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DRIVING STREET JUSTICE:
THE TAXICAB DRIVER AS THE LAST AMERICAN COWBOY

This research explores workers' solidarity and shared culture in the cab driving industry, using theories of distributive justice and relational justice. Cab driving culture involves a high level of worker solidarity, with drivers relying on fellow drivers for assistance, working together in the face of conflict, and imposing various forms of social control when the cab-driving community's norms are violated. This article operationalizes such actions as "street justice." Through both individual and group acts of street justice, the cab drivers promote the main goals of their occupation's culture: justice and safety.

key words: taxicab industry, solidarity, occupational culture, justice, workplace norms

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I think [the image of the cab driver is] a little inaccurate. I think that people tend to think of the cab driver as being the loser guy, that doesn't take a shower, and he's crooked. He runs around and tries to rip people off. I think that's wrong...[Instead] a cab driver is the last American cowboy.

– eight year veteran cab driver [135]

Worker solidarity is important in any occupation, even an occupation in which workers are geographically disbursed, such as taxicab driving. Workers express their solidarity through enforcing their shared norms and providing protection for co-workers from threats – threats both from outside and from within. Members often respond to threats and norm-breaking by embracing either distributive justice or relational justice; that is, by concentrating on the immediate self-focused results of the misbehavior or the impact on group membership and identity.

Often these expressions of distributive and relational justice are unsanctioned and outside of the cab drivers' proscribed job responsibilities. I refer to these acts as "street justice" to underscore both the innovative, unofficial nature of the acts and the focus on fairness and justice. Street justice allows the cab driver, who works alone and relies on him- or herself for most job duties, to benefit from the assistance of other drivers and uphold their shared norms, even when

acting on one's own. In this way, street justice strengthens worker solidarity in the cab-driving industry and reinforces the occupational culture.

Some would assert that the taxicab driver could be seen as “the last American cowboy” [Interviewee 135]. Like the cowboy, alone on the range, reliant on his horse and himself, the cab driver handles most difficulties of the job on his or her own. Both the cab driver and the cowboy uphold the ethics of their occupations, maintaining the street justice or the “frontier justice” of their respective occupational cultures, even when others of their occupation are not present. However, like the cowboy who will band together with other cowboys in time of need, the cab driver, too, will work together with other cab drivers to ensure that they, their co-workers, and their passengers enjoy safety and justice on the road.

Theoretical Context and Previous Research

Worker solidarity “rests on a foundation of mutual protection, friendships, shared meanings, and shared norms.” (Hodson 2001: 206). In his examination of numerous studies of workplaces and workers, Hodson asserts that all work groups share two key goals: control of work and fairness. He found that workers demand some level of control over the pace and content of their labor. Additionally, workers are very aware of co-workers who are taking more than their share or in some way disadvantaging fellow workers (Hodson 2001). This was true of the workers in this study, taxicab drivers. They were concerned with control of their working conditions, in order to ensure their safety (physical and financial) on the road, and with fairness, in that they expected co-workers, passengers, and managers to treat the cab driver fairly and with respect.

Workers enforce specific occupational norms in the workplace through various forms of social control (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Curran and Stanworth 1981; Hodson 1991b; Rothman 1998). When someone violates the norms and ethical codes of the occupation's culture, workers will often respond to this breach by punishing the action and teaching the correct behavior. Although workers are often perceived as wrestling with management for control of their work, such struggles occur as frequently with co-workers as occupational norms are taught and enforced (Hodson 1991a).

Indeed, some assert that punishment strengthens a community's solidarity and reaffirms the group's common identity and shared norms (Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966). When members violate the group's rules, they are challenging what it means to be part of the group. Through identifying deviance and punishing it, the group reasserts its solidarity. For example, when a cab driver steals a ride from another cab driver, the first driver not only disrupts the specific activities and income of the second driver, but also threatens the cohesion and coherence of the social order of cab driving.

When social control is performed by a group, it often becomes a social event, reiterating group norms and behavioral expectations (e.g., Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966; Feldman and March 1981; Trevino 1992). In the workplace, employees teach other employees not only about what the employer expects of them but what their co-workers expect of them (Hodson 1991a; Trevino 1992). Some scholars have found that even extreme acts of social control are important parts of the social fabric of organizational life (Morrill 1995).

When expectations of certain behavior are not met, people often feel unfairly treated. These perceptions of unfair treatment are affected by both direct, material consequences as well as feelings of group membership and identity. Such perceptions directly affect people's

behaviors (e.g., Ambrose 2002; Barclay 1999; Lind, Huo, and Tyler 1994; Major, Bylsma, and Cozzarelli 1989; Tyler 2000; Tyler and Lind 2000).

The relational justice perspective focuses on group membership, norms, and identity (Barclay 1999; Lind, Huo, and Tyler 1994; Tyler 2000; Tyler and Lind 2000). This perspective asserts that people's assessment of situations as fair or just hinges on the degree to which they believe they are valued by, and included in, the group. Thus, perceptions of relational justice depend on whether the person believes that s/he is seen as having full status in the group or society (Tyler and Lind 2000). Being accorded full standing in the group is strongly linked to treatment one receives; if someone is poorly treated, the implication is that that person is not a full member of the group (Barclay 1999; Lind, Huo, and Tyler 1994; Tyler 2000; Tyler and Lind 2000).

Other scholars, however, focus more on a distributive or self-interested justice, arguing that outcomes, rather than identity or relationships, are more important. When determining whether justice or injustice has occurred, these people weigh such factors as who won and how resources have been distributed. This model asserts that workers will engage in social control when they perceive they have been cheated out of rewards they believe they deserve or they receive undeserved punishments (Ambrose, Seabright, and Schminke 2002; Feldman and March 1981).

Hodson asserts that worker solidarity has both "affective and instrumental elements" in that sometimes the focus is on sentiments of affiliation and belonging, while, other times, worker solidarity focuses on the direct results of providing assistance or protecting the worker from external or internal threats (2001: 202). These two categories are closely tied to relational and distributive justice. Workers' demonstrations of solidarity might focus on expressions of identity

and group membership, while, at other times, solidarity tries to correct unjust distributions of rewards that results from misbehavior by people inside or outside the organization.

This study explores worker solidarity in the taxicab industry by examining expressions of cab drivers' "street justice." I define street justice as the unsanctioned, unofficial actions by the cab drivers on the road that reinforce their solidarity with other drivers by instilling and supporting occupational norms. Like other occupations (see Hodson 2001), cab drivers share norms about (1) sufficient control of their work situation so that they remain safe and (2) fairness in how passengers, managers, and co-workers deal with the cab drivers. These concerns over safety and fairness manifest themselves in the cab drivers' street justice. Sometimes the cab drivers enforce their ethic of street justice by punishing violators of these norms; other times street justice demands that the cab drivers rescue another driver, possibly risking their own safety or income. Taxicab drivers enact street justice both alone and collectively, like the cowboys sometimes working alone, but coming together with other cowboys on occasion to see that justice is done.

Sampling and Methods

The Companies and the Industry

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.

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).

Methods

I conducted 34 interviews; each interviewee is identified by a three-digit number. (This research is part of a larger project involving three other industries; the number of interviews for the larger project exceeded 100, necessitating the three-digit identification number.) The sample of taxicab drivers is divided between the two companies with 14 people (41%) from Private Taxi and 20 (59%) from Coop Cab. All interviews were open-ended. I included a wide variety of interviewees to maximize the range of experiences to be included in this study. My sample included present and former employees as well as managers and owners. Interviewees also differed in terms of length of employment, sex, race, age, level of education, and socioeconomic status. Through careful sampling and the repetition of responses I encountered as interviewees spoke of similar themes, I have become confident that my findings are well triangulated and valid. Although these interviewees are not statistically representative of all the workers at their individual organizations, the diversity of this sample is helpful in developing conceptual models.

The interviews averaged about two hours. Although the interviews ranged wider, I used a set of predetermined questions as initial probes on a wide variety of work-related topics. Follow-up questions were based on each interviewee's response. I encouraged the informants to tell me "anything they thought applied." 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 break rooms (less than one-third of the interviews were conducted on-site). In addition to the interviews, I also was included in meetings and observed behavior in the break rooms of both companies. With a few drivers from each company, I also rode along in the taxicabs.

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 "solidarity," were not the result of a direct question or set of questions intended to measure solidarity, but were produced by careful analysis of interviewees' responses to various questions.

Results and Discussion: Street Justice

Taxicab driving is a unique industry in that the drivers spend much of their work time alone, yet they have a well-established occupational culture. The cab driving culture involves a high level of worker solidarity, with drivers relying on fellow drivers for assistance, working

together in the face of conflict, and imposing various forms of social control when the occupational culture's norms are violated.

In some ways, a cab driver is very autonomous, like the cowboy on the range, alone but for his horse – or, in this contemporary case, but for his/her cab and radio. Because taxicab drivers are often by themselves while on the road, when problems occur, cab drivers sometimes must “fend for themselves” (Hoffmann 2003: 41). Potential problems on the road 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). 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.

However, other times they need not or cannot “fend for themselves,” but rely on other cab drivers for assistance. Thus, they are part of an organizational culture that emphasizes helping each other, coming together in time of need, and adherence to the occupation's social norms. For example, rather than relying on the police for assistance, cab drivers will often turn to other drivers to punish misbehaving passengers or co-workers.

In this way, they evoke an image of the lone cowboys who occasionally do rely on each other for help in time of need. Just as the cowboy rides alone on the open range, the cab driver drives alone down the webs of streets, sometimes in the early morning, sometimes in the dead of night, sometimes in the pulse of rush hour. Just as the cowboy would sometimes act outside the law, independently or collectively, and embrace “frontier justice” to enforce the norms of the cowboy code, similarly, the cab driver occasionally engages in “street justice,” alone or in

groups, when the cab-driving norms are violated. As I mentioned above, I refer to these solidarity-stimulating, unsanctioned acts by the cab drivers as “street justice” in order to capture the unofficial, justice-focused nature of their actions.

Distributive Street Justice

Sometimes, the focus of the cab drivers’ street justice was on distributive justice: the cab drivers were concerned about specific outcomes and “just (or unjust) rewards.” These outcomes could involve economic rewards, such as the income from fares, or it could involve physical or financial safety while on the road.

An example of distributive street justice directed on economic rewards is the practice of stealing a fare from a misbehaving driver who had “long-hooded” (lied about her/his true location to the dispatcher) or had stolen other drivers’ fares. Here, street justice focused on the unfairly distributed reward: the cheating drivers received more than their fair share of rides and, hence, money. To equalize this, other drivers would steal subsequent fares from the cheating drivers, reducing their income by roughly the amount that they had unfairly benefited via cheating.

These instances offer examples of the cab drivers’ co-workers violating their justice ethic. One serious infraction in the taxicab culture 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 the appropriate driver who is actually closer to the passenger’s location. This constitutes a violation

of trust and is seen as stealing another driver's fare. In the following example, a young woman driver describes how drivers will steal long-hooders' fares in order to punish 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 whose ride had been stolen] 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. [134]

This cab driver disciplined the deviant long-hooder by picking up the ride of the long-hooding driver before s/he could reach the passenger, thus, reinforcing the street justice norm of justice towards other drivers and, specifically, not long-hooding.

At times, the cab drivers will unify against a cab driver who regularly violates taxicab driving norms. This both demonstrates their solidarity in the face of the deviant and strengthens their solidarity by unifying against a perceived threat. These acts of informal social control could be carefully coordinated among nearly a dozen drivers, as in the example below, or more spontaneously accomplished, as in the quote which follows the immediate example.

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. [070]

Many cab drivers mentioned other drivers who would steal rides, but sometimes the discipline was less coordinated, such as the following example.

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. Things like, for one, talking about them. You'd be in here and there's a group of people in here, and so somebody's gotta constantly be 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 co-worker], 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.[054]

Although these acts were less severe than preventing one from earning much income during a long shift, they still were designed to discipline misbehavior and reinforce the group's norms.

Other times, distributive street justice involved helping others in need. Drivers who rushed to the rescue of fellow drivers, whose passengers refused to pay or were physically threatening, were focused on the immediate distributive justice of the situations at hand. They wished to ensure that the passengers did not act in any way that caused an unjust outcome for their drivers.

In these instances, drivers' solidarity was expressed through rallying to the aid of another driver in need. Although drivers who had trouble could contact the police, involving the police includes potentially long delays after the incident is over to complete the paperwork, as explained above. Additionally, many drivers asserted that other taxicabs are able to arrive sooner than the police. Thus, these acts of rescue not only strengthen solidarity by enabling the cab drivers to rely on each other for safety, but also demonstrate that members of the cab driving occupation are superior to those of the law enforcement profession and reinforce a positive occupational identity.

One reason cab drivers might need assistance is if their passengers are harassing or intimidating them. For example, a driver 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 cab 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. [063]

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. 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.

Another male night-shift driver explained that the ethic of rescuing other cab drivers is so strong that it even 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. He 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, the mechanic, who had heard his call on one of the radios, drove out to help 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. [036]

Similarly, a female driver explained how she and another driver came to the assistance of a cab driver who was being threatened by a mob of drunken students. The college students had surrounded his cab and the driver feared that they were going to break into his cab.

I can remember once [another driver] 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 [toward the cab in danger]. 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. [128]

Sometimes simply the presence of more cab drivers will force people to behave and accomplish the goals of safety and fairness. In the above example, the rescuing drivers did not get out of their cars, yet simply by arriving at the scene quickly they demonstrated their strong solidarity with the cab driver in danger and were able to prevent harm from the threatening students.

This street justice concern for immediate safety was sometimes extended to the drivers' passengers. An example of this is a cab driver who stopped a sexual assault in the back of her

cab. The following detailed quote tells how one female driver tried to protect one passenger from the passenger's male companion.

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 a 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.’

[011]

This driver’s act of street justice meant that she wanted to ensure her female passenger’s actual safety even to the point that she was willing to give up a future paying fare to drive this woman to safety.

Relational Street Justice

Other times, however, the cab drivers’ street justice focused more on relational justice, which concerns group membership and identity. For example, the quotation below describes some drivers’ decision to coordinate their break times so that many of them went off the road during a particular dispatcher’s shift was assertion of their group membership. 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, the quality of one’s passengers, and, most importantly, one’s income. This woman cab driver described a dispatcher whom many of the women at the company thought discriminated against the lesbian women drivers.

He’s just a pig. He really was. Then, one night when a bunch of us dykes were all working, we decided to all take a long break together – to call in that we were taking our break and turn off our radios [all] at the same time. And we [stayed out on break] for quite a while. Women always seem to be on the night shifts more than the day shifts, but this particular time, the night shift had a lot of women on it, and a lot [who were driving] that night were lesbians. And some of the men who agreed with us went on break, too. [Thus,] when we went all got off the road at the same time, this

[dispatcher] was just stranded. He was stuck and had better hope he didn't get many calls or any calls real spread out [across the city]. [115]

In this example, the women cab drivers (and some men) disciplined the dispatcher who was perceived as behaving unjustly toward the lesbian drivers. This discrimination implied that these drivers were not true, full members of the group. By taking their break together, they asserted their solidarity and the inclusion of these women drivers within the occupational group.

Like other examples of street justice, this way of punishing the dispatcher takes a significant amount of coordination, but unlike stealing someone's calls, which would increase one's own income, taking an extended break would have the opposite effect: reducing the amount of money one would earn that day. This example illustrates how enforcing street justice and, in this case, demanding that all women drivers were treated fairly as members of the group, involved monetary self-sacrifice.

Sometimes, relational justice underlined group membership not by directly addressing membership and inclusion, but by enforcing norms of the occupational culture. In these instances, street justice demands that cab drivers be treated with a level of courtesy. The cab drivers identify strongly with their occupation and demand respect for cab drivers, including themselves. To allow their passengers' disrespect to continue unchecked would imply that these drivers were either not members of the respected occupation of cab driving or that the occupation itself was not deserving of respect.

Thus, even when acting alone, cab drivers would maintain the standards of their occupational culture with people outside of the cab driving business: customers. As in other occupations (see Hodson 2001; Rothman 1998), cab drivers' two key norms are fairness and control of work. One aspect of control over one's work situation was being treated with respect

by one's customers and enjoying a level of cleanliness inside one's cab. Lack of respect toward the cab and its driver increased the driver's stress, inserted blatant unfairness into the passenger-driver relationship, and lessened the amount of power s/he had in his work space. By insisting on respect for one's self and one's cab, the drivers asserted control over their work environment.

When customers violated these norms, the cab drivers would engage in informal social control, teaching the customers that such disrespect of the driver or the cab would result in not receiving transportation. The following quote from 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. [086]

In the above quotation, the cab driver's assertion of street justice was minor and the targeted passengers would mostly likely be able to locate another cab, even if with some delay and inconvenience.

A more dramatic example of cab drivers' concern for justice in the face of misbehaving customers is illustrated with the following detailed story. This male driver 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 earning income 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. Such misbehavior by passengers costs drivers not only the lost fare itself, but also the revenue of potential future fares that the drivers miss.

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. [108]

The cab driver shared this story with a great deal of pride, explaining that he felt that he believed in karma and felt that he was often the agent of karma, good and bad. In this case, his execution of street justice meant that he not only was the agent of bad karma on behalf of all the cab drivers she had cheated, but also educated her about violating this important taxicab norm.

Distributive and Relational Justice: Worker Solidarity

Sometimes street justice has elements of both distributive and relational justice. The instances of punishing those who stole fares or who threatened drivers or their passengers could be seen both as distributive justice, as discussed above, or as relational justice, affirming their membership in the group by enforcing certain norms and ethics and aligning drivers against misbehaving deviants (relational justice). Similarly, the drivers who boycotted part of a dispatcher's shift and those who upheld certain standards of behavior from their passengers were concerned with relational justice, as mentioned above, and with the bottom line: unfair shift and fare assignments, stiffed fares, and damage to one's cab had direct financial consequences (distributive justice).

Thus, street justice encompasses both relational and distributive elements. Immediate, results-focused concerns (distributive justice) affected the cab drivers' feelings of membership and identity (relational justice). In addition, group membership and drivers' identity as taxicab drivers (relational justice) were related to their income and safety (distributive justice). In turn, their shared concerns for both immediate distributive justice and mutual awareness of membership in, and identity with, the taxicab occupation (relational justice) enhanced the cab drivers' workplace solidarity.

Hodson asserts that two major facets of worker solidarity are the enforcement of group norms and mutual defense (Hodson 2001). These are used by drivers to establish street justice. Enforcement of group norms corrects norm-violating behavior by punishing the deviant and correcting inappropriate behavior. Mutual defense comes from workers' willingness to "defend each other in the face of challenges" (Hodson 2001: 204). Although these challenges classically are responses to offenses from managers, these threats also emanate from customers and co-workers (Gwartney-Gibbs and Lach 1992; Hodson 2001; Rothman 1998). These findings from other industries were also supported by the data in this study.

Sometimes the cab drivers' street justice was focused on people within the occupation, other cab drivers; other times outsiders, such as customers, were the target or beneficiary of street justice. Both types of action strengthen the cab drivers' solidarity. By working together to punish or aid a fellow driver, the drivers confirm their common identity and shared norms (Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966). They also socialize other members of their group as well as those who have contact with the group (e.g., passengers) with regard to what the expectations are of this occupational culture (e.g., Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966; Feldman and March 1981; Trevino 1992). Moreover, when insiders or outsiders violate norms

of the taxicab industry, they are threatening the cohesion and coherence of the cab-driving community and the identity of the members of that community. When this happens, the cab drivers must act to reassert the standards of cab-driving culture and re-establish their own identity and membership (e.g., Burawoy 1979; Curran and Stanworth 1981; Durkheim (1893) 1984; Erikson 1966; Gusfield 1967; Hodson and Sullivan 2002; Rothman 1998).

Conclusion

This study explores the occupation of cab driving and “the last American cowboy[s]” [Interviewee 135]. It draws on theories of distributive and relational justice to explore how acts of street justice, punishing or aiding fellow drivers and passengers, enhance the cab drivers’ workplace solidarity and shared occupational culture. The analysis of street justice through this lens provides a more nuanced understanding of the bonds among workers and the power of the occupational norms of justice and safety.

As modern cowboys, these cab drivers often rode alone, but would come together when the need arose. Yet, whether accomplished alone or as a group, street justice was an expression of their workplace solidarity and encompassed their two key norms of safety and justice (see Hodson 2001).

Street justice involved both punishment of norm-violating behavior and defense of those in need. Means of norm-enforcement ranged from stealing fares from drivers who stole others’ fares to abandoning a young woman on the edge of town. Defense of those in need could involve instances when a cab driver feared financial harm, such as passengers who refused to pay or threatened to rob the driver, or bodily harm, such as drunken students who threatened to enter the cab or passengers who were physically harassing the driver. To ensure street justice on the

road the cab drivers would even sacrifice income, such as missed fares. These costs to the driver underscored the tremendous symbolic component in some of these street justice acts.

Just as cab drivers held those outside the occupation (e.g., passengers), as well as members of the occupation (taxicab drivers) to certain norms of cab driving culture, similarly both outsiders and insiders benefited from cab drivers' ethic of rescue. The cab drivers talked about their enforcement of norms and ethic of defense in much the same way as the cowboys in the classic movies: they acknowledged their need to rely on other cab drivers/cowboys and their commitment to standing up for others in need. Although their priority was to members of their occupation (cab drivers or cowboys), as members of a roaming occupation that placed them in contact with a variety of people in contexts that occasionally demanded reprimand or rescue, they believed that they had the somewhat unique duty to extend their street justice to people outside their occupation, such as their customers.

These findings are not limited to cab drivers, in all likelihood. Indeed, they might be even stronger in other occupations. The fact that these dynamics were found in the taxicab industry evidences how compelling and powerful worker solidarity can be. These expressions of solidarity and strong occupational norms arose in an industry in which the workers are often on their own and fairly isolated from one another. In other types of workplaces, such as offices, factories, or retail stores, where workers have much more contact with one another, co-workers might be more interdependent and have even stronger connections.

Nevertheless, this sample might be unrepresentative of many workers. It is possible that the taxicab industry may attract a certain type of person. Cab drivers might be people who especially desire a great deal of workplace autonomy and so might have a special draw to "street justice." Therefore, future research should continue to explore these dynamics in other

industries. Additionally, since cab driving is a predominantly male occupation, future studies on workplace solidarity in gender neutral or predominantly female industries might be particularly instructive.

Furthermore, this particular sample of taxicab drivers might not apply to cab drivers in larger cities. This limited applicability might be particularly evident in cities in which the drivers do not operate on a commission system, as do the drivers in this study, or in cities where the drivers are segregated along racial and ethnic lines, unlike the predominately white drivers in this study. These differences could affect the solidarity among cab drivers, their level of street justice, and degree to which they share the same industry norms.

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