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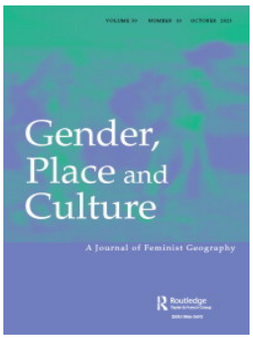

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Stories of the gendered mobile work of English lorry driving

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ABSTRACT

One proposed strategy to overcome labour shortages in male-dominated jobs is to attract female workers. This has been the case for lorry driving in the UK. These efforts, however, often work to reproduce binary gendered stereotypes, or seek to include women without questioning how working conditions and everyday embodied work itself constructs gender roles and difference and is differentially experienced. In this paper, we highlight differentiated lorry driving bodies at work, centring lorries as an essential part of global logistical systems. Empirically drawing from interviews and mobile ethnographies with freight drivers in England, we tell a series of composite stories which uncover gendered ideals of worker-bodies, and embodied experiences of mobilities. With the gendered, embodied life's work of lorry driving remaining largely invisible and poorly understood, we illustrate the complex intersections between places, people, materialities and forms of work. Through this paper, we show how (gendered) narratives and bodily difference are both reproduced and disrupted through lorry driving work. We argue that only through recognising – and destabilising - the gendered re/production of mobile work will other logistical futures be made possible.

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Introduction

The front page of the 2019 World Road Transport Organisation report '*Tackling the Driver Shortage*' (IRU. 2019, Figure 1, Supplementary Material) depicts a woman smiling, with her arms crossed, leaning onto a red lorry (also called a heavy goods vehicle [HGV] or truck). She looks to be in her mid-30s,

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relatively slim, feminine and wearing blue jeans and a plaid shirt and a loose jacket. The road behind her is covered in ice and snow, recognising, perhaps, the popular Ice Road Truckers TV show; a programme built upon ideas of heroics, danger, adventure, and risk tied into representations of masculinity (Moscato 2017). The image on the cover of the report – which is focused on responding to the driver shortage in the freight sector – seeks to reflect the sector's interest in 'diversifying' its workforce. Gender is one category through which this diversifying is sought. Only 2% of the European driver workforce are women (IRU. 2019) and recent data from the UK has suggested this could be even lower (less than 1%, Department for Transport 2021). Although there are women working within freight and logistics (Hopkins and Akyelken 2022), UK *drivers* are predominantly male, white and over 45 years old (Department for Transport 2021).

Efforts to grow the lorry driving labour force through the inclusion of women are bound up in – often stereotypical – representations of masculinity and femininity. Within what we call the cultural mythology of the 'King of the Road', freight driving has long been framed as archetypal 'man's work', emphasising the need for traditionally 'masculine' characteristics: strength, independence, flexibility, spatial awareness, skills in driving complex machinery, and the ability to work in isolation, in difficult conditions with long and anti-social working hours. Truck driving is used in a variety of contexts to exemplify a hyper-masculine workplace (Levy 2016), and a stereotypically masculine job, with drivers described as 'the epitome of masculinity' (Corzine and Kirby 1977, 190). The 'King of the Road' might then be understood as the 'ideal (freight) worker' (Acker 2006) re/enforcing ideas that only a 'manly-man' (Baker and Levon 2016) can succeed in a 'trucker' culture; a framing perpetuated through, particularly, North American and British movies, TV shows, media articles and songs (Eastman, William, and Schrock 2013).

In this paper, we ask: *How do stories of differentiated lorry driving bodies at work relate to - and potentially complicate or disrupt – stereotypical gender assumptions embedded in trucking work?* Based on interviews and mobile ethnographies with freight drivers in England, we use composite stories (see, Falola and West Ohueri 2017) as an ethnographical retelling to maintain the complexity and 'storied' nature of gendered working lives, and retain participant anonymity. Rather than parsing out themes and comparing women to men, reproducing an essentialised gender binary, stories allow for an understanding of how (gendered) bodily work is spoken about, and done, through spatialities and materialities, practices and technologies. Our reliance on composite stories reflects our theoretical understandings of mobile subjectivity, gender and embodied mobile work. Following material feminist and queer theories of difference (Barad 2012; Grosz 2005, 2011) we look to disrupt dominant narratives of 'one sex [male] and its counterpart' (Grosz 2005, 174), embedded within the 'King of the Road' narrative. Instead of

focusing on the inclusion, equalising of 'the other' with(in) the valued, presumed, norm of a white, able-bodied, heterosexual, individualised mobile subject (Davidson 2022) we attend to the proliferation of difference in itself (Deleuze in Grosz 2011). In this view, gender is not the socially-constructed counterpart to the biologically-determined binary of 'sex', but rather 'gender' is a production of material and ideological difference that becomes through specific spaces, technologies, narratives and practices.

In contrast to much research on gender and transport and gendered work, this paper does not address how female and male truck drivers differ (see, for example, Naysmith and Rubincam 2012). Instead, we look to understand how gender is reproduced and materialised through the work of lorry driving. Importantly, our understanding of gender is one that cannot be disentangled from the specific material and ideological effects of classed, racialised, heteronormative and ableist power relations and how they manifest in the specific English context of this research. It is through the specificities of emplaced ethnographic stories that we feel most able to articulate the daily embodied acts (Grosz 2011) that in aggregate become structures of power. We also recognise our role as researchers in (de/re) constructing gender through storytelling. Understanding difference in the way we have outlined, allows for other (gendered, working, mobile) futures (Grosz 2011).

Elliot (2016) outlines two key approaches to gender within mobilities research: 1. gender as a category and, 2. gender as process. Much of the limited prior work on gender and lorry driving takes a 'category' approach, focusing on female lorry drivers as the 'other' half of a pre-existing binary, covering issues such as female drivers' perceptions of safety at rest services (Bernard, Bouck, and Young 2000; Naysmith and Rubincam 2012); gender segregation and continuing structural barriers faced by female drivers (Scott and Davis-Sramek 2021); lorry cab design (Black *et al*. 2017); and employers' perceptions of positive 'feminine' traits of 'cleanliness, risk aversion and cautiousness' (Naysmith and Rubincam 2012). In contrast, our approach to gender in lorry driving builds on research in mobilities that understands gender as a relational process; how mobilities constitute, and are constituted by, gendered meanings, relations of power and subjectivities (Hanson 2010). This work has shown cultures and economies of combustion masculinity (Redshaw 2018); the presumption and reproduction of particular (dominant) masculinities in the design, sale, promotion and representation of motor vehicles (Landström 2006); and the assumed 'technical' skill (Conley and McLaren 2009) and spatial awareness (Lawton 2010) of driving. This research has also interrogated cultural associations of masculinity to valued movement, mobility and freedom (Clarsen 2013) and femininity with fixity (Cresswell 1999). Mobility and driving have conversely been associated as liberating for women (Hanson 2010) or as 'transgression' of social norms (Clarsen 2013; Cresswell 1999).

Our paper looks to address four aspects that remain under-developed within mobilities research: firstly, with exceptions (e.g., Boyer and Spinney 2016), the social construction of gender tends to be emphasised over how embodied difference *becomes* in relation to spaces and technologies. Pick-up trucks for example, are seen as imbued with 'symbolic meanings' within working class Canadian masculinity (Barber 2019). In our stories we centre truckers' bodies and their f(r)ictional relationships with lorry spaces and materialities. This means, for example, understanding truckers' gendered fear and experiences of safety, not simply as tied into social constructions of gender, but to trace design (or absence) of infrastructures as a form of gender-based infrastructural violence (Datta and Ahmed 2020). Secondly, much research on mobility and gender has left the binarised category of gender intact or under-theorised (Hanson 2010; Elliot 2016). As Clarsen (2013) argues, more attention needs to be paid to how mobility shapes understandings of gender itself. Thirdly, while research has questioned the cultural associations of masculinity with relatively unfettered mobility, there remains an attachment of value and freedom to mobility. Our paper addresses a fourth aspect: the relative paucity of research on mobility as labour (in contrast to that on commuting, leisure travel or care mobilities). A focus on mobility *as* labour not only decentres mobility-as-freedom but brings mobility studies into conversation with labour geographies.

Feminist research in labour geographies questions the figure of the valued worker as the 'unencumbered white male' (Acker 2006) and essentialist notions of 'proper' times, spaces and practices of labour (Richardson 2018). As with much of logistics and transportation (Hopkins and Akyelken 2022), lorry driving is a male-dominated occupation and its perceived incompatibility with home life and care commitments is often cited as one of the barriers to women's entry. However, in some respects trucking blurs some of the spatial and temporal boundaries between 'work' and 'home' (Hanson 2010), with spaces of driving labour serving as interim 'homes' (Urry 2006) for eating, sleeping and leisure or the (dis)comforts of 'dwelling on the move' (Gregson 2018).

Considering spatio-temporal divisions of labour, feminist geographers have highlighted how the boundaries between 'productive labour' and social reproduction are increasingly blurred within contemporary capitalism (Strauss and Meehan 2015). The term 'life's work' (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2004) breaks down this binary and focuses on the everyday embodied practices that construct the worker, and yet tend to be under-valued and under-researched (Mitchell, Marston, and Katz 2004; Strauss and Meehan 2015). Focusing on the life's work of lorry driving allows for acknowledgement of embodied vulnerabilities and precarities that sit at the interstices of formal times and spaces of labour (Johnston 2018). Lorry driving work also needs to be understood as structured by wider masculinist production

of infrastructure (Siemiatycki, Enright, and Valverde 2020) and geopolitics of logistics (Cowen 2014). By some accounts, trucking is understood as 'low status' (Teig and Susskind 2008, 858) within contexts of economic restructuring and the redundancy and devaluation of working-class masculine identities (McDowell 2003) and the increased 'feminisation' of labour in which 'masculine' traits and identifications with physicality and strength are devalued and service-sector roles require 'soft' skills and emotional or immaterial labour deemed 'feminine' (Cowen and Siciliano 2011).

Aspects of what we call the King of the Road mythology arise in much literature on trucking. We were introduced to this term in an analysis of UK freight trade magazines, where 'King of the Road' denoted a historically framed set of experiences for (male) drivers. This dominant myth of trucker masculinity is maintained through its opposition with femininity and 'othered' masculinities, as found by McLean (2016b) with 'idealised' white Canadian trucker masculinities constructed in relation to racist stereotypes of feminised, debased South Asian masculinity. The heyday of the 'King of the Road' is contrasted with the reported loss of this 'status' through, for example, technological developments (e.g., vehicle automation): 'autonomous trucks could lead to a demasculinization of very traditional figures of working-class masculinity such as the truck driver' (Weber and Kröger 2018, 20). We are contextualising this framing within UK haulage, which in some respects echoes, and yet differs from, the cultures of road haulage in the U.S., Canada, and elsewhere. The U.S. remains an important point of context, since that is where the majority of popular representations of truckers have been set.

Within this context, women appear as immobile/immobilised support and in caring roles: working in freight offices or roadside cafes, or at home caring for children. When female truckers appear in popular culture, it is as 'daddy's tomboys' and 'mommy's little girls gone wrong': 'misdirected socialization by their truck driving fathers' and 'inappropriately socialized gender deviants' (Eastman, William, and Schrock 2013, 421). In the UK, there is also a narrative of seeking to disrupt ideas of 'stereotypically fat and lesbian' female truckers (i.e., UK Channel 4 2012 documentary on female drivers), by instead promoting how truckers can be ultra-feminine, in for example, 'the world's most beautiful trucker' (The Mirror 2019).

The encouragement of women into the sector coincides with this 'hypermasculine' occupation being viewed as devalued and disempowered through the effects of logistical power and through increasing surveillance. Levy (2016) describes surveillance systems such as GPS tracking, tachograph data surveillance (Hopkins 2022; Kanngieser 2013) as 'emasculating technologies', as they challenge the driver's masculinity understood in terms of autonomy, stamina (to keep working without rest) and ability to provide financially. Gregson's (2017; 2018) UK-based research highlights how contingent piece work, the effects of the 2008 financial crisis and driving time regulations

collide with pressures from logistics purchasers to create a 'logistics precariat'. Performance management, timed delivery slots, fuel costs, congestion, and lack of infrastructures such as running water or toilets (McLean 2016a) as well as European Union drivers' hours regulations (which still govern British drivers' imposed rest periods post-Brexit; UK Government, n.d.) – dictate drivers' spatiotemporal rhythms, and further put into question narratives of lorry driving work as individualistic and liberating (Gregson 2017; 2018).

Through focusing on drivers' stories in this paper, we want to show not only how individual drivers are *affected by* some of the relations of power outlined above, but how they actively enact, are complicit in, negotiate with and subvert forms of gendered logistical power. While our composite stories focus on individual narratives, we do not take a 'micro' focus on mobility as opposed to a 'macro'/structural analysis; rather, we investigate how power is enacted through embodied labour. By highlighting narratives from workers engaged in different kinds of lorry driving – from tramping or trunking to owner-driver or salaried driver, contracted or agency (Gregson 2017, Scott and Davis-Sramek 2021) – we emphasise the specificities within lorry driving work, with different levels of pay, pressures, rhythms, working conditions and levels of gender segregation. We bring together and extend literatures on trucking, gender and mobility and labour geographies to complicate the dominant gendered narratives of trucking work. Composite stories reveal how the everyday life's work involved in trucking is deeply gendered, in ways that both reinforce the 'King of the Road' mythology and confound it.

Methodology and methods

'But have you ever been in a lorry?' This question was asked time and again by interview participants, who sought to describe their time on the road. The suggestion to do drive-alongs (Büscher and Urry 2009; Merriman 2014) came from truckers themselves. They felt that describing the experience through their initial interview wasn't sufficient. Life on the road had to be seen, experienced and 'felt' and they wanted to 'show' their experiences to the researcher. The stories within this paper arise from 18 semi-structured interviews with lorry drivers (974 mins of audio, professionally transcribed into text) and two drive-alongs (21 hours in truck, recorded through field-notes, photos and videos). These methods are part of five years of ethnographic research with actors in different parts of the freight sector in England. Ten of the truckers interviewed identified as men and eight as women. Fifteen were white British, one trucker was Caribbean-British, one was Yemeni, and another was Indian. Truckers were recruited through freight companies, Facebook groups and snowball sampling. Snowball sampling was particularly important for recruiting female participants – with many companies never having recruited a female driver. We found that social networks (e.g., private

groups on Facebook) are important and well-used for worker collectivism. University ethics procedures were followed and informed consent was received from all participants.

The complex and unpredictable schedules of the freight drivers meant that despite plans to meet the lorry drivers in person, 16 of the interviews were conducted over the phone (hands-free) at home or work. The interviews covered: their pathway into the sector, experiences of freight work, family and home life, technologies and future work/life intentions. Debbie undertook the two mobile ethnographies, initially to 'supplement' and 'enrich' (Dowling, Lloyd, and Suchet-Pearson 2016) the interview material. Both mobile ethnographies followed an initial interview. The first ride-along was a day shift (6 am to 7 pm) with a male driver doing hub-and spoke routes in the South-East of England, and the second was a night shift (5 pm until 3am) with a female driver trunking between a depot in the West Midlands and another in the South-East. While sharing time in the cab, Debbie heard stories as recounted by truckers, and shared something of the visceral and material realties of (work) life on-the-move (Harada and Waitt 2013), documented in textual and visual form. These drive-alongs and Debbie's observations and experiences are refracted through the novelty of being in a lorry, as well as her own gendered, classed, embodied positionality. Her identities as a white British, mid-30s academic researcher, conditioned the kind of rapport created. Some of this was self-conscious decision-making around self-presentation in terms of clothing and regional (West Midlands) accent (see, Hey 1997).

The lorry journeys afforded conversations and communication, as well as sensory 'data' that could not be constructed through interviews; sharing food, silences and experiences, as well as stories about life on and off the road. Research on passengering and socialities in cars shows how the spatial configuration in a vehicle allows for highly personal conversations, due to the bodily positioning and lack of forced eye contact (Harada and Waitt 2013). While interviews tended to elicit fully formed 'stories' of hope/horror on the road, the ride-alongs allowed for more mundane and complex stories, as well as the expression of unplanned, less rehearsed emotion, practices and bodily affect. Since the lorry cab separates the lorry driver and passenger(s), Debbie was able to comfortably make detailed notes. Some direct quotes are included in the stories below. Throughout the paper, we use a variety of pronouns; when 'we' is used, we are referring to both authors, when 'I' is used in the stories, this refers to Debbie, who conducted the fieldwork.

Composite (counter-complicit) stories

Our research question centres on truckers' bodily, intimate, lived experiences of work (Dutta 2016). This includes the physicality of the job, but also the

embodied forms of life's work that are necessary to the job: sitting, cleaning, eating and toileting. Rather than disaggregate 'data' into themes, our theoretical framework necessitates fidelity to the material, spatial and wider structural contexts of trucker's working lives. Our findings speak to feelings and sensations entangled in working lives on the move; thus, the empirical material needs to be represented in ways that 'induce feeling' (Lorimer and Parr 2014, 544) and 'move' (Jacobson and Larsen 2014) the reader, reflecting how truckers' stories 'moved' us.

However, providing such contextualised and in-depth stories of bodily work requires care. This led us to composite characters (Cook and Dixson 2013) and narratives (Willis 2019). Telling composite counter stories is an approach developed within Critical Race Theory in education studies (Cook and Dixson 2013; Solórzano and Yosso 2002). Counter stories are narratives, particularly of experiences of racism and racial oppression, told by the oppressed, which challenge singular, dominant and totalising (white supremacist) versions of reality (Cook and Dixson 2013). This narrative methodology blurs the lines between fact and fiction, truth and untruth, story and research, using a variety of sources of data (Solórzano and Yosso 2002), to 'bring credibility and an emotive legibility to personal experience' (Falola and West Ohueri 2017, 724) and give voice to collective experiences.

Many of the truckers interviewed are marginalised in terms of class and gender, however, both in our sample, and more widely across the sector, trucking is a predominantly white occupation. In this respect, although many of their stories counter – or complicate – dominant narratives of trucking, they are also at times complicit in re-producing white supremacy. The invisibility of whiteness (Sue 2006) and maleness emerged through the research, for example where gender was only articulated through femaleness (as the 'other' to the taken-for-granted norm of male trucker identities). Questions of safety, for instance, were interpreted in specific ways by female truckers, who implicitly understood what the female interviewer meant; a shared – albeit differentiated - understanding of danger, risk and threats.

Our composite stories fictionalise accounts by combining different facets of participants' lives and protect the anonymity of participants. We align with methodologies that understand all research narratives, not as accounts of 'the truth', but as co-constructed stories that are always partial and performed. However, following Gullion (2016), we feel a duty to readers to be transparent about how and why we have fictionalised narratives. We sought not to represent a clean and linear 'theme' for each composite story, but to animate and reflect the embodied, sensory and material experiences and complexities of trucking life. This means each of the stories contain multiple characters and inherent contradictions. In line with conventions of telling composite counter stories, we have used direct quotes and specific details as told by participants, with the only fictional element being the construction

of composites. We discussed at length the risks of different ways of representing composite characters: for instance, by segregating out male and female drivers' stories, would we risk re-producing dominant and stereotypical narratives of homogenous 'male trucker' experiences and the female 'other'?

The composite stories, below, are sited in the Cab, the Depot and the Lay-by. These are the spaces of trucking work, and through the iterative process of reviewing the transcripts, fieldnotes, photos and videos, we found these to be prominent sites where truckers described (and did) gendered 'life's work'. The Cab engages with bodily form, dis/ability, and social reproduction. In the Depot we encounter gendered socialities and performance (and surveillance) of driving skill, and in the Lay-by, the work of toileting and maintaining 'safety'. Together these situated stories interrogate and make visible the gendered life's work of trucking in the UK, disrupting simplistic man/woman binaries and instead showing how gender is worked into existence in situated and contingent ways.

Truckers' stories of bodily difference

Episode 1: the cab

The first thing I notice as I step into Alex's lorry are the cushions set out on the driver's seat, three in total: two on the backrest and one on the seat. Alex notices me looking and explains that she needs them because of a number of surgeries she'd had in recent years. These surgeries kept her from driving for several months, the longest time in her adult life she'd been off the road – even childbirth had involved less time off she tells me – but she's still in a lot of pain; the cushions make driving and sitting for long periods of time easier. Before I met Alex in person, we spoke on the phone, it was during that interview that she asked me to join her for a shift. In the phone call Alex described herself to me 'I'm only small, I'm only about 5 ft 1… I'm a bit vertically challenged'.

Charlie describes himself as 'big and strong', explaining that he could buy alcohol without being ID'd from his early teens: 'I've always been big'. But as he went on it became clear that he did not consider his size to be healthy, and saw it as linked to driving lorries: 'I'm about eight stone overweight… I've got a massive belly. I just sit on my backside 15/16 hours a day'. He described other physical effects of trucking work: 'you watch them get out of the cab; they hobble around'. This resonated with me after my first drive-along, when my notes end with '19.10, getting closer to the depot. Feeling tired. Long day. Bottom is numb. Legs are aching, esp. knees'. Charlie is a 'tramper', he sleeps overnight in the cab of his lorry, in a single bed just behind the driver and passenger seats: 'you're eating in there, you're sleeping in there and you're driving in there, in an 8 ft by 2 ft space and that's your home life'.

Descriptions of truckers' bodies and bodily size came unsolicited through the phone interviews with truckers. It was as though their bodily size was

mentioned to stabilise or subvert expectations of what a trucker would or should look like. Despite there being bodily diversity amongst the truckers we spoke to, there remains a dominant discourse around who can, who could and who *should* drive lorries, based largely on supposed 'masculine' traits of height, bodily muscle and strength. Drivers seemed to situate themselves in relation to this, arguably they are *small* or *overweight* only in relation to a supposed 'norm'. This King of the Road is not only discursive but becomes materialised as it is designed into the conditions of work and life in the cab: seat heights and spacing designed for 'average men', timetables and regulations about when to stop and availability of food. We argue that bodily difference in terms of gender, race, bodily size and ability, in some respects *become* in relation to the materialities and meanings associated with the mobile work of trucking.

Alex's cushions and her *vertically challenged* body-in-pain appear as the 'other' of the dominant image of a trucker. Yet, it is the work of trucking itself, the very *becoming trucker* that create the conditions for pain – the cushions alleviating some of the discomfort of long hours sitting and repeating specific motions. Her size, as with other truckers who do not fit an 'average male' body, only becomes noteworthy in relation to the ways in which their bodies do not 'fit' and are 'othered' by the design in and around the cab. Cushions, tools and aids (e.g., steps, ladders, grabbers) are used to cope with seating and positioning and machinery designed for a presumed average worker and legs that are 'too long' ache from being crossed under the seat. While Charlie fits the stereotype of 'big and strong', he does not sit in opposition to Alex for his body has *become trucker* in ways that also elide a masculinist notion of 'hard' bodily boundaries and control. This resonates with many truckers interviewed: leg and foot pain, back problems and body weight are constituted through trucking work; life on the road, cost and difficulty in accessing healthier food and repetitive strain. This is where the life's work of trucking matters and blurs the (gendered) spatial boundaries between 'work' as the space of production and 'home' as the space of social reproduction, domesticity, rootedness and leisure or rest.

It is in the cab (Figure 2, Supplementary Material) where some of the life's work of eating, resting, leisure, cleaning, toileting, washing, sleeping, exercise and maintenance of social contacts occurs that constitutes truckers' body-minds (Gregson 2017). The physical space of the cab and the spatio-temporal rhythms instituted by the driver's different delivery schedules, such as enforced breaks according to EU drivers' hours regulations, condition how these activities can occur. Depending on the specific type of job drivers do and whether they have to 'share' the vehicle (e.g., with a different driver on an alternate shift), their relationship with this space differs. Many lorries have fridges and microwaves, and while some truckers described bringing fresh fruit and vegetables, or 'home-made' food, others rely upon 'unhealthy'

and expensive food from lay-by food cabins and truck stops. In this way, trucking work and truckers' body-minds are constructed in relation to material and imaginative (Blunt and Dowling 2006) configurations of 'home' and its roles and responsibilities. It was clear in interviews that some truckers have the 'care infrastructures' - often unpaid care work undertaken by wives, partners and parents - in place that enable them the time, resources and energy to rest or exercise, and provide them(selves) with healthy packed food for the road.

These stories reaffirm the power of the King of the Road narrative: both Charlie and Alex feel the need to explain or justify how their embodiment aligns (or not) with a trucker stereotype and this dominant 'average' remains embedded in lorry design. It is the dominant discourses around trucker bodies, as well as the specific (gendered, ableist) technologies and spatialities of the lorry that construct the trucker. The body *becomes* 'small' 'sedentary' or 'large' or (dis)abled in particular ways in relation to the technologies of the lorry, the spatio-temporalities of the job and the dominant narratives around embodiment associated with the job. This subverts notions of the man and 'his' lorry as separable, ownable entities or of gendered embodiment as fixed and pre-existing the daily embodied work of trucking. This theorisation pluralises the ways that one might be(come) trucker and forces us to think critically about calls to 'diversify' trucking by attracting varying (gendered, racialised) identities into the occupation. If we understand embodied difference as co-constituted through the work of lorry driving, the onus should be on the conditions of work: the hours, the technologies, the spaces of the cab and dominant discourses that construct 'the trucker'.

Episode 2: the depot

It's just gone 7 pm on a Saturday night as we (my dad and I) pull into a yard, empty except for one lorry. After Dad is satisfied that I am 'safe', he leaves as I get into the lorry. I have sandwiches, fruit and a flask of black coffee in my bag. Blake – the trucker with whom I will be spending the next 9-11 hours - opens a 'bag for life' which sits on the seat between us, there's a picnic for us to share: 'like mum with the picnic' she laughs. I add my food to the bag and Blake says we can share it all once we get to the warehouse; a four-to-five-hour drive away. She also shows me some muffins she's baked; these are for the depot workers; she says she has to sweet talk them 'to get a quick turnaround'. Blake is paid per shift, £120, regardless of how long the shift takes. It's in her best interest to do the journey as quickly as possible: 'foot to the floor, get there, get back'. She tells me that she is the 'mother hen' of the warehouse, she does the same route each night, so she knows the people who work there, 'it's worth it' she says, 'they're the ones who get us loaded'. But it's not as mercenary as it may seem. She takes her self-described 'mothering' role seriously, she talks to some of the

warehouse workers about their problems, she speaks to them on the phone (two call during our drive) even outside of working hours. When we arrive, Blake is greeted like a friend by everyone from the security at the main gate, to the loaders and the office workers. She leaves me taking photos to go in to see the office staff, she takes muffins and shares them around. By the time she returns we have been unloaded and loaded. Her 'trick' works, but she tells me it has only happened this quickly a couple of times before.

The depot or warehouse is where a range of socialities occur, moving far beyond formal notions of 'customer service'. It is also where technical skills are performed, and where driving competencies are put to the test. It is often entering and within the depot that truckers are required to negotiate tight corners, turn in small spaces, back onto often narrow loading bays, tasks which require a range of largely spatial skills. Some female truckers described an objectifying 'male gaze' (Mulvey 1989), which makes them hyper-visible in a masculinised space. This manifested through feeling pressure to 'get it right' first time – despite knowing that their male counterparts also required multiple attempts. Needing not to be the same, but *better* than their male colleagues was central to their narrative. This was also reflected in asking for help; in that same depot, Blake became frustrated at not being able to unscrew a bolt. After I tried, and it became clear neither of us could do it, Blake considered her options: ask for help, or can we make it back OK? She decided we should carry on, and get it sorted back at the yard. Despite the friendships she had at the depot, Blake was unwilling to ask for help. Later, I asked why: 'I don't want to look helpless', she said, this sentiment of 'get by, avoid asking for help', was expressed by other (female) truckers I spoke to.

McClean (2016a, 2016b) found similar expressions in Canada, with male truckers suggesting that female truckers benefit from extra help, while female truckers emphasise their capabilities and independence. In our interviews, female truckers described some of the various strategies they use working in a male-dominated sector: 'taking up the attitude of the men' or 'I've stopped having the girl attitude of 'you can't speak to me like that'. I've now got the attitude of I will give it back to them'. Gendered behaviour and ways of speaking were interrogated by other (female) truckers: 'quite a few of the lorry driving women, for some reason, want to act like men and they swear… for some reason they want to become a mouthy man. I don't know if they think that's the way they're going to blend in'. These differ markedly from the 'mothering' role described by Blake and show how female truckers speak of available strategies in binarised terms: become masculinised to fit in or emphasise their *difference from* male truckers in taking up traditionally feminine roles or emphasising their embodied femininity when describing themselves in interviews.

Depots are not the only site of social interaction for drivers. Drivers of all genders discussed communication and social relationships with transport

planners and managers, other truckers and the maintenance of family and friendships through calls whilst on the road. These interactions challenge the myth of drivers as loners and emphasise trucking as always-already a 'feminised' job with social relationships and customer service dimensions (Cowen and Siciliano 2011). Driving lorries is not an a-social job, it is just that the modes and rhythms of sociality differ from more sedentary occupations. Yet, as explored above, our interviews and ride-alongs show how the emotional and social work of trucking is gendered.

The spatiality, slowness or stationariness of the depot, the city (and the lay-by, as discussed below) render the drivers, their bodies, belongings and lorry handling more visible. In these spaces, under the gaze of - and interaction with – others, the drivers become gendered subjects. Those gendered as outside of the 'somatic norm' (Puwar 2004) of the white male trucker, could be seen as 'space invaders' (Puwar 2004, 10) - entering institutional, occupational spaces that have been predominantly built around white masculinity. Attempting to 'blend in' through ways of speaking, to accommodate and smooth entry through acts of care and service, could be understood as forms of embodied work to make space for themselves - without threatening the status quo, occupational identity and norm of the white male trucker – the 'King of the Road'.

Episode 3: the lay-by

Ezra has been a tramper for over 30 years, and more often than not sleeps in the truck, parked in lay-bys. Her company won't pay the £30 for 'secure' parking in the motorway services, although I am frequently told it isn't actually anymore 'secure' than anywhere else. For trampers, sleeping in lay-bys inevitably limits access to 'essential infrastructures' including toilets and showers. Lay-bys with close proximity to services are popular, hard to come by and fill up quickly. When I asked Ezra about accessing toilets, she laughed: 'There are times when you park in a lay-by and as a lady, you do get caught short and you need the toilet. We have a little thing called 'bucket and chuck it' and it was the safest way for us to go to the toilet and be safe and not risk that we get jumped as we get out of our lorry'. 'Bucket and chuck it' is exactly as it sounds, using a bucket as a toilet, storing it overnight before emptying it in the morning. Others spoke of using bags and – for truckers with penises - bottles. The fear of 'getting jumped' was associated with being a woman and feeling that she was at greater risk than her male counterparts. Whether this was a size and strength thing, or an out-of-placeness (or both) wasn't clear. She told me that once parked in a lay-by for the evening, she removes anything visible – teddies, names - that might suggest she's a woman, from her cab and shuts the curtains to the windows and windscreen to ensure no one can see who is inside. Ezra's small physical size – again voluntarily described over the phone - and being a woman, made

her feel unsafe in lay-bys at night; spaces assigned as dangerous, subaltern and illicit, places where sex (work) and drug use are (relatively) commonplace. Ezra explained that she had been propositioned, albeit mistakenly, by a female sex worker: 'I had knock-knock-knock, 'hi darling', so I opened the curtain on the lorry and there was a prostitute stood outside offering her services. She had a shock, I had a shock and I didn't have a clue what to say to her and I just went, 'sorry love, you're not my type'. [The sex worker said] 'Oh, I'm so sorry!' and walked off. I've had that happen twice!'. Ezra wasn't the first to talk about this, truckers spoke of gay/bi-sexual men cruising for sex, the presence of female sex workers and drug dealing in lay-bys. While these were used as examples of why these spaces might be 'unsafe', drivers did not speak of the actions (sex or taking drugs), nor the people (seeking/performing sex acts) as a danger directly to them, but rather associated the lay-bys as sites of potential danger, including of fuel theft.

This story examines how, through talk and gendered bodily actions, drivers both contribute to – and complicate – discourses of lay-bys as stigmatised, 'abject' dirty and dangerous. In Britain, a 'lay-by' (similar to a 'rest stop' in the U.S.) is a parcel of land next to a road in which drivers can stop without blocking traffic. They differ in size, services, and vistas. But the lay-by queers the binary between the road as a masculine space of public mobility and labour, and the home as a space of feminised, private, fixed domesticity. The lay-by is a space of both production and social reproduction: Depending on their contracts and working conditions, drivers are 'on the clock' (or taking mandated rest times), and yet they are homemaking (in the truck), eating, sleeping (often, badly) and toileting. Further, the lay-by confounds neat spatio-temporal distinctions: the lay-by is not a single space, but multiple and transitory - transforming from day to night as activities, people and vehicles change. During the day lay-bys are sites of food truck trade, drivers taking mandated rest time or, as Ezra commented, 'foreign' drivers cooking on camping stoves. Shifting from taken-for-granted parts of the road-scape, at night lay-bys become places with renewed meanings, significance, practices and social relations. The liminality and marginality of night-time is extended in the spatio-temporalities of the lay-by, where a range of contradictions lie; close to but not *in* urban centres, lit but not illuminated, attended but not busy, often (fleetingly) seen but seldom visited. Lay-by spaces are both known and unknown, 'a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable' – a 'heterotopia' (Foucault 1997, 332; Johnson 2013).

The lay-by can be understood as gendered in layered ways. The sex worker's shock at finding Ezra in the cab, and the efforts Ezra makes to 'de-gender' her truck appears to indicate that as a *truck driving* woman in a lay-by at night, she is considered 'out of place'. Ezra's fear, restricting her mobility to the small cab at night, align with gendered fears around poorly-lit, depopulated areas and the risk of personal attack and gender-based violence.

The women who do seem to be 'in place' in the lay-by are sex workers, understood not as women with a right to 'safety' (Lieber and Le Bail 2021) but as part of the lay-by's stigmatised landscape of 'danger' (see Corzine and Kirby 1977 for a discussion of truck driver's sexual encounters). In some respects, drivers reproduce the stigmatisation of the lay-by, not only in their descriptions, but also materially – through avoiding being outside and, on occasion, contributing their bodily wastes to the 'dirt' (in 'bucket and chuck it'). Yet, as well as drivers' hours regulations which structure when legally mandated breaks happen, lorry drivers described limited options for how, when and where they stopped: day-rate payment structures incentivise 'trucking on' and avoiding unnecessary stops and high-value loads preclude stopping outside of secure warehouse depots.

For lorry drivers, essential sanitation infrastructures go beyond toilet blocks and shower cubicles, extending to the mundane items such as bottles, plastic bags and buckets sometimes used for urination, defecation or washing. Yet the ability to use these tools is dependent on a range of bodily differences, gender identities and capacities. For urination, bodily difference and cultural norms of 'acceptable behaviour' govern what is (deemed to be) safe and possible: female truckers described the relative difficulty of urination without a toilet; needing to remove more clothing, crouching down behind a tree – and feeling vulnerable. This led to a heightened sense of risk associated with urination, particularly in a lay-by at night. Importantly, these difficulties with sanitation need to be recognised as specific to bodily difference and embodied histories, and not (only) gender. Some drivers described conditions, operations, or childbirth that meant they needed to urinate more frequently/urgently.

This episode uncovers the often-hidden dimensions of logistical work, and the gendered practices and infrastructures which inhibit or make difficult everyday working life on-the-road. The King of the Road figure centres often on the mobile, without sufficiently recognising the time-spaces of immobilised work, the social reproductive work and the (heterogeneous) infrastructures which make this type of work more-or-less possible for some people and some bodies.

Conclusions: gendered mobile work

We have presented three composite stories which were constructed from extended engagement with England-based lorry drivers. We have presented these stories in connection to particular places; the Cab, Depot and Lay-by, not to lock stories *in place,* but to account for the importance of context (Hanson 2010) in the everyday gendered work of trucking. Our emplaced composite stories maintain the relationality between spatialities, materialities and meanings and their (re)production of gender through the bodily work

of trucking. Specifically, these are spaces of 'life's work' that are mobile or shaped intimately in relation to mobility. We argue that the kinds of life's work – the home-making, eating, toileting, maintenance of feelings of safety, and of social relations - that are possible and the way they are performed and experienced are deeply gendered and shaped by being on-the-move. Conversely, it is also these everyday acts of work that shape gender and gendered bodies. Future research might take up more intimate and sensory geographies of drivers' gendered mobilities: engaging with, for example practices of menstrual care, or with gendered sense perceptions (e.g., olfactory, auditory) of fossil fuels.

In contrast to some research within gender and mobilities or gendered labour studies which assumes and reifies a gender binary (and related binaries of home/away, production/social reproduction, mobility/immobility), our composite stories reveal a more complex relationship to gender. In this paper we have analysed this in relation to a 'King of the Road' narrative – the dominant mythology of the male, macho, large and physically strong, 'loner' trucker. In some respects, the stories disrupt and unsettle this mythology, by showing how gendered bodies work within, rub against and/or directly challenge the dominant narrative: The truckers we spoke to were larger and smaller, male and female. They described how becoming-trucker impacts their bodies in ways that then refute a 'strong and able' worker myth. They described highly social aspects to their job as important factors in getting their work done. However, in other ways the King of the Road remains a haunting figure: In our stories the King of the Road myth still manifests in drivers of all genders needing to negotiate with - and find spaces within – a sector dominated by a presumed white male 'norm' (e.g., truckers emphasised body size and shape; female truckers not asking for help and finding strategies of 'blending in' or hiding gender to feel safe).

The truckers' stories did not reflect *gendered* relations of power alone but are also the 'effects' of logistical power (Hopkins 2022; Gregson 2017; Cowen 2014) as it is worked on and through gendered (and racialised and abled/disabled) bodies and relations. Working hours and conditions, pay, restrictions around driving and rest times and provisioning at lay-bys need to be understood through this framework as much as through a gendered lens. Although gender is the dominant analytical framework within this particular paper, further work is needed to understand how the 'King of the Road' trucker narrative is constructed – and disrupted – in relation also to white supremacy, heterosexism and ableism.

From this, we argue that seeking to add women and people of colour to make up for an increasingly urgent lorry driver shortage needs to be problematised, particularly if the sector continues to centre and presume a white, 'unencumbered' male, heteronormative worker as it designs and manages logistical work. Interventions for improving workers' lives need to ensure

they do not simply presume or reiterate this myth of the 'ideal freight worker' and its binary 'other' (a female freight worker). Future research in this vein might seek to uncover the nature and characteristics of a renewed freight sector, and design programmes which move beyond diversifying ('adding in difference') towards more structural changes to working conditions in the sector.

The embodied realities of lorry driving work portrayed in our composite stories defy simplistic binaries and speak to the need to attend to the material, emplaced and gendered life's work of lorry driving as mobile work. As the challenges of moving freight accelerate, not least relating to e-commerce, digital economies, and Brexit, as well as technological changes associated with vehicle automation, rethinking 'diversity' in trucking is central to changing the material realities of mobile working lives.

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