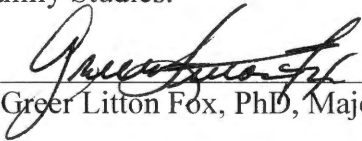
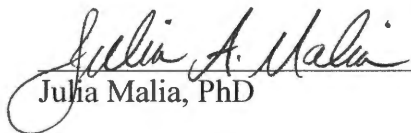


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jeremy P. Sayers entitled "The Haunted Hero: Mythology and Meaning in the Fathering Accounts of Long-Haul Truckers." I have examined the final paper copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science, with a major in Child and Family Studies.

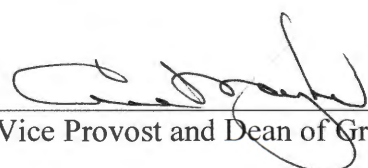

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**The Haunted Hero: Mythology
and Meaning in the Fathering Accounts of
Long-Haul Truckers**

**A Thesis
Presented for the
Master of Science
Degree
University of Tennessee, Knoxville**

**Jeremy P. Sayers
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Abstract

Long-haul truckers face challenges of time and distance in their attempts to be what they consider good fathers. In their quests to define themselves as fathers and as men, they also are shadowed by the challenge of a pervasive macho mythology of the trucker as an American cultural hero--a high-flying, hard-driving, highway cowboy. As were the cowboys of the Old West, the mythological trucker is a loner, complete in his freedom from the worries and demands of more pedestrian lives. Through intensive interviews with 12 men who make their living as over-the-road (OTR) truckers, I explore the interwoven identities of the trucker and father with their differing and conflicting behavioral demands. Based on analysis of the interview responses of these men, I find confirmation of three different types of truckers initially identified by Ouellet (1994): worker, trucker, and super-trucker--each with different attitudes about the work-family interface and, thus, each with a different approach to fathering. Specifically, analysis of the data revealed across all three types of OTR drivers varying degrees of despair over absence from their families and powerlessness to be a "good" father. The negotiation of the conflict of frequent absence from the family was handled differently across driver types. Finally, reliance upon the trucker mythology and on traditional gender stereotypes to give meaning to their lives and to the compromises that their occupation required them to make with their ideas of appropriate fathering differed systematically across the three types of OTR drivers. The importance of these findings for OTR drivers and their families lies in better understanding not only of the difficulties men in these jobs face in maintaining meaningful relationships with their wives and children, but also in highlighting creative and successful means of constructing family roles and relationships. Further, educators and counselors may be able to apply these findings to other categories of fathers with similar types of chronic absence.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The idea to study truck drivers was engendered by a serendipitous relationship with a neighbor who is a truck driver. My own personal past has involved intense affiliation with the downtrodden and weary. Most recently, I co-authored a paper on wife-batterers. Before that I was a counselor to troubled adolescents--both survivors and perpetrators of sexual abuse. Truck drivers seemed to fall within this class of acutely suffering persons. In any case, that is what my neighbor said. In his own words, truck driving resulted in the end of his marriage and ultimately estranged him from his children: "When you divorce the wife, you divorce the kids."

I followed my neighbor on a few occasions to a local bar haunted by truck drivers and occasionally their spouses. These places were loud and raucous, but my neighbor assured me that I would find lots of drivers willing to share their stories of loss. Occasionally I was able to have conversations with these men. Late in the night they often professed to be proud of their occupation, but references to family were tainted with anger, resentment, and occasionally sadness.

After several of these conversations, I started to understand these men as individuals who, like all of us, are interested in leading meaningful lives. For these men, their meaning, their heroism was born of membership in an elite class of truck drivers. They needed more than the common, everyday heroism of the father and husband. To make their lives significant, they needed to be cowboys on wheels. Unfortunately for most, their project to be a hero unto themselves and their families failed to provide sustaining and enduring meaning. Here they were, drinking in a bar, many without

families to go home to anymore. Like the cowboy who loses the gun battle or the soldier who comes home in a body bag, their heroism was born out of tragedy. Somewhere along the way their effort to find personal worth went wrong, with heartbreaking consequences. While many drivers can convince themselves that they are heroes they still seem to be only a step away from despair, lost in individual dreams without sustaining social commitments. This paper attempts to show the ways in which the heroism of the truck driver fails and what success might look like.

In popular mythology truckers are kings of the road not over-endowed with brains. In reality the trucker is a calculating fellow who must drive himself to the edge to make ends meet. (*The Economist*, p. 23)

Research Problem

This project began in the middle of the night, in the middle of Ohio. While driving the 11 hours from school to my parents' house, I stopped for a late supper at an all-night truck stop and diner. I was joined by a fellow traveler, an over-the-road truck driver who also had stopped for a break. With a mixture of sadness, frustration, and resignation, this man in his 40s told me that his teenage son was supposed to have been traveling with him. When I asked him why his boy was not with him, he explained that he was failing a subject at school and thus had to attend summer school. I asked, "What subject is he failing?" The driver responded, "I don't know. You'd have to ask the old lady about that." I was struck by the absolute matter-of-factness of this statement. Clearly this man did not see it as his responsibility to be concerned about his son's education. That was his wife's job. Family issues did not preempt him from being the trucker he wanted to be, yet he was clearly troubled by the conflict in roles. It is this man's and his fellow over-the-road drivers' negotiation of this conflict that is the subject

of this research project.

The Population Studied

When I refer to over-the-road (OTR) truckers, I am referring to that segment of truck drivers whose job it is to travel between states in large tractor-trailers carrying anything from cogs to cars. Briefly, a tractor-trailer is usually an 18-wheel, 5-axle combination of a cab pulling a trailer loaded with freight. The average tractor and trailer are 63 to 73 feet in length and haul a cargo of goods averaging 60,000 pounds. In 2002 the over-the-road trucker logged nearly 100 billion miles of driving in 18 wheel trucks alone.

For the typical driver, job requirements mean being away from one's home for 5 or more consecutive days, often for weeks at a time. For most of us, our experience of these truck drivers is limited to encounters on interstates. We see them either passing us at speeds we assume to be dangerous, or we idle behind them as they slowly climb steep grades. The media and the entertainment industry often provide our images about the person behind the wheel for us. As one researcher observed,

Popular portrayals of truckers in movies (e.g., *White Line Fever*), television series (e.g., "Movin' On"), songs (e.g., "I Fought the Diesel and the Diesel Won"), and personal-interest newspaper and magazine accounts usually paint a picture of a man who is not simply doing a job, but who is doing this particular job because he has a certain wanderlust: the road is in his blood. (Ouellet, 1994, p. 104)

Just as we romanticize athletes, authority figures, and super-models, we also glorify truckers as mysterious rebels, "the most literal descendants of the cowboy" (Ouellet, 1994, p. 104). We see this mythology in advertisements featuring truck drivers, and it is echoed repeatedly in the preferred music of the driver:

A faded pair of Levi's, sharp-pointed rubbed out boots,

Fancy buckle on his belt, he's got that Texas look.
He's a cowboy,
He's a diesel-doggin', truck-drivin' asphalt cowboy.
(Clark Bentley, "Asphalt Cowboy")

Research Questions

In examining these men as individuals embedded in decades of mythology, I am focusing on one particular aspect of the trucker's life: his dual role as over-the-road truck driver and father to his children. While there is some research on blue-collar fathers (Bellah, 1985; Loscocco, 1990; Rubin, 1976), there is very little research that addresses the unique set of difficulties associated with being an OTR father. More often than not, research focusing on fatherhood has emphasized middle-class men living relatively traditional life-styles, and references to lower-class or blue-collar fathers are short and speculative. For example, as LaRossa (1988) pointed out, nearly all books and articles discussing the emerging new nurturant father are written by and about upper-middle class professionals. Recently, several researchers have begun to question whether this set of cultural expectations, the expectations of the new nurturant father, are shared equally across race and social class lines and, further, if these expectations are realistically reflected in men's behavior (Fox, Bruce, & Combs-Orme, 2000; Furstenberg, 1995; Griswold, 1993).

Clearly there are different societal expectations for blue-collar families that warrant attention. As one theorist suggests, lower-class Americans have patterns of relationship and solidarity that differ from middle-class life and buffer against what Bellah calls "the emptiness of the middle-class professional" (Bellah, 1985, p. 152). Like the family in Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, lower-class families survive

economic hardships in part by finding meaning and comfort in kin relations and neighborhood-based friendship patterns. These expected patterns of solidarity may prove especially problematic for the OTR driver so frequently away from his family. One begins to see a new kind of dilemma as the lower-class, truck-driving father works to give his family a middle-class life-style. Those who wish to do better than remain among the *respectable poor* (Rubin, 1976) often must sacrifice the above-mentioned culturally valued time at home. At the root of this financial ambition is the desire to establish personal dignity (Sennet & Cobb, 1973). For truck drivers, this may involve purchasing their own rig, a nice home for their family, and nice things for their children. However, the cost in terms of time spent away from the family defines the dilemma. Working-class family ties that should buffer against what Bellah (1985) called *middle-class despair* are weakened and often broken with each extra day spent on the road earning a middle-class living. For many drivers, the end result is a wholesale loss of personal meaning and the “empty self and empty relationships” (Bellah, 1985, p. 152) that Bellah claimed characterize middle-class life. This idea will present itself often in subsequent chapters.

The scarcity of research on blue-collar fathers, and specifically the near absence of research on the OTR dad, presents a significant gap in the research literature when one considers that there are over 5 million truck drivers, most of whom have children (U.S. Department of Labor, 2002). This study attempts to explore the meaning of fatherhood and describe the family lives of OTR drivers who have children. Specifically I started out to address the following two research questions:

1. How is responsibility regarding child-care issues negotiated with each return and departure, and what sort of conflicts result from the constant negotiations between

job and family?

2. How does the driver reestablish himself as a father figure after returning from a prolonged absence?

In order to address these questions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 men who were, at that time, OTR drivers with at least one child. Despite my attempts to structure the interview so that responses would address my research questions, when given the opportunity to speak freely, the men in this study often talked about unanticipated issues with unexpected clarity and depth. Thus, in the course of conducting these interviews and addressing the research questions, I found that several themes emerged in response to my questions about fathering that at first glance may not seem to be directly related to the research questions. As this study was designed to be exploratory, I was not entirely surprised by the wealth of thematic material provided by these men. It would not be good social science, indeed it would not be possible to do justice to the complexity of the lives they presented to me, to ignore or omit this unanticipated thematic material. The extra themes will be explored specifically in Chapter Four.

In my attempt to understand the depth of the respondents' thoughts about trucking and fathering, I turned to some older theoretical literature about the concepts of mythology, heroism and the construction of meaning. Chapter Two includes a summary of these perspectives that help to describe the search for meaning in the lives of blue-collar families. In Chapter Three, the methodology of this study is discussed. In Chapter Four, I identify thematic material provided by my interviews, and further, the research questions posed in Chapter One are discussed as well. In Chapter Five, I attempt to bring

together and discuss the research questions, the findings, and the conclusions of this study, as well discuss the limitations of this study, implications for practitioners, and directions for future research.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, there is a significant gap in the research literature as it applies to this study. Specifically, very little sociological research has directly studied the truck driver. While the body of research on fathers in general has grown rapidly, to the best of my knowledge, only one researcher (Ouellet, 1994) has examined the truck driver's role as a father. In addition to this, there are two good studies on blue-collar families that are instrumental in understanding the successes and failures of the OTR father: Rubin's (1976) *Worlds of Pain* and Bellah's (1985) *Habits of the Heart*. Further, other research that takes fathers in general as its subject provides us with a language that is useful in describing the lives of long-haul fathers. And last I will examine Scott and Lyman's (1968) theory of accounts. Their terminology is useful in understanding the language or discourses used by OTR dads in their attempts to bridge the gap between who they expected to be as fathers and what they became instead. This chapter will examine that research that is used to define the conflicts described in subsequent chapters.

Ouellet's Trucker Typology

In an earlier work, Ouellet (1994) divided truck drivers into three distinct personality types: workers, truckers, and super-truckers. While these categories separated men by the types of equipment used, in the drivers' self-portrayals and other factors, according to Ouellet, interestingly enough, the primary distinction among these categories was the driver's relationship with and attitude toward his family. Below is a

brief description of the three types of drivers.

The worker. The worker “wants to spend as much time as possible with his family” (Ouellet, 1994, p. 203). His sole motivation for being a truck driver is to provide financially for his family as best as he can. The worker is not overly enamored with either the freedom of the road or the machismo often associated with long-haul drivers. On the contrary, his focus is on providing his family with a middle-class living, and he is willing to sacrifice whatever is necessary in order to accomplish this. Similar to the blue-collar factory men in another study, the men identified as workers by Ouellet have internalized the role of “good provider” (Loscocco, 1990, p. 172). These men are also the first to feel that their status of provider creates a detrimental lack of involvement in the lives of their children (Blankenhorn, 1995).

The super-trucker. The super-trucker is the stereotypical driver who sees himself as the king of the road, the asphalt cowboy. This driver places a tremendous amount of importance on the job he performs, the equipment he uses, and the load he hauls. The super-truckers value their time on the road so much that they often will buy their own trucks and equip them with condo-packages and stretch cabs, turning their rigs into “the truckers’ version of a recreational vehicle or boat cabin” (Machalaba, 1993). This driver “strikes or forces a bargain with his family in which it is understood that the vast majority of his time will be devoted to his job” (Ouellet, 1994, p. 199). They are uncompromising in their position and typically find a way to turn time at home into more driving-related work (cleaning the truck), or they blocks off their time at home as rest and sleep time.

The trucker. Simply stated, the trucker falls somewhere in between the worker and super-trucker. However, his situation is often the most complicated. Unlike the

other two types of drivers, the trucker does not have any clear arrangements with his family about the apportionment of work and non-work time. “The truckers’ family sees someone who wants or acknowledges a duty to spend as much time as possible with them, but whose notions differ from their own as to what is possible” (Ouellet, 1994, p. 205). The trucker may see himself as minimally committed to his work and appropriately involved with his family, often defining his family role as breadwinner. This is often at odds with his family, who are likely to see things the other way around—that he is overcommitted to work and nearly absent from the family. Because of these differing perspectives, the trucker is likely to blame his family for preventing him from being the trucker he would like to be.

Zvonkovic’s Happy Wanderers

Anisa Zvonkovic’s (2001) qualitative study of truck drivers and fishermen examines the ebb and flow of family life in terms of how families experience time. She identified four phases experienced by families who experience extended periods of father absence: departure, separation, homecoming, and reunion.

Departure involves getting ready to leave. For the men in Zvonkovic’s study, this meant establishing an emotional distance from family members while mentally preparing for the long journey ahead. For their wives, this was a time to do shopping and plan for the weeks ahead, and it was a time of intense emotion--typically emotions of anger and resentment. The phase of separation concerns family members being away from each other and staying connected while the husband is away. During this phase, men focused on the task at hand with little thought given to family matters while women tackled home and family responsibilities. In Zvonkovic’s study, the women reported feeling great

senses of accomplishment, individuality, and pride in their management of the family during separation. The third phase of homecoming is described as anticipation of being together again as well as the initial togetherness of the husband returning home. For husbands, this period was experienced as a big party, and both husbands and wives reported the time as being filled with excitement. Women, however, worked hard to create a restful and quiet home environment and took on extra duties associated with another person being in the house. The final phase of reunion concerns creating a renewed sense of family after the initial excitement is over. During this time, the family adjusts to having two parents instead of one at home. This was often a time of conflict as wives were reluctant to hand over the control of the family to demanding husbands. This conflict involved debates about “how much room” to make for the father.

Zvonkovic’s research uncovers themes similar to those found in the present study. There are important differences, however, and these will be covered in Chapter Five.

Rubin and Bellah: Mythology and Meaninglessness in Blue-Collar Fathers

Lilian Rubin’s book, *Worlds of Pain* (1976), provides a clear picture of how families, particularly blue-collar families, “are embedded in the hierarchy of social classes in our society” (p. 28). One’s social position not only creates different sorts of problems for the person, but it also limits the solutions available to her or him. For example, according to Rubin, the middle-class professional’s work requires too much personal investment while the blue-collar worker’s job requires too little. The middle-class father may compensate for his overinvestment in work with the accumulation of material possessions, while the blue-collar man more often turns to his family and community for meaningful connection.

For Rubin's blue-collar family, life is very difficult. She describes their progress through life at various times as filled with *pain, bitterness, loneliness, anger, rebelliousness, and resignation* (Rubin, 1976). She described blue-collar life as a "fertile field in which fatalism, passivity, and resignation . . . grow . . . [as] realistic responses to the social context in which [they] live" (p. 163). These responses grow out of "dull, routine, deadening, . . . alienating labor" (p. 160). However, the blue-collar worker survives this with a strong reliance on "substitute gratifications to be found in the private sphere of life--that is, the family" (p. 160). The blue-collar connection to family is not a simple convenience called upon under special circumstances. It is, in fact, an expected part of the working-class man's identity. Family connectedness is a source of pride.

The truck driver, while still part of the blue-collar work force, stands out against this backdrop of alienating labor. One of Rubin's respondents was an OTR truck driver. She stated that his work "allows for freedom and autonomy on the job [and he] feels like a free agent once he gets out on the road" (p. 157). It stands to reason that this freedom should buffer against the typical blue-collar alienation and passivity. For men whose definition of self is so closely tied to work, having such a high-status job should allow him to feel like "a good man" (p. 158). And, to a certain extent, the freedom of the road does provide a sense of meaning rarely found in the blue-collar work world, but at what cost?

The immediate cost of the OTR drivers' freedom, simply stated, is extended periods of absence from the family. While this freedom allows the driver to rise above the blue-collar work routine, it carries with it a direct challenge to the values of family connectedness embedded in lower-class life. To illustrate this dilemma, I turn to Bellah's

book, *Habits of the Heart* (1985).

According to Bellah (1985), the OTR father “lives outside the normal bourgeois pattern of career and family” (p. 146). Like the cowboy of the Old West, the long-haul truck driver is a loner and an individual who leaves the standard blue-collar work force and elevates himself to the level of “mythic individual hero” (p. 145). For some, this is a choice, an attempt to gain rare personal dignity, to be a “truly good person, worthy of admiration and love” (p. 145). The way to attain this status is through actively resisting the blue-collar class standards. For others, “it is a kind of heroic selflessness” (p. 146) that aims to elevate one’s family to or above the status of what Rubin (1976) called *respectable poor* (Rubin, 1976). In either case, the result is the same: a break with society. The bottom line is that in embracing this freedom, whether spiritually or financially motivated, the driver partially rejects the class-wide reliance on the family.

For Bellah, this break with society admits of degrees. The degree to which one breaks with society unequivocally determines his ability to create and sustain meaning in his life: “If the break with society is too radical, life has no meaning at all” (p. 144). For the OTR truck driver, a radical break is unavoidable. According to Bellah, lower-class Americans need “patterns of relationship and solidarity [to] mitigate the tendency toward an empty self and empty relationships” (p. 152). And thus, indicated Bellah, the driver is “always just a step away from despair” (p. 146). The inner tension between self-reliance and its accompanying loss of family connectedness add up to an experience of “the emptiness of a life without sustaining social commitments” (p. 151).

While this chapter is by no means an exhaustive review of the literature on blue-collar fathers, these two books provide the context in which we can understand the

shortcomings of the OTR father.

The Provider Role and the New Nurturant Father

In traditional American culture, men have been labeled as the economic providers for their families. The role of provider is one that “continues to dominate [men’s] expectations of helpfulness, thus pointing to the continuing importance of the economic provider function to men’s understanding of what it means to be a father” (Fox et al., 2000, p. 125). The role of provider is one that is highly valued in our culture. This is especially true for blue-collar fathers, who are quick to internalize the role of “good provider” (Loscocco, 1990, p. 172). For these men, the drive to provide supersedes all other aspects of fathering and, in fact, to provide well is equated with fathering well. This concept is so fundamental to the blue-collar man that it is accepted without question. If we revisit Rubin’s *Worlds of Pain* (1976), we are reminded that the resignation of the working-class father’s role as provider is a “realistic response to the social context in which they live and define themselves” (p. 163). They define fathering as providing because their fathers and grandfathers did the same, as did the neighbor and his father: “Mostly the men say they just expected to grow up, get married and work just as their fathers had” (p. 39).

While it is simply assumed that fathers provide (Cohen, 1993) and that this provision is valued on a cultural level, the story is often quite different at the level of family. The value of providing ascribed to the father by his culture is rarely matched by members of his family. It is expected but not appreciated (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). Perhaps this is because the father’s work is done away from the home. According to Christiansen and Palkovitz (2001), “When family members do not see fathers in the act

of providing, they may not be as acutely aware of the energy, sacrifice, and labor extended in order to provide” (p. 86). Further, parenting is usually assumed to require direct involvement with the children. This not only robs providing of any association with fathering but further, “providing is often seen as competing with involvement or more severely creating a lack of involvement” (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001, p. 86).

With the father’s providing expected but not respected, his work becomes a necessary evil. Especially for the blue-collar man, whose family rests precariously on the line between poverty and being respectably poor (Rubin, 1976), providing is needed for survival. For these fathers, a few days of missed work to participate in the birth of a child or a family vacation could prove financially devastating. Staying at home to make breakfast for the kids and then showing up late to work would likely result in disciplinary action. According to the findings of many different studies, the “evil” part of “necessary evil” lies in that a father’s seemingly necessary adherence to the notion of providing as fathering even when it prohibits or constrains him from being involved in the culture of the new *nurturant* father (Blankenhorn, 1995; Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Palkovitz et al., 1998; Robinson & Barret, 1986). According to this notion, fathers now are urged to participate more regularly in nurturant opportunities with their children at home (LaRossa, 1998; Robinson & Barret, 1986; Rotundo, 1985). The good father, while still being expected to provide, also must share the roles of protector and care-giver with the mother (Fox et al., 2000; Marsiglio, 1995). While it is not exactly clear if the push towards nurturant fathering crosses class lines (Fox et al., 2000), I am reminded of Bellah’s (1985) idea that family connectedness is cherished by the lower class for its protection against the alienation of the blue-collar work world. For the blue-collar father,

the push towards nurturant fathering may come from class expectations of family cohesion as opposed to middle-class cultural expectations of “androgynous fathering” (Rotundo, 1985, p. 20).

The previous section illustrates the importance of providing on a cultural level. Other research findings have demonstrated that the provider role does matter to men individually. While it seems likely that fathers from different classes value the provider role for different reasons, most every father worries more about his ability to provide adequately for his family than he does about most other aspects of fathering. Further, fathers worry more about providing than do mothers (Fox et al., 2000). In examining the provider role, Fox and her colleagues reported that fathers “feel especially burdened by performance expectations in precisely the area in which their performance is most taken for granted” (p. 126). Not only are fathers anxious about their ability to provide, but they often receive criticism if their efforts to provide are perceived to be interfering with their at-home fathering. And how can providing not be associated with neglecting at-home nurturant fathering? Since the Industrial Revolution, providing has involved leaving the family home for at least 40 hours a week (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001). The problem is that the new nurturant father is more imagined than real--a product of our culture that is simply not a part of the practice of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988). The need to provide, however, is real.

Accounts

According to Scott and Lyman (1968), accounts are linguistic strategies used to “throw bridges between the promised and performed” (p. 46) in situations where the difference between the two reflects poorly on the person involved. Stated differently, an

account is a “statement made by a social actor to explain unanticipated or untoward behavior” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 46). For the present study, an understanding of the varieties of accounts described by Scott and Lyman is crucial to understanding the motivations and actions of the OTR father.

Accounts can be broken down into two general types: excuses and justifications. As defined by Scott and Lyman (1968), justifications are “accounts in which one accepts responsibility for the act in question, but denies the pejorative quality associated with it” (p. 47). An example of this is the soldier who admittedly kills but without guilt, justifying his action by pointing out that he killed an enemy who deserved to die. This is different from the soldier who kills because he is under orders to do so. The latter soldier employs the account of excuse “in which one admits that the act in question is bad, wrong, or inappropriate but denies full responsibility” (p. 47).

Scott and Lyman (1968) described four types of excuses commonly used and often deemed socially acceptable: “appeal to accidents, appeal to defeasibility, appeal to biological drives, and scapegoating” (p. 47).

Appeals to accident mitigate responsibility by pointing to hazards in the environment and the inability of humans to control all motor responses. This type of excuse is often accepted because it does not happen too frequently.

Excuses involving *appeals to defeasibility* rely on the culturally widespread acceptance of the idea that the will is not always free and that sometimes an individual’s actions are misled by incomplete or inaccurate information. When this excuse is used, an actor may claim that he intended to act in an appropriate fashion and the actual outcomes of the actions were beyond his ability to foresee.

Another type of excuse involves *appeals to biological drives*. While this excuse often involves appeals to uncontrollable sexual desires, of interest to us in this study is the appeal to seemingly unavoidable sex characteristics. Such fatalistic invocations such as “women complain, that’s what they do” or “a man’s gotta work” are excuses of the biological type. These statements imply that there are male and female characteristics, biologically based and thus unchangeable, that can account for otherwise unacceptable behavior.

The last type of excuse mentioned by Scott and Lyman (1968) is *scapegoating*. When a person uses this type of excuse, he alleges that his questioned behavior is excusable because it is simply a justified response to another’s behavior or attitude. For example, a man may claim that his wife’s constant complaining drove him to drinking and alcoholism.

Where excuses are employed to explain away negative actions or consequences, *justifications* go a step further and assert that an act is of positive value despite a claim to the contrary. That is, *justifications* claim that seemingly negative acts are actually permissible and required. A very common example of this is the *justification* of murder through claims of self-defense. However, *justifications* take on many different forms. Scott and Lyman (1968) described six of these techniques: “denial of injury, denial of victim, condemnation of condemners, appeal to loyalties, sad tales, and self-fulfillment” (p. 51).

When one employs a *denial of injury* to justify a particular act, the person claims that, since no one or no object was injured or since the injury was minor, there is no need to view that act as negative. I am reminded of a common claim among athletes and their

fans that if there is no blood, there is no foul. That is, an illegally thrown elbow that misses its target should not be considered a penalty even though the intentions were to illegally harm a player on the other team.

When one employs *denial of the victim* as a justification for a negative act or outcome, the “actor expresses the position that the action was permissible since the victim deserved the injury” (p. 51). Often these justifications are used to explain away racially or politically motivated negative behaviors.

Often acts are justified by observing that others commit worse acts that are not punished or that even are praised. This form of justification is called a *condemnation of the condemners*. Using this device, an actor may claim that, given what others are doing, his acts are irrelevant or of little consequence.

When a person claims that his actions were justified because of unbreakable allegiances he is using the technique called an *appeal to loyalties*. While this technique can be used as an excuse, here it is used as a justification because the actor does not insist that he was coerced or forced into a negative act but rather that the negative act was actually a good one in the service of a just loyalty.

What is called the *sad tale* involves a selected and often distorted arrangement of past events to present a life so fraught with difficulty that one’s present negative state can be explained away.

The last type of justification discussed by Scott and Lyman (1968) is a more modern technique called *justification through self-fulfillment*. Appeals to *self-fulfillment* use the idea that an actor’s behaviors are motivated by attempts toward enlightenment, mind-expansion, and personal and spiritual freedom. Accordingly, homosexuals and

drug users may justify what others label negative behaviors by claiming that these behaviors are necessary in order to be free and enlightened and happy.

Accounts come in many varieties, several of which are discussed above. But of general significance is the idea that “every account is a manifestation of the underlying negotiation of identities” (Scott & Lyman, 1968, p. 56).

In this brief literature review I have attempted to highlight those theorists and researchers whose work helps to explain the difficulties associated with being an over-the-road dad, including the problem of meaning that eliminates the struggles to establish a sense of self- worth for the OTR father. However, before I analyze the lives of these bifurcated men, I will discuss my method and introduce the subjects.

Chapter Three

METHODOLOGY

This study was designed to be an exploratory, qualitative study. Interviews were conducted with 12 men who were, at that time, over-the-road truck drivers with at least one child. First, however, two practice interviews were conducted in order to fine-tune my research method and questions.

The interviews were gathered in a 4-week period. Two evenings a week, I interviewed two men separately, each for a period of 30 minutes to 1 hour. The interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed by the author. The names of the respondents and their family members have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Interview Setting and Recruitment of Respondents

The interviews were conducted in the eating area of a busy truck stop along Interstate 40 just outside of the city of Knoxville, Tennessee, shortly after Christmas of 1998. The truck stop itself was quite impressive. Several rows of diesel pumps were flanked on one side by a large building and on the other side by several acres of parking area. In the evening, the parking area was replete with big rigs of all types arranged in neat rows. One count revealed nearly 100 idling trucks and trailers parked for the night. Most of these trucks contained sleeper cabins that allowed drivers to get some rest during the overnight hours. A quick walk through the parking lot provided insight into the differing personalities of the various drivers and, indeed, their trucks as well. Some trucks were plain, most all were clean. Usually the trucks were tricked out with a variety of eye-catching extras: chrome exhaust “stacks,” nicknames and slogans painted on

doors, mud flaps and bug shields, steer horns mounted on engine hoods, shiny air horns, Christmas wreaths attached to the grills, and miniature Christmas trees mounted on dash boards, to name a few.

The building contained about everything a long-haul driver could desire. There were all sorts of driving sundries from C.B. radios and replacement parts to t-shirts, racing paraphernalia, cowboy hats, music CDs, and videotapes of popular movies. At the back of the building were showers and laundry machines, allowing OTR drivers to clean away the grime of the road. In the middle of the building were several choices of restaurant-type areas from a sub-shop to a fast-food burger joint to a sit-down diner. There were rows of sodas and chips, candy bars, toiletries, and reading materials. Centrally located was an eating area full of booth-style seating, and every wall was lined with shelves full of gifts for children and spouses, from knickknacks to stuffed animals and toy cars.

All interviews were conducted on Wednesday or Thursday evenings. These days were chosen at the suggestion of one of the practice respondents. Mid-week days are slow days in the trucking industry and provide drivers with some free time to rest at truck stops. In order to target over-the-road drivers, signs explaining the nature of the interview and requirements for research participation were hung on the shower areas of the truck stop. Signs also were posted on the entrance doors to the truck stop. Potential respondents were asked to see the researcher in the eating area if they were interested in earning \$10 for their participation in the study. In the eating area, the same sign as the one hung on the shower and entrance doors was displayed, as well as a sign saying “research table.” Respondents approached the table and sat voluntarily, and, after

explaining the research protocol and obtaining a signed informed consent form, I proceeded with the interview. At the end of the interview, respondents signed a reaffirmation of consent form before leaving the table.

Interview Structure

Interviews were semi-structured, exploring four basic discussion areas related to the nature of the experience of being an OTR driver and father: (a) demographic information, (b) the driver's connection to his family on his most recent trip, (c) how family decisions are made when he is at home and when he is away, and (d) the pros and cons of the OTR-driver occupation. While these specific questions were presented consistently to each interviewee, participants were encouraged to explore and discuss their experiences in each area in as much depth as seemed appropriate. Typically conversations flowed from one area to the next, as all participants seemed eager to share their perspectives and the details of their lives.

All participants read, signed and dated an informed consent form before the formal interview began. At the conclusion of the interview respondents read, signed and dated a reaffirmation of consent form.

Field Notes

In addition to the tape-recorded interviews, I made field notes as well. These notes should be considered secondary to the interviews. The field notes were used only to record descriptions of the setting, as well as the appearance of the men and in some cases, their trucks. In any case, all data applied to the research questions are taken from the transcriptions of the tape-recorded interviews.

Coding and Analysis of Interviews

The analysis of qualitative data poses unique challenges. Crucial to the believability of an analysis is the inter-subjectivity of the material so that the reader may have the same sense of things as does the analyst. Following the work of others, I relied on the notion of thick description of concepts (Gilgun, 1992; Weiss, 1994). Interviews were transcribed, and, from the first two data sets, textual raw material were coded into thematic concepts, yielding a preliminary inventory of themes and ideas. As additional interviews were conducted, I searched for repetition of existing themes and emergence of new themes. These themes were recorded in a notebook and any passages that lent support to one or another of the themes was noted in the book. Using these notes and frequently returning to the transcriptions, I used a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) to analyze the emerging themes. In order to minimize the tendency of a primary reader to overinterpret or read meaning into interview passages, a second reader was employed. Individual analyses were compared and coding was cross-checked (Arditti, 1999; Gilgun, 1992) in order to establish the credibility of the resulting analysis, and thus were refined interpretations of the data. As is commonly practiced in qualitative research, analysis began immediately after each interview was conducted and transcribed, even though not all interviews had been completed yet (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994).

The Researcher Himself

I was 27 years old, and this was my first effort at conducting an interview-based qualitative study. Except for the briefcase, tie, and tape recorder, I did not look to be a far cry from the patrons of the truck stop. With long hair, a full beard, and a somewhat

stocky build, I did not seem too out of place. I was familiar with the lingo of the truck driver. During the year preceding the interviews, I had installed a C.B. radio in my pick-up truck, and in my travels, I listened to and occasionally communicated with the sort of drivers I knew I would be interviewing. I listened to various exchanges of symbolic language that employed a variety of linguistic styles (Scott & Lyman, 1968; Stryker, 1959): *casual* chatter amongst peers, *consultative* trading of information regarding road conditions and the locations of “smokey” (the state trooper), and rarely a *formal* style of instruction from a dispatcher to her drivers. Familiarizing myself with significant language symbols and styles of interaction made for smooth communication with the men I interviewed. This time spent as a distant observer sensitized me to the fact that drivers in general form a group with a great amount of consensus among members that bridges any differences in subgroups. These men were not so loyal to their individual carrier company that they would not help each other navigate the highways or pass the time. There was little segregation by type of driving done or type of company and it was the norm that all strangers were included without question. At the same time, everyone and no one was a stranger.

In an odd way, my interest in truck drivers seems to have sufficed for inclusion in the group and, thus, conversations with the men were free and easy. At times, the men lined up to be interviewed, mostly eager to help and to pass the time.

While I had some indication as to what to expect from these men, I quickly learned that the omission of the *intimate* style of communication (Scott & Lyman, 1968) in C.B. talk, while understandable, left me vastly under-prepared for the answers I received to my probing questions. In my very first interview, I met a man who

epitomized the concept of the *empty self* (Bellah, 1985) to a frightening degree, leaving me feeling ambiguous about my project. I was excited about the tremendous quality of the data, but more importantly, I felt horrible for encouraging this man to relive out loud his sad story for my benefit. I was fearful that other interviews might involve the same sort of melancholic accounts, and I was not wrong. Without fail, nearly all respondents left me with a tape full of great data of a most heart-breaking sort. Loneliness, apparently, is the industry standard.

It has taken a few years to get around to analyzing these interviews. Now I'm 33 with a wife and two children. My own life changes have lent me a greater appreciation for just how sad and troubled the interviewed OTR drivers were. It's frustrating to think about these men making the same mistakes repeatedly. But looking at my own experience as a blue-collar employee with a family, I can understand somewhat the feelings of powerlessness to effect change so commonly mentioned in the interviews. As a father with fairly hefty job demands, I find myself reacting to the accounts of these men by taking the same dual rejecting and honoring stance as I do in my own life. In writing my analysis of the data, I find twin motives. On the one hand, my experiences with the drivers has left me with an intense desire to do something to help them—or, at the very least, to honor their efforts in presenting their story. On the other hand, many of the social and societal factors that impacted the lives of these men have similar consequences (on a smaller scale) for the rest of us fathers. There are many myths about masculinity, fatherhood and the provider role found in what LaRossa (1988) termed *the culture of fatherhood* that need to be addressed as they appear in the language of living men.

Description of the Sample

It is nearly impossible for me to comment on or to compare the truthfulness of one man's interview with the interviews of the other men. I say this because each man came to me eager to share his story and seeming glad to have someone listening. Several times, the men became tearful or choked up. Often we took a short break to collect our thoughts and ourselves. And in the end, I left the interview feeling good about the information I had collected. At no time did I feel like I was being lied to or misled. Because of these factors, I feel quite comfortable in taking a phenomenological approach to these qualitative interviews and accepting the men and their words at face value.

To begin my description of the sample, I present a brief summary of all of the demographic information provided. In the next section, I discuss each respondent in the order in which they were interviewed. That section provides a brief description of their relevant sociodemographic descriptors as well as a brief synopsis of my reactions and my perceptions of the verisimilitude of their stories.

Age. Ages ranged from 24 to 47 years with an average of 36.2 years old.

Fathering experience. The respondents' experience as a father ranged from 3 to 25 years. The men averaged 12.5 years of fatherhood.

Number of children. The men ranged from having one child to having five children. The average number of children is 2.1. These figures do not include stepchildren. It is clear that several of the men were directly responsible for supporting stepchildren, but no questions were asked that directly related to the number of stepchildren the men were raising.

Number of divorces. The number of divorces ranged from zero to three. The

modal number of divorces is one with a mean of 1.1, and 83.3 % of the respondents have been divorced at least once (10 of the 12 men).

OTR driving experience. Experience driving as an OTR trucker ranged from 3 months to 30 years with an average of 11.5 years of driving experience.

Time on the road. Using the median number of days the men reported being away from home, I calculated that they were on the road ranging anywhere from 5 days to 31.5 days without rest. The average number of consecutive days spent on the road was 15.5. Most drivers reported at least one trip of more than 30 days each year.

Time at home. Using the median number of days the respondents reported being at home between trips, I calculated that they were at home ranging anywhere from 1.5 to 5 days. The average number of days at home was 2.3.

Percentage of the month spent on the road. The average respondent spent 87.1% of the month away from his family. This figure ranged from 71.4% to 93.0% of the month spent on the road.

Description of Each of the Men Interviewed

Roberto. Sisyphus of Greek mythology rolled stones--Roberto worked. For 18 years he had beaten the roads with his truck forth and then back. And now, according to Roberto, there were no happy returns. Typical of many of the men, he had gradually lost touch with his family, and now, in his words, "I am on the road all the time . . . 'cause I have nothin' to go home to. There's the truck and it's my life, and it destroyed my marriage" (35-36).

Roberto was 42 years old at the time of the interview, with the grey skin, pock marks, and sunken eyes of a much older man. The fingers of his left hand were stained

yellow from years of chain smoking. Happy for the company, Roberto spent an hour with me focused on these hands as he recounted the miles he was from being the father he had hoped to be.

For Roberto, things started out well but quickly deteriorated as debt accumulated and financial need drove him to the trucking industry. At first, the good provider role brought him home in good standings with his wife and three children, but within a few years, time spent at home changed from family picnics at the park to fights with his wife and blank stares from his kids. For 18 years of his 22-year marriage, Roberto had worked more than 3 weeks per month to pay the bills and placate his family. Now, with his 22- and 25-year-old daughters out of the house and only 16-year-old Ryan at home, his marriage was ending and his children were reticent: “[They say,] ‘If I see you, Dad, I see you. If I don’t, I don’t’” (272).

For Roberto, truck driving has cost him his role of father and husband as he was systematically left out of decision making, disciplining, and spending quality time with his children and wife. Now, with “nobody to go home to” (289), all that was left was “the freedom of the road” (288) and providing child support when it’s needed: “I’m doing this because I love them. . . . When I go, I want them to have something” (309-310).

Rudy. Rudy was new to the long-haul at the time of the interview. With only 6 months of OTR experience, he was still full of hopes and anticipations as to what this new-found cash cow might provide him and his family. With a 3 year old in his ex-wife’s custody and a pregnant new girlfriend, Rudy felt he had no choice but to give up his local route. Being home in the evenings had been exchanged for a solid month OTR with only 2 days rest. In his estimation, money is the only thing that kept the ex-wife and son

Anthony in the wings just often enough to allow him visits on holidays. Without enough money to retain a lawyer and secure visiting rights (129-131), gifts and cash were his only family leverage: “I’m kind of at her mercy, and she’s a very petty person” (179-180). And then there’s the new girlfriend and wife to consider.

At 24 years of age, Rudy displayed a good amount of insight into the seemingly inevitable consequences of his choice to be almost totally physically absent from his family. He foresaw missing his new child’s birth, first steps, and first words just as he now missed his son’s soccer games and birthdays. Rudy claimed that he was working to assuage some of his fatherly concerns by pursuing a local route that would get him home on the weekends, but in the mean time, he picked up extra routes whenever he could. For the time being, he fit the description of a “provider role overperformer . . . intoxicated with work at the expense of [his] family” (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001, p. 92).

Rudy remained hopeful and clung to the support and assurances of his new girlfriend that he will do just fine as a father. It was obvious that he talked to other OTR drivers and learned from them. His quick and clear responses to my questions led me to believe that he thought about himself as a father and a provider and actively worked to balance these complex roles. However, he’s probably talked to enough OTR drivers to know the cost of driving on the father role. When asked to describe his fathering now, he replied, “In my opinion, it’s kind of like having a part-time dad. You got one but only on the weekends” (231-232). To me, even this disparaging comment seemed optimistic given his financial intoxication and work schedule.

Gil. Delivered in a slow, southern Mississippi drawl, Gil’s words provided the perfect acoustic background for a rich interview with a quietly confident driver. Gil’s

recent decision to become an OTR driver was motivated by two factors. First, he was interested to “try some different things” (115) and second, to make sure that his four children “get everything they want” (117). This driver was neither too enamored by the call of the road nor too engrossed in financial security. He was a trucker who was “a hard worker” (114) willing to “try anything once” (115).

With only 3 months of OTR experience and 11 years as a father at the time of the interview, Gil thought his decision to drive was working for the best--“so far . . . [laughter from respondent]” (109). Even though his work schedule kept him on the road for 21-25 days of each month with only 3 or 4 days at home, he maintained a solid relationship with his kids. They continued to give him “that same respect” (104) that he received before he was a truck driver. Gil remained optimistic that his four children, aged 6-11, would continue to respect him even though his wife now made all major decisions (83-85).

Interestingly enough, the road seems to have saved Gil from the drudgery of domestication and the anxiety of family life: “Being at home, around each other and everything, the tension gets high. But since I’ve been gone, it’s kind of settled down. . . . We talk a whole lot better” (124-126). By his own account, this driver felt a calling to “see the countryside” (141), do something different, and experience the freedoms of long-haul driving. It was these freedoms that afforded Gil the quality of calmness and the gift of storytelling that he would bring home to his family: “I like seeing the countryside and then being able to tell my kids what I’ve seen. You experience a lot of different things out here and that there you can share with them” (141-142).

For Gil, this right of access and immunity from obligation was not without costs,

though certainly worth them. Included in his list of forfeitures were “no home cooked meals, not being able to see my kids, . . . not being able to talk to them on a constant basis, . . . [and] not being able to be part of the decision making with them” (168-170).

Moses. Among truck drivers, there is an amazing amount of consensus, a consciousness of kind whereby all drivers, regardless of individual differences or types of driving done, are warmly included in the group. They seem to share an understanding about why they are on the road and why it is good--shared justifications for their decision to leave their families. For Moses, this was not so.

Moses approached the interview with something to say, a message he hoped might reach other men before they made the decision to give up being “a complete parent” (266) in exchange for the role of breadwinner. Bitterly, he recalled making this decision for himself, and with 8 years on the road behind him at the time of the interview, he didn’t see any chance to escape ahead: “It’s the only job in the area that I live in that I could have the income that I have right now. . . . I would get out of it right now if I could find a job that would suit me” (228-230). Moses’ bitterness was fueled by a rocky relationship with his ex-wife and a confused 4-year-old daughter in the middle. In his estimation, his ex-wife was an unfit mother who “believes in free sex and whatever feels good” (195-196). While his OTR occupation probably facilitated this lifestyle, his driving paid the child support and, at the same time, barred him from having any legal custody of his child.

Despite what other truckers might believe, Moses didn’t see any positive side to being an OTR driver: “I’d say it’s a bad situation for any father. . . . It’s not very good for a child not to have both parents available” (247-249). While other fathers who drive have

“just got into the grid of things and enjoy having that free lifestyle” (258-259), Moses couldn’t accept that the cost, “not being able to be a complete parent” (266), justified the freedoms of the road. And it’s not just the wife and child who suffer from the father’s absence. The father pays a heavy price too: “The child doesn’t get the full effect of you being the father and you don’t get the full effect of being a father” (281-282).

Moses had remarried recently and, despite the problems he already experienced as a father and a driver, he was planning on fathering again in the near future. This man, in his words, likes being a father too much to not give it another try.

Edgar. Edgar was in no hurry and was happy to kill a little time talking about himself with a stranger in the interview. He was an owner-operator. This means that his truck was truly his truck: He owned it, outfitted it, drove it, and decided when it would roll. With 30 years of experience--more than any other respondent, and his own truck, he was the king of the road at the time of the interview. He showed me his rig--a top-of-the-line, sleek Peterbilt tractor trailer equipped with what’s called a “condo package.” In his truck were, among other things, dual bunks, a computer with Internet access, a TV/VCR combination, and a stack of videos next to his mini-refrigerator. Along with all these luxuries came a fat paycheck as truck owners command quite a bit more money than carrier employee drivers. And, most importantly, as an owner operator, he decided when and where he wanted to go.

Edgar wasn’t always so fortunate though. He had to make a lot of money in order to buy his truck, and that took years of devoting the vast majority of his time to driving. This was not without cost to his role of father and husband. While it was “working out fine at first” (120), eventually his wife “felt that there was more to life going on besides

[Edgar] being out on the road, her being at home” (125-126). In Edgar’s estimation, Jackie, his ex-wife and the mother of his daughter, did at least two-thirds of the child rearing while he made the money. He called home frequently and always brought home gifts for his family. For Edgar, this arrangement was ideal because the weekends he spent at home were made fonder by his frequent absence, and his devotion to work made him a proudly successful provider. But for Jackie, “it got real lonely, . . . to the point where she just couldn’t deal with it” (127-128). Uncompromisingly, Edgar drove on, not willing to make any concessions to his family: “This is my livelihood. . . . This is what I do for a living” (128-129). They divorced when their daughter, Brandy, was about 13 years old.

Edgar’s addiction to the provider role grew to incorporate a good portion of whom he was, and his dedication to making his plan work may have cost him an intact family--but that was okay with him. Brandy was a “great child” (148), and now she was grown up with a family of her own. Edgar had a new girlfriend who was happy to be a trucker’s wife and looked forward to yearly vacations on the truck. He participated in an adopt-a-driver program where he frequently communicated with middle-school kids via e-mail from his truck to their classroom. Edgar loved his life now and didn’t get bored “because there is always something different out on that highway” (226-227).

Marcus: Marcus’s interview was over in the time it took him to smoke a cigarette. His thoughts were shortened by a perceptible sadness that overtook him a little bit more with each question. For him, the details I was interested in were of little or no significance. All that mattered was what driving had cost him: “Being away from the family. . . . It cost me mine. . . . It was just something I didn’t have the time to do--being

a family” (145-146).

Marcus’s marriage lasted the first 8 years of his 18 years as an OTR driver at the time of the interview. His schedule was mild compared to most of the other drivers in this study, as he was home every weekend for nearly 2 full days. On top of this, he had called home every night, still did. But his primary role was that of provider. All important decisions regarding his two children were handled by his wife. He just handed over a check, mired in powerlessness: “She runs the house. When you’re gone, you can’t really do it. I guess that’s why we’re divorced” (127-128).

Now, Marcus’s 17-year-old daughter was in college and his 13-year-old son was at the ex-wife’s house. He called every night, but his physical contact was limited by his driving: “The way things have been lately, I haven’t been able to spend much time with them. . . . It was a lot better when I was at home with their mother than it is now” (106-109). Marcus believed unequivocally that driving cost him his marriage and his family. He seemed like a shell of a man sitting across the table from me, hollowed from too much work and with nothing left to work for. He missed his children: “They were just my life” (153), and he knew he had gotten the short end of the provider role stick. Depressed as he was by his life, there was just no escaping this end.

Dylan. Like Marcus and so many of other the men interviewed before him, Dylan simply didn’t have the time to be a family. Unlike the other respondents, Dylan did not seem crushed by loss, though. For him, machismo played a central role in his beliefs, and he believed that a man could be a man without having a family but not without a good job.

When Dylan got married he was a rookie truck driver, but it was his dream job.

He had a child, Dylan Jr., immediately and left the child rearing to his wife. Dylan would stay on the road 4 to 6 weeks before coming home for 2 days. The first day of his 2 days at home he spent sleeping and cleaning his truck: "The first thing I did when I got home was take a shower and go to bed" (104). The remaining day he would go out with his wife: "I'd give her that. . . . It was only fair" (116). Very little time was spent with his son because "Jr. was 3 years old so we couldn't take him a whole lot of places--like a father and son thing, you know" (73-74). Eventually this arrangement soured and ended his marriage through no fault of Dylan's: "She just couldn't handle being alone with the kid all the time. You know, some women can handle it and some can't. . . . She didn't like it so I told her, 'You married a trucker; . . . you knew me before we got married, you knew what the life is like'" (75-78).

Now, Dylan had a better father-son relationship with Junior. His parting with his wife was amicable, and he was free to see his son whenever his schedule allowed. Every couple of months, he arranged to be at his ex-wife's house where he was able to spend quality time with a son who idolized him. Junior thought truck driving was "the coolest thing in the world" (231), and his father fueled this through lots of postcards, pictures, and an allowance earned by cleaning the truck. Dylan was quite happy with this arrangement. He believed that he was teaching his son important lessons about geography and work ethic: "I just think that there are things I can get my son out here on the road that I couldn't give him at home" (225-226).

Dylan's plan to be a truck driver began when he was 13 years old: "I decided I was going to see this country and the world" (156). He followed the advice of school teachers and went to college, but this proved unsatisfactory: "It's the last of the cowboys,

that's what I wanted to be" (180-181). And now, with 10 years of solid confidence in his occupation at the time of the interview, Dylan realized that "there's a price you have to give up, . . . a stable home life to give up to be the king of the road, but you got to make that decision and you got to live with it" (182-184).

James. James approached the interview table, tall and striking, with deep blue eyes and an air of sadness and kindness that was perceptible. He made it clear from the start that he wasn't interested in the \$10 I offered him for his participation but that he just wanted to help. And help he did. His story was so informative and his insights were so helpful that I would have gladly given him any amount for his participation.

Forty-one years old at the time of the interview, James had been a truck driver on and off for most of his adult life. The last 14 years he had been driving OTR without interruption. James had five children, three with his present wife and two others, each from two previous failed marriages. His oldest child was 23, and his youngest was 6. He had been married to his present wife for 10 years.

For James, "this job was a destiny" (398). His father and two older brothers worked for the same trucking company that he did. Currently, his job was fairly suited to family life as he got home every weekend for the entire weekend and his seniority in the company allowed him freedom to get home when he needed to with options to work longer if he desired. He also was provided with a nice truck and hotel rooms to sleep in every night--a luxury almost unheard of in the truck driving industry.

But things weren't always this good. Just as his occupation was a destiny handed down from his father, he saw his role of dad and husband mirroring his own experience of having an absent father. His first marriage was clearly ruined "by the love of money

or the seemingly only way to get it” (218-219), and James suspected that “that might have been the ruin of my second marriage” (221-222). His second wife was a flight attendant and was always gone as well. Their child typically was left with relatives, and the family members “were strangers basically” (224). As a young truck driver and inexperienced father, free time was spent in bars and doing drugs: “I wasn’t really spending any time with my wife and zero with my children” (282-283). Yet James was secure in the notion that all he needed to do as a father was be the breadwinner:

Raina, . . .when she was one and a half, that marriage was over for that reason . . . I saw it happen in my own life, and I see the failure, the biggest part of it was my own, . . . thinking that I was doing them justice by going away. (226-228)

At 38 years of age, James finally hit bottom, and, together with his wife, they worked out a plan to get their lives together. They started attending church together and worked out various plans to keep the family healthy. They discussed the option of James finding a new job, but the money and insurance benefits were too important to pass up. Further, James felt that he was the type of person who “needs time alone in order to spend quality time with others” (430), and driving gives him this time so that, when he is at home, he wants to be a father.

While it is hard not to be suspicious about this sort of thinking, it appeared to be working for James. He now had custody of all of his five children and had a close relationship with each one: “When I’m home, I try to spend time with each one individually to build them up and let them know that I love them very much, and they have time to tell me things that are going on in their lives that they’d like to share with me” (173-175). On Friday nights, he would tuck each one in their beds and say prayers with them. On Saturday they would have family meetings where decisions were made

jointly so that “they suit not just one person more than the other but suit the family” (159-160). He helped with discipline and chores where he could and he always gave his wife time to get out of the house and spend time alone if she wished. When he was back on the road, he called every morning before school to help motivate his children, and he called every night to check on their day.

Things were better now but still not ideal. Recently he had received a letter from the second youngest daughter that said, “Dad, I love you very much, wish you were home more” (167). While he thought that “they understand what it is I’m trying to do--supply for our needs and furnish insurance” (206), he didn’t think that they or he would ever be satisfied until he “can be back home with the children every night or be there to wake them up every morning” (239-241). James believed that he had begun to do what he had to do to save his relationships with his children; however, he feared that “it’s hard to cover up scars that are deep in a child’s life when they grow up without their father” (317-318).

Ezra. In the 1-1/2 years that Ezra had been an OTR driver at the time of the interview, he had already seen the devastating effects of his absence on his family that so many of the other respondents described. Twenty-six years of age, Ezra had a 3-year-old son and a marriage that had ended. He didn’t have an apartment or a home, “I’m living in my truck basically” (18), and he kept his ex-wife’s address as a place to get mail. But that was not too much of a problem for Ezra—he was not off the road too often. His average tour lasted 3 weeks. However, his current run had lasted 6 weeks and counting.

Ezra described his relationship with his son as one of friendship: “He doesn’t know me like I want him to know me ‘cause I’m not around enough. He knows that I’m

his father because she tells him, [but] he looks at me like a real close friend” (113-116). Even this may be an overly optimistic appraisal of their relationship. Ezra reported that his son always cried when he picked him up upon return from the road--hardly indicative of a friendship.

While most of the respondents’ stories were sad in some ways, there was really nothing positive or redeeming in Ezra’s account. He recognized that he had missed everything critical in his child’s life from first steps to first words, but he felt powerless to do anything about it. His decision to start driving was initiated by “stress of money” (140), and now, even with a fatter paycheck, after the bills were paid, “I’ll only have a little bit of money left to last me while I’m out on the road” (165-166).

For Ezra, the only reason to drive OTR was to support his son and ex-wife. His financial woes had made it such that, even if his company could get him home more frequently, he would choose not to because he couldn’t afford to not have a good check. Many of the drivers interviewed expressed the same feeling of powerlessness, but for Ezra, it was an incontrovertible fact that, for the foreseeable future, all he could do was work and provide:

The only thing that I can say is it’s tough. We got to deal with it. I can only see for a driver to be on the road and have a family at home and loved ones--I don’t see it getting any better. And there’s nothing they can do to make it any better. That’s all. It’s something I think about every mile down the road. It tears me up (185-188).

Doug. Despite my best efforts at eliciting rich responses, Doug was in a hurry and really didn’t have a whole lot to say about being a truck driver and a father. At 43 years of age at the time of the interview, he had been married four times and had one biological child with his first wife and two step-children from his current wife. While

this was never stated explicitly, Doug's first marriage seemed to have ended because his wife wanted to move to another state to be with her sick mother and he could not because he did not want to leave his job. Doug's other two marriages were short lived and produced no children. It is not clear why these unions were dissolved. Doug claimed that, when he was married to his first wife (the mother of his daughter, who was then 3 years old), returning from the road "was just like a guy going to work 8 hours and coming home. . . . You just go to work and come home and start living" (86-87). It seemed to me to be a bit improbable that someone could leave for 2 weeks and return to everything being "normal." While he was on the road, he would call a few times a week, and when he was at home, he was "just kind of there being Dad" (96).

For many years now, Doug had owned his own truck, and with 20+ years of experience, he had been able to do a few more fatherly things. Once a year, he took his biological daughter on the road with him, and he spent 1 week per year camping with her. His daughter was in a ballet school, and his ex-wife videotaped her performances for him.

Doug felt that he was better off than most other OTR drivers. Other drivers are "gone a lot longer than I am and miss a lot more" (239). He got along well with his first wife, and he felt he had a good relationship with his daughter: "I got a cell phone, and if she needs me or wants something, she can call me" (230-231).

Bill. Bill approached the interview table after he finished his work out in the rest stop weight room. His physical strength was matched by his mental determination to be a good father, and he was eager to showcase this.

Thirty-six years old at the time of the interview, Bill had three children from two different women. He had a son and a daughter, 9 and 11 years old respectively, from his

first wife and a 2-year-old daughter from a now ex-girlfriend whom he met after his divorce. His divorce was not a direct result of his driving as it was with so many of the previous respondents. With 5 years of OTR experience, Bill had become a truck driver after years of marital discord.

Bill still had regular contact with his ex-wife and his children. His road trips lasted him 2 to 3 weeks, and between trips, he spent 2 to 3 days with his children. His relationship with his wife was amicable, and so her house was still somewhat of a home for Bill. When he came off the road, he did his best to leave the road behind: "I'm not a truck driver right now. . . . I'm a dad, and I'm home" (152-153). For Bill, there was a sense of urgency to "make up for all the time you've been gone in a short period of time" (158-159). He did this partially through conversation and family time--he helped with homework and discussed whatever had happened in his childrens' lives. But he compensated for lost time primarily by "getting my kids what they want" (355), and in return, his children treated him as if he hung the moon.

Bill did his best to focus on his job and detach himself from his family when it was time to go: "I just think about what I got to do because, if I think about anything else, I won't go. If I think about how much I want to be around them I won't go" (91-93). He still cried when he would leave though: "You miss a lot of your kids' lives being out here on this road" (375-376). For Bill, and for the rest as well, it's tough being an OTR driver, constantly either alone or surrounded by strangers.

Bill saw himself as "just a hard working guy out to make a living like everybody else" (237-238). He survived by resigning himself to being the best provider he could be, and like so many of the drivers before him, this decision was forced by financial

necessity: “They throw you in jail if you don’t pay your bills. . . . They don’t throw you in jail if you’re away from your family every now and then” (379-380). Bill seemed comfortable with where he was in life now, as a father and a man. It had certainly helped that he had an ex-wife who worked with him. But even more than that, Bill had adopted a philosophy of resilience that made things work in his mind:

We have to play the hand we’re dealt. But it’s not like winning or losing. In life, we just have to make choices and live with them. But once you’ve made the choice, just make the best of it, whether you’re a truck driver or whatever. Life is too short to not make the best of it. (388-391)

Terry. Terry was happy to be a truck driver but happier to be a father. He was married and one of only two respondents who remained married to his first wife and the mother of his children. In 10 years of marriage at the time of the interview, he had raised two children, a 7-year-old boy and a 5- year-old girl.

Terry had followed a very calculated plan in his life. He wanted to give his children the type of life he never had. With two abusive parents, he had been a wild child who was shipped between aunts and uncles several times a year. Consequently, he was working very hard to provide a stable home life for his kids with lots of love and discipline: “My family now has a home that’s paid for, the land is paid for, and they don’t have to move” (212-213). Both children were being home schooled and were far ahead of their peers: “I got two beautiful children that are well disciplined” (185). Terry said he was proud of what he had accomplished for his family.

His decision to become an OTR driver was bitter-sweet. It was a financial improvement over his previous job as a diesel mechanic; however, he was afraid to give up the closeness with his children that he had worked hard to create: “I was there when

both of them were born. . . . I'd never spent a night away from them 'til I started truck driving. . . . I was always there" (85-88). Now, he compensated for his absence by spending "all available time" (91) with his children. And when he was on the road, he still played the role of father to the best of his ability, "only difference is I do it over the phone" (113-114).

Terry readily admitted that he had made great sacrifices to support his family, "but we all have to do something to make a living" (217). He believed that his wife and children loved, respected, and understood his decisions and frequent absence. Without the support of his wife, Terry believed, there was no way this job could work: "I've got to give her credit. . . . She's a good woman. . . She does her job" (135-136).

A General Observation

As a bridge between these descriptions of the individual participants in this study and the report of my findings regarding the research questions, I want to make note of the commonly reported connection that developed between the men and their trucks. Nearly every driver exhibited a good deal of pride in his truck and a certain attachment to the particular truck he regularly drove. Trucks were typically reified as "she" or "my baby" and always were well cared for and clean. It was common to hear drivers complimenting each other via radio and commenting amongst themselves about their trucks or other rigs rolling by. In subsequent research, I discovered that most trucking companies assign particular trucks to drivers until the truck breaks down or the driver leaves. This arrangement is due to the commonly acknowledged attachment that results from a driver "knowing all there is to know about his truck." After I listened to various conversations about trucks, it seemed to me as if the truck is a spouse or child to the driver, obediently

serving the man who knows it best.

Chapter Four

FINDINGS

In this chapter, I address the two research questions outlined in Chapter One, namely, (a) how responsibilities regarding child-care issues are negotiated by the OTR driver with each return and departure and (b) how the driver reestablishes himself as a father figure after returning from a prolonged absence. In order to do this, I used Ouellet's (1994) classification of OTR drivers to sort the 12 men into groups of (a) workers, (b) super-truckers, and (c) truckers. In conducting my interviews, I found that each respondent fit rather neatly into one of these three types. Each type demonstrated a clear and distinct pattern of family interactions as well as a unique attitude about the dual role of driver and father. This categorization proved useful in organizing the data from the interviews and in describing the lives of the drivers. Each type of driver is discussed in terms of his fathering behavior on the road, upon his return, and again at his next departure.

The worker type of driver is by far the most represented in this study with 7 of 12 respondents clearly workers: Roberto, Rudy, Moses, Marcus, Ezra, Bill, and Terry. Only 2 of the 12 respondents, Edgar and Dylan, fell into the category of super-trucker. Of the 12 men interviewed, Gil, James, and Doug have been what I would categorize as the trucker type of driver throughout their careers, and Roberto moved from worker to trucker after losing all connections with his family.

The Worker on the Road

The worker spends more time on the road than any other type of driver. For the worker in this study, more than 90% of his average month is spent away from his wife

and kids. At the time of the interviews, all but one of these worker drivers was divorced from the mother of his children. Because of this high divorce rate, I asked the respondents to think back to the time when they were married and living with their families when responding to my questions. All of the drivers were readily able to do this.

While on the road, the drivers I identified as workers left all responsibilities, child-rearing and otherwise, in the hands of their wives: "When you're gone, you can't really do it" (Marcus, 127). All respondents reported that their wives were responsible for the handling of finances and had free reign to spend the family money in whatever fashion they deemed necessary. Several workers added that any unanticipated spending needs would be discussed first over the phone.

While the men were on the road, discipline of the children was handled by the wives as well. Some men feared that their children were being allowed to "slide" a bit when the wives were in charge: "When they do something wrong, Daddy ain't getting a hold of them" (Terry, 172-173). But these men accepted this as unavoidable if unfortunate: "Sooner or later the kids start losing track of Dad . . . because Dad's not there to supervise. . . . The kids just start doing things on their own without thinking about Father" (Roberto, 87-91).

The workers kept in better contact with their families while on the road than did the other drivers. Not surprisingly, the sole means of maintaining this connection was the phone: "I called every night, I still call every night" (Marcus, 64). And again, with Moses, "I call my wife every day" (Moses, 102). For some divorced workers no longer living with their children, efforts to stay emotionally connected with their kids involved phone calls: "On the weekends when I'm home, I call my daughter. . . . I get visitation

with her every other weekend, so in order to get visitation on the other weekends, I call her” (Moses, 101-104). Keeping in touch via phone was “one of the most important things for a truck driver because, until you get back home, you’re around nobody but strangers” (Bill, 125-126). Most drivers mentioned buying phone cards and calling late at night in order to make this more affordable. Typically, the workers called once a day, sometimes at prearranged times. For most workers, calls were made whenever there was time: “I just pick up the phone and call . . . when I’m getting loaded or when I stop and get fuel” (Moses, 108-114). Even with such regular phone contact, workers felt that their responsibilities were eroding with the passage of time: “A lot of times, I didn’t find out about decisions until it’s like a month later” (Rudy, 101-102). And in Roberto’s words, “It got to the point where my opinion didn’t matter anymore. . . . That’s just how it ended up. . . . It just started going down hill” (Roberto, 134-136). Eventually, this worker’s children developed problems in school, and when Roberto tried to discuss this with them, their response was, “Well Dad, you were never home” (Roberto, 172).

The Worker Returns and Departs

Especially for the men described as workers, being at home meant being a dad: “I’m not a truck driver now, I’m a dad and I’m home” (Bill, 152-153). “When I go home, I pick him up. . . . I just spend time with them every time I go home” (Ezra, 44-46). For Moses, “I get to see my child every other weekend, and I spend every moment that I’m home with my child and my wife. . . . We spend the whole weekend together” (Moses, 73-75). For Marcus, “When they was little, . . . [I] just spent all my time with them. . . . They were just my life” (Marcus, 151-153). Returning home involved preparation: “You got to get ready to be Dad again” (Bill, 260). The driver returns from

an environment of solitude and hard driving to an emotionally charged family life where prolonged absence is made up for in a short period of time: “You try to make up for 2 or 3 weeks of being gone in 2 days. . . . That’s hard to do, you never get caught up” (Bill, 158-159). And again, “Two days is no time after being out 3 weeks” (Ezra, 146-147). Most workers recall time at home as being entirely devoted to passively doing whatever the rest of the family wanted to do, “maybe go out and picnic or go visit relatives or, you know, just do things together” (Roberto, 53-54). And for Terry, “I spend as much time with them [the kids] as I can in what short time I do have with them. . . . I try to make sure all available time is for them” (Terry, 84, 91).

Workers also reported taking time at home to plan for the upcoming weeks of father absence. Usually this took the form of budgeting and scheduling doctors’ appointments and so on: “What we do, before I leave we have a budget, we make up a budget for every week” (Rudy, 93-94). And again, for Moses, thinking back to when he was married to the mother of his child, “Before she makes any decision, we talk about it together and decide together . . . when I come in on the weekend” (Moses, 145-153). Most workers and their wives showed constructive efforts to take care of as much as possible while both parents were present, leaving little guess work for the wife at home. Even so, for some workers, all planning was left to the wife: “Most of the time, that’s left up to my wife because I’m out there” (Terry, 133). And again, “She runs the house. When you’re gone, you really can’t do it. I guess that’s why we’re divorced” (Marcus, 127-128).

Several workers used technology to their advantage in an attempt to keep up with important events in their children’s lives. Three different men told of how their wives

videotaped ballet recitals, football games, and wrestling matches that occurred when the driver was on the road. For these men, part of the time at home was spent proudly reviewing these performances with their children.

When it was approaching time to leave, many workers described a process of mental preparation: “You always have to start detaching yourself a little bit because it’s hard” (Bill, 78). Several men described the pain of pushing away from “clingy” children and wives who try to understand but remain lonely. Especially for fathers of young children, there were always questions about why Dad has to leave. For every worker, leaving was replete with pain and anxiety for the whole family.

I’d say it’s a bad situation for any father. . . . It’s not very good for a child not to have both parents available. It’s hard on both the wife and the child. The child doesn’t get the full effect of you being a father, and you don’t get the full effect of being a father. I still cry when I leave my kids. (Moses, 246-279)

While most men reported enjoying fond returns early in their careers, most, driven by financial need, could not ignore the loss of 2 days’ wages while off the road: “It’s the only job in the area that I live in that I could have the income that I have right now” (Moses, 228-229). And for Ezra, even if it was possible to get home more frequently, “then I wouldn’t make the money that I need for me and my son” (Ezra, 158-159). This was a source of anxiety for many workers whose idea of fathering was paying the bills. For many men, this anxiety kept them on the road longer than they wanted, picking up extra loads when they were available, and for most it was a precipitating factor for their divorces.

[My wife] didn’t like it that well. . . . I would get out of [driving] right now if I could find a job that would suit me and I could be home every day. There’s a lot of guys out here that love being away from their families, but I don’t like it. I wish I could be there every day. (Moses, 228-232)

For the worker, then, we see that there is indeed a problem with the allocation of time between work and family. Daly (1993) has suggested that some men may discard the ideal notion of father altogether and flee from involvement in the face of such time constraints. Not so for these drivers: The workers in this study did what they could to stay involved. Time at home was spent selflessly on the family, and when they were on the road, communications were kept open via the telephone. Nonetheless, the reality was that, after being gone for so long, the men found that they just couldn't get caught up. These drivers were honest in reckoning their family problems. Few accounts of excuse or justification emerged in my interviewing the workers. These men believed that they had made a choice that would better their life and the lives of their families. Workers believed that they would keep connected with their spouses and children. But they were mistaken. Many workers appeared to excuse their loss of family connectedness by appealing to defeasibility but not in the sense that they believed someone else had misled them. More likely, the worker seemed to trace his problems back to faulty decisions on his part. His thought process seemed similar to the process of self-transformation described in the Fox et al. (2001) study of batterers. That is, just as the batterers experienced a critical moment of self-recognition, at some point before these interviews these workers too had recognized their failings, many suffering through divorce. These truckers seemed to have been through the process of remorse, responsibility and attempts at reparation, but unlike Fox and her colleagues' batterers, these men had no court-ordered therapy sessions to help them reach redemption and reconstruction of their lives (Fox et al., 2001). For these truckers, reconstruction meant manageable despair. The

workers kept on driving and providing for their estranged kids without the reward of family connectedness. Of the seven workers in this study, five started over with another wife, hoping that this time they could make it work. However, like Rubin's (1967) blue-collar men, the worker's social position and occupation created within the family problems whose potential solutions were limited by the job's required absence from the family.

The Super-Trucker on the Road

The drivers I placed in the category of super-truckers spent only slightly less time on the road than did the workers--88% as compared to 91%. The difference between these men and workers rested in their motivation for staying on the road and their attitude about the consequences of their absence on their family. Super-truckers enjoy being on the road and even think that being away helps them be better fathers: "It pulls you away from your family, but on the positive side, you got it to look forward to, to spend that quality time" (Edgar, 231-232). And for Dylan fulfillment of his personal goals was a prerequisite for being a good father: "The last of the cowboys, that's what I wanted to be, . . . but there's a price you have to give up. . . . There's a stable home life to give up to be the king of the road, but you got to make that decision and you got to live with it" (Dylan, 180-184).

Unlike the workers, who shared some decision making with their wives, responsibilities for child-rearing and financial matters were handled entirely by the super-truckers' wives while they were on the road. As one driver put it, "Everyday decisions, that's hers. . . . They're the one's eating the food and wearing the clothes" (Dylan, 190-191). And again, "She'd get the check in the mail. . . . She cashes it, or she puts it in the

check book. It was taken care of” (Dylan, 198-199). For Edgar, “Should something arise while I was at home, then I was the one who dealt with it, [but] she handled everything while I was out on the road” (Edgar, 117-120). Contact was maintained via the phone, and one super-trucker reported having an Internet connection in his truck that allowed him to stay in touch with his family. Another super-trucker did fathering on the road by collecting post-cards and taking pictures of interesting geographical points to take back to his son. But, primarily, fathering was equated with providing: “I made the money” (Edgar, 120).

The Super-Trucker Returns and Departs

For the super-trucker, returning home was less like switching hats and more like hanging up the hat. While some time at home was spent doing what the wife wanted to do, much of the super-trucker’s time at home was spent resting or working: “The first thing I did when I got home was take a shower and go to bed” (Dylan, 104). Edgar described quality time with his son as watching his son clean his rig in exchange for spending money. For Dylan, who no longer lived with his family, special arrangements often had to be made: “I have to reschedule my route--that’s why I’m looking at the map--I’m going to Houston now, so I’m trying to get a load going down to Tampa to see my kid” (Dylan 123-125). However, earlier in his child’s life, Dylan was virtually uninvolved with his child because “Jr. was 3 years old, so we couldn’t take him a whole lot of places--like a father and son thing, you know” (Dylan, 73-74). This type of thinking fits neatly into Scott and Lyman’s (1968) excuse categories, denial of injury, and further, it resembles Daly’s (1996) observation that many men flee from involvement with their children. In this case, avoiding fathering seems less likely a response to

dissonance between ideal and real and more likely a simple laziness and lack of creativity. Three-year-old children love doing almost anything with their dads.

Where workers described feelings of sadness when departing, super-truckers adopted a more detached, unfeeling attitude. To them, they were just doing their job, and it wasn't their fault that their wives and kids couldn't handle it: "She didn't like [that I was leaving] so I told her, you married a trucker, you knew me before we got married, you knew what the life is like" (Dylan, 77-78). And for Edgar's wife, "it got real lonely for her, . . . but, you know, this is my livelihood, this is what I do for a living" (Edgar, 127-129). Like the workers, this absence resulted in the loss of family, but unlike the workers, the loss for super-truckers was not problematic. Super-truckers were quick to blame both the wife for failing to take responsibility for the family and also the companies that they worked for: "Trucking companies have this thing about sending you home. . . . They don't want to do it" (Dylan, 132-133).

Super-truckers, then, rely heavily on justifications to explain away all responsibility for their inability to be a father or a husband. Super-truckers are quick to deny injury and even to deny a victim when the family begins to crumble. These drivers are wont to point out that they have done their part in providing for the family--a sufficient condition for being a good father. Rather than make any effort to manage the difficult balance between fathering and providing, the super-trucker kicks the fulcrum out from under the balance and claims the two are the same--end of discussion.

The super-trucker's solution is no more or less disastrous than the worker's failed attempts to do fathering. Both tend to lose the opportunity altogether. Whereas the worker tends to pick up the pieces and keep going, the super-trucker denies there are any

pieces to pick up. This driver is firmly embedded in the mythology of the truck driver. He is likely to cast himself in the role of victim, as having been abandoned by his own family for simply doing his job. Thus, the super-trucker may be the king of the road and a hero in his own mind, but he has completely broken from his cultural expectations, is without love and yet denies feeling lonely.

The Trucker on the Road

Both the worker and the super-trucker's massive commitments to work demonstrate a work spillover into family life that "interferes negatively with family life" and "leads to less available energy with which to pursue non-work activities" (Small & Riley, 1990, p. 52). The men I denoted as truckers, on the other hand, seem to have found some compromise that keeps them committed to both work and family with fewer negative consequences in both arenas. The trucker personifies the principle of the Golden Mean of the road: everything in moderation. In this study, I found that he spends the least amount of time on the road (i.e., 81%, 10% less than the worker averaged). Related to this, the trucker spends more time directly involved in the lives of his children.

Like the other drivers, for the trucker, the phone is the primary means of connection between father and family. Two truckers, unlike all other respondents, carried cell phones to maximize the amount of contact they could have with their families. Truckers, however, had a more specific purpose in mind in phoning home to family members. Unlike workers and super-truckers, truckers used this time to actively participate in family decisions and to talk with their children.

I would normally call in the morning when I knew that they were getting up and getting ready for school. I'd call then so I could say hello to everyone and, if there was a problem, then I could speak to that or if they just wanted to speak to

me. Then again I would call in the afternoon, maybe after they had gotten home from school, the children, and then maybe call my wife later that night when I got where I was. (James, 102-106)

An OTR driver, regardless of type, is still gone a great deal of time, and naturally then, even for the trucker, most daily responsibilities were left for his wife. One trucker, Doug, was fortunate enough to have a wife who worked for his dispatcher. This made making contact and managing finances that much easier.

Two truckers also reported taking their children with them over the road during summer vacations as a way of bonding. Doug reported that he takes his teenage daughter with him for at least 1 month every year: "She likes to go, and I like to have her along" (Doug, 184). While other drivers had mentioned child ride-alongs as a long-term goal, only truckers had actually made it happen.

The Trucker Returns and Departs

For truckers, like workers but even more so, returning home was truly shifting gears. These men verbalized a process of preparing to go home so that when they got there they were not just physically present but mentally available. One trucker, James, described stopping for a bite to eat and a cup of coffee whenever he pulled into town just before he returned home. This break acted as a transition period and worked to buffer any negative spillover from the fast pace of OTR driving.

[In the past] I'd walk in the door and they'd expect me to be the loving husband, open arms, and I'd expect them to be there too, and it just wasn't that way. And so I found myself, sometimes I would stop just before I got home and pull over in a place like this and sit down and have a sandwich and a drink, coffee or something. Just kind of get away from the roar of the truck and the annoying people around you and the stopping and starting, that sort of thing. Just give me time to collect my thoughts, to really do what I was thinking about doing before, . . . and it really helped. It'd give me time to unwind and really adjust instead of going home and just changing from the go, go, go to the I'm home, home, home

kind of thing. . . . When you've been at the wheel for 10 or 12 hours and done nothing but that, . . . you're pretty wired, you're pretty stressed and tense. It wouldn't take much to trigger off a bad reaction. So I found myself coming home with an attitude and wanting to be the loving husband and loving father but being just the opposite. That had to change. (James, 435-451)

Truckers were clearly more involved with their children when at home than were other drivers. Their descriptions of at-home activities were richer and more detailed. Truckers reported spending time with each child individually, saying prayers, reviewing homework, playing ball, and engaging in meaningful conversations about private issues like dating and friendship. James talked about family meetings where "we do everything jointly and try to hash them out where they suit not just one person more than the other but suit the family so that the outcome is for the best" (James, 159-160).

Truckers believed that one of their primary roles as father was breadwinner. Therefore, they would head back to work like the rest of the drivers. While there was sadness and tears when it was time to go, for the truckers and their families this seemed more manageable. An understanding and acceptance of why the dad was leaving seemed to have facilitated this easier departure: "They understand what it is I'm trying to do-- supply for our needs and furnish insurance" (James, 206). And regarding Gil's children, "They know I'm a hard worker. . . . I'm a good father. . . . I provide, and they get everything they want" (Gil, 114-118). And for Doug, "Me and my daughter already got a good relationship together. . . . If she needs me or wants something, she can call. Many over-the-road drivers are gone a lot longer than I am and miss a lot more" (Doug, 229-239).

The trucker is happy to get back on the road. Part of their contentedness lies in not "leaving a lot of unfinished business at home" (James, 220). They reported being

able to go out and fulfill their provider obligations knowing that they had an emotionally rich father relationship to return to. And, like the super-trucker, there was some magical feeling to being on the road, doing something different than in-home fathering. Truckers reported enjoying and even needing the solitude of OTR driving in order to have a good family life.

Right now, everything's all right. I know, being at home, around each other and everything, the tension gets high. But since I've been gone, it's kind of settled down, you know. We talk a whole lot better. When I was at home, you know, everyday being around each other, . . . now that I'm out on the road, it's just like "forget about it, we can talk." (Gil, 123-128)

The trucker is the driver who has most successfully balanced the dual demands of father and provider. He has done this by drawing a clear line between the two while still being able to do both at the same time when necessary. When the trucker is home, he is firmly involved in his role as father. And when he is on the road and away from home, he is able to step into the role of father. Yet, he is on the road because he loves his job and because, like his family, it is an important part of his identity. Most importantly, for the trucker, providing may be a necessary condition of fathering, but it is not a sufficient condition of being an OTR dad.

Behind the balanced trucker was a supportive and understanding family. The interviewed truckers always made mention of their somewhat lonely but devoted wife and older children. Marital harmony manifested itself in concerted efforts to stay out of debt, budget, and make other similarly reasoned choices together. This seemed to make it easier for the driver to become a trucker rather than a worker. I wonder how many workers could have been happier truckers if only they had started without debt and other financially burdening choices.

A Closing Observation

By analyzing the linguistic tales provided during my interviews with truck drivers who have children, I hoped to add some clarity to the OTR driver's seemingly inevitable problem of balancing the provider role with fathering. I found in this study, for instance, that the *denial of the victim* justification was typically employed by drivers who claimed of their wives that "she knew she married a trucker." Likewise, the *sad tale* technique often was employed by truck drivers as they recounted their troubled childhood and tough luck in early adulthood to justify their financial and marital problems.

In summary, I have demonstrated in this chapter that nearly every driver I interviewed had experienced some loss of meaningful connections with his family, frequently with devastating consequences.

Chapter Five

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

All of the drivers in this study fell into at least one of two traps. The first trap is that their desire to avoid the despair of the typical blue-collar job led them to embrace a precarious mythology about the OTR driver as asphalt cowboy and good provider, and the second trap is that their efforts to be more than poor kept them working long hours and eroded their connection to family and community. In either case, the end result was despair without blue-collar comforts, loss without accompanying long-term reward.

Discussion

In Chapter Two, I discussed Zvonkovic's (2001) study of truck drivers. Her research uncovers themes similar to those found in the present study. There are important differences, however. Briefly, Zvonkovic's families were all intact and seemed to be functioning fairly well, given the extraordinary complications of such occupations as truck driver and fisherman. The families in the present study were not so fortunate, as we have seen. However, those families in this study that are intact and functioning fairly well exhibited many of the same characteristics, communication styles, and attitudes as Zvonkovic's families. In comparing Zvonkovic's truck drivers to the drivers in the present study, it is important to note one major difference in samples--namely, Zvonkovic's drivers all worked for the same company and all had the same 5-day work schedule that routinely brought them home on the weekend. As we saw earlier, in my sample, only one driver had a routine schedule that brought him back home on the weekend. This sample difference likely explains some of the differences between Zvonkovic's findings and mine--namely, because one set of drivers had predictability and

control over their absence and return and the others did not. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the notion of individual control of time (Daly, 1996) and a driver's ability (real or imagined) to influence structural and spatial control of work constraints is important in reconciling the struggle between work time and family time. The ability to put to rights the conflict between the ideal and the actual fathering-self hinged on the driver's ability to control both time and space.

In the qualitative interviews of the OTR fathers in the present study, dissonance between the ideal and the actual fathering-self was quite evident. While this conflict exists to some degree for all men who are fathers, for most it is a manageable dilemma. The men in this study knew on some level that their stories contained elements of both failure and success in the dual role of provider and father. The respondents also knew that, for the most part, things had not turned out the way they had planned. In fact, most had managed their dual roles with disastrous results. That is, most of the men believed that their better providing would make them better fathers. They had promised their wives and children, and themselves, that more money would make them a happier family. But it didn't. In fact, for most, the occupation required absent fathering and quite typically resulted in little or no fathering. When given the opportunity to talk about anything they wanted, it was this disparity between expectations and actions that the respondents typically chose as their topic. With plenty of time to think about their troubles, these men were happy to share them with a stranger.

As the men looked to explain the forces that led them to the occupation, their failed marriages, and diminished roles as father and husband, they turned to the use of accounts (Scott & Lyman, 1968). These men, faced with overwhelming evidence of

having failed in the roles of father and husband used accounts liberally in an effort to rescue some self-worth from an otherwise busted-up life.

In analyzing the data and discussing the two research questions, I discovered that each type of driver demonstrated different approaches to meting out father- and caregiver-related responsibilities and reestablishing himself as a father. Workers and super-truckers left nearly every responsibility to their at-home spouses and found it very difficult, if not impossible, to reestablish themselves as fathers. This formula for fathering always ended in divorce and often in estrangement from their children. Truckers, on the other hand, took a larger role in handling family responsibilities and worked more successfully at establishing themselves as a father both when at home and on the road. While truckers also experienced divorce, all seemed to have learned from their mistakes and were currently married. One interviewed trucker had never been divorced.

Each type of driver exhibited different classes of problems and corresponding different attitudes regarding the dual role of father and long-haul driver. Workers, driven by financial necessity, despaired over their necessary absence from their family and typically experienced a gradual loss of connection with their wives and children. Super-truckers also lost touch with their families, but to them this was an acceptable loss and simply an unavoidable part of being an asphalt cowboy. Truckers created a working balance between their dual roles that minimized conflicts. An extra day at home and a higher quality of fathering behavior made all the difference for these men. What conflicts did arise were managed through complex and multi-dimensional problem solving.

Despite the driver types' differences, there were several themes that emerged across the boards. This is not surprising given that every driver, regardless of type, had chosen the job of OTR driver and consequently was away from home almost constantly. While some of these themes were discussed in Chapter Four, they deserve revisiting because of their importance for future research.

Technology. Technology played a large role in many of the drivers' efforts to stay connected to their families and do fathering. Not surprisingly, all drivers used the phone to keep in touch, and some utilized the now universally affordable and accessible cell phone to make this connection stronger and more available: "I do the same things on the road as if I was at home, . . . only difference is I do it over the phone" (Terry, 112-113) And for Ezra, if there's a problem at home, his wife "calls the company and the company sends the message, and I'll stop at the nearest truck stop or phone--call her back, talk to them" (Ezra, 77-78). Some drivers even had computers with e-mail capability and used this to touch base with family members. While none of the respondents mentioned this, there are now several web sites devoted to OTR drivers and their families. At these sites, drivers and their families can chat with others in similar positions and share thoughts, feelings, and strategies for survival. Many drivers are now outfitted with sleeper-cabs and condo packages. These rigs provide some of the comforts of home, and this makes it easier to bring along wives and children (Machalaba, 1993).

Technology made reestablishment of the father role upon return easier as well. Several of the respondents spent time at home watching home movies of events and milestones they had missed while on the road. First steps or ballet steps, these recorded images at least partially made up for not being there in person: "I can't be at every ball

game, but I make sure she videotapes it, and when I come home, I watch it with my son. . . . That way I'm not missing out. . . . That's the great thing about video" (Dylan, 271-279).

Reparational scripts. In a study of Canadian fathers, Daly (1993) described a pattern of men's using their own fathers as a negative role model for parenting. While reparation can apply to any relationship (Fox, Sayers, & Bruce, 2001), in this study it refers to the efforts of the drivers to provide better home lives than they had for their children. Reparational scripts (that is, repair of the parenting relationship experienced as a child) ran through most of the men's interviews. Most men chose to accept the difficulties of OTR truck driving and the consequences for their father role because the occupation paid more than any other job they had worked in the past or could work in the foreseeable future. In Moses' words, "It's the only job in the area that I live in that I could have the income that I have right now" (Moses, 229). And for Rudy, "I'm out there turning those wheels so I can provide for her and my son, give him a better family life than I had" (Rudy, 186-187). Terry came from an abusive family where he was shipped around frequently, and consequently, he works very hard to provide a stable home: "My family now has a home that's paid for, the land is paid for, and they don't have to move" (Terry, 212-213). This financial lucrativeness was one form of reparation.

Reparational scripts also emerged as drivers of all types recognized that they were recreating the father-absent childhood they had had with their own children. This realization sometimes resulted in driver efforts to get home more often and be as involved with their children as possible. In James's words,

My father was a driver and he was never home. He was never there to tell me that

he loved me. . . . I saw that I was wearing my father's shoes, . . . and I definitely wanted to change that in my children's lives. (James, 477-484)

Dylan talked about educating his child “‘cause I don't want him to turn out like me and my father” (Dylan, 137). Frequently enough, though, drivers hadn't gotten much further than realizing they were following in their father's footsteps.

The problem of Jonah--Embracing the provider role. The notion of reparational scripts, especially in the financial form mentioned above, is closely related to the idea of fathering as providing. As mentioned above, nearly all of the men in this study held some form of the belief that being a good provider was a necessary, and often sufficient, condition for fathering. When asked why he chose a job that kept him away from his family, Edgar stated simply, “There [are] no decent local jobs making the same type of money” (Edgar, 207). James' family “understands what it is I'm trying to do--supply for our needs and furnish insurance” (James, 205-207). However, it is important to note that these same men entered into the fathering role with expectations of living up to some version of the nurturant father: “Even though I can't be there every minute of every day, I want them to know that I care, and it is important to me the things that they're going through” (James, 486-487). I say “some version” because nurturant behavior for these men deviated somewhat from the middle-class version of the same. That is, these dads were not taking their kids to see ice capades or large scale Disney productions. Rather, they expressed interest in teaching their kids martial arts and car mechanics. While some drivers were in tune with the new culture of fatherhood (LaRossa, 1988), which highlights the opportunities fathers have to be intimately involved with their children in the home, most were insulated from this by their status of blue-collar worker. That is,

intimate involvement with children for blue-collar dads is often neither something that is expected from them nor a luxury they could afford even were they interested.

More common for working- than middle-class fathers was a sense that one's work was an expression of family roles. It was their status as husbands and especially fathers that frequently led them to take or keep the jobs they were in, [even when these jobs kept them from their families]. (Cohen, 1993, p. 19)

This is clearly the way most drivers thought, even though this standard quickly grew old with the wives and girlfriends left at home raising children alone. Similar to the middle-class men of other studies (Daly, 1993; LaRossa, 1988), the OTR drivers quickly found themselves both falling short of their fathering expectations for themselves and failing similar expectations held by wives and children: “[Being gone], it’s affecting my relationship with him. . . . As far as getting closer with him, . . . he doesn’t know me like I want him to know me ‘cause I’m not around enough” (Ezra, 91-114). The resulting personal dissonance between ambitiously adopted cultural expectations of self and the actual self has resulted in a number of notable outcomes. While some participants in this study manipulated their use of time and restructured their family lives to allow living more ideally with the family, most simply abandoned the ideals. Talking about his month-long absence from his family, Ezra said, “This is something I can’t change. It’s been going on for years and years. The only thing I can say is it’s tough. We got to deal with it” (Ezra, 184-185). And for Terry, “we all have to do something to make a living” (Terry, 217).

Ideals were replaced with the “pseudo-stupidity . . . of Jonah” (Maslow, 1996). Just as the biblical Jonah attempted to evade his destiny, these dads exchanged the full intensity of the fathering experience, replete with its difficulties, for a safer, fatalistic and

rigidly held belief that providing is fathering. Like Rubin's (1976) blue-collar men, the truck drivers in the present study often would redefine success so that it was more compatible with their modest accomplishments in the father role. And for most, it was easier yet to simply turn a blind eye to their shortcomings in the father role: "It's better to forget about things that bother you" (Rubin, 1976, p. 29). The husbands in the present study, like Zvonkovic's (2001) fishermen and truck drivers, all of whom "strongly identified with breadwinning, . . . [and] projected themselves into the future" rather than deal with "the emotionally ripe present" (p. 144).

For some of the drivers in the present study, being the hero of the road was enough, and low levels of aspiration at home were acceptable to them. In turn, these narrowed down expectations of self became "powerful shapers of [the men's] evaluations of experience" (Fox et al., 2000). Despite a nearly 100% divorce rate and near total absence from their children, these men deemed their fathering performance as good: "They know I love them, I know they love me" (Marcus, 107). Moses stated he is proud of his parenting and claimed that his daughter sees him as a role model: "I try to be a good moral leader to my daughter because I know that that's not going to be taught in school" (Moses, 178-179). According to Gil, "they think I'm a good father. I provide. They get everything they want" (Gil, 116-117).

As the authors of one study of the provider-role (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001) mentioned, "Although providing may represent a culturally valued role for fathers, in individual families and fathers' lives, providing is not always explicitly appreciated" (p. 85). Deinhart and Daly (1997) found that some fathers "would relinquish their daily involvement at home to secure long-term financial stability. At the same time, these men

stressed the importance of 'providing' for their families and how they saw it as one way of being involved" (p. 155). This certainly seems to apply to the men in this study, but I would add that these OTR drivers were working to secure short-term financial stability alone.

Several studies (Christiansen & Palkovitz, 2001; Stearns, 1991) have attempted to shed some optimistic light on the provider role and free it from the negative connotations that it has taken on in this new culture of nurturant fathering. In these studies bread-winning is portrayed as active, responsible, emotionally invested, demanding, expressive, and measuring of real devotion. For the truckers in the present study, this conception of the father as provider accurately describes those men; providing is a valued form of parental involvement. However, for the largest groups of truck drivers, the workers and super-truckers, the value placed upon the provider-role by the men proved to be devastating to their fathering and husbanding.

It is not uncommon for working-class fathers to express a desire to be more involved with their children but, because of the salience of the provider role and time demands created by real economic necessity, not have the opportunity for much at-home interaction (Palkovitz et al., 1998). Nowhere is this more evident than in the responses of the worker drivers interviewed in this study. Driven by desires to attain the outward symbols of middle-class status, many of these men took on significant consumer debt early in life, worked hard to pay down this debt, then lost their wives and gained child support payments in the process. While initially these men may have freely chosen to be "provider-role over-performers" (Bernard, 1981), their intoxication with big paychecks and easy credit was quickly replaced with a simple and overwhelming need for cash.

For blue-collar men in general, and truck drivers specifically, the provider role is an inescapable part of being a dad. Yet it is a role that is underappreciated for its difficulties and the sacrifices it necessitates. To embrace the provider role as the sole route for doing fathering is to embrace the danger of becoming a father in name only.

The problem of time. Daly (1993) commented that work has a dominant claim on family time. Most fathers struggle between spending time providing for their families and spending time with their families. In this study, the relationship between the dual roles of provider and father often was cast in terms of the negotiation of time. That is, good time management often made for better fathering while still adequately providing: “Everyone has 24 hours in a day, and it’s how you spend it--but it seems to fly. . . . Before you know it, you’re back in your truck and rolling up the road “ (James, 186-188). Conversely, failure in the father role often was explained in terms of mismanaged time: “Leaving a lot of unfinished business at home, . . . I believe that that might have been a lot of the ruin of my second marriage” (James, 219-222). And just below the surface of the interview conversation was the idea that perhaps wives and husbands had different concepts of time. A father’s urge to provide represents an understanding of time that differs from his wife’s desire to have her husband spend more time doing fathering. This finding is noteworthy in that the failings, and rare successes, of these men are not only reflected in societal norms gathered from the media but also are contained in the criticism of their spouses and children.

According to role theory (LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993), the expectations of significant others are of great importance in shaping the enactment of one’s father role and the construction of meaning within this role. Stated differently, the social acts of the

father cannot be understood “except with reference to the positions of mother, child, and so on” (Stryker, 1959). Of interest in the present study are the differing perspectives on time between family players (Daly, 1993). Like the middle-class families discussed by Daly, the men of the present study demonstrate an attitude of “time as a commodity to be spent wisely” (Daly, 1993, p. 468) towards family time that differs from the more complex understanding of time shared by their wives. When drivers took the role of the other and focused, with their spouses, on quality of time as opposed to quantity of time, outcomes were usually positive. However, more typically, men heard their wives’ complaints and internalized these proposed shortcomings, creating a personal dissonance between the ideal fathering self and the actual fathering self. This, in turn, frequently led them to discard any notions of the ideal in favor of adopting a provider-role account of justification. That is, many of the drivers considered providing food and shelter to be a sufficient condition for being a good father.

Related to this issue is the idea of individual control of time. Similar to the men discussed in Daly’s (1993) study of middle-class men, the fathers in the present study employed varying attitudes towards the control of time on a *humanistic* to *fatalistic* continuum. With what little discretionary time that was available to the OTR drivers, some exerted a great deal of control over their time while others, more fatalistic in posture, entered into their time commitments on the basis of obligation, compulsion, and coercion. While all OTR drivers face serious constraints on their time, attitudes about time did play a role in the successes and failures of men attempting to do fathering. It’s worth mentioning that the men’s wives’ effort to organize and facilitate good use of time appears to have been instrumental in doing good fathering: “I’ve got to give her credit.

She's a good woman anyway. She does her job" (Terry, 135-136). In Zvonkovic's (2001) study, one fisherman reported that his leaving was not hard on the family because "his family structure provided relatively high support and low stress" (p. 145). For a few drivers in this study, having good (i.e., self-sufficient and supportive) wives made for successful fathering and husbanding.

In past studies (e.g., Robinson, 1977), time has been treated as a quantifiable resource that operates like dollars in an accounting system. These studies demonstrate that the way men spend their time in the family has changed little over the past 25 years. According to a review of this literature (Pleck, 1995), it was found consistently that men have spent about one third the time that mothers do in engagement time with children and in household labor. It is unclear why this is the case, why men seem reluctant to reflect cultural demands for more father involvement in their personal lives (Daly, 1996). Daly (1996) has suggested several explanations. One possible explanation is that "men and women have fundamentally different frameworks that structure their choices with respect to paid work and family work" (p. 466). Accordingly,

women are more likely to see their commitments to jobs and children in terms of a trade-off involving ongoing choices, men are more likely to view their commitments to work and parenting as independent of each other and do not view themselves as having to make the choice between the two (p. 466).

As a result of these differing frameworks, women are more likely to experience conflict in balancing work and family and to feel that their husbands unfairly are not doing enough to help. In this view, men do not believe that an unequal distribution of time is problematic until they are told it is by their wives.

Daly (1993) mentions a second explanation for the continuing disparity between

men's and women's allocation of work and family time. This second explanation "focuses on the gap between what fathers think about the fatherhood role and what fathers actually do" (p. 466). Fathers think that they should follow the cultural expectations of the new nurturant father. However, these fathers feel that they are unable to do this because of structural constraints such as work hours and the need for a certain level of income (Daly, 1993) or they are unwilling to do so because "they do not find the idea all that attractive" (LaRossa, 1988, p. 454). Some men experience this conflict between what is expected and what is deemed possible as a "personal dissonance between the ideal or possible fathering self and the real self, with the result that the father may flee from involvement and discard the ideal" (Daly, 1996, p. 466).

Whatever the explanation, the important thing to note is that men experience the dual demands of culture to provide and to nurture as being at least somewhat contradictory. The struggle to realize the fulfillment promised to the new nurturant father requires an increase in the amount of things a father must do in the day. This new busyness added to already existing struggles in the family and at work seems impossible for the men to reconcile, rendering change in fathering behavior slow at best.

The problem of meaning for the isolated individual. All of the cultural myths of the truck driver have created an oversimplified cultural understanding of a segment of the population that we actually know very little about. The role of myth and the image of the driver as a self-sacrificing hero emerged frequently as an account of justification and an excuse for failed marriages and mediocre fathering: "Some women can handle it and some can't" (Dylan, 76). Similar to the *ex post facto* aligning actions of batterers (Wolf-Smith & LaRossa, 1992), whereby social actors attempt to mend breaks between socially

established norms and deviance from these norms, truck drivers engage in dismissals, excuses, and justifications with regularity: “My wife didn’t like [my frequent absence] so I told her, ‘You married a trucker; you knew me before we got married, you knew what the life is like’” (Dylan, 77-78).

For the OTR driver, solitude and loneliness are the industry standards. Like Hamlet’s student friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are happy that they are not too happy, the heroes of the road accept their solitude as a kind of *heroic selflessness* (Bellah, 1985) and appeal to their heroic individualism to account for their self-imposed break with societal expectations and its accompanying isolation. While not all drivers embraced the idea that they were in some way heroic, they all lived the lives of the isolated hero and consequently deeply felt “the emptiness of a life without sustaining social commitments” (Bellah, 1985, p. 152). These men were torn by ambiguous and conflicting ontological motives, wishing to live as autonomous and self-reliant individuals and yet still maintain meaningful relationships with significant others in the context of family life. Like the cowboys described by Bellah (1985), many drivers’ break with society was too radical to support any sort of meaningful social existence. For most drivers, their individualism was not embedded in a working social framework. Their tendency towards “an empty self and empty relationships” (Bellah, 1985, p. 154) was not mitigated by the society of truck drivers or their firm grasp on heroic individualism. Here I agree with Bellah that “it is part of the profound ambiguity of the mythology of American individualism that its moral heroism is always just a step away from despair” (Bellah, 1985, p.156). Thus, in analyzing the words of these OTR drivers, I uncovered a philosophy of meaninglessness characterized by guilt and despair but cherished for its

protection against the loss of independence altogether.

Conclusions

Men generally have been socialized into the belief that providing makes them a good father. Virtually every OTR driver in this study subscribed to this belief and vocalized this conviction. Only a few drivers recognized the need to do fathering in other ways, and for those men, the lesson was not learned until after their families and children were hurt by their absence. For most of these men, it was really too late rectify the situation. With bills to pay and typically child support to provide, “most [drivers] work more than 60 hours per week--not to get ‘ahead’ but just to make ends meet” (Belzer, 2000, p. 21). For OTR drivers these numbers represent a fraction of the actual time spent away from home.

Most OTR drivers stubbornly continue turning the wheels and working long hours despite the obvious costs to their family, begging the question, why? The most obvious answer to the question of “Why do they keep driving despite the cost to their family life?” lies in the nature of the financial trap they have fallen into. Most drivers, subscribing to some version of the father-as-provider notion, have accumulated debt, taken the highest paying job they can find (driving a rig), and then gotten divorced and thus taken on additional child-support financial responsibilities. For the men in this study, recognition of the trap came too late. Usually, it was within a couple of years that the trap was sprung--the family was gone, and the financial needs were mounting even higher.

Financial motivation is certainly one explanation for why the men keep driving, but the machismo of the blue-collar man further helps to explain the stubbornness of the

OTR driver. I did not meet one driver who did not seem uneasy about his masculinity, wondering if he was doing a good enough job of providing and living up to what it meant to be a man. Machismo also played a role in the men's decision to keep driving despite their losses. The culture of the truck-driving community with its glorification of the freedom of the road and its infatuation with manly machines seems to blind the driver to his failures. The message is to "keep on truckin"--resilience is its own reward.

A final explanation for why failed fathers keep on truckin' lies in the concept of inertia. With nothing to go home to and few skills to ply, what else is there to do but keep turning the wheel? In fact, for one driver in this study, there was not even a reason to keep a residence. His home was his truck, and driving was all he had. He was a homeless man with a job.

Given the stories of the lives of these 12 drivers, I cannot help but conclude that the combination of this expression of masculinity, the drivers' very real financial needs, and the father-as-provider notion is a fraud and a trap. For the OTR driver, being "man enough" has the unintended consequence of giving short-shrift to their role as dad.

Even so, it is important to note that, in many cases, these men were driven by the notion of individual heroism and that this motive did provide a few of them with some sense of self-worth. Such disparate views are captured in the literature as well. Bowen's (1978) work, for example, emphasized the importance of maintaining individuality within relationships, while feminist theorists have questioned this idea and instead urged individuals to maintain connections within relationships (McGoldrick, Anderson, & Walsh, 1991). More work is needed to flesh out the different ways of "doing relationships" between men and women.

More and more prospective OTR drivers are learning about the familial perils of the occupation and are shying away from the long-haul as a result. Currently, there are over 80,000 vacancies in the OTR field (U.S. Dept. of Labor, 2002). Companies, aware of the problem, are now making efforts to get men employed as their truckers home to their families more frequently. Various labor organizations (e.g., Canada's Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union) are working in a heavily deregulated industry to reestablish some rules that will protect drivers and allow them more at-home time. Things are looking up for the OTR driver, but even so, a driver still works more and earns less than the same man would have two decades ago (Belzer, 2000).

Limitations. This study has many limitations. Because of the small scope of this study and its recruitment method, no data were gathered directly from the wives or the children of the drivers. Without a doubt, interviews with the wives and children of OTR drivers would provide a valuable alternative understanding of the unique problems of near-constant father absence.

Many topics were raised in the interviews that were not thoroughly explored due in large part to my inexperience in conducting qualitative research. For example, the topic of sex was alluded to several times in the course of the interviews but was never followed up with probing questions. Further, religious beliefs, alluded to on several occasions, were never explored in detail as a potential factor in the negotiation of work and family conflict.

Many potential topics were not broached due to the limitations of the question guide I used in conducting the interviews. For example, I didn't ask the OTR drivers about alcohol and other drug use. Drivers were not asked about things that concerned

them while on the road such as their own and their wives' potential for marital infidelity. Further, drivers were not asked questioned about their choices to continue driving despite familial discord and relationship loss.

Implications for future research. Truck drivers represent the very extreme end of work-related father-absence. Many fathers find themselves away from their families for extended periods of time but usually not by choice. Incarcerated fathers and military fathers are two such examples. In the group of men who participated in this study, I found some hope for families in the approach taken by some of the truckers. Future research should focus of the successes of this type of driver. Factors that allow the trucker to stay attached to his family in a meaningful way have implications for men in other occupations who are kept from their families for long periods of time. In the present study, helpful wives, understanding children, and spiritual connections all helped to make truck-driving "work". Future research should examine the experiences of spouses and children of truck drivers. As was evident in Zvonkovic's (2001) research, some father-absent families seem to work in large part because of the efforts of the wives to ease the transitions between work and family time. A detailed analysis of the routines of intact father-absent families may shed some light on potential pitfalls and successful strategies. Further, an analysis of the influence of spiritual beliefs and religious involvement on frequently separated families could have implications for all who experience work-related stress.

Truck drivers represent one class of fathers who engage routinely in what has been theorized as situated fathering (Marsiglio, 2003). Men involved in situated fathering create fathering identities in ambiguous social and spatial contexts that give rise

to all sorts of uncertainties. In the present study, I interviewed drivers who manipulated their truck-space to make it feel more homelike. The OTR fathers in the study also used technology to bridge the gap created by physical distance and thus better managed a remote fathering identity.

Of all the men in this study, the fathers who seemed to do fathering best were those drivers who had taken some control over their spatial situation and had orchestrated and manipulated that space so that, at least, space was not a major impediment to good fathering. Moreover, through their use of communication technology several of the OTR fathers were able to mitigate the constraints of spatial distance on their fathering behaviors. Future research should focus on how drivers can better control physical and social space in hopes that this control will enable men to better manage their fathering identity.

Implications for practitioners. This research study has some implications for practitioners of marriage and family therapy. With most families experiencing some degree of work-related father absence, the failures of truck drivers can provide some insight into the various work-related stresses experienced by families. For example, in this study, men and women seemed to have different levels of expectations that negatively impacted the balance between work and family. Women were reported to believe that their husbands should take on more fatherly responsibilities than their work allowed, and men believed that their role of providing was a sufficient condition for successful fathering. Both men and women seemed to expect that making more money would make life easier but failed to fully appreciate the very real cost of the husband/father's absence on the family.

Practitioners can learn from the rare successes of these drivers. When family responsibilities were shared, spousal communication was good, and schedules were modified to make coming and going more routine and predictable, families functioned better. For men, leaving truck-driver machismo at work and striving to be a quality father at home allowed them to keep stronger connections with their children. For women, delegating responsibilities to their older children and to their returning husbands eased their burdens some. Finally, spiritual connections and church membership may have offered both husbands and wives additional emotional support during times of stress and prolonged absence.

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VITA

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