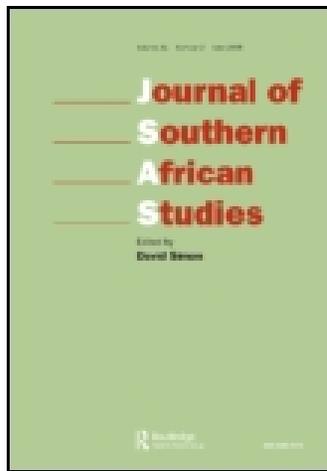


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### Women in the Driver's Seat: An Exploratory Study of Perceptions and Experiences of Female Truck Drivers and Their Employers in South Africa

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# *Women in the Driver's Seat: An Exploratory Study of Perceptions and Experiences of Female Truck Drivers and Their Employers in South Africa\**

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*The road freight industry is essential to Southern African economies, and South Africa, the largest economy and port of entry and exit for the majority of goods coming and going to the region, has a shortage of trained, quality truck drivers. This study investigates the extent to which employers are hiring female drivers in response to this skilled-labour shortage and brings to light the experiences of both employers and female truck drivers in South Africa's road freight industry. Although there is a dearth of literature on the experiences of women in skilled blue-collar work in South Africa, previous studies from the developed world have established certain expectations for the integration of women into traditionally male-dominated fields; the results of this study are discussed in relation to these expectations. Findings suggest that women are increasingly targeted for employment, beyond the requirements of affirmative action legislation, due to the perception that female drivers are safer, more conscientious, less likely to endanger public safety and company property, and less likely to engage in risky forms of behaviour including those associated with exposure to HIV/AIDS. This has led some employers to conclude that the female drivers they employ are not only equal but superior to their male colleagues. While female drivers note challenges in gaining entry and acceptance in the industry, they also report a near-unanimously positive experience with colleagues and supervisors. This study furthers our understanding of changing gender dynamics in South Africa as well as the secondary impacts of HIV/AIDS on southern African countries. The future of female employment in South Africa's road freight industry holds both opportunities and challenges.*

## **Introduction: Too Much Freight and Too Few Drivers**

The road freight industry is essential to South Africa's economy. Roughly 80 per cent of the country's freight is carried on approximately 265,000 km of roads,<sup>3</sup> and 'freight transported

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1 Scott Naysmith is supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the London School of Economics and Political Science, and is a doctoral scholar with the Trudeau Foundation.

2 Clara Rubincam is supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the London School of Economics and Political Science.

3 The Road Freight Association, [http://www.rfa.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=19](http://www.rfa.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=19) (accessed 20 February 2009).

by road' accounted for the largest employer in the transport and storage industry.<sup>4</sup> South Africa is the point of entry and point of departure for many of Southern Africa's goods and products, and the economies of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) rely heavily on South African trucks and drivers.<sup>5</sup>

Despite recent economic woes, falling consumer demand and high unemployment, road freight companies in South Africa have reported a shortage of trained, quality truck drivers for many years.<sup>6</sup> The industry loses approximately 3,000 drivers per annum and, according to the Road Freight Association, requires 15,000 new drivers each year to fill vacancies despite the contracting labour market.<sup>7</sup> The two most notable factors affecting the labour shortage are a lack of adequate training and testing programmes and the impact of HIV/AIDS on male truck drivers.

Truck drivers and the commercial sex workers who frequent their routes have long been linked to the spread of HIV around the world and in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. In 1995 Webb and Simon reported on the crucial role mobile populations in Namibia, including truck drivers, play in transporting HIV from urban to rural areas.<sup>8</sup> Studies across sub-Saharan Africa have found higher HIV prevalence among workers in the transport sector than in the general population in Kenya,<sup>9</sup> Tanzania,<sup>10</sup> Uganda,<sup>11</sup> and Nigeria.<sup>12</sup> Ramjee and Gouws' study of HIV prevalence among truck drivers in the South African province KwaZulu-Natal found a staggering 56 per cent of male drivers to be infected with the virus.<sup>13</sup> Ramjee and Gouws' findings have particular import, as they report on HIV prevalence among individuals transporting goods between Durban and Johannesburg, the same locations in which this research was undertaken.

The impact of HIV/AIDS on the road freight industry in South Africa has not gone unnoticed. Public-private partnerships to test and treat employees have been developed and many companies have initiated in-house testing and treatment programmes. Yet, despite the attempts to prevent new infections and treat those already infected, a skilled labour shortage in the road freight industry persists. The causes and consequences of this labour shortage are

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- 4 Statistics South Africa, 'Transport and Storage Industry'. Statistics South Africa (Pretoria, 2006), p. 9.
  - 5 D. King, 'The Fourth Annual State of Logistics Survey for South Africa' (Pretoria, South Africa, Council for Scientific and Industrial Relations, 2007).
  - 6 FleetWatch, 'Truck Driving . . . it's the Job of the Future', in <http://www.fleetwatch.co.za/marketwatch11,2001/11-TruckDriving.htm> (2001); P. Collings, 'A Clot in the Lifeblood', in <http://www.fleetwatch.co.za/magazines/Apr2007/29-AClotInTheLife.htm> (2007); FleetWatch, 'Tools to Help Operators', in [http://www.fleetwatch.co.za/marketwatch072,010/mw-04-Tools to help operator.htm](http://www.fleetwatch.co.za/marketwatch072,010/mw-04-Tools%20to%20help%20operator.htm) (2010); D. Parker, 'Road Freight Set for Bumpy Ride in 2009', in *Engineering News* <http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/road-freight-set-for-bumpy-ride-in-2009-2009-01-30> (accessed 15 February 2009); P. Collings, 'Skills Shortage: The Struggle Continues', *Fleetwatch* <http://www.fleetwatch.co.za/magazines/Apr2008/22-Struggle%20continues.htm> (accessed September 15, 2008).
  - 7 Parker, 'Road Freight Set for Bumpy Ride in 2009', *Engineering News*.
  - 8 D. Webb and D. Simon, 'Migrants, Money, and the Military: The Social Epidemiology of HIV/AIDS in Owambo, Northern Namibia' (Windhoek, Namibian Economic Policy Research Unit, 1995).
  - 9 J. Bwayo, F. Plummer, A.M. Omari, A. Mutere, S. Moses, J. Ndinya-Achola, P. Velentgas and J. Kreiss, 'Human Immunodeficiency Virus Infection in Long-Distance Truck Drivers in East Africa', *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 154, 12 (1994), pp. 1,391–96; J.J. Bwayo, A.M. Omari, A.N. Mutere, W. Jaoko, C. Sekkade-Kigondu, J. Kreiss and F.A. Plummer, 'Long Distance Truck-Drivers: Prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)', *East African Medical Journal*, 68, 6 (1991), pp. 425–9.
  - 10 K. Nyamuryekung'e, U. Laukamm-Josten, B. Vuylsteke, C. Mbuya, C. Hammelmann, A. Outwater, R. Steen, D. Ocheng, A. Msauka and G. Dallabetta, 'STD Services for Women in Truckstops in Tanzania: Evaluation of Acceptable Approaches', *East African Medical Journal*, 6 (1997), pp. 343–7.
  - 11 M. Gysels, R. Pool and K. Bwanika, 'Truck Drivers, Middlemen and Commercial Sex Workers: AIDS and the Mediation of Sex in South West Uganda', *AIDS Care*, 13, 3 (2001), pp. 373–85.
  - 12 I.O. Orubuloye, P. Caldwell and J.C. Caldwell, 'The Role of High-Risk Occupations in the Spread of AIDS: Truck Drivers and Itinerant Market Women in Nigeria', *International Family Planning Perspectives*, 19, 2 (1993), pp. 43–71.
  - 13 G. Ramjee and E. Gouws, 'Prevalence of HIV Among Truck Drivers Visiting Sex Workers in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 29, 1 (2002), pp. 44–9.

the impetus for this study. Findings suggest that in response to this shortage, some employers are turning to what Fox has called 'the talents of the other half of the workforce'.<sup>14</sup> Though this is not the first time employers facing a skilled-labour shortage have turned to non-traditional employee groups,<sup>15</sup> it is notable in the South African context where truck driving has long been the preserve of men.

### *Gender Equity at Work and Home*

Bagilhole advises, 'women in non-traditional occupations need the crucial assistance of positive action and targets from national legislation'.<sup>16</sup> In the South African context, the employment of women, particularly historically underrepresented women such as African, Indian and Coloured women, is one of the primary goals of Employment Equity legislation.<sup>17</sup> Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE) legislation also targets the hiring of historically marginalised groups into upper-level, higher-skilled jobs.<sup>18</sup> In this context, research on the formal employment of women in non-traditional fields holds special relevance.

Although a progressive constitution and well-developed employment equity legislation define post-apartheid South Africa, women continue to struggle for equal rights and representation and the majority of women remain disproportionately affected by social and structural barriers. Alarming high rates of sexual and physical violence are perpetrated against South African women.<sup>19</sup> Some researchers conclude that these acts of violence are used to 'inscribe subordinate status'<sup>20</sup> onto women as a result of a crisis of identity among some South African men who are 'unable to affirm their fantasies of power'.<sup>21</sup> Securing land and inheritance rights for women also remains difficult.<sup>22</sup> Partly as a result of these challenges, young women are more likely to be HIV positive than their male counterparts, as illustrated in Table 1.

Despite myriad challenges confronting women in South Africa, the end of apartheid signified an increasing role for women in public life. Walsh and Scully contend, 'one result of

14 K. Fox, 'Move Over Boys', *Personnel Today* (United Kingdom, Reed Business Information, 2 July 1998), p. 28.

15 Q. Reade, 'Firm Beats Skills Shortage with New Refugee Recruits', *Personnel Today* (United Kingdom, Reed Business Information, 20 August 2002); B. Willmott, 'Road to Ruin? Shortage of 80,000 Lorry Drivers in the UK', *Personnel Today*, United Kingdom, Reed Business Information, 2 July 2002), p. 10.

16 B. Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations: Challenging Men* (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p. 193.

17 T. Adele and J. Harish, 'Employment Equity in Canada and South Africa: Progress and Propositions', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15, 1 (2004), pp. 36–55.

18 But see N. Pons-Vignon and W. Anseeuw, 'Great Expectations: Working Conditions in South Africa Since the End of Apartheid', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 35, 4 (2009), pp. 883–99 for a discussion of exploitation within BEE legislation.

19 R.K. Jewkes and N. Abrahams, 'The Epidemiology of Rape and Sexual Coercion in South Africa: An Overview', *Social Science & Medicine*, 55 (2002), pp. 1,231–44; R.K. Jewkes, J.B. Levin and L.A. Penn-Kekana, 'Gender Inequalities, Intimate Partner Violence and HIV Preventive Practices: Findings of a South African Cross-sectional Study', *Social Science & Medicine*, 56, 1 (2003), pp. 125–34; South African Police Services, 'Crime in the RSA for April to March 2001 to 2005/2006', Pretoria, [http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2006/\\_pdf/provinces/rsa\\_total.pdf](http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2006/_pdf/provinces/rsa_total.pdf) (Accessed 2 October 2008) 2006); H. Britton, 'Organising against Gender Violence in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1 (2006), pp. 145–63; H. Moffett, '“These Women, They Force Us to Rape Them”: Rape as Narrative of Social Control in Post-Apartheid South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1 (2006), pp. 129–44.

20 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

21 L. Bank, 'Angry Men and Working Women', *African Studies*, 53, 1 (1994), p. 111.

22 B. Scholz and M. Gomez, 'Bringing Equality Home: Promoting and Protecting the Inheritance Rights of Women: A Survey of Law and Practice in Sub-Saharan Africa, Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE)' (Geneva, Switzerland, 2004); R.S. Strickland, 'To Have and to Hold: Women's Property and Inheritance Rights in the Context of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa' (Working Paper: June 2004, International Centre for Research on Women (ICRW), [http://www.icrw.org/docs/2004\\_paper\\_haveandhold.pdf](http://www.icrw.org/docs/2004_paper_haveandhold.pdf) 2004).

**Table 1.** Estimated HIV Prevalence of South Africans by Age and Sex.<sup>23</sup>

Age cohort	Female prevalence per cent	Male prevalence per cent
20–24	21.1	5.1
25–29	32.7	15.7
30–34	29.1	25.8
35–39	24.8	18.5

southern African women's greater political engagement has been to intensify the pressure on traditional gender roles in both the public and private spheres'.<sup>24</sup> It follows that there have been notable changes for women in the sphere of employment, including an increasing feminisation of South Africa's work force. While more South African women appear to be working, their employment is often insecure, frequently seasonal and overwhelmingly concentrated in care-giving jobs and more informal sectors, such as subsistence agriculture, where women must 'make work for themselves'.<sup>25</sup> As Casale and Posel observe, South Africa's labour market has not sufficiently absorbed the swell of women entering the labour force, resulting in a sharp increase of women without work and the continued 'feminisation of low-paid insecure forms of employment'.<sup>26</sup>

In short, South Africa is a country where significant obstacles face women attempting to succeed in a traditionally male-dominated workforce. In this context it is instructive to examine the tension between the lived experiences of women 'acting otherwise' and the challenges and barriers they face in navigating formal, skilled employment in the road freight industry.

### *Women in the Transport Sector*

There is a dearth of research on women working in the transport sector. The majority of studies referring to 'women', 'employment' and 'transport' focus on highlighting the barriers that transport costs and logistics can pose to true gender equality for women.<sup>27</sup> Women in the transport sectors in the United States and Europe have generated more attention in popular media than in academe, partly as a result of efforts by advocacy groups. One such group is Women in Trucking, a United States-based non-profit organisation devoted to advocating for women's rights in an industry historically dominated by men. As part of their advocacy, Women in Trucking released a documentary, *Alligator on the Zipper*, depicting the lives of seven female truckers in the United States.<sup>28</sup> Websites such as

23 O. Shisana, T. Rehle, L. Simba, K. Zuma, S. Jooste, V. Pillay-Van Wyk, N. Mbelle, J. Van Zyl, W. Parker, N. Zungu, S. Pezi and S.I.I. Team, 'South African National Prevalence, Incidence, Behaviour and Communication Survey 2008: A Turning Tide among Teenagers?' (Cape Town, HSRC Press, 2009).

24 D. Walsh and P. Scully, 'Altering Politics, Contesting Gender', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1 (2006), p. 1.

25 D. Budlender, 'Women and Men in South Africa' (Pretoria, Central Statistics, 1998), p. 20; D. Casale and D. Posel, 'The Continued Feminisation of the Labour Force in South Africa: An Analysis of Recent Data and Trends', *The South African Journal of Economics*, 70, 1 (2002), pp. 156–84.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 157.

27 J. Turner and P. Fouracre, 'Women and Transport in Developing Countries', *Transport Reviews*, 15, 1 (1995), pp. 77–96; L. Dobbs, 'Wedded to the Car: Women, Employment and the Importance of Private Transport', *Transport Policy*, 12 (2005), pp. 266–78; R.B. Dixon, *Rural Women at Work: Strategies for Development in South Asia* (Baltimore, Maryland, Johns Hopkins University Press for Resources for the Future, 1978); C. Greed, 'Are We There Yet? Women and Transport Revisited', in T.P. Uteng and T. Cresswell (eds), *Gendered Mobilities* (Hampshire, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

28 See: [www.alligatoronthezipper.com](http://www.alligatoronthezipper.com)

Layover.com have also run profiles on the experiences of female truck drivers in the United States.<sup>29</sup> While the female truck driver population in the U.S. has become more celebrated through active promotion, truck driving remains dominated by men with female drivers representing around 5 per cent of the total U.S. truck-driving workforce.<sup>30</sup>

In Britain, the proportion of female drivers is estimated to be between 1 and 2 per cent of all drivers.<sup>31</sup> The *Women in Wheels* programme, developed by Skills for Logistics, the UK skills council for the freight industry, set up a pilot-programme in 2005 in Scotland to train fifteen female road freight drivers.<sup>32</sup> Though no similar advocacy group currently exists for female truck drivers in South Africa, there are early signs that targeted recruitment and training of women is taking place.<sup>33</sup> Although, in the absence of detailed studies, it is difficult to disaggregate road freight drivers from other types of transport work, such as taxi drivers, the hiring of women in the transport sector in South Africa is a small but visible trend – from 2 per cent of transport sector employees in 1995 to 3 per cent in 2001.<sup>34</sup> The targeted hiring of female truck drivers in South Africa is a more recent phenomenon.

## Women in Non-traditional Occupations

Existing research on women working in non-traditional fields has interrogated the reasons for gender segregation in employment. This includes both persistent horizontal segregation, where certain fields are almost exclusively all-male or all-female, and vertical segregation, where certain positions in the same field are routinely occupied by either men or women.<sup>35</sup> The majority of these studies examine the experiences of women in the global north and tend to focus on women in business or management<sup>36</sup> as opposed to skilled 'blue-collar work'.<sup>37</sup> The

29 T. Wallace, 'Women of the Road' (15 September 2008). (<http://www.layover.com/driverscorner/womenintruckin/roleinhistory> (2008)); Georgiagirl Blog, 'Safety for Women's Sake', in *Women in Trucking – Staying out of Harm's Way* (<http://www.layover.com/driverscorner/womenintruckin/harmsway>).

30 Layover.com, 'Women in Trucking', <http://www.layover.com/driverscorner/womenintruckin/>; Y. Prabhudas, 'Women Take the Wheel', in *International Transport Workers Federation* (2006).

31 *Ibid.*

32 Skills for Logistics, 'What Sfl has Already Achieved', <http://www.skillsforlogistics.org/en/index/aboutus/how-you-can-help/sfl-achievements/>. All of the women who participated in the pilot received their large-goods vehicle (LGV) license and have continued to work in the industry. The pilot has evolved into a wider training programme, where 40 places (out of 1,000) have been ring-fenced for women. Diversity and the Skills for Business Network, 2006, GHK Consulting.

33 For example, see Imperial Logistics, 'Women Drivers Add a Softer Touch to Imperial Logistics' Services', <http://www.imperiallogistics.co.za/news2004.html> ([Accessed on June 23, 2008] 30 November 2004).

34 D. Budlender, 'Women and Men in South Africa' (Pretoria, Central Statistics, 1998), p. 51; D. Budlender, 'Women and Men in South Africa: Five Years On' (Pretoria, Statistics South Africa, 2002).

35 Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations: Challenging Men*; M. Whittock, *Feminizing the Masculine? Women in Non-Traditional Employment* (Hampshire, Vermont, Ashgate, 2000); M. Whittock, 'Women's Experiences of Non-Traditional Employment: Is Gender Equality in this Area a Possibility?', *Construction Management and Economics*, 20 (2002), pp. 449–56; J.F. Bennet, M.J. Davidson and A.W. Gale, 'Women in Construction: A Comparative Investigation into the Expectations and Experiences of Female and Male Construction Undergraduates and Employees', *Women in Management Review*, 14, 7 (1999), pp. 273–291; S.L. Fielden, M.J. Davidson, A.W. Gale and C.L. Davey, 'Women in Construction: the Untapped Resource', *Construction Management and Economics*, 18 (2000), pp. 113–21; A.W. Gale, 'The Socio-Economic Significance of an Increase in the Proportion of Women in the Construction Industry', in *Coombe Lodge Report: Managing Construction Education* (Bristol, 1987); C. Greed, 'Women in the Construction Professions: Achieving Critical Mass', *Gender Work and Organization*, 7, 3 (2000), pp. 181–95.

36 J.A. Green, *Blue-Collar Women at Work with Men: Negotiating the Hostile Environment* (Westport, CT, Praeger Publishers, 2006); S. Weiler and A. Bernasek, 'Dodging the Glass Ceiling? Network and the New Wave of Women Entrepreneurs', *The Social Science Journal*, 38 (2001), pp. 85–103; A.L. Anna, G.N. Chandler, E. Jansen and N.P. Mero, 'Women Business Owners in Traditional and Non-Traditional Industries', *Journal of Business Venturing*, 15 (1999), pp. 279–303.

37 Green, *Blue-Collar Women at Work with Men*.

involvement of women in unskilled manual labour in the global south is normalised and well documented.<sup>38</sup>

Occupational segregation by sex exists in all countries, regardless of political institutions or economic structure<sup>39</sup> and previous work on women in non-traditional employment has both diagnosed the causes of this segregation in employment and advocated particular solutions. Explanations for sex segregation largely focus on supply and demand. The supply side factors concern the vast disincentives for women to combine paid formal work with unpaid domestic labour, due to both logistical challenges and pressures from male family members to prioritise child-rearing and housekeeping.<sup>40</sup> Supply side explanations emphasise 'learned differences in women's and men's skills and abilities'<sup>41</sup> or women's 'choices, plans, attitudes and aspirations'.<sup>42</sup> Demand side explanations, by contrast, focus on 'processes of exclusion and inclusion of workers of a certain sex through the power of employers and male workers'.<sup>43</sup>

Proposed remedies for sex segregation, the so-called 'levers of change', include the achievement of a critical mass of women in a particular profession,<sup>44</sup> targeted training programmes, or the elevation of successful women as mentors<sup>45</sup> or role models.<sup>46</sup> Several scholars have challenged the 'critical mass' solution, arguing that simply having more women in the workplace is not sufficient to change an organisational culture. Eveline calls this the 'add women and stir' method and argues alongside other scholars that it fails to take account of how women are not only disadvantaged in the workforce but also in wider society.<sup>47</sup> A further 'lever' of change is human agency, even in situations that pose almost overwhelming structural barriers to non-traditional participation in the workforce.<sup>48</sup> Giddens argues that agents are capable of 'acting otherwise', even when a pre-existing state of affairs renders their social relations unequal.<sup>49</sup> The juxtapositions and tensions created by individuals exercising agency in non-traditional employment, particularly in countries where women continue to face serious challenges to achieving basic human rights, clearly illustrates how the 'local pattern may differ from the global pattern'.<sup>50</sup>

38 B. Bagilhole, 'Through the Upgrading of Skills to Empowerment: a Collaborative Project between East and West for the Career Promotion of Women in India', in *International Women's Conference, 'Women's Status, Vision and Reality, Bridging East and West'* (New Delhi, India, 2000); M. Mukhopadhyay, 'Silver Shackles: Women and Development in India' (Oxford, Oxfam, 1985), p. 49; A.Y. Adeyemi, S.O. Ojo, O. Aina and A. Olanipekun, 'Empirical Evidence of Women Under-representation in the Construction Industry in Nigeria', *Women in Management Review*, 21, 7 (2006), pp. 567–77; S.O. Ogunlana, U. Rost, L. Robles-Austriaco and K. Worawichawong, 'Women in the Thai Construction Industry', in *AIT Women Study Circle and the Structural Engineering & Construction Program* (Bangkok, Asian Institute of Technology, 1993), p. 5; M.T. Sokomba, 'The Participation of Women in Design and Construction of Housing Stock in Nigeria', in *Proceedings of the Nigerian Indigenous Building Materials Symposium* (Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 1990), pp. 213–37.

39 Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*; R. Anker, *Gender and Jobs: Sex Segregation of Occupations in the World* (Geneva, International Labour Organisation, 1998).

40 Ojo, Aina and Olanipekun, 'Empirical Evidence of Women Under-representation in the Construction Industry'.

41 Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*, p. 181.

42 F. Devine, 'Gender Segregation and Labour Supply: On 'Choosing' Gender-atypical Jobs', *Journal of Education and Work*, 6, 3 (1993), p. 61.

43 Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*, p. 181.

44 R.M. Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women', *The American Journal of Sociology*, 82, 5 (1977), pp. 965–90.

45 E.M. Byrne, *Women and Science: the Snark Syndrome* (London, Falmer, 1993).

46 B. Bagilhole, A. Dainty and R. Neale, 'Women in the UK Construction Industry: a Cultural Discord?', *Minorities in Science and Technology*, 6, 1 (2000), pp. 73–86.

47 J. Eveline, "'Normalization'", "Leading Ladies", and "Free Men": Affirmative Actions in Sweden and Australia', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 17, 2/3 (1994), pp. 157–67.; D. Dahlerup, 'From a Small to a Large Minority: Women in Scandinavian Politics 1988', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 11 (1988), pp. 275–98.

48 R.W. Connell, *Gender and Power* (Cambridge, Polity Press 1993).

49 A. Giddens, 'Structuration Theory: Past, Present, and Future', in C. Bryant and D. Jary (eds), *Giddens' Theory of Structuration* (London, Routledge, 1991).

50 Whittock, *Feminizing the Masculine? Women in Non-Traditional Employment*, p. 19.

As a way of theorising the workforce dynamics that result when women enter traditionally male jobs, Kanter's work on the politics of 'skewed' groups is instructive. This framework refers to environments where one unit (dominants) holds far greater numbers than another (tokens), and focuses on analysing 'what happens to women who occupy token statuses and are alone or nearly alone in a peer group of men'.<sup>51</sup> Kanter's framework is relevant to our study because female truck drivers comprise a small number of the total truck-driving workforce in South Africa.<sup>52</sup>

While Kanter's predictions about the pressures and responses that will result when 'tokens' are introduced into the workforce have been critiqued, they retain continued relevance for more recent studies.<sup>53</sup> The framework suggests that upon entering a male-dominated workforce, women will be closely and critically scrutinised by colleagues and supervisors (visibility), that their differences will be negatively exaggerated in relation to their colleagues (polarisation), and that their colleagues and supervisors will distort their characteristics in order to suit stereotypical ideas about how they will behave (assimilation). As a consequence of these perceptions, Kanter's framework predicts that women in non-traditional employment will feel pressure to overachieve in the workplace, will become conscious of 'boundary heightening' between themselves and their male colleagues, and will be 'entrapped' in stereotypical gender roles.<sup>54</sup> Kanter's predictions frame the analysis of this research and our discussion is informed by studies from the developed world, which have established certain expectations for the integration of women into traditionally male-dominated fields.<sup>55</sup>

## Methodology

With no existing studies on the quantity or location of female truck drivers working in South Africa's road freight industry, snowball sampling provided the opportunity to speak with as many companies as possible that currently employ, have previously employed, or have heard of other companies employing female drivers. This research was guided by semi-structured interviews with road freight employers (n = 35) and female truck drivers (n = 5).

Interviews with industry representatives were conducted by phone and, when possible, in person. All interviews were in English and held with those responsible for human resources, the hiring of truck drivers and the supervision of employees. Themes of questioning for road freight employers included: factors leading to a skilled labour shortage in the industry generally and their company specifically, impact of the skilled labour shortage on their company, mitigation strategies to deal with the skilled labour shortage, and experiences with hiring and working with female truck drivers. If employers did not have any female driver employees, they were asked about the reasons for this, whether they had employed women in the past, and whether they would be interested in hiring women in the future. Questions were informed by Healey and Rawlinson's work on interview techniques for business managers.<sup>56</sup> Interviews lasted from 35 to 90 minutes, depending upon the willingness and experience of the individual.

51 Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', p. 968.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 967.

53 L.M. Roth, 'The Social Psychology of Tokenism: Status and Homophily Processes on Wall Street', *Sociological Perspectives*, 47, 2 (2004), pp. 189–214.

54 *Ibid.*, p. 972.

55 C. Greed, 'Women in the Construction Professions: Achieving Critical Mass', *Gender, Work and Organization*, 7, 3 (2000), pp. 181–96.; Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*; J. Eveline, "'Normalization", "Leading Ladies", and "Free Men": Affirmative Actions in Sweden and Australia', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 17, 2/3 (1994), pp. 157–167.

56 M.J. Healey and M.B. Rawlinson, 'Interviewing Business Owners and Managers: a Review of Methods and Techniques', *Geoforum*, 24, 3 (1993), pp. 339–55.

All interviews with female truck drivers were undertaken in person, conducted in English and semi-structured, allowing for a range of themes to be covered and unique stories to be told. The women ranged in age from between 24 and 39 and all were black South Africans. Although English was not their first language (primary language was isiXhosa for three of the drivers and isiZulu for the other two), all women stated that they were comfortable speaking in English and were interviewed without a translator. That all female drivers interviewed for this study were black was not driven by a deliberate desire to examine one particular sub-group in South African society but was, rather, an unintentional effect of snowball sampling. We recognise that women's experiences are not only shaped by their gender, but also by their ethnicity, race and class<sup>57</sup> and thus our study attempts to situate our respondents' comments in the context of their experience with race as well as with gender.

The topic guide for interviews with female truck drivers included: motivations to enter this profession, the experience of acquiring a licence and getting hired, the experience of work, risk perceptions of driving a truck, perceptions of peers, employers and family members, and plans for the future. In contrast to some previous studies on women in non-traditional employment<sup>58</sup>, neither employers nor female truck drivers were prompted to speak specifically about negative (or positive) experiences. This enabled respondents to highlight what was dominant for them about their experiences, rather than feeling pressure to slot their experiences into our expectations.

This study did not attempt to quantify the number of female drivers in the whole of South Africa's road freight industry. It is noteworthy, however, that we spoke with representatives from the largest road freight companies in South Africa. Fifteen of these companies had at least one female driver working for one of their divisions. When a woman was identified as working from Durban or Johannesburg, arrangements were made to speak with her in person. We identified ten female drivers that did not work in Durban or Johannesburg and thus were not interviewed for this preliminary study. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

In the later stages of our research, a photographer and a filmmaker became interested in documenting the lives of female truck drivers in South Africa and used this research as a point of entry. The filmmaker produced a film that followed one female driver entitled *Roads Less Traveled: A Lady Truck Driver's Story* which is available online through the *Wall Street Journal*.<sup>59</sup> The photographer created a multi-media piece entitled *Women in the Driver's Seat* – featuring the lives of three female truck drivers – that was shown alongside a series of photographs at a gallery in Durban during the 4<sup>th</sup> South African AIDS Conference held on 2 April 2009.<sup>60</sup>

### *Reasons for the Skilled Labour Shortage*

The majority of road freight companies in South Africa struggle with a skilled-labour shortage of Code 10 and Code 14 drivers – the licences required to drive freight in South Africa. Employers claimed that the labour shortage was the result of several important

57 K. Crenshaw, 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color', *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 6 (1991), pp. 1,241–299; L. McCall, 'The Complexity of Intersectionality', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30, 3 (2005), pp. 1,771–1,800.

58 J.D. Yoder and L.L. Berendsen, "'Outsider Within'" The Firehouse: African American and White Women Firefighters', *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 25 (2001), pp. 27–36.

59 See: Andrew Naysmith, "Roads Less Traveled: A Lady Truck Driver's Story", <http://online.wsj.com/video/roads-less-traveled/B29D292F-236A-427F-8B60-72A96C86A2F4.html> (Aired: 7/8/2010).

60 See: Liz Rubincam, 'Women in the Driver's Seat', <http://www.heard.org.za/multimedia/women-in-the-drivers-seat> (Screened: 2/4/2009).

factors, including training and certification of drivers, disciplinary problems, and the impact of HIV/AIDS on male drivers.

Employers expressed concern over the process of licensing a driver. In particular, several mentioned the recurrence of being presented with forged licences during hiring processes. One employer noted that, 'It is becoming a nightmare to have enough skilled drivers. In terms of the drivers, there is a deteriorating number but also a deteriorating quality of drivers'.<sup>61</sup> Another highlighted a poor training environment, suggesting that the lack of adequate driver training facilities affected the quality of the available drivers. Employers also noted that existing drivers (all males) had to be disciplined frequently, as a result of incidents such as drinking on the job, picking up passengers, and reckless driving. This led to a high turnover from 'drivers being involved in incidents – there are lots of temptations and some drivers fall prey to these temptations'.<sup>62</sup> One employer observed that in 'one week you'll get 15 new drivers, and the next week you'll have to fire 10 of them because of poor driving. The amount of traffic fines that they get is enormous – and wear and tear on the vehicles is enormous'.<sup>63</sup>

The cost of getting a Code 14 licence was also seen as playing a role in barring new applicants from entering the job market as drivers. Depending on where lessons took place, a Code 14 licence could cost upwards of R18,000 (reported in 2009), making it difficult for an unsponsored driver to get training.

Reiterating earlier studies, employers frequently cited HIV/AIDS related morbidity and mortality as a major reason why they currently had a skilled labour shortage. One employer noted the wide impact of the disease on the industry, saying 'The HIV/AIDS epidemic is starting to take hold – not just the long haul but also the short haul routes are starting to be affected by HIV and AIDS'.<sup>64</sup> Another employer stated, 'We're losing more drivers [from the epidemic] than we can train'.<sup>65</sup>

Other reasons cited by employers were that truck driving was not a sought-after job, with long hours, insufficient pay and, in some cases, work for a commission that created additional stress. This is in line with industry publications, which have drawn a link between certain 'unglamorous' aspects of the job and the driver shortage.<sup>66</sup> A minority of employers believed that the economy was growing and that it was likely that the shortage of skilled drivers was just the result of the industry not keeping up with progress.

### *Perceptions of Employers without Female Drivers*

Employers who had *not* hired female drivers were asked about their reasons and whether they would consider hiring a female driver in the future. In line with other studies, some employers cited a concern with upsetting the dynamic in the workplace as one reason why they had not hired females<sup>67</sup>. As one employer stated: 'It is a cultural thing, our [male] drivers don't like the thought of having ladies do their jobs'.<sup>68</sup> Another suggested that employing females

61 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 9, 2009.

62 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 12, 2009.

63 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 16, 2009.

64 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 9, 2009.

65 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 11, 2009.

66 S. Terblanche, 'Technologically Challenged', in *Road Ahead Online* <http://www.roadaheadonline.co.za/index.php/road-ahead/logistics/137-technologically-challenged> (2010).

67 K.R. Yount, 'Ladies, Flirts and Tomboys', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19, 4 (1991), pp. 396–422; B. O'Farrell and S.L. Harlan, 'Craftworkers and Clerks: The Effect of Male Co-Worker Hostility on Women's Satisfaction with Non-Traditional Jobs', *Social Problems*, 29, 3 (1982), pp. 252–65.

68 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 18, 2009.

would be disruptive for his existing male workforce, stating, 'We don't hire female drivers because they would just confuse our male drivers about where they have to go'.<sup>69</sup>

Others cited health and safety concerns. As one employer emphasised: 'It is not a good environment, especially not for ladies'.<sup>70</sup> Employers expressed particular concerns for women who are more vulnerable with regard to breakdowns, hijackings and armed robbery, despite the fact that these are dangers that face every truck driver in South Africa regardless of gender.

Some employers stated that the unique needs of women would interfere with the job. In particular, the additional costs associated with pregnancy and separate bathroom facilities were flagged as disincentives to integrating women into the workforce. A manager stated that his company had 'played around with the concept of having females, but don't have any facilities for them'.<sup>71</sup> One employer noted a negative experience that had turned him away from the idea of hiring women in the future, relating: 'We did have a project on cement operations – 5 ladies trained, but they all ended up pregnant'.<sup>72</sup> Another manager bluntly stated, 'Females in the industry are a logistical nightmare'.<sup>73</sup> Overall, road freight companies who did not employ female drivers were reluctant to introduce women into a workplace that lacked segregated facilities and was considered too dangerous for women.

### *Perceptions and Experiences of Employers with Female Drivers*

Truck company representatives who did employ female drivers had near-unanimously positive reports on their employment experience. Employers pointed to their female employees' safety record, quality of driving, good appearance, and risk aversion as significant factors influencing their perspectives.

Some of these employers, however, expressed an initial degree of ambivalence towards hiring female drivers. One manager said: 'At first I wasn't sure about hiring a woman. This job can get pretty physical',<sup>74</sup> while another employer noted, 'In the beginning [their male colleagues] did not really welcome them. They were hired to fulfil Employment Equity legislation'.<sup>75</sup> Another manager traced the evolution of opinion within his male staff: 'It took a while for the line managers to accept it, but they are very impressed now... at the beginning, there were problems with the male drivers, it was like bees to a flower'.<sup>76</sup>

With time and experience, many employers viewed women as safer, more reliable drivers. One employer asserted that women were 'softer on the trucks',<sup>77</sup> while another emphasised: 'Look at the life of trucks, the safety of our roads, and quality of drivers, and women are hands-down the best choice of drivers'.<sup>78</sup> One employer summarised: 'That's why we moved to the ladies, they take care of their vehicles – a truck can go an extra 1,000 kilometres if a lady is driving it'.<sup>79</sup>

Employers noted how women had distinguished themselves from their colleagues, with one manager telling of a female driver in his company who won the 'Driver of the Year' competition. While this might, at least in part, be a consequence of the higher visibility of female employees in relation to their male colleagues, resulting in excessive scrutiny from

69 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 19, 2009.

70 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 18, 2009.

71 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 17, 2009.

72 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 18, 2009.

73 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 10, 2009.

74 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 2, 2009.

75 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 13, 2009.

76 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 10, 2009.

77 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

78 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

79 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 19, 2009.

others and a tendency to overachieve,<sup>80</sup> it is notable that women were seen as not only on-par with their co-workers but exceeding expectations set out for all employees.

Employers also felt that their company image benefitted from having female drivers employed. One employer noted that: 'Ladies take more pride in their work. They don't wear sloppy clothes, [and] always dressed properly. Men, they can wear the same shirt to bed and then to work in the morning'.<sup>81</sup> Women were generally perceived as having good manners to match their tidy appearance. When women did not conform to this set of expectations they were disciplined. As one employer explained, he was forced to fire a female driver because she had an 'unnecessarily aggressive' attitude. Although he noted that 'it is a tough environment', he asserted that her 'negative attitude' led to her dismissal.<sup>82</sup>

A final factor influencing positive perceptions of female drivers was women's risk aversion. Many employers felt that female drivers were less likely to engage in the sorts of risky behaviours that were problems in the road freight industry, such as dangerous driving, working under the influence of alcohol or drugs, and picking up passengers, particularly commercial sex workers. As one employer summarised: 'Ladies don't pick up ladies and ladies don't pick up men'.<sup>83</sup> Another employer emphasised female employees' conscientiousness, and their tendency to drive safely: 'That is why we turned to women: we want people that show attention to detail and discipline. They are safer, less aggressive drivers'.<sup>84</sup>

Although the majority of employers' perspectives on female drivers were positive, some noted reservations around certain issues, particularly concerning safety and security, maintaining a professional atmosphere in the workplace, and dealing with the additional costs of pregnancy and maternity leave. Safety of female truck drivers was an oft-repeated concern of employers in relation to night shifts and long haul shifts. One employer worried that night shifts provided opportunities for unsafe encounters, stating, 'If I had my way, I would not let them work nightshifts – it is dark, there are elements about'.<sup>85</sup> Another manager highlighted the differing risks posed to female and male drivers at night: 'Driving at night, it changes somewhat. Drivers are sleeping along the road. The feeling is that [women] will be more vulnerable'.<sup>86</sup>

Another noted the need to maintain separate working facilities, even within the company: 'We need to keep them separate from the males so they are not attacked'.<sup>87</sup> This suggests that the threat of violence, even between work colleagues, is a great concern. Some employers stated that they had already faced challenges with the male-female relationships in the workplace, though of a non-violent nature. One noted, 'Some of them have had relationships with other drivers and this causes problems'.<sup>88</sup>

The lack of female facilities was a concern for some road freight companies. One employer, who was also a woman, noted that 'Women are disadvantaged across the industry, particularly on mine sites – when they want to use the bathroom, they have to sign out of the site, leave the area, find a washroom, come back, sign back in – that is two loads lost by that point'.<sup>89</sup>

Lastly, employers noted the potential additional costs for employers if a female driver became pregnant. One employer observed, 'At 7 months, you don't want to be in a cab that is bouncing and vibrating around. So we put the women in the office for the last few months.

80 Whittock, 'Women's Experiences of Non-Traditional Employment', p. 451; Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', pp. 965–90.

81 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

82 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 12, 2009.

83 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

84 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

85 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 12, 2009.

86 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 12, 2009.

87 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 4, 2009.

88 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 12, 2009.

89 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 20, 2009.

But there are only a few jobs for the office and then you have to find something else for them to do'.<sup>90</sup>

To summarise, employers of female drivers recognised the positive aspects of this non-traditional workforce while acknowledging the ways in which the presence of women in a male-dominated environment could create new challenges. It is notable that no employers interviewed suggested that they would prefer to return to a time in the past when women were not employed as drivers in their company. Indeed, the majority of employers who had hired female drivers wanted greater numbers of women behind the wheel. As one employer concluded when asked about his existing female drivers: 'I'd prefer a couple more'.<sup>91</sup>

### *Experiences of Female Truck Drivers*

Five female truck drivers in the Durban and Johannesburg area were interviewed and asked about their experiences of obtaining a licence, joining the profession as a woman, and balancing work with life and family commitments. Most of them reported having been challenged by men from the moment they indicated their desire to acquire a Code 14 or Code 10 license. One noted:

No one thought I was serious at first. When I went to the testing site, the man behind the desk asked me what code I wanted, and when I said 'Code 14' [the licence required for driving trailer trucks], he laughed: 'How can you take Code 14 when you are small like that and you are a lady?'.<sup>92</sup>

All five female drivers spoke about their families' reactions to their employment. Generally, their children, spouses and families were supportive. One driver stated that her children were already accustomed to her authoritative nature, saying, 'I am strong at home too, so my kids are not surprised that I am a truck driver'.<sup>93</sup> Several of the women spoke about their communities and about how their job was inspirational to those around them. One woman observed, 'My daughter is so proud of me. My friends, they were so shocked and they say, "You are so brave"'.<sup>94</sup>

Two of the female drivers interviewed had partners who were also involved in the transport industry. One woman said: 'My husband is a private car driver. He has a Code 8, and I have a Code 10, and I say that he is just playing. He is scared of driving trucks. When I drive a regular car now, it is so light, it is like paper'.<sup>95</sup> Another emphasised how supportive her husband was when she was away for work: 'My husband is close to me. When I'm not at home he covers my, my space 'cause he's there for the children'.<sup>96</sup>

The drivers spoke about how strangers perceived them while they worked. One driver said that 'People clap their hands when they see me on the road',<sup>97</sup> while another noted how she coped with more assertive propositions on the job:

When men see you on the road, they get like 'Ah, a woman driving, and she's so young!' 'Hi, how are you? Teach me how to drive. Do this. Do that.'. And you're like, 'Hey . . .' It's the usual story [she laughs] and you drive away'.<sup>98</sup>

90 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 19, 2009.

91 Interview, Road Freight Employer, February 16, 2009.

92 Interview, Female Truck Driver, January 15, 2009.

93 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 16, 2009.

94 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 12, 2009.

95 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 12, 2009.

96 Interview, Female Truck Driver, January 15, 2009.

97 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 16, 2009.

98 Interview, Female Truck Driver, January 15, 2009.

In general, the women interviewed spoke positively about their interactions with co-workers. In particular, they spoke about the trajectory of their relationship with male colleagues, moving towards equality and respect. One driver stated:

Like, at work my colleagues, like, my work colleagues, they at first used to take advantage from me 'cause I was young. But now, I mean, they're used to me and they know my rules and regulations. Now they don't ever take chances. I mean, when you are young and being in a men, like a men-dominated workplace, men tend to take advantage of you.<sup>99</sup>

Another echoed this sentiment with her early experiences:

So they were like: 'Oh, a lady coming to drive. This is a baby. She won't drive a truck. She won't be able to make it.' And they were like, they wanted me to feel more down, more bad about myself. But I stood up for myself. I said no. Don't let these men take over what I have. I'll just show them how women work. And today I drive better than hundreds of them.<sup>100</sup>

While female drivers seemed to feel that their relationships with co-workers were productive, they did express a certain sense of unease about another aspect of the job, namely safety. Several of the women reported preferring night shifts, as these enabled them to balance work with their responsibilities as mothers. They did, however, acknowledge that additional risks were posed by working at night. One driver recounted the following story:

I used to see a white lady driver on the way between Jo'burg and Durban, and we would, like, wave to each other, be friendly, and then one day I stopped seeing her. And after a few weeks, I asked around about what happened to her and one guy said that she broke down on the side of the highway. She radioed for help and the guys were on their way, but before they got there some car stopped and she was attacked. She was in the hospital for a long time.<sup>101</sup>

In light of these dangers, several of the drivers highlighted the simple things they did to stay safe. One woman explained: 'Me as a lady, I can't park anywhere and sleep like men 'cause anything can happen. I always make sure to have my doors locked, that's the most important thing'.<sup>102</sup> Another emphasised how little protection she kept with her during her night shift: 'I don't even have a gun, or anything. I only lock my door. And pray to God to keep me safe'.<sup>103</sup> One Human Resources manager noted that many of their male drivers carry weapons when on the job. In a country where armed robbery, hijacking and rape statistics are alarmingly high<sup>104</sup> it is notable that none of the women we interviewed brought weapons into the trucks with them, relying instead on their instincts and their faith to keep them safe.

When asked about their initial motivations in seeking this non-traditional line of work, several of the female drivers cited the steady, relatively higher salary earned through driving trucks as an advantage over other types of employment. This echoes other studies of women that show the importance of economic factors in motivating women to seek non-traditional employment.<sup>105</sup> One woman noted that, as she had only a Standard 6 education (roughly

99 Interview, Female Truck Driver, January 15, 2009.

100 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 12, 2009.

101 Interview, Female Truck Driver, January 10, 2009.

102 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 5, 2009.

103 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 12, 2009.

104 South African Police Services, 'Crime in the RSA for April to March 2001 to 2005/2006'. Pretoria. [http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2006/\\_pdf/provinces/rsa\\_total.pdf](http://www.saps.gov.za/statistics/reports/crimestats/2006/_pdf/provinces/rsa_total.pdf) (Accessed 2 October 2008) 2006); R. Hirschowitz, S. Worku and M. Orkin, 'Quantitative Research Findings on Rape in South Africa', Pretoria, Statistics South Africa 2000.

105 M.A. Pinkstaf and A.B. Wilkinson, *Women at Work: Overcoming the Obstacles* (Reading, Massachusetts, Addison-Wesley, 1979); M. Walshok, *Blue-Collar Women: Pioneers on the Male Frontier* (Garden City, NJ, Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1981); B. Carroll and F. Cherry, 'Some Advice for Overcoming Barriers to Women's Achievement in Non-Traditional Occupations', *Feminist Perspectives* (Ottawa, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women 1988).

equivalent to Form 3 in the UK), she would be unable to find a job with a high enough salary to support herself and her children. With a Code 14 driving licence, however, she was able to join the ranks of the semi-skilled. Put simply, she said: 'I am very happy. I can support my family. This is a good job'.<sup>106</sup>

### *Analysing Women in Male-dominated Work*

This study looks at the perspectives of road freight employers and female truck drivers in South Africa. While there is no known research on this specific topic, previous studies from the developed world have established certain expectations for the integration of women into traditionally male-dominated fields that are relevant to this initial study.<sup>107</sup>

Kanter's tokenism theory – which examines how workplace environments are altered by the presence of women (or other traditionally-excluded groups) – will frame the discussion and be interrogated in light of other relevant literature.<sup>108</sup> To reiterate, Kanter suggests that predictable pressures and responses will result when 'tokens' are introduced into the workforce and asserts that women in these fields will experience negative manifestations of three perceptual phenomena: visibility, polarisation and assimilation.<sup>109</sup> According to Kanter, these women will be overtly scrutinised by colleagues and supervisors (visibility), their differences will be negatively exaggerated in relation to their colleagues (polarisation), and their co-workers will distort their characteristics in order to suit stereotypical ideas about how they will behave (assimilation).

### *Visibility: Women in the Public Eye*

Kanter suggests that women working in male-dominated employment will be both supervised and scrutinised more closely than their male colleagues, leading to self-consciousness of their own heightened visibility in the workplace. In this study, female drivers report being interrogated or scrutinised prior to attaining their licence, as well as while on the job. All of the women recalled incredulous reactions from driver testing officials, supervisors, colleagues and strangers when they first appeared in the workplace. In line with Eveline,<sup>110</sup> it is notable that both women's professional performance *and* their sexuality are subject to scrutiny, with several female drivers experiencing sexual advances from colleagues and strangers while on the job.

Lee's study<sup>111</sup> of female ambulance drivers during the First World War highlights how women often feel pressure to meet the highest of standards when working in non-traditional employment, as the following attests:

106 Interview, Female Truck Driver, February 5, 2009.

107 Whittock, *Feminizing the Masculine?*; Whittock, 'Women's experiences of non-traditional employment'; Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', pp. 965–90; K.R. Yount, 'Ladies, flirts and tomboys', *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 19, 4 (1991), pp. 396–422; L. Zimmer, 'Tokenism and Women in the Workplace: The Limits of Gender-Neutral Theory', *Social Problems*, 35, 1 (1988), pp. 64–77; B.F. Reskin and I. Padavic, 'Supervisors as Gatekeepers: Male Supervisor's Response to Women's Integration in Plant Jobs', *Social Problems*, 35, 5 (1988), pp. 536–50.

108 Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life'.

109 *Ibid.*, p. 972.

110 Eveline, "'Normalization", "Leading Ladies", and "Free Men", J. Lee, "'I Wish My Mother Could See Me Now": The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) an Negotiation of Gender and Class Relations, 1907–1918', *National Women's Study Association*, 19, 2 (2007), pp. 138–58.'

111 J. Lee, "'I Wish My Mother Could See Me Now": The First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) and the Negotiation of Gender and Class Relations, 1907–1918', *National Women's Study Association*, 19, 2 (2007), pp. 138–58.

Hutchinson's need to be recognised as a proficient mechanic, for example, is illustrated when she reported for duty and found two male officers clad in overalls inspecting her car. She played for time, told the inspectors she feared she might be late in her duties, and pleaded with them to substitute another car for hers, saying she would bring back her car for them in the morning. She went to work that night and stayed up cleaning and greasing for hours so that the car would pass its inspection with flying colors the next morning.<sup>112</sup>

Each female truck driver recounted how they were able to reduce negative visibility in their workplace by asserting themselves with colleagues and performing their duties to a high standard. While none of the women reported feeling stressed to achieve these standards, claiming instead a feeling of pride when their hard work translated to recognition, the fact that one female driver was awarded 'Driver of the Year' by her company suggests an overwhelming motivation to achieve success in a non-subjective measure.<sup>113</sup> Another driver asserted that she could 'drive better than hundreds of [men]', further demonstrating the extent to which high performance is seen as an antidote to scrutiny and necessary in order to be taken seriously. These findings echo Lee<sup>114</sup> and Kanter,<sup>115</sup> suggesting that 'performance pressures' – however slight – are indeed a consequence of women's heightened visibility in male-dominated employment.

It is significant that no female drivers reported experiencing negative social sanctioning by friends or family as a result of their work in a male-dominated profession. All female drivers reported on the positive aspects of heightened visibility, stating that they were often praised by family members, including their husbands and boyfriends, and were only too happy to respond to excited strangers' queries about their unique line of work. This suggests that female drivers may be upheld as role models to younger girls and other women in their communities. Further research is needed to determine whether these female drivers have encouraged other women to drive freight in South Africa.

### *Polarisation: Exaggerated Differences*

Kanter suggests that women in male-dominated professions will have their characteristics exaggerated in relation to their male colleagues. Both groups of employers in this study – those who did not employ women as well as those who did – discussed the challenges of integrating women in the industry along traditionally gendered lines. Physiological difference between men and women was a recurrent theme. In Acker's words, 'women's bodies – female sexuality, their ability to procreate and their pregnancy, breast-feeding, and child care, menstruation, and mythic 'emotionality' – are suspect, stigmatised, and used as grounds for control and exclusion'.<sup>116</sup> Some employers discussed a fear that women would be 'distractions' for men, believing that they would complicate the workforce dynamic by having relationships with co-workers.<sup>117</sup> Other studies observe the benefits of perpetuating certain generalisations about women in order to justify their exclusion. Burton termed these 'masculinity protection strategies' and suggested that by exaggerating the unique demands of

112 B. Hutchinson, 'Transcript of Oral History', Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents, Number 74/105/1, quoted in Lee, 'I Wish My Mother Could See Me Now', p. 153.

113 Roth, 'The Social Psychology of Tokenism', pp. 189–214.

114 Lee, 'I Wish My Mother Could See Me Now', pp. 138–58.

115 Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', pp. 965–90.

116 J. Acker, 'Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations', *Gender and Society*, 4, 2 (1990), pp. 139–158, p. 152.

117 J. Lorber, 'Trust, Loyalty, and the Place of Women in the Organization of Work', in J. Freeman (ed.), *Women: A Feminist Perspective* (Palo Alto, Mayfield, 1984).

women in the workplace, men are able to preserve their work environment as a male-only domain.<sup>118</sup>

Employers without female drivers suggested that the potential for female employees' to become pregnant was sufficient to render their training useless. Such comments illustrate what Correll and colleagues call the 'motherhood penalty', where women with children are perceived as less dedicated to their job, less capable of performing, and less desirable as employees.<sup>119</sup> It is notable that none of the employers spoke of pragmatic strategies, such as improving access to crèche services, in order to enable more women with children to participate in the work force. Rather, pregnancy was seen as an obstacle to employment. One employer mentioned a targeted training program for women that failed because 'they all ended up pregnant'. This attitude exemplifies the 'pregnancy bias' that leads to additional workplace discrimination and is characterised by consistently lower performance evaluations of pregnant women than other women, expectations of pregnant women to be more patient, nurturing and passive, and reluctance to hire women because they may become pregnant in the future.<sup>120</sup>

Eveline notes how 'workplaces are largely organised as if the only interests involved are those which benefit male stereotypes'.<sup>121</sup> This is never more evident than with the issue of separate bathroom facilities for women – a concern employers frequently mentioned. The costs and logistics of separate facilities were said to pose a significant obstacle to the integration of women into the industry. This is echoed by other studies on the constraint of non-traditional 'blue collar' employment.<sup>122</sup> A woman in O'Donnell's study of non-traditional employment recounted the following story:

A garage I applied to said I could have an interview and then when it came down to it they said we haven't got toilet facilities and that was their reason. I said well you've got to have a toilet for staff so what's the difference, but they said it was a man's toilet. I said: "Why can't I use the same toilet as a man?" and they said "no".<sup>123</sup>

Greed's study of the construction industry contains similar accounts of non-existent toilet facilities for women, or of the necessity of travelling additional distances in order to use a bathroom.<sup>124</sup> For the women in this study, frequently the only option was to use the male bathroom facilities. This reality was captured in Photograph 1, taken by a photojournalist that followed the lives of three of the female truck drivers from this study. Safety on the job is one of the most oft-mentioned concerns about hiring female drivers. While most of the health and safety risks involved in truck driving are present at an equal level for men and women, it is only upon the influx of women into the industry that these concerns are openly articulated. By emphasising occupational dangers along gendered lines, some employers without female drivers, in effect, justify the exclusion of women from entering the profession while

118 C. Burton, *The Promise and the Price: The Struggle for Equal Opportunity in Women's Employment* (Sydney, Allen & Unwin, 1991).

119 S. Correll, S. Benard and I. Paik, 'Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?', *American Journal of Sociology*, 112, 5 (2007), pp. 1,297–339; M. Baker, 'Motherhood, Employment and the "Child Penalty"', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 33 (2010), pp. 215–24.

120 J.A. Halpert, M.L. Wilson and J.L. Hickman, 'Pregnancy as a Source of Bias in Performance Appraisals', *Journal of Organizational Behaviour*, 14, 7 (1993), pp. 649–63.

121 Eveline, "'Normalization", "Leading Ladies" and "Free Men"', p. 158.

122 A. O'Donnell, 'Gendered Choices: Young Women's Perspectives on Non-Traditional Training and Careers in Northumberland', *Education and Training*, 50, 6 (2008), p. 484; Greed, 'Women in the Construction Professions'; A. Batty and R. Birchielli, 'Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire? Persistent Gender Barriers in Australian Fire-fighting and Challenges for HRM', *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49, 3 (2010), pp. 308–24.

123 A. O'Donnell, 'Gendered Choices: Young Women's Perspectives on Non-Traditional Training and Careers in Northumberland', *Education and Training*, 50, 6 (2008), pp. 474–88, p. 484.

124 Greed, 'Women in the Construction Professions', p. 193.



Figure 1. A Female Truck Driver in a Male Washroom.<sup>125</sup>

maintaining a façade of concern. Employers with female drivers seemed genuinely concerned about the risk of physical or sexual violence against women should they break down on the side of the road, particularly during a night shift.

Despite evidence that some employers in the road freight industry emphasise the negative dimensions of women's difference from their male colleagues, it is notable that female drivers report a relatively positive experience with co-workers. This echoes other studies<sup>126</sup> and complicates the notion that discrimination and sexism naturally underscore male-dominated work environments. Moreover, while employers without female drivers tended to overestimate the relative costs of pregnancy and exaggerate the differences between men and women in the workplace, employers with female drivers on staff asserted that these were a necessary trade-off given the benefits of employing women.

### Assimilation: Slotted into Stereotypes

Kanter's framework proposes that women entering non-traditional employment will perceive their characteristics to be distorted by colleagues and supervisors in order to suit stereotypical ideas about how women behave.<sup>127</sup> Partly as an antidote to these negative characterisations, more recent scholarship has observed that in order to be employed or accepted into male dominated professions, many women feel that they must actively shed any traits that are traditionally associated with femininity. Bagilhole's research with women in academia yielded the following observation from a female professor: 'Because there are so few women, they will only select "male" females. You have to adopt that model to get on'.<sup>128</sup> Another

125 See <http://lizrubincam.com>

126 Whittock, 'Women's Experiences of Non-Traditional Employment'; O'Farrell and Harlan, 'Craftworkers and Clerks', pp. 252–65.

127 Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life'.

128 Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*, p. 155.

respondent from the civil service stated that, 'Managers look for male qualities and therefore give men the promotion as opposed to women'.<sup>129</sup> Cockburn summarises this viewpoint: 'If you want to join men as equals in the public sphere, you must leave behind womanly things, you must be indistinguishable from a man'.<sup>130</sup>

The findings from this study suggest that, far from feeling forced to adopt traditionally 'male' qualities, women in the road freight industry are being specifically recognised as having desirable differences in relation to some of their male colleagues. Certain characteristically 'feminine' traits, such as cleanliness, risk aversion, and cautiousness are cited by employers, not as barriers to employing female drivers but as a positive motivation for employing more women.

Kanter's observations about the potential for women to be characterised in exaggerated, caricatured roles – what she termed 'role entrapment' – are illustrated in a modified form with these findings. In Kanter's original formulation, women in non-traditional employment would be inducted into one of four stereotypical roles: mother, seductress, pet ('kid sister'), and iron maiden. These roles served to make women's presence in the workforce palatable, by preserving 'the familiar form of interaction between the kinds of people represented by the token and the dominants'.<sup>131</sup> Importantly, these roles are applied differently depending on other markers of women's status, such as race. In Martin's study of black women in the US police force, she observes:

Many of the white patrolmen are protective of white women, and the latter acquiesce by enacting the stereotyped roles of "pet", "mother", or "seductress" to gain personal acceptance and backup. Black women are also told to remain "back covers" by male partners who do not expect them to perform as equals. When they defer to white men and accept a passive role, however, they cannot count on being protected as females and may instead be viewed as 'lazy' (thereby fitting the "welfare mother" stereotype).<sup>132</sup>

In the context of this study, where all of the female drivers are black South Africans, it is notable that the praise they receive for their exemplary dress, manner and driving skills illustrates the benefits of conforming to certain stereotypical gender traits. Such endorsement supports the view that, by and large, women in this sample were being viewed in a modified version of the 'mother' role. This is not an uncommon experience of women in non-traditional employment. Some studies, however, have problematised the idea that women who enter a male-dominated work environment are necessarily a 'civilising force'.<sup>133</sup> As in Eveline's study of affirmative action programmes in Australia, the benefit of hiring women 'is coded through the inseparability of women's sexuality from their role in paid labour'.<sup>134</sup> The emphasis on women's civilising attributes also frames 'typical male behaviour' as barbaric and uncivilised, while serving to exclude those women whose characteristics fall outside of such stereotypical, gendered categorisations.<sup>135</sup> The dismissal of one female truck driver for being 'overly aggressive' bolsters the suggestion that women are granted entry and approval into this new profession depending on whether they exemplify 'typical feminine traits'.

129 *Ibid.*, p. 152.

130 C. Cockburn, *In the Way of Women* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 1991), p. 164; Bagilhole, *Women in Non-Traditional Occupations*, p. 151.

131 Kanter, 'Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life', p. 981.

132 S.E. Martin, "'Outsider within" the Station House: The Impact of Race and Gender on Black Women Police', *Social Problems*, 41, 3 (1994), pp. 383–400. p. 391.

133 T. Wallace, 'It's a Man's World!: Restructuring Gender Imbalances in the Volvo Truck Company?', *Gender Work and Organization*, 6, 1 (1999), pp. 20–31.

134 Eveline, "Normalization", "Leading Ladies", and "Free Men", p. 163.

135 *Ibid.*

These findings suggest that women in the road freight industry experience both negative and positive impacts of this type of 'role entrapment'. On one hand, women who deviate from select 'feminine' traits or behaviours may be sanctioned. This raises issues about the extent to which women are truly free to be themselves in this industry, rather than feeling forced to conform to gender stereotypes. Additionally, the fact that employers perceive women to be less of a risk for HIV infection, even though statistically speaking, women in South Africa are more likely to be HIV positive than men (see Table 1), suggests that this type of stereotypical characterisation is persuasive enough to override evidence-based decision-making.

On the other hand, women are perceived to have desirable differences in relation to their male colleagues, and are being employed as a result of these perceptions. According to the testimony of road freight employers, in many ways the definition of a 'good driver' seems to be increasingly feminised, defined by both technical competence as well as an awareness of safety, risk aversion and conscientiousness. In contrast to the findings from previous studies that 'virtually every perceived difference between male and female employees [is] unfavorable to women aspiring to high level occupations'<sup>136</sup> and that, as a result, women must adopt typically 'male' characteristics in order to succeed in non-traditional employment, this research suggests that assumptions about women's 'natural' tendencies (to be responsible, sober and safe) as well as observations about women's competence with technical tasks are fuelling demand-side interest in employing women.

Kanter's tokenism framework serves to illuminate important facets of the reality of female truck drivers in South Africa. In line with other studies of women in non-traditional employment, female truck drivers report experiencing each of Kanter's perceptual phenomena – visibility, polarisation and assimilation – yet their experiences also deviate from these expectations. Whereas in previous studies, the cumulative effect of these three phenomena is largely negative for women – they perform exceptionally only to be seen as 'adequate' at best and remain limited by the stereotypical roles they inhabit – the collective experience of the women we sampled is generally positive – they perform the technical aspects of the job at an exceptional level and are viewed as more desirable employees. This has led these women to be considered not just as equal to male drivers, but in some cases as superior.

### *Study Limitations, Further Research and Conclusion*

As an exploratory study, this research was undertaken with a small group of road freight employers and women employed as truck drivers in South Africa. While this captures employers' and female drivers' experiences, it cannot provide a holistic account of how employment in the industry is changing for women over time. There is also an absence of the voices of women who were once employed in the industry but have moved on for various reasons, including the challenges of balancing childcare with employment.<sup>137</sup> Future studies are needed to examine women who have remained as drivers, as well as those who have left the industry, in order to represent the pressures and challenges of this type of employment more comprehensively.

136 B. Rosen and T.H. Jerdee, 'Perceived Sex Differences in Managerially Relevant Characteristics', *Sex Roles*, 4 (1978), pp. 837–43, p. 843.

137 Batty and Birchielli, 'Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire?', pp. 308–24; J. McLennan, A. Birch, R. Beatson and S. Colishaw, 'Factors Impacting on Recruiting and Retaining Australia's Volunteer Firefighters', *Australian Journal on Volunteering*, 12, 2 (2007), pp. 59–69.

This study is not informed by the perceptions and experiences of male truck drivers. While findings suggest that more women are being hired to drive trucks in South Africa, they will long remain the minority of South Africans with Code 10 and Code 14 licences. In order to be able to draw wider conclusions regarding the evolving workforce dynamics between colleagues and peers in the road freight industry, future studies will need to include also the voice of the majority of those who drive freight – men. The ways in which male drivers perceive and interact with female drivers will provide critical insight into how traditional notions of masculinity are being rearticulated in light of this burgeoning female workforce.

A further limitation of this study is the small sample size of female drivers, and the fact that all interviews were with black South African women. This was not the result of deliberate recruitment criteria; our snowball sampling technique yielded a sample that is neither representative nor generalisable, either in number or in ethnic/racial composition. Future research will need to include a broader group of women in order to explore the differential experience of female truck drivers in South Africa's road freight industry.

Even so, the positive and affirming experiences of 'blue collar work' for these women are in line with what other studies have reported in the developed world.<sup>138</sup> We do not, however, know the extent to which this commonality of experience exists between skilled non-traditionally employed women in the global north and the global south. Further research is needed to examine the experiences of women in emerging economies.

Despite these limitations, we can nevertheless argue that the legislative motivation from BBBEE and Employment Equity policies, coupled with the threat of a skilled labour shortage and HIV/AIDS have forced employers in the road freight industry to reconsider hiring practices. In response, some of these employers have turned to the 'talents of the other half of the workforce' by hiring female drivers. These women are frequently considered superior drivers to men by many employers due to the perception that they are safer, more conscientious, less likely to endanger public safety and company property, and less likely to engage in risky behaviour including those associated with exposure to HIV/AIDS. To meet growing demand, findings suggest that women will increasingly be hired to drive freight in South Africa – three of the country's largest road freight companies have plans to begin or continue targeted training programmes for female drivers. In light of the on-going presence of women in this field, this study contributes insights into the reasons for their employment, the risks associated with their jobs, relationships between them and their colleagues and supervisors, and their perspectives on the balance between family and work obligations.

While this research presents a relatively optimistic picture of the future of women in the South African road freight industry, these results should not detract from the need to continue advocating for greater awareness of women's labour rights in South Africa and across the region. Whittock's observation that 'the local pattern may differ from the global pattern',<sup>139</sup> is particularly apt in South Africa, where opportunities coexist with deep historical and structural inequalities. It is clear that, for women, simply gaining entry into the road freight industry is only the first step in a complex process of gaining acceptance, support and respect. In this context we endorse Walsh and Scully's assertion that 'it is here in southern Africa that scholars can "access and make the workings of power visible – to read up the ladder of privilege" and expose inequities, ... empowering southern Africans to resist multiple forms

138 O'Farrell and Harlan, 'Craftworkers and Clerks', pp. 252–65; H. Meyer and M.D. Lee, 'Women in Traditionally Male Jobs: The Experiences of Ten Public Utility Companies' (Monograph Number 65, U.S. Department of Labour', Washington D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office (1978); M. Walshok, 'Factors Affecting Success for Women in Skilled Blue-Collar Jobs' (paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Social Problems, Boston 1979); Batty and Birchielli, 'Out of the Frying Pan, into the Fire?', pp. 308–24.

139 Whittock, *Feminizing the Masculine? Women in Non-Traditional Employment*, p. 19.

of oppression and to imagine new ways of living'.<sup>140</sup> One form of these 'new ways of living' will be the continued entrance of women into non-traditional employment.

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140 D. Walsh and P. Scully, 'Altering Politics, Contesting Gender', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32, 1 (2006), p. 12.