]. The next day. All the supervisors were at [the folded company's] parking lot, like, "Come see us, come see us!" Because they were so short-handed on drivers.

This driver worked for four different companies in the space of ten years, moving on each time due to either layoffs or company closings. My father had a similar experience in the 1980's, working for five different trucking companies during that decade, changing positions for the same reasons.

Michael, the union driver who spoke above about bouncing from company to company, also explicitly linked the undercutting that has flourished with deregulation to safety concerns. He said:

But personally I think that competition is a sacrifice of the safety issue. "We don't care about that, we're gonna beat the other guy to it, go!" And they threaten the employee, "If you don't go..." You've got guys that say, hey, "I'm not gonna drive that truck, it's got bald tires on the front." And then you go get a competitor to take it. You know, like, "Get out there, or you're fired." It's a race to the bottom. Like that.

Michael makes the argument that deregulation leads to “destructive competition.” That given the increased competition that deregulation (at least at some points) has encouraged, companies and drivers have felt pressure to drive unsafe equipment or cut corners in order to keep rates low and competitive (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005; Belzer 2000).

Mitchell, a driver with over 30 years of experience, drew a similar link, talking specifically about his experiences in the tumultuous 1980’s.

Stressful, yeah. No sleep. Work, work, work. Going down the highway sometimes, with one eye or something like that. When you see elephants and stuff like that, people do see that! I’m serious. I mean, I’ve seen some things! I woke up one time, I was goin’ out to Ohio, and I was on the Indiana turnpike, and I woke up just sparkin’ - thank God I hit the guard rail, the guard rail kept me on the highway. And that woke me up right away. And you know, I pulled over in one of the rest areas on the toll road like, “Wow. What am I doin’?” But, you know, you had to do it. You had to do it. Because if you didn’t do it, somebody else back then would do it, in the middle ’80s, early ’80s, when everything got screwed up.

Drivers felt the insecurity and pressure that these economic changes created, and everyone appeared less safe for it.

Given all these negatives, deregulation did have an interesting positive effect on the wage gap that had previously always been present between black and white drivers. Researchers found that post-deregulation, the initial wave of increased competition led to employers being unable to maintain premiums traditionally paid to white drivers. While overall driver earnings have decreased (as I will discuss in the next section), due to the greater percentage of drivers who are white, earnings for African-American drivers



remained steady, at least during the ten years immediately following deregulation.

(Peoples and Saunders 1993).

### Getting into Trucking

Even with its history of economic upheaval, new drivers are always entering the industry. The most common path into trucking is to have a family member or friend working as a driver. Out of the twenty-three drivers I interviewed, sixteen had this kind of connection. In seven cases, the driver was their father. In one case, both the respondent's father *and* mother worked as truckers. In other cases, the connection ranged from grandfathers to romantic partners to close friends who alerted them to opportunities at their company. For women drivers, the most common entry point was having a husband or romantic partner who is a driver – this was the case for three of the six women I interviewed. On this measure, my sample converges with Ouellet's 1993 findings in his study of small, non-union trucking companies (Ouellet 1993).

In the cases where trucking was a multi-generational family tradition, drivers often spoke about becoming a driver as if it was inevitable. Here, Thomas described how he became a driver.

Just basically fell into it. My dad drove a truck. His dad drove a truck for years. Just fell into it.

Ed, a driver with 40 years of experience, had a similar story:

My dad was a truck driver, and that was basically all I knew from the time I could reach the pedals. I started driving probably when I was 8 or 9 years old, my dad taught me. And I would hook him up like on Sunday afternoon, drive it around the yard down there, back it in, and uh, stuff like that. That's how I got started in it, and I've been in it all my life.

Of the twenty-three drivers I interviewed, thirteen spoke specifically about driving as an option they turned to because they could make decent money without needing advanced education. Though drivers need to work long hours in order to earn what they do, many of them see this as the only choice available to them, and specifically talked about their lack of higher education as a significant factor in their choice to go into trucking. Jeff, who did not have a parent or other family member in the industry, described how he settled on trucking:

So I knew I had to find a job that I didn't need an education for that, you know, I could make seven, eight hundred dollars a week. I opened up a newspaper, and all I saw was truck driving ads, and I had worked at a truck stop for seven years, so I kinda knew all that so, it was kinda natural (laughs). 'Cause there's just not much around here that you can make yourself eight hundred dollars a week.

Because so many of my interviewees had family members who were also drivers, in many cases it was a combination of feeling as if their options were limited, coupled with the fact that trucking was “what they knew.” Here, Tim describes how his lack of higher education, paired with family history in his case, led him to become a trucker:

Uh, when I was a kid, everybody in the city of Chicago was a union truck driver, as far as their parents, that we knew that were in the industry. My dad did it, he always was a union man, it uh, it provided well for the family. We were never a Donald Trump level family, and we were never washing, you know, cars for a living. It was always a middle class income, it always kept the kids, we always had new clothes, we ate good, my mother didn't have to work, we all went to Catholic school. My dad put money in the bank, you know what I mean, he retired well, he had a pension, we had good insurance. It was a middle class income. Blue-collar world, but it was a middle-class income. And uh, I liked it, because I never was a superior academic. I got smarter as time went on. College wasn't for me. And at the time, not a lot of people went to

college back in the '60's, '70's, when I was a young kid. You could make a good living working in the manufacturing plant! Now, without college, you can't make it. But the transportation industry is still here, so you gotta do what you gotta do.

As I discuss later in this chapter, it's significant that union membership strongly shapes how drivers feel about their jobs, with union drivers and drivers with parents who were union drivers speaking much more positively about their choice of career.

<b>Name</b>	<b>Connection to Trucking</b>	<b>How Learned to Drive</b>
Amy	Friend	Taught by friends
Brenda	Father and mother	Taught by parents
Daniel	Other Employment (factory)	On-the-job training
Ed	Father	Taught by father
Harold	Grandfather	Taught by grandfather
Harry	Father and friend	Taught by friend
Gary	Friend of father	Taught by friend of father
Janice	Ex-husband	Taught by ex-husband
Jeff	Other Employment (Truck stop)	On-the-job training
John	Friend	Formal educational program
Juan	Friend	On-the-job training by friend
Kevin	Father, friend	Taught by friend
Marshall	Other employment (Tractor-Trailer repair)	On-the-job training
Melinda	Uncle	Taught by uncle
Michael	Father	Taught by father
Mitchell	Other employment (Dock worker)	On-the-job training
Nathan	Uncle	Taught by uncle
Pamela	Boyfriend	Formal educational program
Rochelle	Other employment (Office work at Trucking Co.)/Partner	On-the-job training
Sam	No prior connection	Formal educational program
Shawn	Other employment (Van driver for trucking company)	On-the-job training
Thomas	Father	Taught by father
Todd	No prior connection	Formal educational program

*Learning to Drive*

The most common way drivers in my sample learned to drive was through the friend or family member already working in the industry. Requirements for becoming a trucker are not onerous. Though some state regulations go over and above federal requirements, at a minimum people seeking to obtain a commercial driver's license (CDL) must have a clean driving record, be at least 21 years old (in order to drive across state lines), and pass written and practical tests that demonstrate their ability to safely operate a commercial truck. Drivers must also pass a physical exam every two years, checking hearing and vision and ruling out drivers with conditions like epilepsy or diabetes that are not controlled by medication (BLS OOH 08-09 <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos246.htm>). Twelve of the twenty-three drivers in my sample received informal training from a friend or family member in the industry, and studied for their written exam using a combination of study guides provided by state department of motor vehicles offices and information passed on by their mentors.

It was very common for drivers I interviewed to feel at loose ends about what to do after high school. Many of the drivers had not thought about going into trucking, but at this point in their lives something happened that made them consider it. Sometimes it was a random twist of fate, as in Gary's case. After Gary got out of the service he was looking for work, and learned to drive with the help of a friend's father:

I got into trucking, a friend of mine's father broke his foot, and they asked me could I drive his truck, uh, with him in it, and it was a steel truck. So I was drivin' around to the places he told me to go. He taught me on the fly. He broke

his leg jumpin' off the back of a truck, a flatbed truck, and he needed to keep his business goin' because he was an owner operator, uh, and he didn't have anybody to do that, so he asked me could I help him out by drivin' a truck, which I knew nothin' about. I just drove a stick shift car, and he knew I drove a stick shift car, and he told me he would coach me through it, or talk me through it, which he did. So that's where my trucking started.

The friend's father took Gary to get a permit, and from there taught him what he needed to know, and helped him study for the written exam. Similar to Gary, Amy, then unemployed, opted to learn a new skill from her friends. In a story that is more than a little frightening, she described:

So I was permanently laid off, and I'm a worker! So on the weekends, there's lots of logging going on up north, so what I did for cash is I would go with my buddies, and they taught me how to drive the trucks in the forest. Now, this is quite a story now - the reason why the company hired me for a permanent driver, is that up north, they only work enough to pay their bills, and then they stay drunk! It was a small company, seven drivers, and all of them got a DUI on the same weekend! Everyone had suspended licenses except for me - and that's really the way it is. I don't drink at all. So he literally had to hire me, because nobody else was legal.

Amy took advantage of this circumstance and her newly learned skills to get her first trucking job. While the situation she describes is a bit extreme, it does point to a recurrent problem in the industry. Prior to the recent economic downturn, much was made about the "driver shortage", which research suggests is more accurately described as a problem of turnover – some large firms have reported turnover of 100% (Belman, Lafontaine and Monaco 2005). Trucking companies increasingly find it difficult to recruit and retain drivers given the industry's wage declines and the increasingly

regulated and monitored working conditions drivers experience (see discussion later in this chapter and in Chapter Four) (Conyngham 2005).

Drivers who grew up in trucking families generally learned to drive from their family members. Although Harry's father had been a driver, Harry had initially wanted to go into politics. When he saw that his political career might not take off, he recalled riding along with his father when he was a child, and thought trucking might be an option, although he knew it was difficult. Here he described some of what he learned from his father and how trucking has changed due in large part to improved equipment:

For him it was hard. He - he broke his back with the trucks. Today - he'd have loved to be drivin' today. I mean, with the way the equipment is. The equipment was brutal back then. It was mainly power steering was a big thing. And when he taught me - he taught me how to drive a truck, so he was trainin' me on the truck, and he'd turn that wheel with one hand, and I'd have to stand up and try to turn it, and I couldn't do that! It was really brutal. And there was a lot of - back then you had to load and unload your own trucks, even when I first started drivin', but today it's mostly palletized. You don't touch anything, it's probably 99% palletized, no touch. But it was harder for him. And I thought I never wanted to get into that. It just happened, you know.

Harry had also described how trucking had physically broken his father down by the end of his career (he was hobbled by problems with his back), and although he laughed while telling some of the stories, his relief was palpable that trucking today is not as physically demanding as it was for his father – power steering and better seats, in particular, have helped.

An additional seven drivers I interviewed began working for trucking companies in other capacities – driving smaller trucks, for example – and were eventually given

formal or informal on-the-job training driving eighteen-wheelers. Mitchell described being bored in his office job at a trucking company – during slow times, he began practicing his driving skills:

You know, like pull a trailer out, put a trailer in, and I learned how to drive basically on my own. And you know, I would take the truck up and down the street a couple of times, shift the gears, get a feeling for it, and uh, that was that. And then every once in a while we had a night driver that would run railroad trailers. So he would let me drive a truck with him, you know. Back then it wasn't a big deal, you know, with the CDLs and crap like that. And then I was there until '75. A friend of mine called me and says, "Do you know how to drive a truck?" And I said, "Yeah, I basically taught myself." He said, "We need a driver." I said, "When?" He said, "Now."

The informal experience Mitchell gained by himself and driving along with his co-worker allowed him to move into a legitimate full-time driving position, eventually being fully licensed.

The remaining four drivers in my sample who neither received informal training from people they knew nor on-the-job training where they worked, enrolled in a training course at a local community college or truck driver training school. These formal training programs are increasingly common – and increasingly required by companies, most of which are hesitant to hire drivers without experience or formal training. One of the most experienced people I interviewed was Ed, who had retired from driving after 40 years. After ending his driving career, he went to work part-time as a teacher at a local community college driver-training program. Here, Ed described the curriculum:

They have one week in the classroom, which teaches them to read a map, how to log, they gotta do a DOT test, and uh, then an instructor in the classroom will start them on a pre-trip, which is basically every part on that truck, they have to know

every part on that truck, what it does, what it's function is, and little requirements that the [state] wants for them to pass. After that, you get three weeks, hands-on training. You'll be in the yard practicing your back-ups, your right turns, how to back up, pre-tripping the truck, learning the parts, what the state wants you to know. Then, whichever section of the day you're in, the other section of it you will go out on the road. There's four hours in the yard and in pre-trip, and four hours on the road. It is, uh, we take you through town, we teach you how to upshift, downshift, make your turns out on the road, we take you through town, see if you can take the pressure of traffic and everything, and then uh, we take you out on the road, let you run the road a little bit, which is basically a fifty to sixty mile radius of [the city where the training program is located].

After the fourth week of training, a tester from the state department of motor vehicles would arrive on-site so that potential drivers could complete their written and practical exams. Drivers in the program Ed teaches for have a pass-rate of approximately 90% for their first attempt.

Companies frequently offer some additional on-the-job training in order to introduce drivers to the specifics of their business. This training generally ranges from a couple of days to a couple of weeks, and usually involves ride-alongs to allow new drivers to both observe and be observed by more experienced drivers. Brenda serves as a trainer for her company, and explained what it's like to train new truckers:

Oh. God! Scary! (laughs) It's scary, it's real scary. I mean, 'cause you're sitting over in that passenger seat and you can't control that truck. When they kill it out in the middle of the road and you have a truck coming this way and a truck coming from this way, there ain't nothing you can do! You just go out there and do the best you can. But I mean, I'm not gonna turn them loose out there if they're not confident. I want them to feel like, ok, I know what's going on, I got it down, I understand, I comprehend. And you can tell when they're ready. When they stop saying, "well, I



weigh this much on the front, should I shake it back or should I shake it forward?" You know when they're ready. Some take a couple weeks extra, some pick it up in the first week.

Rochelle also serves as a trainer for her company, which hires drivers to a probationary period, during which they do on-the-job training. Here, she described a difficult time as a trainer where she had to fail a driver she was working with, an older woman who passed the road portion of her training but could not roll tarp over her trailer, an essential part of the work at this company.

Um, she just couldn't roll the tarp. But she was really broke, she really needed the money, um, I felt really like crap. And she was one that you just wanted to pass, just so she'd have a job, and that was the hardest thing I had to do. And then you've got men over there passing men who can't drive. We had a guy that got passed over there one day, and I fueled my truck, I didn't fuel it that night, I was doing it that morning and I came in I fueled my truck and I stop and there's this guy trying to back out of this parking spot. I mean, just backing straight back and I fueled my whole truck and he still wasn't out. And we passed him!? A guy did. "He's a good kid, he just needs a break!" Ok, just keep him away from me! (laughs). I don't want to be turning people loose, and have them not be able to back up straight. That kind of thing bothers me. But there's not a whole lot of women in the field.

Given what Rochelle described about the training process at her company, her concluding remark makes a lot of sense.

### Driver Earnings

Once drivers have entered the industry, what does the picture look like today in terms of earnings? Drivers are working very long hours for surprisingly little money. The Sloan Foundation Trucking Industry Program driver survey, drawing on over 500

interviews conducted in 1997 (the most current survey of its kind) found that driver median annual earnings (in 1996 dollars) were \$35,000 per year. This figure is substantially higher than it was at that time for the median U.S. wage earner, who earned only \$28,222 annually. However, the wage earner making 28,222 per year did so by working 1,868 hours. Drivers, by contrast, worked 3,000 hours. If drivers had worked the same amount of hours as the median U.S. wage earner, they would have earned only \$21,800. (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005). The most recent (less detailed) data from 2008 shows that truckers are earning a median wage of \$17.92 per hour, or \$37,270 annually (OOH, 2010-2011). In Sweatshops on Wheels, Belzer reported that the average over the road driver worked 65.7 hours per week, at a time when the legal limit was 60 hours per week (2000). Competitive pressure often leads drivers to work hours that exceed those allowed by HOS (hours of service) rules, established by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005). That's a high price to pay for earning a middle-class income.

Drivers feel the pinch. Here, Janice, a non-union driver, talks about how her income situation has changed over the course of her time as a driver:

When I sold my truck this last May [2002] I was making eighty cents a mile. I made eighty cents a mile in 1978. Now tell me that's an improvement. You know, the money is not there. We figured if we didn't clear \$60,000 back then we had a bad year. Now, if I could get to \$60,000 I'd be turning cartwheels across the parking lot!

For Janice, not only has she not made economic progress, she feels as though she has taken a step backward. Janice worked for many years as an owner-operator, and because

of these declining earnings, she decided that the hassle of having to maintain her own truck was not worth it. She sold her truck to work as an employee driver.

Harry and Margaret, who explained that they had moved to a more expensive suburban neighborhood from their old home in the city when their children were young, spoke about trying to maintain a middle-class life on a trucker's salary (Margaret also works part-time as a teacher's assistant).

M: See, that's the thing, you know, you try to make it and it's so hard, you know, and that's what the thing is. And then you hear your other friends who make \$45 an hour, and you sit there and you try to keep up with them, and yet they all know we don't, we don't have to, but you know, sometimes we just get that –

H: It gets frustrating, it gets frustrating. We've worked a long time, and have two grown children, our baby is 30 years old, you know, and she's a high school teacher, and as we get closer to something, they raise the prices of it. You get further and further away from it. The taxes on this place alone kill you. It's unbelievable what they charge you, you know, you're already on a fixed income and they keep raising the taxes on you. It's six grand a year on this place, for nothin'.

Drivers thought of themselves as middle class, but always pointed out that in order to make their middle-class income, they work exceedingly long hours. And although union drivers have higher median incomes, union and non-union drivers talk about their financial situation using similar language. Mitchell, a union driver, explained:

Our job is a lot of time. A lot of time. And if you don't work a little bit of overtime, it's not really - I think your forty hour base is maybe right around \$900, you know. And nowadays, you know, you want to have the big house, you want to keep a pool, you want to have it look decent, new cars and stuff like that.

Drivers may also emphasize that they are middle-class even when they are feeling rather insecure about their incomes – “middle-class” is the default, the normal, and thinking about oneself as anything other than middle-class can be damaging to one’s self image, and can make comparisons painful (Rubin 1994). Michael, also a union driver, said:

But yeah, the quality of life, I have a very high quality of life, as far as our family life. Do I go to Vegas once a week, do I go out to dinner every night? No. I'm a middle-class, and I want to stay that way. And it seems like the middle-class is being drawn on so much, to bear so much burden, we want to take your retirement, we want to take your overtime, “What do you need overtime for? Jeez! It's too expensive for the company!”

So even though he characterizes himself as middle-class, he emphasizes things he cannot afford to do, and about feeling his retirement and overtime threatened, rather than highlighting a middle-class feeling of security. Of course, this probably also points to the fact that middle class families in our country are often just one missed paycheck or one medical problem away from serious financial difficulties (Rubin 1994; Newman 1988).

As companies rush to lower labor costs, and as owner-operators increasingly “sweat” their own labor, drivers earn lower wages for longer hours and must deal with more inexperienced drivers on the road who will work for less pay, to the advantage of company owners (Belzer 2000). This is a short-sighted advantage, however. For example, between 1983 and 1985, accidents involving interstate trucks rose 23.4%, from 31,628 to 39,030 (Horwitz 1988).

Truckers have often reacted bitterly to the changes in their industry, and this has led some to develop the class-consciousness that led to the heavy unionization of their industry many years ago. While many union companies were driven out of business by

deregulation, some companies that were left standing now see their workforces attempting to unionize (like Midwestern). The following fieldnote excerpt, between two drivers at a Midwestern trucking company, is instructive:

D: You know, this used to be a good job, 25 years ago, you know. I made more money with better benefits than my buddy over there at (a local company seen as a prize place to work, despite notorious battles with its union). There wasn't much of anything around here that paid better. Then came that deregulation bullshit."

Denny's voice sounds wistful as he talks about how it used to be.

J: God Bless American capitalism. Ain't nothing they've deregulated yet that its been good. Except for the capitalists, it's good for them. And the thing I'm worried about now is the Mexican trucks coming up here. They pay them so little. If the trucks go much further north than Texas, we'll all be out of jobs."

Jim and Denny are clearly aware of their position in the economy, not only in terms of their relationship to their own company (as the proletariat) and its owner (the bourgeoisie), but also within the global system. With a high level of class consciousness, they link their own struggles to the process of globalization that has allowed Mexican trucks to cross the border into the United States at much lower rates than are available from U.S. trucking companies. Jim's comment that "they pay them so little" shows both empathy for the plight of Mexican truck drivers as well as a sense that he is in a class with drivers from Mexico – united against the "they" that would pay them both such low wages.

And while many economic analysts predicted that lower rates after trucking deregulation would benefit everyone, including small business, over the long term it has

primarily benefited the largest shippers and retailers that have gained the biggest advantage by the sheer volume of products they send and receive (Belzer 2000).

### The Role of Unions

Unions provided a number of benefits for the members I interviewed. At the most basic level, they provided a format for workers to collectively present their views and preferences on workplace issues ranging from wages and benefits to working conditions. They provided a grievance mechanism to address worker complaints and work rule violations, and a protective process for workers who are being disciplined or who have been accused of wrongdoing (Freeman and Medoff 1984, as cited in Hodson 1997).

The number of drivers who are union members is in decline; their percentage has fallen from nearly two-thirds of drivers in the 1960's, to just under half in 1975, to only 26% in 2000 (Belman et. al. 2005). Trucking companies frequently go to great lengths to prevent their workers from organizing, up to and including firing of union activists, "terminal closing and relocation, and even business termination and reorganization" (Wedekind 2007; Belzer 2000:48). Perhaps this response is because union status, though in decline, makes a tremendous difference. In 2000, average weekly earnings for non-union drivers stood at \$594, while union drivers brought home \$772 (Belman, Monaco & Lafontaine 2005).

Drivers I interviewed, particularly those who were involved in their union in a stewardship role, recognized that rates of unionization were in decline, and felt the loss, taking a global view of the benefits that unions bring to all workers. Michael argued:

The union guys, we could be getting better contracts. If everyone was in the union, we'd get a better contract, we'd have a better

labor agreement. But you have to stay competitive. You can't pay your guys \$30 bucks an hour and have the other guy payin' a guy \$11 bucks an hour and expect to be in business long.

Language specifically linking unions to helping all drivers, not just those who are union members, was not used by non-union drivers or by drivers less involved in their union local. Michael continued, talking about his annual income, and the additional income benefits that union drivers are entitled to:

And I'm anywhere between \$68,000 and \$80,000 per year. And our road drivers, they get higher rates on mileage, and they get hourly rates as they're sitting. From the minute that they sit. None of this two hour delay and then they start getting paid. That's bullcrap. Your time is worth money.

Michael, who has many years of seniority in his union, earns a lot more than the average driver, union or non-union. But his experience points to the additional benefits of working a long career for a union company, with pay scales that allow for regular increases. He also highlights the issue of “waiting time” – for many non-union companies (like Midwest, under their new wage plan I discuss below) there are periods of time when drivers are waiting to be loaded or unloaded, or for other delays, where they are not paid until after specified periods of time. Since drivers are not covered under the Fair Labor Standards Act, non-union companies can get away with structuring employee pay in this way.

Union drivers I interviewed emphasized their advantage in benefits like insurance, pension and worker protections more than they do pay. Harry commented:

And mainly it was the medical benefits. I never - never thought of the pension. You're in your twenties, I'm just tryin' to put food on the table for my family, and the medical was excellent, I think Michelle cost us what, like \$40 for her

birth. You know, I mean it was unbelievable. And so that's what you were thinkin' of. And it wasn't until you got older that you started thinkin' about your pension. And I've been really fortunate, because [company name] is the fourth company I've been with, and I've never missed a beat. They've all been [organized by the same union local].

Because Harry was able to maintain membership in the same union over working for several companies, he experienced no interruptions in his excellent medical benefits or in his pension.

Kevin, whose father and grandfather were both union truck drivers, saw this advantage growing up, and vowed that his situation would be the same. When I asked him if he was always focused on being in a union, he replied:

Oh, yeah, always. Because you know, my father was union, and I saw the benefits of working union. You know, he had a guaranteed work week, he had guaranteed overtime, he had insurance, he had a pension. Because I remember, when I was a child, going to the union clinic all the time. So I - sure, sure. It's like any job. If you're gonna do it, do it union.

Kevin, similar to Michael, also points out the guarantee of overtime as an additional benefit to being in a union.

On top of the solid financial and fringe benefits of being a union driver, interviewees also emphasized the feeling of being “protected” by their union. Gary, a driver fortunate enough to work for one of the large, remaining union companies, even felt protected from the ravages of deregulation by his union position. He said about deregulation:

Well, I noticed it, and it did hurt our industry, but I was sort of protected because I was with a union company, so I did see it, as far as the trickle down effect, deregulation hurt the industry but due to great prior thinking and planning and scrutinizing of



the industry, [his employer] was able to uh, maintain, and being a member of the [his employer's] family, I was able to maintain. So, I can't say that it actually hurt me. It hurt the industry more than I can see that it hurt me, I was able to maintain and be - but if I really think about it I would say that even to prosper. I was able to still prosper. Although I was watching my industry being taken apart.

While Gary's comments might not be entirely accurate, given that *many* union companies did fail over the past thirty years, he was protected both by his union status and by the size and willingness to improvise and work with other companies displayed by his employer. Because of the benefits of his union status, he felt attached to his company, referring to himself as a "member of the family" – he wasn't related to the ownership, but felt respected and protected.

Union drivers are also protected in another way – from unjust firing. Kevin, who has been a union steward for many years, said this when comparing union to non-union driving:

Because I know how these guys are treated, what they're paid, uh, what their benefits are, what their insurance consists of, and it's just not up to par with what I get. And I don't understand why more companies aren't going union. The uh, drivers are all scared like hell of the bosses there, because they don't have any safeguards there. If the boss doesn't like the way you comb your hair today, they fire you.

As a steward, Kevin had been able to help protect fellow employees who had been unfairly fired or disciplined, and emphasized that this was a process non-union drivers did not have the benefit of.

Michael, with his twelve years of service as a union steward, was a very articulate interviewee on this subject. He argued:

And benefits are the difference - see, what they did was the non-union companies got smarter. They pay them more wages, and their argument is this: "We pay you what the union pays you!" And they don't. There's a lot more to being in the union than strictly wages. There's protections. There's contract language. Job rules. Safety issues. Um, we get more vacation time. And people think, "Oh, what do you need more vacation time!?" Well, like you say, they needed it 25 years ago, and it was earned. Why should you change now, especially in a more hectic world today?

This quote from Michael succinctly summed up the sentiments of his fellow union workers.

Drivers working for non-union companies realize that they are missing out on the benefits enjoyed by union drivers. During the time I was doing fieldwork at Midwestern for example, a number of drivers and organizers had been attempting to unionize the company. At one point, they had actually successfully voted in the union. The driving factor was that drivers had been incensed about a new pay plan being implemented by management that *purported* to be a raise, but under real working conditions (ie. traffic jams, poor weather, slow-moving warehouse workers), was actually a pay cut. The new pay plan would increase the amount that drivers were paid per mile, but raised the amount of time (to two hours) that would pass before drivers were paid for standing time – the periods when drivers are waiting, for example, to have their trucks unloaded. Drivers felt like this was an indication of their powerlessness – that the company ownership could make changes on a whim that had very detrimental effects on their lives and bank accounts. This feeling made drivers more open to the idea of unionization. I spoke to Todd, a forty-three year old driver with twenty years of experience who was one of the organizing forces of the union drive, after the vote.

[It's always been] long hours, low pay, and they were trying to make it lower pay. So we decided we needed to do something about it. We got the union in. I think it will, if nothing else, it will make it so they can't just up and do anything they feel like without the drivers' input, or anything like that. And I'm sure we'll get more money out of it – probably not much though. But we won't have to worry about them taking anything away from us. Once we get going.

Unfortunately, the first vote was followed by allegations of impropriety. Some of the drivers who were pro-union as well as union organizers were accused (by company ownership and a few anti-union drivers) of attempting to intimidate drivers into voting for the union with harassment and threats of physical violence. It was difficult to get specific information about this episode from the drivers, as none of the drivers felt that they understood or had access to the details about what happened. The first vote was then nullified and was followed by a second, unsuccessful vote. Drivers at Midwestern have been struggling for the past ten years, off and on, to become unionized.

In most cases, union drivers talk about non-union drivers with a mixture of pity and contempt. Many of the union drivers come from families where their fathers were members of the same union, and they cannot fathom why anyone would put himself or herself in a situation where they had no protection from the whims of management.

Michael said:

I always tell a non-union guy, "You have a job; I have a career." It's different. [With the union] You get rewarded in the end of your career.

In cases where union drivers attempt to identify with non-union drivers, it's often around working conditions, especially situations where drivers are fired for unfair reasons.

Excerpted in Chapter 4, a discussion between John and his wife, Marie, revealed another way that union drivers distance themselves from non-union drivers. John expressed anger at non-union companies and their drivers for putting other motorists at risk by being more likely to use false logbooks, drive fatigued, or drive with unsafe equipment. This is commonly the kind of scenario that union drivers brought up when talking about non-union drivers.

### *Union Leadership*

Union involvement (beyond just membership) was very common among the union drivers I interviewed. Of the ten union drivers I interviewed, four were current or former stewards. One driver, Daniel, took advantage of a program between the union and a local university to earn a certificate in labor studies, and a bachelor's degree. Daniel's hope was that by becoming educated in this area, he could gain employment with the union international offices, and help to strengthen the union movement within the trucking industry. Here, he talks about his involvement in the program.

So, I took one class, and it was very interesting. And I said, "If there's more classes, I would really like to go to some more." And they said, "All you gotta do, you can go to as many classes as you want, just bring back good grades." So, since they opened that door, I ran with it. So, [local university] had a three-year program, all certificate level. And I did that. And then there was about a year lag, or something, two years, whatever, and that's when the National Labor College partnered with [local university], and now this would be a degree. Ooohh!

Daniel now has a bachelor's degree and is working on his master's degree in education. He hopes to eventually work for the union at the international level, in their education department.

The drivers I spoke to who were union stewards felt very passionately about representing their fellow workers. Here, Kevin talks about why he became a steward and the pride he takes in having that job.

Well, I guess that uh, being the sort of guy that I am, I guess I like shaking it up with the management first of all, and foremost! And second of all, I do like to take up for the underdog. You do have a lot of guys that will do everything they're told to do, even if their boss knows that he's giving him an unfair assignment, or giving him an assignment that's not really legit, according to the contract. I like to talk up for those guys. You do the best you can. But I do like being a spokesman for the union, I've always been um, for the union, third generation Teamster, um, I just uh, I like being a Teamster, and I've been elected four times by the membership, to represent them, so I apparently must be doing something right. I enjoy that job as much as I do getting in the truck and driving it every day.

For the drivers who work as stewards, it's a powerful feeling to be able to defend their fellow workers in conflicts with management. Here, Michael talks about the process he typically goes through when dealing with a driver accused of a misdeed at work:

You have rights that are signed by the company, and the first thing I tell [management] a lot of the time, when they try to violate the contract, I go to the page where their signatures are. "Did you sign that? Not you, personally, but did your company attorney sign this? Because you're gonna stick to it." And I'm not playing around. And sometimes I tell them, "I'm not playing games here. If this is not a just-cause termination, it's a witch hunt, and I'm gonna take this as far as I gotta go." And I says, "I guarantee you, I'm gonna build up enough evidence against you to prove harassment, disparate treatment," And I guarantee, a lot of times they come back and say, "Michael, want to talk?" [First] They'll let me walk out of the office, "Do what you gotta do." And I'll be going through my daily routine, because I do drive on the street. And they'll call me to the office, "Michael, we want to see you, come back to the terminal." The boss will call me back in, see, because he was posturing for the other

supervisors. "Shut the door behind you, shut the door behind you. See, I'm gonna let that go, ok." You know why? Because he knows! He thought about it for a while! Does he have uh, concrete evidence that it's gonna work in his favor? No, he doesn't.

A central aspect of a steward's job is confronting management over unfair driver treatment, or drivers being accused of something without the company having proper evidence to back it up, and for the stewards I interviewed, this is one of the most rewarding aspects of their job. Michael gave an example of a specific case where a driver had been accused of a pattern of falsifying manifests that showed where he had made deliveries throughout days he was working. The dispute was unable to be resolved formally, and went to a hearing panel comprised of both management and union representatives. Michael did a significant amount of investigation prior to the panel, and described what happened before the hearing even started, when a company representative pulled one of the union agents aside:

What he said was, "Ed," - my agent, Ed - he said, "I cannot terminate, I'd like to move this out, we cannot terminate. Uh, your steward has compiled enough evidence against us that if we go in there, we're gonna be embarrassed."

For Michael, this represented a triumph of the union process for him personally and for the driver he was defending.

I also interviewed drivers who worked with stewards to combat unfair treatment or violation of work rules. Melinda's manager put her in a situation that she felt was unsafe, and she used the grievance process informally to rectify it:

I had a situation where the supervisor wanted me to continue working after my first route, I was doing mornings, and they wanted me to continue working because they needed me badly,

and I said, “No, I’m going to sleep, I will be a danger to myself, and others.” And he wouldn’t take no for an answer, and he tried to get one of the supervisors to fire me. And I got one of the drivers to get me in contact with somebody, and he got the agent who came down from [the city], and he got a union steward on the phone, and we all organized this. And he literally said, “Are you gonna fire her or not?” And he had his supervisor come out and he takes my card, and within the next day I had my job back.

For disputes not resolved so easily, the next step for workers would be to go through the hearing process described above.

A steward’s job is not always satisfying, however – it can lead to a lot of frustration. Harry described one of the more futile times he had gone to bat for a fellow driver:

I mean, I’ve had, I’m a union steward, and I’ve gone to war with these guys, and there’s really nothin’ I can do with ‘em. You know, I had this one kid, with four kids, and he flunked his drug test, they’re allowed once chance to go into rehab, and come out of rehab, but you can’t flunk another drug test. Right out of rehab, he comes back and he failed that drug test.

With the changes in the global economy I discussed in an earlier section, drugs have become an increasingly persistent problem in working-class communities hard hit by the job losses attendant with deindustrialization (Black 2009).

The position of steward can also be a thankless one, as drivers put in extra hours only to end up being attacked for it by fellow drivers who have been unhappy with the grievance process who hold their steward responsible. Daniel explained:

Um, the other thing is that you have to decipher, if somebody has a grievance, if it has grounds, or if somebody’s just shooting stuff out their ears. And then, quite often, they don’t like to hear that. “I have a legitimate claim!” “Now, wait a

minute, I'm not gonna split hairs here. This is how this works. Now, if you want me to go in there, I'll go in there, but I'm telling you, you don't have a leg to stand on." And they get mad, blah, blah, blah, "You're a no good SOB!" And all that for a while. Even though - and there was a time, seriously, at [company name], when I wanted to get a shirt with a bullseye on the back, just for my own guys! (laughs) It can be frustrating!

Regardless of the frustrations, the stewards I interviewed speak with pride about doing their job, and that sense of pride and service to fellow drivers is what keeps them at it, as Kevin explains:

Either I'm gonna do the job that I'm supposed to do, that the men expect and that the union expects of me - and I expect of myself - I'm either gonna do the job right, or I'm not gonna do it. That's the kind of person I am. If you give me a job, I'm gonna do it right, or I'm not gonna do it, I'm gonna back off. And I do try, and do the job, for the men, and for the union, and for myself. You know, you have to have some pride in what you do.

And in some cases, like for Kevin, their sense of service to their fellow drivers also seems to be grounded in specifically *masculine* pride – referring to defending their “men.” This kind of identity work is something that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter Five.

### Conclusion

The trucking industry has seen a lot of turmoil since deregulation, with winners and losers. The drivers I interviewed felt strongly that they had been given the short end of the stick in these changes. With wages stagnating or falling and companies failing, employers were able to benefit from a climate of fear and uncertainty just as drivers became less and less likely to be protected by a union. In the face of these changes, people are still becoming truckers – it’s still an occupation with low barriers to entry, and workers with low levels of education can still earn a marginally middle-class income,



even if it means working hours unthinkable to many workers. And some drivers are finding ways to deal with and improve their situation, whether this means attempting to regain control by becoming leaders in their union or trying to organize their non-union company. Of course, since I recruited many of my interviewees during a union meeting, my sample likely over-represents those who are active in union leadership and organizing.

On a broader basis, what can be done when competition becomes destructive? There is evidence from other industries and other types of destructive competition that may be instructive. With regard to international trade, Chan and Ross have shown that while destructive competition has developed between countries in the global south, agreements between governments, trade unions and workers in these countries to develop stronger social protections across borders can help put an end to the race to the bottom (2003). This shift in perspective comes from realizing that these countries are, at this point, competing with one another, not with Northern countries. Similarly, with regard to environmental regulation in the United States, Woods argues that states frequently enter into destructive competition with one another over luring new industry (2006). Consistent environmental regulations that prevent states from ignoring the negative externalities (air pollution or runoff that often ends up becoming a problem in states downwind or downstream) can prevent states from moving towards the lowest common denominator as it relates to environmental protection (Woods 2006).

In trucking, this points to the idea that work must be done with workers, unions and individual business owners to advocate the idea of collective resistance to the race to

the bottom. Research shows that during this downward spiral, trucking company profits have also dropped, with operating ratios steadily worsening from 1970 on, and return on equity dropping consistently for Class I general freight carriers (carriers grossing more than \$5 million annually) (Belzer 2000). Industry groups like the American Trucking Associations, which ostensibly advocate for policies that are beneficial to trucking companies, are dropping the ball in this regard, focusing primarily on promoting policies that lengthen the hours drivers can legally work, and on image campaigns for the industry. The very largest companies may be able to sustain and even thrive in the race to the bottom, but ATA may be left with very few members to represent if current trends continue.

## CHAPTER FOUR: TIME, SAFETY AND WORKER AUTONOMY

In this chapter I will be examining the technological and policy changes driving the trucking industry, including increased monitoring of drivers' activities; the drivers' responses to changing rules governing their work; and the role of unions in dealing with these issues. These changes directly address autonomy and control, time and safety. They lay bare the frequently conflicting interests of drivers, trucking companies, and policymakers. Drivers are interested in preserving their autonomy, maximizing their pay, driving safely, and having enough time to rest and spend time with friends and family. Companies are interested in maximizing profit and increasing control over drivers and company assets. Unions are interested in expanding membership and political power and, at the least, maintaining worker wages and protections. Policymakers are (ostensibly) interested in protecting the broader driving public, while balancing the concerns of both companies and drivers.

Against the backdrop of a changing industry, a number of issues emerge as important to drivers and their sense of control over their work. One of the most compelling aspects of driving remains the sense of freedom derived from getting behind the wheel of a powerful truck and heading out on the open road. Away from the stifling and close supervision typical of most blue-collar work, truckers enjoy both the lack of physical supervision and the ability this gives them to maintain the mysterious and self-

reliant image commonly assigned them (Ouellet 1994). This feeling is something that helps drivers continue to find at least some enjoyment in their work, even in the face of so many negative changes.

In spite of this feeling of control, truckers have always been subject to a higher level of supervision than the popular stereotype of “driver as close descendent of cowboy” suggests (Ouellet 1994). Delivery deadlines, requirements to check in with dispatchers, and laws requiring detailed logbooks have been traditional ways to monitor drivers. Over the past several years, however, the industry has adapted a variety of devices that allow companies to monitor the location and status of trucks and trailers. Billed primarily as a sophisticated way of providing real-time shipment tracking, preventing cargo-theft, and even as a weapon in the “war on terror” (Kilcarr 2004), truck and trailer tracking devices and GPS are also a high-tech way to monitor employees.

Safety is also an important buzzword in the trucking industry, one that ties into issues of worker autonomy, time management, and money, and with important implications for the lives of drivers. The Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration is the government agency charged with working with the transportation companies to reduce crashes, injuries and fatalities involving trucks and buses. Specifically, one of the agency’s responsibilities is to regulate the “hours of service” (HOS) that drivers are allowed to log in a given period of time. These HOS regulations have changed just two times in the past fifty years, amid great controversy, as any changes in HOS regulations seek to balance the government and public’s desire for increased safety with the trucking

industry's desire for greater profit. As one might imagine, the side of increased safety has not always triumphed.

In this chapter, I explore popular stereotypes of freewheeling truckers and how these images compare to reality, both historically and in today's more technologically advanced trucking industry. I examine drivers' thoughts on safety, from interactions with their employer around the safety of equipment, to their experiences with accidents, and to the way that monetary incentives have historically encouraged unsafe or fatigued driving. As part of this discussion, I look at the safety implications of hours of service (HOS) regulations and how these regulations affect the pockets of trucking companies and the daily lives of drivers. Finally, I examine both traditional and "high-tech" ways of monitoring truckers as well as how drivers respond to these increasingly intense surveillance tactics.

Throughout the chapter, I highlight the interplay of the interests of relevant actors – truckers, company management, the trucking industry and policy makers. In my research I spoke directly to drivers and company management; I use public relations campaigns and information from the American Trucking Associations to represent industry perspective and recent regulatory rulings issued by the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration to represent the views of policy makers. Other researchers have provided relevant examinations of the issue of conflicting interests, as well as interest alignment, both in trucking and non-trucking settings (Belzer 2000, Leidner 1993, Ouellet 1994). This research is an update to Ouellet's qualitative examination of the

work lives of drivers, and provides a qualitative counterpoint to Belzer's industry-wide research.

### The Last of the Cowboys?

In the popular imagination, trucking is an occupation that offers freedom from the close and often stifling supervision found in other blue-collar jobs. Trucking allows drivers to “embody, or at least appear to embody, qualities associated with some of this country's most treasured male icons: cowboys, frontiersmen, explorers, adventurers” (Ouellet 1994). Many of these qualities – independence, stoicism, strength, control, travel, and danger, not coincidentally, are also linked to those associated with hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). And although interviews with drivers bring up many negative aspects of the job to counter the more romanticized ones, the negative aspects do not capture the popular imagination in the same way.

Once a driver himself, sociologist Lawrence Ouellet has written:

Early and late in the day, armies of motorists pass by on their way to and from work, some dressed in business suits and some dressed like me, and they appear locked into boring and overly domesticated routines with few prospects for adventure, for even the chance of something different. I feel a tad smug. In more than a few of their faces and gestures I detect the fantasy that friends and acquaintances have so often confessed: to do my job, to be king of the road, to head down a highway toward the unknown and away from their lives (1994).

This passage captures the romanticism typical in many descriptions of trucking. Ouellet, while countering many of these stereotypical descriptions throughout his analysis, also paints a more complex picture. Even with the hassles and increased monitoring, drivers

are still more physically and symbolically free than other blue-collar workers, and this is an important theme in their narratives.

Earlier in my research, I entitled my master's thesis "The Last of the Cowboys" because the phrase was actually used by two of my interviewees, and many others made comments evoking similar sentiments. It was the first and one of the most prominent "codes" to come out of my research, which suggests to me that, although it's certainly not the most accurate description of a trucker's life, it is still extremely salient to their identities.

Both male and female drivers emphasized the "cowboy" aspects of their profession, in positive and negative lights. The term "cowboy" is often used to describe drivers who drive dangerously or discourteously, frequently to "show-off" (fieldnotes 2002). In this sense it is used in a derogatory way. But then, often later in the same interview or conversation, drivers will also refer to the "cowboy" or the more positive general qualities listed previously, to describe their own work lives in a positive light. When discussing a new pay scale introduced by Midwestern, Dan and Kirby use the term "cowboy" in a negative sense:

- D: And you know how guys are. Half of them think of themselves as road cowboys, anyways. My other concern is that lots of times, things are out of our control. What if we are stuck in traffic jams or bad weather, or our trucks break down. This new plan makes no allowances for that.
- K: And it's easy for everybody to fly off the handle over things like that – I mean we're truck drivers, what do you expect?! (2002)

This exchange is interesting for two reasons. First, part of the new pay plan was to shift more pay for local drivers from hourly to number of loads “hooked” or “dropped” (picking up or dropping off loads) and the number of miles driven. When Dan talks about drivers thinking of themselves as road cowboys, he is referring to the implications of creating more incentives for driving faster – and therefore less safely. His reference to things being “out of our control” is an important contrast to a more positive “cowboy” image, where control is of central importance.

Second, Kirby’s comment, said in a tone only slightly ironic, points to drivers’ awareness of the negative (and often contradictory) stereotypes applied to them. While they are seen as “in control” behind the wheel of a large truck, they may also often be seen as people who have trouble keeping *themselves* under control – linking them to other, less romanticized conceptions of blue-collar workers. At Midwestern, for example, signs were posted outside the dispatch offices proclaiming “NO Drivers Allowed.” The dispatchers admitted to me this was to keep out drivers who were angry about load assignment or other issues relating to the dispatch department, and who might be tempted to take out their anger physically on a dispatcher.

In other cases, interviewees played up positive images of drivers, and positive connotations of the “cowboy” image. Sam, a driver in his mid-thirties with experience in both local and over the road (OTR) driving, describes two of the things he has enjoyed most about trucking:

Well, the neatest thing in the world...I’d get out of the truck, look back, and I’d say, “Damn. I drive that big-ass thing.” It’s just kind of humbling – I control that big thing!



That's eighty thousand pounds sitting right there and I can drive it! It's neat.

I have oodles and oodles of rolls of film I've taken on the road....Just things you see that you normally wouldn't see if you've never left (central Illinois) before! I was standing on the shores of New Jersey, looking out, and I could see the New York skyline. You just kinda – just standing there just looking at it, kinda neat.

Some of what that Sam enjoys most are things associated with the positive connotation of the cowboy – the skill and control involved in driving an eighteen-wheeler, and the travel opportunities that took him to places he would not have otherwise had the opportunity to see.

Another positive aspect of the association with “cowboys” for the truckers I interviewed is that they frequently asserted they “couldn't do office work.” Regardless of the actual level of control they have over their specific activities, they do have a certain amount of physical freedom. Not only do they get to see unique sights, as Sam described, but they are physically separated from management. Exchanges they have with people on the road are done on their own terms (within reason) and even with GPS, management can't tell exactly what a driver is doing at a given time. Short of installing a camera with audio capability in the cab of each truck, the amount of surveillance a company can do is limited. Drivers can talk to whomever they want, listen to whatever radio station they want, enjoy scenery, wear jeans, use curse words, and do many other things that most office workers cannot. Given the changes in the labor market over the past thirty years, and the decline in the availability of good jobs open to those without a college education, drivers emphasize these freedoms as what they like most about their

jobs – in direct opposition to what might be considered more prestigious “office jobs.”

Here, Kevin summed up both the (somewhat shaky) argument for autonomy (using a captain analogy in place of the cowboy), and the idea that he’s not cut out for an “inside job.”

But what I do like about it, is once I do hook up my tractor-trailer, and check it out and leave the yard, I'm the captain of the ship! (laughs) And I've had some differences with customers over the years, too, but you know, more or less, you're the captain of the ship when you leave. So that's what I like about it. And number one is, I've never had an inside job, I've always had outside jobs, I've never worked inside, I don't know if I could adjust to an inside job.

And here, from John:

Working in, you know, inside, and as much as I liked doing the work, I hated being stuck inside. I couldn't stand sitting in an office. I had to be outside. I've loved driving since I was a kid. I like what I do, I like the company that I work for, I hope when contracts come up that we can negotiate our new contracts again, soon, without having any problems. Our company has never had any problem negotiating contracts, you know, we ask for more, they want to give less, we find a place in the middle to meet that works for both of us, and that's the way it's always been.

Drivers most frequently talked about this aversion to inside or office work when I asked them what they liked best about their jobs. Here, Michael echoed Kevin and John’s sentiments:

I like bein' outside. I never was a - when I was in high school, I used to have factory jobs, you know, but couldn't do it. I just couldn't do it. (makes buzzer noise) Buzzer goes off for break, you sit there for fifteen minutes, (makes buzzer noise), gotta go back. I just couldn't do it, you know what I mean? I'm an outside guy. I was a hunter, fisherman, things like that. Freedom of makin' my own decisions. Uh,

and that's somethin' that the non-union realm could also comply with, you know, they're outside, their boss isn't on their back, and all that. Um, I like bein' outside. I guess that's the major thing.

Michael also made another important point here, which is that the lack of direct visual supervision is also something that non-union drivers enjoy. Usually, when union drivers talk about the situation of non-union drivers, they can think of nothing positive to say. This is the one exception to that rule. Additionally, the fact of working outside and away from direct visual supervision is also seen to shore up gendered identity, here as Michael tied the outdoor aspect of his work to traditionally masculine pursuits like hunting and fishing.

Because they have an “outside job”, drivers also must deal with harsh weather conditions. Daniel described why it’s worth it:

And I make a decent living, so - I don't know. I had an office job once, and I really didn't like it. I like being outside. I don't necessarily like out there, counting trucks in the rain and stuff, or in February when you have 20 or thirty below, with the wind chill, and I was out there 12, 14 hours per night. And that's the part that really - not the good part. But right about now, in the summer - it rains once in a while, who cares? But the wintertime is when we work hard. But other than that, driving a truck is uh, is a lot of fun, actually.

The unspoken but obvious contrast in all of these quotes is to the suited up office worker.

While drivers often chafe at negative stereotypes of drivers, they also take pride, to a certain extent, in rejecting the image of that same safe, clean, boring office worker.

Here, Kevin explained why he’s glad I’m doing research on truck drivers.

K: You know, somebody should sit down and write books from guys like me and others and characters

in the business like myself. Because we're all characters - that's why we're not riding the el downtown with a suit on. You know, I mean, this is why we're truck drivers, because we're not conformers, we're characters. And more so, as I was growing up, in my father's generation, he worked at some of these companies where if you didn't have a yellow sheet, they wouldn't hire you. Just like it used to be out at some of these (unclear) places, that's the way it used to be.

C: I don't even know - what's a yellow sheet?

K: Uh, jail.

Here we're back to that romanticized (and slightly dangerous) cowboy image that can cut both ways.

Women interviewees expressed many similar sentiments, in particular about the relative freedom of their jobs (especially as compared to “girly jobs”). But women were definitely more critical of the cowboy image, and often used that imagery more frequently to refer negatively to male drivers whom they regarded as unnecessarily flashy or unsafe in their driving, or those who tried to make them feel inadequate as women truckers. All the women I interviewed made the point that while male drivers may, on average, be physically stronger, they are often overconfident or careless. They see this as one of the few advantages enjoyed by women in trucking, who don't have standards of masculinity to live up to. Pamela, a trucker in her mid-thirties with about six years of driving experience explained:

Most women are more detailed. They take more time, they're more careful. They don't have to prove something – well, they have to prove something, but they don't have to prove something to the guy next to them that “I'm better than you.” All they have to prove is that they can do it and do it well. And they take more time, and at a certain point, you just get to the point where you laugh because the men are so, they just try to be so big, and oh

(puffs up) “I’m a truck driver!” You know, we’re all drivers, but a lot of guys take it really, real serious.

Pamela argues that masculinity is often a performance for other men – a way of proving their manliness to each other (Messner 2002; Paap 2006) that, in this case, also reinforces the “cowboy” image. For Pamela, not having that pressure gives women an advantage in doing the work of trucking.

While being female may allow women drivers to feel exempt to some degree from performing masculinity, it doesn’t stop male drivers from expecting them to prove themselves in other ways – up to and including driving too fast or in other ways unsafely. Melinda, a union driver with many years experience driving professionally (she was previously a bus driver) but just three years experience as a truck driver, explained pressure she has felt to rush through her daily route, and how she’s responded to that pressure – pressure that is sometimes gendered.

And I thought, well, I'm not gonna let this happen to me! I'm gonna take care of myself. And I don't care if they belittle me as a woman, or whatever, I'm not gonna let them make me feel that I have to rush. I always say, “Safety first!” (laughs) Safety first. But then some of them say, “Well, you can be safe and fast.” Reeaalllly. Why don't you go out and do this route, how about if I take care of your job today, and you take care of mine, and we'll see how you do!

Overall, the women I interviewed were more attuned to the negative aspects of the cowboy image, at least as it relates to safety, while men were more likely to describe dangerous driving by drivers of cars and other vehicles (as I’ll describe in more detail below).

The trucking industry is aware of the negative “cowboy” image that can be associated with drivers, and is very concerned about countering any negative perceptions. The American Trucking Associations (ATA) frequently engages in public relations campaigns designed to improve public imagery surrounding truckers. For example, in 2005, their campaign was “The Good Stuff – Truckers Bring It”, which is designed to focus attention on the importance of trucking to the nation’s economy (ATA website headline 2005). Along with Volvo Trucks North America, they have also sponsored a public outreach program comprised of truckers with exceptional safety records called “America’s Road Team.” The slogan for this group is: “Safety is our driving concern” – and their mission is to “spread the word about safety on the highway” (ATA website headline 2005). As I discuss in a later section, the industry has lobbied hard against regulatory reform that would restrict drivers’ hours of service – emphasizing an industry focus on safety may help encourage perceptions that the industry is fine as it is, that self-policing is common, and that no further reforms are necessary.

### Truckers and Safety

The first thing that most of the drivers I interviewed wanted to emphasize was that drivers want to be safe. Drivers are not only concerned about their own safety, but realize that they have a great deal of responsibility for keeping the drivers of “four-wheelers” (cars) safe as well. Harold, a driver for non-union Midwestern Trucking, described to me a scary choice he had to make:

I had a flatbed, and it was loaded with steel. I was coming back up out of the south, down below Springfield, and uh, it was actually blizzard-type conditions, it was night time, and I knew the road, I ran it so many times that I knew it like

the back of my hand. But there was another truck that was northbound and I was northbound and came over an overpass and then the road would make a gentle curve. So there was a little four-wheeler, a little car, and this was at night time, but I could see with my headlights not even past the hood. But there was a car there and there was another truck on the other side that was squeezing this car because he didn't realize that the road was changing that much. And I had a choice of either running over that little car, that had at least a couple people in it, or going off the road. So I put the truck in the ditch. I kept control of it, and there was enough snow that actually it helped. But then I got stuck. And uh, I made it to a safe stop. I knew I had a choice of either running over the people in the little car, or put the truck in the ditch, so I put the truck in the ditch. And so anyway, the next morning when the state trooper showed up, he wanted to know was I ok, and I said yeah, I just got stuck.

Drivers organize their routines around making sure they get enough rest and making sure their equipment is in safe working order, because the potential for killing or injuring themselves or someone else (mostly they talk about a fear of harming others) is always on their mind. To emphasize the seriousness of his responsibility for safety, Gary drew a distinction between his job and white-collar jobs.

So we - over the years, we have learned that my job – for me to be efficient at my job, I need to get plenty of rest, and I need to not be pressured into tryin' to get off, tryin' to hurry to get off. And that's one thing that I do, I tell all the time, if you were to fall asleep at your desk, you drop a pencil, or a pen. When I fall asleep, I kill somebody or myself. You know, so I can't afford to be fatigued on my job.

The drivers I interviewed are acutely aware of the stakes every time they get behind the wheel.

The drivers in my sample also paid a lot of attention to the condition of their trucks, knowing that sometimes that can make all the difference in preventing an

accident. And when they spoke about the potential for accidents, and emphasized the measures they take to avoid those accidents, the most common imagery they referred to was that of mothers and children. Here, Kevin talked about a time when he had a brake problem that he reported to management and had fixed before he began to drive.

You pull out the um, brake valve from the tractor, to lock the brakes on the trailer, and you can still drive around the yard with them, and the trailer's empty, which means you have no resistance to stop. If you can move that unit empty, imagine what would happen if you had 35,000 pounds of freight on there, and you went to stop and there's a station wagon with a mother and a bunch of kids in it. That would be disastrous.

Clearly, that would be a disastrous situation regardless of who was hit, but in driver's imaginations, the most frequently pictured potential accident victims were mothers and children, or whole families.

Brenda, a driver with over ten years of experience (and whose parents were also truckers), echoed Gary and Kevin's concerns in more detail, and also mentioned the possibility of killing a mother and her children:

But the scariest thing for me, with truck driving, is that, if I get into a wreck, if you hit a car with a woman, and a little toddler in the back seat, and her kids and stuff, you're gonna kill them, and you're gonna live through it. But whoever I hit, or whoever hits me, isn't. Can you live with that? Hitting a mother with a carload of her children, and killing them all, and you're sitting there looking at it, knowing you came out without a scratch? Could you live with that? That's what you gotta think about. That's not just a pick-up, that's an eighty-thousand pound vehicle out there on the road, compared to a little-bitty eight thousand pound mini-van full of babies. No comparison.

Every driver I interviewed had a similar fear, or had an actual story about a close call or accident they had been involved in or witnessed. Even when the drivers were not



responsible for the accident described in their stories (which was most often the case), they remained haunted by the incident. Marshall, a driver for non-union Midwestern Trucking, explained one of his worst memories:

Well, the things that always stick out in my mind is that I have seen some brutal, brutal wrecks. I've seen a lot of people killed. A lot of people over twenty-six years of driving. Out in Pennsylvania once, going around a two-lane road, it was messy. And there was - there were little bodies, everything was covered up and blood-soaked. It was messy. And really, that's the bad side, but that's what sticks in your mind.

One of the moments that most sticks out in my own mind from interviews is an incident described by Ed, who had driven for over forty years and who talked with a wry sense of humor when describing situations he'd been in and stupid things he'd seen people do while driving. When I asked him about accidents he had seen or been involved in, he described an incident just a few short sentences, but the look on his face and the change of the tone of his voice told me it was something he had spent a lot more than three sentences thinking about.

E: I had one bad accident, and uh, there was a person, a gentleman went to sleep and he came across the center line and hit me head on at 60 mph.

C: In a car?

E: A car. He was in a car and I was in the truck. And, needless to say he did not make it. (staring off at this point, eyes sad). And that happened in 1970.

Ed's wife Gina was with us during this interview, and she just rubbed his hand as he mentioned this accident. Recalling the story was clearly difficult for Ed, who is retired from driving now but working as a teacher at a truck driving school.

Because they generally take safety so seriously (though there are complicating factors – see next section), many of the drivers I interviewed resented the fact that truckers sometimes have a bad reputation on safety issues. Here Marshall emphasized that truckers, in many cases, are much more safety-conscious than drivers of four-wheelers.

They'll risk, almost kill themselves to get, you know, around you or...it's just amazing what people do. I've had people spin out....spin around three times, almost take my bumper off to get around me, to gain like three seconds. You don't really figure out what these people's frame of mind are when they get in their car. You know, I think they put a NASCAR helmet on.

While truckers feel that they are much safer than other drivers, they also believe that when accidents happen, they are most likely to be blamed on truckers, regardless of their focus on safety. John, a union driver, explained this dynamic:

And you have to deal with that, and large vehicles being on the street, there's more traffic now than there ever has been, and a lot of idiots out there, I mean, you've seen it every day. People just totally ignoring the right way to do things. And the first time something happens, it could be her fault, she could hit me, but the first thing they do is they try to blame it on the truck driver all the time. I get rear-ended, somebody gets hurt, I still have to go take a drug test. I still have to take, you know, a sobriety test right then and there. You know, it's the professional driver who gets questioned first. And you have all that to deal with, and that's why we deserve getting paid well!

John's description of this situation is gendered as well, as the hypothetical irresponsible driver of the car is coded as female. Jeff, from non-union Midwestern Trucking, expressed a commonly held concern about truckers being unfairly targeted or blamed

(Ouellet 1994). Jeff also returned here to the imagery of injuring or killing a mother and child):

We're a target for fines, and I don't know, maybe I'm just seeing something that wasn't there, but over the road it was, and even driving the other day, I had a lady, I don't know what she did, but we were going down the interstate, and I think she was mad at her kid, but she locked up her brakes and skidded to a halt right in the middle of the interstate. It was about twenty miles up the road. At first I dodged left, and I didn't see any route there, so I dodged right, and took it off the road and down through the grass and back up on you know, if I wouldn't have done that I would have creamed this lady. And you would have heard this story, uh, you know, driver runs over woman and kid, woman and kid dead, and of course you'd feel like hell killing somebody and while it wouldn't have been your fault, but wherever you went, you know, you'd be branded.

Because the drivers I interviewed saw the drivers of “four-wheelers” distracted by all manner of things (from unruly children to their own cell phones), they are hyper-vigilant because they feel that even if they are not at fault in an accident, they will end up being blamed.

#### *Why Safety May Not Always Be Priority Number One*

While the drivers I interviewed were genuinely concerned about safety, there is an inherent conflict surrounding that concern. And that is money. The trucking industry is structured such that many incentives are built around a driver's ability to “sweat” his or her own labor (Belzer 2000). In many cases, the more loads one pulls, the more miles one drives, the more money he or she earns. And although drivers desire and strive for safety, the incentives are there for behaviors that put everyone at risk. In this situation, interests of drivers and company owners (when the driver is not an owner operator) align,

but in a way that is not beneficial and can be dangerous (Belzer 2000; Leidner 1993).

Rochelle, a driver in her early forties who works for one of Midwestern's competitors

and also has training responsibilities at her company, explained the dynamic succinctly:

Ok, [the company] pays you a percentage of the load....If You don't get the load, you don't get paid. So, in order – the more loads you complete, the more money you make. So that's how they keep you running. And you've got guys running up and down the road ninety miles an hour trying to get that extra load. Well, I've been there long enough – you can run up and down that road ten, fifteen miles over all day long and you're not getting an extra load.

In many cases, even fast and dangerous driving is not enough for the drivers to squeeze out any extra money from their loads. Experienced drivers like Rochelle see that the potential extra money gained from driving dangerously is frequently not enough to make this risk worthwhile.

Much of the tension surrounding safety and drivers and companies that “sweat” themselves or their employees is over trucker hours of service (HOS) – the guidelines that govern the number of hours a driver can work during a certain period of time, including both driving and non-driving time. Prior to 1962, rules governing truckers' hours of service were based on the assumption of a regular, 24-hour cycle, limiting drivers to 15 hours on-duty (10 hours driving time) and nine hours of rest in each 24-hour period. After 1962, however, the base cycle upon which HOS are calculated shrank; creating a work/rest cycle that could be as short as 18 hours. It removed the 24-hour period standard, making it so that drivers could, conceivably, drive for ten hours, then sleep for eight, and then start the cycle again. They could also insert up to five hours of non-driving tasks in their workday in order to break up and draw out the ten-hour period

of driving. This meant that a driver's allowable hours were reset and calculated against an ever-shortening period of time, though they were limited to 60 hours of work in seven days and 70 hours in eight days (Husting and Biddle 2005; Peoples 2005). In 2003, responding to concerns about public safety and widespread logbook violations, the FMCSA proposed new rules that created a minimum 21-hour drive-rest cycle. The new rules stipulated a maximum of 11 hours of drive time after 10 consecutive hours off-duty, "or for any period of time after having been 'on duty' 14 hours following 10 consecutive hours off-duty" (Husting and Biddle 2005). If drivers were using a sleeping berth (as drivers frequently do when driving over the road), the rest period could be split into two periods, and did not have to be consecutive. These proposed rules changes were controversial because of the eleventh hour of drive time and the ability to split the rest period into two shorter periods, and so their enforcement (originally planned to begin in 2004) was put on hold. In July 2004 the U.S. Court of Appeals struck down the rules and sent them back to the FMCSA for further consideration. Revised rules, effective in October 2005 (with an update announced in November 2008 that took effect in January 2009), kept the 11-hour driving maximum but eliminated the provision that allowed drivers using a sleeping berth to divide their rest into two shorter periods (FMSCA 2008). The issue of driver work hours is one of the most salient ways drivers are caught up among the interests of many different parties, including themselves and their families, company management, industry and government organizations and the driving public.

Drivers themselves tend to have mixed feelings about HOS guidelines, on one hand lamenting the fact that they work too many hours, and on the other that they *need* to

work as many hours as possible in order to make a decent living. Some drivers, like Sam below, experience the HOS regulations as just another way to disrespect drivers by undermining their ability to judge for themselves if they are too tired to continue driving.

What other job can you work twelve, fourteen hours per day and not get paid overtime? And what other job do you have that's so closely regulated by the government? You can work fourteen hours a day, you can drive eleven. That just switched at the first of the year. Let's say I'm a factory worker, and I decide to work a double shift, that's sixteen hours. You're telling me that he's not gonna be that tired, getting off a sixteen hour shift and driving home. I'm a professional – well, not a professional, hell I'm just a truck driver (smiles), but I'm trained to do it, and I'm used to working the long hours. You know, if I can, if I drive eight or nine hours, and I take about a six hour nap or something and I get up and I'm refreshed and I can go on, I can't do it! I can't do it. They won't let me. I *do* do it...I mean as far as being over the road. But it's just – it's just too strictly regulated. And we're not getting paid enough.

If I had to sum up the situation regarding HOS regulations in one paragraph, driver Sam did it for me, in the above passage. He touches on drivers' frustrations relative to being exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act (the FLSA, which provides overtime protections), makes an unfavorable connection between the situation of drivers and that of other blue-collar workers, acknowledges negative conceptions of truckers, and admits to falsifying his log on OTR runs, all in one short paragraph. He ends it by asserting that the need for money (in his case, as a single father, this was a recurring theme) is at the root of the problem. And it is.

Wages in the trucking industry have been in a free-fall since deregulation in the 1980's. Real earnings dropped by over 30% between 1977 and 1995. Belzer points out

that, “in 1977 dollars, the average driver earned \$11,793 less in 1995 than he would have, had his current wages been at the same level as his 1977 wages” (2000). Trucking companies, which have also been hit economically by deregulation, are in some cases complicit in providing drivers with incentive to use unsafe practices. While Midwestern Trucking has a good reputation for not directly pressuring drivers to use unsafe practices, most of its drivers had experience working for companies that did.

Fourteen of the twenty-three drivers interviewed had started in OTR (over the road – being away from home for weeks at a time) driving, and then moved into local driving, which is generally considered to be more desirable, and where there is less pressure on drivers to use “funny books” – slang for doctored log books. While Rochelle previously pointed out that driving at unsafe speeds often does not benefit drivers, she tends to use her willingness to work long – illegal – hours to make more money.

The harder you work, the more money you make. Unfortunately, the more creative you are with your logs you can work longer. As far as men and women, women will tend to make more money than men, or work harder than men – they’re lazy, they don’t want to get out there and do it. I get a lot of crap over there, they say that the dispatcher favors me because I make more money, but no, every time she says that you won’t do the load, I take it! I like that green stuff, it will fit in my pocket. I tell them that all the time! (laughs)

Although Rochelle described a gendered contrast, the men in my interviews were just as likely as the women to have admitted to using “funny books” or “comic books.” Of the fourteen drivers interviewed who had done over the road driving at some point, nine admitted to log falsification at some point, and one other alluded to it. Of the three women with over the road experience, two of them admitted to log falsification. Out of

the eleven remaining male drivers, seven admitted to it. While my sample is too small to draw any statistical generalizations, I would imagine that if there is any gender effect on incidences of log falsification, it would only be due to the fact that women, who in many cases are just entering trucking, are more likely to be concentrated in OTR driving, where log falsification is much more common.

Fines have also increased for this kind of activity, as well as the level of public, governmental and technological scrutiny. Harry responded to my question about falsifying logs by explaining the changing environment in trucking, as well as the contrast between over the road and city driving as it relates to keeping logs.

C: It used to be a lot easier to fudge the log book, right?

H: We used to call it a comic book.

C: Yeah, ok.

H: Ok, you know, carry a couple of sets of books with you, uh, depending on where you were. And uh, I'd generally do the same area, and we did 22 states. I didn't go coast to coast, and I was number two, so I got to pick where I wanted to go, so I generally knew what I could do and what I couldn't do on my runs. I'd run, mainly Louisville, down to Kentucky and back, or down to Tennessee.

C: Mm-hmm.

H: Uh, I knew what I could do with the scale houses down there, you know, so it was easier then. Today, a lot of them are computerized, and even the company is more apt to suspend you for uh, logbook violations, because of the stiffer fines. But I don't do that no more, I'm city now. Now she wishes I was on the road! (looks at his wife, Margaret, and laughs).

Drivers are clearly quite savvy and although they may experience pressure from their company, they are also agents in terms of knowing what they can and cannot do, and



what is and isn't in their best interest in terms of money and keeping things looking legal on paper.

Being in a union makes a huge difference in terms of the temptation to run a second or falsified logbook. Drivers who work for unionized companies felt that they had recourse when they were fatigued or were asked to work hours beyond what was lawful, and were more likely to earn an income that makes them feel less forced to drive illegally. Being a union member provided drivers with formal channels, outside of company management, to go through when asked to do something unsafe or unlawful. Since union wages are generally much higher (particularly when compared to non-union, OTR pay) there is not a significant economic incentive for unionized drivers to "sweat" their own labor the way there is for non-union or independent, owner/operator drivers. In 1996, for example, hourly wages for union drivers averaged \$14.68. Non-union drivers, by comparison, earned an average of only \$11.67 per hour (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005). Also important to consider here is the fact that because truckers are not covered under the Fair Labor Standards Act, they are not required to receive overtime pay – if a driver is non-union, they likely won't earn any additional hourly wage for working more than 40 hours per week (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005; Belzer 2000).

Kevin, who has been driving for forty years (for the past thirty-four years with the same union company) and who is a union steward, responded to my question about the environment at his company around the amount of hours that drivers are asked to drive.

C: And so you - have you ever felt any pressure to work more hours than you felt like was safe?

K: Uh, no. Because under the DOT rules today, if you are feeling ill or you are at your max of your hours,

you just tell the people at the window, "I'm fatigued, I've got to go home, I can't work any more."

C: Mm-hmm.

K: And they have to let you go, under the DOT section of the Motor Carrier's Directory. That's a must. If you tell them at the window that you're fatigued, you cannot work anymore. They cannot argue, they cannot write you up, they cannot discipline you in any way. We've won grievances on that. We've had letters removed from their files for that. So, today, the government has stepped in and it trying to do the right thing for the public safety.

While drivers at non-union companies are governed by those same Department of Transportation regulations, they have no outside recourse to grieve unfair practices that might be used by dishonest companies. They also are likely to be making less money (especially due to lack of overtime pay) with fewer benefits and would be more likely to comply with illegal demands from their company.

While union drivers acknowledge the privilege they have to take recourse if asked to drive when tired or for too many hours after moving to the position of union driver, unionized interviewees tended to view their non-union fellow drivers in a less than empathetic way. In this extended conversation, John, a union driver, discusses with his wife, Marie, the situation of one of his neighbors (who is also dating a friend of Marie's), who works for a non-union company. According to John and Marie, this neighbor had previously had the opportunity to go to work for a unionized package delivery company but turned down this position because it would have required him to do dock work (unloading) in addition to driving. He remained with the non-union trucking company.

J: Yeah, but he doesn't want to work the dock, though! Come on! You want to make a decent living, you're gonna have to earn it! I earn mine.

- M: Yeah, well he's putting his dues in now, that's for sure.
- J: It's not getting him anywhere! He's making - he says he makes decent money, but he's working, what, five, six days a week. He has no family life.
- M: He's working like sixty hours a week, and it's probably coming out to be -
- J: Twelve, thirteen dollars an hour, if he's lucky. You know, he could be starting making \$18 per hour, driving and working the dock for [another company]. You know, it's gonna be tough for his first year, two years, maybe, but, he'll be making more money, and he'll be home a lot sooner! You know, he'll be actually able to get eight hours of sleep a day instead of 5! You know, that's not even safe. How he's getting away with only sleeping 5 hours a day - I jumped on her friend's boyfriend last week about how he's cheating on his logs and how he's actually not getting all the, you know, he's driving twelve, thirteen hours per day when the limit is 10, and you're out there doing this, and when you get in an accident, it's guys like you who cause accidents and make the rest of us look like idiots. I jumped all over him, and he didn't like that. He said, "Why do you have something to say?" Because I'm a driver and I have to go by the rules! Guys like you - they don't have to abide by the rules. I get very upset with drivers like that. And this guy, as nice of a guy as he is, he's stupid!
- M: John, be quiet, he could hear!
- J: I don't care! He's irresponsible, driving, working fifteen hours a day and only getting five hours of sleep! How can he be that - she could be the one he runs into! You know, it could be anybody that he kills out there!
- M: Mm-hmm.

Here, John is drawing a significant moral distinction between himself and the other driver, with the implication being that out of sheer laziness (not wanting to work the dock) this driver is keeping himself from an improved economic situation, and is endangering others. The irony being that although John asserts that his neighbor is lazy, the neighbor is, by John's estimation, putting others at risk by driving too many hours!

As John points out, the neighbor is motivated by economics to drive an unsafe number of hours. John and Marie also simplify the situation and motivations of their neighbor – in addition to dock work (which can be very physically demanding); there may have been any number of other significant reasons why the driver turned down the union position. As I discussed in the previous chapter, this disdain is common – union drivers tend to dismiss non-union drivers with either pity or condescension and (with some significant exceptions) do not see them as partners in their class struggle, but rather as part of the problem.

In another instance where safety and money collide, companies may put off equipment maintenance or other safety precautions in a shortsighted bid to save money for the company or gain personal enrichment for the owners. Here John (with his wife, Marie) described the perceived disincentives for safety at a non-union company he worked for before starting his current unionized position:

- J: Because it's a lot of - who knows? That guy Dave, you know, to get away with not spending \$50,000 a year on upkeep on those vehicles, he's getting money in his pockets.
- M: Yeah, because he gets a bonus.
- J: Right, he gets a bonus. And if something happens – blame it on the driver! Blame it on the driver.
- M: True.

But again, as Kevin commented during the discussion on accidents, drivers with union protection feel that they are strongly backed up if and when they have a concern about their equipment.

### Electronic and Supervisory Control of Drivers

Many of the regulations companies enact do more to make drivers feel disrespected than they do to truly address safety concerns or good business practices. For example, many drivers feel that dispatchers have undue influence over their days. If a driver is in the “city-pool” at Midwestern, the dispatcher assigns him or her seemingly random runs throughout the day. If a driver is lucky enough to pull certain runs from the city pool that are hourly, those loads are more desirable than some of the runs where pay is based on mileage. When a driver builds a rapport with a certain dispatcher who will give him “his” runs – a favorite run of a particular driver – that is a good set-up for everyone involved. The driver is happy to be making good money, and the dispatcher doesn’t have to spend time dealing with an unhappy driver. Jeff, a driver in his late 40’s, described how tenuous the situation often is with dispatchers, comparing his current situation to when his favorite dispatcher, Stan, was with the company.

Like Stan was just so good, he had a grasp of everything that everyone liked, and you know there are runs that are bad runs. I started a hassle with the young dispatcher on graveyard because I had a Butler run, which is my run, and another city driver, all they had for him was a flatbed load that went to [another city]. It’s only sixty miles, and it’s a mileage run, but he put me on that run. And Stan would do things like that, but then he would give you, you know, four days of really good runs where you make good money, the rest of the week. Whereas this kid on third shift, he’s just trying to cover the runs, he doesn’t care who gets mad.

Although Jeff had more seniority than the other city driver who was given his prized “Butler” run, he had no recourse. In a non-union environment like Midwestern, seniority is used when bidding on set runs (most of which are taken by drivers with the most

seniority), but not in daily “pool” dispatching, which is a big source of frustration for many drivers. And although it is easier for dispatchers to work with drivers who like them, there are no real consequences for a dispatcher at a non-union company when he or she treats (or is perceived to have treated) a driver unfairly. Drivers resent this favoritism, experiencing it as a further loss of control over their income. Situations in which drivers see a loss of income may provide further incentive for manipulating logs or hours to make up for the lost income.

Beyond their interactions with dispatchers, many drivers also experience company regulations as unnecessary and missing the point. A sign in the driver’s room at Midwestern reads:

ATTENTION ALL DRIVERS: All drivers must call into dispatch before moving to another location. Dispatch must be informed of any and all movement of equipment and personnel. DO NOT take it upon yourself to come to the yard when your run is done. You must have permission to return to the yard.

Some drivers have somewhat steady runs that rarely change from day to day. These drivers in particular resent policies like the one described on the sign. They figure that they know their routine, and see it as a waste of time and effort to wait for a dispatcher’s recognition of each task they complete during the day. It is especially frustrating during busy periods, when they may have to wait ten to fifteen minutes (frequently unpaid) for a dispatcher’s recognition. The drivers’ room is a place where drivers often discuss the implementation of new rules and policies, as Andy and Joe do here.

A: Hey, you two, make sure you hand that paperwork to Darren now, don’t just put it in the basket.  
 J: Yeah, I guess we’re kids now.

A: Pretty soon they're gonna have someone riding along with us...make sure we don't screw up or cheat on our hours!

On the day I observed this conversation, a new sign had been posted directing the drivers to turn in their paperwork directly to Darren, the unpopular safety manager at the time. The general feeling among drivers was that this was just another unnecessary strain on their time, without producing any kind of benefit for themselves or even for the company.

Other company interventions seem to be more effective in keeping drivers from running "funny books" or redistributing time in their log books to "keep it legal." On the low-tech end of the scale, many companies (including Midwestern) have computerized measures built into their trucks that keep them from exceeding 65 miles per hour. With a full load on their truck, generally it is impossible to even make it to 65. So there are some effective checks on truck speeds that are already quite common. Others are newer, including satellite tracking of trucks and trailers, and computerized log systems that draw their information directly from the truck. Currently, many companies, including Midwestern, rely on paper logbooks that are then fed into a computer system and analyzed. The machines will kick out any obvious errors or signs of falsification, but a savvy driver can generally make their falsifications subtler, and so these paper-based logs are much easier to falsify, as they are essentially based on the discretion of the driver. The trend however, is towards fully computerized logs. These measures make it much more difficult if not impossible for drivers to run funny books or multiple logs. Pamela said:

Some companies where they do the computer log, you can't do it. You can only log that you're off-duty if the

truck is idling. They know if you're lying or not, and they won't allow you to. Our physical logs are computerized, and they scan them. But when the computer is hooked to the truck, they can't cheat.

These kinds of measures are taken as just another part of the trend towards tighter control of company assets and employees.

More vexing to some drivers are actual satellite tracking devices that not only report the status of the truck, but its position. These devices are perceived as having a major role in refuting the previously discussed image of the autonomous driver. I asked Janice her thoughts on the popular image of completely autonomous drivers. A 58-year old driver with over twenty years of experience driving for one of Midwestern's competitors, she explained:

You know, they always say that, but you got somebody on your back all the time. I don't care what you do or where you go, you know, unless you're the boss...They always say, "oh, I like to be independent!" Independent from what? You still call in six times a day and tell them where you're at and what you're doing. And now, with this Qualcomm, they can put you – their finger on your head at any time.

Qualcomm is a popular system for satellite tracking of trucks, and also provides wireless systems to help companies communicate directly with drivers. At Midwestern, any truck that is used for work outside the metropolitan area of the small city where the company is located is equipped with GPS tracking through Qualcomm. Steven, Midwestern's current safety manager (he replaced the unpopular Darren almost two years ago) and a former trucker, explained the benefits to companies that have monitoring technology like Qualcomm:



Uh, well the benefits are that it's taken some of the old school, "concrete cowboys", I guess they used to call them, "highway heroes and concrete cowboys", it's taken a lot of that away, that it's not just outlaw trucking anymore, you can't just do what you want. It's pretty locked in, and I think it provides a safer environment for the drivers first, and the general public as well....A lot of the holes in the compliance net have been repaired. When I first started, um, as a driver, I was one of those outlaw truck drivers, that broke all the rules, and I did run really, really hard...and violated the hours of service rules all the time.

Qualcomm and other GPS devices are definitely not popular with drivers. Here, Amy expressed with pride the freedom from monitoring she feels, particularly in comparison to non-union drivers:

- C: I interviewed a whole bunch of non-union drivers down in (another area).  
 A: I feel sorry for 'em.  
 C: And they all had some kind of (name of GPS system) or other monitoring system on their trucks.  
 A: See, when I was with [other company], we had (name of GPS system), and they couldn't give me decent directions for the life of 'em. I begged for the company's phone number where I was going to, you know, and when I got into town I called 'em, you know, and that just wasn't allowed, but it was tough, you know. A huge difference. Bein' a (name of union company) driver, I'm at the top of the food chain. There's no need for me to ever, ever leave. And like I said, I don't take it for granted, you know. I don't take it for granted, you know, so.

Amy equated being in a large, unionized company with being free from the restraints of GPS monitoring, but I interviewed drivers from two other large, unionized companies that did, in fact, use GPS to monitor their trucks and the hours their drivers were on the

road. Kevin described his experience as a union steward representing drivers accused slacking off on the job:

I know what will happen [when the company suspects something is going on]. They will put a security on this guy, and they will say, like I said, “What do you want to see first, the stills or the video?” Of him sleeping, or reading, taking an hour and a half for lunch, extending your break without having called in and getting it ok'd.

Kevin's company uses GPS to track its equipment, which is how their suspicions about particular drivers first arise. Using that information, the company then sends security to confirm these suspicions.

At the heart of these measures, aside from the advantage to companies of being able to pinpoint all of the equipment at any given time (Kilcarr 2004) is the ability to prove that their drivers are not exceeding the hours of service (HOS) regulations. Having a computerized log system is likely to save companies money in fines and time in dealing with representatives from the Department of Transportation. It may also pay dividends in terms of public opinion. Steven, the current safety director at Midwest, commented that many of the drivers who resent electronic monitoring measures see them as a “knee-jerk reaction”,’ brought on by the actions of “politicians who have no idea what trucking’s about.” So while overall safety is certainly a concern, there is the advantage of worker control for those companies that use GPS tracking systems, and that is an additional motivation for the industry as a whole to encourage using them.

The trend is towards a wider variety of monitoring devices and more sophisticated methods of tracking drivers and equipment. According to a report from the Transportation Research Board, “other advanced technologies under development, and in

some cases marketed, include adaptive cruise control systems (often in combination with forward collision warning), side collision warning systems (to prevent encroachment onto adjacent vehicles during lane changes), roll stability advisers and controllers, and lane tracking systems that advise of overall lane tracking quality (a measure of driver alertness and overall performance), and provide lane departure warnings. Advanced on-board sensor systems can also provide diagnostic monitoring of safety-critical components such as brakes and tires (Kipling et al. 2003). With these forthcoming technologies, drivers will be more and more closely monitored.

### Conclusion

In the long run, it will be fascinating to see the extent to which trucking companies embrace computerized control of their drivers. I mentioned above the benefits in terms of money and time, but there are also consequences. The computerization of worker control also exposes the fact that companies benefit from drivers' willingness to bend the HOS rules. The more drivers bend the rules (assuming they are not caught or involved in fatigue-related accidents), the more the companies benefit, especially since they are not required to compensate drivers above straight pay for their long work weeks. While many large companies have turned to GPS tracking to avoid hassles over their more large-scale regulatory issues, most small and medium-sized trucking companies have not, as they are less likely to see much return on their investment. This fundamental conflict of interest is at the heart of many of the issues I have touched on in this paper. At this point, cheating the system in terms of driver hours and safety appears, in my sample, to be much more common at non-union, small trucking firms (especially for

over-the-road drivers) and among owner-operators. Large companies may no longer see it as worth it anymore to try to cheat the system in terms of driver hours, though they continue to press for expansions in hours of service (HOS) rules in ways that will help them respond to demands from shippers at the potential cost of increasingly fatigued drivers (Husting and Biddle 2005). While trucking companies should in theory want to introduce safety measures to protect their drivers and the driving public, it may not always be in their immediate financial interest to do so – especially because those companies that do introduce these measures must still compete economically with those that do not. Economies of scale make it easier for large companies to adhere to safety regulations than for smaller companies or owner-operators.

Harold, the oldest and most experienced driver I have interviewed, is now 67 years old. He first learned to drive a truck when he was fourteen, as he grew up on a farm. Over the course of fieldwork and an interview, he was one of my most important informants, and he speculates here on how computer technology and tracking will affect the industry in the future when he says, “That’ll be up to the grease that turns the wheel, you know, which is money.” In the trucking industry, which seems to be running an effective race to the bottom (Belzer 2000), it seems that money is what it always comes down to.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### TRUCKERS AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

As I discussed in previous chapters, the trucking industry has undergone wrenching economic changes in the thirty years since deregulation, many of which have made the occupation less desirable. Rates of unionization have fallen from approximately 2/3 of drivers in the late 1960's, to just under half of all drivers in 1975, to only 26% of drivers in 2000 (Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005). Correspondingly, after deregulation, non-union wages fell between 11.7 and 15%, while union wages fell between 7.6 and 8.3 % (Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005). In the intervening period, more women, people of color and immigrants have moved into trucking, finding salaries that, although less desirable than in the unionized heyday of the industry, are higher than in many other occupations with high demand for workers and low educational requirements. From 1975 through 2000, women grew from 1% of drivers working for for-hire companies (as opposed to in-house, for companies like Wal-Mart), to 4.4%. During that same period, African-American drivers went from 7.2% to 12.6% of drivers, and Latino drivers from 4% to 10% (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005).

Taken as a whole, these are significant shifts in the makeup of the trucking workforce. Women drivers are often met with what at worst feels like open hostility, and at best a sense of being unwelcome. The one African-American driver I was able to

interview felt the chill from his fellow truckers, ranging from being called a racial epithet to being assigned inferior equipment. And although I ran into no openly gay male drivers, much of the boundary work that men drivers do is focused on establishing themselves as proudly and unquestionably heterosexual. In this chapter, I will explore the experiences of women and non-white drivers, as well as boundary work carried out by white male truck drivers.

#### Boundary Work: Continual Assertion of Hegemonic Masculinity

As other researchers have found, white, working class men often construct their masculinity in opposition to various “others” – women, gay men and racial minorities. (Connell 1995, Fine et. al. 1997). This is a strategy used frequently by men in my sample, and most frequently by white men drivers (although gender-based boundary heightening was also used by the male drivers of color in my sample). Among the drivers I interviewed, gender and racial ethnic-based boundary heightening and verbal denigration of homosexuality allow drivers to assert their masculinity by defining it in opposition to women and gay men. Union drivers also construct their masculinity in opposition to non-union drivers, who are viewed with a mixture of pity and contempt. In this chapter, I discuss how some drivers police the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity, and how other drivers perceive this and respond.

In my research, the specific groups that seem most targeted for “othering” vary based on geography and union/non-union status. Non-union drivers that I interviewed in a more rural area with less racial and ethnic diversity were much more concerned with distancing themselves from women and gay men. Union drivers in an ethnically and

racially diverse urban environment talked more frequently about ethnicity and non-union status. Fine et. al. suggest that this kind of boundary work based on oppositional masculinity is often tied to the economy and economic insecurity, and that as white men have seen their relative advantage (particularly access to well-paid, union jobs) fade, they have masked their newfound fragility by focusing on themselves as “victims” and on “others” – women, people of color, and gay men as “perpetrators.” (Fine et al, 1997; p. 52). This focus on individual “others” as perpetrators when larger social forces are to blame is the “least likely strategy for transforming inequitable social conditions and the most likely strategy for creating poor mental health outcomes.” (Janoff-Bulman 1979, as cited in Fine et. al. 1997, p. 52).

#### *Gender-based Boundary Heightening*

The effort to maintain clear gender-based boundaries is a central part of the drivers’ efforts to assert their oppositional masculinity. Drivers often “do masculinity” by distancing themselves from woman drivers and by questioning the women’s driving abilities, possibly attempting to shore up their status in the face of women’s movement into this traditionally masculine occupation.

“Tokens”, or numerical minorities in the workplace, are often subject to a “heightened visibility” on the job (Kanter 1977). Tokenism certainly exists at Midwestern. Midwestern drivers took great pleasure explaining to me the exact details of the firing of the last few women drivers who were employed there – but were not nearly as familiar with the circumstances of the men drivers who had been let go during the

same time period. Rochelle, a driver with over ten years of experience, described the heightened scrutiny women are subject to in trucking:

You're either a whore or you're gay. You'll get into a company somewhere and if the dispatcher doesn't like you, and you're female, and they don't like you just because you're female, they'll starve you out. You're not gonna make any money. And then if he does like you, and he gives you decent loads, then he's playing favorites and you must be screwing him. No matter which way you go, you know. And I've been out of the other workforce for so long - I know there was a little bit in that, before, at other jobs, but it's stronger in the trucking industry, big-time. The spotlight is on you.

Women drivers are not only subject to heightened visibility, but also expected to conform to traditional standards of femininity. In the following interview excerpt, Harold, a driver in his mid sixties who has been with the company for over ten years but driving for much longer, described a woman who used to work for Midwestern, with whom he shared a truck (he drove first shift, she drove second):

Well, there was a girl that used to do second shift for me... she was about as foul-mouthed as anything. Name was Wendy. I mean, her language would put a sailor to shame. She was a young girl. She got fired for sexual harassment, if that tells you anything.

In this description, Harold seemed to equate cursing like a sailor with being a sexual harasser. Since Wendy crossed gender boundaries with her swearing, it was believable that she was fired for sexual harassment. Harold continued, comparing Wendy's job performance with the driver with whom he now shares his truck.

And I'll give her credit for this. She always asked me, she said, "am I doing things ok to suit you?" I guess she knew I was a grumpy old fart, but...(laughs). But she did a better job than this guy. I don't care how she talked or anything else. Long as she does the job, and leaves it ok for me, I've got no complaints. Pretty foul mouth, but she did drive a truck pretty good. I mean,



you could tell, I can tell if somebody knows how to drive a truck if they drive from here to the street.

Wendy's language was the first thing that came to Harold's mind when he thought of her, not the driving skill that he admits she possessed. While praising her driving, he still adds the caveat, "pretty foul mouth, but..." Similarly, in the male-dominated world of futures trading, Peter Levin found that women who, along with the men, told dirty jokes or cursed were seen as "unladylike", "not very delicate" and ironically, talking "like a truck driver." (2004).

Male drivers often questioned the driving abilities of women. In this excerpt, Marshall, a forty-six year old owner-operator gave his assessment:

To tell you the truth, I don't know if they should be driving. I would say, out of the ones I've just met on the radio, which you can't tell nothing, but, uh, very few of them that I would - let's put it this way - my wife, driving, do you know how many years it takes to get experience to drive one of these? Most of the gals driving, at least the ones that talk on the radio, I just shake my head. Because what they say, it's so silly!

Because Marshall admitted that relying on comments made on the radio is not a great measure of driving ability, he went on to explain that women can become good drivers, but only under certain circumstances:

Uh, let's just say that the ones I think are better drivers are the ones who are with the guys, who are married, and who are with the guys, and the guys have taught them all their good habits.

In response to a question from me about whether his company had any women drivers, Harry answered:

Oh yeah, yeah. Oh, we have women drivers. We have two in the city, and there's a bunch of them on the road. You know, I don't see the road drivers, because I'm not - it's a big house.

But uh, most of the women drivers can't back up. They get frustrated in the city; they do what we call a shuttle. They go from one point to another point and back. They just drop the trailers off. And, throughout life, you can't do the job, I don't care if you're male or female, get out and let somebody else do it. You know? I don't want to hear you whine about it, you know? And until that, uh, I don't see much women doin' it.

Harry's knowledge about the supposed reason that you most women in his company did a "shuttle" route was not very specific, and he chalks it up to the fact that they can't handle it – get "frustrated." Shuttle routes are short, routine jobs that remain the same from day to day. If, in fact, women are concentrated in shuttle routes at Harry's company (this kind of specific data is not available on a company or even an industry-wide basis) his description of what happens to women drivers in his company ignores the plethora of other reasons women could be concentrated in these jobs. For example, shuttle routes may pay less. In many male-dominated industries, women, who are likely to have less seniority, get shuffled into lower-paying corners of their work in comparison to men (Eisenberg 1999; Paap 2006). Additionally, shuttle routes often have shorter and more predictable hours, advantageous for workers who need to be caretakers, as all of the women that I interviewed were currently doing, either for their children or for elderly parents (see Chapter Six). On an industry-wide basis, the most specific data available about jobs held by women comes from the Sloan Trucking Industry Program driver survey, conducted between 1997 and 1999. In this survey, women made up the highest proportion of owner-operators, at 4% (women made up only 2.6% of the total sample) (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005). Owner-operators can do a variety of jobs, either

working independently or under contract to companies, and some work as husband-wife teams.

In one interview, I asked the driver, Michael, what he would think if his daughter wanted to become a driver. He responded:

Naahh. It's not a female job. I mean, I'm not bein' discriminatory, you know what I mean? But every time I see a female truck driver, I wonder - did she get pushed into this just for a job, or um, I mean - I'm talkin' a big rig. A lot of girls drive for UPS, the small things, and they make \$80,000 a year. They do fantastic. I don't think she would get the benefit out of it. Because I know how a lot of people think. And - I don't know everything but it's - "Oh, I drive a truck for a living." People always expect a woman to have a dainty job. Nurse. This and that. But she doesn't seem like she wants to go that way, anyway. 'Cause she's scared of 'em. You know? Whenever I put her up in the seat of my truck, she's like, "Get me down, Dad, get me down!" She panicked, because it's so high up. (laughs)

Women drivers also experience another difficulty common among token groups. Each woman driver is seen as representative of all other women truckers. Here, Janice described how this works – and how it is exacerbated by stereotypes, the lack of solidarity among women in the occupation, and the heightened visibility of female drivers:

Very seldom will you get another woman driver to talk to you. I think it's because they think you're queer. And that, that is a big problem. Also, it's terrible to say but some of the worst language on the radio comes out of a woman's mouth, and to me – I just want to box her ears. I mean, we've got a bad enough image without that, you know. Everything we do is under scrutiny.

Demonstrating the phenomenon that Janice describes, Carl, a dispatcher at Midwestern, offered his opinion on why women truckers seem to have more attendance problems than men (based on his experience with only two women drivers).

It seems to me, and I don't want this to sound sexist, at all, but it seems to me like women have a lot of attendance problems. A lot more so than men. I know Jill didn't have any kids. So it wasn't kids. Uh, the one gal, Bobbi, she missed a lot of work and I'll be honest with you. The reason I think this - there's just things that lead up to make you put things together. She's a very pretty lady. She used to get flowers, cards, candy, at work! I think she was dating people and not coming to work, you know what I mean. I think she, she was so overwhelmed with offers to go out for dinner and things like that. And I think that's what happened. It would be my guess because she'd miss on a Friday night and not come in on Monday because she had a - a long weekend or something! You know, that kind of stuff.

Although Bobbi was the only woman currently working as a driver at Midwestern (Jill had worked there several years before), Carl takes these limited experiences to mean that “women have a lot of attendance problems.” Additionally, Carl discounts any other reasons Bobbi might have given when she called in, assuming that any attractive female driver who misses work is probably too involved with dating to be a responsible employee. This seems to validate Rochelle’s earlier comment that female drivers – if not assumed to be “gay” – are often seen as sex objects. Though I was not able to find data indicating whether women drivers were averaged more sick time than men, the two other dispatchers I interviewed (one man and one woman) did not mention women calling in more frequently than men.

Men may also harass women on the CB radio, an important communication medium for drivers. Emboldened by the relative anonymity provided by the radio, some

men drivers make offensive and intimidating comments to women truckers. Here,

Rochelle explained her experiences:

I go out there everyday and if you're talking on the CB you're going to have somebody harass you. He's either going to sexually harass you, or he's gonna tell you that you need to be home barefoot and pregnant in the house, you know. And there's still a few that get really nasty with you out there. They're just intimidated, I think. You know, "you took a job from a man", you know!

Given the industry's problems with turnover, the idea that women drivers are "taking jobs" from men is silly – at least prior to the current economic downturn, trucking firms have found it increasingly difficult to attract and retain quality drivers. With turnover rates at some companies at or near 100%, trucking has not historically been lacking in job opportunities (Belman, Lafontaine and Monaco 2005; Conyngham 2005).

While rude and harassing comments are common over the CB radio, Pamela, a non-union driver with five years of experience pointed out that not all men are out to harass the women:

Some of them are like, "you need to stay home, you need to be at home with the children," this and that. And they'll say that right on the radio. But then sure as anything some other guy will pipe up and say "shut up." Because most men out there don't think like that.

All of the women I interviewed told similar stories but were quick to point out that there is always a "decent" man who will correct the harasser. This contrast points to a struggle among the drivers to both retain their traditional sense of masculinity while accepting the presence of women in the traditionally masculine preserve of trucking. This struggle is increasingly common globally, as men and women's roles are transformed by economic change. Sometimes the change is shaped by migration for new economic activities

(Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), and sometimes, as for the women and men in my sample, it is shaped by a changing domestic social and political environment (Freeman 2000; Johnson 2002) that makes women's employment and women working at jobs traditionally held by men more common and acceptable. Deindustrialization and, for the trucking industry, deregulation have led to falling wages and job loss, making the kind of employment traditionally available to men with low levels of education less attractive to them. However, even at historically low levels, workers at jobs like trucking make an overall, industry-median wage of \$17.92 per hour (OOH 2010-2011). These earnings, even at the very conservative estimate of 40 hours per week, would lead to an annual income of approximately \$37,270. Median earnings at traditionally feminine jobs like cashier (\$8.49 per hour), administrative assistant, (\$13.96 per hour) or bank teller (\$11.35 per hour) cannot compare (OOH 2010-2011). This imbalance in earnings potential makes blue-collar work increasingly attractive to women (see Chapter Six).

Moving past simple harassment over the CB radio, other situations faced by women drivers are downright scary. Amy, who has been driving over the road for the past five years, has learned to always carry a "tire buddy" (a large object used to check tire pressure) with her when she is driving and using the facilities at truck stops. She's been physically attacked twice:

When I was with [company name], I was jumped twice. In truck stops. Done for the day, done driving for the day, so you park at the truck stop. And you get out, and get all your stuff together so you can take a shower, and blah, blah, blah. And that's it. And somebody - you're in a line with 50 other trucks, and it's all trailer to trailer to trailer. I carry my tire buddy wherever I go. They were definitely hurt. The first one was three against one. And I turned around and I got –

and they broke my nose, immediately, so I knew - a woman knows - you know what's goin' on. So I knew I couldn't pass out, because everything was red, I was weak at the knees, and I knew I couldn't pass out. So you make it. I don't know how you do it, you make yourself don't do it. And you come up swingin'. Don't stop swingin' until they're down.

Amy talked about these instances completely nonchalantly, as if they were just another aspect of her job that she'd had to get used to. Amy was the only woman driver I interviewed with a story of physical violence, but she was also only one of three women I interviewed with experience in over the road driving. With a larger sample size, and with more women who have driven over the road, unfortunately I am sure more experiences like this would have emerged.

*Work Smarter, Not Stronger*

Women in the trucking industry are not passive recipients of male truckers' boundary work and harassment. While some men work to distance themselves from and/or degrade women, women drivers have developed strategies to deal with harassment (sexual and otherwise), intimidation, and doubts about their abilities. They emphasize the power and control trucking gives them, call attention to the fact that they, too, have families to support, and posit themselves in a physical and mental struggle to work smarter, not stronger.

Here, Pamela described how working at a traditionally masculine job has improved her self-confidence:

I guess I like – I guess you call it control. I don't know a better word, but the power of it. Um, not just that, but the satisfaction that I can do it.

She later described the thrill of being able to out-maneuver male drivers who she sees as over-confident and careless, and using their own insults against them:

I've done a lot of places that lots of guys have said, "no way am I getting in there", but I do it and I'm like "yeah, I did it and you're a sissy!" (she laughs).

In many cases, like the example above, even the women join in the denigration of femininity, using words like "sissy" to insult male drivers. However, as Paap points out, the use of words like "sissy" or "pussy" in this context, while denigrating women and femininity, are also used as a way to (in a back-handed way) compliment the women who are able to successfully perform blue-collar work like trucking – separating them both from men and women who cannot (Paap 2006).

While situations like that described by Pamela are empowering, women must also develop ways to manage rude and insensitive comments that are made by their male co-workers. Brenda, a thirty-seven year-old single mother, explained how she deals with harassing comments on the radio:

The men out there, they see us taking a job from a man. That's why a man's out there waiting on tables when he should be out doing our job – because some woman came in and took it. You should actually ride in a truck and listen to how they talk. But you just turn the radio down and do your job. You gotta make a living, too.

All of the women I interviewed have learned to employ just this strategy – simply tuning out the comments and concentrating on their work.

In addition to simply tuning out disrespectful comments from their co-workers, another important strategy used by the women I interviewed was "working smarter, not stronger." All made the point that while male drivers may be physically stronger, they



are often overconfident or careless. They see this overconfidence as one of the few advantages enjoyed by women in trucking, who don't have to live up to standards of masculinity.

In Chapter 4 (see page 84), driver Pamela highlighted masculinity as a performance for other men – a way of proving their manliness to each other (Messner 2002, Paap 2006). Pamela believed that not having that pressure gives women an advantage in doing the work of trucking. However, she later pointed out that women have a way of making up for differences in physical strength – they do still ultimately need to prove that they can get the job done:

Some things are more physical. There are some things it might take me ten minutes to do that a guy can do in five minutes, or something like that. I may have to do it a different way, but I'll get the job done. Men can work stronger, but women can work smarter. Find a different way around.

For example, at Pamela's company, new drivers are put on a challenging assignment that involves unloading trailers filled with heavy cartons of cigarettes. After removing all the cigarettes from the trailer, they must be reloaded on pallets according to customer order.

Pamela said:

Well, that's pretty physical. And I think that's the reason they put you right on that job almost immediately. You won't always have to do that job, but they want to find out how well you do your job. Most guys will say, "This is for the birds, this is absolutely stupid." But they're new like I am. So we just have to put up with that. It's just something I have to do. It may take me an hour longer than a guy because I'm not physically as strong, but I'll get there. Be patient.

Describing the use of mental toughness – not giving in, even when a job seems “stupid” – rather physical strength is one way women asserted their ability to “get the job done.” This desire to work smarter also extends to, as discussed in the previous chapter with Melinda, not giving into gendered pressure to drive too fast or in other ways recklessly. Ultimately though, it’s still important to prove a physical ability to do the job, even if it may take longer – Pamela did complete the task, thereby proving her ability and value as a worker (Paap 2006).

*Feminism on the Road?*

Women drivers share many common experiences on the road, but there are barriers to developing a sense of solidarity. As I wrote earlier, one of the foremost hurdles is the “token” status of women in trucking. “Tokens”, or numerical minorities in the workplace, are often subject to heightened visibility on the job (Kanter 1977) – as Rochelle put it, “the spotlight is on you.” And Rochelle, as an “out” lesbian, feels additional pressures at work:

But one of the things that gets me, that I'm self conscious about, is that - with my being gay, I feel like I have to be very careful. How I talk to people, how I touch people. Because there are those stereotypes out there. Not only from being a female, but on top of that being gay. Lots of stereotypes, and I am always monitoring myself in that sense.

Pamela echoed Rochelle’s sense of the stereotyping applied to women truckers:

And the stereotype is that you are either a whore or you are gay. That’s the stereotype.

Divisions like the “whore” or “gay” dichotomy described by Rochelle and Pamela are extremely divisive, and are common to many male-dominated workplaces (Paap 2006).

Since *one* woman in trucking is often seen as representative of *all* women in trucking, it often seems more sensible to women truckers to align themselves with men rather than with a female driver who seems to step out of line or to misrepresent female drivers.

While internal divisions over problems like tokenism and the “whore”/“gay” dichotomy may divide women drivers, there are also ways the women are united. Research focusing on blue-collar women has found that they often use “heteroglossia” or “melding of discourses” when discussing their experiences (Hollis 1994). During interviews, this was clear as the women struggled to express their attachment to individualist conceptions of traditional American ideology while at the same time embracing feminist principles of equality as well as a high level of class-consciousness. For example, Pamela described how learning to drive a truck was empowering and helped build her self-confidence – an experience that many of the women shared:

I always kind of doubted myself, and so every little thing that I master gets me away from some other fear, and when I first started driving, I thought that there was no way I was gonna be able to do this. The thing was so huge, I was gonna run over somebody, I just knew it. But when you master it all, you finally think, "Hey, I can do this, and I can do it well."

Comments like this, however, is about as feminist as it gets – for the women I interviewed, like Pamela, their feminist analysis expresses only a kind of “girl-power” feminism – I can do anything a man can. The cultural resources the women have access to do not really allow for a broader sense of solidarity as women truckers. Some even express essentialist notions of femininity, perhaps in response to stereotypes of women truckers. One of my respondents, Brenda, explained to me three or four times during the interview how different men and women are:

You'll find, my dispatcher at work will tell you. The women are more reliable, they're more cautious, and, yeah, you go and look in the yard, we got the cleanest trucks, and that just goes back to the difference between men and women.

And later in the interview, talking about jobs that require the driver to unload his or her own truck:

God didn't make a woman like a man. No matter how hard we work and all this stuff, physically our bodies aren't made as strong, though. A man's gonna have a stronger back than you and I. Bigger arms. That's not to mean that if we had all day we couldn't get the job done, but it's just reality.

While the divisions and stereotypes faced by women drivers do not provide the greatest atmosphere for the development of feminist solidarity, certainly many of the women have developed a feminist consciousness around the way they are often treated on the job. In terms of day-to-day survival, some women drivers seem to decide against being self-consciously feminist. Not all women, however. And union membership seems to help in this. Of the six women drivers I interviewed, four were non-union and expressed some ambivalence about feeling solidarity with their fellow women drivers. Two, however, were union drivers, and both these women expressed a different attitude. I asked Amy whether she had been able to establish a supportive relationship with the other women at her company. When she responded with an enthusiastic yes, I expressed some surprise, and told her that some of the other women I interviewed felt ignored or avoided by other women drivers. She responded:

Oh no, see, we don't play none of those games, and that's what I call it. That's what I call "their problem." I hear a lot of women saying, "I don't even want to work for a woman boss, because she's a backstabber." You know what, that is your shortcoming. Because I am out there. You know what I mean,

I'm the new generation that's not afraid to work, and it doesn't matter what - as long as I can support myself, and I've found unions and I'm stickin' with it. And I do a good job, and that's my reputation. So, and when it comes down to it, all that matters is your character.

Amy specifically ties her attitude to the fact that she has “found unions”, implying that the attitudes that go along with union membership have helped her to avoid feeling divided from other women drivers. Similarly, when I asked Melinda (who had worked previously as a city bus driver) if she thought being a woman had shaped her experiences in driving, she also emphasized the importance of her union, even making the context for comparison international:

Seeing that I haven't been a man in this lifetime, I can tell you - that's the only way I feel like I can answer that honestly, because I don't really know what it's like to be a man, except to watch my boys. But since I started out as the third woman bus driver, that helped me be assertive, and seeing that there was a path. It was kind of a scary path, because there were still women being killed in Juarez because they're women and they work, and nobody cares. And seeing that that still happens, I'm feeling I'm on top of the world. I feel like nothing can stand in my way. I'm feeling pretty good. You know, because I feel I have some kind of a support system here in the States with the union. That's the big plus, the union.

In addition to helping raise wages and improve working conditions generally, it seems that union membership can also help women better draw common cause with one another.

### *Emphasized Heterosexuality*

Another important way the male drivers in my sample asserted their masculinity was through a contrast with homosexuality, which they associated with men who are wimpy and effeminate. Excluding same-sex desire from conceptions of masculinity is “a

key feature of modern hegemonic masculinity” (Connell 2000). It’s also a way of “proclaiming who they are by asserting who they are not” – constructing their identities in opposition to real or imagined gay men in trucking (Embrick et. al. 2007). Working-class men often yearn for simpler times that were supposedly ruled by moral absolutes – when being gay, for example, was clearly a moral offense (Rubin 1994). This yearning for simpler times may be expressed by men such as those I’ve interviewed through the ever-present homophobic language of the drivers’ room at Midwestern Trucking.

Trucking and other blue-collar occupations like police work (Miller et. al. 2003) provide an interesting counterpoint to the “asexuality” of corporate America (Woods 1993). In corporate workplaces, Woods argues that an “asexual imperative” rules – workers are assumed not to bring their sexuality into the workplace – although in reality workers’ sexuality is everywhere. There is flirting, gossip, and pictures of spouses. For the drivers in my sample, I would argue that rather than a disingenuous assumption of asexuality, there is a very definite, conscious effort to enforce a “heterosexual imperative” through active denigration of gay and lesbian sexuality and valorization of heterosexuality and traditional masculinity.

Heterosexism is one of the last and most stubborn publicly acceptable “-isms” in the United States, particularly in small town, “middle America”, where I carried out my research. The truckers at my research site felt no embarrassment about using derogatory terms to refer to gay men and lesbians. This contrasts to research in England, for example, which shows that while people still work within a heterosexist framework, they are aware of the unacceptability of denigrating gay men and lesbians (Speer and Potter

2000). Their respondents attended to their language when discussing matters of sexuality, demonstrated awareness that openly expressing heterosexist attitudes was no longer appropriate, and used a variety of discursive strategies to avoid appearing heterosexist (Speer and Potter 2000). Speer and Potter did not provide information about the social class or occupational backgrounds of their respondents, so it's difficult to compare contexts. One possible difference could be that their sample was skewed towards middle-class or professional respondents, given that their results contrast sharply with mine, focused on working-class respondents.

It was extremely important to the drivers I interviewed and observed that they emphasize their heterosexual orientation. While their earnings may be in decline, at least they are still "real" (heterosexual) men. The following excerpt illustrates a typical, heterosexuality-enforcing exchange in the driver's room. The drivers, Lou and Nate, explained the circumstances of one female driver's dismissal from the company, ending with teasing their co-worker, Tim.

- L: Well, I guess it was sexual harassment. Just a lot of incidents.
- N: Didn't really surprise me. But I didn't mind her. We were at that "driver's appreciation" thing and I dropped something. When I bent over, she smacked me on the ass! (mimicks a smacking motion). Hell, I didn't mind. She was like "oh, I guess they warned me about not doing that!" I told her, "You can spank me anytime!"
- L: (laughs)
- N: Then, I guess she got some tattoo, like on...right by her nipples. And she was showing it to a bunch of the drivers. I guess some guy got offended and complained. Now what kind of guy would get offended by tits?! I guess he must have been a fag or something!
- L: I was gonna say...I don't know why anyone would be offended by that! He probably was a fag...maybe it was Tim!

(He jokingly pointed at another driver who was at the far wall by the bulletin board doing paperwork).

T: (engrossed in his paperwork) I'm not a fag!

In this passage, the drivers are confirming that they, as strong, heterosexual men, would certainly not be “offended by tits.” The only kind of man who would be offended by this inappropriate display, they conclude, must be “a fag.”

Epithets for gay men make up the majority of insults hurled in the driver’s room at Midwestern. In the following exchange, drivers Brent and Lloyd joked with Trevor, a dispatcher:

B: Then we got this stuff. (he motions to a sign announcing the April anniversaries of people who have been with the company for 2 years, 3 years, some as many as 15.) I've never been on that. I've been here over 2 years. Wasn't on there the first year, or this time. But then that's Trevor's fault. (laughs)

L: Everything is Trevor's fault! (laughs)

B: Ain't that right, Trevor? Just nod, ok?

T: Sure, as long as you weren't calling me a homo!

B: Naw, I wouldn't do that to you, Trevor!

T: Well, I'll nod as long as you don't!

For Trevor, being called a “homo” would have been the worst possible insult in this particular exchange.

In other instances, drivers assert their heterosexual masculinity by pointing to their sexual exploits or fertility. In our interview, Harold explained his involvement in raising his children.

C: Was it real rough in terms of your kids?

H: Yeah. I didn't see a lot of the kids raised because I was on the road, but I told my wife at least maybe I'll get to see the grandkids raised.

C: How many kids do you have?

H: Six kids, fifteen or sixteen grandkids, and there's



three great-grandkids. Two great-grandsons and a great-granddaughter. There's a lot of bark on this old tree!

Harold reasons that he can make up for his absence in his own children's youth by being there for his grandchildren and great-grandchildren. This also gives him a chance to point to his status as the head of a large family. His comment that "there's a lot of bark on this old tree" asserts his masculinity through his fertility in having a great number of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

While the epithets being tossed around regarding sexuality are generally directed toward real or imagined gay men, Rochelle, who identifies as a lesbian and currently drives for a non-union company, felt that she had been directly affected by compulsory heterosexuality in trucking. Here, she described how she was dismissed from her last job (where she used to work with her partner, Lynn):

Because actually I felt more like I got fired because I was gay – well, I know – I'd been there five years without getting wrote up! I mean, I made them print out a copy of my personnel record and there's nothing in it! They couldn't even stop me from drawing unemployment. I didn't have a record where – I didn't have a bunch of crap in there. There were a few little things, but nothing that was bad. And I was actually – I was given a verbal warning on Thursday and fired on Monday. And they fired another gal before they fired me, and she was...and then they fired – and then they fired Lynn. And it was just hugely obvious. The whole state is like that too, at will employment. I can't even do anything about it.

The instance that Rochelle describes happened before the state where her company was located passed legislation outlawing discrimination in employment based on sexuality. If this incident had happened today, rather than several years back, Rochelle would have

had some recourse. Although filing a discrimination complaint is a time-consuming process and can be cold comfort for a person who feels they've been the victim of discrimination because it can take so long to see results and may open workers to even more harassment and retaliation.

*"Foreigners!" – Ethnicity and Boundaries*

Drivers I interviewed in an urban, unionized environment spoke much more frequently about the encroachment of recent immigrants on trucking jobs. In the particular metropolitan area where I did my research, drivers perceived that there was a huge influx of new drivers lured to the area by large, non-union companies. Much as been made of the shortage of drivers in recent years, though as discussed in Chapter Three, some researchers argue that while the need for drivers is expanding, it's as much a problem of employee retention and high turnover – as much as 100% at some non-union companies – as it is of an actual shortage (Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005). Regardless of the reason, most large companies are looking for workers in communities where they have historically not hired. In many areas of the country, this includes reaching out to Latino drivers who may not be fluent in English and who are more likely to come from industries (such as agriculture) where the wages and working conditions are much worse than those in the trucking industry (Levy 2005).

Union drivers like Harry, quoted below, felt threatened by these drivers. Rather than seeing them as potential union workers and partners in the struggle, he sees them as depressing wages and as not possessing the appropriate level of driving skill. Here, Harry and his wife Margaret talked about Harry's career path and the trucking industry,

pointing to the declining status of trucking as an occupation tied to an influx of “foreigners.”

- M: I guess I never thought my husband would just stick to being a truck driver all this time. Because he always – he was into marketing, and all the things he did, I always thought that he would get tired of it, but he didn’t.
- H: The guys on the road when I first started drivin’, you know, everybody got along, and now I don’t even want to be around them. Because you’ve got a lot of these (pauses, sighs)
- M: Just say it.
- H: Eh, you got a lot of these Russian, Polish, and Spanish drivers that come from different countries, and uh, I’m trying to be polite here,
- M: Foreigners! (laughs)
- H: [large companies] went over to Croatia, or whatever, brought these guys over, they didn’t speak the language, and they’re payin’ ‘em nothing, and driving the trucks and they don’t know how to drive worth anything. It’s getting very frustrating out there, and it was to the point years ago that you used to look up to a truck driver, and now you can’t. And I don’t like it. I don’t like my profession the way it is, we can’t get any young guys, nobody wants to do it anymore, and so when you can’t replenish it with a new generation, what you’re gonna get is the bottom of the barrel.

The exchange starts with a clear slight from Margaret regarding Harry’s staying “just a truck driver.” In response, Harry attempts to explain the ways trucking has changed from the (unrealistically idealized) occupation it once was. The ironic thing about the ethnic distinctions Harry draws is that during the interview he spoke repeatedly of his Italian heritage and his wife’s Polish heritage, and how generations of their families had struggled to attain middle-class status. Clearly, he’s not connecting the two situations, and is instead seeking to distance himself from more recent immigrants.

Concerns about the depressing effect on wages were most likely to come up in relation to Mexican drivers – four out of the ten drivers I interviewed at my urban site brought up this issue. The drivers I interviewed were, for the most part, aware of the trucking industry recruiting in communities it previously ignored, and this is coded as a threat to their jobs when it involved drivers from Mexico in particular, who several interviewees described as willing to work for much lower wages. Here, Tim described his concern about this issue.

The big thing last time was the Mexican trucks. I have nothing against Hispanics. When they come here, no problem. Don't come here to be exploited, don't bring our standard of living down, because that's exactly what the corporation is trying to do, is make things cheaper and more profitable for them.

Drivers often tie the “encroachment” of ethnic and immigrant others to the declining economic conditions in the industry, and argue that a more heavily unionized industry would be more likely to attract more desirable drivers – and by desirable, some mean non-immigrant whites. Here, Mitchell described how he thinks the union companies should speed up the process of making union scale wages in order to further attract “better quality” drivers:

You know, price of gas, price of food, price of insurance, price of, you know, electricity, everything. So I think with the union, you know, if you get a new hire and maybe start him about at 90%, and give him a year to get to 100%, you're gonna have a better chance to get a better quality driver. Because there are, you know, you're getting a lot of Russians now, you're getting a lot of Croatians, you're getting some Mexicans, Spanish now. Pssht. It's really – because there was a point there, where it was like, “Well, I'm out of school, and I think I'm gonna go – I'm not gonna drive a truck. Nobody drives a truck! Trucks suck!” Because it's always these bad things

about, oh, a driver raped this girl on the highway, killed her. It's not us, it's the wackos out there. Every place has got wackos. But uh, "I don't wanna drive a truck." You know, so – then maybe that guy goes to computer school, or a trade school, or something like that, or you know, he's in his house, he's got his business out of his house and he's just pushin' buttons.

So in this example, Mitchell is not only impugning the competence or "quality" of ethnic minority and immigrant drivers, he seemingly implies that they are more likely to fall into the category of "wackos" out there – those who contribute to negative stereotypes about drivers.

Harry and Mitchell are not the only ones concerned about the quality of drivers. The trucking industry is concerned both about quality and quantity. There is a fair amount of truth to what Mitchell says about young people (men, it's always assumed) choosing other occupations over trucking. Regardless of the reason (high turnover or expansion of opportunity) industry estimates place the driver shortage at nearly 20,000, and that shortage is only expected to grow over the next several years (quoted in Ataiyero 2006). According to the American Trucking Associations, trucking companies are seeking drivers from the baby boomer generation, who they see as being more likely to have "solid work histories, valuable life experiences, and, more important, good driving records." (ATA 2008, Noonoo 2007). Harry and Mitchell would approve, as these drivers would also, presumably, be less likely to be "foreigners."

### *The Taboo Topic – Racial Boundaries*

While the white men drivers spent lots of time outlining their objections to women in trucking, gays and lesbians in general, and "foreigners" who are taking their jobs, race was a topic never raised in interviews. That, however, doesn't mean it's not an

ever-present backdrop at work. The effect of race in trucking was something that was only teased out in interviews, and then only specifically from an African-American respondent and a woman respondent. Gary, the only African-American driver in my sample, and a union member, described how race operates in his experience:

And there's a level of, as well call it, hidden racism, but that's very, very – you know, you see it every day. At my company, you see it a lot. The way they talk to you, the equipment you get - the equipment you get, you know, you see – and I don't mean for this to sound, to be taken out of context, but you'll see white guys drivin' better equipment every day, and you'll see black guys driving inferior equipment.

Gary saw a pattern that was discernable, but one that he felt was just subtle enough not to be blatantly (and actionably) racist. This sense of hidden racism that Gary has experienced jibes with what Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes as America's current frame of “color-blind” racism – a new style of racial ideology based on the assumption that racial inequalities in America are merely myths at this point; that everyone has moved beyond racism, and continuing inequality is evidence only of the deficiencies of individual people of color (2006). The effect of race (and talk about race) has thus moved officially under the radar, as everyone is assumed to be “color-blind” but it still shapes the lives of drivers and all workers.

Gary also expressed doubt that the class ties that bound workers together would ever be enough to get over the divisive effect of racial differences.

I doubt if you'll ever see - some of the secretary-treasurers, I doubt if you'll ever see them stand up and say, “We're one people! We're gonna stand united together! There is no black, no white, no green, no purple! We are one!” You're not gonna have that. You know, you might see a man stand up and say, “We're together! We're the working

class! And we're gonna stay together as the working class! We're one!" That's it, the working class. You put race in there, and it's not gonna happen. I don't think that'll happen anytime soon.

Gary spoke from experience. At one point in Gary's tenure with his current employer, a fellow worker called him the "n" word. Gary reported this conduct to the union, and their response was "Whatever you wanna do, that's ok with us." They did not attempt to stop him from taking the issue up with his employer, but they also didn't give him any support.

Race, gender and sexuality also intersect in the lives of drivers. Amy, a union driver working for the same company as Gary, recalled one of her first on-the-job interactions with her co-workers:

I'll tell you what, here's a story, I swear to God. The first week, I come walkin' in. The black guys are asking me, "So, do you go out with black guys?" And the white guys say, "You better not go out with black guys!" Wait! And then the women say, "You don't ask men for anything!" So it's like – and I knew – whatever happened to, "Hey, how ya doin'?" That's what you walked in on, so...

Amy had entered the driver's room at her union company and found a scene like one from the Jim Crow era. So much for making friends with co-workers, Amy thought. Although drivers don't talk about race openly in interviews, it can clearly shape their interactions on the job.

### Conclusion

What changes could be made in the trucking industry to improve working conditions for women, people of color and immigrants, gays and lesbians, and non-union drivers? One factor is sheer numbers. The increasing presence of workers from under-

represented groups is bound to help, and whether there is a driver shortage or just a problem with high turnover, it should be sufficient to push companies in the direction of recruiting more broadly. Trucking is a compelling case study in these issues, because compared to other types of blue-collar work, at this point in time its ranks are still dominated by white males. As I discussed in the introduction to this chapter, trucking has seen a significant increase in women and racial and ethnic minority workers, but the industry still lags dramatically behind other blue-collar occupations. For example, according to 1997 CPS data, 39.8% of blue-collar workers in the United States are women and 24.6% are non-white (Belman, Monaco & Brooks). Those numbers are only likely to grow, in trucking and on a broader basis, making the experiences of women and racial and ethnic minorities in these blue collar occupations generally and specifically in trucking increasingly relevant.

However, numbers alone won't change the industry dramatically. There must be a fundamental shift in how white men drivers view their diverse colleagues, and, in many cases, in how these colleagues view each other. These changes happen only over time, and in a process shaped by the interactions of workers and their families (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994). In Chapter 6, I argue that it is extremely important for male drivers to recognize their women co-workers as working-class partners. Other parts of my research have shown that the men are increasingly sharing the burden of housework, and seeing their *wives* as "partners" as they simultaneously develop (or, in some cases, re-develop) class consciousness. If this awareness of the potential of women (and, by extrapolation, people of color and immigrants, as well as gay and lesbian workers) to be *partners* was



transferred to the workplace, perhaps workers' struggles in the trucking industry, such as unionization drives, would begin to see success again, and trucking (as well as other blue-collar workplaces) would provide a better environment for all workers.

If more workers are successfully unionized, divisions between union and non-union drivers become less salient. As we saw in Gary's comments, divisions among workers based on race and ethnicity (and, presumably, gender and sexuality) persist even in union environments. And unions like Gary's may be loathe to appear somehow "on the side" of non-white workers, given that the majority of their membership is white - data show that 72.8% of union employees are white, non-Hispanic (BLS 2008). But I would argue that without the union/non-union divide, the economic fear that white male workers may feel towards women, immigrant and non-white co-workers would be less powerful - making it easier for all workers to find common cause in improving working conditions for all drivers.

CHAPTER SIX:  
RACING TO THE BOTTOM AT HOME

In the preceding chapters, I outlined the ways in which the working lives of drivers have been shaped by the economic and technological changes of the past thirty years. In this chapter, I explore how those changes have affected the personal lives of drivers. Have economic changes and declining rates of unionization changed the amount or quality of time drivers are able to spend with their families or on outside interests? Which factors affect the amount of domestic responsibility a driver has? What challenges do drivers face in balancing their work and personal lives, and how does their struggle relate to that of all workers?

One of the most important contributions of family sociology has been to encourage a move away from talking about “the family” as if it were a monolithic and unchanging social formation. Sociologists point out that there have always been plenty of families that have differed from the “traditional” American family – a white, middle-class, heterosexual, child-bearing family dependent on a male breadwinner (Coontz 1992). Now, increasing attention is centering on gay and lesbian families, interracial families, families based on non-biological relationships, and families that do not include children (Carrington 1999, Stacey 1998). Sociologists have also been instrumental in keeping a focus on the importance of family as a mechanism for reinforcing the status quo of our system of social class – even as a focus on class has fallen out of favor in

media accounts (Rubin 1994; MacLeod 1995; Bettie 2003; Lareau 2002). This is important in the context of my research because I encountered drivers with very diverse personal lives, from those with “traditional” families, to a committed lesbian couple raising a daughter, to divorced drivers with children, to un-partnered drivers who balance a variety of other close familial and non-familial relationships and interests. Some drivers consider themselves comfortably middle-class, while others see themselves and their families as part of a struggling working class with shrinking incomes (See Chapter 3 for a discussion of driver income). Nearly all the drivers I interviewed experienced some difficulty in balancing their long working hours with family commitments and leisure time.

#### How Does it All Come Together? Gender, Class and Family Life

The structure of trucking – particularly the unpredictable hours and long periods of time spent away from home – assumes the absence of family responsibilities. In many ways quite similar to corporate settings, this arrangement is tailored to a male worker who is able to count on the domestic labor of a wife or partner (Hochschild 2003; Fried 1998). Even for the most privileged male workers, this “male breadwinner” model is outdated, as the vast majority of families now include two wage earners (Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Mennino and Brayfield 2002). The assumption of a male breadwinner has historically been even less realistic for families of color and working class families, who have long depended on two wage earners (Landry 2002; Rubin 1976).

The assumed absence of family responsibilities makes work in trucking particularly challenging for women, to whom the biggest part of the domestic burden

generally falls (Hochschild 1989). For the women in my research who have children, they all had one very important thing in common – active participation from husbands, partners, or extended family members in raising their children and providing childcare. Without complex arrangements for their children (based on their unpredictable schedules and long hours), these women would have been unable to find and keep work in trucking. And it is important to point out that all the women in my thesis research were white – it is probable that, depending on family resources, women of color could face even harsher challenges in arranging reliable care for their children.

The overall structure and built-in expectations of the trucking industry serve as a challenge to women looking for employment in trucking. But that is not the only difficulty they face. One of the most important problems for the women I interviewed in this gendered industry is gender-based harassment – those comments and situations that are not specifically sexual in nature, but other types of harassment directed at drivers simply because they are women working in a male-dominated field. These stresses both at home and at work make finding a satisfying balance that much harder for the women I interviewed.

Scholars have recently urged us to look at work and family as overlapping and interrelated sectors of our lives (Estes 2003; Gross 2001; Hertz and Marshall 2001; Jang 2009; Kelly and Moen 2007; Jang 2009), and not as “separate spheres.” The conceptualization of work and family as separate spheres encourages the kind of essentialist thinking that sees the domestic sphere as the domain of women, and the public world of work as the domain of men. It is also problematic to limit thinking about

this issue to work and *family* concerns, because this terminology seems to favor those with children in targeting workers for “family-friendly policies”, while ignoring those workers who do not have children, but still struggle with finding enough time for people in their lives and for activities they enjoy outside of the workplace.

Gender is also at the forefront of this discussion, as workplaces where women are the overwhelming majority of workers are the workplaces where employers are the least likely to offer family friendly benefits (Deitch and Huffman 2001). Since gender is associated with the desirability of jobs – with “men’s jobs” being higher in both pay and prestige – these overwhelmingly female workplaces are often low paid and provide little or no benefits. In still other organizations, women make up such a small percentage of the workforce that things like family benefits – characterized as a “women’s issue” – are not a concern of upper management. Deitch and Huffman argue that workplaces in which women have made significant inroads to high level positions, and in which women are evenly distributed throughout the hierarchy (but not at overwhelming levels), are the workplaces which are most likely to offer so-called “family friendly” benefits like flextime, on-site daycare, and block scheduling and job sharing (2001).

The work/life balance is also heavily impacted by the ideas about gender within each family, as well as race and social class, and families use widely varying strategies to carry out their daily lives, with varying degrees of success. Families with high levels of education and financial resources in their favor may find it much easier to strike a satisfying balance. For example, organizations are also most likely to provide family friendly benefits to their highly skilled and educated employees while ignoring work-

family issues for their low-level employees (Deitch and Huffman 2001). Since workers with less skill and education are easier to replace with quickly trained workers, they are often seen as expendable, and companies spend less time and money making sure they are able to effectively balance the demands of work and family. And when companies are less likely to provide these benefits to their working-class employees, the balance is especially difficult to manage because these are also the employees who are less able to “purchase” the care work that keeps many middle-class families going (Hochschild 2003).

This is where the intersection of race and class becomes particularly visible, since people of color are frequently concentrated or over-represented among lower-level employees, exactly the workers least likely to receive family-friendly benefits. For example, educational attainment for African-Americans has been on the rise, but these workers have not necessarily seen these gains translate into increased success in the labor market, especially with declines in the industrial sector (Bound and Holzer 1993).

#### *Partnership or Inequality? The Lives of Married Men Drivers*

Because the majority of drivers I interviewed for this research were married men, I want to start with an examination of a prominent pattern that emerged from these interviews with the men and their wives. For all the macho bravado many male drivers exhibited at work or when talking about their work, interviews regarding their home lives often tell a different story. Eleven of the thirteen currently married men I interviewed had a working spouse, and most conceded that the extra income was a necessity. When talking about their wives, the married drivers expressed appreciation and admiration for

their hard work, and their homes seemed to serve as a site for the development of empathy or even solidarity with working women. Perhaps expressing similar solidarity at work would be interpreted as a sign of weakness; the job site is a place where traditional masculinity must be protected against encroaching women. As more women demonstrate their ability to work as drivers, this undercuts the job's ability to bolster workers' masculinity. Additionally, nine of the twelve married drivers' wives worked in traditionally female occupations – grocery store clerks, secretaries, temporary employment counselors, or health care workers, perhaps making them less threatening in that sense. Just two wives worked in traditionally masculine or blue-collar jobs, and as I highlight in this section, the drivers married to these women, as well as drivers married to stay at home mothers, had a very different attitude – one that sharply limited their participation in housework and childcare.

An important aspect of this disconnect between the male drivers' treatment of their working wives and their treatment of women drivers may be the idea of working together. During my observations at Midwestern, drivers seemed to regard their fellow (all male) truckers as teammates of sorts, evidenced by a lot of “us vs. them” talk about management, and discussions about a sense of community with drivers from other companies on the road. Similarly, the men often describe their relationships with their wives in a language of “working together” to get things done. However, this language does not exist across gender lines at work. When speaking specifically about women truckers (or even about lower-level female office workers at Midwestern), the male

drivers were much more likely to use the same “us vs. them” language that they did when discussing management.

The feeling of “we” is not limited to relations between drivers who work for the same company. Shawn, a long-time Midwestern driver, explained the camaraderie that develops among “the guys” on the road.

We would always end up at the same truck stop up there in [a town approximately 80 miles from Midwestern Trucking], drinkin' some coffee with the other short hop drivers and this guy from [a beverage company], the guy that we'll be seeing here shortly. Some of these guys, you just talk to on the radio and then if you see them enough, you start to just say hey whenever you guys drive by each other. You learn who they drive for and stuff. Some of them, you know, they have different lights on their trucks, or like Little T, he drives an International, and they have these yellow lights on their driver's side mirror, so that's how I can tell it's him.

Mediated by the CB radio, drivers can create small communities of other truckers and create a routine. Shawn speaks only of “guys” – no women are part of this group. Language of common experience at work is limited to experiences shared by male drivers, often excluding their female counterparts, and this exclusionary attitude plays into the hands of management, one of the forces that the drivers are more consciously struggling against. Protection of male privilege encourages arbitrary divisions among workers, prevents class-consciousness and makes unionization and other forms of class solidarity difficult (Gray 2000). Though it can be harmful to building a sense of solidarity, “guys” language may also be partially explained by linguistic laziness, given that women still make up only 4.4% of drivers (Belman, Monaco & Brooks 2005).



For many of the married men I interviewed, the teamwork or solidarity talk that male drivers use among themselves also extends to their home lives – seeing their relationship with their wives as “team” oriented. Increasingly, the so-called “revolution at home” is not limited to middle-class families – working class husbands are sharing more of the burdens of childcare and housework (Deutsch 2000). The drivers in my sample are no exception. Many realize that their wives also put in long hours at work and should not be expected to tend to the children and housework alone.

While some research indicates that men’s participating in the household division of labor increases along with women’s earnings (Stier and Mandel 2009; Moe and Shandy 2010), other researchers have found a more nuanced dynamic – that in families where women out-earn their husbands and men become more dependent on their wives’ earnings, they actually do less around the house (Greenstein 2000; Bittman et. al. 2003). In this case, rather than operating as an economy of gratitude, as Hochschild describes, where working-class men increase participation in household labor in recognition of their wives’ contributions to the family income, it operates in reverse. Greenstein refers to this phenomenon as a “deviance neutralization” – since men have lost the traditionally expected power in the relationship deriving from out-earning their wives, they can gain it back by refusing to participate in household labor in any meaningful way (2000). Hochschild calls this opposite reaction “balancing” (1989). Research focusing on households in Australia and the United States shows a similar pattern in this regard. As wives’ earnings increased up to 50% of their household’s income, their time spent on housework decreased. However, when their income surpasses the 50% mark, rather than

continuing that pattern, married women's hours spent on housework increased dramatically in Australia, and in the U.S., men's hours spent on housework began decreasing (Bittman et. al. 2003). The authors make a similar but more specific argument than Greenstein, suggesting that this pattern represents "gender deviance neutralization" – when men are unable to sufficiently live up to male breadwinner expectations, both men and their wives may compensate by creating a more traditional division of labor at home. The married men I interviewed who were married to women working part-time or in pink-collar positions contributed more in housework and childcare – and used a language of "working together" and partnership to describe their household division of labor. On the other hand, drivers in my sample who were married to women working in blue-collar occupations, or women not working at all, had a much more traditional division of labor, contributing very little towards housework and childcare.

Marshall's situation is illustrative of the first category. A forty-six year old man who has been driving for over twenty-five years (much of it over-the-road), Marshall is currently an owner-operator, a position that allows him to be home every night. For the past several years, his wife had worked full time as the manager of the deli within a major grocery chain. She has recently moved to a less demanding managerial position within the liquor store portion of the chain. Both Marshall and his wife sought out changes in their work situations that allowed them more time with their children. Marshall explained:

Now, what I've got off is the days she works, and vice versa, so there's almost always someone watching the kids. There's like two days where my mom or her mom comes over and watches the kids. But it's working out better. I mean, uh,

there's nothing like having your dad home every night. It makes a big difference for your family structure, you know, not dumping everything off on mom and having her actually raise the kids.

Marshall's comments show his understanding that not only is his income important to his family, but also his presence as a father; physical involvement in the tasks of raising children. Here, he explained how he, his wife, and their children split up the housework:

It's fifty-fifty, we just pitch in. Laundry she does. Every once in a while I will do it. Dishes, my wife doesn't do, and I don't do, that's why we have a dishwasher! (laughs). But basically she cooks, and I vacuum, I make the bed, the kids make their own beds and have their chores. I do the lawn and I've got a huge fricking lawn, it takes four hours. Dusting and all that stuff we give to the kids now. But basically as the kids have gotten older we give them an allowance every week to compensate and everybody's happy.

Since both Marshall and his wife work long hours, they outsource as much of the household work as possible; not, as in many middle-class families, to cleaning services, but to their children, to whom they pay an allowance. Marshall's language suggests a "working together" relationship where he and his wife do what they can around the house and receive additional help from their children.

Shawn is another example of a driver who had realized the importance of sharing housework and childcare. He is a forty-three year old driver with nearly twenty years of seniority at Midwestern Trucking, and formerly worked in the "short-hop" division of the company. Working in the short-hop, or flatbed, division involves beginning work around 2:00 a.m. and not returning home until the late afternoon. Shawn has since divorced, but here explained how things worked while he was still with his wife, a bank teller:

I would actually do a lot of cooking and making dinner for the kids back when we were married, because Tammy worked at a bank, and she didn't get off until 5:30, or 6, so I would, you know, come home and take care of supper for the kids. I did quite a bit of stuff. Me and the kids did the yard work, I did cooking and stuff. We split the laundry up between us. Pretty mutual thing there.

Shawn now has full custody of his daughter and joint custody of his son, and has rearranged his work schedule to make time for them. Here, he explained why he got out of the short-hop division:

When I got out of short hop is when the kids were starting to get more involved in sports. That's another thing that got me out of it. I mean, you go to games and the time – if you go somewhere at eight, nine p.m., and then get up at midnight, you can't survive on two, three, four hours of sleep. It isn't worth it.

Nathan has nearly fifteen years of seniority at Midwestern Trucking, two sons and fourteen years of marriage to his wife, Ann. Their sons are now twelve and ten years of age. Up until a year ago, Nathan and Ann had worked opposite shifts in order to assure child care coverage for their sons. Nathan drove a grueling 2 a.m. to 3 p.m. shift, and Ann worked second shift at the postal service. Recently, as the boys have gotten older, Ann decided to make a career change, and now works a traditional nine to five schedule as an administrative assistant at a staffing agency. Their original alternating shift arrangement is common among working-class families as a strategy for assuring childcare coverage (Deutsch 2000). Ann talked about why this challenging arrangement was necessary:

We did it for the kids, most of all, and money, because I did make good money there [the post office]. I'm grateful that I had that job, and that I could raise my kids. Then he took over when I went to work.

Ann regrets the stress this schedule created in their relationship, but ultimately argues it was worth it because she got to spend time with her children. Her comment, though, that *she* could raise *her* kids, followed by her assertion that he would “take over” when she went to work warrants further attention. Her language in the first remark implies that she is the one who was doing nearly all the child care work, so when she says that he took over later, it seems contradictory. Here, they explain the current situation, and also how things were in the past:

- A: We share. We - whoever has the time to do it, does it. So that's nice. That it's not just all one person's job.
- N: We really do fifty-fifty. In the past, she did a lot more and I really stepped up in the past year especially and I've done a lot more, so...(she smirks). And I realize that. It helps a lot. When she would work second, you know, we hardly saw each other as it was, and then when she did have free time, she needed to do this cleaning and that. So I realized that if I did a lot more, then we had more time together. And really it's been great.

While Nathan may have never pictured himself contributing on the level that he now does, he admits that it works out much better. At this point, I wondered if Nathan had come to this “housework epiphany” by himself, or if Ann had nudged along his awakening. After recounting how frustrated she became when she was handling all the housework herself, she talked about how the change in Nathan’s attitude occurred, and how it has improved their relationship.

It wasn't Nathan just realizing that he better kick in, I told him numerous times, but we - it was to the point where I said I just can't do it all, I'm burnt out. And he doesn't complain, or go around and grumble about it, he just does it now. He likes to now, I think - he enjoys helping. I think we treat each other better and have more respect for each other. And it's not him

not appreciating me anymore, now we appreciate each other, so that's nice. I think before he felt that since he worked so much that he didn't have to contribute around the house and help with the homework, and I said, you know, this isn't... we needed to change. But my forty hours didn't - didn't compare to his sixty or more. So I had to work forty and do everything else, and I got burned out. But it's better now.

In this case, Ann was grateful for the extremely long hours Nathan was putting in at work, and in return dutifully worked the “second shift” at home. However, Ann eventually realized that this was an unfair burden for her to undertake, and once they changed the way they divided the domestic work, both spouses recognized a change for the better in their relationship. The interesting thing here, however, is that the change occurred when Ann moved from a higher-paying blue-collar job at the postal service to a lower paying, “pink-collar” job at a staffing agency – a pattern that corresponds to the research findings discussed above (Greenstein 2000; Bittman et. al. 2003).

Drivers whose wives stay at home and those married to women currently or formerly working in blue-collar occupations were most likely to adhere to traditional gender roles at home. Harold, a driver in his mid-sixties whose wife is now on disability from a factory job at a wire-making plant, explained the division of labor at his house:

- H: It's always her turn to cook....My wife is a wonderful cook....She's great, but she's awfully damn messy.
- C: Do you clean up, then?
- H: A lot of the time. Some of the time. Ah, mostly, a lot of the time she does her own cleaning up. So I don't holler a lot!
- C: What about the rest of the housework?
- H: Well, I try to help and then she helps me. Out where we're living now, she'll do most of the grass-mowing during the summer. But it has to be on a riding mower. I'd walk and do it, but she uses the riding one. But she helps me and I help her. It's my job to take care

of the vehicles and stuff like that...construction, destruction, stuff like that. I do plumbing and stuff. She wouldn't even attempt that.

Harold characterizes their relationship as one of complementarity, but in his description it doesn't seem that he actually does much household work. Like many men in "traditional" households, Harold is responsible only for the more periodic work of the household – things like vehicle maintenance and plumbing that only require attention every few months (Hochschild 1989). It is interesting that in Harold's household, his ex-factory worker wife not only does the traditionally feminine task of cooking, but also takes care of the lawn - often a male preserve.

Todd, a driver in his mid-forties, is in a similar situation. His wife works full-time at a blue-collar job, working with gauges and wiring as a lab technician for a local tractor company.

All I usually do is the yard work, stuff like that. I work on vehicles, fix things up. Normal things guys do around the house. I chip in now and again. She probably does 80%, the kid 15%, and I probably do 5%. Probably not as much as I should.

Todd admits that he doesn't do much work around the house, and later in the interview his wife, Karen, expressed her frustration:

But you need to get with it, it's 2000. Men are supposed to do Fifty percent, right? Half and half? it would be different if I didn't work every day. Then I wouldn't complain at all.

Karen gets to the heart of the issue when she points out that she wouldn't mind doing the lion's share of the housework if she wasn't also working full-time. And, like Harold's wife formerly did, she is working at a blue-collar job.

Similarly, in the rare household where the male driver is the sole breadwinner, housework falls to the driver's wife. Jeff and his wife are both forty-nine years old and have no children together, but his wife has two adult children from a previous relationship who no longer live with them. Since his wife has a slight physical disability, she is currently unemployed (although she has a history of spotty part-time work), and Jeff feels that as he puts in more hours, the household work should fall to his wife. He explained:

More or less, I pay the bills and you know, she takes care of the house. Uh, and I guess that's the way you'd put it. I don't do much around the house. I used to cook a lot, I used to love cooking, but I kinda got out of that.

Jeff, in the interview, also takes a matter-of-fact tone when discussing his lack of participation in housework. His comment that "I pay the bills" ignores the periodic monetary contribution from his wife's part-time work. Similar to Harold, Jeff's attitude is that his full-time employment excuses him from equal (or any) participation in household work.

Michael, a driver in his mid-40's, has a similar mindset. Michael's wife (who formerly worked in airport security) currently stays at home with their two young children. Here he described how he and his wife arrived at their current household division of labor, and how that arrangement works from his perspective.

I'm an old-fashioned guy, I'm Italian and Irish background and stuff. I watched my mother not work, you know what I mean, and I always thought that I would be able to do that. I got this real macho thing. Man provides, that's it, I'm like this, this, this. And my wife's like, "Ok, have your moment." You know what I mean? But she cooks the meals for the kids. She uh, she's a homemaker, you know what I mean?



She does the laundry, you know, the kids, in the summer are out playing ball, my daughter's at a girlfriend's or the girlfriend's over here, they're in the swimming pool. My wife does her thing, does her gardening, my wife cuts the lawn. So, I always tell her, I'll buy you the best snow blower, I'll buy you the best lawnmower! And she likes doing that stuff, she's real outdoorsy, you know. So it works out real good.

Unfortunately, Michael's wife was not a part of the interview, so I didn't have a chance to ask her how well it actually works out for her. In this case, Michael's language lays bare the financial exchange involved in this relationship – he'll buy her all the tools she might want or need to get the job done, just as long as it's done.

Many of the men drivers and their families in my research are caught in Hochschild's "stalled revolution" – one in which women have changed much faster than men by going to work full time in huge numbers, but men have largely failed increase their responsibilities around the house (1989). The gap between men's and women's time spent on housework has decreased, however, because women have simply decreased their time spent these tasks, more so than men have increased theirs (Hochschild 1989; Coltrane 2009, Gornick & Meyers 2009). Over the past twenty years, sociologists have extensively documented social inequality within marital relationships, much of it revolving around the household division of labor. As women have moved into the workforce and are increasingly working full-time, even with young children in the household, they have continued to disproportionately shoulder the load of household and childcare tasks. Those fortunate enough to be in middle or upper-class families, as I mentioned earlier, are often able to "buy" themselves out of the second shift by hiring people (working class and poor women of color, most frequently) to take on child care

and cleaning tasks (Hochschild 2003; Tichenor 1999). But even then women remain the household “managers”, responsible for organizing the care and the cleaning (Coltrane 1996). In those families where an economic solution to the second shift is not possible, the situation is much more stressful for overworked families – overworked wives.

And studying the so-called “second shift” is a challenge. Studies have found that both men and women tend to over-report their contributions to the household division of labor (Press and Townsley 1998; Coltrane 1996; Robinson and Milkie 1998). Researchers have tried to get to the bottom of the phenomenon of over-reporting in a variety of ways, both in terms of understanding *why* people exaggerate, and *how* people exaggerate. Press and Townsley (1999) found that both men and women exaggerate, but in different ways. By comparing time diary and self-reported questionnaires, they determined that women exaggerate more than men absolutely (by hours over-reported), 12.8 hours per week for women compared to 5.8 hours per week for men. But they also found that men over-reported dramatically more when looking relative to the amount of housework done, 149% exaggeration for men compared to 68% exaggeration for women. More interesting than their findings about the quantity of exaggeration were their findings that the biggest over-reporters were women with traditional orientations and men with egalitarian orientations. Press and Townsley argue that “social desirability in the face of gendered social expectations appears to structure reporting bias.” (1999).

So the possible explanation is that both traditional women and egalitarian men over-reported more because they *felt and expected* they should be doing more. Egalitarian women and traditional men felt less of these pressures, and so their over-

reports were less egregious. Even when male partners make significant contributions to the household division of labor, it is still most often women who take on the role of “household manager” (Hochschild 1989; Coltrane 1996).

#### Creating a Work/Life Balance on Limited Time

At this point, I’d like to take a closer look at the specific categories of work involved in keeping people and households running, including non-work time spent at leisure. Up to this point, I have discussed dynamics from my research centered on heterosexual married couples in which the husband is working as a truck driver, but there is much more diversity in my sample and in the types of family life truckers create for themselves. There is also more to drivers’ home lives than just tasks like cleaning and child care; while working long hours, drivers also struggle to create time for leisure activities and being with friends and other family members.

#### *Cleaning, Cooking, Home Maintenance and Yard Work*

Cleaning is a contentious topic, and equality is difficult to come by, even in households where equality in undertaking household chores is an explicit goal. For example, many researchers have found that husbands often are responsible for the more periodic and more traditionally “manly” tasks around the house – yard work, car maintenance, taking out the garbage, and other such tasks (Hochschild 1989; Coltrane 1996; Cowan 1985).

Women have adapted to the lack of male participation in the second shift in a variety of ways. In addition to purchasing services, there is some evidence that families increasingly settle for a slightly lower standard of cleanliness than might have been

expected twenty years ago (Robinson and Milkie 1998; Coltrane 2009). Some wives, rather than insisting on male participation, actually blame themselves for not doing a better job of cleaning and maintaining their homes (Robinson and Milkie 1998). In some cases, when women out-earn their husbands, they are able to use their increased marital bargaining power (Coltrane 2009) – operating in Hochschild’s “economy of gratitude” – to extract more household labor from their husbands – and in other cases, an increased income for wives makes no difference (1989; Tichenor 1999). In other families, couples describe “natural” differences between men and women, arguing that women are “better at” or enjoy certain tasks more than their husbands in order to explain their inequitable divisions of household labor and to make it more palatable (Coltrane 1996; Walzer 1998; Ranson 2001). In any case, inequity in the household division of labor is not a recipe for a happy marriage; women who perceive that they do more than their fair share of housework are more likely to divorce than those who perceive the division to be fair (Frisco and Williams 2003).

One of the most common strategies used by the families I interviewed was to farm out a fair proportion of the household tasks to the children – especially in households where both adults were working. Melinda, a union driver with three years of experience (prior to driving a truck she drove a city bus for many years), and her husband Eddie have three sons living at home, ranging in age from 15 to 22.

We do that - partially it's because we had all the kids so we could get the chores done! (laughs) No, and then the other part is that we, like, we don't want to make them just doofusses, going out there, and you know, letting other people take charge of their life. They're putting - and I know that it's harder for them to help me, because I'm always helping them, it's - I

notice that, it's really strange. Because they'll do all the chores, and everything, but when I ask them to do something, it's like I'm asking them to bring me gold or something like that. It's like really hard for them or something. I haven't figured that out.

Part of Melinda's reasoning was that she wanted their sons to learn to do things for themselves, even though, as she admits, she often still "helps them." Melinda and Eddie were concerned about their eldest sons, who were not in college and still living at home. At this point, their continuing contribution to the household division of labor was a condition of their tenancy in their parents' home.

In addition to getting help from their sons, interestingly Melinda and Eddie were the only couple I interviewed who seemed to speak in a genuine joint fashion about getting household work done. In every other interview with both a man and woman present, the men hung back during discussion of household labor, and would make a comment here and there, but by and large would allow their wives or partners to do the explanation. In this couple, self-described "lefties", the dynamic was different and her husband made equal contributions to this discussion. In fact, Eddie cooked and served a meal during the interview, calling out his contributions to interview questions from behind the stove. He grew up in unusual circumstances that shaped his perspective on housework:

But that's the way that I grew up. I grew up in a foster family, so it was like, everybody had to do chores. And you often had to move – and we switched them around, so everybody got to do everything. And the theory there, of course, is you're not gonna live there forever, you may not live there next week, you know, who knows. So, the more you can learn to do, the more skill sets you have, the more prepared for life you're gonna be. And so I've tried to pass that along.

Both Melinda and Eddie worked around the house, and both had their own motivations for making sure their children learned to do the same.

Heterosexual couples frequently use biological arguments about the “natural” concern of women for the state of the house, and feel it only makes sense for the female partner to take on this role (Coltrane 1996). Interestingly, gay and lesbian households also often have a “manager/helper” dynamic to household labor, but in these couples, without gender as an organizing factor, many couples use psychological reasons to explain who takes this role (ie. One partner is more concerned than the other with standards of cleanliness, one partner is more “anal” about cleaning than the other) (Carrington 1999). In the case of Rochelle, a driver in a same-sex relationship with her live-in partner, this is also the case, but is organized around work hours, similar to what you might find in a “traditional” heterosexual couple. When I asked Rochelle how she and her partner split up household duties, she answered:

We don't! She's gone five days a week, she's OTR. Even though she's pretty much in this area somewhere, she's gotta stay out five days a week. She gets home on Monday and goes back [out] on Wednesday. So it's like a day and a half or whatever. She's only home on Mondays and Tuesdays. But yeah, as far as household chores, she comes home and I try to keep everything done up for her when she gets here, and then she can concentrate and worry about her stuff. She usually will come home and mow the lawn and take care of that kind of stuff, just whatever that she wants to piddle around with, but she doesn't have much time. Not at all. And it's not any different in a same-sex relationship, trust me! The same issues are there. Unfortunately, it still works out the same way.

Rochelle sees the similarity to many heterosexual couples, and relates to that similarity as a negative but unavoidable part of her relationship. The same economy of gratitude

exists in this same-sex relationship, suggesting that hours of paid employment has a powerful effect on household division of labor, even without gender as an organizing factor.

In yet other situations some people are, due to personality or earlier experiences, more concerned with maintaining a higher level of cleanliness in a way that is not related to a gendered division of labor. Mitchell, a divorced union driver with 35 years of experience, explained:

No, I always - my dad was in the Army, we were brought up in the military, so. I mean, you go upstairs in my bedroom right now, and - well, the dogs are on it, now, but you could bounce a quarter off my bed. I was a clean freak. I was always a clean freak.

Mitchell pointed out some shoes that were out of place as something that was annoying to him during the interview. Mitchell, who was living only with his adult son at the time of the interview, had the cleanest house I saw during all of my research, including those houses that had paid help with cleaning.

For two of the families I interviewed, a lack of time coincided with an adequate level of resources, and they were able to “buy out” of the second shift. This allowed couples that could afford it to mostly avoid the issue, at least as it applies to cleaning. Marie’s glee at being able to do this was apparent in my conversation with her and her husband John, a driver for a union company.

M: As far as household chores, it's slim to none, honestly. [The people who clean the house do] everything. They come every other week, and I'm almost thinking of switching it to once a week, because I really like it! To be honest with you!

C: So they do everything, even like, laundry?

- J: No laundry. I do laundry. I do it, I don't even want Them to do it.
- M: No dishes. It's the vacuuming, mopping, cleaning of the furniture, they don't do windows, um, the bathrooms they scrub the tubs and the sinks and all the dusting, so when I get home, it's like the tubs are shining, and the silver part is all shining, and there's no soap scum, you know, everything is vacuumed and mopped. And like two days later, like, they just came Thursday but you probably wouldn't know it, because of our dogs, and you know - and occasionally I'll take the vacuum cleaner, but I'm seriously thinking about - because I'm working long hours now, of my choosing, I can, I have an older kid, I don't have to be home. So I'm working from 8:30 or so and sometimes not getting home until 7:30 and the last thing I care to do is clean, and I'm not going to!
- J: And I don't expect her to!

John was careful to emphasize his generosity at the end of this comment – that he wouldn't “expect her” to clean after getting home from work. It's significant that throughout the interview, both John and Marie made mention of Marie's lucrative accounting job. Of the three couples I interviewed in which a male driver was married to a woman with a high-paying job, two of them used the extra income to “buy out” of this portion of the second shift.

The other driver in this situation was Gary, whose wife works long hours as a nurse, and who is also working to start a small nursing school in the suburb where they live. Gary and his wife do not have a steady housekeeping service, but do make frequent use of outside help, as he explained:

There is no once a week type thing, there's nothing like that. If we need them - like we did some painting here, so we needed 'em, um, maybe in a couple of weeks, when we get ready to do something else, or a week or two, if something else needs to be, and we can't handle it, then they'll come in. So that's it.



Whenever we - we both share in the housecleaning, and we share it with - we call in a housekeeper.

A lot of the other families I spoke with would love to be able to make that same choice, given an adequate level of resources.

### *Caring For and Nurturing Children*

It is certainly more common today for men to be active participants in child care – not only playing with and teaching children, but the routine, unglamorous work of caring for their physical and emotional needs (Coltrane 1996). But women still spend more time with and make more career sacrifices for their children than do men. And again, many couples fall back on “natural” explanations for why women still take more responsibility than men for providing child care (Walzer 1998; Coltrane 1996; Ranson 2001; Fried 1998).

At least some of this continued imbalance can be explained by the fact that men are still expected to make work their first priority (even while they are or want to be involved fathers) and women are still expected to make family their first priority (even while having a successful career). So there is a conflict for both men and women between work and family, but the conflict plays out in gendered ways. Many men still feel pressure to live up to a breadwinner ideal that places their income and career as most important – even if their wives actually bring in as much or more money than they do. To be a good provider, they must be a good worker – including spending long hours putting in “face time” at the office (Ranson 2001). There is also a lot of pressure on fathers not to take advantage of any family-friendly policies their workplaces may offer,

as workers who do this are seen as less serious and less committed to their positions (Fried 1998; Hochschild 1989).

Many factors affect the extent to which fathers feel comfortable placing their families before (or at least equal to) their work. Fathers who have met their career and financial goals may find it easier to scale back and become more involved, making it easier for well-off fathers to choose, if they so desire, to put family first (Ranson 2001). For fathers who are still struggling to “prove” themselves at work, or to attain specific career goals, there may be a lot more (both self and employer induced) pressure to keep work as first priority (Moe and Shandy 2010). Sometimes, as I discuss below, drivers make changes in their schedules in response to what they their children’s needs.

Shawn, who I discussed in an earlier section, made the move from over the road to the “short hop” division of the company he worked for when he felt his children needed him. “Short hop” is somewhat of a misnomer; the hours were long. But they allowed him to be home every day, in contrast to over the road driving. And although his new schedule involved long hours, it allowed him to have a very early start time (often 2:00 a.m.), and get home earlier (usually around 3:30 or 4:00 p.m.). This shift allowed Shawn to put in more time cooking, since he got home earlier than his wife. The benefits of this shift diminished, however, when Shawn started missing his children’s sporting events and other after school activities, and he moved out of short hop when he came to realize that it “wasn’t worth it.” At that point, Shawn was willing and able to prioritize time with his children over his work. He was able to scale back on work hours by changing to a different run schedule that allowed him to be more involved in his

children's school activities. He had been settled into a more conventional schedule for quite some time, and now has full custody of his son and joint custody of his daughter.

Many (especially working-class) families find it beneficial, both economically and in terms of their relationships with their children, to use shift work as a care strategy (see Ann and Nathan's example, discussed earlier in this chapter). This eliminates the need for outside childcare, which is expensive and can be unpredictable, and provides the opportunity for both parents to be involved in their children's daily routines and provision of care (Deutsch 2002). When men work different hours than their wives, they are more likely to become involved in care work (Gerstel and Gallagher 2001; Presser 2004). For many couples, this also helps to take away the "manager/helper" dynamic so prevalent in housework, since each parent is entirely responsible for the child or children while the other parent is at work. This strategy, unfortunately, can be taxing on a marriage as partners merely pass each other on the way to work (Deutsch 2002; Lively 2003).

Class is an important factor in childcare equity (or lack thereof). Hochschild, for example, found that although the middle-class men in her study were aware that it was now less socially acceptable to be distant and uninvolved fathers, they still didn't come close to providing fifty percent of household labor (1989). Women in these families were much more likely to purchase care and cleaning than to have participation from their husbands. Working-class husbands, on the other hand, were more susceptible to their own version of an economy of gratitude – in return for the important economic contributions of their wives, they (in spite of often having very traditional ideologies)

contribute much more at home than their middle-class counterparts (1989; Cooper 2002). This was also the case among many of the men in my own research, who, as a matter of practicality and as a way of acknowledging the importance of their wives' incomes, participated more than they would prefer, in both cleaning and in routine care for their children (Lively 2003).

At the same time, many of the men I interviewed felt that their long work hours prevented them from being involved with the daily care of their children. Gary explained:

I was workin' some real crazy hours, um, sunup to sundown, uh, coming in here, and uh, in the summertime, I'd come in, and I was able to play around with 'em, especially uh, throughout the week, very little, on the weekends, a lot, but throughout the week, very little. So she was cookin' dinner, she was bathin' them, dressin' them, undressin' them, takin' 'em to the school, takin' 'em to the babysitter, she did the whole - she did everything.

Similar to Gary, many of the men drivers described a focus that was primarily on having fun with their children when they had a chance, because they weren't around to help with their children's daily routine – this less enjoyable work was performed almost solely by wives.

Many drivers also talked about how working long hours forced them to miss important moments in their children's life, and that they felt this loss potently. This isn't surprising - in a 2007 survey, 80% of fathers ranked relationships with their children under 18 years of age as very important to their happiness and fulfillment – ranking it a 10 out of 10 in level of importance (Pew Research Center 2007). However, the drivers I interviewed were also conflicted – feeling clearly that they were missing out, but that

they were gone for important reasons that allowed their families to live better – even if it meant living without seeing their father. Kevin, a union driver with forty years of driving experience, explained:

Well, you know what, my job, as you have asked about - the hours, when I first started, you know, I probably worked so much, sometimes six days a week, I wasn't there when my two boys took their first steps; I was working. I wasn't there when they said their first words; I was working. Many a time, I didn't get to go to the doctor with them because I was working. I was there when they graduated from their schools and all that, because I ended up having to take the days off, but I did miss a lot of my boys being little, growing up, seeing them take their first steps, hearing them say their first words, because I put in a lot of hours, and being a steward - since my children are older now - but my wife still complains. You know, she says, "You don't come home until 10:00 at night sometimes, and you're punched out at seven." And I tell her, you know, either I'm gonna do the job that I'm supposed to do, that the men expect and that the union expects of me - and I expect of myself - I'm either gonna do the job right, or I'm not gonna do it. That's the kind of person I am. If you give me a job, I'm gonna do it right, or I'm not gonna do it, I'm gonna back off. And I do try, and do the job, for the men, and for the union, and for myself. You know, you have to have some pride in what you do. And I - I've missed a lot of stuff, personally, with my family. I've put in a lot of hours, working for the company, for the union, for the men. But I have no regrets, you know, I mean I've told the management on more than one occasion, I've said, really, I don't know if you people realize it or not, but when you sort of um, screw around with the men at work, do you realize that they're here more than they're with their families? They spend more time at work than they do at home? I said, think about what you're doing.

Although Kevin castigates company management for the long hours drivers work, he voluntarily added time to his workday by serving as a steward because he felt strongly about being a voice and advocate for his fellow workers. He was visibly emotional during this point in the interview, and it was clear that although he said he had “no

regrets” that he felt a sense of loss from not being there for important moments in his children’s lives. And ultimately he prioritized. The job it was most important for him to “do right” was his job as a trucker, not his job as a father. It’s also important to point out that Kevin is a driver with many, many years of experience. His children were born in the 60’s – a time when it was even more difficult for a father to choose to prioritize his family over his career.

And even though times have changed somewhat, even younger drivers in my sample felt that it was very hard, if not impossible, to prioritize family over work. Juan, who, at 34, was one of the youngest drivers I interviewed, felt that he was able to spend even less time with his children than his father spent with him:

And the downside, I would say, basically is that it's a lot of hours. Granted yes, I get time and a half, granted I get paid for it, but I'm losing out here. The time that I want to be with the family, because when I was a kid, you know, my mom and dad, pretty much, was here, 24/7. Making sure our schoolwork was done, making sure we did whatever we had to do. And Dad was constantly with us for baseball, he worked a double shift, but he was here. And when I hear that I can't go to see my son play, it irritates me. You know, and it's like, I want to be there, you know. And that's the one part I don't like.

Sometimes the sense of regret doesn’t kick in until later, when drivers and their families have a chance to reflect on the choices they felt they had to make. Daniel and his wife Marjorie were dissatisfied with the public schools in their neighborhood, and wanted to send their kids to parochial school. He recalled:

And there was a time when half of our liquid assets, half of our liquid, was going to tuition. So there was - we wanted family time, but we really couldn't afford it. So whatever we could do, we did. But there really wasn't much of it.

And the kids, when they were young - our oldest one, Roy, is 26. And Stacey's 24, and Allison's 19. But they really didn't understand then, but they understand now. Which is really all I can ask for. I wish we'd had more time.

And Daniel drove for a union company. For most non-union drivers, the need to work long hours is driven by a need to keep up with their mortgage, rather than paying for an "extra" like parochial school.

As discussed above, a variety of factors shape the level of involvement of parents in their children's lives, including work pressures, economic pressures, ideology and practicality. Many couples who achieve equality in parenting do so intentionally, with an eye toward feminist ideals, while others fall into it as a matter of pure practicality (Coltrane 1996). Women also face gendered pressures around their dual roles as workers and mothers. Since the default assumption is that women are primarily responsible for childcare, employed mothers often face more guilt and stress around childcare arrangements while they are working than do employed fathers. The white, middle-class housewife ideal is just not practical for most families, and so these pressures are increasingly common. Feminists of color have long critiqued the "nuclear" family care model, where isolated, traditional family units are completely on their own in terms of caring for children. Recognizing that this is an impracticable situation for most families (regardless of race), there has long been a tradition of community responsibility for children, as well as relying on networks of kin to care for children. "Othermothers" – kin who serve as additional mothers to children – have been central in both communities of color and working class communities (Hill Collins 2000; Stack 1974). As I will discuss in the next section, with one exception, all the women truckers in my research were all

single mothers, but all had extensive networks including the fathers, their families, and their friends that allowed them to work at a job that requires long and irregular hours. All of these women also stressed that they would not be able to do the job they do, and provide well for their children, without the support of these networks (2002). Not all women, however, are lucky enough to have rich networks of social support. In urban areas with high rates of young single motherhood, many women have difficulty finding *anyone* they can trust enough to help them with child care and other family needs (Edin and Kefalas 2005).

Gay and lesbian parents provide a great example of the potential for re-designing parenthood without regard to traditional gendered constraints. Without the baggage of expectations based on gender, these couples can “re-invent” parenting in a way that is more truly equal, and a way that is very beneficial for the children, who have two very involved parents (Dunne 2000). And although there are far more similarities between heterosexual parents and gay and lesbian parents than differences, gay and lesbian parents may find themselves able to more easily provide opportunities for their children to experience broader role expectations, without the limits that traditional gendered socialization tends to put in place (Schacher et. al. 2005; Ryan-Flood 2009). Ryan-Flood’s research with lesbian parents in Ireland and Sweden, in particular, found that lesbian parents were open to a “multiplicity of gendered behaviors in their children, not necessarily dependent on biological sex” (173; 2009).

Looking specifically at lesbian couples, the situation is advantageous in that partners can decide who becomes pregnant when based on economics, individual desires,



and career goals. If one partner wants children, but doesn't want to go through pregnancy, the other partner may want to experience it. In other cases, if one woman is infertile, the other may be able to become pregnant (Dunne 2000). Once children are born or adopted, lesbian women have a variety of options in terms of involving men in their children's lives. In the case of donor inseminations, sometimes the men become "uncles" or are recognized as fathers (Dunne 2000). In their relationships and care strategies, they are able to be more financially flexible without experiencing provider/homemaker tensions that heterosexual couples face. However, recent research focusing on black lesbian families found that, without gender as an organizing factor, members of same-sex relationships may use factors such as income or which partner is the biological parent of the couple's children in order to assign power in the relationship and care work responsibility (Moore 2008). Additionally, progressive domestic arrangements are challenged when one or both partners work in a long-hours occupation like trucking. In Rochelle's case, for example, she and her partner worked as truckers, but only Rochelle was able to arrange her schedule to also allow time for involved parenting and housework – hours spent at work served as a proxy for gender.

There are many hopeful signs that point towards increasing equity in childcare arrangements. Many couples that strive towards this equity find that men can, in fact, nurture "like women" if they have the willingness and opportunity to do so (Coltrane 1996). There is some evidence that as today's young people become parents, they bring more egalitarian attitudes with them that bring an *expectation* that women will be devoted to their careers as well as their children (although some guilt over child care still lingers

for many employed mothers) (Blair-Loy 2001). There is also an increasing understanding that it is often difficult for people to feel fulfilled while concentrating *only* on work, or *only* on family – a sense that people can become further developed as human beings by being both hard-working employees and committed and nurturing parents (Coltrane 1996; Risman 1998).

Because of the issues outlined above, I pay special attention to the women drivers in my research who are also mothers. Many of the women I interviewed stressed the redefinition of motherhood to include a focus on employment as well as caring for and nurturing children. Working *for* one's family, and not in spite of them (Johnson 2002; Lively 2003). Working-class mothers have always seen working as a very important part of what they do to care for their children. Many women, rather than dwelling on the challenges of arranging child care, see their child care providers as an extension of themselves – they see themselves as partnering with their child care providers to teach and nurture their children, and work hard at maintaining a good working relationship with providers (Uttal 1996). This, too, is an extension and redefinition of what good mothers are able to do for their children.

Being both a mother and a truck driver presents additional challenges for the women I interviewed, four out of six of whom had children and were either divorced, widowed or never married. While most of the women explained to me that trucking was not their ideal job, they continued in their positions in order to support their families, seeing trucking as a higher paid alternative to other, often pink-collar jobs. Although the pay is better, the demanding hours of the job make using traditional child care services –

like daycare – impractical. Most of the women explained that it would be impossible for them to continue driving without the support of family members or friends who are able to watch their children.

Many of the women I interviewed stressed that the primary reason they went into trucking and remain there was their families. Brenda is typical in this respect:

I have two kids to feed, and ain't nobody gonna feed them for me. You gotta do what you gotta do. I mean, yeah, I could go wait on tables but I wouldn't be able to pay my bills. And I guarantee you I make more than any damn waitress. Or any girl that cuts hair or does nails or does a girly job. And that's why I do it. For the money.

She makes an important contrast between trucking and “girly” jobs, most of which pay much less. Like many working-class women, Brenda is not choosing between work and family, or merely balancing them – she is working *for* her family (Johnson 2002).

Because historically the “breadwinner” role has not been women’s primary one, this contrast is different for the women I interviewed than for the men (Coltrane 2000). All four women I interviewed who were mothers talked about why they chose trucking in this very specific context – choosing trucking for their families – without me specifically asking. In contrast, just three of the fifteen male drivers with children “explained” their decision to become a truck driver in this way.

Some of the women started out in more traditionally feminine jobs, but found it difficult or impossible to support their families on such low wages. Pamela explained how she made the transition to trucking:

Well, uh, when I was little I always thought it would be a cool thing to do, but then when I was older, I was a pharmacy technician. I was getting a divorce, and I knew that I wouldn't be able to support myself with that income, because you can only get

so high, you know, as a technician. I had just had a baby, so I thought, well, this is the time to learn, to find out if I like it or not, and I knew that I could probably make some decent money and support myself. So I tried it, and I liked it.

Divorce, and the need to support herself and her child became the impetus for Pamela's career change.

But, as Pamela mentioned, she went into trucking right after having a child (her second daughter). The challenge of childcare was a recurring theme in my interviews. The women use a variety of strategies, depending on the situation of their other family members and their relationship (or lack thereof) with the fathers of their children. Here, Pamela talked about the situation with her ex-husband.

We get along much better than when we were married, and he runs for those kids. He is so good, like if I get home, and they are at his house, he always, I almost never have to go get them. He'll almost always bring them in, or his parents will. I mean, I have to take my kids hardly anywhere. Somebody's always there that will run them, and their dad, he - he's not real social and that's kind of his social life is the kids. And at night, either they will stay with me, and my mom will come over and get them in the morning or they'll stay with their grandma or their dad at night.

Between two sets of grandparents and her ex-husband, Pamela is able to arrange coverage for her varying hours. She repeatedly explained how fortunate she was to have an ex-husband who was involved in his children's lives, and that she knew not everyone was that lucky. When she spoke, it was as if she saw her husband as doing her favors, rather than doing things that he *should* be doing.

Brenda, the mother of two grade-school aged boys, is in a long-term, live-in relationship. Her boyfriend, Aaron, drives a garbage truck with more regular hours and is

able to cover much of the childcare and housework. Here they talk about how they have worked it out:

- B: I wouldn't make it without him.  
 A: Ta-da! That's me. I do laundry, I cook, I clean.  
 B: I wouldn't make it without him, plain and simple. I wouldn't make it. For instance, they call me the other day and say the kids didn't show up for school, they skipped school. I'm down in Missouri, I'm four hours from home, it's not like I can run home and get 'em. He's gotta take care of it. I couldn't make it without him. I mean, yeah, it's hard to take care of my duties, here at home and stuff, and I wouldn't be able to do it without him.  
 A: And I wouldn't let her.

The women I interviewed pointed out how this is different for women and men drivers. They argued that many of the male drivers have wives who work part time, or who, regardless of their full-time hours, still coordinate the childcare and housework. Pamela talked about how her opportunities to take chances in the trucking industry are limited by her status as a single mother:

I've thought of becoming an owner-operator. I think I would have already taken that chance if I was married, and I had somebody to - to fall back on financially. If all the bills didn't depend on me, I would have tried it already. But I'm afraid that if I do it, and I fail then where is that gonna lead me. And I've got kids, so I can't take that risk. A lot of guys out there will tell you, "Oh, yeah, you can do it. You can do it." But then I'm like, "you have a wife at home!" A back-up income. It may not be much, but enough to get you by. But, yeah, I've thought about it plenty of times, just because, you know, you don't make money working for somebody else!

A majority of the male drivers I interviewed had, at some point in their career, been owner-operators, owning their own trucks and arranging their own business. For some it worked out, and for others it didn't, but they all expressed to me that they were

glad they gave it a shot. Most of the men got out of it because they found themselves spending all their time fixing their trucks and found that it took them away from their hobbies.

The women who tried owner-operating had different reasons for getting out. Brenda was able to try it, but had to get out due to the instability of the income – she, like Pamela, had no one to fall back on. Janice had been married to an owner-operator and got into trucking by partnering with him. After he passed away, the insecurity of the income led her to get a job with a company. In this way, many women, particularly single mothers, find their opportunities within trucking to be limited.

*“I Have No Life” – Creating Time for Leisure and Relationships*

Time is an increasingly hot topic in discussions about working families. Historical shifts and the introduction of new technologies have always created changes in the way people think about the distribution of their time (Fuchs Epstein and Kalleberg 2001). While some scholars argue that individual Americans are working more hours than ever before (Schor 1993), others argue that the increases are actually occurring at the level of the family. Since dual-earner couples are increasingly common, hours spent at work per family have risen dramatically, especially for highly educated workers in demanding professional positions (Jacobs and Gerson 2001; Moe and Shandy 2010). Increases in hours are often more problematic for working-class employees, who are less likely to see their work as identity-affirming, and are more likely to consider outside interests or families as sites for re-affirming identity (Thompson and Bunderson 2001). Working class families, while averaging slightly shorter work weeks than their higher-

earning counterparts, experience less flexibility with their schedules (Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

All too often when time is limited, work (paid employment or household tasks) wins and time for just enjoying life, whether with family or spending time on hobbies or other pursuits, loses out. Driver after driver (and, in many cases, their families) described lives with time for little else than working, eating and sleeping. While I asked every respondent about hobbies and leisure time, their responses were short and generally included a wish for more time, or memories of a time in their life when they had more of a chance to do things they enjoyed. Jeff, a 49 year old driver with seven years of experience, started out driving over the road, gone for a week or two at a time. He commented:

It gets awfully lonely. Especially when you come into town, and you see you friends having a good time. I remember coming into town, pick up the wife, and go over to some friends house. We'd be drinking, carrying on, having a good time, and then it would be like, "well, I have to leave Sunday morning, so I have to get home and go to bed." I really didn't like that.

Even when Jeff started working a "city" job that gets him home every night, he felt that his time was too limited.

The thing I hate most is you just don't have any life. You're either...if you could get it to an eight hour day, that would be great. Or even a ten hour day. If I lived in [local town] and ran a ten hour day, that would be great. That would give me fourteen hours to myself, you know. But uh, most of the time it's eleven, twelve hours, and then two hours of commuting back and forth, and then that gives me ten hours at home, I try to sleep, you know it just gives you four hours a day. Truck driving is kind of like a twenty-

four hour, five day a week thing, you know, because you just don't have very much time for yourself.

Not only can it be a lot of time away from home, it's also physically and mentally exhausting work. Brenda, a driver with ten years of experience for a non-union company, explained:

No...I think when you're working twelve hours, driving, it's pretty stressful. You get home, you really don't want to – me personally, I hate driving, other than work. I get home and I don't feel like going anywhere. But I'm a homebody. Um, I like being at home. I'd be with my kids twenty-four seven if I could. And a lot of people don't like that, they want to go...and that's fine, but I just get home, and if someone said to me, "Let's go to the mall, or somewhere," it's just like, "well, are you driving?" You know? And if you're driving, I'll go but I don't want to drive! As far as fun stuff, we don't really go on vacations or anything...I really never make enough money - I have my house and my pick-up, and just to maintain that, it's just barely covers it. So we don't go on many vacations, but sometimes we go to the movie theater, or something special...but otherwise we will just rent movies.

Between being exhausted and being concerned about money, Brenda doesn't have too many leisure options left. And although she chalks some of this up to being "a homebody", it's clear that there are activities like vacations that she would be interested in if she had more time and money.

Another frustrating situation for drivers is unpredictable schedules. Many times, even if a driver has a set run, depending on traffic, weather and other factors, it can be hard for him or her to predict what time they might be home. This makes it hard to plan family or couple time, or hard for drivers who are parents to promise their children that they can attend sporting events or other school functions. In the following excerpt,



Margaret talked about difficulty she faced due to Harry's long hours when their children were younger.

So that was the other part for us - our life - there was nothing that could be done during the week. It was, you know, school functions, personal things, I really was on my own, and he was just working. And you almost felt like you were a divorcee or something, because you had no husband around, you know, to show.

Later in the interview, Harry remembered trying really hard to make it to whatever games or other events he could.

As the girls got a little older, I tried uh, I broke my butt to get home, you know, it's a little harder to do now, with all the DOT regs, (laughs), but when - I used to - I'd drive 15, 18 hours a day just to get home. If the kids had a function, if they were in a play or something, you know, just to get home. And I couldn't tell you what it was about, but (laughs)...

And this is a position drivers are put in – sometimes when it means making a choice between missing something that's important to their family, or driving for dangerously too long and not even being able to enjoy the event when they finally get there – they choose the latter.

And at other times, as Margaret alluded to above, drivers make a choice to prioritize rest, but may miss out on things that are important to them, as Gary described here:

Monday through Thursday, don't try to plan a date for me. Ok, well, we need to be at the PTA meeting at 6:30, or 5:00 – that doesn't happen, normally. You know, because I'm not gonna make it. Don't plan for me to be at the volleyball game, basketball game for the kids at 4:30, 5:00 in the afternoon. I'm not usually gonna make those. Although

I try, I get there in the last half, the last quarter or somethin', but don't plan for the kids to ride with me to the game, or me to take 'em, stuff like that, I can't do it. So we – over the years, we have learned that my job - for me to be efficient at my job, I need to get plenty of rest, and I need to not be pressured into tryin' to get off, tryin' to hurry to get off.

This struck a chord with me, because I remember many basketball games in high school where I would be glancing up in the bleachers constantly, checking to see if my father had made it to join my mom in the bleachers. He would always try to make it, but many times got home too late and had to be in bed too early.

The long hours and stress of driving don't only make leisure time and time with one's children difficult; they also take a toll on relationships. During my interview with Harry and Margaret, Margaret (who works as a teacher's assistant) spoke at length about the difficulties of feeling alone for much of the time, and about finding time to connect with Harry.

You know, you need to go - you've got school tomorrow morning, pre-school, or whatever it was, and, you know, and gearing everything only for the weekends was hard, and then trying to have social lives, you know, and then separation, you know. He's the type of guy who needs some space then to unwind, and here's everybody else wanting to glom on him. So you do have strains on the marriage that way, and um, you know, and sometimes you almost say, you know, better be divorced, that I can do this, otherwise the structure of him not knowing when he's coming home, when he was comin' home.

It's also difficult to try to build a new relationship while working such a demanding job. Amy has been driving for five years, all spent over the road, and is currently dating Darren, a mechanic for the same company she works for.

- A: So when two people get together, you have to go slow with lots of patience, consideration. Give 'em the benefit of the doubt for everything. You know, trust, everything, all those issues are even bigger because I'm not around. You know, so it takes a real special person. And he has patience, you know, because I'm always sayin' goodbye - "See ya!" And now, I don't know when I'm comin' back, you know.
- C: So is that really difficult? I would think it would be.
- A: Be honest! (looks at Darren).
- D: Yeah, it is.
- A: I know it is for him, yeah. And I tell him immediately when I know I'm comin' back to Chicago. So you know, "A day and a half, and we get a date!"
- D: That doesn't mean we see each other, though!
- A: True, because the last two times that I was home we didn't Get to see each other. Nope. Because I only had 10 hours off. And I got called in right away. Yeah. Yeah, the past two times.

Darren was very quiet during the interview, but spent a lot of the time just looking lovingly at Amy while she talked. When he responded to the questions during this particular part of the conversation, you could tell how genuinely difficult it was for him to see her so infrequently. With Amy and Darren, as with many of the interviews, I felt extremely grateful and humbled that, given their limited time together, they were willing to spend part of it speaking to me.

Mitchell, a union driver with 35 years of trucking experience, described the long hours he had worked for most of his career as part of a trade off. Eventually, he came to feel that too often those trade-offs associated with working long hours aren't worth it. He was recently divorced, and during our interview he spoke about the failure of this relationship. I asked him whether he thought his long work hours were a factor in ending his marriage.

Yeah. I think so. My time, yeah. Otherwise it would have been better. I mean, I'm not sayin' I was a rotten husband, or a rotten father. But I could have been home more. Guys out on the street, they're home at 4:30, 5:00, that's a great job. You know, you can cut the grass at night, you can wash the car, and watch TV, you know. Our job is a lot of time. A lot of time. And if you don't work a little bit of overtime, it's not really - I think your forty hour base is maybe right around \$900, you know. And nowadays, you know, you want to have the big house, you want to keep a pool, you want to have it look decent, new cars and stuff like that. You do, you miss out. Three quarters of your life is spent on this, the other quarter is, you know, maybe - I don't work weekends. I refuse to do that, anymore. I used to, but ever since I got this job, no weekends! I don't care. I am not workin' a weekend. Even if I just sit on my deck out here. I got a pool out there, I like floating in the pool. That's me. I just want to relax. Sometimes I wake up and think, "Yeah. Time to turn over." It's my turn to relax now. I've been there, done it, did it. I want to relax now, you know?

At this point in his life, he's made a conscious choice to limit his overtime and set aside full weekends for relaxing.

Drivers who have been able to make their relationships work definitely feel that they are part of a select, lucky few. Juan, a union driver with four years of experience and two young children, said:

No, but just something that I've noticed, from buddies that I've had, that they've been divorced twice, three times, because of the stress of the job. I'm fortunate; we're fortunate that we've actually been hanging on and pulling through this. And like I said, knock on wood, that we've been blessed. And making sure that everything is falling into place. And it is a stressful job. And depending on the company you work for, some are family oriented, and some aren't. Some don't care. You know, some don't care if you're sleeping! You know, and you just - they want you moving that freight.

Daniel and his wife Marjorie, who have been married for over twenty years, also feel that they are part of a small number of successful trucking marriages, and chalk it up to a very specific mindset:

- M: Your job is pretty much all-consuming. I mean, if you were married to a different type of person, it wouldn't work, I don't think, honey. And I'm not patting myself on the back, it's just - um, I'm pretty much in the same thing as being a military wife or something. If you're not able - if you're not good on your own, you know,
- D: It's not gonna last.
- M: And actually, we have had difficulty, in that almost everyone that we hung around with in our early 20's, um, now they're at the age when their parents are passing away, or whatever, and you go to the wake, and nobody's still married to the person they started out with. We can't even say, "Oh, how's so and so," because they're like on their second or third wife by then, we're the only ones that are really - really from the layoffs that we had, and the financial hardships that we've had...
- D: That time with my arm, that was -
- M: We were people that they were betting were not gonna last, you know.

Watching the marriages of so many of their friends fall apart further reinforces the feeling of being exceptional and fortunate in making their marriage work.

### Conclusion

Drivers and their families clearly struggle to find a balance. After long hours spent at work, it's difficult to find time for relationships, children, and leisure pursuits. Drivers and their families, like other workers, make decisions based on many different factors, including ideal worker norms, ideas about what "makes sense" that are based on outdated notions of appropriate gender roles, economic necessity, and the competing urges to both provide for and to spend time with their families (Moe and Shandy 2010).

The men in my sample are particularly conflicted. On one hand, most recognize and respect the hard work of their wives, and increasingly share the burden of housework. At the same time, they tend to denigrate the women they work with, and to show less appreciation and make less of a contribution to the household work when their wives also have blue-collar jobs. In these times of economic instability and de-industrialization, women who hold jobs that are “equal” to the male drivers’ are more threatening to their sense of traditional (hegemonic) masculinity. This conflict of emotions plays out both at home and at work.

It is important for the men who display increasing awareness and recognition at home to extend that awareness to the women they work with, and to wives who hold blue-collar jobs. If they do, that increased awareness is likely to strengthen feelings of unity and class consciousness that could lead to increased rates of unionization (perhaps even a union at a company like Midwestern) and a recognition that the women are partners in a working-class struggle. Women would finally be included in the “we” teamwork language that many drivers use.

Women drivers in my sample were driven by an urge to work for their families, seeing their work as doing what is necessary to support their children. They deal with additional obstacles on the road, but appreciate the higher pay scales than can be found in “girly” jobs that they see as the only other employment open to them.

All drivers – men or women, gay or straight, single, partnered or married, with kids or without – have in common the difficulty of finding time and money for leisure, and the challenge of building and making relationships work, whether those relationships

are with their children, their husbands or wives, their partners or their friends. In a time when all workers are being asked to put in more and more time on the job, trucking provides a particularly salient example of what happens at the extremes that we are all moving towards (Schor 1993; Jacobs and Gerson 2001).

## CHAPTER SEVEN:

### CONCLUSION

My research has provided an on-the-ground examination of the lives of truck drivers, thirty years after their industry was deregulated. Listening to voices of individual drivers allowed for a complex picture of lives shaped by long working hours. Building on the overview of the industry developed in Sweatshops on Wheels, I examined how the issues Belzer focused on have affected drivers in their daily lives and has allowed me to take the research further, into the family and personal lives of drivers (2000).

My goal in this study was to start by talking to drivers about their work and personal lives and to see where their experiences led me. As I began doing fieldwork and interviews, I was guided by a number of central questions: Thirty years out from deregulation, how are the drivers' lives affected by the current economic state of the industry? How do drivers and their unions interact with public policy and company regulations that shape their on-the-job autonomy and their own and others' safety on the road? How do the drivers experience industry dynamics around race, gender and sexuality? How do these dynamics shape the experiences of drivers who are not white and male? How does working in a high-stress, long-hours occupation affect the family and personal lives of drivers? In each chapter, I was able to look at each of these questions in detail, developing further and more specific questions as drivers began to tell me their stories. The answers to these questions are outlined below.



## Study Implications

### *Unions Are Still Relevant*

These are challenging times for unions in America. Legislation such as the Taft-Hartley Act have weakened unions in a variety of ways: making organizing more challenging by eliminating non-election and informal ways of determining union support, outlawing “closed shop” arrangements, where workers must be union members before their hiring, and by creating a system that allows states to “pass further laws restricting union security within their borders”, leading twenty states to pass “right to work” laws that are hostile to union formation and strength (Fantasia 2004).

Although 53% of non-union workers would favor and join a union in their workplace if given a chance (Dine 2008), they are up against strong opposition from employers. When faced with union organizing drives employers utilize a variety of strategies, some of which are illegal but still common. Employers may hold mandatory meetings that serve as a chance for management to spread misinformation to workers and invoke a climate of fear, harass workers who are in favor of unionization, threaten to close plants or move businesses, or fire or discipline workers involved in organizing (Dine 2008). Workers may be wary of unions due to historical ties to corruption and organized crime, undemocratic forms of union leadership, and both perceived and real union weakness in the face of pressure for give-backs from companies claiming economic hardship (Fantasia 2004; Dine 2008; Penney 2004). Particularly in the United States, many workers have an individualistic orientation that makes them unsympathetic

to collective workplace efforts such as unionization, and skeptical that unionization could be a benefit to them (Penney 2004).

Unions are working to respond to these challenges by focusing on new philosophies of union leadership and of organizing workers. An emphasis on “social movement” unionism promises to help revitalize the union movement. Social movement unionism seeks to organize workers and promote leadership from the ground up, do extensive research on vulnerabilities of specific employers and workplaces targeted for organizing, use “card check recognition” rather than NLRB elections, and speak in a language framed with social justice and civil rights rhetoric, appealing to the interests of the broader working-class, and not just employees in specific workplaces (Fantasia 2004). These new strategies have borne fruit in campaigns such as “Justice for Janitors” in Southern California in the 1990’s, and a massive organizing campaign for hotel workers in Las Vegas subsequently (Fantasia 2004). These new tactics are not without complications, however. Frustrated with disagreements about where unions should focus their energies (politics vs. organizing; top-down efforts vs. grass-roots mobilization), several unions have recently separated from the AFL-CIO coalition of labor and created the “Change to Win” Federation. This split means a duplication of infrastructure, redundancy of administration and doubling of overhead costs, and also demonstrates a lack of labor solidarity at a time when unions are already weakened (Dine 2008).

Given this complex and challenging picture for unions more broadly, what are they accomplishing in the trucking industry? How have their efforts shaped the lives of drivers I interviewed? In Chapter Three I argued that, despite falling wages and

declining benefits, drivers are still entering the trucking industry because in comparison with other blue-collar jobs, it remains an occupation that can provide autonomy and a decent wage for workers without advanced education. However, drivers for union and non-union companies experience significant differences. Union drivers earn, on average \$178 more per week than non-union drivers (Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005) even while working, on average, 5 hours less per week (Belzer 2000). Union drivers I interviewed reported greater satisfaction with their benefits packages and felt that they had support in pursuing remedies when treated unfairly. Drivers at union companies, while still seeing some decline in wages and benefits since deregulation, have been protected from the worst of the negative economic changes in the industry. Union jobs are in jeopardy, however. Overall, unionization in the industry has fallen from 2/3 of drivers in the 1960's to only 26% in 2000 (Belman, Lafontaine & Monaco 2005).

If current trends continue, more and more truckers will miss out on the additional wages, benefits and protections won by union drivers. In a shifting economy, worker agency is of central importance (Strangleman 2007; Hodson and Roscigno 2004), and as my research has shown, union membership is an effective way for truckers to have a voice in their workplace. Additionally, as Belzer points out and as we have seen from interviews with individual drivers, unions provide a buffer against the worst kinds of destructive competition in the industry – keeping companies and drivers from “sweating” labor – the less unionized the industry becomes, the harder it will be for unions to continue to have this effect (Belzer 2000).

*Policy Development*

In Chapter 4, I explored the interplay of competing and aligning interest between drivers, company management, unions, the trucking industry and public policy makers around issues of driving time, safety and worker autonomy. In Sweatshops on Wheels, Belzer argued that sweatshop conditions exist with the presence of three conditions: low wages, long hours and unsafe and unsanitary working conditions. Do they? Even a cursory look shows that with wages that would equal only \$21,800 per year if drivers worked the same amount of hours as the median U.S. wage worker. However, instead of working 1868 hours per year, drivers work 3000 hours per year (Belman, Monaco & Brooks). The cost of this heavy workload is high. According to Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data, “truck drivers lead the nation in the number of occupational illnesses and injuries requiring lost work days.” (Belzer 2000). With regard to both driving time and overall safety, if the trend toward decline in unionization in the trucking industry continues, drivers and the driving public will more than ever need the protection of public policy makers to shape safe roads. Belzer reports that,

While crashes per mile have remained relatively stable, truck traffic has increased dramatically over the past two decades, increasing the public’s exposure to wrecks. While assessments vary, The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) has recently estimated that 15% of all truck-related crashes are due to fatigue. (2000)

According to these criteria, Belzer makes a compelling argument. With the words of individual drivers highlighting the same issues, I’ve shown how the decisions of policy makers, as lobbied for by the industry and carried out by trucking companies, affect the lives of drivers and the driving public.

Individual companies, in addition to public policy makers, are responsible for shaping a culture of safety – making repairs in a timely fashion and respecting driver work hour limits. In companies where employees are represented by a union, they have recourse in a situation where they are being asked to drive unsafe equipment – in a non-union environment, they don't. If trucking companies make this commitment, it will also have a positive effect on the owner-operators who contract with them and on independent owner-operators who, sometimes flying under the radar of official regulation, are most likely to make concessions to safety in order to maximize earnings (Belzer 2000).

The single most important change the industry can make to help dismantle destructive competition is to include truck drivers in the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. In many cases, non-union drivers work sixty-plus hour weeks without overtime pay, and are not paid for time spent waiting to be loaded or unloaded, or for truck repairs or other unexpected delays (Belzer 2000). With all company drivers protected by the FLSA, both owner-operators and non-union company drivers will feel less pressure to fudge log books and drive dangerously long hours. If drivers are paid for all their time spent on the job, there will be less incentive to log waiting time as “off duty” time (Belzer 2000). Although profits across the industry are down, several of today's large unionized companies have proven the ability to remain profitable while paying workers for non-driving time and overtime, and if all companies and owner-operators were competing on the same level, quality of life for drivers and public safety everyone else would triumph.

Additionally, policymakers continue to struggle with developing hours of service (HOS) regulations that satisfy the needs of drivers, trucking companies, and the public interest. The recent changes to HOS regulations discussed in Chapter Four are still contentious, with drivers increasingly arguing that the lack of flexibility granted to them in terms of waiting time and not being able to “break up” the rest period is harmful to both their pocketbooks and their ability to remain awake on the roads (Kvidera 2010). There is much recent literature regarding worker control of their time. This research historically hasn’t seemed relevant to truckers. Much of it has traditionally focused on flexibility – for example, the ability to crunch five days worth of work into four, to start or end the work day earlier or later, or to reduce their hours – and looked primarily at highly educated and well-paid professional and technical workers with more leverage than drivers generally have (Deitch and Huffman 2001; Meiksins and Whalley 2004; Pitt-Catsouphes and Googins 2005). However, recent research on worker time has argued for the importance of a shift from flexibility for workers (still ultimately shaped around a companies’ need to have their workers in the office for a set amount of time) to worker *control* over their time (Kelly and Moen 2007; Roberts 2008). Giving drivers more discretion in terms of how to use the mandated rest period is something that, with regard to new HOS regulations, would recognize the unexpected occurrences that drivers must deal with on a daily basis – over the road drivers, in particular – and would go a long way toward bolstering drivers’ feelings of self-determination in an industry where that is increasingly hard to come by (Kvidera 2010).

*Gender, Work and Life*

In Chapter 6 I argued that, especially as union trucking jobs disappear, it becomes even more difficult for drivers to balance work and life commitments. Beyond the long hours worked, as wages and benefits are cut or employees are asked to make greater contributions, families are left with dwindling financial resources. This makes it more difficult for friends and families to spend quality time together, including vacations and other leisure activities, and adds to the stress that individuals and families experience. Because the granting of work-life balance policies such as flexible scheduling, paid parental leave or on-site childcare has been left up to individual companies rather than public policy, it's the rare working-class employee who has access to policies that make a balanced work and personal life possible. And even when the policies are in place at an organizational level, if the employee's direct supervisor is not supportive, it can be difficult for employees to take advantage of these benefits without an organizational culture that encourages this support (Mennino et. al. 2005; Jang 2009).

The drivers and spouses that I interviewed struggled to find a balance between work and other areas of their lives, with particular struggles over housework and childcare. They are not alone. For many households, the total gender specialization of the past (with women relegated to the household and men as breadwinners) has given way to a kind of partial specialization where both partners work but one (generally the woman) prioritizes the home, and the other (generally the man) prioritizes work (Gornick and Meyers 2009). This was the case for many of the families I interviewed, with men's participation in housework and childcare increasing, but still not equal to their wives'.

For the drivers I interviewed, in addition to being linked to gender, this is also a function of the long hours worked by drivers. Without gender as an organizing factor, Rochelle, the partnered lesbian driver I interviewed, ended up being responsible for nearly all housework and childcare because her partner drove over the road and was away from home for weeks at a time. Given trends toward longer household workweeks, this is a problem that's not likely to go away (Jacobs and Gerson 2004).

Until we are able to de-link commitment to work and commitment to home from gendered expectations, we are likely to continue to see families who are unhappy with their household's division of labor. Couples who would like to strive for equality at home are thwarted by gendered inequalities in labor markets and employment opportunities, household-level economic incentives for husbands focusing on work, inadequate institutional supports for caregiving and gendered social norms (Brighthouse and Olin Wright 2009). Perhaps the most challenging of these barriers is gendered norms that limit possibilities for choice. Recent research with respondents between 18 and 32 years of age found that 80% of women and 68% of men wanted to build an "egalitarian partnership with room for considerable personal autonomy" (Gerson 2009). However, the "fall-back" options for these same respondents were conflicted – short of an egalitarian partnership, women preferred "self-reliance" economically, and men preferred "neo-traditional" arrangements where they would serve as primary breadwinner, though their wives might also work but would focus on the home (Gerson 2009). In this regard, we may still be seeing faster-changing women and slower-changing men (Hochschild 1989; Gornick and Meyers 2009).



The situation is not without hope. As Deutsch and Butler point out, if we “do gender” in interactions and performances, we can “undo” it – using the socially emergent and interactive process of building gender to shape new expectations and provide new choices (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007). Government supports and policies that encourage decision-making that is de-linked from gender (ie. providing paid support for parental leave only when both partners choose to take it, increased subsidies or government provision of high-quality child-care) could go a long way towards helping this transformation (Gornick and Meyers 2009, Brighthouse and Olin Wright 2009).

#### *Race, Gender and Sexuality at Work*

In Chapter 5, I explored the experiences of women drivers and drivers of color, and the boundary work carried out by some white male drivers, emphasizing how hegemonic masculinity acts as a buffer against declining economic conditions and a way for drivers to define an oppositional masculinity (Fine et. al. 1997; Embrick et. al. 2007). While the women and drivers of color I interviewed expressed overall satisfaction with their jobs as drivers, they felt hostility from other drivers and from company management. Companies must develop and vigorously enforce non-discrimination policies. With high rates of turnover in the trucking industry, and demographic changes in the workforce, this is no longer just an issue of doing the right thing – it’s an issue of economic necessity. Discrimination is an issue that affects workers at every point of their employment, and that can be either blatant or insidious and disguised. Workers can experience discrimination against through hiring practices solely based on referrals by current employees, personal questions asked in interviews, unevenly applied work rules

and disciplinary procedures, and outright harassment (Embrick 2007; Roscigno et. al. 2007).

Diversity issues at work are further complicated given that class, race, gender and sexuality continue to combine and interact in complex ways. For example, Acker points out that a hypothetical white male top executive, secure in multiple privileges, may be more supportive of efforts to address workplace inequality than a hypothetical white male mid-level manager (Acker 2006). The current economic situation isn't likely to help efforts at greater equality, either. As Acker argues:

Greater equality inside organizations is difficult to achieve during a period, such as the early years of the twenty-first century, in which employers are pushing for more inequality in pay, medical care, and retirement benefits and are using various tactics, such as downsizing and outsourcing, to reduce labor costs (2006).

Unions must get involved in this struggle. Paap points out that with affirmative action and EEO programs, unions in blue-collar industries such as construction have been asked to ensure “the very opportunities that they have historically served to block” (Paap 2008: 372), and that they are torn between representing the interest of serving the white male privilege that many of their members have come to expect and the legal and moral mandate to make workplaces more accessible for women and people of color. This kind of dynamic, which Gary experienced when a co-worker called him the “n” word (see Chapter 5), and which reared its head among union members in the 2003 UFCW supermarket strike in California points to a bleak future for a labor movement unable to address diversity issues in the workplace (Wilson 2008).

### Limitations of this Research

Because of my small sample size, it is difficult to generalize my findings to the broader population of truck drivers. Though I was able to interview a good cross section of drivers in terms of age, union vs. non-union, large company vs. small and management (dispatchers and company representatives) vs. drivers, there were areas in which my sample fell short.

My sample was fairly homogenous. In terms of geography, although I was able to interview drivers in both a small town and large city environment my sample was limited to drivers in the Midwest. In terms of work experience, the drivers I interviewed were overwhelmingly those drivers who do not currently work over the road (though fourteen of my interviewees had previously). And in terms of racial and ethnic diversity, only two of my thirty-eight interviews were with people of color – one African-American driver and one Latino driver. Although I went out of my way to seek out drivers of color at the union meeting I attended, most were not willing to be interviewed. This may have been for the same reason Gary gave – he was particularly concerned about confidentiality because he felt that, as an African-American driver, he already stood out at work and doing an interview could potentially bring more unwanted attention from his employer. I'm sure there were other reasons, as well. But my study would have been richer with experience if my sample had been less racially and ethnically homogenous.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, my positionality as the daughter of a truck driver is also a potential limitation. Although I believe it helped me with establishing initial contacts and in many cases with establishing rapport with drivers, it could also have

hindered my research in a number of ways. Drivers may have been less specific or detailed with me in some instances because they knew that I was already somewhat familiar with trucking. And because I *felt* somewhat familiar with many of the topics being discussed, there were instances where I should have asked follow-up or clarifying questions but did not – I could have missed drivers' meaning in this way. Several of the drivers I interviewed had known my family member who had worked at their company (only one person knew the family member well), and even though the informed consent form they signed promised confidentiality, this could have given them pause in being completely honest with me. And because my father is a truck driver, my sympathies clearly lie with drivers. Though I have been open about this and have attempted to be as self-reflective as possible, my positionality as a driver's daughter has without doubt had some influence on my thought process and analysis of the data.

Lastly, whenever possible I requested and encouraged the participation of partners and spouses in interviews. It was important to me to get a sense of how both partners felt about creating a personal life with a partner who works long hours. In spite of my efforts, it was not always possible for significant others to be present. Of the sixteen married or partnered drivers I interviewed, in nine cases I was able to arrange for the significant other to be present. This means that in the other seven interviews, I was left to, in a sense, take the driver's "word for it" when they described household division of labor and childcare. It is possible that, without being checked by their spouse or partner, these drivers were inaccurate in their descriptions. Additionally, I interviewed four drivers who were divorced and not currently in a relationship, and one driver who was

single, never married. This doesn't mean that there weren't other types of significant others in the lives of these drivers who could have shed light on their lives outside of work – I regret that for these drivers I didn't ask if there was a close friend or family member who could have participated in the interview.

### Directions for Further Research

#### *Detailed Quantitative Data*

During the course of my research, I found it impossible to track down data about earnings, unionization rates, hours of service, and other topics as they related to driver demographics. These data exist relating to blue-collar occupations as a whole, but not specific to trucking. Common sense and research from most other industries would indicate that they probably do, but there is no data on this. And given that, as we saw in Chapter 5, the demographics of the trucking industry are quite different than for blue-collar occupations as a whole, it's quite possible that the dynamics of race and gender are also different.

#### *On-the-Job Violence*

Even with a specific focus on recruiting women, only six of my twenty-four driver interviews were with women. Of these six women, three had experience driving over the road. Over the road driving is inherently more dangerous – forcing drivers to use shower facilities at truck stops and to sometimes sleep in their cabs (occasionally companies pay for motel accommodations). Of the three women with over the road experience, only Amy told me about multiple occasions in which she was physically threatened or attacked. If I had been able to connect with more women drivers, and

particularly more women who drive over the road, I speculate that I would find more stories like hers.

Interestingly, none of the men with over the road driving experience told me about any violent encounters. I am not sure if this is because they never experienced violence on the job, or because they were hesitant to tell me about it. Again, no data exist for this more qualitative, personal, and frightening aspect of the industry.

### *Deregulation of Industry*

Though there has been much written about this as it relates to trucking, airlines and telecommunications, this is still a developing topic. The recent financial crisis in our economy has been linked in a number of ways to deregulation of financial markets, a lack of oversight of financial products by regulatory agencies that still exist, and undue influence of the corporate world on regulators (Evans 2009; Snider 2009). Though there is less of a frenzied focus on deregulation at this point in time than there was twenty-five years ago, we are still seeing the effects of deregulation and destructive competition in our economy, and the phenomenon deserves continued attention from scholars.

### The Future of Trucking

Earlier this year, my father Keith was laid off from his job. His company was not unionized, and had just lost their largest contract, causing the company to cut their driving workforce by more than half. Struggles in the larger economy have led to extension of unemployment benefits, which has been important to my parents as my father looks for a new job and my mother deals with a recent breast cancer diagnosis. Trucking jobs are still available in the area where my parents live, but my father, getting

older, does not feel comfortable going back to over the road driving, or to driving an overnight shift, which narrows his options. In his nearly 40 years of trucking experience, this is only the second time he's been out of work.

Where is the trucking industry headed, and how is this related to the broader world of work, particularly blue-collar work, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? While America has seen significant deindustrialization over the past thirty years, recent research focusing on 18 OECD countries over the period between 1970 to 2003 shows that for most countries, deindustrialization is a “U” shaped phenomenon, showing recovery with continued economic advancement (Kollmeyer 2009). Manufacturing in this country is not likely to disappear entirely, and even if it did, there would still be a need for drivers, exempting the trucking industry from some of the worst predictions in the “end of work” arguments of the 1990s (Rifkin 1995). However, the economy has experienced significant change and is increasingly marked by unpredictability and instability (Bourdieu 2003; Sennett 1998). The truckers in my study have experienced this, with many bouncing from employer to employer during the rash of trucking bankruptcies. While it's been a difficult thirty years for the trucking industry, recent research points out that we should be careful not to become too nostalgic for the relations of work during the majority of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – our economy has undergone tectonic shifts before and each previous change (such as from agriculture to industry) has brought both benefits and drawbacks for workers (Strangleman 2007). Taking this into account, it becomes even more important to focus on the agency of workers (both in unions and individually) in shaping

the relations of work and employment in this new period (Strangleman 2007; Hodson 1997).

In spite of the current recession, analysts still predict a growing trucking industry, with 13% growth in job demand for heavy and tractor-trailer drivers between 2008 and 2018 (OOH 2010-2011). Who will take tomorrow's trucking jobs? While I didn't formally interview my dad for this project, we had countless informal conversations, and I also drew on nearly 30 years of memories of his experiences in the industry. I asked him what he would have said to me if I'd told him I wanted to become a truck driver.

- K: Oh, I probably would have had a discussion with you.  
(chuckles)
- C: And you would have told me what?
- K: Not to do it!
- C: Why not?
- K: Well, you know, there's a lot of headaches, more so than any other industry. Like this (he motioned outside to snow) Wondering if you're going to go in the ditch. You'd be overly tired all the time. Dispatch is always messed up and it's aggravating – they send you the wrong place, or the place they send you isn't expecting you. A lot of sitting around. Nothing ever goes right, that's the whole thing there.

This is a question I also posed in interviews. Only two of the twenty-three drivers I interviewed had children who were currently working as drivers. Eight of the drivers had children who were still in high school or younger, and three didn't have children at the time of the interview. Three of the drivers had children currently in college and two had children working in skilled trades. The remaining drivers' children were working at other jobs not related to the trucking industry. One driver whose children worked in other fields had a daughter who was married to a truck driver.



Drivers whose children were still in high school or younger had a variety of responses when I asked about the possibility of them becoming truckers. Juan said:

I would say, “Really think about it.” Because watching me, you know, because there are some days when I come in growling like a dog, and you know, really quick, and there – there are benefits, the money. And the cons are, you’re gonna be working *hard*. Unless you have a straight no-touch load, like, you know, the tractor-trailer guys where you go drop the load and pick it up and just go. I wouldn’t – I mean I wouldn’t hesitate, but I’d prefer, and we all say, you know, even our own parents want to see us doing something better than what we’re doing. So you know. But I wouldn’t discourage him. Because it’s a decent, solid job. Versus if he said he wanted to be a manager at a club, you know, (laughs), then I’d be like, “Oh, great.”

Juan’s response was typical in that he mentioned a benefit (money), several drawbacks, and then the desire to see his children doing “something better.” Michael, who has two young children, said:

You know what – I would give them what my father told me – I don’t want you to be a truck driver. If you have to, I’d like you to be a union truck driver. If my son said he would do it, I would say, “If you want to be a union truck driver, go for it. If you want to just drive a truck just to waste your time, don’t. Because you’ll get nothin’ out of it, and you’ll waste a lot of your years.” But I’d rather have them be career people.

Michael at first seemed to say he’d give the same advice to both his children, but then emphasized what he would tell his son. He’s the driver I quoted in Chapter 5 who, when asked what he would tell his daughter, argued that trucking wasn’t a “female job.” But Michael’s advice to his son, similar to what Juan would tell his children, argues that under the right conditions, trucking can be a decent choice – but there are better jobs out there.

Other drivers whose children were younger at the time of the interview emphasized college exclusively – two of the drivers interacted with their teenage children *duing* the interview, and repeatedly asked them questions about their college plans.

Gary, whose son was just starting out as a trucker, said:

I really wanted him to stay in school. I really wanted him to stay in school, and so my initial reaction was, you know, you need to stay in school. And he was like, “Well, you make a good living.” And I was like, “Yeah, and I work hard at it. But you’ve got a chance to stay in school, get a six-figure job and go to work every day, four, five hours a day instead of eight, nine, ten, twelve hours a day. I talked him out of going into the service, that was one thing. Yeah, I talked him out of that, but I wasn’t able to talk him out of this truck driving thing. He really – he really, really wanted to do it, and there was no talking him out of that, so I just settled one for one.

Though Gary worked as a union driver and expressed satisfaction with several aspects of his job, especially the pay and benefits, he still felt like he had “settled” for his son being a driver, and that he had passed up better opportunities. Gary’s two daughters worked as a teacher and a nurse, respectively.

Kevin, who had one son working in the skilled trades and another who is an insurance agent, said, without me even asking a question about it:

I’m happy to tell you that my two sons have nothing to do with the business, which I’m happy about. Because right now this is a dying field. I mean, I’m the last of the dinosaurs, I have a union job, which is very rare, I have a pension that the company has paid for, I have insurance that the company pays for, God forbid, if something happens to my job or one of these other union companies, they’re not coming back, you know. It’s a sign of the times. Like all of our factories, our heavy industry, it’s gone, it’s moved to China. And the jobs have gone with it, so it’s a dinosaur business. And actually, if you’re gonna be in the business, you want to be in the best part of it.

The common theme for all these drivers, whether they had children who still might be thinking about becoming drivers, who were already working as drivers, or who had already chosen other career paths, the thoughts of their fathers seemed to be the same – there are better choices out there.

There are many things that drivers like about their jobs. Regardless of employer surveillance, drivers still feel a sense of freedom and adventure when on the road. Although they might have an electronic boss monitoring their movements, they enjoy not having a physical boss looking over their shoulders. Drivers enjoy the chance to see parts of the country they might otherwise not have. And they enjoy the camaraderie that often exists between truckers. But the trucking industry, individual companies, and public policy makers must focus on addressing destructive competition, the central issue affecting both safety and the declining economic conditions that have such a destructive affect on workers and families. The single most important change is to include truck drivers in the provisions of the Fair Labor Standards Act. It is unconscionable that non-union drivers work sixty hour weeks without the right to overtime pay. The original rationale for this rule (safety, ironically), is woefully unsupported, and has been recognized as such going back to the 1940's (Yale Law Journal, 1948). Unions, while continuing to work at broadening representation in the industry, also need to focus on addressing diversity within their membership – realizing that addressing the concerns of women and people of color within their ranks will, in the long run, *increase* solidarity, rather than decrease it. With progress being made on these issues, perhaps trucking will become a more attractive option that workers feel proud to choose.

APPENDIX A:  
IRB MATERIALS

### Interviewee Consent Form (Driver/Other Company Employee)

My name is Cassie Lively. I am a graduate student in the sociology program at Loyola University Chicago. I am interested in studying the profession of truck driving. As a part of a research project, I would like to learn about your work life within the truck driving industry, and how this involvement in trucking has affected your life outside of work.

I greatly appreciate your interest in being interviewed. The interview will last no longer than one hour. The interview will be audio-taped, and the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my apartment, to which only I have access, and labeled with pseudonyms. These tapes will be erased at the conclusion of my research. Questions asked during the interview deal with how you became involved in the trucking industry and how this involvement has shaped other parts of your life. The interview is completely voluntary on your part. If you agree to an interview, you may choose to end it at any time as well as refuse to answer any question that you so choose, with no penalties. No personal benefits will be provided to you as a participant. To protect your confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in any material submitted for publication and in my thesis. Additionally, any identifying details or situations will be changed. After the interview has been typed up, a copy will be available for you. Your participation is confidential and your name and identity will not be used in my work. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact Loyola University's Compliance Manager at (773) 508-2689. My advisor in this research is Judith Wittner, Ph.D., who can be reached at (773) 508-3473. I can be reached at (309) 648-1773, as well as by e-mail, at [clively@luc.edu](mailto:clively@luc.edu).

I thank you again for volunteering to be a part of my research. I believe that the trucking industry has much to offer in terms of sociological insight into the world of work.

I freely and voluntarily give consent to be interviewed.

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Signature of investigator

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date

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Signature of interviewee

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date

### Interviewee Consent Form (Spouse/Partner)

My name is Cassie Lively. I am a graduate student in the sociology program at Loyola University Chicago. I am interested in studying the profession of truck driving. As a part of a research project, I would like to learn about how your spouse/partner's involvement in trucking has affected your family.

I greatly appreciate your interest in being interviewed. The interview will last no longer than one hour. The interview will be audio-taped, and the tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet in my apartment, to which only I have access, labeled with pseudonyms. All tapes will be erased at the conclusion of my research. Questions asked during the interview deal primarily with when and how your spouse/partner became a trucker, and how this has shaped or changed your family life. The interview is completely voluntary on your part. If you agree to an interview, you may choose to end it at any time as well as refuse to answer any question that you so choose, with no penalties. No personal benefits will be provided to you as a participant. To protect your confidentiality, pseudonyms will be used in any material submitted for publication and in my thesis. Additionally, any identifying details or situations will be changed. After the interview has been typed up, a copy will be available for you. Your participation is confidential and your name and identity will not be used in my work. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this research, you can contact Loyola University's Compliance Manager at (773) 508-2689. My advisor in this research is Judith Wittner, Ph.D., who can be reached at (773) 508-3473. I can be reached at (309) 648-1773, as well as by e-mail, at [clively@luc.edu](mailto:clively@luc.edu).

I thank you again for volunteering to be a part of my research. I believe that the trucking industry has much to offer in terms of sociological insight into the worlds of work and family.

I freely and voluntarily give consent to be interviewed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of interviewee

\_\_\_\_\_  
date

**APPENDIX B:**  
**INTERVIEW SCHEDULES**

## Interview Schedule for Drivers

\*These are sample questions that will guide the initial interviews. New questions of a similar nature may be added as the interview process evolves.

### Topics and Questions for Interviews

#### I. Getting into truck driving

Could you tell me how you became a truck driver?

What work experience did you have before becoming a trucker?  
Were any of your friends/relatives truckers?

#### II. Trucking experience

Could you describe the positive and negative aspects of your job?

What do you think about the pay/benefits, the hours, the work environment?

What do you think about the amount of time you are able to spend with your friends and your family?

What do your family and friends think about your occupation?

What do you think about the company you presently work for (and others for which you have worked in the past, compare/contrast)?

Can you describe your interactions with dispatchers (other drivers, etc.)

Can you walk me through a recent day in your life?

#### III. Personal/Family Relationships

Could you describe your present living situation?

How has your career affected or shaped your living arrangements and/or family relationships?

Spouse, children, parents, etc.  
Living environment (apartment, house, city/country)  
Friends/entertainment interests



Can you describe the division of household tasks in your family?

Who is responsible for what?

How are decisions made?

If children are present, how do parents divide up tasks concerning the children?

What activities do you and your partner carry out with your children?

#### IV. The Future

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Do you think you will remain a driver? What factors have influenced your answer?

Are there any outside interests or conflicts that may prevent you from remaining a driver?

What would you think if your son/daughter wanted to become a truck driver?

What advice would you give to him/her?

How did you get out of trucking? (For those who are no longer driving)

### **Interview Schedule for Spouse/Partner**

\*These are sample questions that will guide the initial interviews. New questions of a similar nature may be added as the interview process evolves.

#### **I. Background**

At what point in your relationship did your spouse/partner become a trucker?

What were your thoughts about him/her entering that profession?

What do you think about it now? Have your thoughts changed? If so, how have they changed? What factors have influenced your thoughts?

What do you think are the positive/negative aspects of your spouse/partner being a driver?

What would you think if your son/daughter wanted to become a truck driver?

#### **II. Family Life**

How do you think trucking has influenced your family situation?

Do you have children?

Do you think that your spouse/partner has enough time for family obligations?

Can you describe the division of household tasks and childcare in your family?

#### **III. Your Work Life**

What is your occupation, and how did you become involved in it?

Could you walk me through a recent day in your life?

What, if any, arrangements have you made in your own work based on your spouse/partner's profession?

## **Interview Schedule for Dispatchers/Other Company Personnel**

\*These are sample questions that will guide the initial interviews. New questions of a similar nature may be added as the interview process evolves.

### **I. Work Environment**

How did you become a dispatcher/other title?

Could you describe your duties as a dispatcher/other title?

How would you describe your relationships with the drivers/co-workers?

What are your thoughts about your job and your co-workers?

Describe typical and/or unusual interactions you've had with your co-workers.

What is the most unusual thing that you have experienced as a dispatcher/other title?

Could you walk me through a recent day in your life?

### **II. Family Life**

Could you describe your current living situation?

How has your involvement in the trucking industry has affected your family/personal life?

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