The Complex Identities of Women
Married to Professional Truck Drivers.

by
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Chapter 1: Introduction and Literature Review

The image of the long distance trucker brings to mind a sort of highway cowboy, a loner who moves from place to place, delivering his load across the country. Many of these drivers are on the road for weeks at a time, over three hundred days a year. Yet, many of them have a devoted spouse and children waiting for them to come home when their schedule allows. What kind of person [most often a wife] sits by the phone, or watches the driveway, waiting for a few hours with her husband, only to watch that rig head back out on the highway a short time later? This thesis examines the interdependence of these women in light of their lifestyle in an effort to determine how they maintain such an independent perspective while keeping their marriages intact.

Statement of the Problem

A long distance truck driver chooses not only a career, but a lifestyle. With almost three million professional drivers on the road today, more attention is being paid to the driver's family, and the effects this occupation may have on his or her spouse and children. Carriers are struggling to deal with the truck driver shortage by providing support for the families during the driver's long absences.
There is very little information on how to accommodate those left at home, so that they can support and encourage the driver on the road. Trucking companies are concerned with the current driver shortage and the job burnout experienced by drivers who must be away from their homes for extended periods of time. They are looking for a way to deal with this situation, so that they may reduce driver turnover and increase or even maintain the current level of service provided to the shipping public. More importantly, with increasing regulation and higher stress levels experienced by the drivers, carriers need to allow their employees to operate the equipment with as few distractions as possible. This situation has turned companies’ attention to the home environment and has prompted a recent change in attitude on the part of those who do the hiring.

Many carriers are starting family support groups and acknowledging the spouse's needs as the sole parent in the home. They have started to recognize the necessity for family solidarity in their search for committed, hard working over-the-road drivers. Without the support of his family, a truck driver cannot do his job in the most safe and professional manner possible. This need is finally being addressed and this study will help in defining some of these areas of need.

According to a media guide published by John Deere Insurance (1997), most professional truck drivers are middle aged males. Although there are many women who have entered this field, most of them are single or drive as
a team with another person. Since I have yet to encounter a situation where the wife drives a semi-tractor trailer and the husband stays home to maintain the household, I have focused this research on women who are married to professional drivers.

This thesis explores the ways the wives of truck drivers cope with the long separations and the ways communication is used to realize their sense of self in maintaining their independence in their marriages. Many of these women enter into their marriages with hopes of keeping their husbands home, but when they finally realize that these guys "have diesel fuel flowing through their veins," they learn to accept the situation and make the most of it. In other instances, couples have been married for years when the husband decides to make a career move into long haul trucking. This situation has an even greater impact on his family which is accustomed to having him home each evening, but must now rely on the wife to maintain the family life at home.

Regardless of how these women arrive in a long distance marriage, the coping skills and the need for self-sufficiency are the same. Very few women fully understand the ramifications of being married to a professional driver until they experience it themselves. For this reason, it is also difficult to relate to other women who cannot comprehend the roles a woman must assume when she cannot rely on her husband for this day to day assistance.

The intent of this qualitative analysis has been to understand the
complex identities of women who are married to professional drivers. I have used in-depth interviewing as the primary method of research. Through a process of documenting and analyzing the interactions of women married to truck drivers, I have identified the areas of shared meaning, and have determined how this interdependence is used to sustain their identities as wives, mothers, friends and independent women. Thus, the focus of this research is the way these women interact with others in their daily encounters.

Research Questions

Communication problems are often cited as the number one reason for divorce. Indeed, researchers in *Communication, Conflict and Marriage* agree that the “lack of communication seems to have become the predominant complaint of couples who seek help for marital difficulties” (Rausch, et al, 1974, p. 9).

Families in which one spouse is absent most of the time, such as when one partner is a long distance truck driver, face a different kind of challenge regarding daily rapport. How does the wife at home define her expectations and understanding of her role as an independent part of a long distance relationship, especially when daily interaction is rare, or nonexistent? What are the expectations of the woman who marries an over-the-road driver at the beginning of the relationship? Do these expectations change as the
years go by? What are some ways truck drivers’ wives learn to cope with the absence of daily interaction with their spouses? How do these wives share meaning through interdependence with others?

Parameters of the study

This research focuses on the experiences of women married to professional truck drivers. So for the sake of studying the most common situations in trucking marriages¹, I have limited the research to the woman at home.

Husbands were not interviewed for this research, for a number of reasons. My interest is in how spouses adapt. The husbands chose the occupation, but their wives have been forced to accept a lifestyle affected by this career decision. Moreover, truck drivers are typically loners, as they spend hours within the confines of a tractor cab with little human contact other than the CB radio or a quick stop at a truck stop for a rest, fuel or food. These men are usually not expected to discuss their personal relationships, and as many wives of trucker’s will state, they are not prone to being introspective in regard to their marriages.

Finally, the limited time truckers have at home, and the difficulty in anticipating free time for research prompted me to focus this study on the women involved. I prefer to leave the actual analysis regarding truck drivers and their interdependence to future research.

¹The terms “trucking marriages” and “trucking families” are commonly used by those in the industry.
Only married women were interviewed. In appreciation for the admonishment by Rausch, Barry, Hertel and Swain in *Communication, Conflict and Marriage*, (1974, p. 6) only “real” married women were sought. Since there is a difference between those who refrain from making a formal commitment and those who have become legally married, the focus was narrowed to only include the latter.

Furthermore, only home based wives of long distance truck drivers were interviewed. An “over-the-road” driver is gone overnight, often for up to six weeks at a time. This situation creates lengthy separations, and is different from marriages in which the driver is a “city” or “delivery” driver, and returns on a daily (or nightly) basis. In addition, women who drive as a team with their husbands were excluded. Only home based wives of long distance drivers share the unique experience of long and regular separations.

Significance of the study

This research may be beneficial to a large number of people. Since there are almost three million professional drivers in the United States, there are almost as many family members who experience the lifestyle which accompanies the occupation. There are also many trucking companies which are eager to accommodate the professional driver by relieving some of the stresses at home. The results of this research may be helpful to recruiters in helping potential drivers to assess their family lives before contemplating
a career in trucking. The personnel departments could also benefit from the ability to identify and eliminate some of the concerns the families may have when the driver is on the road. Dispatchers could use this information in understanding the strains experienced by drivers’ families.

Since there is no similar research available which would aid the wives (and future wives) of professional drivers, this study could prove particularly valuable. Women who are considering marrying an over-the-road driver will be able to gain some insight into the coping skills of other truckers’ wives. Truck drivers and their spouses will be able to better understand their family interactions and the challenges they face, and will be able to identify with the experiences of other truckers’ families. I hope that this thesis will provide drivers and their families with information which may allow them to maintain and perhaps, enhance their marriages. They may also use this study to better understand their situations and their reactions. This is the primary goal for this research, as many women marry an over-the-road driver without understanding the ramifications of his absences, and her need to become more independent.

As the trucking industry continues to work toward alleviating the strains on long distance relationships, they will be able to respond better to this need. If the wives need a place to meet to socialize, then the carrier can provide a room in the terminal. If child care or refreshments are required, they can provide these services, too. Perhaps some recognition in
the company newsletter, or personal contacts during special days or illnesses would make the wife feel more connected to the company. Such steps might go a long way toward making (or keeping) their drivers happy.

Since this is an emerging area of study, this research could prove to be a valuable resource for anyone involved in the trucking industry. If those concerned work to understand the needs and experiences of the truck drivers’ wives, they may use this information to attract and retain good employees whose families offer the support and backing they need.

**Literature review**

The experiences of women in long distance relationships are relatively unexplored in contemporary studies. Although there has been significant research on couples and their interactions, relatively little attention has been paid to the effects of separation. While research on marital separation examines narrow aspects of the relationship, (Adams, 1970-1971, Boss, 1976, Hojat & Crandall, 1989, Kersten & Kersten, 1986) the long term adjustments of such couples have not been studied in much detail.

Similarly, while there are a number of studies of long distance relationships (Farris, 1978, Gerstel, 1977, Gross, 1987, Holt & Stone, 1988), the unique situation in trucking families is the subject of little research. Although some trucking companies have begun to recognize the need to understand this aspect of their employees' lives, the industry has
not initiated any serious studies of the drivers’ family situation.

The number of women married to truck drivers is unknown. However, with 2.9 million truck drivers in the nation (John Deere, 1997) and 55% of the nation’s households composed of married couples, (Bennett, 1994) the number of women married to truck drivers should be significant. Additionally, much of the information in this study will be relevant to unmarried couples living in the same situation.

This chapter will provide an overview of the relevant literature. To begin, we will first consider what is meant by a successful marriage. Then, through the theoretical framework of symbolic interaction, we will look at the multiple facets of the women’s identity as defined by relationships and communication with her family and social contacts. Thus, we will consider the types of interactions that make her a wife, a mother, a daughter, and a friend.

Determining Marital Success

Marriage is a relevant topic for most adults. Thus, it should come as no surprise that there has been considerable research directed toward marital interaction. Although the marriage rate has decreased 25% in the past three decades most adults will be married at some point in their lives (Bennett, 1994). Communication within marriage has been studied extensively (see for example, Farber, 1964; Gerstel, 1977; Rausch, Barry,

Research on successful marriages is constantly changing; several definitions have been developed. A successful marriage is a subjective determination which changes with both society’s views and the historical period of valuation (Fitzpatrick, 1988). Since measurable results can be determined only by outward behavior, Fitzpatrick (1987) identifies three approaches to measuring marital success: stability, function and quality.

Stability is merely the measure of the current state of the union. If a marriage is intact, it is considered stable. From this perspective, a stable marriage is one that ends in only one way, with the death of one of the partners (Fitzpatrick, 1987). Fitzpatrick cites research linking stability to the level of happiness the couples claim to experience (Lewis & Spanier, 1979; Spanier & Lewis, 1980). There is some evidence that the contentment of partners can be expected to be related to the length of the marriage.

Research has shown that couples who are apart feel that the separation is less stressful if they had years together as their foundation. The feeling of satisfaction is higher for, “older couples, having endured as a marital unit [who] possess a backlog of experiences on which they can rely to stabilize their ongoing relationship” (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 76). Gross
(1987) found that the longer couples have been married, the better their expertise in overcoming the detrimental effects of missed time together. The longer couples are together, the more they see themselves as a unit with a shared history (Kirschner & Walum, 1978; Farris, 1978, Gerstel, 1977).

The second determination of marital success identified by Fitzpatrick is "marital functioning." This is defined as "the accomplishment of major marital or family goals" (Fitzpatrick, 1987, p. 567) such as career planning or vacation decisions. The author also looks at what many couples view as being normal in marriage (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1987; Farber 1964). Normalcy has been defined variously as the partners' determination of optimum physical and mental health (Bochner & Eisenberg, 1987), the way the marriage can be categorized by researchers as falling into identified patterns (Price-Bonham & Balswick, 1980), and a moral consideration of marriage (Staples & Mirande, 1980).

The final and most popular approach to the meaning of marital success is the determination of the quality of marriage. Quality has been variously measured as marital satisfaction (Burr, 1973), the partners' feelings regarding the relationship, (Spanier, 1976) and how family members rate the couple's happiness (Kolb & Strauss, 1974).

In her research on communication in marriage, Fitzpatrick identifies three models of communication processes; coorientational, interactional and
typological (Fitzpatrick, 1988). These three types are considered both by
the input of the subjects themselves (the insider perspective), and by the
observable facets of the marriage as noted by those outside the union
(outsider perspective). The coorientation model examines the way the
couple is in agreement in interpreting each other’s messages and whether
the interpretation is accurate. The second model, the interaction
perspective, looks at the effects of particular interactions on behavior. For
example, what are the triggers which prompt a reaction from the other
person. Finally, the typology model of communication seeks to categorize
marital interaction in an effort to delineate and bring order to the research.

By acknowledging the effect the husband’s absence has on his
family, we can examine the communication processes and how the
separations encompass the relationship.

Long distance relationships

Although still seen as an anomaly, the long distance marriage is
nevertheless the subject of increasing research (Boss, 1976, Kirschner &
Walum, 1978, Zurhorst, 1995). The findings reflect in particular the
experiences of commuter couples where the husband and wife live in two
separate homes (Farris, 1978, Gerstel, 1977, Gerstel & Gross, 1982, Gross,
1987) and those who may find themselves in a temporary long distance
relationship, such as that of students away at college (Holt & Stone, 1988).
Long distance relationships are different than more traditional unions. The couples involved often view their situation as temporary, and consider it outside the norm (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, Gross, 1980). The women involved may find within themselves a new independence (Farris, 1978, Gerstel & Gross, 1982). They then learn to appreciate this ability and to enjoy the sense of increased power which accompanies it. Finally, the issue of trust while apart is not related to the separation, but rather to the predisposition of those involved and their tendency to become drawn into extramarital affairs (Gerstel & Gross, 1982).

Many spouses in non-traditional marriages hope that their lifestyle will eventually change. Gerstel and Gross found that most commuter couples did not consciously make the decision to live apart; it was more of a matter of adapting to their circumstances. Typically, one or the other would begin an application process ... without much discussion of what a favorable response to such application might mean for their shared lives” (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 74.) Farris, in her research on ten commuting couples, determined that the couples, “took very little time and deliberation to choose commuting” (1978, p. 103). An impulsive decision might change the marriage for a long time.

The length of the time apart seems to be a critical factor for long distance marriages. Gerstel & Gross (1982) concluded that couples who were apart for a month or longer felt that they were emotionally disconnected
from their partners. Farris writes that “it is possible that dissatisfaction with the arrangement increases with the duration of the separation” (1978, p. 104). Regardless of the distance between these respondents, frequency of contact was a more important factor in determining satisfaction (Gerstel & Gross, 1982).

Researchers have found various ways which couples use to cope with their situation. Holt and Stone (1988) discuss the effect of separation on couples who were apart for varying lengths of time. They compare the use of verbal interaction (via telephone) to “imagined communication,” which they defined as daydreaming. Depending upon individual needs, such imaginary communication may be helpful in maintaining relationships.

Longer separations promote an uncomfortable arrangement for the partners. In a study of time and place disjunctions on 28 dual career couples who lived apart, Gross (1987) found that consistent regrouping is beneficial to long distance relationships. It is particularly significant that those who can predict the reunions tend to feel more stability in the marriage and to compare their situation more to traditional relationships.

Gross (1987) found that the pattern of separation had a great effect on the quality of the marriage. Couples who regroup, or see each other every weekend have a routine which closely aligns with that of many married couples, so they don’t feel that their marriages differ greatly from their sense of what constitutes a marriage.
For couples whose schedules do not allow such regular encounters, the relationship is likely to suffer. "Irregular regrouping, that is getting together when either one's schedule permits them to do so, challenges the relationship's quality in ways that regular regrouping (e.g. every week end) does not" (Gross, 1987, p. 217). Couples who are together on a consistent basis have a better sense of control over planning and reconnecting.

The research also suggests that commuter couples look forward to the time when the separation will end. Gerstel and Gross (1982) report that commuters considered their situation temporary even when they had no immediate plans to obtain a job closer to home. By considering the situation to be only short term, it becomes tolerable, if not optimal.

Gross and Gerstel (1982) have studied time apart, concluding that the length of separation is an important factor in marital satisfaction. Weekly reunions seem to be the most optimal for separated couples. Most couples who were apart one or two weeks found the situation tolerable and even beneficial in some instances. However, those who lived apart longer than a month at a time were much more likely to find the situation "extraordinarily stressful" (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 78).

Research on couples who live apart is not limited to the investigation into time and space differences. Other aspects of the situation include the factors which affect the woman's feelings about her circumstance. Without a husband there to depend on every day, she may find some rewards in
learning to depend on herself when it comes to increased household duties.

When a delineation of duties has been agreed upon by both partners, less conflict is anticipated. The woman who assumes responsibility for household duties can allow her husband to concentrate on his job. Bailyn (1978) suggests that the effect of agreed-upon guidelines will allow both parties to make these decisions independently. This would seem to be vital in long distance marriages, as timely consultations are not always possible.

Many women gain a sense of accomplishment in their ability to handle the responsibilities of home and family. A study of wives of prisoners of war and servicemen missing in action found that their forced independence allowed them to believe that they could now handle much more than they had previously (McCubbin, et al, 1973). By increasing the women's self esteem, such independent living pushes the wife to handle a variety of "masculine" demands, many which were formerly limited by parental modeling.

In contrast, the more traditional structure which delegates "feminine" jobs to the wife and "masculine" duties to the husband may be predictable and comfortable, but it may also promote codependence. When the domestic shores are determined by traditional means, the wife may become dependent upon her husband for many duties she is actually very capable of handling on her own. Gerstel labels "the single residence marriage ... a training ground for incapacitation," (Gerstel & Gross, p. 84).

Although it is easier to resort to traditional distinctions regarding
responsibility, the sense of accomplishment which accompanies accepting additional assignments can be gratifying. Lazarus (1985) agrees that distress in a marriage is often the result of our belief in society's view of gender based household responsibilities. Perhaps the ability to cross gender lines and learn to do the typically "male" duties is beneficial for wives in long distance marriages!

In fact, Gross (1987) found that many women in long distance marriages find an inner strength, which results in a sense of accomplishment. They "take pride (and comfort) in their ability to cope with this arrangement, 'to get through it.' The sense of accomplishment they get from their joint effort - the marriages' continuing endurance - is comforting and rewarding. It is one of the few benefits they attach to the lifestyle" (Gross, 1987, p. 225).

Among other benefits to having a husband who travels is flexibility in time management. Gross found that for commuter couples, the "consequence of not needing to fit one's daily schedule and work periods around a mate's schedule is a freedom from constraint" (1987, p. 215). Many of these women enjoy time with their family and friends without having to consider their absent spouses' needs.

On the other hand, such couples may have a hard time scheduling activities together. Commuter couples complain about their lack of time for shared leisure activities (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 81.) Thus, the luxury of
finding time for one’s own interests comes at the expense of time to pursue those interests with a spouse.

Since time as a couple is harder to find in long distance marriages, a wife is more likely to feel that she should give her husband her undivided attention when he is home. Gross (1987) explains that couples who live separately are especially aware of their need to use their time together productively.

Daily interaction can be comforting, but is something that couples who live apart must do without. In contrast, couples who are together every day may come to take for granted the intimacy they share on a daily basis (Gerstel & Gross, 1982). Although many consider these small interactions boring, the routines of daily life are often missed by partners who do not consistently share them. Eating breakfast together or watching a favorite television show may not be exciting, but it provides a sense of comfort. Couples who live apart may sorely miss the predictable nuances of marriage embedded in such routine interactions.

Sometimes being apart makes us really appreciate the time we do have together. Couples who share more time together may find that they do not appreciate or even recognize the time as important. Fitzpatrick found that, “some couples are so well-meshed and so unlikely to interrupt each other that on a day-to-day basis they are unlikely to experience much emotion, positive or negative, even though the marriage is a very close one” (1988, p.
For commuter couples, this condition is not prevalent.

Lazarus (1985) cautions against overemphasizing the importance of large amounts of time together. The idea that husbands and wives should do everything together has been labeled as one of the "myths" of marriage. He cites examples of couples experiencing marital distress because one or both of them felt the need to do everything together, which allowed very little autonomy.

The effect of separation depends to a great extent upon the way the span is accommodated. Each individual is comfortable with a preferred level of detachment. As Broderick puts it, "each of us develops a certain range of tolerance for separation and for connection - a comfort zone - outside of which we are uneasy" (1993, p. 93). The ideal situation is one in which the partners bring to the marriage similar comfort zones; if not, they need to find a mutually accepted level of separation (Broderick, 1993). This tolerance, while different for each individual, could be a key factor in determining whether or not a spouse in a long distance marriage will thrive or not. It is important that the husband and wife require similar amounts and similar types of interaction.

Clearly, the telephone provides the major link for most long distance relationships. Gerstel & Gross found that the couples they studied called each other often. Such phone conversations "reduce loneliness and provide a sense of security, as well as limited emotional support" (1982, p. 81).
Gerstel suggests that the conversation for long distance couples typically excludes the small talk which often occurs when the couples are together physically. Instead, “they tend to summarize their experiences and discuss practical concerns” (1982, p. 21). Such calls are frequent, and the subjects reported that the interactions helped them in coping with loneliness. Unfortunately, such conversations provide only minimal emotional support. The couples seemed to accept this limitation as a consequence of career choices (1982).

Some of the spouses in Gross’ study had a hard time concentrating on their work if they were apart from their spouses at a time when they felt they should be together. Gross writes:

I think of these statements about diminished concentration capacity as evidence for a feeling of being unmoored in a meaning-giving relationship. The fact that members of such couples are not around to sustain realities for each other results in a kind of unhinging, as if they literally felt detached from a meaning-giving unit (1987, p. 216).

Yet, the level of interpersonal activity is not a factor in measuring marital satisfaction. “The marriages of those who avoid and deny interpersonal involvement are, so far as we can see,” according to Rausch, et al, “no less stable, no less compatible, no less comfortable that other marriages” (1974, p. 82). In fact, for couples who resort to avoidance techniques, or denial, it seems logical that they would perceive themselves
as happy in their marriages.

The issue of trust is another concern of women who are married to men who travel. Most women who endure marital separations feel that trust in their spouses is crucial. A common stereotype of the truck driver is that he has a girlfriend at every truck stop. This stereotype is also extended to traveling salesmen and was something that the commuter couples mentioned as being a "belief by others that they would discard habits of monogamy and take advantage of new found possibilities for sexual freedom" (Gerstel & Gross, p. 86). Yet, commuters are not any more likely to become involved in an affair than they would be in a more traditional arrangement. So, research indicates that it's not the distance and time apart that predicates whether they will remain faithful or not, but rather their commitment to fidelity or proneness to infidelity.

Exploring a long distance relationship in light of the couple's telephone conversations, their career choices, trust and other components allows us to understand the ways these people maintain a relationship despite the distance. It is not only the relationship that must be maintained; the very identities of those involved are socially constructed by the lifestyle they have chosen. The information available from the trucking industry offers some insight into this experience.
Transportation related literature

The transportation industry has recently begun to acknowledge the significance of the family’s support in maintaining satisfied drivers. The popular trucking related magazines reflect this trend. Magazines are now featuring articles devoted to family issues. Every aspect of the industry is working to promote the importance of family support, from the carriers to the insurance companies.

The John Deere Insurance Group has devoted much time and effort into furthering the positive side of trucking. Their publication, Sharing the Road (1997) is full of information about the industry as a whole, and the men and women who are involved in trucking. This publication is useful in offering demographic information concerning the trucking segment of the population. It offers details on the impact of the industry on the nation, and the figures which support the safety and financial aspects of the industry.

A series of articles which regularly appeared in Land Line magazine through 1991 focused on the relationship of the wife to her trucking husband. Nola Fields wrote the column, which was called “Trucking Wives.” Fields discusses her first hand knowledge of the long distance relationships, and offers readers her advice on how to survive the separations. Her comments are useful in supporting the views expressed by driver’s stay at home wives. Fields’ columns (You & him together, March/April, 1992 p. 18) were replaced by this writer’s articles beginning in 1994.
In addition to my articles in *Land Line* magazine, I also write about family issues for numerous other transportation publications. For the past two years I have been a contributing editor for *Driving Force* magazine, and have had feature articles in *Transport Topics*, *rpm* magazine and internet web sites; TheBigRoad.com, HOMEROAD.com and layover.com. My reputation for understanding the experiences of families within the industry has been broadly recognized.

An article written for *Trucker/USA* (1992) by a trucker’s wife depicted the usual lifestyle in long distance relationships. Sue Mroz identified the aspects of truck drivers’ marriages, which are unique to the occupation. From being responsible for paying the bills, to plowing the driveway in the winter. Truckers’ wives face additional responsibilities often assumed by many non-trucking spouses. The erratic paychecks and unpredictable schedules add to the pressures for the stay at home spouse and parent. Although Mroz writes about stresses similar to those noted by Fields, the article portrays reality by including a number of trucking couples in the material. Quotes from wives support the author’s views and provide additional insight into the relationships. Subjects covered include trust, friendships and disciplining children.

Articles about the family lives of truck drivers have become more popular, and most offer lots of advice for coping with the separations within the marriage. Dave Adams, in the December 1995 issue of *Truckers/USA*
focuses on some of the negatives for truckers' families. He reiterates the realities of the loneliness felt by family members left at home. One woman, a 35 year veteran of a long distance marriage, still fights to hold back the tears when her spouse leaves on a trip. Her story may typify that of the women who celebrate birthdays, anniversaries and holidays alone. Instead of offering words of advice on coping, this essay recognizes the hardships and allows those involved to realize that their situation is not unique.

Charles Cox, writing for Overdrive magazine, interviewed women for their secrets in surviving the separation typical in trucking marriages. His article (Surviving Separation, January, 1999) touches on some of the concerns in this study, but most of the couples cite basic tenets for all marriages. Few of the secrets to success are unique to spouses who endure long distance relationships. Mutual trust, security, honesty and spending time together were discussed. These are traits most long term marriages are based on, regardless of the time and place disjunction.

While many articles acknowledge the difficulties experienced by trucking families, a few offer advice in making the relationship less stressful. In rpm magazine Chuck Zurhorst (March, 1995) offers a compilation of tips for the business traveling spouse in keeping in touch with those at home. Sending postcards from distant cities, calling frequently and reminding them of your love are all offered as ways to promote closeness. These can be used by fathers who are concerned about the effect their
absence has on their children.

The transportation industry may be awakening to the idea that the person in the driver’s seat has a life outside the cab of the truck. Families are becoming recognized as an important part of the trucker’s concerns. The industry publications reflect this acknowledgment of the driver’s lifestyle. These articles are important in looking at the way relationships are maintained and the identities of those involved. The theory of symbolic interactionism offers an explanation of how socially constructed identities are pertinent to the industry.

Symbolic interactionism as a theoretical foundation

For this study, symbolic interactionism has been used as a theoretical framework to explore the ways in which truck drivers’ wives construct and adjust their identities. This filter recognizes that shared meaning is found in the social interaction of a group. Meaning is determined, then, through the process of social interaction and applied to one’s own internal thoughts. This theory will be used to understand the social interaction and the internal experience of women married to truck drivers. It will also help in understanding the social interdependence of these wives. Their interaction with others allows them the ability to develop their own personal means of understanding in their relationships in maintaining their own identities.

Manis and Meltzer (1978) offer seven propositions as the basis for
understanding the symbolic interactionist's approach to social interaction. The propositions are: (1) humans understand their experience by attributing meanings to them, (2) human interaction creates one's meaning through the process of shared symbols, (3) society is composed of people constantly interacting, (4) individual behavior is determined by social interaction, (5) interaction within one's mind is a crucial component of discovering oneself, (6) behavior is created during the process of interaction, and (7) meaning must be understood by discovering the other's intent, not just their outward action.

Although there are many theorists who have written about the theory of symbolic interaction the contributions of George Herbert Mead, Charles Cooley, Herbert Blumer and Kenneth Burke are particularly relevant to this study.

According to George Herbert Mead (1934), our thoughts are a function of language. Mead felt that the experience of an individual should be considered in light of his observable interaction. He felt that people are reactors to others in their social circles. Instead of simply acting in a particular manner, the conduct in question is interrelated to the response of others and the meaning associated with that response. Especially significant for this study is Mead's approach to group conduct, or the manner in which we study a group by observing the entire process. Instead of trying to analyze a group through the participant's individual actions, the process is
central to the research.

Mead (1934) delineated the components of the process of interaction into three parts: mind, self, and society. The “mind” is our thought pattern, the way we interpret the actions around us. The mind is developed through social process, and in order to construct our reality, is dependent upon our previous experiences. The symbolic meaning often differs between individuals only because their past experience varies.

Mead's (1934) definition of the “self” is the culmination of thought processes which arise through interaction with others. This component is dormant at birth, but is developed through the person's relationship to those around him. The “self” can be separated into two sub-components, the “I” and the “me.” The “I” is the part of an individual's thoughts which Mead determined as the unorganized, fluctuating side as opposed to the “me” which is more consistent and structured. The act of communication begins with the “I” and is then controlled by the “me.”

Finally, Mead's view of society was that the individual and the group are dependent upon one another. Only through the interaction with others can we make sense of his reality. Mead explains:

A human individual is able to indicate to himself what the other person is going to do, and then to take his attitude on the basis of that indication. He can analyze his act and reconstruct it by means of his process. (Mead, 1934)
Although Cooley was a contemporary of Mead, they differed in a few of their theories regarding the social process. Cooley determined that it was the primary group one associated with as opposed to the notion of "other" which influences us. He also delineated the physical elements of our life in contrast to the social experience.

For our present purpose we may, then, distinguish two sorts of knowledge: one, the development of sense contacts into knowledge of things, including its refinement into mensurative science. This I call spatial or material knowledge. The second is developed from contact with the minds of other men, through communication, which sets going a process of thought and sentiment similar to theirs and enables us to understand them by sharing their states mind. This I call personal or social knowledge (Cooley, 1926, p. 60).

Cooley studied society's influence on our behavior and felt that there were two functions of our interaction with others. The first, was that of unity, or the sharing of experiences. When we relate to those around us by the similarity in circumstances and thinking, we find a sense of cohesion.

The other aspect of organization in society was differentiation. This is the tendency to find uniqueness in our environment. The idea of competition is the goal of personal opportunity and advancement. Cooley suggested that, "it is chiefly through competition that we come to know the world, to get a various insight into people's minds, and so to achieve a large kind of
sympathy” (Cooley, 1927, p. 127)

Cooley advocated the study of social process through research which abandoned the typical statistical applications of behavior. Instead, he urged his followers to disregard the observable, and to consider the internal aspects of behavior. While the author agreed that social observation is not as verifiable, nor as precise as quantitative research, he felt that many of the studies his peers were involved in omitted an important aspect of research, that of observing the individual as a whole being instead of a quantifiable series of actions.

Herbert Blumer offers a short, but succinct definition of symbolic interaction, and proposes three premises. The first “is that human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings the things have for them” (Budd & Ruben, 1972, p. 135). The “second premise is that the meaning of such things is derived from, or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with one’s fellows. The third premise is that these meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretive process used by the person dealing with the things he encounters” (Ibid. p. 135). Blumer is credited with coining the term, “symbolic interactionism” to describe this process.

Although Mead and Blumer are similar in their perspectives of human communication, Blumer places more of an emphasis on action. Instead of assuming that our actions are based on an internalized set of filters, our true self is exposed through social interaction. In Blumer’s theory, the
interactions vary depending upon the circumstances and our predisposition to external triggers may be altered in response to other's actions.

Mead and Blumer shared many views of social interaction, but their contemporary, Kenneth Burke, focused on the emotional context of language. His views coincide with many of his contemporaries by agreeing that we identify with those around us in our effort to find unity, but he uses the word, “consubstantiality” to focus on the shared “substance” between individuals (Foss, Foss & Trapp, 1991, p. 174).

The idea of consubstantiality aligns with the study of symbolic interaction, as they both seek to find a feeling of harmony with others whose experiences are similar to ours. Identification can be changed through the communication process and Burke’s theory was that communication can be achieved in a more successful way when the division between the participants is reduced and identification is increased (Burke, 1966).

The focus on language as being a human trait, and its relation to alleviation of guilt is a prerequisite to understanding Burke’s view that words create our reality. Burke defines man as:

a symbol using animal, inventor of the negative, separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy and rotten with perfection (Burke, 1966, p. 16).

Although Burke concentrates more on the motives which govern our use of language, he still strives to define our existence by our perception of
symbols. Mead and Cooley may have laid the groundwork for understanding the use of symbols in social interaction, but Burke added significantly to this concept in his comparison to the natural world and our differences determined by our ability to understand the meanings behind the words.

The theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism is important in understanding how a woman’s complex identity is defined. The way a woman’s identity is constructed may differ as her interaction with those around her varies. Her interdependence is related to the symbolism she shares with her family and friends.

The Importance of family and friends

This study of women married to long haul truck drivers recognizes the challenges associated with the physical separation between the driver and his family. A woman’s family, friends and co-workers are often geographically available, and interactions with them are at least potentially significant in the process that constructs and maintains the identities of these women.

Since part of being human is the desire to interact with those around us, we learn to overcome the loss of daily interaction when distance inhibits this interchange. Those who experience the marital disjunction of time and space must find other ways and other people to interact with and depend on.
Children

The addition of children to a family offers additional components to a woman’s identity. Children provide an outlet for interaction and are a major focus in the daily activities of mothers who are also married to men who travel. Thus, children are a significant factor for inclusion in this study.

Many women fill a void by adding children to the family, while assuming most of the additional responsibilities for herself. While traveling fathers often have the sense that they are missing important aspects of their children’s upbringing (Gerstel & Gross, 1982), the mothers usually step in to minimize the effect this may have on their children.

The families who spend much time apart are subject to scrutiny from outsiders, and this scrutiny may lead parents to question their own involvement. Not only do many of these fathers “have to deal with their own sense of loss and guilt, some simultaneously faced social pressures from other adults who questioned their adequacy as parents” (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 76). Again, this is an issue that many families must deal with in raising their children apart.

With the father away, there is additional pressure on the mother to reduce the feeling of loss a child may experience due to his father’s absence. This is a serious issue, since the loneliness of a child can be carried into adult feelings of inadequacy in intimacy (Hojat, 1987). Such individuals are considered to suffer from inadequate development in interpersonal and
social relationships. Pearson (1989, p. 24) puts it another way, “children who do not develop feelings of attachment may have different needs for autonomy and intimacy as children and adults.” The culpability of the driver’s wife in alleviating this potential childhood malady is great.

While it is unfair to direct the responsibility for adult dysfunction on the absent parent, many times the father is blamed when he is consistently away. Parents who are “effectively absent” (Duck, 1993, p. 12) such as in single parent homes, alter the maintenance of the relationship when the child reaches adulthood. As in divorce situations, the mother’s commitment in keeping the absent father’s presence in her children's minds is a factor in their ability to cope with the absence.

This research is vague in defining “effectively absent.” This term does not suggest a minimal level of contact between the parent and child. For families who maintain telephone interchanges, although they are physically apart, there is consistent interaction between parent and child.

While it is generally assumed that an absent parent is a liability, there is come evidence that in fact, the separation may be beneficial for children. Farris (1978) found that the children of commuting couples did not suffer from the separation of one parent; these children thrived. They showed indications of increased independence, confidence in their own abilities, resourcefulness and an interest in a wide range of activities.

The parents studied in Farris’ research of commuter marriages
appeared to compensate for their absence by more intense interaction. They "seemed to be highly attentive and sensitive to the various needs of their children and to place greater emphasis on the importance of being able to communicate with them" (Farris, 1978, p. 105).

Since most long distance relationships are due to the father's absence, many women will be expected to adjust to raising their families alone. Broderick (1993) claims that one half of all children will live apart from their natural fathers at some point in their lives. While it is rare for a child to be separated from his or her natural mother for an extended period of time. So the research on long distance marriages seems to correspond with the norm in that the father is the one who travels away from the home.

Children, therefore, constitute a major focus for mothers who are married to over-the-road truckers. These women experience a source of significant interaction with the children themselves, who facilitate a continuing link with their father and with their grandparents. The result is often an increasingly stronger relationship with her own parents and in-laws.

Family of origin and in-laws

Adult children often turn to parents for their primary sense of identity as they mature. For some, parents offer important relationships even when the children have reached adulthood and have started families of their own. Parents, and subsequently, parents-in-law, offer opportunities for
interaction, and allow the husband and wife to settle into a new sense of identity as adults. The form this relationship takes varies among couples, and even within the family of origin itself. This level of interaction will also change according to the stage of life the couple is experiencing. Parents and parents-in-law are a prominent aspect of this study because of the significance of their interactions with their offspring.

Upon reaching adulthood, the ties between a woman and her parents may become even more ardent. Adams (1970-1971) found that the bonds between a parent and child often increase when the child matures. Interaction may become more frequent, and the contact may become more important to the daughter, particularly if her husband is gone a lot.

A woman looking for family support in her husband's absence will often turn to her own mom or dad. Adams (1970-1971) found that that a husband often becomes closer to his in-laws than his wife does because he is more likely to reach out to either set of parents. A wife may concentrate on the relationship with her own parents, so the contact with her husband's parents may not be as frequent.

Even for those who are close to their parents, it may be difficult to convince those who are of a different generation that the marriage is strong, despite the absences. Gerstel and Gross, cited a study which found that parents “take the conventional marriage as their standard” and may view their children in a long distance marriage as neglectful (1982, p. 85).
For this reason, women whose fathers were professional drivers may find it easier to maintain a good relationship with their parents or in-laws who are less disapproving. It is more likely that her parents will support her situation because it is similar to their own.

Yet, regardless of whether the parents approve of her marriage to a long distance truck driver, the woman may still have a close connection with them. Although this may not always follow a traditional pattern of consistent interaction, the ties may remain strong. Duck (1993) found that we are culturally conditioned to maintain our relationships with our parents in some manner. Actually, the form this connection takes is shaped more by our geographic proximity than by other factors (Pearson, 1989). These relationships are also affected by the cultural view that adult children should find their own economic and social independence.

Regardless of the degree of contact between adults and their parents, the addition of a grandchild will often help to increase the interaction. A grandchild brings a different focus to the relationship, and with it the justification for additional interest and intervention in their children’s lives (Duck, 1993). Additionally, our society encourages grandparents to become actively involved with their grandchildren, although the responsibilities are minimal (Pearson, 1989). An adult child’s exposure to parenthood provides a common ground which allows the grandparents to offer advice and reassurance in childrearing, yet without obligation to adhere to the
suggestions. Clearly, interactions with parents and in-laws may contribute significantly to the identity of such women.

Friends

A woman who experiences separations in her marriage may turn to her friends to fill the void created by the time apart from her husband. Friends often provide the emotional support which is potentially lacking in a long distance marriage. This additional level of interaction allows the professional driver's wife another source of identity in her social realm. Friends can enhance a relationship, especially when the absence of a spouse increases the need for personal interaction. Friends of women married to husbands who travel share an even greater role in supporting and encouraging them.

Our culture offers strong historical precedence for women who miss intimacy with their husbands to find emotional support in other women. The significant role of close female friends can be traced back to the nineteenth century (Kersten & Kersten, 1986). Often, when husbands were engaged elsewhere, women found that their husbands did not offer needed intimacy, so friendship was important because these contacts were, "the only real option for an emotionally close relationship between equals" (Kersten & Kersten, 1986, p. 9). Kersten and Kersten found that "talking helped relieve troubles - troubles that apparently no man could understand" (1986, p. 10). This feeling of camaraderie, the basis for the symbolic interactionist's
perspective, offers evidence of the importance of friends to women married to professional drivers.

Friendship is the product of the choices we make in determining what characteristics we value in a companion. Adams (1970-1971) calls this component *consensus* which he defines as the most important aspect of a non-family relationship. We can choose who we desire to spend our time with, and this must be a mutual determination in order to foster a relationship.

Friendships thrive when women share ideals and enjoy similar activities. Friendships often form when two people share the same social class, work setting, leisure pursuit or club, thus they are often dependent upon a women's circumstances and her class hierarchy (Duck, 1993). However, these relationships are sustained by more inherent needs, such as the desire for mutual support in the husband's absence. Surely, the similar situation for women married to professional drivers allows them greater understanding of the lifestyle and promotes companionship.

The way a woman discusses her marriage is important in determining if her friends can appreciate her situation. Outside communication either reinforces or breaks down the relationship, depending on how the wife presents the marriage. When a woman speaks in favorable terms about her husband, she gives others the opportunity to support that relationship by reinforcing how she feels through verbal praise and agreement.
Women whose husbands share the same lifestyle can reinforce each other’s relationships while enhancing their own. Those outside the lifestyle may not understand the marriage commitment, especially in the case of long distance unions. A study of commuter couples found that many of the couples’ friends assume that the marriage is in trouble or that the couple is on the brink of divorce (Gerstel & Gross, 1982). Such a negative assessment, even if false, can lead to serious problems all around. The disapproval of others may cause a strain on the friendship, which may then have an adverse effect on the marriage.

When women share the same situation, the need to present the marriage in a positive light is less important because the friend’s experience is similar. Research suggests that marital happiness can be enhanced when friends support the relationship rather than prompt dissatisfaction in the union (Julien, et al, 1994). It is evident that having support from others in enduring the separations allows the wife of a professional driver to feel comfortable in her situation.

Friendships are sometimes based on experiences in common situations, such as a job outside the home. Employed women married to truck drivers may find jobs which do not conflict with their increased responsibility at home. If such women work outside the home, the job must be a relatively low priority. The woman whose husband’s primary commitment is to his career has to, “be fully accommodative, placing primary emphasis on the family.”
Any outside work they do has had to be adjusted to fit this primary commitment” (Bailyn, 1978, p. 160). This could be why many women whose husbands travel assume primary responsibility for the domestic and childrearing duties.

Since friendships are built entirely on interactions, it makes sense that such relationships are fluid. The definition of a friend may change with time; so may the categories of friends. Duck refers to the change in friendship circles as the need for “servicing” (1993, p. 7). When circumstances change, the need for support in the accompanying area may increase or decrease. For example, when a woman moves from her parents’ home and finds her own place, or goes to college, or even marries, she will tend to define her new situation by that role, and her friends will most likely be in the same environment.

The friends who remain important through life changes are those which do not require a great deal of “active attention” (Duck, 1993, p. 7). They may be sustained because of a shared past, a sense of historical oneness which assists in retaining the ties. These are the few and far between friends we turn to through the years, however sporadic the contact may be.

A women who is married to a long distance truck driver must learn to turn to others to fill in the gaps her husband may leave when he is on the road. Although her roles may vary with the people she interacts with in his absence, she discovers her sense of self through these relationships. Her
children, families and friends all provide her with a socially constructed identity through her various roles with the people around her.

Research Questions

The intent of this study is to explore the ways a woman maintains her identity by turning to others to meet some of her needs which may remain unmet due to her husband’s physical absence. While most women have a variety of relationships in addition to the marriage, women whose spouses are unavailable may have a greater need for interaction with other people. These alliances vary in importance from one woman to another, but the effect of the unmet needs indicates the importance of these family members and friends.

Families in which one spouse is absent most of the time face a different kind of challenge regarding daily rapport. The purpose of this study is to explore the ways a woman in such a relationship adjusts to extended absences of her husband. How does the wife define her expectations and understanding of her role as an independent part of a long distance relationship, especially when daily interaction is rare, or nonexistent? What are the expectations of the woman who marries an over-the-road driver? Do these expectations change as the years go by? What are some ways truck drivers’ wives learn to cope with the absence of daily interaction with their spouses? Who do they turn to when they seek the
support which cannot be met by a traveling husband? How do their roles as wife, mother, daughter and friend complement their need for personal identity? How do these wives share meaning through interdependence with others?

By looking at these relationships using a theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, we can determine how the support is provided and how important this is to the woman's identity adjustment.
Chapter 2: Methodology

This chapter defines the methods used in this research. Included are the justification for the study, a discussion of the researcher’s role and the procedures for data collection, recording and analysis. Each of these is described in detail along with the procedures used to accomplish them.

Justification for a qualitative study

The purpose of this thesis is to discover the ways a woman married to a professional truck driver identifies herself in relation to those around her. How does she construct her identity in comparison to others in the same situation? Whether she finds her needs met by family members, friends or co-workers, there are challenges which are often filled by others when she is married to a man who travels frequently.

Qualitative research extracts meaning from the respondents as each of them perceives her own situation. Mead explains how an individual identifies with those in her social circle to make sense of her experience (1934). Since the role of a trucker’s wife is related not only to occupation, but to an entire lifestyle, her view of the circumstances is pivotal to a woman’s social identity.

The most relevant idea advanced by Mead (1934) is the understanding of the components of “self.” The “I” and the “me” are sub-components
which make the distinction between the constantly changing “I” and the more structured “me.” These two identities are developed through interaction with others, allowing the “self” to be realized. For women in a long distance marriage, the development of the “self” can be more dependent upon her relationships with those around her.

Since qualitative researchers are more interested in the process than the outcome of research, it seems logical to follow an inductive approach. According to Marshall & Rossman

the strengths of qualitative studies should be demonstrated for research that is exploratory or descriptive and stresses the importance of context, setting and the subjects’ frame of reference (Marshall & Rossman, 1990, p. 46).

Such a qualitative process is not determined by a presupposed theory, but allows the theory to become evident during the stages of data collection and analysis (Creswell, 1994). Strauss and Corbin (1990) agree that the types of interview questions should determine the methodology used. The idea here is to discover the way women who are married to truck drivers cope with the independence and even find a comfort level in regard to their “self,” the exact outcome is ambiguous in this early stage of research.

The interviewing technique for this study is guided by McCracken’s *The Long Interview* (1990). McCracken describes the long interview as one of the most powerful methods in the qualitative armory....[it] can
take us into the mental world of the individual, to glimpse the
categories and logic by which he or she sees the world (1990, p. 9).
The long Interview lends itself well to the qualitative procedure because it
allows the researcher to expand upon the social significance of the data.

The researcher's role

The process used in this study was complex. For each step, caution
was taken to accept the data as intended by the respondent instead of
assuming her experiences were similar to mine. I was careful to keep this in
mind throughout the interview process. I began by determining what I was
looking for, what areas should be covered and how could the information be
used? Then, I began the task of identifying women who could be questioned
regarding their experiences. I was fortunate to know a number of women
married to professional drivers, but in addition to this, I was careful to find
others I did not know in order to achieve a variety of perceptions.

I began each interview by asking a number of questions and allowing the
respondents to elaborate on their replies. The interviews seemed to go in
different directions, depending on the areas deemed important by these
women. For some, children were their priority and many answers revolved
around their families. For others, the focus was on their siblings, parents or
others.

During the interviews, I allowed these women to answer the questions
with as little or as much of a response as they felt adequate. I noted their answers while carefully making every effort to comprehend the meaning, without coloring it with my own perceptions. At times, I would acknowledge their thoughts by mirroring the comments with my own for clarification. Many times, I would ask for more information and probe for added insight. Every effort was made to present the information in an unbiased manner. From these interviews, I was able to determine the major themes to be analyzed in this research.

As the wife of a truck driver, I feel that my identity within the culture can offer increased comprehension in the interview process. McCracken calls such inside experience both a “great potential and the great difficulty of qualitative methodology” (1990, p. 11). He cautions the researcher to look within their own understanding of the experience and use this insight to analyze the data from the interview. However, this immersion within the experience can also cause the researcher to neglect to identify cultural biases and stereotypes. He notes, however, that those within the culture can utilize the interview method best, “by drawing on their understanding of how they themselves see and experience the world that they can supplant and interpret the data they generate in the long interview” (1990, p. 12). For this reason, the interview offers rich information for a project guided by symbolic interactionism, and I have worked to heed the author’s warning to avoid succumbing to potential blindness in comprehension.
The benefits of having similar experiences as the respondents were evident. I was already familiar with the lifestyle, so the women could assume a comprehension of their situation. For example, I did not need to have the role of dispatchers explained, nor did I need clarification of the frustrations drivers encounter in their daily travels. I already knew how lonely a woman can be when she needs comforting and how telephone bills can become a major expense in a trucking family.

However, these same experiences could also lead to bias on my part, making it difficult for me to understand the respondent where experiences are very different than mine. So it is particularly important to heed the advice of experts.

The role of the researcher in the interviewing process is to be as objective as possible, and to listen and respond with appropriate questions. McCracken (1990) advises: (1) to listen intently while allowing the imagination to expand the understanding, (2) to work to understand meaning as presented by not making associations based on one's unique experiences, and (3) to avoid interpreting hidden meaning in the responses.

Personal bias must be minimized so that the data are not distorted to fit the researcher's viewpoint. Corbin and Strauss (1990), offer some suggestions for avoiding bias. First, the questions must be considered in light of the potential categories. Then, words, phrases and sentences can be analyzed for proper meaning. Since words have different meanings to
different people, the researcher must make sure to understand the intent behind the way it was used.

Strategies to avoid bias extend into the analysis. Corbin & Strauss (1990) suggest using a technique they label the "Flip Flop," which is merely analyzing the negative of what you have been researching. Systematic comparison is a method of leaving the standard means of comparing behind and breaking the stereotypes we may be accustomed to. In addition, far out comparisons to what is not true allow the researcher to determine real meanings to the words or phrases. Finally, one more technique, called the red flag, is used when words such as "never" or "always" permeate the analysis. The researcher must look at these in a relative light and investigate any limitations imposed by their own bias.

As a woman who is also a member of the group I have researched, I made it a priority to overcome any biases I may have projected in to the study. To clarify the answers, I repeated them in the manner I interpreted them, so that I did not take any comments out of their original context. While collecting the data in this way, I began to organize the information into themes. Then, I sorted through the interviews, looking for ways these themes became developed by the respondents' replies. All of these steps are important in presenting a fair and impartial view these women offered.

The internal validity of the study was verified by "member checks" (Creswell, p. 158) in order to verify the information received by the
respondents. This is the process of describing the major premises to the informants and asking for verification that the understanding is accurate. By verifying my interpretation of the replies, I was able to check my interpretations for accuracy.

External validity is more difficult to verify, as a qualitative analysis is not intended to generalize, but rather to interpret. Replication of the study would not be simple, as the selection process will be subjective, and the timing in regard to the transportation industry’s attitudes toward trucking families is unique. This study will be used to suggest areas for consideration and possibly ways to adapt the industry’s actions and relationship with the truck drivers’ families.

Data collection and recording procedures

In qualitative research, the process of collecting data begins with defining the parameters of the study. This means deciding who is to be selected for questioning, where they will be interviewed, what questions they will be asked, and how this process will be accomplished.

The respondents were chosen specifically to include women married to over-the-road (long distance) truck drivers. Only married women were chosen, and these were limited to wives whose husbands did not come home nightly.

The age of each respondent as a specific criteria was not important,
but the length of the marital relationship was recorded to ensure a broad sample within the group. The women had been married for various lengths of time, ranging from three months to 45 years.

Eight respondents were interviewed. While somewhat arbitrary, this number reflects McCracken's suggestion that it is more beneficial to examine in detail the information from fewer respondents than to give less attention to more data. The number of women chosen for this study was based on McCracken's statement that "for the majority of research projects, eight respondents are entirely sufficient" (1988, p. 17).

By limiting my respondents to eight, I was able to give special attention to their circumstances and stories. The interview method of research looks at how meanings are interrelated. By allowing respondents to offer their insight through personal contact, it has been easier to gain additional information by letting them elaborate on their responses. This is a crucial factor in inductively organized research such as this.

Before embarking on the project, approval was received from the Institutional Review Board based on the proposal as shown in Appendix A. The steps outlined in this proposal have been taken in regard to the privacy of the respondents and efforts to maintain anonymity despite the use of quotes and some identifying characteristics.

In selecting a site for each interview, I considered the comfort and privacy of the respondent. My goal was to find a site where the respondent
would feel relaxed and comfortable in speaking to me. Most of the interviews were done at the woman's home, although two were done in homes other than their own, but were done for their convenience. In each instance I was alone in the room with the respondent, and when possible, all external noises were reduced. This was also important so that the tape recorder would pick up the conversation rather than other distractions.

While most of the interviews lasted between 45 minutes and an hour, one interview was over in 45 minutes, but most of them exceeded sixty minutes. The longest interview was the first one, which was lengthened by numerous interruptions from the woman's children.

The questions asked of each respondent can be found in Appendix B. Each woman was asked the same questions, and their answers were noted before moving to the next one. The length of each woman's reply varied depending upon whether she felt the need to elaborate on some answers to a greater extent than she might on others. Every effort was made to mirror the replies by asking for clarification and affirmation of understanding.

The interviews were recorded, only after the interviewee agreed to this, and had signed a consent form. The names of respondents remain confidential and recordings were not identified by name. Instead, a system of numbering was used, beginning with respondent #10. After the completion of each interview a transcript was made of the recording. These transcripts were also labeled only with the assigned number. A list of the
names and their numbers was kept in a separate, secure place. After the project was completed, both tapes and the master list will be destroyed. Within the thesis, I use pseudo names to identify the subjects, and will use assigned names in alphabetical order (Amy, Bobbie, Carol, Diane, Elaine, Fran, Grace and Helen). No identifying information was made available to anyone other than myself. This naming system not only protects the identities of respondents, it also makes it easy for the reader to distinguish one respondent from another.

Furthermore, any factors which are specific to one person and may prompt identification have been altered so that the respondents will not be subject to scrutiny. The spouse’s names are fictional, as is the name of the company the truck driver works for if it is mentioned. Geographic locations are not relevant to this study and have not been identified.

Data analysis procedures

The process of taking the information apart, finding themes for analysis, and then assigning significance to the information is called coding. Creswell (1994, p. 153) suggests that in qualitative analysis several simultaneous activities engage the attention of the researcher: collecting information from the field, sorting the information into categories, formatting the information into a story or picture, and actually writing the qualitative text.
Corbin and Strauss (1990, p. 57) identify three methods of coding used in qualitative data analysis; open, axial and selective. The first method of analysis, open coding, involves identifying the ideas and then placing them in categories. Two analytical procedures are basic to the coding process, the first applies to making comparisons, the other to asking questions (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 62). The interviewer must listen for recurring themes and then consider how each one relates to other major ideas.

In this study, the process of open coding began during the interviews. After the first three or four interviews, major themes were beginning to develop, such as the issue of trust. After identifying these major areas of discussion, I began to consider how the subject might be related to other areas, such as the relationship to her husband.

The next method of analysis is called axial coding. This process occurs after the interviewer has identified themes and then begins the process of putting the data back together in light of their perceived connections. Axial coding, according to Corbin & Strauss is an intricate process of deductive and inductive reasoning and involves making comparisons and asking questions (1990). This process goes one step further than open coding by focusing the process more on finding and relating the categories to one another.

While the process of axial coding can occur during the interviewing, it also emerges during the exercise of open coding. For this study, I color
coded each of the roles a woman has in her life. The role of mother, daughter and others was assigned individual colors, which assisted in identifying both the quotes relevant to the study and the literature which related to the theme itself.

Finally, selective coding involves choosing the data and presenting it in relation to the other data. This is the final step and is highly subjective to the researcher’s interpretation of the data. Corbin and Strauss suggest that the process is not extremely different than axial coding. It is accomplished at a more speculative level of analysis (1990, p. 117).

While selective coding is in progress, there are many things to be considered. How do the themes correspond to one another, and how will the major ideas be supplemented by the information offered while answering other questions? The selective coding process was also influenced by the literature which suggested ways to enhance the information by understanding its correlation to other data. Selective coding was the final step in organizing the information obtained in the interviews.

During the process of selective coding, I found that there were some themes which had emerged in which more information should be gathered. For example, the idea of complex identities which are transformed through ritual resulted in the need to ask further questions of the women. So, I phoned four of the respondents, chosen at random, and asked them whether they had any activities which were consistent when preparing for their
husbands' leaving or his homecoming. I also asked each of them questions about their initial attraction to their spouses, since the courtship phase was being explored. These additional answers were then incorporated into the narrative portion of this study.

Chapter three provides insight into the respondents' thoughts by offering information about each individual interview. The interviews are presented in chronological order, and give a brief biography of the women along with the information in their own words. This chapter is intended to offer the reader to meet the women who agreed to be subject for this research.
Chapter 3: Results of Interviews

Women married to truck drivers have a lot of wisdom to share, and they are willing to offer advice to others in their situation. The interviews revealed many surprising observations, some of which were made for the first time as respondents identified these feelings. From their roles as mothers, friends, co-workers, daughters and daughters-in-law and as that of wife to a professional driver, these women talked about their visions, their desires and the reality of being a “trucker’s wife.”

Eight women were interviewed for this research. Of the eight women, all were mothers. Not all of them had parents who were still living, but every one of them had siblings, whether they were close to them or not. Half of the women worked outside of the home at the time of these interviews. Three of the respondents grew up in a home where her father was a truck driver, so they were already familiar with the lifestyle.

To visually provide a recap of the biographical data, I have included a table of relevant information about the respondents.
Table 1. Overview of Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Years Married</th>
<th>Father-Driver</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Employed</th>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carol</td>
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<td>Diane</td>
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<tr>
<td>Helen</td>
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<td>No</td>
<td>Six</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The women who were interviewed have been given substitute names to maintain their anonymity. The respondents were given aliases in alphabetical order, as they were interviewed. A synopsis of each interview conducted for this research is provided.

**Amy**

To begin this process, I began by contacting a woman I had seen with her husband at a local truck show. She and their children had seemed to be thrilled with his truck and his job, as they polished rims and washed the cab in preparation for the truck judging contest. I located her husband’s name and called her to ask for her assistance in this research. I drove to her home in
a small, nearby community. She, along with some of the younger children, met me at the door.

At the time of the interview, Amy had been married to her husband for 19 years. He had been a professional driver for 13 of those years. They have six children, and she home schools three of the younger ones, so she does not work outside the home.

Amy’s husband drives for a large, over-the-road, local carrier. He averages two weeks on the road at a time. When asked how often her husband calls her, she replied that he called at least once a week, but more if he suspects a problem at home. Amy insists that her husband has a sixth sense and knows when she needs him:

He can tell in my voice that there’s something wrong. I don’t keep nothing from him. Usually if there’s something wrong with the kids, I don’t know how he knows it, but that night he always calls. [We usually talk] anywhere from a half hour to an hour. You want my phone bill?

Amy partly attributes the success in her marriage to the absences: I think (his being a truck driver) brought us together more because of the short time we are together. But, I can’t see him being away from here this long. It bugs me. By the time he comes home, I’m ready for him to come home. I don’t even remember our last fight. Seriously, if he was home every night I’m sure we would clash a lot more.
Where, with him gone all the time, we don’t clash at all.

Amy’s six children are all living at home and under eighteen years of age. She describes her husband’s return from his trips,

The kids [will] see him coming up the road and it is a mad house here. Everyone is jumping and running and they’ll go stand out on the porch, cause they can’t go no further than the porch when he’s backing in, cause he can bring the full rig in here. They’re sitting and jumping, all excited, and I stand back and allow the kids first at him. Then, after the kids have finally calmed down I say, ‘Hey, hi, how are you.? Yeah, I’m here too!’

His homecoming may be an excitement for the children, but the children themselves help Amy to deal with the loneliness of being married to a professional driver. “[When I’m lonely] I bind more with the kids. The kids help me, when they’re gone I don’t know what the heck I’m going to do. I think maybe that’s why I had so many kids.”

One of the challenges of raising children alone is the difficulty in disciplining children. Amy forces her children to tell their father when they’ve misbehaved:

When they get into trouble they know they have to tell Dad, and that’s a big punishment for these kids. (I tell them), ‘You have to tell Dad what you did. You either tell him when he’s coming home and he’s close to being home [or] you tell him when he gets home.
Otherwise the next phone call, when Dad calls, you tell him.’ And that is the worst punishment you can have.

Women married to truck drivers often have a good sense of humor. When asked if she worked outside the home Amy retorted, “Six kids and home schooling three, do I need to?” Amy’s responsibility at home raising six children fills much of her time. When she and her husband do get out, it’s not often, “I’d say a couple times per year. His kids come first, long before that.”

Amy seemed to be happy about her husband’s career choice, comparing it to another profession, “I never thought he would be a truck driver. Never. I thought he would be a factory guy the rest of our lives and we wouldn’t go nowhere. We’d just be the normal, happy little family.”

When asked if she would encourage any of her children to follow in their father’s footsteps, Amy was the only respondent who said she would, “I’d say ‘go for it.’ My nine year old, right now, thinks [my husband’s company] is the top of the world.”

Bobbie

For the second interview, I drove to Bobbie’s home which is about an hour away. This woman was a friend of mine, whose husband drove for the same carrier as my husband. We met at a company function years earlier, and she was willing to assist me in this study. Bobbie does not work outside
the home, but she has been caring for her ailing mother, which consumes much of her time.

Bobbie has been married to her husband for twenty years, although he was not a long distance driver when they were first met. He has been over-the-road for the last eighteen years, however, so their two children are familiar only with this lifestyle. Although her children are nineteen and seventeen, she is still extremely close to them.

This respondent was one of three women interviewed whose fathers had been long haul truck drivers. Bobbie told me, “My dad drove truck, so I was raised with that.” Apparently this didn’t mean that she felt any closer to her parents, when asked who she calls when she just needs to talk, Bobbie replied, “I usually don’t call (my) family.”

Bobbie has friends who are married to drivers, and some who aren’t, she said they all, “are pretty close because …. we’ve had so many years together, so basically they understand a lot of things.” She did admit that:

I had one (friend) that couldn’t understand (my lifestyle) and I said, ‘Well, [your husband] comes home every night and [mine] doesn’t, If you have a problem you can pick up the phone and he’s home in twenty minutes. We don’t have that luxury.’ If there’s a problem, we face it, we deal with it, we take care of it. You tell [your husband] later, ‘I took care of it.’ Most women that are not in trucking call their husband and don’t know which way to turn to
handle [a situation].

When her children missed their dad at special events, Bobbie urged them to wait and talk to their dad before they became upset, “I always say ‘Don’t get mad (at your dad) until you find out the reason...why he didn’t make it home. Don’t get mad until you sit down and find out why it happened first.’”

Would she encourage her children to become professional drivers? Bobbie said she offered her son this advice, “[He] talked about (being a truck driver), but actually, we told him to get a real job, one where he can be home.”

Since most of a couple’s communication in a long distance relationship takes place over the phone, this emerged as an important part of the interview. Bobbie said her husband calls her:

every night. We’ll start talking and ask how each other are doing, or how our day is. Then he asks me how the kids are doing, what we’ve planned for the rest of the week, then he tells me if he’s coming home.

This driver’s wife talked about the difficulty in being alone and how she had imagined married life to be. Bobbie said:

I guess I thought things would be a lot easier. [My husband] would be home all the time. But, even with the guys that I see that are home, their problems are worse than ours. I guess, just over the years, you
learn to deal with the problems a little bit better than you did back then.

Finally, when asked if she would ask her husband to get off the road, Bobbie, whose husband has been an over-the-road driver for most of the twenty years of their marriage said, "No, because I don't think he'd ever quit. Even if he stopped going out on the road and got a nine to five job, he'd still be driving truck."

Carol

The third interview was with a woman whose husband had once leased his truck to the same carrier as my husband. We hadn't known each other at the time, but over the years our paths crossed from time to time. Carol lives about twenty minutes away, so I drove to her home for the interview.

Carol has been married to her husband for 25 years, the last fifteen have been in the trucking industry as an owner-operator of their own rig. She has two children who are both out of high school, but who still live at home. Carol's father was a truck mechanic, so he was involved in trucking, but he was home each night.

Her husband calls her daily, and Carol said their average telephone call is five minutes in length. When asked if she tries to protect her husband from worrying about what goes on at home, Carol said, "Sometimes I don't tell him because I know he's going to get upset, and I figure it's easier to deal
with here at home.” She insisted that she doesn’t keep things from him, but just saves them for when he’s home and has more time to talk about day to day activities. Carol told how their calls are concluded, “We always end our call .... with , ‘Good Bye, I love you.’”

When asked about the challenges she faces in raising her children Carol said, “It’s a totally different lifestyle raising children when their father is away. It’s like being a single parent, it’s like being single five or six days a week ..... It’s not easy raising children (for the most part) alone.”

Many women do not encourage their own children to become truck drivers. One of these, Carol stated:

I did everything in my power to discourage [my son from becoming a truck driver.] Because it’s not an easy life. It’s dangerous out there, for the men, women, whoever, for the truck driver. It’s a lonely life. There isn’t enough money in it. I just wanted something better for [my son]. I think every parent wants something better for their kids.

Carol became concerned when I asked her if she maintained friendships outside of the office with the people she worked with, “No, I don’t socialize with them,” when asked about her social life she said, “What social life?” Maybe the responsibilities in raising children and running a home alone take time away from leisure pursuits with friends. Since she had also claimed that she didn’t have a lot of friends, she quipped, “I’m going to need some
counseling after this.”

When asked about her childhood hopes, Carol admitted:
I thought I’d be married to a man who carried a brief case and wore a suit to work. Like Donna Reed, with a dress and a little waist and pearls [on] every day. And your kids would go off to school and I’d be in the kitchen....that’s like a little girl’s fantasy, I suppose.

She wasn’t alone in her dreams.

When asked about the issue of trust, Carol said, “You’ve got to have it or you’ll go nuts. And that goes both ways.” Carol, as many of the women in this study, seemed comfortable in their relationships with their husbands, and didn’t seem to worry about any violations in this area.

Would she want her husband to get a job requiring less travel? Carol was less concerned with her husband’s time on the road than with his ability to keep up with things at home, she replied, “Oh, well I still think it would be nice if he would have a day job or be home more during the week. Projects would get completed, things that we think about doing around the house or around the yard....trips.”

Diane

For the next interview, I contacted a woman married to an over-the-road driver for an area carrier. Since I had been in touch with this company professionally, I was able to ask for respondents from the carrier. This
woman, who I will call Diane, lives in a rural area about an hour from my home. I drove to her house for the interview.

When I had scheduled the interview, her husband was not expected home. However, when I arrived at her home, he was there also. This is not uncommon in this situation, as drivers take advantage of any free time to spend with their families. In order to allow us the privacy to continue, he graciously moved to another room so we could conduct the interview.

Diane has been married to her husband for only three years, but he has been a professional driver for the past seven years. They have one child, a three year old. Her father is a professional driver, so she was familiar with the lifestyle before she married her husband.

Like other respondents Diane believes there is an ideal length of time for her husband to be on the road:

[In the past] he’d be out 21 days and come home for two. Now, that I don’t know if I could handle, that’s a little extreme because I’m used to the week (absence) and that’s about enough. I look at it as, when he’s gone during the week, I’m like a single parent and when he comes home, then I feel married. Because that’s more or less what it amounts to.

Diane, whose son is only three, looks forward to her husband assuming his responsibilities as father. She admits that she he less strict in her disciplining, and welcome’s her husband’s assistance in this area:
I think it has a lot to do with him not being home during the week and he’s with me seven days a week, but [my husband] only gets to see him a couple of days. He steps in and disciplines when he gets home. I’d rather him do that, because I’ve had the week full of it and I’ll let him see what he’s like.

Since Diane’s father was gone much of the time, she is closer to her mother.

For the most part I think I have a good relationship (with my mom), I think (it’s) a better one, now that I’m out (of her home). I’m closer (to her) I think....I did miss [my dad] when I was younger, but ... I don’t have a real close bond with my dad like I do with my mom.

When asked if her marriage differs from others, Diane said:

I think, to a point it does. I think you have to realize that when you get married you’re probably going to be alone most of the time, so it’s actually like being a single person again, but yet, in the same respect and you’re married and you have to stick by them guidelines.

Since Diane was familiar with the trucking lifestyle, she was aware of the need to be independent. When asked if she had looked for someone who was a truck driver, she replied:

Um, boy, that’s really hard to say because my dad drove truck, so I knew that lifestyle already.... I was just looking for somebody who had the same interests and stuff as I had, as long as we got along
good. It didn’t matter what kind of job they had or what they were into. I think I was looking more for somebody with a seven to three job or like an eleven to seven job, who came home every night and stuff. But I don’t mind the way it is now.

Diane noted that family and friends don’t always understand the lifestyle:

Most people work during the day so they’re home during the evening hours. They get to see each other, you know, they both get home around five o’clock or so, so they’re home together at night, every night. Where, in our situation, I only get to see him, maybe two days a week, three days at the most. The rest (of the time) I’m home, here by myself. You don’t get that as quality time, as I think most people get when they see each other, even if they work odd shifts. They still get a sense that somebody else will be home when they get home. In this situation you don’t get that.

Like most other wives, Diane would like her husband home more often, but she accepts his job, “I’d like him to be home a little bit more often, but if that’s the profession he chose and he wants to deal with it, then I don’t want to make him change.”

Elaine

For the fifth interview, I asked a woman who recently married my
brother-in-law if she would be willing to be a part of this thesis. Elaine has the least experience in being a trucker’s wife, as she had been married only three months at the time of the interview. She and her husband have been together eight years, however, and have a four and a half year old son. Elaine’s husband is home every weekend, but he calls her nightly; sometimes they talk for up to a half hour.

When asked who she turns to when she needs support, Elaine said, “I don’t talk to my friends so much; I talk to my sisters. I’m really close to all of them (my family). They’re my best friends.... either my older sister, my sister who just got married, or my mom.”

Elaine and her husband recently bought a house in the country and her family is concerned about her living alone:

They are (supportive), but I guess they have to [be]. I would like them to see what I go through in a week, cause it’s really not that hard. But, they don’t, they’ll come over during the week and say, ‘Oh, this house is so big and you’re here all alone.’ My dad works in a mill. He’s gone eleven to seven, so my mom does sleep alone at night. Other than like that part, she doesn’t know how I can be alone in the house all by myself.

Elaine is so busy that she doesn’t have much time for a social life. said, “I work forty hours a week. I don’t really have [a social life] after work. I come home and take care of [my son.]”
Although Elaine doesn’t make plans to go out often during the week, she does admit that her friends:
do’t understand how I can do it because he’s gone all week. They understand that I want to spend time with him if he does come home, but they don’t understand why he’s got to be gone the whole time. It seems like a couple of my friends say, ‘Oh, I don’t believe he’s gone all week.’

Elaine talked about the loneliness the lifestyle offers in contrast to that of more traditional marriages:

I figured I’d cuddle up every night, not by the phone, but on the couch or just to talk to somebody face to face. Not like on long distance, you know, just a long distance relationship. But then on the weekends it’s like I imagined it should be.

There are some positive aspects to being apart, as Elaine pointed out, “I thought we’d argue more. We don’t argue anymore I think, because he’s gone all week and we don’t argue. I know why we don’t argue, because we’re not in each other’s face anymore.” Even when the comments are made in jest, many women held the same belief as Elaine when they suggested that their marriages would not be the same if their husbands were home each night. As Elaine said, “Everybody asks me, ‘What would you do if (your husband) was home every night?’ I’d say I’d probably be divorced. I think I would, I’m so used to being without him, versus being with him all the time.”
Fran

The next interview was with the wife of another driver from the carrier noted earlier. I drove to her home, which was over an hour away. Fran said that her father had been a truck driver, so she was aware of the long separations. Fran’s husband was a farmer when they married, but he has been a professional driver for the past fifteen of their eighteen years of marriage. They have three teenage children, all of them living at home.

Fran described her husband’s calls home:

I don’t tell him, ‘You have to call home every night,’ because I know that’s not going to happen. So, if he goes out, say, Sunday, or whatever, he’ll call Thursday or Friday. We usually talk quite a while, probably at least a half hour, sometimes 45 minutes. It depends on what we have to say. We usually talk about what he’s done. Sometimes he’d had a good week, sometimes a bad week. I’ll listen to him, and then we talk about the kids, of course. ... Once in a while we talk about my work [but] not too often.

Fran suggested that children of truck drivers have mothers that are good role models because “They see their mothers not relying on people.” Instead, they are raised by women who seem to handle most of the day to day household responsibilities alone. She has additional insight into the trucking lifestyle, “My dad’s a truck driver. I knew what it was like. I guess I
was accustomed to that, maybe.” But she doesn’t turn to her mother when she’s lonely, “I don’t like to bother her a lot because I’m grown up. We’re not real close.”

Like other trucking wives employed, Fran does not socialize much with co-workers. Fran said, “They pretty much go all their own ways. They all have their own families.” She continued, “I’m not sure they’d ever understand [my lifestyle] without being there.”

Instead of socializing with co-workers, Fran found companionship in other ways. She wasn’t looking for a friendship when she met another trucker’s wife:

One [of my friends] is married to a truck driver. It just kind of turned out that way. It wasn’t like I was looking for someone [like] that. But you know, you kind of bond more, I think, because you’re living in the same type of situation. It’s not like you have the father home every night.

For those women fortunate enough to have empathetic friends, they can expect them to understand when plans change. She cites one instance when, “I had to call up my friend and say, ‘I’m sorry but my husband has made it home and he wants to go to [a truck show].’ I had to give, but it wasn’t the end of the world. I would have loved to go to the party, but it was more important for me to spend time with [my husband].”

Fran felt that emotional stability was important when married to a
truck driver:

you have to [be prepared to] emotionally deal with something that happens that might be real stressful to you, or your kids, or something in your life. Say something made you really angry or someone did something that hurt you. You kind of have to deal with it yourself, or talk to a different friend and get through it. I guess I didn’t necessarily think that I would have ... so much on my shoulders. ....It’s a lot, it’s really a lot.

When asked about the trust in her marriage Fran said, “I think trust is real important. ... He doesn’t come out and say to me, ‘I trust you,’ It’s there, behind the words,” she continued, “you know, you have to have a trusting relationship and it works both ways.”

Grace

The seventh interview was arranged with a woman whose husband was also a colleague of my husband. She lives about an hour and a half away, but travels to my community often. She offered to come to my home to be interviewed, as it was convenient for her.

Grace and her husband have been married 29 and one half years, and of those, he has been an over-the-road driver for the past 23 or 24 years. Grace has two children, both out of high school, but the younger (23 year old daughter) still lives at home.
Grace’s husband usually calls her Thursday nights to tell her when he plans on arriving home, which is consistently on Fridays or Saturdays. He doesn’t leave until Monday morning so he is home every week end. When asked about her conversations with her spouse, Grace said, “We save a lot,” she continued, “I’ll tell you, the time we usually talk is in bed on Saturday morning. We’ll lay there for an hour and just tell each other some things... ‘cause there’s nothing he can do over the phone.”

Sometimes, when the wife at home is listening to her husband vent, she needs to remind herself that it’s not always directed at her. Grace suggested:

If he’s angry and he’s yelling you know it’s not you he’s angry about.

Some of that stuff you just can’t take to heart, either. Cause they’re mad, and if you find out they’ve had a rotten day, naturally....I was always told..that.. people always hurt the people they love, because that’s the person they can vent on.

Since she was the primary parent during the week, Grace often encouraged her husband to spend time with their kids when he was home. Grace told how she “pushed him to do things with [our children.] He’d go, like flying, on a Sunday and I’d say, ‘Well, take somebody with you.’ And he’d take [one of our children]. I was always forcing him into doing it.”

Truck drivers miss many of their children’s special events, such as ball games, concerts and school functions, so it is often the mother who goes to
great effort to attend the events. Grace said, “I always made sure that I was there [at their activities] and as long as one person was there from the family, they felt better about it.”

Grace felt that it was important for their children to not become resentful toward their father for being absent most of the time. “I didn’t like my kids being negative about their dad, cause that’s their dad, no matter what,” she continued, “You always talk positive [about him] even though you’re hurting about a situation.”

Although Grace’s children are grown now, she confided:

I didn’t think any of my kids would make 16 (years old). I mean, I’d go lock myself in the bathroom cause I couldn’t handle it and there was nobody to call ... I had to do [myself.] I think it’s easier now that I’ve got my daughter to talk to, cause she’s been there through the whole process, almost. And there was times when I couldn’t even talk to her, but now we can sit down and talk about things.

Although her friends are important to her, Grace agreed that some of them did not understand what her life is like, “If their husband(s) goes away for a week, on a trip or something, they will say, ‘How can you do that all the time?’ It doesn’t faze me, you know.” Grace mentioned how difficult it is to go to social engagements alone:

Oh yeah, I’ll go with couples, I’ll go to parties by myself. The hardest thing is walking in the door by yourself, but after you get in
there, it's like, you never see your husband anyway, so...I mean, he
goes his way and you go yours, so it's like, nobody ever notices that
you're alone.

Grace felt that a husband who is on the road often needs to learn to
accept the situation he finds at home

When you are adjusting [to being alone] you're crabby, you're moody
and he can't expect to come home and have everything rosy and that,
too. So, he's going to have to make your life a little easier, you're
going to have to make his easier. [You have to tell him] 'Help me
through it. Help me adjust to it. Help me adjust for him being gone.
Maybe call me a few more times.' ... He's got to understand not to
yell back and to just try to calm you down and tell you that he loves
you. And you've got to remind him that you love him too. Just cause
the whole week went rotten [don't think] that you're going to get out
of this marriage or he's going to get out of truck driving.

Grace, who has been married for almost thirty years, said, "If he
makes you happy, that's all you need to have. You've got to make sure that
he likes what he does."

Helen

After a number of weeks spent trying to coordinate my schedule with
the final respondent, I decided to choose an alternate woman to be
interviewed. My own aunt has been married to a professional driver for as long as I remember, but since she is not geographically close, we have not developed a personal relationship despite our family and career similarities. She was in the area for a family visit and I asked her to participate in this study.

Helen and her husband have been married the longest in this study. At the time of the interview he was planning on retiring, so their 39 years apart will end when he gets off the road. They have been married 45 years, and have six grown children. Helen’s husband calls home once every day or so, but they keep their calls short, from five to fifteen minutes.

Although she admits that she saves information for later, Helen insisted that, “I tell him everything, but I wait until he gets home if I don’t want him to worry when he’s driving.” So, it’s not that her husband is kept in the dark, it’s more a matter of protecting him from additional stress while he’s driving.

When her children were younger and their dad couldn’t attend their events, Helen said she would “just explain to them that he couldn’t be (here), that it was his job and he would be here if he could.” She went so far as to promote his relationship with their children, “even though maybe he wouldn’t have gone with them for some function anyway, because he didn’t want to, I never let on that Dad didn’t want to go ... I never told them that. I always told them that he would if he was here.”
Keeping busy with the kids was something Helen experienced when her children were younger:

I always had the kids so I suppose they were part of the coping mechanism. I was always so busy that I didn’t have time to get frustrated. And since I had six of them, I was really kept busy all the time. I also participated in their activities, Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, Brownies....athletics in high school. I was really active that way, in the PTA...that relieved the stress really, because I was doing something (so) I didn’t have time to be upset.

After forty five years of marriage, Helen doesn’t even try to get out much anymore. She described the reasons for her limited social life:

I don’t make plans. Not any more. I learned the hard way that it doesn’t pay to make plans....when I did make plans and then he was late, (maybe from a) truck breakdown, it was all unavoidable. But when the plans were made and I was ready to go and looking forward to it (and I had to cancel), that upset me. So, I don’t make plans because I don’t want to go through that.

Since she rarely socializes, Helen feels comfortable in being alone. When asked who she turned to when she was frustrated, she said, “I probably don’t talk to anybody.” When questioned further she said:

I love music, so I can just relax and forget any frustration by either playing music myself or listening to music. I suppose I have just
learned through the years that that’s the technique that I use. I rather enjoy my own company, I don’t mind being alone.

Although she doesn’t mind being alone, she sometimes feels the pang of loneliness. When asked how her marriage is different than those whose husbands are home every night, she said it was, “probably the loneliness of being a truck driver’s wife.” She sighed, “It can be lonely.” It is also important to be “fiercely independent,” Helen added, “very trusting and not prone to getting over stressed, or anxiety. I mean, you can’t worry when they’re away or you’ll ruin your own health.”

Helen was quick to respond when asked if she would have ever asked her husband to get off the road, “Oh no, he loved it too much.” When asked why she felt this way she said, “I wanted what he wanted.”

Although Helen would never have asked her husband to change careers or to find a job which would keep him home more, she was soon to face the ultimate test of togetherness when her husband retires. When asked how she felt about this, she said:

Boy, (I have) mixed emotions. We laugh and joke about it, but you know how when they’re home I get nothing done. He’s underfoot, which of course, he can’t understand. But I’ve talked to other wives, and they’re not truck drivers’ wives, and that seems to be a “wife thing” in general. You just don’t get anything done when they’re home. We have discussed this, and I’m going to have a hobby for him.
Or get him involved in doing some of the stuff around the house, because just sitting.....

her voice trails off:

I guess the underlying thought I have is that I’m fearful of his health when he retires, because if he just sits.... even my children are concerned about that. You read too many obituaries where a year or two after they retire they die, because you’ve lost the routine of trucking and being on the road and that scares me. So, if I can get him actively involved, I think I am going to love retirement.

Since Helen and her husband were the longest married couple in the study, I asked her for any advice for the rest of us, for all of the women who were married to truck drivers right now. She said, “Hang in there, because it does get easier.” Let’s hope she’s right.

The introduction to the respondents is important in understanding how each of them views their relationship. Although they are similar in many respects, they each have unique perspectives on the lifestyle. With this in mind, it naturally leads us to analyzing their input and applying the research to the information. This will be the focus of chapter four.
Chapter 4: Analysis

Blumer (1969) defines meaning as a product of social life. The meaning a person assigns to something is the result of the individual’s interaction with others about the object being defined. Meaning is secured when a person contemplates the symbol, or when (in this case) the semi tractor becomes important to that individual. The mutual understanding creates a sense of meaning for the individual, who then engages in interactions with others who share the same understanding. Through this process, identity itself is socially constructed.

In exploring the experiences of a woman married to an over-the-road driver, we must first understand the process of sharing meaning which leads to the construction of her identity. From her early expectations of marriage to the reality of her marriage relationship, her world is defined by her interaction with those around her. The influence of interactions with her family, friends and co-workers can be significant, and are the focus of this chapter.

The process begins with what attracted her to her husband in the first place, particularly whether or not some aspect of the macho image of the road warrior drew her in. Then, the courtship stage predicts their future marital relationship, especially in terms of intensity and absences.

These couples are likely to align their gender roles with the models of
more traditional eras, where the husband is the provider, and the wife at home is the primary nurturer. Their time together is short, yet intense, with little time for extended family relationships and social affiliations.

However, these traditional delineations apply only to the roles they maintain when he is home. The woman must accommodate a very different type of situation when her husband is away. This is a much less traditional arrangement, and the transformation from a partner to a person in charge causes her to become a very independent, self-sufficient woman.

When he gets back into the truck, the wife's role is suddenly expanded into that of nurturer, financial manager, activity director, social coordinator and family liaison. She is expected to handle many situations often delegated to the proverbial man of the house. She accepts these obligations in order to make her marriage survive, and to allow her husband to pursue his career dictated lifestyle.

Between the extremes when her husband is gone and when he is home, a trucker's wife must prepare for the change. She must be transformed from one half of a couple to an independent woman. Then, days later, this transition takes place again, in reverse. Her husband is expected home, so she must prepare for his reentry into the family and into her life. These roles and the changes which occur repeatedly are central to the complex identity of a trucker's wife.

This thesis is an exploration of the experiences of women married to
truck drivers as they adapt from one identity to one another. Since many of these women were initially unaware of the way their husband’s career choice would affect every aspect of their lives, they were not prepared for the negative aspects of the lifestyle. Each of them learned to cope by turning to others in her social circle and by interacting with them through the symbols they shared.

Because the husband is gone for so long, the wife is likely to turn to others to negotiate a complex identity through interactions with others. Those who assist in this process include the woman’s children, family, friends and co-workers. A visual depiction of the woman’s various roles would look like this.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1. Regular regrouping. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. The process from (1) courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting.
Courtship

We all have an image of what marriage should be like. As young girls, we often picture that "perfect husband" and envision our future with the man of our dreams. For most of us, spending the majority of our time alone is not part of our ultimate plan. Eating meals for one, sleeping alone in a big bed, and raising our children without daily assistance from their dad is not the ideal we imagined before we said, "I do."

The attraction for the women in this study was not the idea of the "macho" man in the big, powerful truck. That stereotype does not pertain here. Bobbie said that she was attracted to her husband by his warmth and personality. At the time, he wasn’t driving a big rig, but he was transporting children in a school bus. Elaine’s infatuation in her husband was similar. Although he was a professional driver when they met she was charmed by his personality more than by an image of a highway cowboy.

For Carol, the magnetism was mostly due to the fact that her future husband had a car, at a time when most of her dates relied on her for transportation. "He was fun. He had money," so Carol began spending more time with him, and they eventually married, right after high school. Her husband didn’t decide to become a truck driver until ten years after they had been married.

Two of the women in this study married men who were already truck drivers. Only Diane and Elaine began their marriages knowing that their
husbands were professional drivers, and would be absent for extended periods of time. Since Diane’s father was also an over-the-road truck driver, she was aware of her future lifestyle and the impact his job would have on their marriage. However, Elaine did not have any close relatives who were professional drivers, so she had less of a vision into her future situation.

Although Diane grew up in a household with a truck driving father, she married someone in the same occupation. “For me it didn’t matter,” she admits, “I was just looking for somebody who had the same interests and stuff as I had, as long as we got along good, it didn’t matter what kind of job they had.” However, when asked if she had anticipated the loneliness of the lifestyle, she admits that she, “was looking more for somebody ... who came home every night.”

None of the respondents had imagined that they would be alone so often, even those whose father had driven a truck. Bobbie, whose father was a truck driver, represented the sentiment of the other women when she said, “I guess I thought things would be a lot easier, [my husband] would be home all the time.” Diane, who also grew up in a family where her dad drove a truck, didn’t care what type job her husband would have, but she said she, “was looking more for somebody with a seven to three job or like an eleven to seven job.” The other respondent whose father had been a truck driver was Fran, and her response to the question of how she imagined marriage
reflected the others’, “I guess I didn’t necessarily think that I would have a marriage with so much on my shoulders.” These women married men who had the same occupation as their fathers, yet they still dreamed of less responsibility, more togetherness and someone who was home more often.

These women dislike the solitary nights. “I figured I’d cuddle up every night, not by the phone, but on the couch, or just to talk to somebody face to face,” Elaine admitted. Grace had much of the same response; she imagined, “somebody there for you every night, somebody that would take care of you.” After 45 years of marriage, Helen is accustomed to the time alone, but as a young girl, she also, “dreamed of getting married and living happily ever after.” For Helen the biggest challenge is, “probably the loneliness of being a truck driver’s wife.”

Some of the women had dreamed of a husband who, as Carol had hoped, would have “carried a brief case and worn a suit to work.” Grace pictured marriage as allowing her to, “be rich!” Regardless of these women’s dreams, they are making the most of the lifestyle and putting the idealistic hopes of their teenage years behind them.

A husband is expected to be our friend and our counterpart. Someone who shares not only a life together, but a presence which supports our image as a couple. We want to appear as a unit when we’re in public.

This is even more true for women married to professional drivers. A partner is not available when he is hundreds of miles away and cannot be
reached at work. The experience for these women is defined by acculturation in her husband’s lifestyle.

Marriage-time together

After the courtship comes marriage. All of the women in this study are still in their first union. This may be significant given the extreme divorce rate in the United States. People in the industry have suspected that the divorce rate for truck drivers is probably higher than that of the general population, but exact figures are not available. This would be an interesting comparison in light of this study.

For the short times these women do spend with their spouses, the need to connect is strong. They are aware of the limited time available, and so they learn to put small annoyances aside, and to concentrate on matters which are more important. They ignore many of the little aggravations which grate on some to the extent that they become larger problems. For women who count time with their husbands in hours, rather than days, small things lose their significance.

Despite the distinct separation due to the nature of the trucking career, the sense of identity in trucking families is strong. The need to counter negative assumptions about drivers themselves, and the industry as a whole, pervades the couple’s social experience. The public’s perception of truck drivers in recent years has not been positive, and this leads many
families to build a sense of belonging to counter any outside criticism they may encounter.

Many of the women mentioned that their time with their husbands was considered special because it was so rare. Amy said that the length between her husband’s home time has, “brought us together faster.” She said that she couldn’t remember their last argument, as the petty things which couples usually fight about seem less important. “If he was home every night, I’m sure we would clash a lot more,” she admits, but they just don’t have the time to fight over their disagreements. Elaine too, believes that there is less conflict in her marriage because, “we’re not in each other’s face.” She said that they don’t argue anymore because he is gone during the week.

Conversations in families who cherish their time together are more meaningful. Infrequent time together is seen as a chance to catch up on the things they may have missed during the week. Children’s activities, family matters, friends, bills and discipline are important matters to discuss. These are often omitted from telephone conversations because they are not urgent, but they are important for Dad to feel involved in family matters when he’s home.

For many women, the time alone with their husbands is especially sporadic and often invaded by their children. Time spent socializing with friends and family is also infrequent, and considered less of a priority.
Instead, the focus is on their relationship for the short time the couple is together. Along with her need to connect with him in a limited time, the children are clamoring for attention. Family time, while limited, is considered to be extremely important.

In-laws and siblings are also significant, but may not be a priority when Dad’s home because time is so limited. Carol mentioned the inability to visit other family members who don’t live in the vicinity. “Four hours is just too far to go, one way...you don’t have time to go visit other people,” she stated.

Friends may also be expected to curtail their social expectations when the driver is home for a few days. Elaine agreed that although she doesn’t often have to cancel plans with friends, “they understand that I want to spend time with him if he does come home.”

Even though their original ideal of marriage didn’t materialize, these wives of truck drivers cited a number of reasons why they were satisfied with their arrangements. The first is that the time they are together is even more precious, and they make it a priority to put each other first. Secondly, these women experience a feeling of accomplishment by being independent and taking responsibility for the typically “male” duties of the household.

The time spent together for trucking couples may be short, but its intensity is evident. For these women, the importance placed on their
husband's presence is surely beneficial to their relationships.

Although their time together is a priority, the time comes when the driver must prepare to leave home. Unless the miles are accumulating, he isn’t making money. As he gathers his clothes and completes his paperwork in anticipation of another trip, his wife must begin her transition from that of spouse to being alone again.

Transition-preparing for his departure

A woman’s preparations for her husband’s departure may seem trivial, but when these patterns of behavior are viewed as rituals, their significance becomes clear. As symbolic communication, (Broderick, 1993) rituals are important in bringing meaning to everyday life, and they play an important role in delineating changes in the status of the identity.

Rituals are ways in which we settle into a routine that feels comfortable, although we may not always be consciously aware of the inherent symbolism. Rituals also serve to transmit our cultural identity to those around us. “We need (rituals) to give stability to our behaviors and to serve as vehicles of communication” (Driver, 1991, p. 23). In fact, much of our communication is non-verbal, and can be understood as creation of meaning for oneself and transmission of that meaning to another person.

We create order in our world when we use rituals. By invoking the learned behaviors which offer comfort in their familiarity, we find a sense of
orderliness and bonding with those around us (Geertz, 1983). These small ways of organizing our world provide us with a means to deal with other areas which may be the source of stress.

Meanings are attached to symbols, and ritualizations are considered symbols (Driver, 1991). A symbol, such as a handshake, is a ritual practiced daily throughout the world. It is understood to be a greeting, a way of saying hello or good bye to people we meet. How this meaning became attached to the motion of a handshake is still being debated, but it is a way to communicate to others, who we can assume will understand our intent.

Family rituals are important in understanding how a family functions. Broderick writes of rituals:

In fact, if one knows the pattern of participation in these regular ritual events, then one has a key to a family’s internal structure ....the sense of identity and oneness is strongest in those units where it is supported with ritual, and weakest where it is not.

(1993, p. 209)

These homecoming greetings are rituals which Pipher says, “protect time” (1996, p. 231). Pipher suggests that families can become stronger by defining rituals which are important to them. This must be a conscious effort in making time to be together and appreciate one another.

When asked if they had rituals which they followed during the transitional period, the respondents tended to claim that they did not. Upon
further questioning, however, consistent patterns became evident. Carol insisted that she did not have any identifiable ritual before her husband leaves, but her husband follows a predictable routine.

Each Sunday morning, before he leaves, Carol’s husband makes coffee to take with him in the truck. Then, he gets his clean clothes ready to store in the truck. He then makes a trip into town for cash from the TYME machine, stopping at a fast food restaurant to pick up breakfast for himself and for Carol. Then, the two of them eat their breakfast before he begins his trip.

Carol’s husband may be more independent than Bobbie’s spouse. Bobbie helps her husband get his paperwork together, and she washes, packs and loads the laundry in the truck for him. She also makes sure that he has enough money to get through the coming week. Then, she often drives him to the repair shop to pick up his rig.

Elaine is also responsible for making sure that her husband has the cash he will need for expenses on the road. For her, the preparations often include a good meal the evening he leaves. Since he usually departs late on Sunday evenings, he gives their son a kiss and a hug first, and tucks him into bed before he says his good byes to Elaine.

Although these small rituals may not seem dramatic, such symbolic activities are used to communicate our experiences of transition. Amy admits that she is guilty of leaving her husband’s laundry until the last
minute. Instead of washing his clothes when he first arrives home, Amy says that she waits until the last minute, “and it [makes] him late for the first taking off.” She agrees that this is merely a ploy to keep him home longer, but it’s a habit she finds hard to break.

Although rituals are often personal activities, those around us must understand the importance of the ritual. It may be important for Amy to keep her husband home longer, so if he recognizes the reason for her delay in getting his laundry ready, he can appreciate her need for more time together. Driver calls this process one where individuals, “direct their interactive performances toward the reordering of social relationships” (1991, p. 191). Amy’s husband can confront her delay tactics by trying to find more time for the two of them before he leaves.

Although none of the women would go so far as to give their husbands an ultimatum to get off the road, some of them wish he would be home a little more often. They acknowledged that there would be changes in their routines. Amy stated that one difference for her would be cooking more substantial meals. “He loves to cook,” she boasts. Their meals while he’s away usually consist of hot dogs and macaroni and cheese! Elaine also mentioned that her, “kitchen would be a disaster” if her husband were home nightly. “Everything would be put in a different spot, or where it’s not supposed to be,” she said.

These women have settled into routines which allow them to prepare
mentally for their husbands’ departure. Once he has gotten back into his rig and left his family once again, her role changes into that of an independent woman who may turn to others for the support she needs when he’s away.

Marriage-time apart

A woman married to an over-the-road truck driver spends the majority of her marriage alone. While the days as a couple allow her to focus on their relationship, the time apart is more of a time to focus on herself. However, there are many things which get put on “hold” while she waits for her husband’s return.

The short time around the house leads to numerous unfinished projects for many families. Carol wished that her husband would have more time to get things done in the yard or on the house. “Because he’s gone so much, he has to get caught up on fixing things around the house,” she said.

Diane’s husband wants to be home more so he can spend more time with their son. He would still drive a truck, she believed, but he would probably find a local job, such as driving a milk route, so he could be home at night. For Diane, this would provide, “the sense that somebody will be home when” she gets home.

No one ever said that marriage would be easy, but Grace seemed to capture the essence of keeping her marriage intact. “If you love the person, you’re going to put up with it. It’s okay, you know, this isn’t half as bad as I
thought, once I talk about it." Helen, who has been married for over 45 years reminds us to, “Hang in there, because it does get easier.”

Women married to truck drivers learn to adapt, to make the most of their circumstances. These women’s identities are constructed through interactions with not only their husbands, but other significant individuals as well. When their husbands are on the road, these women turn their attention to their children and the running of the household. Interactions with other family members, including in-laws and friends and coworkers can also contribute significantly to her sense of identity.

**Independence and trust**

In the absence of her husband, the woman is likely to carry a lot of responsibilities on her own. A truck driver’s wife is like a single parent when her spouse is on the road; and she is also likely to have business responsibilities. Often, owning a business means working alongside one another to make the endeavor succeed. For those in trucking, the partnership is also a long distance relationship, where the husband typically operates the equipment and the wife takes care of the office duties. A number of responsibilities are likely to fall on the wife’s shoulders; making truck payments, understanding accounting transactions and filing required taxes. She may or may not share in the feeling of pride her husband has in owning a business. Regardless, she must assume additional responsibilities
for which she may or may not feel competent, so that his dreams can be realized.

In addition to the intense time together, the sense of individual accomplishment is another benefit of a long distance marriage. Self sufficiency provides these women with increased dependence on their own ability rather than that of a husband. The women find a level of satisfaction in accomplishing things on their own. Bobbie mentioned that she felt much more secure in her ability to "deal with things on her own."

All of the woman in this study agreed that the wife of a truck driver must be independent. Elaine stated that a woman married to a trucker must be, "a lot more independent. They have to make sure everything gets paid, everyone gets fed." She compared her situation to that of a single parent. Fran agreed that a woman must be, "very independent," although she admits that she may occasionally, "take it too far," by not asking for help when she does need it.

The women all felt that in order to make a marriage succeed, you must have implicit trust in your husband. "Trust is a big one," Amy stated, "If that's not there, you're [marriage is] dead." She feels that the stereotype of a girlfriend at every truck stop is wrong, but could be easier for an over-the-road driver because it wouldn't "get back to you" as fast as a husband having an affair locally.

Amy's trust in her spouse is evident, as her husband frequently
travels with women. He is a driver trainer, which means that he must take new drivers out on the road for a week or more at a time. Amy isn’t pleased with the fact that the company expects the opposite sex drivers to sleep in the cab of the truck, although they have separate bunks in the truck. For weekend layovers, they get separate motel rooms, but during the week they are confined to the inside of the cab. Amy’s husband allows her to meet each potential trainee and approve or disapprove of the arrangement. “I pick the women,” she said, “there are certain women out there that when I see [them] I say, ‘you will not take this one.’” However, she does let the, “big, fat, ugly ones” go with her husband. Perhaps Amy feels that she can trust her husband, but her wariness in his potential cab mates is evident.

Bobbie, who doesn’t question her husband’s fidelity, believes that the public perception of drivers is that they are less faithful than most men who come home every night. “They feel that there’s more temptations out there because they deal with so many more people than those in a nine to five job,” The perception of outsiders that the separated couples are more prone to extramarital affairs is not the case. If a marriage was destined to be split by an affair, it was not due to the partners being physically available on a daily basis.

One of the women talked about the way her husband would bring up the subject of trust. Fran stated that her spouse, “doesn’t come out and say to me, ‘I trust you.’” Instead, he talks about his friends who aren’t as
fortunate to have the same level of confidence he has in his relationship with Fran.

The trust a woman has in her husband's fidelity must be the same as his belief in her faithfulness. "The trust is still both ways," admits Grace, "cause you're home too, you could be out in bars, sitting every night, trying to pick up something." Without the trust between a woman and her long distance spouse, the likelihood of a successful marriage is dismal.

**Interactions with children**

Children seem to fill a void; they may provide someone to love and to hold when a woman's husband is away. The presence of children often relieves the loneliness they experience when their husbands are away from home.

The children of the women in this study varied in age from a few years to adult, but their experiences were similar in that they spent all or most of their growing years with a father who was an over-the-road driver. When children are raised in an environment where this is the norm, they are often unaware of the more typical home life situation where Dad comes home from work on a daily basis. Their reality is in seeing Dad for one or two days a week. The visitation pattern is similar to that experienced by many children of divorce, although without the stress or acrimony of estranged couples. For this reason, many women married to over-the-road drivers consider
themselves “single Moms.”

The women in this study assume the role of liaison between Dad and the kids. The moms work hard to nurture the father-child relationship, despite the physical distance between them. Grace admitted that she often, “pushed” her husband to do things with the kids when he pursued his own activities. “He’d go flying on a Sunday,” she said, “and I’d say, ‘Well, take somebody with you.’” So, he would spend the afternoon with one or both of their children, although Grace admits, “I was always forcing him into doing it.”

It is sometimes difficult for these moms to reassure their children who miss their fathers, when they themselves are feeling pressured. Grace admitted that, “even though you’re hurting about a situation...you always talk positive” about it. “I don’t like my kids being negative about their dad,” she continued, “’cause that’s their dad, no matter what.”

It is not uncommon for mothers to put their own needs behind those of their children, but the women in this study do so without complaint. Despite their own loneliness or frustration, they kept a positive attitude when it came to their children’s feelings. Bobbie reports she nurtures by telling her kids that they should, “accept what he’s doing for a job, because he is out there working hard.” She cautions them to give their dad the benefit of the doubt when he can’t be around for them.

Having one parent absent much of the time puts a greater strain on
the one at home to fill in the gaps. Grace makes sure she attends her children’s events, “cause somebody’s got to do it. I always made sure that I was there,” Grace said, “and as long as one person was there from the family, they felt better about it.” Helen even went so far as to say she made her children feel better about their dad than he might have deserved. She would reassure the children that he would be at their events if he could, “even though maybe he wouldn’t have gone with them for some function anyway because he didn’t want to, I never let on to them that Dad didn’t want to go...I always told them that he would if he was here.”

Grace’s approach aligns with advice by experts who agree that we should refrain from expressing our frustrations in a negative manner. McMahon advises the reader to, “learn how to express your feelings in a constructive way around the ones you love most. Explain your emotions to them as you would like them to explain theirs to you. Own your own feelings and try not to blame them on your spouse or children” (1996, p. 127). For the children of professional drivers, having a mother who encourages a positive relationship with their father will benefit them in the long run.

A child of a long distance marriage can also be a confidante, especially for a mother who needs someone to understand her situation. However, children who are willing to foster an intimate relationship such as this are not the norm. In The Shelter of Each Other: Rebuilding our Families (1996), Pipher argues that the American culture promotes rebellion rather than
confidence in the wisdom of our parents. In trucking families, there may be a special closeness and a woman may turn to a younger family member who understands her situation in search of support.

Often, a male child is expected to assume the role of "man of the house" when his father is away, or he feels this obligation without prompting from his parents. Bobbie told about her son helping out by, "keeping an eye on Mom, mak[ing] sure she's okay," for his father.

Other sons go to the other extreme and try to push their weight around with Mom when Dad's away. Amy's teenager began to physically push her around, but, "he made the mistake of doing this in front of my husband," she said. "He was just seeing how far he could push [her]" but his dad put a stop to that in a hurry.

Disciplining children can be a struggle, especially when parenting styles differ from Mom to Dad. Diane admits that their three year old son, "runs right over me." Fortunately, his dad seems to be able to get his message across in a firmer manner. "[My husband] has to just say something to him [and] he listens," Diane confided, "I think that has a lot to do with him not being home during the week and he's with me seven days a week."

Amy and her husband share discipline responsibilities. "When they get into trouble they know the punishment....they have to tell Dad," she said, "and that is a big punishment for these kids." Sometimes her husband will prescribe an additional penalty, but for the most part, telling their dad what
they did wrong, “is the worst punishment you can have,” in Amy’s family.

It takes a lot of effort to raise children, and when that responsibility falls on one of the parents, it can overwhelm. A single mom describing her fears of raising a child without assistance from her spouse expressed her fears, “I’d be on my own ... No one to gloat with over report cards or fret with over bed-wetting, no one to share the news if the annual well-check turned up a problem” (Winik, 1998, p. 70). Although a truck driver may be available via his nightly phone call home, the physical duties of parenting are mostly the responsibility of his wife.

As the sole available parent, the mother must also be the primary disciplinarian. Since the father is not around to provide the feedback and support needed to train the children, this, too, falls on the available parent. Many women take this responsibility in stride, but wish that their spouses would assist them more in this area when they are home.

Finding a balance between discipline and autonomy is difficult, but even more so when one parent is the primary care giver. Parents who enjoy a strong relationship with their children must balance the need for understanding with the necessity for discipline. Pipher (1996) compares today’s parents with those from past generations. She writes about parents who feel that they need to provide the unconditional love that they themselves have not experienced to allow their own children the acceptance they felt was not offered. A mother who is responsible for more than her
share of the raising of her children must find the balance between a loving environment with limits and one which is ruled by their children.

Raising children can also have its rewards. Two of the women interviewed who had large families admitted that they may have had more children to fill their time and their homes. Helen admitted that her six children may have been part of the equation for her. “Well, I always had the kids’ [activities] so I suppose they were part of the coping mechanism ... I was always so busy that I didn’t have time to get frustrated. That relieved the stress really, because I was doing something [so] I didn’t have time to think about being upset.”

Amy, also the mother of six children, turns to her children when she misses her husband. When she’s lonely, she “bind[s] more with the kids. The kids help me, when they’re gone I don’t know what the heck I’m going to do. I think maybe that’s why I had so many kids.” This is the same coping mechanism observed among wives of military men missing in action. The women focused their concern on their children, rather than their own needs. This allowed them to be less apprehensive about themselves and transfer the worries to their children’s welfare (McCubbin, et al, 1973).

The concern for their children extends to the child’s career choices. The women in this study were hesitant to allow a child to become a truck driver. They considered how they would feel if their daughter were to become the wife of an over-the-road driver. They all felt that self
sufficiency and independence would be a prerequisite for this type of union. None of them claimed that the lifestyle would be easy. Bobbie suggested that, “she should be able to deal with every crisis without picking up the phone and expecting him to be home in twenty minutes.” She admonishes an potential trucker’s wife to, “just try to be a strong individual,” and to keep the lines of communication open.

Although Carol and her husband had been married ten years before he became a professional driver, she was candid in the advice she would give her daughter. “I would remind her of all the times her dad is gone...I’d probably make it sound worse than it is” she said. Carol also suggests that the potential wife, “go with him a couple of times on a trip.” She ended her advice with the quip, “try to get this guy to go to school and get a real skill!”

Both Diane and Fran had fathers who were professional drivers. The advice they offered was to go on a trip with a future husband before deciding whether to marry him or not. Diane said that she would, “explain to her that it’s not all fun and games and that you’re by yourself most of the time....you’re a single parent until the other person gets home.” Fran wouldn’t discourage her daughter from the trucking lifestyle with a future husband, but she knows that her daughter is aware of the need for independence in this type of arrangement.

The advice from Elaine, Grace and Helen was similar. They all would warn their daughters that they would be alone most of the time if they
married a professional driver. “Being alone all the time,” was Elaine’s response. Grace said she would, “try to make them understand...that they have to be alone, and it’s not just for three or four days.”

Many fathers hope that their children will fill their own shoes when they become adults. The mothers may not be so positive about their children one day driving a truck. Only one woman said that she would encourage her child to become a professional driver. Amy’s nine year old wants to drive truck for the same company as his dad. Amy told him to, “Go for it.” She explained that her children are excited about the truck and they help their dad wash and polish the rig so they can attend truck shows with him.

Most of the women interviewed for this study are adamantly opposed to their children becoming truck drivers. For Bobbie, the thought of her children driving a truck for a living doesn’t make her happy. When her son began to think about becoming a professional driver, “we told him to get a real job...one where he can be home,” she explained.

Similarly, when Carol’s son was failing a class in technical college, he wanted to drop out and go to truck driving school. She said, “I did everything in my power to discourage him.” Why didn’t she want him following in his father’s footsteps? “Because it’s not an easy life,” she admitted, “It’s dangerous out there for the men, women, whoever...for the truck driver. It’s a lonely life, there’s not a lot of money in it.” Carol’s son completed his technical education and now earns much more money than
either his mom or his dad procure.

Although their fathers may have wanted these children to follow in their footsteps, many of the mothers in this study did not want their sons and daughters to replicate the lifestyle of their parents.

**Use of the telephone**

Since absences are so much a part of this life, each couple must find a routine that keeps them connected. The telephone is central to such a routine. The number and the length of calls varies, but most of the topics discussed are similar.

Amy, Fran and Grace talk to their husbands the least. Amy’s husband calls at least once a week, but more often when he has been away for eight days or more. Fran and Grace’s husbands usually call toward the end of the week to let them know when he’ll be home. Bobbie’s husband calls home daily, but the calls can range from “anywhere from five minutes to an hour.” Carol talks to her husband every day, but the calls last about five minutes each time. The length of calls vary from five minutes for the couples who are in contact daily, to an hour for those whose husbands call less often.

Many of the children in trucking families use the telephone to maintain the relationship with their fathers when they are on the road. Elaine said that when her husband calls home his son chants, “I want to talk to Dad, I want to talk to Dad.” So, she hands him the phone, and she confides that,
“sometimes they talk longer than I do.”

What do kids talk about when their dads call home? “Whatever is on their mind,” says Amy, “they choose the topic,” For Bobbie, her son uses his time on the phone with Dad to share his concerns regarding family issues. His dad would ask him how Mom was doing, and he would report on what she was doing.

For the wives, telephone conversations often begin with the husband’s report on where he’s delivering and where he has been. Then, the husband typically initiates topics of conversation, often beginning with the children. Amy, the mother of six children, said that she appreciates the face to face conversations more than those over the phone. She finds this to be a rare opportunity when her husband is home. “When you’re on the phone, it’s just the two of you, but when you are sitting here, you’ve got a kid on your lap and he’s got a kid on his lap” she continues, “it’s a little bit harder to have a .... conversation.”

This approach to telephone calls is, in fact, common among commuter couples in general. The dialogue which takes place over the phone lines is often routine. The absence of visual and nonverbal cues hinders the conversation. Researcher confirms that couples, “tend to summarize their experiences and discuss practical concerns rather than the much missed review of their daily lives” (Gerstel and Gross, 1982, p. 81). Carol said her husband always tells her when he’ll be home, how the truck is running and
where he is. Then, she confides that, "we always end our call with... 'Good Bye, I love you.'" Although such calls may help in dealing with the loneliness which accompanies the separation, they are a poor substitute for daily interaction (Gerstel & Gross, 1982).

Some of the wives admit that they save some information to discuss when their husbands get home, but they would never keep information from them. When their daughter was in an accident, Bobbie told her husband right away, but when their children do something "seriously wrong," but not physically detrimental, she will wait until he gets home, "so he can concentrate on his driving." Carol usually withholds information until her husband gets home only "because it'll take too long" to tell him." Sometimes she keeps surprises from him so he can discover them when he arrives home. She gave the example of the recent lawn ornament she had purchased, which isn't something her husband necessarily needs to hear about when he's on the road. Grace and her husband find time to talk, "in bed, on Saturday morning. We'll lay there for an hour and just tell each other some things."

The interaction couples have over the telephone is not always limited to practical conversation, sometimes the ability to talk to his spouse prompts a husband to unload his frustrations. Bobbie admits that. "there's times when he'll call and he'll just dump his rotten day on me and I'll say, 'Hey, you're not the only one who's had a rotten day.'" Fran said that the
way she deals with her husband’s anger is to, "just end the conversation.” She advises women to not take it personally when their husbands are having a rough day, as many times it has nothing to do with them, but the situations the drivers encounter on the road. They end up venting to their wives. Grace prefers that her husband relieve his anger on the telephone than keep it inside. “I’d rather have him tell me about it and get it out of his system than to go down the road, and the madder he gets the more careless he is on the road,” she said. Grace reminds us of her husband’s grandmother’s advice, to remember that, “people always hurt the people they love, because that’s the person they can vent on.”

All of the women believe that keeping secrets from their husbands is unhealthy. Fran tries to share all the positive news, but said that, “if something bad happens it’ll have to wait. I do that because he has enough to worry about out there.” Even when the information could be devastating, the response was to tell the driver so he can deal with it, rather than wait until he gets home and the emergency may have passed. “I just try to be as honest as possible,” Diane said. Elaine always shares information with her spouse and would never keep anything from him. Amy insists that her husband can tell when something is bothering her, and when there is an emergency, he seems to have a sixth sense and always ends up calling her when she needs it the most.
**Interaction with family of origin and in-laws**

Although the roles of wife and mother are central to many women's identities, they also have other relationships which help define their distinctiveness. These can include extended family members, and may also encompass people related by marriage, such as parents in law.

Fortunate is the woman who has parents or in-laws available to assist when her husband is on the road. Many women are very close to their parents, and depend on them for child care, home emergencies and for a basis to lean on emotionally when the driver is on the road.

Those women lucky enough to have their mothers still alive and geographically close can find a sense of security in that relationship. For those even more fortunate to have a mother or mother-in-law who has experienced the lifestyle as a truck driver's wife, the bond can be even stronger.

Seven of the respondents still have their mothers to confide in. Only Helen had lost her mother at an early age, although she did keep in touch with her father until his death a decade ago. The remaining seven women see their mothers on a somewhat consistent basis and rely on them for assistance with child care or for a sympathetic ear when needed.

Amy is the exception. Her mother lives within a half hour's drive, but she doesn't see her often because her mother doesn't "really care for" Amy's husband. She sees her parents and her siblings at family functions,
but doesn’t receive any support or encouragement from them at all.

Bobbie is what we commonly refer to as the “sandwich” mom. Although she has children of her own, she is also responsible for her own mother who is ailing. Although her mom lives only a short distance away, Bobbie devotes much of her time to taking her to doctor appointments, hospital visits and the occasional social event, such as visiting another relative. The responsibility of taking care of parents in addition to daily obligations is extremely stressful (Witkin, 1991). Yet, if that parent fills a need in supporting the woman who experiences loneliness due to her husband’s absence, perhaps that stress is diminished. Bobbie’s father was a truck driver, so she and her mother share a sense of understanding many women can not find within the family.

Many women find that their mothers provide an “anchor” in both assistance with child care and unconditional love. Some mothers assume a large share of the child rearing responsibilities for their daughters, just to relieve them from this obligation. And for some women, a mother can be a lifesaver and a major influence in her daughter’s life. As Anna Quindlen has said, “we believe down to our bones that our mother’s greatest calling was us,” (1988, p. 86).

The bond between a woman and her mother has been the subject of research which both promotes and discourages this type of allegiance (McMahon, 1996, Pipher, 1996, Winik, 1998). Hammer explores the mother-
daughter relationship in its various aspects. She warns of the negatives of emotional dependence on one’s mother. She cautions us that “[a] mother’s emotions can have a powerful effect on a daughter and can become part of the glue that binds a daughter to her mother from guilt and fear,” (1976, p. 36). Some women may have struggled with this issue, and were suffering from the guilt associated with independence, especially when they are looking for a connection that may be lacking within their marriages.

In this sample of eight women who are married to truck drivers, three of them (Bobbie, Diane and Fran) had fathers who were also over-the-road truckers. One of them had relatives (Elaine) who were also in the industry, but it is notable that these women were familiar with the lifestyle as children, and chose to experience it again as adults. The remainder (Amy, Carol, Grace and Helen) had little or no contact with professional drivers prior to marrying their husbands.

Diane’s father is still on the road all week, so she feels this has strengthened her relationship with her mom. Her mother sometimes watches her three year old son so she can go out with friends, but Diane and her mom often go shopping together or her mother comes over for supper during the week. Diane calls her mom when she’s lonely, because she knows that she understands what she’s feeling.

Although her mother lives only thirty miles away, Fran doesn’t see her very often. “I don’t like to bother her a lot because I’m grown up,” Fran
admitted. But, “if something is really, really wrong ....I’ll call my mom. We get along just fine but we’re not really close.” She finds her understanding and support from friends more than her family.

For those whose parents have no experience with the trucking industry, it is more difficult for them to understand how their daughter can cope with the absences. Many times the parents will try to fill the gaps of a traveling son-in-law. This is especially easy for fathers and fathers-in-law, who feel a need to help with the physical maintenance around the house.

For Diane, Carol and Elaine, the first person they would call in an emergency would be their father or father-in-law. “My dad is the one that I call when something needs to be looked at right away,” claims Carol, ‘my dad is the one who would help. You need to have somebody.” When she needs help, Elaine calls her dad or her husband’s dad. Since they both live nearby, this seems to be the natural solution. Diane admits that she usually handles emergencies herself, but if she needs help with broken water pipes or other house repairs, she usually call her father-in-law, “if his dad’s home, cause he knows stuff like that.” Diane and Elaine were the two respondents with the fewest years of marriage in this study.

Mothers also want to help their daughters, and may offer emotional support rather that physical assistance. Although Elaine’s mother-in-law calls her daily, she doesn’t consider this a problem. “She asks me if I need anything from town because she knows that I don’t leave that often,” Elaine
admits. She may be different from Carol because she has recently married and her child is still young. Elaine may also be more receptive to parental concern because she considers her extended family to be her “best friends.” She may have a greater need at this point in her life for support from family members.

Some women are more independent than others, and may resent any assistance by their moms. Carol feels that her mother is more of an imposition in her life than a source of support. She says that her parents are “worry warts” and “they call me more than I would like.” She agrees that she “needed [them] when the kids were little” because she depended upon her mom to babysit. Now, she is more independent and wishes that they didn’t, “want a report every day of what we’re doing.” Her in-laws used to come over every Friday because they knew her husband would be home, but they didn’t seem to understand that this took away from her time alone with him.

Families can be a great source of strength for women who spend much of their time alone. Family celebrations create memories, which promotes the symbolic interaction between relatives. Many wives choose to attend family functions, regardless of whether their spouses can accompany them or not. It is important to promote the interaction between the generations, with both parents and parents-in-law.
Interactions with friends

Many women turn to their friends for comfort when they are lonely. Women married to truckers have great opportunities to allow friends into their lives, although the need for interaction most likely corresponds with that same separation. It is impossible for a husband to satisfy all of his wife’s needs, particularly so in trucking marriages because the husband and wife spend so much time apart. Perhaps friendship is given an even higher priority because there are more gaps that need filling in a long distance relationship. Such liaisons can be beneficial for all concerned, and are especially important in families separated by distance.

A woman may be friends with others who are married to truck drivers, and with those who are not. She may have friends who are single and others who are married. The friend’s presence in her life may be very influential, or it could be extraneous, depending upon the woman’s other support systems. At some point in the woman’s life, her friends understand her situation and share something in common.

Women who understand the way we think make better friends than those who don’t. Discussing feelings openly allows others to see us from the inside. For some women, the shared needs might be related to the lifestyle of the trucking industry. For others, the needs could be related to shared experiences of children.

Friendship comes from sharing experiences and helping others through
their struggles and accomplishments. It helps to have something in common. Although Grace has friends who are married to drivers, she considers her best friend to be the woman who was available while she raised her children. Grace said that her friend “was there a lot” and “her kids were friends with my kids.” So, she and her friend supported each other through the childrearing years. This friendship is held together by a mutual need. Grace and her friend have learned their coping techniques and problem solving skills together through the years of raising their children.

Although friends unfamiliar with the trucking lifestyle may not appreciate the husband’s occupation, the women in this study all felt that their friends understood, at least to some extent. Elaine, who has been married to her trucker husband for only six months, explains that her friends, “understand that I want to spend time with him if he does come home, but they don’t understand why he’s got to be gone the whole time.” She suggested that sometimes they don’t really believe that he’s not home at all during the week.

Even when their non-trucking friends did not always understand their lifestyle, these women remained friends with them because of their other shared experiences. Many of Bobbie’s friends are not involved in the trucking industry. She said she was close to them, “because of the fact we’ve had so many years together, so basically they understand a lot of things because of ..... the years.”
Fran, the mother of three teenagers, also has friends both inside and outside of the trucking industry, but one became special. She became close to one of the mothers of her daughter’s friends. She turned out to be married to a truck driver, but as Fran says, “It wasn’t like I was looking for someone [like] that, but, you know, you kind of bond more, I think, because you’re living in the same type of situation.” Although Fran may not have been looking for friendship in her daughter’s activities, she did pursue this relationship with the mother of her daughter’s friend because of the mutual lifestyle. “She knows my husband’s not home, I know her husband’s not home,” she acknowledged, so they sometimes go out for pizza after their daughters’ cheerleading events.

In addition to supporting a woman’s emotional well-being, many friends also enhance and encourage the woman’s relationship with her husband. According to Rubin (1985), this could be the reason many women turn to friends to, “fill the gaps the marriage relationship leaves, allowing the wife to appreciate those things the husband can offer rather than to focus on those he can’t” (p. 141). The “friendships we form separate from the couple, then, remind us of our own identity, enabling us to retain the ‘I’ without getting lost in the ‘we’” (Rubin, 1985, p. 134). Friends are often important factors in forming a woman’s identity.

For many social events, the driver is away from home. Having a spouse who travels often means that the wife must either attend social
functions alone or avoid them altogether. It can be uncomfortable to walk into a party alone, especially when you are married and expected to be accompanied by your spouse. In some circles, a woman attending a party alone is still considered a impediment in many social environments (Rubin, 1985). The ability to bring a friend who may share the same situation will strengthen that relationship and allow both persons the chance to socialize, but not completely on one’s own.

Since many of these women attend events alone, they learn to “tag along” as Grace calls it. She said that the, “hardest thing is walking in the door by yourself, but after you get in there, it’s like you never see your husband anyway [because] he goes his way and you go yours, so it’s like nobody ever notices that you’re alone.” So she wouldn’t cancel any plans she had made with friends, even if he did come home during the week.

Friendships offer opportunities for social activities. Most of the women in this study said they were responsible for planning the couple’s social events. Even when her husband is not interested in joining her on an outing, a trucker’s wife may go alone. Carol has been married to her husband for almost 25 years. She describes him as “an old man” when it comes to going out with friends, so when he’s home she may ask him to go along, but she she would go out whether he accompanied her or not.

Despite their importance in our lives, our friends often take second place in our lives. This may occur when a husband returns home from a trip
and interrupts his wife’s plans with her friends. She can cancel her plans in order to give her husband top priority or she can leave him home alone. McGinnis (1979) suggests that to maintain and deepen a relationship with a friend, they should be assigned top priority. Finding that elusive middle ground is not always an easy task.

Although friends are important and are vital for support, not everyone looks to others for comfort. Some women prefer to find peace within themselves. Helen, who has been married for 45 years, and whose husband will soon be retiring, listens to music or does odd jobs around the house. She admits that, “I suppose I have just learned through the years that that’s the technique that I use. I rather enjoy my own company. I don’t mind being alone.” she does have a friend who calls her twice daily, which Helen says, “annoys” her. She feels that, “once a week to catch up on what’s going on would be fine, not twice a day.” But she accepts the calls because her friend, “needs me and I recognize that, so mostly I listen.” A solid spiritual grounding can bring happiness from within. (Salzburg, 1997).

Interaction with co-workers

An obvious source of shared meaning can be a woman’s employment outside the home. In the nineties, it may be common for women to have their own careers, but their dependence on co-workers may vary considerably. Women married to truck drivers tend not to identify strongly with their
professional contacts. In fact, many women married to professional drivers feel a sense of separation which may be attributed to the different lifestyles. If they work outside the home, their work is separate from their home life.

Of the eight respondents, only half of them work outside the home. Those who do, do not consider their co-workers to be important in their social circles. Some women are content to maintain a professional distance in the office and do not associate with coworkers after hours. Fran works for an accounting firm in a Midwestern city. She doesn’t socialize with her co-workers on a consistent basis, but does enjoy their company at the occasional work related function. “They all have their own families,” Fran stated. She doesn’t feel as if they fully comprehend her situation, “I’m not sure anybody would ever understand without being there....they live totally different lives.” She feels that their families, along with the spouse at home, get their attention rather than turning to co-workers outside of the work place.

Although Elaine works full time as a beautician, she doesn’t socialize with her co-workers after hours either. Instead, her priority is to, “come home from work and take care of [my four year old son].” Both Carol and Grace said that they too, spend more of their free time with friends and family than with their coworkers. So instead of getting their sense of belonging from their jobs, they are more apt to turn to others for this type
of support.

Perhaps these respondents are not typical of many women who do find their sense of identity within their careers. In this study, however, when looking for social interaction, the respondents to not depend on their coworkers. Witkin (1991) suggests that support systems can come from whatever network we feel comfortable depending upon. For many, this network of support is found in other arenas. As indicated earlier, these networks may consist of a woman’s friends or family members who offer support in her husband’s absence. When he returns, her focus is shifted back to her relationship with her husband once again.

Transition-preparing for his return

When a truck driver’s wife hears the familiar sound of the 500 horse power engine in the driveway, her world is immediately transformed. Instead of being in charge of the household, she now allows her husband to step in and assume the duties he abandoned when he last walked out the door. For many women, the need to relegate the obligations is anticipated during his absence. She may plop the baby in his arms and tell the children to take their disputes to their dad while he’s home.

After the long absences, the homecoming can be more intense. Some fathers are greeted by their children each night, but professional drivers receive their welcome home less often. For a few, however, the greeting is
exuberant! When Elaine’s son hears the semi pull into the driveway, he “runs out the door [yelling], ‘Daddy’s home, Daddy’s home.’” Bobbie’s children would stand at the end of the driveway and, “as soon as the air brakes went on they...were around the side, knocking on the door [saying], ‘Hey Dad, open up!’”

Fortunate is the father who returns home to his children’s open arms and open hearts! Amy’s husband gets a special reception every other week when he arrives home. “The kids see him coming up the road and it is a mad house here,” Amy jokes, “Everyone is jumping and running....all excited, and I stand back and allow the kids first at him, then, after the kids have finally calmed down, I say, ‘Yeah, I’m here too!’”

Elaine’s preparation for her husband’s homecoming involves getting their son, “psyched up.” She said “I tell him that Daddy should be home pretty soon, and when he gets home he’ll play [with you].” She also admits that she likes to make sure the house is clean, “like he likes it” before he arrives.

Some woman make a special effort to prepare their homes for their husband’s arrival. Cleaning the house was mentioned by Bobbie as something she does to get ready for her husband’s arrival, also, “I try to get as much of the housework done as I can, so that when he gets home .... I don’t have to worry about trying to get everything done in the house.” Carol also said that she tries to get the house neat before her husband returns. She often
plans that evening's meal, despite her aversion to cooking. More importantly, she has rearranged her work schedule to accommodate his time off. Since he is often home Thursdays, she has worked her part time schedule around his home time.

When the short time together is over and the driver is back in his truck, the separation can be difficult. For many women, this is a time of learning and adjusting to increased responsibility. It is a time of independence and along with that, an added sense of satisfaction and self confidence in the ability to assume traditionally male duties.

Figure 1. Regular regrouping. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. The process from (1) courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting.
Duel faceted identity of the trucker’s wife

Women who are married to long distance truck drivers have a unique lifestyle as the result of his career choice. Their time together as a couple may be more traditional than that of many marriages. She is responsible for the children, the home-making and the nurturing responsibilities. His duties include bringing home an income so that they can maintain a comfortable lifestyle. Their time together is intense, and they concentrate on each other and their time as a family.

The relationship begins a transformation as he prepares to leave. While there are certain chores which must be done before he departs, there is more to this process than meets the eye. Along with having clothes laundered, food prepared and cash to send with him, the wife of a driver must mentally go through the departure in preparation for his absence. These activities become rituals, as they are repeated each time the driver must take another trip. This is a time to adapt to a role different from the one she has been immersed in while he is home.

The process continues, and the transformation from partner to parent-in-charge takes place. She now moves into a non-traditional role as independent household manager. The responsibilities increase and the woman at home is no longer merely the nurturer, but must now take care of the physical needs of the home and family. She may turn to others for social activities and to assist her with the duties at home. Her family and friends
become important for her well being. Her only contact with her husband is over the phone, and is extremely limited. She is an independent, self reliant woman in his absence.

Soon, her husband will turn his rig toward home and she will again prepare for his reentry into her life. The rituals she has to prepare for his return may include cleaning the house, fixing a home cooked meal or could be a mental process. She will soon be transformed again from the independent woman who spends her nights alone, to the traditional wife and nurturer.

The transformation process may offer excitement and fulfillment for women married to truck drivers. The process of change from a traditional to a non-traditional arrangement promotes a complex identity as a woman experiences two diverse relationships in one marriage.

**Stressful disruptions**

The life of a professional driver's wife is difficult enough, but when her husband has total control over their time together, it makes the relationship even more stressful. The woman is subject to her spouse's schedule, and whether she is prepared for his arrival or not, he may drop in unexpectedly and expect to be welcomed with open arms. He may not understand her need to change from the role of independent, able woman, to that of partner, devoted wife. A surprise visit requires that she be immediately transformed into the role which is defined by her relationship to him, leaving behind the
less defined, less traditional one she experiences in his absence.

The wife of a professional driver is a diverse one, requiring her to consistently adapt to her husband’s schedule. She must be flexible enough to turn into the traditional role of wife when he is home. Then, she must adapt to his absence with an independence and self sufficiency only required when he is on the road. The ability to adapt to these two dichotomous identities adds to her complexity.

Once a woman has completed the transition process and is settled into her role as an independent woman, any unexpected disruption can be detrimental. Unexpected stops at home by the truck driver add to the difficulty of the transitional period. If the driver has a load which allows travel near his home, he may stop in to shower, eat or to just be with his family. For the driver, this may offer a quick respite, but for the wife who is not expecting him, this surprise visit means an additional adjustment. Carol describes a recent unexpected visit by her husband,

I was at work, I got home... and he was there. And I was shocked. I felt kind of uncomfortable that the house wasn’t mine, because the house wasn’t mine, because I own the house. ... I own it. I’m in control. When he’s here [then] I have to share my space. And that was my time, he wasn’t supposed to be here.

Carol’s attitude may sound extreme, but for a woman who is comfortable with her independence, and is mentally prepared to be alone, the adjustment
can be challenging.

Bobbie may or may not be pleased with such a surprise visit, depending upon whether or not she has time to give her husband. Often, she may be leaving to take her mother to the doctor's office, or she may be running errands. When this is the case, she'll greet her husband with a hello, and a good bye, as she walks out the door. When she has free time, Bobbie is happy to spend time with her spouse, but only at her convenience.

The relative newlywed, Elaine, was the only respondent who immediately claimed that she would be happy to see her husband if he came home for an unscheduled visit, adding that she had nothing to hide. Elaine sees such disruptions more in terms of trust than agreed upon boundaries. However, it will be interesting to see if her response changes after a few years of marriage.

In reviewing the model of a woman's various roles and transitions, it is evident that the roles are circuitous and that they follow a path which is both predictable and comfortable. When a woman's complex social identity is constructed in a consistent manner, she settles into her routine. An unexpected visit by her husband may throw the anticipated routine off balance, resulting in discomfort on the part of the wife. This may explain why many women married to truck drivers do not appreciate surprise visits by their spouses.

An interruption in a woman's anticipated plans may not seem to be
crucial to the success of a relationship, but it should be viewed as a potentially devastating disruption. The identities of these women are unusually complex, and flexibility is possible only because the changes are predictable, regular and framed by rituals. Rituals offer stability in our lives. When these routines are disturbed, the results can be unsettling. According to Driver (1991), "To lose ritual is to lose the way. It is seen as a condition not only painful and pathetic but also dangerous" (1991, p. 4).

A ritual is an activity that we initially choose to engage in, but as we continue the process, a repeated ritual comforts through its predictability. Geertz explains the process, "human beings are less driven by forces than submissive to rules, that the rules are such to suggest strategies, the strategies are such as to inspire actions, and the actions are such as to be self rewarding" (1983, p. 25). The process of assuming a ritualized behavior is made by choices which become beneficial to our well being. We then find comfort in the repetition of these actions.

A woman married to a traveling spouse is subject to his schedule for regrouping and absence. When he is home, her role is more traditional, and expectations are defined in terms of her relationship to him. When he is away, her role is less defined and she has greater freedom in her choices. The transitions between these identities constitute significant boundaries between the two. She learns to move from the independent, self sufficient woman whose husband is away, to a partner, expected to redirect her time
and attention while her husband is at home.

**The Importance of regular regrouping**

Regular regrouping is important because it offers a familiarity for the participants. The success of a relationship may be more associated with the capacity to predict behavior and activity than we realize. The ability to allow someone to share our environment begins with a recognizable pattern of behavior.

Since part of the process of regrouping includes mental preparation, separations can be made less stressful by consistent timing. For those women whose husbands are home every weekend, the time apart is relatively easily accommodated because the wife can predict the frequency of her husband's homecoming. She can find some regularity in matching the process to the day of the week. For example, Grace can expect her husband to call her on Thursdays to tell her when he will be home Friday. She can predict and plan because his schedule is somewhat the same each week.

The difficulty arises when the driver's trips vary in length. Many drivers are away for weeks at a time, and their families are unable to predict when they will return home. A driver may stop at home after a week, or he may not return for three or four weeks, or even longer. Such irregular regrouping creates a hardship for the families by removing any pattern of regularity.
The optimal time apart for couples is a week (Gerstel, 1979). Couples who are reunited on a weekly basis feel less set apart from those in more traditional marriages. They feel that their situation more closely resembles that of their friends and co-workers. Also, weekly regrouping allows more “solidarity and continuity” (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 78) in the marriage due to consistent time together.

For many in the trucking industry, weekly regrouping is not a possibility because of the nature of the business, but regularity can still be maintained. If the driver is guaranteed home time every other week, both he and his family can work around this schedule. Some carriers allow their drivers to be away for three weeks, and home for one. This too, would be better for the families than unpredictable trips and varying time spent at home. The important consideration is the attention to regularity, allowing the family to predict their time together and to plan on this work schedule.

In contrast, many trucking companies dispatch their drivers from load to load without allowing them to return to their home base on a consistent basis. The drivers are not aware of their next load’s destination until a day or so in advance. They will usually plan a stop at home when the routes accommodate the diversion. This type of schedule can be extremely disruptive for the wife of such a driver.

In addition to not knowing how long her husband may be away, the wife may not learn that he is returning until a day or maybe hours before he is
home. This situation creates the most strain on the relationship because there is no pattern in the regrouping. The irregular reunions cause some couples to feel that they are living in “separate worlds” (Gerstel & Gross, 1982, p. 78). Such couples can be expected to feel a void when their spouse is away, they may ultimately experience a feeling of being out of touch with their partners.

Figure 2. Irregular regrouping. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. (1) The process from courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting. Irregular and unpredictable regrouping pulls the complex cycle into disequilibrium. Such a lack of routine disrupts the already complex balance of time together and time apart.
The minimum requirement for maintaining such complex and flexible identities is regularity and predictability of the communication environment. These women's identities are complex and flexible, the minimum requirement is at least regularity and predictability. The ability to predict is important, and evidenced by the cyclical nature of the relationship. When the cycle is disrupted, the anticipated environment is unavailable; the result is likely to cause stress to the woman due to her complex identity. When a routine is established and that routine is broken by an unexpected visit, the situation can add stress to the relationship.

The woman is likely to have difficulties adapting to unexpected visits. Stress can result when the traveling husband cannot or will not make an effort to accommodate her need for some regularity in his schedule. It is difficult for such a women to be required to adapt to spouse's schedule, especially when she has little or no control over it. Some wives may have other priorities which do not align with the unpredictable nature of her husband's job. For such a woman, the independence to pursue those priorities is a payoff for the flexibility and it is important that her independence during the driver's absence not be damaged.

A woman recently married to an over-the-road driver must learn to adapt and to become comfortable with this pattern of change. She must find a balance between the independent woman and the more traditional wife's identities. Add this to the already stressful situation of being a
newlywed, and having to adjust to other facets of the relationship and the
stress may escalate. The unpredictability of her husband’s time at home will
affect her social and family interactions more than she may have
anticipated. It is particularly important that she have opportunities for
interaction with the other women married to long haul truck drivers. The
need to feel understood, and the sharing of similar experiences will allow her
to find comfort and possibly to readily accept her diverse identities. Such a
woman is likely to benefit from information about the demands of the
trucking lifestyle.

The identity of the trucker’s wife continues to evolve in two separate
spheres, and her ability to change from one state to another appears to be a
key to success in sustaining a trucking relationship. The complex changes
assumed when moving from the role of traditional wife to that of
independent woman are difficult to comprehend, and will be different for
each individual. Furthermore, these patterns of change will not remain static
for the duration of the relationship, as she and her spouse continue to
mature and change in their own identities.

However, regardless of how individuals evolve, a significant part of the
woman’s identity depends upon social interactions with her friends, family
and co-workers. One or more of these groups may fill the void which is left
by a husband who is physically absent much of the time. Some women may
turn to the guidance of their families, others will rely on their friends. This
dependence can also vary over time. Such a woman needs to establish a social identity will remain dominant. By understanding how a woman refines this complex identity through her interaction with others, we can learn to lessen the stressful situations and appreciate her ability to adapt to her husband's chosen occupation.
Chapter 5: Outcome of the Study

Summary

This study has explored, through the theoretical framework of symbolic interactionism, the ways that women married to long haul truck drivers construct complex identities. This was a way to understand the ways these women form their support networks and interact with those around them.

In depth interviews were used to gather information from eight respondents. The interviewees were chosen with the intention of allowing as much diversity as possible in the selection. Respondents were found through trucking company contacts and a two were friends of the researcher. Some of the women were strangers; others were not. Respondents were selected to provide variations in age, length of time married and whether her husband owned his own rig or was a company driver. All respondents were legally married to long distance truck drivers.

Each interview was conducted in person, one at a time, and over a three month period. Respondents were interviewed in their homes, when possible, and all the conversations were audio recorded. The interviews were structured around open ended questions, allowing the women to elaborate as much or as little as they felt comfortable revealing. Upon completion of the
interviews, tapes were transcribed and the process of coding the information began.

At this point, open coding began as data was sorted into the various roles that these women played; wife, mother, sibling, co-worker and friend. For much of the process, these roles dominated the coding sequence. These roles were then woven into a sequential narrative drawn from the respondents’ comments in the interviews. In the process of axial coding, the focus changed to include the woman's identity as a woman within two very different situations. One realm of identity included a complex of her independent, self sufficient roles when her husband was at work; the other was part of a twosome when he was home.

The narrative was written to offer a synthesis of the women's interview responses. The women’s comments were threaded into the different aspects of identity each one experiences as the wife of a professional driver. First, I gathered their comments on the courtship, and what had attracted them to their spouses. Then, information about their family situation, and whether or not their fathers were truck drivers was also noted.

The roles were sorted into larger categories related to whether the husband was home or not. When he is not working, the time together is intense and focused on each other. However, when he leaves, other people in the wife’s world have a greater impact on her identity. For example, friends
were typically more important when the husband was away, and probably not a major factor when he is home. Family members also take a back seat when the driver is home so the families can spend more time on each other in the short time they are together. Co-workers were not found to be significant in these women’s circle of relationships.

Once the women’s social interactions were defined, I constructed a visual model to show the cyclical nature of her roles. This allowed me to show the ways her identity as a wife (when he is home) is different than her identity as a “single” wife when he is away. The arrows represent the periods of transition, which also depict the ways she must prepare for the changes his absences bring.

![Diagram](image-url)

Figure 1. Regular regrouping. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. The process from (1) courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting.
The study offers a glimpse into the traditional nature of a trucking couple's marriage when her husband is home. Responsibilities of the spouses are similar to those seen in the typical television marriages of the fifties. His priority is in providing for his family. This would include financial support, but can also include the more physically demanding duties which his wife saves for his return. In contrast, she is the nurturer, the person in charge of the children's well being, the domestic duties and the social aspects of their marriage.

The transition begins when her husband prepares to leave on a trip. She may have routines which dominate their activities, or he may be the one who determines their practices. For some, practical considerations include having the laundry ready, the truck cleaned out, stocked with food and cash on hand for him to use on the road. Either of them or both of them may take responsibility for these duties. Often, departing includes spending "daddy" time with the kids. Everyone is aware of the coming absence and the effect it will have on their situation.

Once the truck has left the yard, the transition process transforms their time into a less traditional, less structured environment. The woman is immediately in charge of all aspects of the home and family. She is the decision maker, the sole parent, the caretaker of the home, and a woman alone. She turns from her husband to others in searching for her complex identity.
A woman married to an over-the-road truck driver must find a balance between these two extremes. She must feel comfortable in a traditional role, and then in a more independent lifestyle realm. The transitions between the two identities are marked by ritual.

Once axial coding revealed a more complex process for adapting the changes in the regrouping, selective coding began and a new figure was drawn. This graphic shows how the husband’s reentry into the wife’s life can differ. Depending on how long he has been away, and whether or not his wife is anticipating his arrival, the regrouping can become more or less stressful on the woman at home.

Figure 2. Irregular regrouping. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. (1) The process from courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting. Irregular and unpredictable regrouping pulls the complex cycle into disequilibrium. Such a lack of routine disrupts the already complex balance of time together and time apart.
The significance of regular regrouping is an area which has been relatively unexplored. Since rituals offer comfort, the disruption in these rituals can cause stress to the woman at home. If she is not expecting her husband and he makes a surprise stop at home, the result could be additional stress her. Being able to plan for his return offers her at least some control over her circumstances and the ability to plan and predict her activities.

Even though the daughters of professional drivers may be familiar with the lifestyle, they still envisioned a different marriage for themselves. Yet, when they did marry a truck driver, like their own fathers, they continued to hope for a change in his career. Whether they wanted him to get a non-driving job, or to become a local carrier, they could only hope that he would make the change himself.

All of the women interviewed were adamant that they would not ask their spouses to change careers. Even when they hoped that he would, they would not ask him to do this for their sake. They all understood the negative impact this could have on their relationship if he did not like his career move, he would blame his unhappiness on his wife.

Some myths regarding trucking relationships have been found to be unsubstantiated for the women in this study, although additional research focusing on divorced women may find different results. Based on this study, there is no evidence to support the public's perception that long distance
relationships lead to infidelity. The trust exhibited by these women was implicit. This is consistent with the research on commuter couples (Gerstel & Gross, 1982), which suggests that infidelity is something related to the person’s values, not to the career choice.

When their husbands are away, the respondents are able to spend more time with their family and friends. They have the freedom to plan their social time and to see their friends more often. The friends they chose are often women who share similar lifestyles, whether the similarity is a husband who drives a truck or children in the same age range, they have a shared identity.

The theory of symbolic interactionism has provided a subtle backdrop for understanding the interdependence these women have with the people around them. By examining the way a woman finds her identity through her interactions with those around here, we can appreciate her complexity. The meanings shared by others in her periphery, such as her family, create her unique identity.

Family members are important to some women married to professional drivers, but not to others. This relationship was not dependent upon distance apart or the father’s occupation, but was probably due to other factors. Women who were close to their parents or in-laws depended upon them for assistance in their husbands’ absence.

This thesis offers a glimpse into the life of a woman who is married to
a truck driver, yet the results are not generalizable. This is an exploratory study only, but it provides a basic understanding of the woman's complex identity and the various ways her identity changes within her marriage.

**Discussion**

The process involved in writing this thesis was extensive; from the beginning to the conclusion, this study encompassed more than two years of effort. There were many challenges specific to this research. In addition to my personal immersion in the industry, I was pleased to find that there is a much broader scope in the types of marriages than I had imagined.

The greatest difficulty in this study was in finding relevant material for reference. Very little research has been done on couples who live apart, and as of 1999 there appears to be no academic research on couples in the trucking industry. The literature which did help in this thesis was mostly the information from commuter couples. So, in synthesizing the literature for this research, documentation was taken from studies involving military families, college students in long distance relationships, and commuter couples.

The challenge in interviewing the women was in maintaining a passive role in the interview process. Because of my familiarity of the lifestyle they were describing, I worked hard to listen to what they were saying without relating it to my own experience. I repeated their phrases for verification,
and listened without offering directives through nonverbal cues.

Some of the results, while predictable, revealed a different way of thinking about the situation. For example, while women married to truck drivers have usually been responsible for the children and domestic responsibilities, they have probably not viewed this as being a "traditional" marriage situation. Since the same woman has an extreme role change when her husband is away, she is probably not thinking of her marriage as being traditional in any sense. The theoretical model that emerged offers a more complete picture of the identities of these women.

A number of themes emerged in this study. The first opinion stressed was that these women felt strongly about their spouses' need to determine their own career choices. They also confirmed the level of trust they had in their husbands' fidelity. Finally, the way they portrayed their husbands' absence to the children added to their means of coping.

None of the women suggested that they would try to change the career decision of their husbands, as they felt it would only harm their relationships. Whether he had been a driver when they married, or in the event he had decided to become a driver after they had been together for a number of years, they did not question their job choice. Although some of these women would prefer that their husband be home more, none of them would suggest it, much less insist on it in their own marriages.

Although some of the women were raised in homes where their fathers
had been professional drivers, they did not anticipate this for themselves. None of these respondents had envisioned a life similar to that of their mothers. Indeed, they all pictured a marriage where the husband is home each night, and helps raise the children alongside his wife. Surprisingly, three of the women in this study were daughters of truck drivers who later became wives of truck drivers. This could be due to the fact that they were looking for someone like their fathers to marry. It could also be that their social circles were conducive to meeting this type of person. Finally, this could be the result of a woman's quest to make her childhood situation right, or to alter her own situation to align with that of her parents'.

Although rituals are significant in this study, the respondents did not readily recognize them in their own lives. When asked if they had "rituals" before or after their husbands leave, most of the women felt that they did not. However, when asked to describe their activities in preparation for his leaving, they described things involving their husbands and children. So, although these women did not consider these to be their own rituals, they were involved in them, and they assisted in maintaining them.

Often when a driver's wife was feeling lonely, she would turn to her children for comfort. Some of their offspring were grown, and could relate to the situation and provide reassurance to their mothers. Others had smaller children who could offer a hug and the attention only a youngster can offer. Children seemed to offer a way to counter the emptiness and the
physical needs for reassurance.

Probably the most astonishing aspect of the thesis was the effect that unscheduled visits has on these women. In light of the importance of rituals and the way women find comfort in maintaining a sense of balance between two very different lifestyles, it makes sense that a husband's unexpected visit would be unsettling. These women admitted to being in control when he is gone, and in taking pride in their ability to be independent. When a husband interrupts that sense of control, there is discord. The woman caught in a distant region of the identity is then uncomfortable with this situation. This suggests that the drivers should find a way to avoid these types of visits.

As the process of understanding these complex identities changed, the graphics shown in the preceding chapters did not seem to exactly show the way women change in their relationships over the years. Perhaps, instead of a cyclical graphic, is would be more appropriate to show something like a spiral, since each identity continues to evolve, and each cycle is likely to be somewhat different from the previous one. As these women experience personal growth and change in their own lives, the spiral continues to vary. The two dimensional model is more appropriately changed to a three dimensional graphic, which is a better illustration of the women's adaption to the roles, and how this may change over time.
Figure 3. Roles and transitions of women married to professional drivers. The process from (1) courtship to marriage; (2) the husband at home, (3) preparing to leave, (4) away and (5) reuniting. The process occurring over time as a changing, growing relationship.
The findings in this thesis were surprising to the extent that they are more predictable than isolated experiences. Perhaps this research will provide some basis for understanding the ways women married to truck drivers find comfort in their interactions and their rituals.

Implications for the industry

This research may be beneficial to a large number of people. Since there are almost three million professional drivers in the United States, there are almost as many family members who experience the lifestyle which accompanies the occupation. There are also many trucking companies which are eager to accommodate the professional driver by relieving some of the stresses at home. The information in this research may be helpful for recruiters, as they can then assist potential drivers considering a career in trucking. Personnel departments will benefit from the ability to identify and eliminate some of the concerns the families may have when the driver is on the road. Dispatchers will be able to use this information in understanding the strains experiences by drivers’ families.

If the trucking industry continues to work toward alleviating the strains on long distance relationships, they will be able to respond much better to this need. If the wives need a place to meet and to socialize, then the carrier can provide a room in their terminal. If child care or refreshments are required, they can respond to these details, too. Perhaps
some recognition in the company newsletter, or personal contacts during special days or illnesses would make the wife feel more connected to the company. These are steps the carriers can take in making (or keeping) their drivers happy.

One important change which could be made to accommodate the driver's family stability would be to find a way to get him home regularly. This may not be easy, but could be beneficial for drivers whose wives are experiencing distress in their situation. The carriers could allow the driver to schedule his trips around a recurring calendar. Some drivers could get home each week end. For others, this may mean that they would be out for three weeks, and home for one week, but on a consistent basis. If the time home is regular, it allows the couple to regroup in a consistent manner, which offers more stability and a greater level of comfort in the marriage.

Since this is an emerging area of study, this research could prove to be a valuable resource for anyone involved in the trucking industry. If those concerned work to understand the needs and the experiences of the truck drivers' wives, they may use this information to attract and retain good employees whose families offer the support and backing they need.

Most importantly, those within the marriage should benefit. Women who are considering marrying an over-the-road driver will be able to gain some insight into the coping skills of other truckers' wives. Truck drivers and their spouses will be able to examine their interdependence and will be
able to identify with the experiences of other truckers’ families. This is the primary goal for this research, as many women marry an over-the-road driver without understanding the ramifications of his absences, and the women’s need to become more independent. Since there is no similar research available which would aid the wives (and future wives) of professional drivers, this study should prove to be a valuable tool.

Research focusing on families in the trucking industry is just starting to emerge as important to carriers and the drivers and their families. While this study found many ways women who are married to over-the-road drivers cope with the absences, there are probably many more approaches used by women in other parts of the country, other income levels and possibly other ethnic or racial groups. This research was limited to white, middle class women in the Wisconsin area.

Future research might explore the experiences of women in different geographic, economic or racial groups. It may also be beneficial to study the driver’s viewpoint of his family roles. Another possible focus would be to investigate the coping techniques employed by women who accompany their husbands in a team situation as opposed to those who do not drive a truck. Either qualitative or quantitative research methods would benefit those interested in determining satisfaction in long distance marriages.

There are much more areas for investigation when studying trucking families. These studies may reveal how one woman can thrive in her
marriage to a professional driver and the next can suffer from the long separations. Those in the industry who truly care about the well being of their drivers and the family situation should take notice of these findings and use them to promote better driver relationships in their work and family life.
References


Appendix A

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Instructional Review Board for the Protection of Human Rights

Protocol

Date of IRB Review:__________________________________________________________

UWSP Proposal Number:_____________________________________________________

A completed protocol must be submitted to the IRB for approval prior to the
initiation of any investigations involving human subjects or human materials,
including studies in the behavioral and social sciences.

Send: 10 copies of (1) the competed protocol; (2) project abstract; and (3)
samples of informed consent forms to the IRB chairperson. PROTOCOLS
LACKING ANY ONE OF THESE THREE ELEMENTS WILL NOT BE APPROVED.

Project Title: “The Single Life of the Trucker’s Wife: The Construction of
the Interdependent Identity of Women Married to Truck Drivers”

Support or Sponsorship by: Graduate Program, Communication Department

Date of transmittal to Agency: May 2, 1997

Award Period:_______________________________________________________________

Principal Investigator: Ellen Voie

Department: Division of Communication

Campus Mailing Address: Communication Arts Building, Room 331

Telephone: 715-346-2060    Sponsor: Karlene Ferrante, Ph.D.
I. Subjects
   
   A. The pool of human subjects will include women married to over the road (long distance) truck drivers.
   
   1. This study is gender specific to women only, however, race and ethnic affiliation will not be specified. Age may be a factor only when considering the length of the woman’s marriage to her husband. In other words, age as a specific criteria will not be important, but the length of the marital relationship will be recorded to ensure a broad sample within the above group.
   
   2. The affiliation of the subjects will be women who are married to long distance truck drivers. No specific geographic region or company affiliation will be sought. Marriage to a truck driver is a prerequisite, as those “living together” have not made the commitment needed for this research.
   
   3. The subjects will be of general (mental and physical) health, however, no subject will be rejected due to any physical limitations. It would be difficult to anticipate the subjects’ mental state prior to the interviews, but this should not be a factor unless duress is evident in the interviewing process. At this point, the interview would cease.
   
   B. No children will be used in this research.

II. Procedures
   
   A. The information to be gathered will be qualitative in nature. The method for this research involving human subjects will be interviews. The information to be requested will involve the following types of questions regarding the lifestyle of the respondent:
   
   1. How long have you been married to your trucker husband?
   
   2. How long has he been a professional driver?
   
   3. Was he a truck driver when you met/married?
   
   4. Describe the communication process in your marriage?
      a. How often does your husband call home?
      b. What are the length of those phone calls?
      c. What are some of the subjects you discuss on the phone?
      d. Do you “save” things to discuss until he gets home?
   
   5. Describe your social life when he is away from home.
      a. Are your friends predominantly married or single?
      b. Do you have friends who are also trucker’s wives?
6. What is your relationship with your extended family like?
   a. Are you geographically close to your parents/in laws?
   b. Are you involved with your family on a consistent basis?
7. Describe your employment (if any) outside the home?

The information which I am looking for relates to the respondent’s sense of identity within the various roles she assumes (wife, mother, employee, daughter, sibling, friend, etc.). The interview will be open ended and respondents will be encouraged to offer information which may be pertinent to this study. Patterns will be the focus of this process, and analysis of the data will be the correlation of themes within the types of relationships.

The means for collecting this data will be personal interviews of approximately eight to ten respondents. The interviews will be done at the respondent’s convenience, at the location and time of her choosing. Some interviews will be done over the phone when geographic distance is a factor.

The recording of the information will be on audio tape, and later written transcripts. The information will then be analyzed for recurring themes which may be used to support the theories presented. Upon analysis, the information will then be presented in a graduate thesis to the Communication Department at the University of Wisconsin in Stevens Point.

B. The personnel interacting with the subject will be myself, only. (Ellen Voie, Graduate Student in the Communication Department).
C. No deception will be used in gathering data. This interviewer will make every effort to be as honest and informative to the subjects as possible.
D. The location for human subject involvement will be as stated above, either over the telephone from the respondent’s home, or in a location of the subject’s choosing (her home, if possible.)

III. Risks
   A. No physical, psychological, legal, or economic risks are anticipated. I cannot foresee any long term or short term risks involved in the interviewing process, other than a risk of being identified by a close friend, spouse or relative. Although, I do not believe that identification by someone will ultimately pose a risk to the subject unless they reveal very personal or sensitive information. I will make every effort to disguise the information so that identification is not a possibility.
B. I would not label this research as “Non-Beneficial,” since all of the information may prove to be valuable to the subjects involved. Many of the subjects may or may not be interested in the outcome of this study. In fact, the response to this study has been phenomenal in regard to the willingness to participate. In response to an article I wrote for a magazine, I asked women to respond to my column (see attached). As of this writing, more than sixty women have written (some quite lengthy) letters, elaborating on their interaction with their truck driver husbands. Many of these women not only offered to be interviewed, they suggested I call them collect! This suggests that the timing is right for a study of this nature.

IV. Safeguarding subject’s identity

A. The interviews will be recorded, only after the interviewee has agreed to this, and has signed the consent form as attached. The respondents will remain confidential and will not be identified by name on the recording of the interview. Instead, a system of numbering will be used, beginning with respondent #10. After the completion of each interview, a transcript will be made of the recording, or parts of the recording as needed. These transcripts will also be identified by an assigned number as corresponding to the tape. I will keep a list of the names as associated with the numbers in a separate, secure place. Within the thesis, I will use pseudo names to identify the subjects, and will use assigned names in alphabetical order (Alice, Betty, Carol, etc.) No identifying information will be made available to anyone other than myself (including my committee).

B. Precautions taken to safeguard identifiable records of individuals will be the use of pseudo names as suggested above. Audio tapes will be destroyed upon completion of this research study and written transcripts will be destroyed at the same time. Also, any factors which are specific to one person and may prompt identification will be altered when possible so that the respondents will not be subject to scrutiny. The spouse’s names and family names will also be fictional, as will the name of the company the truck driver works for if it is mentioned. Geographic locations will not be relevant to this study, other than an attempt to get a good cross section of the United States. The state of residence will probably not be identified, I may potentially make reference to a “west coast” woman or “Mid West” trucking company.

Once this thesis is completed, there will be no further use of the data which will have been gathered specifically for this study and all written and
recorded original documentation will be destroyed. No one else will have access to these sources.

V. Informed consent

A. The procedure for obtaining informed consent will be to ask the respondent to read the consent form prior to the interview. I will mail each respondent a copy of the consent form so that they have enough time to read it thoroughly before our interview. Then, after they have agreed to the procedure and have signed the form, I will supply them with an unsigned copy for their use. For those interviews which will be over the phone, I will include a signed, self addressed, stamped envelope for their convenience. I will file the signed copies with my research information. Anyone who does not wish to participate will not be made to feel uncomfortable about her decision, but will be thanked for her time and interest in the study.

B. A copy of the informed consent form is attached.

VI. There are no cooperating institutions in this study.

Standard Ethics Protocol
Consent Form

This form to be provided by interviewer prior to the interview. One copy will be left with the respondent, and one copy should be signed by the respondent to be retained by the interviewer.

Explanation of Procedures: Ellen Voie, a graduate student in the division of Communication at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point is conducting a study involving women who are married to long distance truck drivers. This research will focus on the women’s sense of identity in her role as wife, mother, daughter, employee, sibling or neighbor and her interdependence with these people within her life. This study should prove to be useful for anyone involved in the transportation industry, and will benefit those who are concerned with the driver’s family situation in reducing the stress associated with the long separations with his wife due to his occupation and lifestyle.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked a number of questions pertaining to your life as the wife of a truck driver. You may chose the time and place for the interviews (or over the phone if you prefer
or as distance may dictate.) Your identity will remain confidential and any identifying factors will be omitted from the completed study.

Alternative procedures: This study is being conducted through the use of interviews to achieve unanticipated results by the use of a qualitative analysis. The use of surveys, questionnaires or other quantitative methods were not considered appropriate for this study.

Risk: No risk is anticipated in this study.

Safeguards: The information will be kept confidential, and your anonymity will be maintained by using pseudo names and by recording the information you provide by using an assigned numbering system.

Freedom to withdraw: Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may refuse to answer a question at any time. You may withdraw from the interview at any time. Information you have provided would be destroyed upon your withdrawal.

Offer to answer inquires: If you would like a copy of the results of this study, please indicate so below. If you any questions regarding this research you may contact me at:

Ellen Voie
Division of Communication
CAC-331
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715)346-2060

Third Party: If you have any complaints about your treatment as a participant in this study, you may contact:

Dr. LaRene Tufts, Chairperson
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
School of Communicative Disorders
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
(715) 346-4511
Although Dr. Tufts will ask your name, all complaints are kept in confidence.

I have received a completed explanation of the study and agree to participate:

Signed_____________________________________
Printed name__________________________________
Date___________________________________________

This research project has been approved by the University of Wisconsin Stevens Point Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects.

For those requesting research report:
Name_________________________________________
Address_______________________________________
City, State, ZIP_________________________________
Appendix B

Interview Questions

1. Biographical information:
   a. How long have you been married to your trucker husband?
   b. Do you have children? How many?
2. How long has he been a professional driver?
3. Was he a truck driver when you met/married?
4. Describe the communication process in your marriage?
   a. How often does your husband call home?
   b. What are the length of those phone calls?
   c. What are some of the subjects you discuss on the phone?
   d. Do you “save” things to discuss until he gets home?
5. Describe your social life when he is away from home.
   a. Are your friends predominantly married or single?
   b. Do you have friends who are also trucker’s wives?
6. What is your relationship with your extended family like?
   a. Are you geographically close to your parents/in laws?
   b. Are you involved with your family on a consistent basis?
7. Describe your employment (if any) outside the home?
8. What attracted you to your husband?
9. Do you have any rituals that you follow:
   a. before your husband leaves?
   b. before your husband comes home?