

2008

## **“Revenge” and “Rescue:” Workplace Deviance in the Taxicab Industry**

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**Abstract**

This study explores taxicab drivers’ acts of “revenge” and “rescue,” some of which are expressive acts, while others are more instrumental. This article builds on earlier theories of workplace deviance, demonstrating how deviance can serve different purposes and expanding the concept of “deviance admiration” (Heckert and Heckert 2004). It examines deviance in a circumstance – the taxicab industry – which introduces a tension between mandated conformity and necessary deviance: employees must conform to the employers’ rules and yet, to accomplish their jobs well, they need to abandon those rules occasionally. In addition to its theoretical contributions, this work has important practical applications for managers.

key words: workplace deviance, taxicab industry, revenge, rescue, management

This article explores cab drivers' workplace deviance to address the gaps between the goals and rules of the cab companies – generating revenue and conflict resolution through formal mechanisms – and the cab drivers' own goals of justice and safety, through direct, more expeditious self-help. Two types of workplace deviance are contrasted, revenge and rescue, which are performed both by individual cab drivers and by groups. This article demonstrates that workplace deviance can generate “deviance admiration” in different ways, even by the same workers at the same companies.

These various acts of workplace deviance sometimes serve instrumental purposes, such as restoring safety and redistributing ill-gotten income. Other times, these acts are more expressive, providing an outlet for drivers' feelings of frustration or anger. Both may be social events that strengthen group solidarity, teach group expectations, and reinforce group values.

The taxicab industry offers an excellent arena for studying workplace deviance. Cab drivers enjoy a substantial amount of autonomy and yet are also monitored by their dispatcher-supervisors. By studying cab drivers' acts of revenge and rescue – both as individuals and as groups of cab drivers – an understanding of workplace deviance is achieved that builds on earlier deviance theories and emphasizes that deviance can serve different purposes for different actors in different circumstances.

## **Theoretical Context: Workplace Deviance**

### *Workers and Deviance*

The struggle between workers and managers for control of work is a central activity in the workplace (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Curran and Stanworth 1981; Hodson 1991b; Rothman

1998). Hodson's research, for example, demonstrates that "workers are active on their own terms and motivated by their own agendas" (Hodson 1991a: 47). He asserts that while "the struggle for control of work is a central focus for workers, this struggle occurs as frequently against co-workers as against management" (Hodson 1991a:47).

Such struggles are often ignited by perceived injustices. When a worker believes she or he – or even another person – has been treated unfairly, that worker may try to "even the score" through various forms of workplace deviance (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002). Previous research demonstrates that the goal of workplace deviance is often to restore equity to an unfair situation (e.g., Tripp and Bies 1997). Thus, injustices at work might spur workers to embrace their moralistic outrage and take action (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002).

Black defines action that seeks to address a grievance through unilateral behavior as self-help (1998). Self-help, however, may include mild and non-violent actions, such as glares or frowns, as well as extreme or violent acts, such as homicide (Black 1998). This self-help may be accomplished by an individual acting alone or by a group. If performed by a group, it may become a social event, reiterating group norms and behavioral expectations (e.g., Feldman and March 1981; Trevino 1992). In the workplace, employees teach other employees not only about what the employer expects of them but also what their co-workers expect of them (Hodson 1991a; Trevino 1992). Some scholars assert that even extreme self-help, such as revenge, is an important part of the social fabric of organizational life (Morrill 1995).

Additionally, other scholars have shown that these actions may be instrumental, to restore equity to the situation, or they may be expressive, to vent the feelings of outrage or

frustration (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002). From a justice-oriented perspective, instrumental acts to “restore equity” often serve to increase the level of reward that someone was wrongly denied. In contrast, the goal of expressive retaliation is to harm a wrong-doer, even if that retaliation does not redistribute reward (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002). However, with both restoration of equity and retaliation, this workplace deviance will usually target the party or parties responsible for the injustice, rather than simply lashing out randomly. For example, in their study of workplace saboteurs, Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke assert that these workplace deviants “target their sabotage at the source of the perceived injustice” (2002: 953).

In addition to self-focused actions, deviance may also include helpful and altruistic acts (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002). Some scholars assert that “when empathy for others, rather than self interest drives actions, individuals engage in altruism” (Cheng 1996: 139). Thus, sometimes workplace deviance may include acts which bring the avenger, him/herself, no benefit, but only benefit others. These could include self-sacrificial actions, actions in which the avenger receives no gain, or confrontations on behalf of another party. For example, Tripp and Bies, in their study of “avengers,” found that workers often saw their avenging acts as helpful if the avenger’s punishment corrected the misbehavior of the one targeted for revenge. This behavior could be understood as altruistic when these acts were done for the benefit of, or on behalf of, others, without directly benefiting the avengers, themselves. These workers assessed their avenging as morally wrong only if the act hurt innocent bystanders or invited counter-retaliation from the one harmed (1997).

## *Deviance Admiration*

Deviance has been of interest to sociologists across the history of the discipline, from Durkheim's analysis of anomie (Durkheim (1893) 1984) to Merton's typology of individual modes of adaptation (Merton 1949)<sup>1</sup>. More recently, Heckert and Heckert (2004) have proposed a typology of deviance that subdivides deviant behavior into four distinct subcategories: negative deviance, rate busting, deviance admiration, and positive deviance. This new four-part typology consists of (1) negative deviance, nonconformity or underconformity that is negatively evaluated, (2) rate busting, overconformity that is negatively evaluated, (3) deviance admiration, nonconformity or underconformity that is positively evaluated, and (4) positive deviance, overconformity that is positively evaluated (Heckert and Heckert 2004). Heckert and Heckert assert that future research should analyze why nonconformity "can result in positive evaluations," and how the power and perspective of the audience affects these evaluations (Heckert and Heckert 2004).

This article takes up their call. In exploring workplace deviance that encompasses both acts of revenge and rescue, this paper investigates "positively evaluated nonconformity" driven by both instrumental and expressive motivations. Furthermore, this study more deeply investigates Heckert and Heckert's category of "deviance admiration" to ascertain how acts of nonconformity can be positively evaluated because they impart a helpful, positive benefit (e.g., altruistic rescue) or because they enact retribution ("revenge").

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<sup>1</sup> Merton's typology offers five ways in which people respond to structural stress: (1) conformity, in which society's goals (especially wealth) are accepted and legitimate means are employed, (2) innovation, in which individuals still strive for the culturally specified goals, but embrace illegitimate means, (3) ritualism, in which individuals abide by the conventional means, but no longer pursue the goals, (4) retreatism, in which individuals abandon both the goals and the legitimate means, and (5) rebellion, in which individuals reject both the goals and the legitimate means, but rather than "dropping out" of society as with "retreatism," above, these individuals, instead, embrace new, alternative means and goals, such as prizing reputation or gang affiliation over money and conventional status (Merton, 1949).

Revenge and rescue are two very different types of rule-violating acts, yet they both fall under Heckert and Heckert's category of rule violations that are, nevertheless, admired. Thus, this analysis expands on Heckert and Heckert's typology, posing a possible variation/subcategorization of "deviance admiration" – admiration based on perceived benefit versus admiration based on enforced/enacted justice.

### **Methods and Setting**

This qualitative study used open-ended interviews to study workplace deviance in the taxicab industry. In some ways, cab driving is an atypical job; cab drivers do not occupy a single designated station, window, or office. Instead, they roam the streets continuously, having contact with a wide variety of people in many different parts of the city. In addition, their income is always uncertain: it can be affected by road conditions, generosity of passengers, weather, skillfulness of dispatchers, personal ability, and luck (Davis 1959). Nevertheless, cab driving also has many similarities to other occupations. Many of the problems that cab drivers encounter are similar to those of office, retail, or factory workers. For example, cab drivers have conflicts with co-workers, supervisors, and customers, which disrupt their day, cause them stress, and may impact their income.

### ***The Companies***

This study examines the taxicab industry of a medium-sized, midwestern college town, by studying its two main taxicab companies, Coop Cab and Private Taxi. The companies are similar in that they both draw from similar groups of people for workers, are approximately the same size, and run their businesses similarly: both allow only single calls

(picking up only one party at a time) except for airport runs, and both use a commission system, meaning that drivers pay the company a portion of the fares, in contrast to other cab companies where drivers “rent” the cab for a flat fee and then keep all revenue for themselves. Both cab companies have management structures, discipline procedures, and grievance procedures, although Coop Cab is owned collectively, while Private Taxi is privately owned.

### ***Methods***

I conducted 34 interviews. The sample of taxicab drivers is divided between the two companies with 14 people (41%) from Private Taxi and 20 (59%) from Coop Cab. I gained entry by spending time at the cab companies’ workers’ rooms and offices. I did not post a “sign-up” sheet for interviewees to volunteer nor did I ask the cab companies’ managements to suggest or assign people to be interviewed. I avoided these two means of gathering interviewees because I was concerned that such methods could produce a pool of subjects that would over-represent characteristics that were important to this study. For example, would-be interviewees who are sufficiently assertive to volunteer could represent the more brash and aggressive of the drivers; conversely, potential interviewees offered by management might be the more docile and obedient drivers. Instead of either of these methods, I, myself, approached workers, explained my study, and asked if I could interview them. Sometimes I interviewed the driver immediately; other times we set a time for me to interview her/him, either on-site or off-site. Later in the interview process, I telephoned ahead to set up interviews with the managers and owners of the businesses, some on-site, some off-site.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Although I did not have a prior relationship with the cab industry or either specific cab company, the workers were very willing to talk with me. Being outside the industry, unlike ethnographies of the taxicab or any other

In order to address concerns that participating in this study could have harmed participants by asking them to discuss unpleasant issues, I approached each interviewee with respect for their well being. All interviewees signed a consent form which told them that they could stop the interview at any time. In addition, I orally told them that they could discontinue the interview at any point. I also emphasized that they could stop the tape recorder, and still be part of the interview, although few people ever asked for any portion of the interview to not be recorded.

### ***Qualitative Methods and Validity***

One of the key benefits of qualitative studies is the high validity possible: the researcher is able to understand the greater context, obtain a large overview, and can triangulate the accounts of differently situated interviewees with various bases of knowledge. In gathering data for this study, I interviewed workers; observed behavior; read related documents and articles; attended companies' business meetings and, when possible, grievance hearings; and participated in aspects of some businesses (e.g., rode along in the taxicabs, listened along in the dispatcher room).

Interviewees in this study were asked open-ended questions on a wide variety of work-related topics. Open-ended interviewing uses a simple, straightforward structure of a predetermined set of questions. I used these questions with each interviewee to ensure that certain topics will be covered with everyone. Rather than serving simply as an oral survey, however, these initial probes were augmented throughout the interview by follow-up

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industry, gave me the scholarly distance that allowed me to ask questions and study responses to produce a more nuanced analysis.

questions. Although a few follow-up questions were pre-determined, most were based on each interviewee's particular responses.

This allowed me to develop the interview in the most productive way and to explore all fruitful comments given by the subject. By permitting the interviewee to expand on any question or even move to other topics altogether and by following interviewees' tangents with appropriate additional questions, I was able to increase the amount of data I collected, ensure greater credibility and dependability of the data, and heighten the study's validity (Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Hoffmann 2007).

The interviews ranged from 20 minutes to over five hours, with most lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. Most of the interviews were conducted off-site in public places, such as coffee houses and restaurants, and at the companies themselves, in the parking lots and the breakrooms (less than one-third of the interviews were conducted on-site). All interviews and most site observations were tape-recorded and transcribed, so all quotes used here are direct quotes.

The transcribed interviews and field notes were coded, using NVivo, for various themes. Some of these themes were responses to explicit questions (e.g., "In what ways is your job difficult?"). However, many others were extracted from the responses of interviewees to broader questions (e.g., "How would you describe your job?" "How would you recommend/criticize your job to another worker in the same industry?" "What would you change about your job if you could just snap your fingers and it would be different?") or to follow-up questions to other responses. Thus, many codes, such as "revenge," were not the result of a direct question or set of questions intended to measure revenge, but were produced by careful analysis of interviewees' responses to various questions.

A possible methodological weakness of interviewing generally is that the interviewee might provide only the “official account,” a reporting of what she feels ought to happen rather than what did happen (Becker 1970; Bourdieu 1977). This can be a very serious issue in interview-generated data. However, I addressed this weakness by triangulating the accounts of interviewees whenever possible. In other words, I spoke with interviewees from a variety of perspectives about the same phenomena, confirming one account with the account of other, differently situated interviewees. I also collected data from more than one method; for example, combining interview data, with observational data and written data. Additionally, during the interview, I encouraged the interviewees to speak beyond the “official account” by asking questions that address the researcher’s areas of interest in several ways and from different conversational directions. This provides the interviewees with opportunities to report the “official account” as well as provide any possible contrasts with their own opinions or behavior or stories of others’ “less official” behavior (Becker 1970).

### **Workplace Deviance by Individuals and Groups**

Unlike many other occupations, cab driving allows a great deal of autonomy. Although management structures and rules officially govern the taxicab drivers, while on the road, cab drivers often engage in self-help, deviating from the formal rules. When conflict occurs, whether with a customer or a fellow driver, cab drivers often must “fend for themselves” (Hoffmann 2003).

A consequence of the mobile nature of the cab driving job is that the driver rarely deals with any one customer on a regular basis. This makes the job both more exciting, with

its constant variety, and more dangerous, with more unknowns. Potentially unpleasant situations can range from armed robberies to harassment by drunken passengers to fare-jumpers to harboring persons fleeing the police (Davis 1959). For these reasons, many taxicab drivers feel that cab driving can be dangerous and unpredictable (Onishi 1994; Wolf 1993).

The formal goals for both companies in this study are to generate revenue while incurring the fewest costs possible. Thus, the explicit, specific job of these cab drivers is to transport passengers safely and quickly. Neither company officially encourages the drivers to go out of their way either to aid or to “discipline” others. If a driver encounters a passenger who needs emergency help, both companies’ handbooks say that the driver is to call the police or have the dispatcher contact the police. If a passenger misbehaves, the driver is to report the person’s name and any additional information, including details of the incident, to the dispatcher on duty who might formally report it to the management or the police. If a driver misbehaves towards a fellow driver, the offended driver is to report that behavior to the dispatcher or manager, either informally or through formal grievance procedures. If a driver is in danger, the driver is to call the police.

In actual practice, however, these formal rules are often insufficient. The cab drivers found that police assistance is often more inconvenient than helpful and that formal procedures usually yield insufficient punishment for misbehaving passengers or co-workers. To address these gaps, the cab drivers often resorted to various forms of workplace deviance, deviating from the formal rules and goals of management in order to address the needs they saw in their everyday work lives.

Sometimes these acts were done alone, as individuals, while other times these acts were group acts and became a social event. I contrast two types of workplace deviance, revenge and rescue. Although the motives behind each are different, both are important examples of what Heckert and Heckert call deviance admiration (2004).

### ***Revenge – Individual***

Dispatchers, who assign rides, play an important role for the cab drivers in this city, where most rides are requested by phone, rather than by flagging down a cab. Thus, dispatchers have the power to affect how bored or busy one is (i.e., how much “dead time” one has), the quality of one’s passengers, and, most importantly, one’s income. If a driver believes that a dispatcher is discriminating against him or her or otherwise mistreating the driver, under the rules of both taxicab companies, that driver may bring a formal grievance against the dispatcher to the cab company management. This, however, is seen as a lengthy and often ineffective process. It also makes the conflict open and public. Instead of adhering to the formal procedures of the cab company, a driver might target the dispatcher for revenge if he or she felt cheated by the dispatcher. For example, this young, male cab driver described how he would punish a dispatcher he felt consistently assigned him low-fare rides and frequent dead time.

When there’s two drivers calling [on the radio] at the same time, you don’t [hear] anything instead of [hearing] one of them. So if you’re mad at a dispatcher and you want to get back at him, right, you don’t want him to know it’s you. So every time they call someone else’s cab number, you just push your button on your

microphone, and so they get static and it really annoys them for like 20 minutes, and then you stop. So it's a good way to piss off your dispatcher. [John]

In this way, John was able to anonymously exact revenge on the dispatcher without risking open confrontation.

The companies also had rules about how drivers are to handle problematic passengers. If passengers are simply rude or obnoxious, drivers are to ignore the behavior; however, if passengers damage or dirty the taxicab, then the cab driver is to report the incident to the dispatcher or manager along with as much information about the guilty passengers as possible.

However, drivers found this formal policy to involve a burdensome level of paperwork and delay. Instead of following these workplace rules, the drivers might target passengers for revenge. Most frequently, this involves minor revenge, such as refusing a customer a ride or asking a customer to exit the cab. The following quote from, Larry, a middle-aged male driver illustrates how this driver handles rude would-be passengers.

If they come and they rip open my door and they demand a cab ride, they're not gonna get one. Or if they start [littering in my cab], that's my office and I try to keep a nice, clean office. You know, I drive the same cab every night; try to keep it nice for everybody. And the people that get into my car, and disrespect my space, they won't get a cab ride. [Larry]

In the above quote, the revenge was small and the target passengers would most likely be able to locate another cab, if with some delay and inconvenience. Similarly, the driver has lost a fare, but may recoup that loss with another fare in the near future.

Less frequently, drivers go out of their way to exact greater revenge. The driver in the following quote, Hank, described one incident in which he came across a girl who had cheated him as well as other drivers out of their fares. When a cab driver is cheated out of a fare – such as if a passenger runs off without paying, as this girl did – then the driver must report the incident to the police in order to not be accountable for that money that was owed her/him. This means the driver loses a significant amount of time during which s/he could have been driving because s/he has to wait for the police to come to take the report and then, once the police do arrive, the driver may lose up to an hour filling out the report and other paperwork. Thus, such misbehavior by passengers costs drivers not only the lost fare, but also the revenue of potential future fares that the drivers miss. Understandably, such behavior engenders strong resentment among cab drivers as illustrated by this detailed story:

There was a young woman, 14-year-old girl...She would call up and ask for a cab ride across town, saying that she was going home. She said that she didn't have the fare, but that when she got home her mom would pay it. And so [I] would take her, bring her there, and then she would have the driver wait while she went in to get her mom, and she'd go around the house and she would just disappear. This happened to me at least twice. The last time she did this to me, I went to the address that she had listed when she called for the ride, what she'd said was her destination, was her home [and actually knocked on the door]. And the person at that address said that no one even lived there by that name.

Then about a year later, half a year later, a call came in from this woman. I heard it over the radio and asked the dispatcher if I could get that call. Explained that I thought it was the same woman who had ripped me off a couple times and

had ripped off a number of people. And I wanted to see if I could identify her. The dispatcher said, sure. Gave me the call. [I] picked her up. And it was the same woman. And she says, she wants to go across town. So I pick her up and start driving the opposite way. And she says, 'Hey, you're going the wrong direction!' And I tell her, 'Look you have three options: one, you can agree to go to the police and tell the police that you're the person who's been ripping off all these cab drivers over the last year; two, you can pay me the two thousand plus dollars that you owe all these cab drivers -- and I said I'd be responsible for paying everyone back -- or three, I'm gonna take you to [a small farming town outside the city] and just leave you there.'

And she said she won't go to the police. She denies all of this. But I'm certain that this is the same woman. So I take her out to [the farming town] and leave her there. [Interviewer: Is that very far out of the city?] Oh yeah. Well, it was about a 20 mile walk into town. Not too bad. It was a nice night. It was summerish. It was eight o'clock at night or so and it was still light. [Hank]

Hank shared this story with a great deal of pride, explaining that he believed in karma and felt that he was often the agent of karma, good and bad. In this case, Hank felt that he was the agent of bad karma coming back and "biting her in the ass." [Hank]

Sometimes other cab drivers are the targets of revenge. A serious infraction in the cab driving industry is misrepresenting one's location when bidding for a call ("long-hooding"). When the dispatcher announces a passenger's pick-up location, various drivers in the area will call in to "bid" on the ride by telling where each is presently located. The dispatcher then gives the fare to the closest driver. However, when a driver long-hoods and lies about his/her

true location, s/he will win the ride instead of another driver who is actually closer to the passenger's location. In the following example, Jenny, a former waitress, describes how she gets revenge on fellow drivers who misbehave in this way.

Some drivers out there will long-hood it, meaning that there's a destination [e.g.,] at State and Gill, okay. Well they're actually farther away from State and Gill than what they say they are. Let's say they're at Regent and Park, and they're saying, 'I'm at State and Gill.' If they get caught by another driver and then the other driver gets really upset. And sometimes [the other driver] will go and scoop their calls when they get a call, just to get them back. Sometimes you have stuff like that: the tit for tat process. [Jenny]

Since long-hooding is officially against the rules, a driver could raise a formal grievance against a long-hooding co-worker. However, as the above quote illustrates, the long-hooder might become the object of revenge rather than a formal grievance. This cab driver enacted her revenge on long-hooders by engaging in another form of misbehavior herself, picking up the ride of the other cab driver before the assigned cab driver could reach the passenger.

The misbehavior of stealing passengers from assigned cab drivers is itself often punished behavior. For example, the quote that begins the next section describes how several cab drivers collaborated to punish a driver who had upset them by her ride-stealing.

### ***Revenge – Group***

Sometimes the cab drivers will work together to get revenge on another driver. These acts of revenge can be carefully coordinated among nearly a dozen drivers, as in the example below, or more spontaneous, as in the next detailed quote. Ed, a cab driver for over a decade,

described how a number of drivers disciplined a driver whom they believed had been stealing other drivers' calls.

You're not supposed to steal other people's calls. There's not really rules about that. But there's sort of etiquette. You just want to be fair to everyone. Because if you start stealing people's calls, then everyone will get mad. Then everyone else will start stealing all your calls. We did this to someone a couple weeks ago who was being a real problem.

She's like just nasty and greedy. She just can't see beyond the moment, [e.g.,] if she's driving past, even if she has someone in her car – you just take one person at a time for the most part – if she drives past a spot where someone else's call is, she'll just stop and throw 'em in and drive. Really bad things. And she's always doing it. And so we got frustrated and finally said, well, we'll try and give you a taste of your own medicine.

We decided, like for a night, we were going to steal every one of this person's calls, and we did. At the end of the night she'd made \$20 in ten hours or something. She was broke, right? So you just sort of do things like that, sort of like teach them a lesson: 'Be good!' you know? [Interviewer: How many of you were doing that?] Probably at least ten people and that was downtown. So if you have ten people downtown, it's a really small area, so you can pretty much always have someone really close to the call. [Interviewer: Do you think she realized what was going on?] Oh, absolutely. [Ed]

Many cab drivers mentioned other drivers who would steal rides, but sometimes the group revenge was less severe, such the quotation from Monica, a seasoned veteran, below.

It's wrong to steal other people's calls and stuff like that. When one person does it, they all kind of even gang up on him. Making jokes or putting them down, or talking bad about them.

Or they'll do things to their cab. If you see their driver's permit, they'll draw all over it, or goofy things like that. [For one man], they taped his pages together in his book...all kinds of little silly s\*\*t just to bother him, just to get on his nerves.

And then, like, [woman driver] they mess with her really bad. They'll get in her cab and like set all her radio stations to one, like, heavy metal station and turn the volume all the way up so that when she gets in her cab and starts it [she gets startled by the loud music]. [With another driver] he'll come in for a break, and they'll go and move the cab around the corner or something, so that when he gets out there, it's not there. It's childish stuff but it sends a message. [Monica]

Although these smaller acts of revenge were less severe than preventing one from earning much income during a long shift, they still were designed to at least annoy and create a disincentive for misbehavior.

Just as individual cab drivers targeted dispatchers for revenge when the driver felt mistreated by the dispatcher, sometimes groups of drivers would cooperate to punish a dispatcher who had upset all of them. Jim, a middle-aged man who had been driving cab for 13 years, provides a good example.

There have been times when there's a really bad dispatcher and all the drivers don't like this dispatcher and don't want him to be working. And then one day, *everyone* decided that they'd rather not be working than be working with such-and-such dispatcher, so they *all* check in. [Before the bad dispatcher started, the

drivers were] really busy, and there's 20, 30 people driving cab. Half an hour later, all the cabs are parked in the lot and everyone's turning in their keys and going home; and that's it. Then [the dispatcher] is stuck for a day until the following shift of drivers comes in. [Jim]

Even if "everyone" does not decide to check in and turn in their cabs for the day, having only a few cabs on the road would be stressful for a dispatcher who is trying to cover all the passenger calls. Like the other examples of group revenge, this way of punishing the dispatcher takes a significant amount of coordination and monetary self-sacrifice. Unlike stealing someone's calls, which would increase one's own income, turning in one's cab early would have the opposite effect: reducing the amount of money one would earn that day.

Both the small, annoying revenge and the large-scale coordinated revenge are examples of the cab drivers' workplace deviance to fill in the gaps of the official rules. The managements of both cab companies have formal processes for censuring cab drivers and dispatchers. However, the cab drivers feel that these are time-consuming and less effective. The above examples of workplace deviance illustrate how the cab drivers acted creatively to address workplace needs that were not met by the management's formal procedures.

### ***Rescue – Group***

Drivers will also work together to rescue each other when in need, violating company rules in order to protect drivers from physical or financial harm. These acts of rescue are important aspects of the taxicab culture, whether done by individuals or by many cab drivers together.

One reason cab drivers might be in need of rescue is if their passengers are harassing or intimidating them. For example, Michael, who often worked the day shifts and rush-hours, recounted an incident in which another driver was being threatened by his passenger.

One of our drivers had a guy who was being really abusive to his girlfriend in the back of his cab, and then spit on the seat of his cab because he was drunk and being arrogant. And so [the driver] turned around and said, 'If you're gonna do that, I'm gonna have to ask you to get out of my car.' So then the guy was threatening him and was gonna punch him in the head and grabbed him by the coat collar from behind the seat and pulled him back. So the driver got out of the car and grabbed his radio and used this code that we have for that he needs help. And then other drivers just automatically went over there. And they got there faster than the cops. [Michael]

Many drivers shared stories in which they were either the rescuer or the rescued and the rescuing cab drivers arrived before the police or instead of the police.

In an example, Bob, a night-shift driver, explained that the ethic of rescuing other cab drivers is so strong that it extends beyond the drivers on the road. He described a time when his riders were refusing to pay or leave the cab, intimidating him and becoming hostile. Bob radioed in the code for driver-in-potential-danger, but the distribution of cabs was such that none were near him. Instead, to respond to his call for help, Leo, the mechanic, who had heard his call on one of the radios, drove out to rescue the driver himself:

At that case, the rest of the guys and gals driving weren't anywhere near me. The night mechanic – that guy could intimidate the socks right off of you if he needed to – he jumped into one of the cars. He must of got down there in 90 seconds. He

must have been doing a hundred miles an hour in one of the cabs that weren't assigned that night. All of a sudden, I see a cab come around the corner. I see the night mechanic jump out. He throws it in park right in front of me and he gets out with a club as big as me. He says, 'Bob, seem to be having any problems here tonight?' Boom, I got paid. They got out of the car. [Bob]

Similarly, Beatrice, a female driver who often worked the night shift, explained how she and another driver came to the assistance of a cab driver who was being threatened by a mob of drunken students.

I can remember once, Kevin was downtown on State Street, and there was a pack of people who wouldn't let this guy drive through. The dispatcher said, 'Are there any cabs close to State and whatever?' I told the dispatcher where I was and the dispatch says, 'Can you go to this location; driver needs assistance.' I just said, yeah, turned to the passenger and explained. I turned the meter off and we agreed on what the price was. I said, 'I'm not gonna take you home right now, I'm gonna help this other driver.' The guy that I was driving was cool because he had heard what the dispatcher had said, too. So I just drove down State Street. Another cab was coming from the opposite direction. When the pack of people there saw that there were two other cabs coming, like, right away, they just dispersed and the guy drove away. It wasn't like anything really happened, but that driver felt the need to ask for other cabs to come. They wouldn't let him through and they were trying to get into his cab. Whether they were going to rob him or pull him out of his cab, whatever, who knows. [Beatrice]

Sometimes simply the presence of more cab drivers will force people to behave. In the above example, Beatrice and the other driver did not get out of their cars, yet by arriving at the scene quickly they were able to rescue the other driver.

These acts of workplace deviance served the goals of the drivers – safety from physical danger and from being robbed – although they violated the of cab companies’ official policies and removed drivers (and a mechanic) from the work that they were supposed to be doing. These workers deviated from the formal rules and worked together to create a more efficient, cost-effective solution. Having fellow cab drivers come to one’s rescue meant that the driver did not waste time (and, hence, money) filling out paper work with police officers and received a faster rescue, lessening the possibility of lost fares or physical harm to the cab driver.

### ***Rescue – Individual***

While drivers often spoke about rescuing other drivers from passengers, occasionally drivers would rescue a passenger from another passenger. Alexandra, who had been driving cab for over ten years, recounted a recent incident.

I had two couples [one couple in the front seat and the other in the back]. The second man tried to rape his wife in my back seat. I was going 55 [m.p.h.] down the Beltline. All of a sudden I had this woman screaming in the back seat, ‘No, no! Stop it! No.’ She’s screaming and crying. I look in the back seat and see him with her, I see him unzip his pants and he’s got his hand on the back of her head and is trying to force her head down on his cock.

I turned on the dome light. They were all rip-roaring drunk. I turned on the dome light and yelled, 'Hey, what the hell is going on back there! What the hell do you think you're trying to do to her?! Stop it right now!' And then the people in the front seat got in the act, saying come on now, knock it off. The woman was just crying and crying. So he came to. I said, 'Zip up your pants!'

When we got to where they were going, I pulled the woman aside and handed her my business card with my name and phone number on it. I made him pay for the cab also, because he was trying to get her to pay for the cab. This guy was scum. I insisted that he or the other man come up with the money so that she'd have some money left in her purse. I wanted to make sure she wasn't giving up her last dime. Then I pulled her aside and told her, 'You don't have to go in there with him or with your party; you don't have to go. You're already drunk; you don't have to get drunker. Free cab ride anywhere in the city, anywhere in the county.' And she said, 'No, no; he's my husband.' That's when I found out they were married. I said, 'That's really sad, but...you know...in the meantime here's my name and number.' [Alexandra]

Alexandra believed that she had a duty to do more than simply drive her passengers safely, her official job goal, but that she should also try to ensure their actual safety. She was willing to give up a future paying fare to drive this woman to safety.

## **Discussion**

This research explores workplace deviance in the taxicab industry. I explore the tension between the cab drivers' goals and those of the cab companies and the resulting rule

violations that occur. The main goal of both companies' managements was generating revenue and each had rules about resolving conflicts through formal mechanisms, such as submitting a formal grievance to the management regarding a fellow worker or contacting the police to address trouble or danger on the road. This structure, however, left several gaps: filing formal grievances and police complaints often demanded time by the complainant, during which s/he is not on the road earning money. Additionally, the companies' internal formal procedures were viewed by many as seldom being effective, immediate means to stopping undesirable behavior.

In circumventing and violating the formal workplace structure and rules, the cab drivers worked to further their own goals of justice and safety by resolving disputes through direct, more expeditious self-help. Sometimes these deviant acts were done alone, as individuals, while other times these were group acts, even social events. In either case, the cab drivers embraced deviant behavior, violating their workplaces' official rules.

Some of the individual acts of revenge were expressive actions, in which the action was the immediate goal itself (rather than a means to another goal). These expressive actions allowed the cab drivers to vent feelings of outrage and frustration (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002). Although these acts did not remedy any situation, they allowed the driver to embrace her/his outrage and release it. An example of a mild form of this was the instance of causing radio static whenever a disliked dispatcher tried to use the radio. The driver causing the static did not improve his own situation, but he did find a way to express his frustration. A more serious example of an expressive deviant act was the instance of Hank abandoning the young woman 20 miles out of town. This act did not restore the money she supposedly had cheated from the cab drivers, but it did allow this avenging cab driver to feel vindicated. In

his own words, he had become an agent of “bad karma” for her, which gave him pride – but no greater income. In fact, the drive to and from the edge of town cost him quite a few lost fares.

Other individual acts were more instrumental. The drivers engaged in the actions, not for any emotional reasons, but to achieve specific ends. This workplace deviance achieved the drivers’ own goals of safety and justice. For example, the cab driver who refused to drive passengers who littered in his cab was directly addressing the situation with his actions. By taking such a hard stance on behavior in his cab, he was able to “keep it nice” [Interviewee Larry] and prevent litter and other damage to the inside of his cab.

Other deviant acts had both expressive and instrumental elements. For example, a driver who steals a call from a long-hooding driver has acted instrumentally in that s/he has decreased the level of the reward (income) of the long-hooding driver so that the reward is approximately what that driver might have had without long-hooding. However, as the words of Jenny indicated, this was often done in anger: “If they get caught by another driver and then the other driver gets really upset.” Thus, although such acts had instrumental qualities, they also were expressive in that the driver who steals from the long-hooder might do so to vent her/his anger and frustration at the long-hooder’s misbehavior.

Group revenge was also both expressive and instrumental. When individual drivers spontaneously acted together to engage in pranks (e.g., moving someone’s car, turning up someone’s radio, or drawing on someone’s driver’s permit), their actions took on an expressive element. They were angry with the targeted person for stealing rides and decided to vent by annoying or upsetting that person in return. Although these acts may have served

to deter the targeted driver from stealing rides in the future, the primary nature of this workplace deviance was more expressive.

Other times, group revenge was more consistently instrumental. These incidents were social events in which co-workers coordinated their actions to target an individual (e.g., a bad dispatcher, or a driver who steals rides) and discipline that person. This orchestrated group deviance communicated a message. It served, as Ed said, to “teach them a lesson: ‘Be good!’” emphasizing the values of justice and cooperation.

Turning to acts of rescue, individual and group acts were both more likely to be instrumental, rather than expressive. These deviant acts were aimed at quickly remedying dangerous situations: being physically threatened by passengers, having passengers refuse to pay for their rides, confronting a drunken mob, or stopping a sexual assault. The rescuing cab drivers were trying to restore the situations. They were not acting to express their emotions. Obeying the company rules would have meant diminished time, money, and safety. These drivers broke the rules – not to retaliate against the company, as in other studies of workplace deviance (Ambrose, Seabright and Schminke 2002; Hodson 1991b; Rothman 1998; Tripp and Bies 1997) – but to aid fellow workers.

Thus, acts of rescue were more likely to be instrumental actions, while acts of revenge were both expressive and instrumental. However, what most differentiates rescue from revenge, is not the expressive component of revenge, but that acts of rescue were for the benefit of another. They were, in this sense, altruistic. Indeed, the acts of rescue often came at some expense – e.g., time missing calls, hence, loss of income.

This altruism may have been heightened by drivers’ empathy for other drivers in need (e.g., Cheng 1996), but it may also create further group solidarity in that the members came

together to fight an outside threat (Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966). Thus, although coordinated group acts of deviance were often instrumental, they may have served a somewhat expressive purpose in that they reinforced and strengthened cab drivers' group identity (Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966; Gusfield 1967). However, group revenge, as well, may have heightened group camaraderie by punishing one of their own and forcing that misbehaving member into the role of the evil outsider (Gusfield 1967). By coming together to fight someone in the role of outsider, both types of workplace deviance reinforce the drivers' membership in the group (taxicab drivers) and strengthen that identification (e.g., Gusfield 1967; Trevino 1992).

Hodson's work (1991a) emphasizes that workers in many settings create a great deal of autonomy for themselves, whether or not the particular job inherently facilitates much autonomy. Taxicab driving is an occupation with high levels of autonomy built into the job. In addition, their workplace deviance – revenge and rescue – further heightened the level of autonomy for the cab drivers (e.g., Hodson 1991a). These high levels of autonomy, in turn, might facilitate workplace deviance in two ways. First, the cab drivers' greater autonomy could increase the need for workplace deviance by elevating the need for worker solidarity, and, second, heightened autonomy might increase the cab drivers' ability to engage in workplace deviance, making a more readily accessible option.

Thus, these data provide two very different types of “deviance admiration” (Heckert and Heckert 2004). The deviant acts of rescue and revenge were admired for very different reasons. Sometimes, deviance admiration was a result of the revenge perpetuated by the cab drivers. For example, the coordination of many cab drivers to steal all the rides of another

driver who, herself, was in the habit of stealing others' rides, was positively evaluated because it enacted justice and punished the person who was deemed to be a deserving party.

Other times, these deviant acts were positively evaluated because they directly helped the situation. The rescuing cab drivers were admired for their often altruistic benefit to others. For example, the act of missing new fares or delaying bringing passengers to their destinations in order to provide the strength of numbers for a fellow cab driver being threatened by drunk pedestrians was admired because it directly benefited the rescued cab driver, saving him from harassment and possible damage to his vehicle and himself. Such deviant acts were positively evaluated because of the benefit, not the cost, to the target.

Both types of deviance express the taxicab drivers' solidarity with each other. Whether going outside the official rules to help or to punish, the cab drivers' deviant acts enforced the informal group norms of the taxicab driving industry. Hodson found that two major components of solidarity are the enforcement of group norms and mutual defense (Hodson 2001). The cab drivers' acts of rescue and revenge served to defend themselves and each other – whether from financial or physical harm, disrespect, or harassment – and, in doing so, both demonstrated the cab drivers' solidarity as well as strengthened their solidarity with each other. (For further discussion of deviance as creating greater solidarity see (Hoffmann 2006a).)

Some research suggests that workers with greater loyalty to their organization or co-workers will be more likely to take action when confronted with workplace problems (see Dowding et al. 2000; Hirschman 1970; Hoffmann 2006b). This literature asserts that workers with greater loyalty will be less likely to quit their jobs when conflicts arise or quietly tolerate problems, but rather will stay and address the difficulties. While loyalty is the key factor

identified by this research, whether workers have high or low exit and entrance costs also can affect their willingness to address conflicts rather than quitting or tolerating problems; workers with high entrance costs and/or high exit costs will also be more likely to fight problems rather than quitting (Dowding et al. 2000; Hirschman 1970; Hoffmann 2006b).

In the case of the taxicab industry, the drivers had relatively few entrance costs. They needed to have valid driving licenses and to be hired by the managements of the cab companies. Beyond these minimum costs, anyone could easily become a taxicab driver. Moreover, the cab drivers could exit easily, without any repercussions or costs of any kind. Thus, their displays of loyalty and solidarity more likely emerged from the dynamics of the taxicab industry's culture – including deviant acts of revenge and rescue – than from high entrance or exit costs.

## **Conclusion**

This study examines workplace deviance in the cab driving industry. By analyzing acts of rescue along side revenge, this study illustrates that workplace deviance may have helpful effects and may be evaluated positively, despite being rule violations. Thus, this study broadens the focus of much scholarship on workplace deviance that focuses on destructive or at least non-helpful deviance in the workplace.

At an applied level, this research implies that management cannot assume that the only employees to disobey rules will be the “bad employees” who are trying to rebel against or harm the company. Employees trying to do something helpful may also engage in workplace deviance. Therefore, management might not foresee all worker behavior that violates official

company policies if they assume only harmful workplace deviance. Well intentioned employees might just as likely violate company rules as the rebellious, destructive ones.

Moreover, management might not be concerned with monitoring or discouraging some types of workplace deviance, and, instead, might consciously tolerate certain forms of deviance. By violating official policies, employees sometimes address problems and concerns that management is unable to ameliorate. Thus, perhaps management should acknowledge that there might be excellent reasons for certain types of workplace deviance and rule breaking.

In addition to the applied application of this article, this work also builds on theories of both the deviance literature and the sociology of work. It contributes to the sociology of work by demonstrating that not all workplace deviance is necessarily harmful. The deviance the employees in this study engaged in would be characterized by many deviance scholars as deviance admiration (e.g., Heckert and Heckert 2004) or positive deviance (e.g., Ben-Yehuda 1990). Nevertheless, these behaviors are blatant violations of management rules. In particular, this research expands the workplace deviance literature that focuses more on destruction and revenge, by including an examination of rescue, as a form of deviance.

It also furthers the scholarship on work by studying workplace deviance through the expressive and instrumental lenses to explore how workers craft solutions to fill the gaps between their own goals and those of the management. The analysis of workplace deviance through these lenses provides a more nuanced understanding of how workers circumvent and directly violate the official company rules and policies in order to achieve their own goals. This article demonstrates how some deviant acts might serve primarily to vent feelings of outrage or frustration while other deviant acts are mainly to restore equity. Rather than seeing

all workplace deviance in an occupation, or even at a single company, as having the same motivation, this article demonstrates that workers' motives can be varied, with workplace deviance not only taking different forms but also serving different goals.

This work also adds to the deviance literature by elaborating on Heckert and Heckert's "deviance admiration." This category of deviance, which they define as any nonconformity or underconformity that is positively evaluated, encompasses both the revenge and the rescue discussed in this paper. However, these two types of deviant acts are "admired" for very different reasons and represent significantly different motivations and results. The acts of rescue are positively evaluated because they provide a direct benefit to the targeted person; e.g., a driver is rescued from an assailant or a driver's fare is not stolen. The acts of revenge, in contrast, are positively evaluated because they "level the score" meting out punishment to the targeted party, e.g., teaching drivers who steal rides to "be good" [Interviewee Ed].

While this research has various practical and theoretical implications, its generalizability is limited by the scope of the sample. It is possible that the taxicab industry may attract a certain type of person. People who desire a great deal of workplace autonomy might be particularly attracted to cab driving and so these people might provide a limited perspective on workplace deviance. Therefore, future research should explore workplace deviance in other industries, such as workplaces in which employees are less mobile and independent than cab drivers. Additionally, since cab driving is a predominantly male occupation, future studies on workplace deviance in gender neutral or predominantly female industries might be particularly instructive.

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