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She's No Lady: The Experience and  
Expression of Gender among Women Taxi Drivers

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Master of Arts, Atlantic Canada Studies at  
Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia

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## Abstract

### She's No Lady: The Experience and Expression of Gender among Women Taxi Drivers

Kimberly Berry

"She's No Lady" explores the complex relationship between gender identity and work culture as experienced by women taxi drivers in Halifax. Working in a traditionally male industry, women taxi drivers often attract the attention of the press and the public as an amusing novelty, or a scandalous disgrace. These reactions are, in part, the result of the popular perception that masculine and feminine domain are mutually exclusive, restricted to men and women separately and respectively. Furthermore, characterized as highly competitive, independent operators in a dangerous industry, taxi drivers embody a popular image of masculinity. While the place of women is generally considered to be outside of masculine culture, women taxi drivers demonstrate the fluidity of gender cultures as they adeptly navigate the contested terrain of their masculine work-culture. Despite the routine comments and questions from passengers and colleagues alike, most women drivers find a considerable degree of membership within the larger community of drivers, and in this sense become "one of the men"; seen first as taxi drivers and then as a women.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to Shirley Comeau, a veteran taxi driver, tireless activist, and magnificent woman who is greatly missed.

## **Acknowledgments**

The successful completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the tremendous support and assistance of a great many people and organizations. I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the contributions of a number of these individuals and institutions and give my most sincere and heartfelt thanks.

Firstly, I wish to express my appreciation to the Helen Creighton Foundation. The research for this thesis was made possible, in part, by a Grant-In-Aid from the Helen Creighton Foundation.

Colin Howell, whose professional and academic reputation attracted me to this programme of study, and whose generous support and expert guidance were constant throughout.

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I also wish to express my appreciation to the many subscribers of taxi-l, the internet list server. The taxi list server and its subscribers have kept me in touch with the issues that currently concern members of the taxi community and have served as a tremendous resource and source of encouragement.

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The research for this project has taken me to a number of libraries and archives, both locally and nationally, as well as to the offices and files of city hall. I would like to thank the staff and librarians at the Halifax City Regional Library, Saint Mary's University, Dalhousie University, Hunter College, The City University of New York, National Library of Canada, National Archives of Canada, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, and especially the staff at the City Clerks Office of the Halifax Regional Municipality. I would like to give special thanks to Norma Jamieson (HCRL), Sandra Hamm (SMU), and Karen Swim (HRM).

Generally the faculty and staff at Saint Mary's University has provided a wonderful atmosphere in which to study and I would like to express my deep appreciation to the Gorsebrook Research Institute, especially Jackie Logan, Therese Arseneau, and Madine VanderPlaat. I would also like to thank Denise Tucker, Daphne Tucker and Tim Powers for creating such a pleasant and cooperative work environment. Also, thanks to Annette Wright, Atlantic Canada Studies and Marlene Trainor, History Department for always being patient with my questions and requests. Many thanks to the staff at the Help Desk and Liveware Computers for expert trouble shooting. Finally, my warmest thanks to the staff and commissionaires at Saint Mary's Security who, it seemed, were the only others on campus during the many late nights and weekends required to see this project through to completion.

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In addition to the many friends and colleagues who have assisted me, I would like to give special thanks to my husband and my family who always support me in every endeavour I wish to undertake. Most especially my grandparents, Walter and Gertrude Wilson, who have always expressed keen interest and undying support for any project I undertake. My parents, Heather and Leonard Williams whose professional and academic accomplishments have always served as an inspiration to me. My only sibling, Sarah Williams, has given me the most cherished gift - sisterhood. My husband, Paul Berry, who has always been my chief confidant and academic advisor. His patience and understanding have enabled me to pursue any challenge with total confidence, assured of his support. I would also like to extend special thanks to my Auntie Phyllis, Phyllis Dube who has listened tirelessly to my endless woes of

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deadlines and writer's block. Also, to my cousin Ian MacBurnie, who told me that this is my work and whose own scholarly pursuits have served as a model for me.

Finally, I wish to extend my most sincere thanks to the taxi drivers. The men and women of the Halifax taxi industry have been instrumental in my survival as a cab driver and have inspired my study of the industry and its workers. I am deeply indebted to each of them and most thankful to those who have given so generously of their time and themselves to cooperate with my research. I would also like to take this time to give special thanks to my friend, guardian angel, and mentor, Mary Sheppard, who has saved my life again and again and again.

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## Preface

I first became interested in taxi drivers in the mid 1980's. After becoming acquainted with a number of drivers, in the quintessential taxi driver hang-out, Tim Horton's, my curiosity was stirred. Seeing the illuminated rooflights dart through the city streets at night, and hearing the drivers' stories told over coffee, I began to wonder what it was like to drive a cab and, more importantly, what it was like to be a cab driver.

For a high school drop-out working three jobs to make ends meet, the decision to drive a taxi was an easy one. With coaching from some of the drivers I had met, I studied the city streets and buildings, attended the newly instituted Halifax taxi school, and began driving early in February 1987. However, I soon learned that having the licence did not make me a taxi driver. The phrase that comes to mind was often repeated by veteran drivers: there is a difference between a taxi driver and someone who just drives a taxi. This code illustrates the division between rookie and veteran drivers, part-time and full-time drivers, and between those who have found a place within the taxi community and work-culture and those who have not.

Another division within the larger community of taxi drivers is between "day" drivers and "night" drivers. Those who drive days and those who drive nights often do not have

the opportunity to associate with one another. They also work in very different environments, serving a very different clientele. It did not take long to determine that I was a night driver. I preferred playing the street to working the radio, and the people who spilled out of the bars at closing time were my bread and butter. I would be labelled by authors such as Charles Vidich as a "nighthawk" and a "hustler".

I was further categorized as a *woman* night driver and I quickly understood that despite sharing the same occupation with hundreds of men taxi drivers, my experience as a driver was coloured by gender.

Although I took my car out of the business in 1990, and stopped driving taxi completely by 1993, my interest in the occupational experience of taxi drivers has only increased with my academic interest in labour history, women's studies, and Atlantic Canada Studies. This thesis explores the paradox of identity experienced by women taxi drivers. Simultaneously belonging to and being apart from the masculine identity of the taxi driver work-culture, women drivers must navigate the contested terrain of their gendered work-culture.

The first chapter will serve as an overview of the scholarly literature on taxi drivers and the academic theory surrounding women's culture. While the scholarship on the taxi industry has for the most part ignored gender issues,

women taxi drivers offer a unique opportunity to examine the relationship between women, masculinity, and the workplace. The second chapter explores the historical and cultural association of masculinity with both work and the automobile, cementing taxi drivers to the image of rough and ready manliness. Chapter three examines the introduction of women into the manly pursuit of driving taxi and investigates the role that women drivers assume as both members of, and leaders in, the Halifax taxi community. The fourth chapter illustrates the complex relationships between race, gender, and occupational identity by exploring race as a dividing line within the taxi industry. Finally, in chapter five, the issue of class is examined, further demonstrating the gendered nature of the drivers' work experience as the taxi drivers' work-culture is closely linked with the image of working-class masculinity.

The peculiar mix of seemingly contradictory identities that come together daily in the work experience of women taxi drivers illustrates the complex and textured relationship between gender, class, race, and occupational identity. It is this diversity that characterizes the reality of most women's experience, and serves as a reminder of the fluid and dynamic nature of gender, class, race, and work-culture.

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**Missing In Action:  
Occupational Studies and Women's Culture**

Despite the formidable presence of women taxi drivers internationally since the early 1900's,<sup>1</sup> the taxi industry has remained a bastion of the male work culture. Similarly the popular perception of taxi drivers is that they are, and should only be, men. Women are perceived as either completely absent from the business or only exist on the margins of the industry. However, the number of women is greater than many guess, and their participation and adaptation in the industry is considerably more significant than popular image suggests.

Among the most notable popular culture portrayals of taxi drivers is Harry Chapin's 1972 song, "Taxi", the NBC sitcom "Taxi", and the 1976 feature film "Taxi Driver", starring Robert Di Nero. In addition to these well known pieces the internet movie database lists over five hundred films featuring cabdrivers as characters.

Despite an obvious popular culture interest in taxi drivers, and their work environment, remarkably few scholars have examined the taxi industry or its workers. American

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<sup>1</sup>"Women Cabbies A Big Hit: So Popular in Paris That the Cabmen Masquerade as Women," *New York Times* 23 March 1907: 5; "London's Woman Chauffeur: Former Army Nurse Also Carries Medical Outfit in Her Taxicab," *New York Times* 27 December 1908: 2; "Fewer Women Cabbies: Petticoated Drivers Disappearing from the Streets of Paris," *New York Times* 12 January 1908: 2; "Woman Drives Paris Taxicab: Lends Enlivenment to the Present Languid Life of the Boulevards," *New York Times* 19 September 1909: 2.

studies are far more numerous than Canadian. Among the most notable are sociological studies, often based on participant observation. This research method is not uncommon among sociologists and requires the researcher to participate as a member of the group they are observing. Therefore, for many of these studies the researcher engages in operating a taxi while collecting his or her data. Peculiar to this approach is the benefit of experience. The researcher gains first hand knowledge and understanding of the work experience shared by his or her subjects. Perhaps more importantly, unlike employer records or government documents, these studies document work experience and culture from the perspective of the workers.

An overview of the most significant works, both published and unpublished, begins with Charles Morris and his 1951 dissertation, "Some Characteristics of Occupational Choice and Adjustment in A Sample of New York City Taxi Drivers".<sup>2</sup> Prompted by a need on the part of vocational counsellors for better understanding of factors affecting occupational choice and adjustment, Morris examines the dynamics behind the job selection of taxi drivers.<sup>3</sup> Based on interviews with seventy two New York City taxi drivers

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<sup>2</sup>Charles Morris, "Some Characteristics of Occupational Choice and Adjustment in A Sample of New York City Taxi Drivers," diss., Columbia University, 1951.

<sup>3</sup>  
Morris, "Occupational Choice and Adjustment," 27.

Morris unfavourably concludes:

For the most part, these taxi drivers, having terminated school at an early age, entered the world of work without having given appreciable thought to the kind of work they preferred. The choice process of these drivers seems to be characterized by an early, ill-organized, effort to secure maximal satisfaction of values in work.<sup>4</sup>

Morris's sample group consists exclusively of white male taxi drivers and although he recognizes that race and ethnicity are relevant issues he fails to examine them more closely.

It was felt that perception of oneself in relation to occupational life might be affected by the racial group to which one belonged, and it did not appear feasible to obtain a sufficiently large, separate, sample of [black] drivers.<sup>5</sup>

Morris also completely overlooks the issue of gender, implying that there are simply no women taxi drivers in New York City. He thereby ignores the forty year history of women cabbies in New York, including the story of Wilma Russey who, in 1915, became the first woman to drive a taxi in New York City.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, one year later the *New York Times* reports on another woman looking for work as a chauffeur. This woman was working as a stenographer at the time and complained that:

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<sup>4</sup>Morris, "Occupational Choice and Adjustment," 144.

<sup>5</sup>Morris, "Occupational Choice and Adjustment," 48.

<sup>6</sup>Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age* (Toronto: The Free Press, 1991) 85.



It is hard to know the automobile from the head to the tail lights and yet ... to be compelled to spend days in the cramped indoors, bending over a typewriter. ... Unless I have a position as chauffeur offered me I will be condemned to sit before my typewriter and watch the automobiles go past.<sup>7</sup>

Among the earliest published articles is Fred Davis's "The Cabdriver and His Fare: Facets of a Fleeting Relationship".<sup>8</sup> Davis examines the relationship between the big city cabdriver and his fare documenting the taxi culture's typology of fares and strategies used by drivers to increase the likelihood and calculability of tips. Following Davis, in 1962, is Robert Karen's article "Some Factors Affecting Tipping Behaviour".<sup>9</sup> Both Davis and Karen overlook the issue of gender as it is connected to the driver; however, both recognize the significance of the passenger's gender as it relates to tipping. Davis describes the "lady shopper" type, as categorized by taxi drivers:

The stereotype is a middle-aged woman, fashionably though unattractively dressed, sitting somewhat stiffly at the edge of her seat and wearing a fixed glare which bespeaks her conviction that she is being 'taken for a ride'. Her major delinquency, however, is undertipping; her

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<sup>7</sup>Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 85.

<sup>8</sup>Fred Davis, "The Cabdriver and His Fare: Facets of a Fleeting Relationship," *American Journal of Sociology* (1959): 158-65.

<sup>9</sup>Robert L. Karen, "Some Factors Affecting Tipping Behaviour," *Sociology and Social Research* 47 (1962): 68-74.

preferred coin is a dime, no more or less,  
regardless of how long or arduous the trip.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, Karen concludes that men tip far more often than women do, but does little more than Davis in terms of explaining the gender gap. Karen suggests that:

several explanations could account for this finding including sex differences in the handling of money, role playing, etc.<sup>11</sup>

The significance of the sex-based wage gap did not figure into either author's analysis of gendered tipping behaviour. Another scholar who has examined the issue of tipping is James Henslin. More prolific than Davis and Karen, Henslin has published three articles from the research conducted for his dissertation, "The Cab Driver: An Interactional Analysis of an Occupational Culture".<sup>12</sup> In his article, "Trust and the Cab Driver", Henslin describes the methods that taxi drivers use to determine whether or not to accept a particular passenger. Henslin explores how drivers judge the passenger according to sex, age, race, neighbourhood, and sobriety in order to measure the likelihood of either payment and tip, or robbery.<sup>13</sup> Despite a thorough description of how such discrimination aids the driver in

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<sup>10</sup>Davis, "The Cabdriver and His Fare," 162.

<sup>11</sup>Karen, "Factors Affecting Tipping," 73.

<sup>12</sup>James Henslin, "The Cab Driver: An Interactional Analysis of an Occupational Culture," diss., Washington University, 1967.

<sup>13</sup>Henslin, "Trust and the Cab Driver," 140.

better controlling his wage and work experience, Henslin only superficially explores the causal factors for the development of such practices and portrays cabbies as a highly prejudiced group concerned only with making money. Henslin's articles are also limited by the scope of his original research. Little better than Davis, Karen, and Morris, Henslin's original study makes brief mention of the presence of women drivers and the possible significance of gender in the taxi industry:

... female cab drivers probably have differential experience with certain problems with driving cabs than do male drivers, e.g., regarding sexual advances and/or sexual attacks.<sup>14</sup>

Although Henslin recognizes the existence of women taxi drivers and the significance of sex as a determinant of culture and work experience, women drivers are completely absent from his original sample group. Henslin explains that his research was conducted at a taxi company, in Saint Louis, that did not employ women drivers; therefore, women drivers are also absent from his study.

Another American sociologist who has devoted a considerable amount of time to the study of taxi drivers is Richard Schlosberg. Schlosberg's unpublished masters thesis, "A Descriptive Analysis of the New York City Taxi Industry", explores adjustment techniques used by taxi

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<sup>14</sup>Henslin, "The Cab Driver," 309.

drivers to function in their industry.<sup>15</sup> Adjustment techniques are behaviours or attitudes employed by drivers as they attempt to cope with their particular workplace tensions. Although Schlosberg is considerably more sensitive to issues of class and race than many other authors, the absence of women in this study is consistent with studies by other scholars.

In his doctoral dissertation, "Taxi Driving: A Study of Occupational Tension", Schlosberg continues along the same vein of analysis increasingly focusing on issues of class and worker exploitation.<sup>16</sup> Schlosberg contends that analysing the taxi industry as a class system can explain drivers' occupational behaviour and relationships. For Schlosberg, the class structure of the industry, the methods of remuneration, and the exploitation of drivers by fleet owners and dispatchers result in the drivers' employment of tactics to ensure a better income and their attempts to escape their occupational role. However, again Schlosberg deals with the taxi industry as an exclusively male domain.

Among the published authors of the 1970's and 1980's is Charles Vidich. Vidich also examines the New York taxi driver but exhibits considerably less sympathy for the role

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<sup>15</sup>Richard Schlosberg, "A Descriptive Analysis of the New York City Taxi Industry," unpublished masters thesis Hunter College, The City University of New York, 1975.

<sup>16</sup>Schlosberg, "Taxi Driving: A Study of Occupational Tension," diss., The City University of New York, 1980.

of class and race relations in determining driver behaviour or public image. In his book, *The New York Cab Driver and His Fare*, Vidich attributes the popular image of the New York taxi driver as a "crook" to the "hack's character, his actions, and his historical reputation."<sup>17</sup> Vidich portrays the driver as a perpetrator who exploits passengers and states emphatically that "nobody is cheating the cabbie."<sup>18</sup> While taking a hard line with his assessment of the taxi culture, Vidich, like the other authors, overlooks the participation of women taxi drivers in the New York industry.

American sociologist Raymond Russell has published articles that are considerably more sensitive to the role of class relations and ethnicity in the Boston taxi industry. In his article, "Class Formation in the Workplace," Russell addresses the question of how class can be measured in the workplace and contends that the most important determinant of class is not the amount of income earned but the method of remuneration.<sup>19</sup> Russell suggests that the Boston industry illustrates how different types of

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<sup>17</sup>Charles Vidich, *The New York Cab Driver and His Fare* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976) 1.

<sup>18</sup>Vidich, *New York Cab Driver* 12.

<sup>19</sup>Raymond Russell, "Class Formation in the Workplace: The Role of Source of Income," *Work and Occupation* 10(3) (1983): 349-72.

ownership conditions manifest different forms of "interest articulation or political expression by the drivers."<sup>20</sup>

In his later article, "The Role of Culture and Ethnicity in the Degeneration of Democratic Firms", Russell asserts that the collectivism found among members of a shared culture in an ethnic group can have significant, positive effects on the function of democratic firms, such as co-operatives, and worker-owned enterprises.<sup>21</sup> Russell concludes that cultural and ethnic links were instrumental in the establishment of two democratic taxi firms in Los Angeles and their demise was largely determined by regulatory structure. However, Russell leaves the examination of the role of gender in the formation and maintenance of collective bonds among taxi drivers to others.

The first Canadian study of the taxi industry appears in 1982, *The Taxi Industry and Its Regulation in Canada*.<sup>22</sup> Published by the Economic Council of Canada, this Working Paper is a translation of Benoit-Mario Papillon's "Analyse du transport par taxi et de ses reglementations au Canada". Unlike the American studies Papillon's work is truly a study

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<sup>20</sup>Russell, "Class Formation," 364.

<sup>21</sup>Raymond Russell, "The Role of Culture and Ethnicity in the Degeneration of Democratic Firms," *Economic and Industrial Democracy* 5(1) (1984): 73-96.

<sup>22</sup>Benoit-Mario Papillon, *The Taxi Industry Regulation In Canada* Working Paper No. 30 (Ottawa: Economic Council of Canada, 1982).

of the industry, not the workers. In this sense Papillon is not concerned with either issues of class nor gender.

Other Canadian studies that focus more on the direct experience of drivers include work by Edward Sutton, Jane Burns, and Cynthia Boyd. Sutton's article, "Halifax Cabdrivers, 1939-1945" is based largely on interviews with three Halifax cabbies.<sup>23</sup> Although Sutton addresses the scarcity of male workers during World War II because of the large numbers of young men leaving their jobs for military service, he overlooks the demand for women workers. Again, taxi drivers are dealt with as an exclusively male breed; Sutton's only reference to women is in his description of the Central Call Office of the Wartime Taxi Association and the "two girls" who answered the phone and passed the orders to "a dispatcher".<sup>24</sup> The reader is lead to assume that because "dispatcher" is not prefaced with the word "woman" that all dispatchers are also male. While the majority of the sociological work on taxi drivers involve large American urban centres, Sutton's article deals with the smaller urban centre of Halifax. In this sense Sutton becomes the first to publish on the Halifax taxi driver; however, the brevity and scope of his article leave a more thorough analysis to other scholars.

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<sup>23</sup>Edward Sutton, "Halifax Cabdrivers, 1939-1945," *Nova Scotia Historical Review* 12(2) (1992): 66-73.

<sup>24</sup>Sutton, "Halifax Cabdrivers," 72.

Jane Burns and Cynthia Boyd also focus on taxi drivers in the Atlantic region; however, as folklore studies their work fits best with Philip Nausbaum's article, "The Importance of Storytelling Style Among New York City Taxi Drivers".<sup>25</sup> Nusbaum examines the expressive culture of New York City taxi drivers and suggests that the "stylistic organization of cab drivers' stories" is an example of "blue-collar creativity". The artful ability to keep an interaction going by responding to what someone says while portraying relevant events in a fashion that is meaningful to a specific work culture makes storytelling style both creative and class specific.

Burns's article, "'Every One Has Good': A Study of the Occupational Folklife of a St. John's Cab Driver" is largely based on a series of interviews with one St. John's taxi driver, identified only as Gilbert.<sup>26</sup> Although Burns did not specifically address the issue of gender or women taxi drivers in her article she did find that gender affected her research for the article. Burns had some difficulty establishing contact with potential informants for her

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<sup>25</sup>Philip Nusbaum, "The Importance of Storytelling Style Among New York City Taxi Drivers," *New York Folklore* 6(1-2) (1980): 67-89.

<sup>26</sup>Jane Burns, "'Every One Has Good': A Study of the Occupational Folklife of a St. John's Cab Driver," *Culture and Tradition* 4 (1979): 79-87.



research and suggests that part of the problem was that she was a woman intruding upon a male domain.<sup>27</sup>

Cynthia Boyd's paper, "'Just like one of the Boys': Tactics of women taxi drivers" is the only scholarly examination focused specifically on women taxi drivers.<sup>28</sup> Boyd's paper deals with the occupational tactics employed by women taxi drivers to deal with unwanted sexual advances from male passengers. Based mainly on interviews with three women drivers Boyd's article first explores the "techniques, customs, and expressive behaviours" that comprise the taxi work culture, then examines the tactics that women drivers use to ward off unwanted sexual behaviour. While the "canon of work technique", is generally shared by both men and women drivers, Boyd suggests that women taxi drivers have added concerns and must take extra cautions because of occupational risks that are gender specific. While Boyd has not exhausted the topic she has clearly initiated the debate on the role of gender among taxi drivers. In addition to what the study of women taxi drivers has to offer the study of the taxi industry, study of the taxi industry also offers to inform current research in women's studies and gender theory.

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<sup>27</sup>Burns, "Every One Has Good," 80.

<sup>28</sup>Cynthia Boyd "'Just like one of the Boys': Tactics of women taxi drivers," *Undisciplined Women: Tradition and Culture in Canada* Eds. Diane Tye and Pauline Greenhill (Toronto: McGill-Queens, 1997) In Press.

Within the last three decades there has been a noticeable rise in academic consciousness regarding both women's history and gender studies. There has been a growing acceptance among scholars of the social sciences and humanities that gender, distinct from sex, is not wholly determined by biology, but is a social construct. However, there remains much debate surrounding the exact nature and the appropriate terminology to describe the experience of gender. Similarly, the rise of women's history has not developed without considerable debate among scholars in the field. One of the most contentious issues concerns one of the most fundamental question of women's studies: the existence of a women's culture. Much of the debate surrounding women's culture is concerned with what unites and divides women in their experience of gender. Questions of women's consciousness predate the recent rise in women's historiography and modern ideas of women's culture have been criticized before the emergence of "recent trends" such as political culture, multiculturalism, and new gender analysis.<sup>29</sup>

Although several authors from different disciplines have explored questions of culture the definitions used are markedly similar. Notions of culture and other culturalist debates, such as the question of working class culture,

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<sup>29</sup>Joanne Meyerowitz, "American Women's History: The Fall of Women's Culture," *Canadian Review of American Studies* Special Issue Part 1 (1992): 27.

operate with the same basic definition of culture. Among the most commonly employed definitions of culture is that used by Sidney W. Mintz who contends that culture is "a kind of resource" as opposed to society which is a "kind of arena."<sup>30</sup> Susan Porter Benson, elaborates on this and offers a more useful definition when she writes that culture is the "set of frameworks, attitudes, and accepted standards of behaviour that one draws upon in dealing with society."<sup>31</sup> Similarly, anthropologist Helga Jacobson, states that culture is "the values, beliefs, rules of organization and shared traditions that link people within and between generations in any specific or social context."<sup>32</sup> It is generally within definitions such as these that debates on the existence of women's culture occur. The conflict, therefore, does not focus on the definition of culture. It involves the larger issue of whether or not women's culture exists and debate over the significance and influence of other bonds such as class and

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<sup>30</sup>Mintz's definition can be found in works such as Gutman, *Work, Culture, and Society* 16; Susan Porter Benson, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers, and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989) 3.

<sup>31</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures* 3.

<sup>32</sup>Helga Jacobson "Women's Work and Women's Culture: Some Further Considerations," *Women's Culture: Selected Papers From the Halifax Conference* The CRIAW Papers/Les documents de l'ICRAF No. 3, Canadian Research Institute for the advancement of Women (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, c1982) 48.

race, and the question of essentialist interpretations of women's nature.

As Jane Roland Martin explains in her article "Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps" the 1980's saw the vehement criticism of essentialism.<sup>33</sup> Any suggestion that women commonly possessed an intrinsic nature, or that women were inherently or fundamentally similar to each other and thus dissimilar to men, was considered an essentialist analysis. Martin claims that to call someone, or someone's work essentialist was not merely offering criticism, but acted as a "seal of disapproval."<sup>34</sup> Leading critics of essentialist analysis, such as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, assert that the women's culture paradigm tends to involve false generalizations and universality which deny crucial differences among women such as class, race, and sexual orientation.<sup>35</sup> In keeping with these issues an examination of women taxi drivers is particularly valuable not only because of the diversity of the women in the field but also

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<sup>33</sup>Jane Roland Martin, "Methodological Essentialism, False Difference, and Other Dangerous Traps," *Signs* Spring (1994): 630-657.

<sup>34</sup>Martin, "Methodological Essentialism," 630.

<sup>35</sup>See Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," *Feminism/Postmodernism* ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 19-38; Linda J. Nicholson, *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

because of the unique class identification of drivers in the industry. Unlike many examinations of gender in the workplace the study of the taxi industry offers a group of workers that is neither racially homogenous nor clearly bound to one particular class identity.

Although the discourse has changed, many notable women writers have, for centuries, been concerned with the existence and the nature of women's culture. Arguably one of the earliest women writers to consider the nature and image of women is Christine de Pizan. Author of *The Book of the City of Ladies*, de Pizan, wrote in fourteenth century France.<sup>36</sup> Although she was not discussing women's culture in particular, she was certainly debating the nature of women and the power of socially constructed images of women as portrayed by men.<sup>37</sup> De Pizan writes:

. . . so many different men - and learned men among them - have been and are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behaviour . . . it seems that they all speak from one and the same mouth. They all concur in one conclusion: that the behaviour of women is inclined to and full of every vice.<sup>38</sup>

After acknowledging that her own observations of women and their behaviour did not correspond with the notions of these

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<sup>36</sup>Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies* (New York: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1982).

<sup>37</sup>de Pizan, *City of Ladies* 3-4.

<sup>38</sup>de Pizan, *City of Ladies* 3-4.

men de Pizan still questioned herself and "relied more on the judgment of others than on what [she] [her]self felt and knew."<sup>39</sup> Thus de Pizan depicts the power of social constructs by internalizing an image of women which she "felt and knew" to be untrue. The analysis that femininity or the 'nature of woman' is a social construct has been enduring. What is also notable in de Pizan's analysis of women's nature is her consideration of women from different classes.

I considered other women whose company I frequently kept, princesses, great ladies, women of the middle and lower classes, who had graciously told me of their most private and intimate thoughts, hoping that I could judge impartially and in good conscience . . .<sup>40</sup>

De Pizan's consideration of women from various classes signals her understanding that class can act as a barrier between women and may affect a woman's behaviour, or the expression of women's culture. Clearly considerations of class as a fundamental division between women is not new to the analysis of women's culture. While class has long been considered a crucial dividing line among women's experience, women taxi drivers offer a unique example of women experiencing class as it is linked to men's culture.

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<sup>39</sup>de Pizan, *City of Ladies* 4.

<sup>40</sup>de Pizan, *City of Ladies* 4.

Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft writing in the eighteenth century addresses misogynist images of women in literature and using a feminist critique presents the "first sustained argument for female political, economic, and legal equality."<sup>41</sup> Although Wollstonecraft is not particularly debating women's culture, she is certainly addressing women as a class and asserts that women have a common condition of subjugation.

Other women writers who have dealt with women as a class, before the modern women's movement of the twentieth century, include: Sojourner Truth, an African-american woman active in the women's suffrage movement of the nineteenth century;<sup>42</sup> and essayist Virginia Woolf, whose work in the early twentieth century similarly deals with women as a distinct group.<sup>43</sup> What is particularly significant about the words of Sojourner Truth is her awareness that the use of the term woman ignored the experience of African-american women. Long before modern feminist critics such as Fraser and Nicholson, Truth was addressing the absence of black

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<sup>41</sup>See Mary Wollstonecraft with selections from "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1985) 135-160.

<sup>42</sup>Samples of Sojourner Truth's speeches can also be found in *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* eds. Sandra Gibert and Susan Gubar (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985) 252-56.

<sup>43</sup>Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* 2nd. ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1957).

women's experience in debates over women's rights. In her speech, "Ain't I a woman?," Truth exposes the markedly dissimilar experience between white and black women in America and recognizes that the term woman is used to imply only the experience of the middle and upper-class white women.

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?"<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, before the rise of the feminist discourse identifying terms such as 'false generalization' and 'universalism' women writers recognized the limitations of feminist theory.

One of the most notable early opponents to the existence of women's culture is Simone de Beauvoir, author of *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir asserted that although men have some common experiences and joint interests which bring them together, women do not. Women are united only in "mechanical solidarity" from the mere fact of their similarity but lack any "organic solidarity." Although the argument against "organic solidarity" may seem to be an argument against an essentialist interpretation of women's

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<sup>44</sup>Sojourner Truth, "Ain't I a woman?," *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English* eds. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1985) 253.



culture, de Beauvoir's next argument uses essentialist stereotyping to explain the lack of women's culture. She writes that women are too jealous, too vain, or too emotional, even too stupid, to grasp the short-term opportunistic advantages of forming group ties. The only exception to de Beauvoir's argument is the "authentic camaraderie" among women prostitutes.<sup>45</sup> Although judgment de Beauvoir's comments should be tempered by an awareness of the context of her time, the 1940's, well before widespread academic feminist debate on women's culture and essentialism, it should be noted that even de Beauvoir's anti-culture position is presented as an essentialist analysis. De Beauvoir's interpretation of women's lack of community is also significant because it becomes clear that a study of the women's culture paradigm is not as simple as tracing a rise or fall of a new idea. Clearly the contemporary debates surrounding women's culture are deeply rooted in women's writing and pre-date the rise of what many consider modern feminism.

There is, however, a discernible pattern within recent feminist study that many authors recognize. Generally the record shows that from the late 1960's until the mid 1980's

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<sup>45</sup>Thelma McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture: From De Beauvoir to Clause 28," *The CRIAW Papers/Les documents de l'ICRAF* No. 3 *Women's Culture: Selected Papers From the Halifax Conference 3*. Canadian Research Institute for the advancement of women (Ottawa: Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, c1982).

feminist analysis tended to focus solely on the viewpoint of white, middle-class, western women.<sup>46</sup> Since the mid-1980's feminist discourse has been largely concerned with addressing the divisions among women previously dismissed by falsely universalized images of women. The divisions which have attracted the greatest attention include those of class, race, and ethnicity. In terms of reconciling women's culture with class culture, some writers suggest that this is not only possible, but necessary. Susan Levine writes that women's culture can become a:

meaningful category of analysis [if] ... carefully situated in time and place ... and discussed in the context of a particular culture or class.<sup>47</sup>

The importance of recognizing the connection between gender and class is clearly stated in Pamela Sugiman's book *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979*, when she refers to research conducted by Rosemary Pringle, who examined secretaries in Australia, and concludes that:

... classes are always already gendered while men and women experience their gender in class terms .  
 . . class has different meanings for men and women

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<sup>46</sup>Linda Nicholson, *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge, 1990) 1.

<sup>47</sup>Susan Levine, "Labors in the Field: Reviewing Women's Cultural History," *Radical History Review* 35 (1986): 56.

and cannot be separated from these gender meanings.<sup>48</sup>

To dismiss the women's culture paradigm on the basis of existing class division is to understate the complexity of class relations. For a complete understanding of both women's culture and class experience it is necessary to appreciate that class can affect expressions of women's culture while women's culture can also, at times, transcend class divisions.

The notion that expressions of women's culture are class specific is supported by sociologist Thelma McCormack. In her article, "Rethinking Women's Culture: From De Beauvoir to Clause 28," McCormack suggests that after marriage working class women retain many traditional social patterns particularly in their friendship networks. They remain faithful to their neighbours and relatives on a 'woman-to-woman' basis, while middle-class women develop new friendship bonds and socialize as part of a couple with other couples.<sup>49</sup> While there are times when class effectively divides women, specifically determining the expression of women's culture, there are also times when the notion of women's culture is used to bridge the gap between class.

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<sup>48</sup>Pamela Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma: The Gender Politics of Auto Workers in Canada, 1937-1979* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994) 6.

<sup>49</sup>McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture," 9.

In her book, *Counter Cultures: Saleswomen, Managers and Customers in American Department Stores 1890-1940*, Susan Porter Benson observes the interplay between class and gender as saleswomen, their managers, and their customers experience the fluid bonds of class and gender within the context of the larger consumer culture and department store work place. While acknowledging the class division between the working-class saleswomen and their middle-class customers, Benson also suggests that women in both classes experienced, in some degree, the bonds of women's culture. For example, women of both classes appreciated the importance of decisions about fashion choices, domestic goods and the social aspect of shopping.<sup>50</sup>

Central to understanding the complexity of class and gender analysis is an appreciation of the paradox of unity: the same notions that unite women of different classes are also used to divide them. For example, despite the implicit understanding, among women of all classes, that fashion is central to femininity, notions of appropriate dress are class specific.

dress conveys a powerful class-laden message: customers were displeased when 'approached by an employee who is overdressed and who bears on her person marks of opulence which apparently do not accord with her position.'<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures* 130-31, 263.

<sup>51</sup>Benson, *Counter Cultures* 130.

Like fashion the image of domesticity can transcend class divisions among women. Sharing information about upcoming sales and where to buy rationed food during the war demonstrate the common role of women as consumers which is applicable to women of all classes.<sup>52</sup> The significance of Benson's work is the notion that women express and experience their gender and class loyalties in different situations. At times women focus on their bonds of class thus severing the gender bond, and at other times, the strength of gender bonds act to transcend class divisions. Popular arguments against the false generalization of gender often overlook the reciprocal nature of class and gender. As Martin has observed, while too strong a focus on universalism is dangerous, equally threatening is too strong a focus on difference.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the class analysis, the multicultural paradigm calls into question the validity of the existence of one women's culture.<sup>54</sup> Similar to notions of the double oppression of working-class women many argue that the existence of the double oppression of race and gender further separate, for example, African-American women from a

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<sup>52</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 81; Benson, *Counter Cultures* 130.

<sup>53</sup>Martin, "Methodological Essentialism," 630-657.

<sup>54</sup>One notable author who is sensitive to the issue of race and feminist theory is bell hooks. See bell hooks *Feminist Theory: from margin to center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

white middle-class women's culture.<sup>55</sup> Writers such as Joanne Meyerowitz argue that it is obvious that all women do not share the same experiences and identities; therefore, not all women are bound together by a common culture. Furthermore, Meyerowitz asserts that some women have exercised power over others, participating in the racist oppression of other women.<sup>56</sup> Again the key is not to view the experience of race and gender as separate, oppositional, or mutually exclusive. Others argue that just as race affects gender experience, at times acting to separate women, gender also conditions women's experience of their own race, and can act to transcend the division of race.

While race and class are emphasized as the significant factors dividing women, Martin has suggested that there are other aspects of women's experience which may matter as much or more. Martin suggests the list of variables affecting women's culture may include age, sexual orientation, being fat, or being in an abusive relationship. Addressing issues which few other authors in this debate will touch Martin asks:

how can we be so sure that in a woman's case being a rape victim does not matter as much or more than her race or class?<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>Meyerowitz, "American Women's History," 30.

<sup>56</sup>Meyerowitz, "American Women's History," 34.

<sup>57</sup>Martin, "Methodological Essentialism," 647.

Another relevant division which few women address is that of regional identity. Although Christina Simmons, in her article "'Helping the Poorer Sisters': The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945," does not specifically address women's culture it examines the relationship between Halifax women of different classes.<sup>58</sup> In a brief comment on national context, Simmons reveals that regional experience can be an important consideration. She qualifies domestic work in post Second World War Halifax by stating that:

in Halifax, the proportion of women employed in domestic and personal service remained higher than the national averages but was declining more rapidly.<sup>59</sup>

The significance of this statement is not the pattern of domestic service in Halifax, but the recognition that women's employment patterns or life experiences may vary from one region to the next. Therefore, any list of variables should also include region. However, what Simmons's article also indicates is that the divisions between women in Halifax were in keeping with what writers have observed elsewhere. In the case of the Jost Mission the main issues focus around class and religion. Simmons

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<sup>58</sup>Christina Simmons, "'Helping the Poorer Sisters': The Women of the Jost Mission, Halifax, 1905-1945," *Rethinking Canada: The Promise of Women's History* 2nd. ed. eds. Veronica Strong-Boag and Anita Clair Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman Ltd., 1991) 286-307; Simmons's article was originally published in *Acadiensis* 14(1) (1984): 3-27.

<sup>59</sup>Simmons, "Women of the Jost Mission," 291.

also observes that the class barriers were tempered by gender sympathies, and vice versa:

toward the working-class mothers the Mission Committee and staff showed both sympathy as women and the judgmental eye of social superiors.<sup>60</sup>

Another example of the regionally specific experience of women is Marilyn Porter's study of women in the Grand Bank fishery.<sup>61</sup> Porter asserts that women in the Grand Bank fishing industry were uniquely organized, working in a direct commercial relationship with large merchant firms. In other fisheries women were neither organized in such a large-scale commercial way, nor were they directly involved in market relations.<sup>62</sup> Within this unique context, Porter examines women's experience across generations. Although Porter is not theorizing about women's culture she is examining women's perception of their work through different generations of the same families. Therefore, the informants are a homogenous group in the context of race, region, and class. Porter is examining age as the divisive factor in women's experience. Both Simmons and Porter offer a valuable reminder that women's culture may also be

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<sup>60</sup>Simmons, "Women of the Jost Mission," 296.

<sup>61</sup>See Marilyn Porter, "Mothers and Daughters: Linking Women's Life Histories in Grand Bank, Newfoundland, Canada," *Rethinking Canada* eds. Strong-Boag and Fellman (Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1991) 396-414.

<sup>62</sup>Porter, "Mothers and Daughters," 397.



conditioned by region, religion, and age. However, neither study suggests that these differences wholly negate the existence of women's culture.

As the list of variables representing divisions among women is added to, so too are the measures of women's culture being expanded. While women's culture is often seen to be expressed in terms of fashion and beauty, it is often women's role as consumer and domestic patron which bonds them together. Meyerowitz suggests that the bonds of womanhood were imposed on women by excluding them from positions of public power and created by shared daily experience.<sup>63</sup> Similarly, sociologist Ava Baron and economist Martha MacDonald suggest that the capitalist economic structure has, in part, been responsible for the labelling and separation of the public and private spheres, "as if they were distinct and independent realms of activity."<sup>64</sup> It is the social restrictions and the ensuing gender specific experiences that are often used to explain the formation of women's culture. Similarly, Sugiman's argument that sex segregated jobs and gendered work culture

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<sup>63</sup>Meyerowitz, "American Women's History," 29.

<sup>64</sup>Ava Baron, "On Looking at Men, Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History," *Feminists Revision History* ed. Ann-Louise Shapiro (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1994) 151; Also see Martha MacDonald "Becoming Visible: Women and the Economy," *Limited Edition: Voices of Women, Voices of Feminism* ed. Geraldine Finn (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 1993) 157-170.

offered an environment that fostered notions of womanhood<sup>65</sup> runs parallel with the argument that notions of separate spheres helped construct women's culture.

The gender composition of departments further reinforced bonds between employees ... where many women were concentrated in one department, they were more likely to develop a sense of collegiality than where they mixed with men.<sup>66</sup>

It should be noted that the way of thinking that encourages conceptual dualism such as the divisions between private and public also designates the phrase 'women's culture' as an oxymoron. Because the images of man and woman are juxtaposed and linked to sets of dichotomous terms such as aggressive/passive, strong/weak, work/home, and culture/nature<sup>67</sup> the notion of women's culture becomes a contradiction in terms. Therefore, because the notion of women's culture challenges these normative dualisms it can be seen to express a political agenda. Increasingly the political nature of women's culture is being recognized. McCormack, in her article "Rethinking Women's Culture," suggests that presently the only possible women's culture is a political culture.<sup>68</sup> McCormack suggests that women's

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<sup>65</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 93.

<sup>66</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 82.

<sup>67</sup>Baron, "On Looking at Men," 159; also see McCormack "Rethinking Women's Culture," 2.

<sup>68</sup>McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture," 1-11.

culture can be categorized in three main groups beginning with Simone de Beauvoir, and what McCormack calls the 'anti-culture,' a traditional women's culture which is now characterized by the ideologies prominent in the reactionary backlash beginning in the 1970's and 1980's, including ideals which promote pro-life and condemn affirmative action, and the current modern women's culture.<sup>69</sup>

McCormack concludes that when feminists speak of women's culture they include a political factor, a potential to become a social movement, to be an active agent of change which could weaken or alter the patriarchal social structure.<sup>70</sup> Similarly Meyerowitz argues that the new focus on politics simultaneously represents the culmination of the women's culture model and a fundamental departure from it.<sup>71</sup> The new political culture replaces notions that women's culture is based on "sentiment and proximity."<sup>72</sup> As the women's culture paradigm has become increasingly politicized the arguments emphasizing differences between women have also come under question. Despite the recognition that early feminist theory surrounding ideas of women's culture excluded women of colour and working-class women, increasingly women have been calling for solidarity,

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<sup>69</sup>McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture," 3, 6-9.

<sup>70</sup>McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture," 2.

<sup>71</sup>Meyerowitz, "American Women's History," 32.

<sup>72</sup>McCormack, "Rethinking Women's Culture," 9.

and challenging the divisions of race and class. As bell hooks observes, focusing too strongly on difference will compromise any hope for political change. hooks writes:

We are taught that our relationships with one another diminish rather than enrich our experience. We are taught that women are "natural" enemies, that solidarity will never exist between us because we cannot, should not, and do not bond with one another ... we must unlearn [these lessons] if we are to build a sustained feminist movement.<sup>73</sup>

While there remains much debate surrounding the question of women's culture and how it might be reconciled with issues of race, class, and a political feminist agenda, emerging from this debate is a useful analysis. Clearly proponents of any and all extreme interpretations of women's culture cancel each other out, left standing is the textured approach which considers the complexity of and fluid nature of social constructs. What needs to be remembered is that class, race, and gender are all socially constructed and rather than being mutually exclusive, each can affect, and inform the experience and expression of the others. The importance of the women's culture paradigm is that it offers a valuable reminder that notions of dualism, and analysis which tend to deny the complexity and ambiguity of society and history are faulty. Similarly, just as the efforts to appreciate the numerous divisions among women may attenuate

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<sup>73</sup>hooks, *Feminist Theory* 43.

the unifying affects of a women's culture so does the ardent promotion of a women's culture exaggerate the divide between the sexes. Similar to Baron's observation that the capitalist system helps to construct an exaggerated perception of the separate realms of gender so too does the exaggerated division of separate gender cultures skew our understanding of the experience and expression of gender. In addition to the importance of challenging conceptual frameworks that summarily divide masculine from feminine, man from woman, public from private, it is also valuable to challenge the assumptions that fuse inseparably man with masculine and woman with feminine.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the interaction of work-culture and gender-culture within the specific context of the taxi industry, and examine how the experience of gendered cultures act to connect and divide a diverse work community. While many scholars engaged in the debate over women's culture examine women within a work environment, including Parr, Porter, Sugiman, and Benson, few explore the workplace as an avenue to membership in men's culture. Therefore, the examination of women taxi drivers in Halifax will introduce yet another element to the debate surrounding women's culture. While feminist scholars attempt to understand the balance between what divides and unites women in a "feminine" culture, what must not be overlooked is that the divide between men's culture and

women's culture is not impenetrable. Among the arguments against the existence of a women's culture is the assertion that divisions of class, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, region, etc. eliminate any bonds of womanhood. While these divisions must not be denied it is dangerously simplistic to overlook the complex and fluid relationship between all social constructs. Similarly, just as too strong a generalization of women's experience fails to recognize the diversity among women so to does it overstate the division between masculine and feminine gender cultures.

**A Manly Pursuit:  
Masculinity and the Work Environment**

... when I was driving a cab a lot of the kids would say ... mommy, how come she's not a man? ... [and] I've had some of [the mothers] say, well, it shouldn't be but they allow it.<sup>74</sup>

While the vast majority of taxi drivers in Halifax and elsewhere are men, and it is generally accepted that driving a taxi is a "man's job", the origins and affects of this gendered workplace are seldom considered. The purpose of this project is to examine how women taxi drivers navigate an occupational territory complicated by issues of gender, class, and race. This examination will begin by first establishing the gendered nature of the taxi environment. In addition to being clearly among the minority of taxi drivers, women drivers operate within an occupation that is strongly associated with masculinity, both historically and culturally.

In Halifax, when a woman driver first seeks to obtain a taxi licence she turns to the "Taxi Ordinance" as the definitive source on the regulations regarding taxis. Through the gender specific language of the regulators women drivers are immediately introduced to the gendered nature of the taxi industry. The "City of Halifax Ordinance Number 116", or the "Taxi and Limousine Ordinance", has existed in one form or another since before the introduction of

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<sup>74</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver of 22 years, 23 October 1995: 34.

automobile taxis in 1911.<sup>75</sup> The first taxi ordinance was incorporated into the existing "Hack Ordinance No.14".<sup>76</sup> Ordinance 116 has acted as the definitive regulatory text for taxis in Halifax since March 1978 but has come under review with the recent municipal amalgamation. The creation of the new Halifax Regional Municipality on April 1 1996 requires that municipal ordinances, such as, the "The Regulation of Vehicles Transporting Passengers for Hire" be revised in order to accommodate the jurisdiction of the new amalgamated territory. Therefore, at this time the Halifax Regional Municipality is developing a new ordinance to work within the new city structure. Nevertheless, Ordinance 116 is the most recent city ordinance to govern the taxi industry in Halifax and aptly reflects the prevailing attitudes toward gender, within the industry. Women drivers examining the ordinance for information on licensing requirements soon learn that, according to the regulations, not only are women excluded from the category of 'driver', but according to the language of the text, are also excluded from the category of "person".

14 (a) No person shall transport persons for hire unless he first obtains either a taxi, accessible taxi or limousine driver's license.

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<sup>75</sup>"Driver had to Coax Passengers into City's First Motor Taxi 24 (sic) Years Ago," *Halifax Mail* 13 January 1945: 18.

<sup>76</sup>"No. 14 The Regulation of Hacks," *The Halifax City Charter with the Ordinances and By-Laws* (Halifax: Commissioner of Public Works and Mines, King's Printer, 1914) 342-347.



(b) No person shall operate a taxi unless he first obtains a taxi driver's license which shall be as set out in Form II.<sup>77</sup>

The exclusive language of the Taxi Ordinance serves as an accurate illustration of the predominant attitude and perception of the taxi industry.

While it is commonly accepted among drivers, regulators, and passengers that cab drivers are men, it is less common to consider the source and the extent that the occupation is branded with a gender label. To some, the job description of the taxi driver may not appear particularly gendered; however, upon closer examination it becomes evident that even the most fundamental element of the industry has historically been considered a manly pursuit - driving.

As Virginia Scharff has explored in her book, *Taking the Wheel: Women and the Coming of the Motor Age*, from the beginning, North American automobile culture has been considered a masculine endeavour. Scharff suggests that very early in the introduction of the American automobile culture, when only a few American automobiles had been built, car makers had already "begun to forge a concept of rough-hewn, muscle-bound masculinity central to the

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<sup>77</sup>Halifax City Clerks Office, "City of Halifax Ordinance Number 116 Respecting the Regulation of Vehicles Transporting Passengers For Hire," 9.

industry's developing self-image."<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, the rough and rugged masculine image was not limited to the auto producers, but permeated almost every aspect of automobile production, repair, ownership, and driving.

The connection between the sport of driving and the expression of manliness is further explored by American historian Ted Ownby. In a paper presented at the 1996 conference of the North American Society For Sport History Ownby examines traditions of manhood among white men in the southern states and their presence in recent sports. Ownby suggests that stock car racing is among those sports that have maintained identifiable elements of masculine traditions:

Stock car racing ... a sport with a southern identity that still recalls Junior Johnson and moonshine running, it has clearly grown from a fascination with speed that fits clearly within the *helluvafella* tradition and a fascination with tinkering with limited resources that fits within the tradition of preserving independence.<sup>79</sup>  
[Ownby's italic]

In the same sense that the sport of stock car racing comes from and upholds the masculine "helluvafella" tradition, and the manly image of independence, so is the job of taxi driving profoundly linked to images of manliness and independence.

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<sup>78</sup>Virginia Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 10.

<sup>79</sup>Ted Ownby, "Manhood, Memory and White Men's Sports in the Recent South," *North American Society For Sport History Proceedings and Newsletter* 1996.

Similarly, the connection between traditional images of masculinity and the popular auto-culture are maintained within the pages of many current auto magazines. While a number of publications are designed to give the car buyer specific information on different makes and models, there is a large collection of publications that reflect and promote the bond between manly sport and car ownership, repair, and driving. Among the titles of these magazines are a number of publications from the United Kingdom and the United States including: *Street Machine*, *High Performance Mopar*, *Supercharged Performance*, and *Car*. The connection between the automobile and manliness is so strong in these publication that images of women as drivers or spectators are very rare. However, a number of magazines use images of women to compliment the manly image of the car driver and car owner. Publications such as *Muscle Mustangs and Fast Fords*, *Popular Hot Rodding*, *Custom Rodder*, *Hot Rod Magazine*, and *Hot Street Cars* also portray the image of the macho, manly driver who enjoys the mechanics, repair, and maintenance of the car as much as the speed, power, and danger of driving. The women featured in these publications are most often portrayed as either charming automobile accessories or sex objects that appear to be both attracted by, and to the car. Images of women as drivers and car owners are most commonly used in advertisements promoting tools for automobile repair. The message of advertisers is

that their tools and car accessories are so easy to use that even a woman can manage them. Some publications use images of women and sex within the context of the car culture and illustrate the potent sexual power of a man behind the wheel. The most violent sexual images of women are found in publication such as *Low Rider* and *Max Power* which graphically illustrate images of dominance including women in bondage hand-cuffed to the front bumper of the car. The objectification of women is further connected to the car as feature sections and advertisements frequently employ a double entendre in the title "body parts" usually featuring discussion of auto-body parts with images of bikini clad women. In these publications the expression of manliness is profoundly linked to both the image of cars and driving as sport, but also to the image of women and sex as sport. While the publications vary in the degree to which they use images of women to promote ideals of manliness and macho sexual prowess, the publishers and readership of popular car magazines agree on one basic premise: women are not drivers.

In addition to the gendered nature of the North American car culture an examination of taxi drivers' work culture reveals that the masculine image of car and driver has permeated the work culture and the 'hack' is characterized by an expression of manliness usually associated with the working class. Expression of gender in the workplace is not an exceptional phenomena.

Historically, the workplace is one of a number of environments where appropriate gendered behaviour is learned. It is nonetheless important to note that what is considered appropriate masculine behaviour among one group of workers or in a particular historical context may not be considered appropriate for others.

There has long been a strong connection between the experience and expression of gender and the workplace. Despite dramatic changes in dominant discourse surrounding masculinity, the workplace has remained one of the central arenas for initiation into and the expression of masculine culture. As Joy Parr has observed in her historical examination of the rise of industrial management in two Canadian industrial towns, there was a considerable shift in the popular understanding of masculinity within the half century of one Ontario businessman's career.<sup>80</sup> Parr uses a father and son, managers of one furniture producer in Hanover, Ontario, to illustrate the dramatic shift in the definition of masculinity which accompanied the larger social and economic changes of the time.

Daniel Knechtel, Hanover's largest employer, differed markedly from his son, J.S. Knechtel, in his experience both as an employer and as a man. Through his understanding of

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<sup>80</sup>Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns 1880-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

craftsmanship and "Manliness" Knechtel senior was bound to his employees not merely as a manager but as a man:

[he] thought of himself as bound with his men in a common cause, exercising the shared male responsibilities of craftsman, house owner, church leader and civic office holder, governed by a common code of manly conduct in social roles that were at once male obligations and arbiters of masculine identity.<sup>81</sup>

Clearly Knechtel senior's understanding of manliness was closely linked to work and transcended class divisions within his craft and workplace.

By the time Daniel Knechtel gave the furniture company over to his son contemporary notions of gender identity had changed dramatically and class division infiltrated Knechtel's workplace. For J.S. Knechtel, masculine identity was not found in manual work. As the discourse surrounding middle-class masculinity shifted from producer to provider so had J.S. Knechtel's. For managers and owners, manliness was now offered in the form of better salaries and better profits, rather than within the autonomy and visible production of the craftsman.

Barbara Melosh's examination of American public art in the inter-war period illustrates how the images of manly work and the masculine breadwinner merged together.<sup>82</sup> As part of the government's New Deal Policy the Treasury

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<sup>81</sup>Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners* 142.

<sup>82</sup>Barbara Melosh, "Manly Work: Public Art and Masculinity in Depression America," *Gender and American History Since 1890* ed. Barbara Melosh (New York: Routledge, 1993) 155-81.

Section of Fine Arts funded a program that produced more than fourteen hundred public art works across the nation. According to Melosh, images of "working men and manly labor pervaded" the art promoted by the Treasury Section, and therefore, offers a valuable window into the contemporary image of masculinity in the United States. Although Melosh focuses on the gender specific portrayal of work in this art there is also a class specific masculinity promoted that is relevant to the crisis of masculinity experienced during the Depression. Melosh acknowledges that with few exceptions the art produced by the Treasury Section program excluded images of middle-class and white-collar workers.<sup>83</sup> The absence of white-collar workers represents the struggle with the masculine image during the depression as the scarcity of work encouraged the valorization of hard physical labour. Similarly, the expansion of the service sector also represented a threat to the image of manly work as white-collar workers assumed jobs that required them to adopt traditionally feminine skills.<sup>84</sup>

Concurring with Parr's assessment, Melosh observes several hundred images portraying men at work and suggests that the "core ideal of the manly worker relied on a

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<sup>83</sup>Melosh, "Manly Work," 173.

<sup>84</sup>Melosh, "Manly Work," 177.

complementary image of female dependence", therefore, emphasizing the manly provider.<sup>85</sup>

The masculinity of work rested not only on the autonomy of craft skill or visibly productive labor, but on the wage earner's place in the family.<sup>86</sup>

Therefore, concurrent with the image of the masculine breadwinner is the image of the feminine and dependent woman. This juxtaposition serves as one example of how masculine identity relies, in part, on the construction of the "Other" as a means of self identification. In this case masculinity is presented as the opposite of femininity. As women enter the workplace, particularly in jobs that have been the exclusively occupied by men, they challenge the popular notion of the masculine breadwinner as they assume the role of provider and step away from the image of dependent female.

For taxi drivers in Halifax the association with the image of the manly provider is strengthened by the method of remuneration. In Halifax, the industry consists of predominantly owner-operator vehicles; therefore, most of the taxi drivers in the city own their own car and operate in conjunction with a broker who owns the two-way radios and dispatch equipment. The owner-operator pays a flat rate "stand" or "office" rent to the broker on weekly basis for

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<sup>85</sup>Melosh, "Manly Work," 159.

<sup>86</sup>Melosh, "Manly Work," 159.



the dispatch and radio service provided and carries the name of the brokers taxi on his or her rooflight. While dispatchers are employed by the broker and work eight hour shifts (either 7 am to 3 pm, 3 pm to 11 pm, or 11 pm to 7 am) at an hourly wage, drivers are neither considered employees nor assigned any specific work hours. Therefore, the driver comes out to work when he or she chooses and may choose between working with the radio, waiting on the taxi stands, or playing the street. However, during busier times and at some offices drivers are discouraged from playing the street in order to ensure more prompt service for radio customers. Therefore, generally speaking, a driver comes to work at the hour which they choose and proceed to the taxi stand of their choice, usually the closest one, and wait there to be sent by dispatch to the nearest passenger. The owner-operator driver collects the money from each taxi fare, radio call or pick up, and from the total pays a flat rate to the broker or office<sup>87</sup> and divides the rest among his or her other expenses such as gas, maintenance, insurance, licensing and registration fees etc. The drivers that rent cars generally operate on a similar basis, paying a flat rate to the owner for the use of the car, which may or may not include the office rent, and paying for the gas used during the shift, the remaining portion of the fares

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<sup>87</sup>Currently most Halifax taxi offices are charging over \$80/week for office rent.

collected are the driver's to keep. Renting on a percentage basis was more common twenty years ago, as were "company cars" owned by the brokers. However, the industry in Halifax has been moving increasingly since the 1960's toward the owner-operator model that is now predominant.

While a general description of the taxi drivers routine may not appear chock full of gender specific activities, it is unquestionably considered to be the "man's job". Because of the predominant owner-operator system the image of the masculine breadwinner is emphasized. Although drivers, unlike many craftsmen, do not produce a tangible product in their work, there is a strong association between masculinity and the role of the provider. The success of the driver is often measured in how much money he is able to generate for his family, yet as one retired driver observes, the role of provider can be a barrier to more important family relationships.

I would work generally from 7 in the morning, I'd come home 4 in the afternoon. I'd stay home until 6, then I'd go out again [at] 6 and I'd work until 11. Then I'd come home. Fridays, ... now I had two young daughters and we decided that because of the hours I was working ... I gave my family everything, except what they really needed and that was myself.<sup>88</sup>

Although taxi drivers do not produce a tangible product their effort and skill is measured in the amount of money they earn and the skill with which they ply their trade.

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<sup>88</sup>Interview with Gordon Robb, retired Halifax taxi driver, 6 March 1995: 7.

Speaking of the generation of drivers before him, one driver asserts:

these guys were cab drivers. I mean they went out - I know my father-in-law was out at 5:30 in the morning. Now he came home at 8:00 at night. He used to come home for lunch, and he'd come home for supper about 4:00 and then he'd go back to work at 4:30. Now my father-in-law raised 7 kids, paid for a house, - pushing cab.<sup>89</sup>

Clearly the ability to provide for a family and the endurance and determination to work the long hours necessary to survive the taxi industry are respected as a mark of manly success. It should also be noted that given the long hours "pushing cab" Robb's father-in-law was not likely the primary care-giver for his seven children, however, he is respectfully credited with providing for their care through many long hours of work.

Another driver, angered by the term "unskilled labour," argued arduously that taxi drivers are skilled and professional.

Is it "unskilled labour" that can tell, from your address in which block and on which side of the street you live? Is it "unskilled labour" that will get you to the station in time even when you only decided you were going at the last minute? Is it "unskilled labour" that gets you safely home from the nightclub despite all the attempts of the other drivers, possibly inebriated, to impale you on their bumpers? The answer, of course, is "no". The taxi driver is a man of many skills. He must be able to find any address in the City, no matter how badly it is mumbled. He must be able to drive in all kinds of traffic for hours at a

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<sup>89</sup>Interview with Gordon Robb, retired Halifax taxi driver, 6 March 1995: 7.

time without losing his "cool" and without hitting anything. He must know what films are playing; he must know who won the Expo's ballgame; he must be able to recommend a club or a restaurant that would suit your tastes. He must be an ambassador for his City, and he really does consider it *his* city. He must know all its best parts, and even its worst parts, depending upon your mood. ... I believe that taxi driving should more properly be considered a profession.<sup>90</sup>

While taxi drivers do not share the same masculine fraternity as Daniel Knechtel and other turn of the century furniture craftsmen, neither do they participate in the middle-class managerial culture that associates manliness more strongly with leisure than with work. The new order of middle-class masculinity that was experienced by the J.S. Knechtel's generation judged success not by the capacity to work but by the capacity to secure leisure.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, many occupations are structured so that there is a clear demarcation between work-time and leisure-time. Among taxi drivers in Halifax this distinction is clouded by the driver's prerogative to select his or her own hours. The line between work and play is drawn solely in the mind of the driver. While many interpret this a benefit lending itself to more time off it is more often a detriment resulting in the constant awareness that you could be at work. In his text, *Leisure and Work*, Stanley Parker

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<sup>90</sup>John Brown, "Unskilled Labour?," *The Rooflight* 1(3) (1983): 5.

<sup>91</sup>Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners* 155.

suggests that one of the best definitions of leisure measures leisure against two separate tests:

it must be time free from obligations ... and it must serve specific purpose such as relaxation or community participation.<sup>92</sup>

While drivers spend a great deal of idle time, especially when business is slow, waiting for the next passenger or taking a coffee break to get out of the car for a while these times do not constitute leisure time in the true sense. Similarly, the success of a taxi driver is often measured according to his or her ability to consistently work long hours without taking unnecessary breaks or needing the relaxation or community of leisure pursuits.

In some respects the relationship between leisure and work for taxi drivers more closely resembles that of bourgeois professionals rather than of the working class. A survey of American business executives reveals that their way of life also permits no clear-cut distinction between work and leisure.

To counteract the encroachment of work on leisure time, the executive's work is penetrated by qualities which we would ordinarily associate with leisure.<sup>93</sup>

This similarity between the work-leisure relationship of taxi drivers and business executives is one example of the

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<sup>92</sup>Stanley Parker, *Leisure and Work* (Boston: George Allen & Unwin, 1983) 5.

<sup>93</sup>Parker, *Leisure and Work* 73.

contradictory class identification of taxi drivers. However, some correlations between taxi drivers and the bourgeois class identity, cab drivers remain firmly connected with a working-class identity.

Drivers' resistance to white-collar and middle-class identification can be seen in their resistance to the efforts by regulators to enforce dress codes that more closely resemble managers and clerks. Under the title "Responsibilities of Drivers" the "Taxi Ordinance No. 116" indicates that:

(1) Every driver when engaged in the operation of vehicle shall wear a shirt or military type blouse, ankle-length trousers, or dress shorts which are worn within at least three inches of the knee, socks and shoes, which clothing (sic) shall be in neat and tidy condition at all times.<sup>94</sup>

Similarly, the regulators have also dictated a code of behaviour that might be considered befitting the drivers' "neat and tidy" presentation.

(3) A driver shall at all times in a public place conduct himself in an orderly manner, and he shall not be noisy. He shall govern himself by regulations made by the Chief of Police from time to time concerning the conduct of drivers and the manner in which they shall ply their calling at public places.<sup>95</sup>

In fact, the presence of such clauses in the taxi regulations speaks to the absence of such refined dress and

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<sup>94</sup>H.C.C.O. "City of Halifax Ordinance Number 116 Respecting the Regulation of Vehicles Transporting Passengers For Hire," 13.

<sup>95</sup>H.C.C.O. "Ordinance 116," 13-14.

behaviour among drivers. Despite municipal regulation to be dressed, at all times, in a "neat and tidy condition" and to "conduct himself in an orderly manner" taxi drivers are not generally associated with what Parr has coined the "sissifying refinements" in dress and demeanour associated so strongly with "bourgeois men".<sup>96</sup> Taxi drivers, despite the presence of the "Responsibilities" clause are not identifiable by their "white collars", "clean hands", and "quiet offices".

They are, however, profoundly linked to the North American icon of masculinity and leisure, the automobile. Ironically, the association with the car is not based on sport or leisure, but based on work. The role of the chauffeur, or the operator of a vehicle for hire had a powerful connection to class divisions, at the time the automobile was first introduced. As Scharff observes, the first automobiles were only available to the wealthy leisure class and there was little concern for regarding mechanical efficiency or ease of handling because it was expected that the vehicle owners would not actually have to drive the car themselves; rather a driver or chauffeur would be employed for the task. In this sense the notion of the driver for hire has been in existence from the first introduction of the automobile and remains laden with class meanings, the evidence of which can still be seen today. One such point

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<sup>96</sup>Parr, *Gender of Breadwinners* 164.

of class associations attaches to the division between those who own cars for luxury and convenience and those who build and repair the same. Similarly, the masculine culture most strongly associated with taxi drivers is most similar to other working-class expressions of masculinity.

The physical risk to taxi drivers has long been a recognized characteristic of the occupation and commonly associated with masculine bravery. As one veteran driver aptly phrased it "you can always get hit over the head."<sup>97</sup> A recent study on the victimization of, and policing by taxi drivers supports what many drivers have understood instinctively; taxi driving is a dangerous business. The study by criminologist Philip Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop: Victimization of, and Policing by, Taxi Drivers in Three Canadian Cities", examines the experience of taxi drivers in Halifax, Winnipeg, and Vancouver.<sup>98</sup> Stenning concludes that taxi drivers are a "highly victimized occupational group in Canada [and] their victimization while at work may be as high as twenty times that of Canadians generally."<sup>99</sup> Although the term victimization encompasses

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<sup>97</sup>Interview with Matthew O'Toole, retired Halifax taxi driver, 7 March 1995.

<sup>98</sup>Philip Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop: Victimization of, and Policing by Taxi Drivers in Three Canadian Cities," unpublished report of a preliminary study jointly funded by the Research and Statistics Section, Department of Justice Canada and the University of Toronto 1996.

<sup>99</sup>Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop," 65.



offenses such as "fare-jumping", which generally does not involve physical danger to the driver, nor a significant degree of income loss, Stenning also concludes that taxi drivers "face a disturbingly high rate of occupational homicide". While inadequate information prevents accurate calculations homicide data released by Statistics Canada for the early years of this decade indicate that the rate of occupational homicide may be as much as four or five times higher for taxi drivers than it is for police officers.<sup>100</sup> During the four-year period from 1991 to 1995 twenty-four Canadian taxi drivers were murdered while on duty. Of these drivers six were killed in Montreal, three in Toronto and Edmonton, two each in Vancouver and Quebec City, and one each in Ottawa-Hull, Halifax, and Thunder Bay. The remaining five murdered drivers worked in places outside of Canada's twenty-five major metropolitan areas. Comparatively, during the same four-year period ten police officers were murdered while on duty in Canada.<sup>101</sup> A precise comparison of the rates of on-duty homicide in these two occupational groups can not be made because it is not known how many taxi drivers were operating in Canada during this period.<sup>102</sup> Even without accurate figures of homicide

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<sup>100</sup>Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop," 66.

<sup>101</sup>Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop," 3.

<sup>102</sup>The available statistics from Statistics Canada indicate that in 1994 there were 56,000 serving police officers in Canada in 1994 and 32,000 "taxi drivers and

rates among taxi drivers the image of the independent driver, working alone in a dangerous environment has long been a part of the taxiing.

The bottom line is that you're on your own. Out in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night. Outnumbered.<sup>103</sup>

Partially in response to the issue of danger a sense of fraternity and community belonging among taxi drivers is present. Again, the expression and experience of camaraderie among drivers often takes on a masculine character. When drivers are in serious trouble the aid of fellow drivers has been expected and delivered. Speaking of a time when there was an open radio system in the cars one male driver describes the willingness of others to fly to the aid of a driver in danger:

All the cars could hear you and all you had to do was give out your location and everyone would know where you were and then it was like the marines were coming. The boys would come. Because we always did, we always stuck together when a guy was in trouble.<sup>104</sup>

In addition to a degree of pride taken in the camaraderie and cooperation among drivers, this quote also illustrates

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chauffeurs" in Canada in 1991. While not an accurate comparison, these figures suggest that the homicide rate among taxi drivers is disturbingly high. Stenning, "Fare Game, Fare Cop," 3.

<sup>103</sup>Interview with Bruce Chisholm, Halifax taxi driver, 11 April 1995.

<sup>104</sup>Interview with Bruce Chisholm, Halifax taxi driver, 11 April 1995: 3.

the common use of masculine language: "like the marines", "the boys would come", "when a guy was in trouble". Clearly the cooperative effort among drivers, particularly in the face of danger, is perceived as part of the masculine nature of the drivers and the job. Particularly in urban centres, the threat of violence on the job offers an element of danger which appeals to notions of masculine bravado. The notion of the manly provider, independent worker and the camaraderie associated with being a member of the taxi community all play a role in creating a clearly masculine work culture.

**Discrimination and Adaptation:  
The Experience of Women Taxi Drivers**

An examination of municipal records indicates that women taxi drivers in Halifax have been anomalous. However, despite being the minority in a predominantly male industry the presence of women drivers has not generated a significant reaction on the part of either regulators or male drivers. In fact, despite the predominance of men in the industry, and the generally noninclusive language of the relevant regulations, women drivers have found more connection than conflict with their co-workers. There is little evidence of conflict between the sexes within the industry, and women are increasingly at the center of united efforts by drivers to challenge the regulators. Women have been both members and leaders of organizations, associations, and societies designed to represent the interests of the community of drivers.

Municipal records reveal that there is virtually no direct references to women drivers in the Board of Control, City Council, or the Taxi Commission Minutes. The absence of regulatory items dealing with women drivers does not, however, necessarily indicate the absence of women. It does indicate that the initial presence of women drivers did not attract sufficient attention or generate a remarkable degree of discussion or conflict among either regulators or male drivers. This is not to say that women have entered the

taxi industry unimpeded or been welcome with open arms by their male colleagues or the regulators. The taxi industry is clearly a masculine domain both in terms of its work-culture and in terms of the strong association between both masculinity and work, and masculinity and the automobile. In addition to cultural and systemic prejudice the absence of women taxi drivers in Halifax is also due, in part, to the active discrimination against women drivers after the Second World War.

The dearth of reference to women drivers in the regulatory sources makes it impossible to say with any accuracy when women drivers first became involved in the business. However, some veteran male drivers recollect the presence of women taxi drivers during the Second World War.

"Darky" MacInnis, one of the most senior drivers in Halifax, drove with the Halifax Wartime Taxi Association after he was turned down for military service in 1941. He recalls that there were a number of women driving taxi during the war "maybe eight or ten women" and that they "did just as well as the men". Although they were "not supposed to drive at night" MacInnis recalls that some women did but "nobody said nothing".<sup>105</sup> The absence of discussion surrounding women taxi drivers in the City Council Minutes also indicates that if there were restrictions on women

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<sup>105</sup>Interview with Mr. David "Darky" MacInnis, Halifax taxi driver, 11 March 1995. Mr. MacInnis has since passed away.

drivers that were being ignored no one was concerned enough to take the matter to Council or ask that restrictions be created or enforced.

Copies of the Taxi Ordinance available surrounding the war years indicate that the presence of women drivers before World War II was insufficient to generate gender specific regulations. There is no mention of women taxi drivers in the 1935 Taxi Ordinance No. 13.<sup>106</sup> The first record of women drivers in regulatory material occurs during the Second World War and is found in the City Council Minutes in 1942 indicating that women are already present in the business. In October 1942 the Safety Committee made a recommendation to City Council for an amendment to the taxi ordinance.<sup>107</sup> The recommended changes were concerning the dress code for taxi drivers and clearly indicates that there are women taxi drivers:

Every female driver of a licensed vehicle when engaged in the operation of the same for hire shall at all times wear a peaked cap, a shirt or military type blouse which shall be neatly adjusted at the neck, and trousers, breeches or a skirt of dark coloured material.<sup>108</sup>

It is not clear, however, how long women drivers had been present in the industry or if their presence was perceived

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<sup>106</sup>Halifax City Regional Library, Halifax City Council Minutes, 1935: 687-692.

<sup>107</sup>Halifax City Regional Library (H.C.R.L.) Halifax City Council Minutes 1942-1943, 15 October 1942: 205.

<sup>108</sup>H.C.R.L. Halifax City Council Minutes 1942-1943, 15 October 1942: 205.

as a temporary measure to meet war time demand for labour. It was not uncommon for women to assume positions within the traditionally male domain during war time, particularly in jobs where there might be a scarcity of labour due to the absence of male workers. However, it is impossible to say, with any certainty, exactly when women began to enter the industry. What can be said for certain is that this first reference to women drivers is not characterized by debate, agitation, concern, or conflict. Rather, it indicates that the regulators considered women taxi drivers to be taxi drivers first, and women second. There appears to be no concern for their safety or ability to perform the job. Similarly, although the regulators are making a distinction between men and women drivers their dress codes are remarkable similar.

Every male driver ... shall ... wear a peaked cap or hat, a shirt or military type blouse which shall be neatly adjusted at the neck, and trousers or breeches. Suspenders, if worn, shall not be visible.<sup>109</sup>

Although regulators during the Second World War were distinguishing between men and women taxi drivers the regulations indicate that the expectations of both were remarkably similar.

By 1947 Ordinance No. 13 has acquired an age limit for female applicants for taxi licenses. "No license shall be

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<sup>109</sup>H.C.R.L. Halifax City Council Minutes 1942-1943, 15 October 1942: 205.

issued to any female driver who is under twenty-five years of age."<sup>110</sup> While women taxi drivers have clearly made their presence felt they are not considered equal to their male colleagues who are granted licenses at twenty-one.<sup>111</sup> The more tenuous position of women taxi drivers is also demonstrated in 1947 with the proposal that no woman should be granted a taxi license in the City of Halifax. In 1947 City Council introduced an amendment to section 13 of the City Ordinance No. 13 for the purpose of eliminating women taxi drivers. The amendment read:

... no such [taxi drivers'] license shall be issued to any male person under twenty-one years of age or to any female person or to any person in the judgment of the Board not a fit and proper person to be a driver.<sup>112</sup>

While the early presence of women taxi drivers was regulated according to notions of appropriate dress and restricted to women over twenty-five, presumably to protect more innocent 'girls' the post war regulators categorize women and boys among the 'unfit', and the 'improper', reaffirming the manly character necessary to be a taxi driver. It is interesting to note that this amendment was submitted after women drivers had already entered the industry and were recognized

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<sup>110</sup>Halifax City Regional Library, Halifax City Council Minutes, 17 April 1947: 273.

<sup>111</sup>Halifax City Regional Library, Halifax City Council Minutes, 17 April 1947: 273.

<sup>112</sup>Halifax City Regional Library, Halifax City Council Minutes, 16 October 1947: 703.



in the regulations. While the removal of women workers from male industries was not uncommon following World War II, legislation against women taxi drivers in Canada is not limited to the post-war period. For example, Winnipeg City Council attempted to legislate against the licensing of women drivers as early as 1932.<sup>113</sup>

When "several large taxicab firms" in Winnipeg contemplated hiring women drivers and began to advertise for applications from women drivers, the Transportation Employees' Association expressed its concern. In a letter to the City's Chief Constable a representative of the Transportation Employees' Association wrote:

At its last general meeting this association "unanimously passed" a resolution stating the association's disapproval of females being engaged as taxi cab drivers for the following reasons:

1. Taxicab driving is a unsuitable occupation for young women of good moral character.
2. This would offer greater opportunities for women of loose morals to further ply their trade, and furthermore would present a new vice problem for the Morality Dept [sic] of the City police.
3. a large number of experienced male drivers are now unemployed and in receipt of relief, the majority of these men are married and with families. We consider these men should receive first consideration.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>113</sup>Winnipeg City Archives and Records Centre, Minutes Committee on Health, City Council, File 1061.

<sup>114</sup>Winnipeg City Archives and Records Centre, Committee on Health, City Council, File 1061. To Chris Newton, Chief Constable from E.W. Harrison, Secretary, Manitoba Transportation Employees' Association, 25 May 1932.

The Association also asked that the Constable "refuse cab drivers permits to any women who may apply."<sup>115</sup> While this action was initiated by an association representing the drivers, the regulators echoed their concerns. The Secretary for the Board of Police Commissioners wrote:

The members of this Board are quite in accord with the views expressed by the Association ... and are strongly opposed to licenses being granted to females.<sup>116</sup>

With the support of the Sub-Committee on Taxicabs, the Committee on Health and the Board of Police Commissioners, a bylaw was created which effectively prohibited the licensing of women taxi drivers. However, Mr. Justice Donovan, a judge of Court of King's Bench found that "the clause was beyond the powers of the City and ordered it quashed."<sup>117</sup>

While the Winnipeg example illustrates that the industry did not always wait until the post-war period to push women drivers out of the car, Justice Donovan shows that even in the interwar period restricting licenses on the basis of sex was considered inappropriate by the courts.

Internationally, some cities like London England managed to keep women in the back seat until quite recently. According to the obituary of Marie White, the first licensed

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<sup>115</sup>To Chris Newton, from E.W. Harrison, 25 May 1932.

<sup>116</sup>To License Committee, from George F. Richards, Secretary of the Board of Police Commissioners, 9 June 1932.

<sup>117</sup>To M. Peterson, Secretary of the Committee on Health, from J. Preudhomme, City Solicitor, 13 September 1932.

woman taxi driver in London, it seems that at least the city's "black cab" industry was maintained as a male preserve until 1979.<sup>118</sup>

Despite being few in number women drivers have increasingly participated as members of the larger taxi community and worked for the betterment of the industry. Clearly, the presence of women drivers has not been a temporary phenomenon characteristic of war time labour shortage. Women drivers have demonstrated their permanence and commitment within the industry through their participation in movements to improve the industry and secure a better future as taxi drivers in Halifax.

Among the most active lobbyists for Halifax taxi drivers was Mrs. Allie Parsons, Public Relations Officer for the Taxi Association of Halifax.<sup>119</sup> The Halifax Taxi Association was established in 1957 and represents the first recorded voluntary trade association.<sup>120</sup> Throughout the 1950's and 1960's the Taxi Association was active and visible in its efforts to gain licence limitation for

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<sup>118</sup>To Kimberly Berry, from Prof. Norman Beattie, Red River College Winnipeg, 7 October 1996 internet file "Women drivers, file 3 of 4" hard copy in author's possession; *London Taxi Times* 3 June 1996; to Taxi-L <taxi-l@freenet.mb.ca> from Alan Fisher <101553.3551@CompuServe.COM> 9 June 1996 internet message, hard copy in author's possession.

<sup>119</sup>Halifax City Clerks Office, Taxi Commission Files 1971, submission from the Taxi Association dated 4 February 1971: 3.

<sup>120</sup>Halifax City Regional Library, Halifax City Council Minutes 1957, 14 March 1957: 204.

drivers and to influence rate schedules. Although it is not clear whether Mrs. Parsons held a taxi license, she clearly had a vested interest in the industry. Parsons frequently addressed City Council on behalf of the Association and clearly intended to assert the best interests of the drivers. Although Parsons' activity with the Taxi Association may have originated because of familial connections to the industry it should not be dismissed on this account. Women do not have to drive a taxi to be involved in, and affected by the industry. Many wives and daughters of male drivers have been profoundly affected by the drivers' work experience and in some way are strongly connected to the work culture. This can be seen particularly when drivers are killed or injured at work, not only profoundly affecting wife and family but often revealing the bond between the community of drivers and their families.<sup>121</sup> During the late 1960's and early 1970's Allie Parsons appeared before City Council on several occasions on behalf of the Taxi Association's drivers, concerning issues such as the licensing of nine-passenger vehicles and proposed changes to meter rates.<sup>122</sup> Whether a

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<sup>121</sup>One example of the profound connections felt between family members and the taxi industry is felt when drivers are injured or killed at work. The community of taxi drivers often rallies to assist an injured driver or aid the family, particularly the wife, of a driver killed at work.

<sup>122</sup>Halifax City Clerks Office, Taxi Commission Files, Special Committee on Taxis, 13 November 1969: 5-6; Halifax City Clerks Office, Taxi Commission Files, Council Minutes 12

driver, or the wife of a driver, Parsons clearly served the interest of the Association membership. Therefore, the focus of her efforts in front of Council were not for the specific interests of women drivers but the interests of taxi drivers generally. This is typical of the behaviour of women active within the industry. While women do not appear particularly active in the industry until well after World War II, when they do emerge, they are clearly members of the driver community, not a peculiar or separate group.

The 1970's is a particularly active time for community initiatives among drivers and women drivers were no exception. By 1974 a small group of drivers initiated a cooperative taxi company, Union Taxi. Established in an attempt to improve their position at work and increase worker autonomy a number of drivers bought into Union Taxi and became part owners of their own company.<sup>123</sup> Among the members of Union Taxi there was at least one women driver, Glenna Forgeron.<sup>124</sup>

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November 1970: 650; Halifax City Clerks Office, Taxi Commission Files, Taxi Commission Minutes 4 February 1971: 1 and 3.

<sup>123</sup>"Union Taxi: 40 cab drivers succeed in bucking the system," *The 4th Estate* 11 February 1976: 4.

<sup>124</sup>Glenna Forgeron recently retired from Casino Taxi in 1997 and, through her son, has communicated that she is not willing to be interviewed regarding her experience in the taxi industry.

The 1970's also saw an attempt by many drivers to establish a union,<sup>125</sup> others lobbied individually and collectively for access to hotel stands monopolized by Yellow Cab, rate increases, and license limitation.<sup>126</sup> Although women drivers do not necessarily take a leading role in these collective initiatives they were often equally aware of, and involved in such actions. However, it is with the establishment of the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society in the 1980's that women's involvement and leadership comes to the forefront in the Halifax taxi industry.

Women such as Shirley Comeau, Linda Hyland, and Sharon Lantz, were highly visible as early members of the Bureau and played key roles contributing to the growth and success of the Society. For example, Hyland assumed the role of secretary of the Bureau's Constitution and Bylaws committee and Comeau worked in cooperation with Anciel Hartlen to generate new membership for the fledgling Society early in the 1980.<sup>127</sup> These women were also frequent contributors

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<sup>125</sup>The Halifax Taxi Union was unable to obtain union recognition in 1975 because the Labour Relations Board determined that drivers were not employees and, therefore, ineligible to vote. See Halifax City Clerks Office, Taxi Commission Files, minutes from public meeting held 17 May 1976.

<sup>126</sup>Halifax City Clerk Office, Taxi Commission Files, 17 May 1976 to 9 June 1976.

<sup>127</sup>Provincial Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), *The Rooflight* HD 5634 A1 R776, 1(2): 3; 1(3): 2.

to the Society's newsletter, *The Rooflight*.<sup>128</sup> By the first anniversary issue of *The Rooflight* in 1984 Comeau held position of treasurer and both Comeau and Lantz were co-editors of the industry's only newsletter. Their contributions speak strongly to the level and nature of their involvement with the grass roots trade organization. Hyland's first article in the newsletter was a critique of the newly formed Taxi Commission and called for responsible representation on the Commission.<sup>129</sup> Hyland was clearly aware of the nature and the condition of the Taxi Commission, and in her attempt to educate other drivers she assumed a leadership role. Comeau's first substantial piece in the newsletter challenges drivers to become involved in the movement to improve the industry:

this type of organization takes commitment of not just a day, a month or a year - but many years. This is our future, our livelihood. We are professionals and it is time we acted like it. It is time we showed the public and ourselves that we are a good and important part of this community.<sup>130</sup>

The Taxi Bureau's executive election in 1987 brought Sharon Lantz to the helm as the new president and the long hours of work and steadfast commitment of Lantz and Comeau are reflected in the pages of *The Rooflight* which they continued

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<sup>128</sup>PANS, *The Rooflight* HD 5634 A1 R776, see for example, 1(2): 2-3; 1(3): 1.

<sup>129</sup>PANS, *The Rooflight* HD 5634 A1 R776, 1(2): 2-3.

<sup>130</sup>PANS, *The Rooflight* 1(3): 1.

to edit cooperatively. While women may appear seemingly absent from the early public record of the taxi industry they become increasingly visible as active members and leaders in the industry and the struggle to improve the public perception and work conditions of the drivers.

One explanation for the women's initial invisibility within the industry may lie in their ability to fit well within a male dominated industry rather than standing out from it. Clearly, despite the near absence of public records of women taxi drivers, women not only entered the occupation, managed to negotiate a place within a predominantly male industry, but also assumed an active role in fighting for an improved occupational status for themselves and their fellow drivers. These women and their activities demonstrate that although women taxi drivers remain in the minority they are not as marginalized as they may first appear. Despite being consistently few in numbers women drivers have managed to adapt successfully within the industry.

One of the most remarkable methods of adaptation employed by women taxi drivers is their ability to adopt attitudes that are generally considered masculine, displaying many of the same characteristics that male drivers have valued in themselves and associated with membership in their work culture.



When asked about women's culture or "behaviours that you associate with women" many women drivers respond by indicating that there is little room for "femininity" if you are going to survive within a masculine work-culture. One woman driver, a veteran of twenty-eight years said:

You have to put it [femininity] in the background, right, you have to become one of the men. You have to become one of the guys. You have to listen to their dirty jokes. You don't have to, but it's there, right, and they're going to come out with all this crap and you humour them and you let them believe ha ha ha this is funny, right.<sup>131</sup>

Similarly, another driver with approximately seven years experience observes the importance of being considered as a driver rather than a girlfriend:

If you've got the respect of a driver, you might have to push it a little bit harder, but I figure right now I'm just out there with the rest of them. I'd rather be one of the guys, than one of the girls you can lay ... I'd rather be one of the guys cause I mean that way if you're in trouble they're there to help you. You know, if you need a car for the night, whatever, it's much better than being one of the girlfriends. It don't count.<sup>132</sup>

The willingness to fit into the masculine culture of the taxi industry is a crucial part of the occupational experience of women taxi drivers. In similar studies of women workers in other traditionally masculine industries, the attitudes and the behaviour of the women workers is

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<sup>131</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 11.

<sup>132</sup>Interview with Marilyn "Ginger" Protonentis, Halifax taxi driver, 13 February 1996: 6-7.

markedly different. For example, Pamela Sugiman, in her study of women auto workers in Canada, observes the expression of women's culture among the plant workers which she categorizes as traditional. Sugiman asserts that despite their nontraditional job within a male-dominated industry the women workers:

clung to highly conventional feminine images [and] during the Second World War the women's departments in the auto plants reflected a traditional feminine culture.<sup>133</sup>

According to Sugiman this 'conventional feminine image' includes expressions of woman's culture such as fashion, beauty, discussion of topics such as courtship and marriage, and activities associated with the domestic realm such as raffling meat pies, buying each other birthday gifts, and sharing food.

Sugiman argues that fashion and beauty are of central importance in women's culture, and suggests that this is reflected in the type of resistance the women workers undertook.

Although they did not protest unequal wage rates, unfair seniority systems, and inadequate ventilation of work areas, women auto workers resisted what they perceived to be unjust encroachment on their dignity - an assault on their femininity and gender culture.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 73.

<sup>134</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 78.

The women demonstrated the greatest resistance when employers attempted to regulate the dimension of their work lives which related to their expression of fashion and beauty. For example regulations regarding hair protection, the use of close fitting caps, safety shoes, and proper dress generated the greatest response.<sup>135</sup> Workers' resistance to regulations regarding hair fashion is particularly striking because of the physical risk to women who did not comply. In an effort to encourage women workers to cooperate the Chief Inspector of the Department of Labour warned of the potential 'scalping hazards':

Accident records disclose all too clearly that scalpings ... are increasing and most of them mean permanent disfigurement for the victims<sup>136</sup>

Sugiman documents one case in which a woman died nine weeks after being scalped while trying to replace a belt on a pulley. In an other case the woman survived but "never recovered from the shock."<sup>137</sup> Clearly, opposition to some regulations became militant in the sense that women risked their lives rather than conform to company standards. There may remain some question as to the origin of the protest, whether it is gender specific or class specific. One could find numerous examples of working class men resisting similar safety standards such as wearing a hard hat,

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<sup>135</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 74.

<sup>136</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 75.

<sup>137</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 75.

indicating that this behaviour is class specific. However, it is reasonable to assume that in both cases it is an issue of gender. Clearly working-class women can be as adamant about protecting their feminine identity as working-class men can be about maintaining their masculine persona.

Sugiman's research shows that the women workers were most militant when it came to issues surrounding the expression of their feminine culture. Even when it posed a serious threat of injury women workers insisted on wearing fashionable clothing and hair styles. The attitude of women auto workers is remarkably dissimilar to women taxi drivers in this regard.

Among women taxi drivers the most striking gender specific protest appears around the issue of safety. Although there is no evidence of strong protest among Halifax taxi drivers regarding safety issues, in other cities where the taxi cabs are owned and controlled by the office there has been considerable conflict surrounding driver protection. In Oakland, California a rash of assaults on a number of male drivers and the rape of one woman driver led to a union meeting which degenerated to a face off between the women drivers and the men. A woman taxi driver describes the events at meeting where women drivers confronted the union and the company on the issue of driver safety.

The executive board had ... 'invited' the manager of the company to be present to 'answer

questions.' The first question was from Laura, who had been raped the week before. She asked what the company intended to do to prevent future rapes. The minute rape was mentioned, the secretary of the union jumped to his feet and started yelling about our attitude. He was really afraid of us, and he said that the company manager wasn't here to listen to all 'that kind of talk.' ... One man got up and yelled that if we didn't like being raped we should find other jobs. One man, amazingly, got up and explained that rape was a political act of aggression. He was booed. Again we demanded that the manager answer our questions, and he, obviously intimidated by these strong women, started to walk out. Laura jumped up and asked, "Are you just going to walk out and not do anything at all?" And he answered, 'Yes.' 'YOU MOTHERFUCKER!' Laura screamed. The board completely lost itself in hysteria. They all bolted out of their chairs screaming, 'We're throwing you out!' ... But as they moved toward Laura, all the women instinctively made a circle around her. When the board members realized what we were doing they stopped. That one physical gesture of unity stopped the board members in their tracks.<sup>138</sup>

While all taxi drivers in Oakland were threatened by the assaults taking place there was marked division between men and women drivers surrounding the issue of rape. The meeting between the union, the drivers, and the company manager was called after a series of assaults that occurred during the first few weeks of 1974.

... one male driver was shot at and pistol whipped, three were severely beaten, many others were robbed without physical violence, and a woman driver was robbed and raped at gun-point.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>Jeanette O'Connell, "Yellow Cab Blues," *Women: A Journal of Liberation* 4(2) (1975): 52-55.

<sup>139</sup>O'Connell, "Yellow Cab Blues," 54.

While both men and women drivers were being threatened by the frequent attacks, the violence against the woman driver was perceived to be very different from the other incidents. While no actions were taken on behalf of the taxi company to protect any of its drivers the woman who was raped was fired. Other owners have taken similar action against woman drivers who have been raped. A brief report in a 1979 issue of *Kinesis* tells of a twenty-two year old rookie cab driver in San Francisco, Rosemary Belson, who was also fired after being raped at gun point by a passenger.<sup>140</sup> Although Belson is "given a second chance" at employment after she told reporters and threatened to take her case to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the cab owner contends that she was careless for picking a passenger at a bus station frequented by transients.<sup>141</sup>

I can't afford to take any chances, I'm lucky the cab wasn't hurt. [She] might increase my [interest] rates.<sup>142</sup>

Before O'Connell wrote her article documenting the events in Oakland California a male driver was shot twice in the head.<sup>143</sup> Although the company is willing to blame women drivers for the violence committed against them, all drivers are vulnerable to violence. The attitude that holds women

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<sup>140</sup>"Capitalism at work," *Kinesis* August (1979): 16.

<sup>141</sup>"Capitalism at work," 16.

<sup>142</sup>"Capitalism at work," 16.

<sup>143</sup>O'Connell, "Yellow Cab Blues," 55.

taxi drivers responsible for violent assaults against them is not limited to men nor to large American cities. A number of women drivers in Halifax express similar attitudes.

It depends on the person [the driver]. If she wears make-up or low cut dresses, well, what do you expect?<sup>144</sup>

I had [men] taxi drivers tell me to stop wearing skirts cause I would invite unwelcome attention.<sup>145</sup>

While some drivers credit "loose" or "inviting" behaviour as the cause of sexual assaults, others assert that the appropriate response to the threat of assault can prevent it from happening. In either case it is the responsibility of the woman driver to either invite or repel unwelcome advances.

... I find it all depends on how you [act]. If you want to act like you're easy and I mean there used to be a lawyer I knew years ago and they always told me that rape was an act of violence. Nine times out of ten if you said yeah go right ahead, they're going to turn around and walk away anyway cause all the fun's gone out of it.<sup>146</sup>

After Shirley Comeau was sexually assaulted by one of her passengers she was conscious of the attitudes of the other drivers.

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<sup>144</sup>Interview with Sharon Cormier, Halifax taxi driver, 24 January 1996: 8.

<sup>145</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 5.

<sup>146</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 21.

A lot of women taxi drivers ... [would] say we [are] sorry [about] what happened to you Shirley, and then behind [my] back [I would] hear the stories ... she couldn't have fought very hard, and stuff like this. Women themselves say this, and they [say] 'oh, I'd know what to do' [or] 'it must be a bad girl or she must have been dressed sexy or teasing or something'.<sup>147</sup>

There is a marked difference between the attitudes of the women drivers in Halifax and the behaviour of the women drivers in California concerning the responsibility for protecting drivers against sexual assault. While the women in Oakland looked to the company owners and the union to take action to prevent more violent assaults against drivers, the women in Halifax place more responsibility for prevention and protection on the individual driver. The difference between the women drivers in Oakland and Halifax may be attributed to historical context. For example, the reaction of the women drivers in Oakland occurred during the early 1970's during the peak of the women's movement in the United States. Similarly, others may superficially attribute the difference to regional stereotypes crediting Halifax drivers with conservative attitudes toward women and rape and suggesting that California women taxi drivers are naturally more radical. However, the crucial factor distinguishing these two groups of drivers is the industrial structure that they are operating within.

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<sup>147</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 30.



The drivers in O'Connell's article work for Yellow Cab. They are hired by the company and paid on a commission basis. The company owns the cars and dictates the shifts that the drivers work. The drivers are clearly categorized as employees. The nature of the employment relationship is further illustrated by mandatory membership in the Teamsters Union.

Taxi drivers in Halifax are not employed by the brokers, for the most part they own their own cars; therefore, it is considerably more difficult for Halifax drivers to demand more adequate measures of protection from company owners. Halifax drivers are categorized as independent contractors rather than employees; therefore, their occupational experience is characterized by more freedom and independence than the "employees" at Yellow Cab in Oakland. However, the sense of independence and freedom enjoyed by Halifax drivers is accompanied by the knowledge that they are individually solely responsible for their own safety and protection. In part, it is the absence of an employee/employer relationship that encourages the attitude that the individual driver controls her own fate in terms of assault.

A study of women drivers in St. John's, Newfoundland reveals attitudes that are similar to those of Halifax drivers. Cynthia Boyd's paper, "'Just like one of the Boys': Tactics of Women taxi drivers", examines some of the

tactics employed by women taxi drivers in St. John's to deal with unwanted sexual comments and advances.<sup>148</sup> Boyd concludes from her interviews with women taxi drivers in St. John's that:

[the women taxi drivers] did not define [threatening situations] as sexual harassment, they considered them to be a part of the territory of the job.<sup>149</sup>

The drivers whom Boyd interviewed described tactics such as driving in populated areas of the city, keeping their two-way radio mike accessible and ready to use, and asking for assistance of other drivers when dealing with situations they consider dangerous. Similarly, avoiding feminine attire and behaviour is often employed as another tactic. Boyd's choice of title "just one of the boys" suggests that, in fact, encouraging others to see them as a member of the masculine culture is another tactic that is used.

You have to put it [femininity] in the background ... you have to become one of the men. You have to become one of the guys.<sup>150</sup>

While women taxi drivers contend that fitting in to the predominant masculine work-culture of their occupation is part of the job, the women workers in Sugiman's study develop their own gender specific work-culture. In part

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<sup>148</sup>Cynthia Boyd, "Just like one of the Boys".

<sup>149</sup>Boyd, "Just like one of the Boys," 7.

<sup>150</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 11.

this work-culture is characterized by friendship or 'chumming' which might be similar to friendship bonds among male workers; however, Sugiman observes that peculiar to women workers was the notion of "women talk" as part of worker camaraderie. The sharing of personal concerns, talk of marriage, domestic life, and courtship were at the core of women's culture in the auto plants.<sup>151</sup> In addition, the subject of auto work itself was almost a taboo subject. "If somebody started talkin' about work, we'd walk away. Say, 'leave it where it belongs.'"<sup>152</sup> This stands in sharp contrast with the male dominated work-culture of taxi drivers, which relies on work specific story telling to enhance the work place bonds.<sup>153</sup> The behaviour of these women workers indicates that in addition to workplace influences on gender construction, gender can also influence the nature of a particular work culture.

Unlike the first women workers in the auto factories women taxi drivers have adopted the patterns of the masculine work culture, including the tradition of storytelling. In fact, the practice of creating stories that is culturally relevant in the taxi industry was used

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<sup>151</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 78.

<sup>152</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 85.

<sup>153</sup>See Philip Nusbaum, "The Importance of Storytelling Among New York Cabdrivers," *New York Folklore* 6(1-2) (1980): 67-89; Kimberly Berry "The Last Cowboy: The Community and Culture of Halifax Taxi Drivers," unpublished honours paper History Department Dalhousie University 1995: 90-92.

repeatedly by the women informants in the interviews to answer questions and illustrate their point of view. While few informants talked directly about the ritual of storytelling, at times the content of the interviews illustrates the practice of storytelling. For example, one woman driver, in the tradition of driver storytelling, tells about approaching another driver's car and overhearing another example of storytelling:

Well it wasn't like he talked to me personally. He was always very pleasant to me. It's just that, one night, it's so funny because I drove down Brunswick Street, I turned into the Citadel Inn, and I got out and there was a whole line of cars and like, you know, years ago the drivers used to sit in each other's cars and were really fraternizing, they don't do it as much anymore, and as I was walking, they were all in this man's car, and I parked my car, got out and started walking up. A driver sitting in the back seat looked out the window and went like this to me [signalling to be quiet]. You know, the thing over the mouth, and I walked up just in time to hear this man saying, he says how do you guys really think she's earning the money to be driving that big Chrysler. You know there's only one way a woman can make that kind of money, like she makes more money than all of us, appears to make more money and live better than a lot of - and he went on like, and I just walked up by his window and tapped him on the arm and I said, you know, there's only one thing I can say to you and it's that it's too bad I haven't had all this fun you credited me with having, turned around and went back to my car.<sup>154</sup>

This story has all the necessary elements to make it relevant to the taxi work culture. Particularly the detail regarding where she drove, and where she parked the location

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<sup>154</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 6.

of the cars. The exact scene is reconstructed so that other drivers can imagine the precise location and events. Furthermore, the conversation in the car was also focused on key elements of the taxi culture, money and cars, the only catch is the rare element of the woman driver and how to explain her taxi prowess. However, the woman driver gives yet another example of her ability to navigate the cultural codes and conduct of her male counterparts when she delivers her dry, sarcastic response to his accusations. She is not embarrassed by his comments nor does she let him get the better of her by appearing flustered or unsure of what to say in response. Part of storytelling skill in this case is the ability to answer other drivers' stories with relevant responses. Unlike the women auto workers in Sugiman's study women taxi drivers in Halifax are not bound by the code of "women's talk" but engage in the time honoured tradition of storytelling both on the taxi stand and in interviews.

In addition to participating in the rituals of storytelling women drivers also apply the rhetoric of manliness through bravery and violence and de-emphasized feminine attributes as part of their strategy for fitting into a masculine work culture. When confronted with difficult or dangerous customers women drivers often assume the stance of bravery and independence:

You're in the business and if you have a problem  
you gotta get yourself out of the problem ... you

gotta do your own think'n. You can't depend on some man to come throw him out of the car. You gotta throw him out of the car.<sup>155</sup>

If [the passenger is] drunk or going to start giving you a tough time you know right from the start, and you better know how to handle that, [how to] kick them out or whatever you're going to do with them.<sup>156</sup>

If he [the passenger] were mouthy, I even throw on the brakes and tell [him] to get out and ... I'm not afraid to stand up for myself.<sup>157</sup>

I always gave everybody a warning, and if they didn't listen, fine, then their butt was out of my car. You know, and if it meant that I'd have to get out and physically throw them out, they were going out.<sup>158</sup>

In addition to adopting an attitude of the "independent driver" who can physically throw unwanted trouble makers from the car, the women also adhere to codes of masculine camaraderie. One women adds, however, that this was sometimes surprising to men drivers who perhaps expected women to be less willing to come to a man's aid, whether the situation be dangerous or simply mechanical:

When some of the men are in a pickle, you know, like a driver has trouble ... they used to be

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<sup>155</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 15.

<sup>156</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 14.

<sup>157</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 18.

<sup>158</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 26.

amazed [that] I'd be one of the first drivers to show up.<sup>159</sup>

This woman driver is clearly willing to adopt the standard of practice of the taxi work-culture even if the behaviour is strongly associated with masculine bravery or mechanical skill. The ability of women to fit within this work culture can also be measured by the degree of acceptance demonstrated by the male drivers. One example of this involves a driver implying that social conduct in the presence of a woman taxi driver need not apply to the rules generally adhered to in the presence of a woman. After driving taxi for twenty-eight years one woman says:

now these guys will say anything in front of [me]. I was in a garage one day, and somebody said something and the younger fellow says don't say that, there's a woman standing there, and the driver turns around and says she's been driving cab for as long as you've been on this earth.<sup>160</sup>

Clearly the implication is that after almost three decades in the taxi industry the woman driver is chiefly identified as a driver not a woman. In this sense, she is accepted into a work-culture that is influenced by and reinforces working-class images of manliness including rough language, camaraderie, violence, and bravery. The acceptance and adaptation of women workers into this masculine work-culture

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<sup>159</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 7.

<sup>160</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 7.

sharply contrasts with the experience of the women auto workers in Sugiman's research.

Sugiman suggests that the women auto workers were not particularly active within the organized labour movement, they also expressed resistance by drawing on a women's culture that was based on a conventional definition of femininity and their strategies of resistance reflected the power relations within the workplace as well as within the larger society.<sup>161</sup> There was a great deal of concern over the women's resistance to the issue of proper hair protection. Women resisted regulations because "their hair made them feel feminine" it was considered a woman's "crown and glory," however, women risked scalping by machinery in order to wear their hair in the popular fashion.<sup>162</sup> Sugiman contends that:

the women's efforts to 'look good' were, in part, attempts to assert some control, maintain dignity, and impart personal style in the work place.<sup>163</sup>

In light of this interpretation, issues of fashion and 'traditional' images of femininity become contested terrain in the workplace, and adherence to conventional definitions of femininity becomes political. While Sugiman's study offers a significant contribution to the study of women's

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<sup>161</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 66.

<sup>162</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 75.

<sup>163</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 75.



culture, it examines women workers who remain, in large part, sexually segregated in their work departments. This may explain the considerable difference between the attitudes and behaviour of these women and that of women taxi drivers. Women taxi drivers are not segregated within their workplace and, therefore, experience a very different marriage of gender- and work-culture. While the women workers in Sugiman's study create a work-culture apart from that of their male co-workers women taxi drivers adopt a work-culture that is more reflective of their male colleagues than it is of woman's culture.

Clearly workplace segregation should also be considered when examining the interaction between gender culture and work culture. Sugiman suggests that sex-segregated jobs and gendered work-culture offer an environment that fostered strong notions of womanhood.<sup>164</sup>

The gender composition of departments further reinforced bonds between employees ... where many women were concentrated in one department, they were more likely to develop a sense of collegiality than where they mixed with men.<sup>165</sup>

Although taxi drivers are physically separated as individuals in different cars, and at times, linked by two-way radios to different companies they are not separated nor segregated according to sex. Men and women operate their

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<sup>164</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 93.

<sup>165</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 82.

cabs at the same taxi stands, in the same areas of town at the same time of the day and night. Furthermore, they take their coffee breaks, and eat their meals at the same coffee shops and restaurants. This close interaction between workers of both sexes is crucial to the development of a shared work-culture identity.

In addition to the sex-segregation of the workplace, historical context should be also considered when accounting for the differences between the feminine work-culture of the women auto workers and the adoption of a masculine work-culture among women taxi drivers. In addition to a generation gap between women auto workers of the 1940's and the women taxi drivers of the 1970's, 1980's, and 1990's the wartime period offers a very specific context for women workers. During World War II there was a considerable amount of propaganda surrounding the issue of women at work. Strong messages about the temporary nature of war-time work, and the importance of maintaining a strong feminine image illustrate the popular attitudes toward women and work during the war-time period. Therefore, it is not surprising that the women in the auto factory were not interested in being immersed in the work-culture of their male co-workers.

The presence of women drivers in taxi driver associations and societies, and their adoption of the masculine ideals of independence, bravery, and camaraderie indicate that women have assumed membership in the taxi

community, marking a sharp contrast with the traditional feminine identity associated with women's culture. Clearly the assumption of the masculine work-culture can serve more than one purpose. While it indicates belonging in a particular work group it also serves as protection against others in that group and against members of the public. The fact that women can fit within the boundaries of the masculine work culture, indicates the degree to which manliness is a social construct. Relying heavily on codes of conduct, and social discourse, a masculine culture can be shared, at times, even by those who have represented the opposite of manliness. In addition to the influence of historical and political change, masculine identity has been moulded by those on the margins to assert their place within the larger society or a specific work culture.

**Yellow Cab, White Driver:  
Race and Occupational Experience**

In addition to the traditional gender divide within the taxi industry, race has also played a dramatic role in the context of both a divided industry and serving a divided public.

Debbie was a part-time taxi driver in Halifax from 1985 to 1990.<sup>166</sup> After dating a taxi driver for three years Debbie got her taxi licence and used his car to drive in the afternoon and on the weekends.<sup>167</sup> Although Debbie, like the vast majority of women drivers in Halifax, is white, her personal experience reveals the complex conflicts and numerous contradictions between race, class, and gender as experienced in this industry. Debbie's particular experience of race and gender in the taxi industry has been informed by her sense of community in the predominantly black neighbourhood of Uniacke Square and her relationship with her partner, who is black.

Born in 1952, she lived in Dartmouth until she was five and moved to North Street in Halifax and later to Uniacke Square, after it was built. After living in Europe for some time, her marriage failed and Debbie returned to Canada with her daughter. Since her return to Halifax, Debbie has

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<sup>166</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 6.

<sup>167</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 5.

worked at a number of jobs in service industries, including food and beverage and retail sales and service. Although Debbie's experience doesn't necessarily shed any light on the experience of black women drivers, her story strongly illustrates the complexities and the contradictions that characterizes the interplay of race, class, and gender.

When Debbie began driving a taxi in 1985 she encountered the prejudice of other drivers, both because she was a part-time driver and because of the mixed race relationship with her partner. Although Debbie and Reg had been together for a few years she soon learned that her relationship with a veteran full-time driver did not necessarily guarantee a warm reception from the other drivers. Although she and Reg had been living together for some time she was not acquainted with many taxi drivers when she entered the business. She also quickly learned that being a part-time driver placed her at a disadvantage when associating with other drivers. If being a rookie driver makes you suspect, being a rookie part-timer makes you doubly so.

Actually, I didn't know that many of the drivers. The few that I associated with were ones that the drivers never did like ... like firemen ... cause they were the ones that would speak to you ... cause you were part-time and they were part-time.<sup>168</sup>

The common perception is that part-time drivers unfairly

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<sup>168</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 7.

hinder the full-time driver's ability to make a living within the industry. Those who argue against the presence of part-time drivers contend that, because there are only a limited number of passengers and therefore a finite amount of money in the industry, part-time drivers unfairly take a share of a pie that full-time drivers are wholly dependant upon. Debbie is well aware of this attitude toward part-timers.

Oh yeah, part-time drivers out here taking money? Excuse me! I put in as many hours as you. If you don't like it -too bad.<sup>169</sup>

In addition to a degree of discrimination against part-time drivers Debbie has also experienced the racist attitudes of those who condemned her relationship with Reg.

it's more in I'd say black and white in the taxi industry - it's just like shunned upon and I haven't had a problem - even in my own job. Everyone accepts Reg for who is because of who - where he is so easy to get along with.<sup>170</sup>

You know [who] the people [are] - it's so funny cause I mean I can - one guy I knew who was a racist ... and I mean there's nothing you can do about it because they're ignorant and that's the way [they] were brought up and ... He always spoke to me, he just never spoke to Reg. And when I was with Reg, he wouldn't even speak to me. I mean, excuse me, something gotta be wrong.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 7.

<sup>170</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 28.

<sup>171</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 29.

I caught [one driver] one time ... and she made a comment about Reg being - and using the 'n' word and then I just [had] to have physical contact with somebody then. Because [if] you can't say it to him to his face, don't say it at all ... she said fucking nigger and I had just walked in the door and heard one comment and her comment and I said that was it and I said something.<sup>172</sup>

While Debbie clearly finds the racist attitudes of other taxi drivers to be intolerable it is important to recognize that Debbie is not immune to racist attitudes and behaviours. Debbie has taken advantage of the office's policy allowing drivers to opt out of serving the predominantly black population of Mulgrave Park.

you can stipulate - like if I didn't want to go down to the Park - Debbie didn't go to the Park.<sup>173</sup>

While this stipulation means that the office doesn't give a particular driver radio calls to Mulgrave Park drivers accepting passengers hailing them on the street employ other measures to insure against getting fares going to undesired areas. Mainly these drivers simply do not pick up black passengers. Debbie has also employed this method of discriminating against black passengers on the street: "drive right by ... every time."<sup>174</sup> She contends that some passengers are notoriously difficult to serve:

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<sup>172</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 26-27.

<sup>173</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 10.

<sup>174</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 17.

Nine times out of ten you have to wait fifteen minutes for them to come out of the house, then they'll whine about the fare and they would wait for a nickel ... if I knew them, I'd trust them. If I didn't know them you're not getting in my car.<sup>175</sup>

In addition to the notion that black passengers generally take too long to come to the car, complain about the cost of the fare, and refuse to leave a tip there are other stereotypes about the dangerous black passenger that keep drivers from serving the black community.

There was a girl from Dartmouth that was attacked - one of the drivers from I think the Y - [they] held a knife to her throat in Dartmouth, going over the bridge, ... actually she was going to Preston. So you know.<sup>176</sup>

Similarly, another women driver is considered "foolish" for picking up passengers from the Triple A convenience store on Gottingen Street. Even if the call was accepted over the radio, according to Debbie, it is too high risk to be considered a true radio call.

Excuse me. ... three black guys? - no thank you. That is not a radio call. I mean technically it was a radio call but I'm talking about if it was a house call, it's different.<sup>177</sup>

Debbie's sense of community is complicated by her identification with a racially diverse neighbourhood. When

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<sup>175</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 17

<sup>176</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 19-20.

<sup>177</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 20.



asked if she would take calls to Uniacke Square, her response indicates that her attitude toward the two neighbourhoods are quite different:

Well, I mean I grew up in Uniacke Square ... mostly it's because if I knew them, I'd trust them. If I don't know them you're not getting in my car ... But I mean I grew up in the ghetto as I call it and I knew who I could trust and who I couldn't.<sup>178</sup>

While Debbie identifies strongly with the predominantly black neighbourhood surrounding Uniacke Square and clearly has a strong reaction toward derogatory racist terms, she is not free of her own racist attitudes and behaviours. Some would argue that Debbie's affinity with the black community and her commitment to her partner stand in direct conflict with her discriminatory behaviour as a taxi driver. However, familiarity plays a crucial role in determining the tone of the relationship between taxi drivers and the black community in Halifax.

Other white drivers, both men and women, also feel a connectedness with the black community in Halifax because of their connections to a particular neighbourhood or partner. In an interview with a retired Halifax taxi driver now living in New York a similar sense of belonging was discussed. Because Louis Protos lived on Gottingen Street for a time he felt a familiarity with, and a security in an area that was considered by others to be dangerous.

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<sup>178</sup>Interview with Debbie Awalt, former Halifax taxi driver, 19 November 1996: 16-17.

Protos clearly identified certain areas in New York as particularly dangerous to drive in.

... and when you pick up someone in Brooklyn - wants to go to the Bronx, they're in your car you know - no way you're going to get them out, and you take the chance and you take them. Now you hear they got bullet proof, you know [shields].<sup>179</sup>

While the Bronx is clearly considered a dangerous area to be driving in, Protos does not consider any area in Halifax similarly threatening. However, when asked about dangerous areas in Halifax he recalls that he was familiar with the black community.

You knew most of the people, in fact I knew most of the people. I lived on Gottingen Street for awhile, okay, before I moved back, okay, [before] I left, I could go to the club on, ah hum - I forget the name of the street, anyway the coloured people club, on the side street off of Gottingen, between Creighton you know and Gottingen okay, and I would park my car outside with the keys in it and unlocked, that's how safe it was you know, I mean, I would go in to see the people, cause I knew them ... I'd walk in you know, I'd be the only white person in there, but I was safe you know ... I lived there ... There was no racial stereo[type] at that time, you know, that came later.<sup>180</sup>

Unlike Debbie, Protos did not discriminate in collecting passengers, and suggests that there was no need to.

There was no trouble, there was no racial, you know, turbulence. You could pick up somebody, ah,

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<sup>179</sup>Interview with Louis Protos, retired Halifax taxi driver, Long Island, New York 31 August 1996: 15.

<sup>180</sup>Interview with Louis Protos, retired Halifax taxi driver, Long Island, New York 31 August 1996: 15-16.

from Creighton Street, take them to Africville, there was never a problem, never.<sup>181</sup>

Protos admits, however, that not all taxi drivers recognized that there were not dangers.

Well, other drivers, well it's not that there was a problem, they, you know, some of them didn't want to go to that area, because they anticipated problems, they didn't know any better, okay, when people don't know any better they put thoughts in their heads, okay, and it's a fear.<sup>182</sup>

While Protos will suggest that living in the neighbourhood, and knowing the people allows you to recognize that there is not, in fact, any more danger in the black community it may be exactly this, in part that accounts for the difference between Debbie and Protos. While both of these drivers identify with the black community by virtue of where they have lived in their youth neither is black. Beside their sense of community rooted in Halifax's Gottingen Street neighbourhood there is very little similarity in their experiences. Debbie clearly perceives a greater threat within the black community than Protos does but there are several factors that may account for this difference including the era in which they worked and gender.

When Protos began driving taxi in Halifax in 1964 the neighbourhood community may have been more closely knit and

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<sup>181</sup>Interview with Louis Protos, retired Halifax taxi driver, Long Island, New York 31 August 1996: 18.

<sup>182</sup>Interview with Louis Protos, retired Halifax taxi driver, Long Island, New York 31 August 1996: 18.

identifiable than it was by the time Debbie began driving. As Protos points out, Halifax has undergone considerable growth since he was a taxi driver.

I mean Halifax has grown more in the last twenty years, than it has in the previous two hundred years, you know ... you walk down Gottingen Street, if you, you know, if you lived in the area, you walk down Gottingen Street, every second person you passed, you knew, or they knew you, you know. They knew where you lived, they knew what your father did, they knew, you know, and you did the same thing. You knew exactly, you know, whose father worked on the trains, who was a porter, who was you know ... a singer, whose father was you know, played in the band you know, you knew those things ...<sup>183</sup>

Debbie's knowledge of people in her community is similar but on a considerably smaller scale. Debbie suggests that she does trust those people in the black community that she knows; however, not everyone is familiar.

In addition to the growth and change within the community over the years there has also been more profound changes within the broader black community since Protos was first working in Halifax. While the American civil rights movement may have begun in the United States before Louis Protos received his taxi licence, public expressions of black power and black consciousness were not being seen in Halifax until later. While the black community in pre-civil rights North America was not exclusively viewed as innocuous, the civil rights movement gave fodder to the

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<sup>183</sup>Interview with Louis Protos, retired Halifax taxi driver, Long Island, New York 31 August 1996: 18.

white backlash that equated black consciousness and black power with a threat to white survival.

Although the civil rights movement may have enhanced an image of the dangerous black, one time-honoured image of the black threat is particularly relevant to the contrast between Protos and Debbie. Long before the growth in American black consciousness during the 1950's there had been a popular and exaggerated image of the "black rapist". The "black rapist" myth and its relevance to images of middle-class masculinity during the late nineteenth century are discussed in Gail Bederman's article, "Civilization, the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells Anti-Lynching Campaign (1892-94)".<sup>184</sup> Bederman discusses how the image of the "black rapist" is used in juxtaposition with white middle-class masculinity; constructing a savage "other" in order to compensate for the seemingly failing middle-class manliness. While images of the "savage" black are used to elevate white masculinity, those images simultaneously suggest a clear and present danger to women. While Protos and Debbie may be operating taxis at different times, and within changing communities, this does not totally account for the difference of how they perceive threats from members of the black community. The long-

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<sup>184</sup>Gail Bederman, "Civilization, the Decline of Middle-Class Manliness, and Ida B. Wells Anti-Lynching Campaign (1892-94)," *Gender and American History Since 1890* (New York: Routledge, 1993) 207-39.

standing "black rapist" myth clearly has particular resonance among women drivers. As a woman driver, Debbie may have been less willing to service the black community even in a time before the growth of black power or the expansion of the black community beyond close neighbourhood relations. The risk of being raped while on the job is almost universally recognized as an occupational danger for women taxi drivers. Racist notions about the threat of the "black rapist" thus play a gender specific role in the taxi industry.

It is crucial to note that the risk of sexual assault is not limited to women drivers, but also shared by women passengers. Similarly, there is a risk that racist notions regarding the black driver can be employed by the public. One experience of a black woman taxi driver ironically turns the gendered nature of the "black rapist" myth on its head. Annie Reddick-Simmonds remembers one woman passenger who tried to accuse her of rape.

I had a fare going to Spryfield with this girl, she tried to get out of paying - she started to saying she had no money, she thought I was a man 'cause my hair was short and I had pants and a jacket on. So I remember seeing the police [drive] into this Dominion store ... and she started saying she was going to scream rape and everything like that. So I just drove up to where the Mounties [were].<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>185</sup>Interview with Annie Reddick-Simmonds, retired Halifax taxi driver, 17 February 1997: 7.

Although this woman driver had full confidence approaching the police with this passenger, a male driver in the same circumstance may have been considerably more leery. In this case the officers recognized the driver, assisted her in collecting the payment of the fare and removed the passenger from the taxi. Although she had been mistaken about the gender identity of her driver the woman passenger had hoped to take advantage of stereotypes about men, taxi drivers, and blacks to obtain a free taxi ride.

While the race of the driver may or may not have played a conscious role in the use of the passenger's "rape victim" tactic there is no denying that race often complicates the interaction between driver and passenger, and driver and driver. Although the woman driver in this case does not recall any specific examples of racism from her passengers she contends that prejudice remains a relevant and contentious issue.

[It's] never gonna get no better ... prejudice is always gonna be there from the time of the Bible so how do they expect to clear it up in this world. There's no way ... it's always gonna be prejudiced.<sup>186</sup>

One male driver has experienced first hand the discrimination of passengers who select taxis according to the race of the driver.

I [have] had [the] experience that I'm the first cab and because I'm black [the passengers] go to

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<sup>186</sup>Interview with Annie Reddick-Simmonds, retired taxi driver, Halifax, 17 February 1997: 11.

the second cab or the third cab I don't say nothing because if they don't want to get in my cab there's no way [that I want to drive them] ... because they got ideas before they get in ... I'd rather not deal with them at all, you know, if they feel that way they have their own misconceptions ... say well, he's black, probably gonna rape me, assault me.<sup>187</sup>

Although Reddick-Simmonds does not specifically recall this type of discriminatory behaviour on behalf of her passengers, she acknowledges that this may have happened.

I never noticed [passengers passing by my car because I was black]. I never experienced that. I mean it could have happened but I had a no smoking [sign] in my car so people wouldn't ask me [for a taxi] if they wanted to smoke.<sup>188</sup>

Racist attitudes and discriminatory behaviour has profoundly affected the availability of taxi service and the evolution and regulation of the taxi industry in a number of North American cities. The development of the "gypsy cab" in New York City is the most notable result of these problems. In his article, "In The Hot Seat: The Story of the New York Taxi Rank and File Coalition", John Gordon describes the conditions leading to the need of a "gypsy" taxi service in the black and Hispanic neighbourhoods of New

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<sup>187</sup>Interview with Frank Lewis, Halifax taxi driver, 13 February 1997: 10.

<sup>188</sup>Interview with Annie Reddick-Simmonds, retired Halifax taxi driver, 17 February 1997: 7.



York.<sup>189</sup> Although cab drivers had been passing up black people for years, Gordon suggest that government policies of the 1960's further marginalized minority communities in urban America. The deterioration of intercity neighbourhoods, the refusal of lending institutions to support housing or business in these areas and the increasing social problems associated with extreme economic marginalization created neighbourhoods that were characterized by drugs, crime, and violence. Increasingly, taxi drivers were victims of crimes, and increasingly drivers refused to pick up black and Hispanic passengers. Gordon contends that by the late 1960's race played a crucial role in flagging a cab in New York City.

If you weren't white and you wanted a cab, you probably had a long wait ahead of you. It was not uncommon to see five or ten empty cabs drive by a black person before one would stop.<sup>190</sup>

In response to the lack of taxi service in these neighbourhoods a unregulated, non-medallion taxi industry emerged. These drivers, labelled as "gypsies", unlike New York's medallion cabs, could not legally pick up passengers who hailed them on the street.<sup>191</sup> Just as the non-medallion drivers filled the demand for service created by

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<sup>189</sup>John Gordon, "In The Hot Seat: The Story of the New York Taxi Rank and File Coalition," *Radical America* 17(5) (1983): 27-43.

<sup>190</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 29.

<sup>191</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 29.

discriminatory practices of the traditional taxi industry, they were also the brunt of "thinly disguised" racist attacks by the fleet owners and the union leaders. *Taxi News*, the paper published by the fleet owners printed stories that portrayed the non-medallion driver as a dangerous criminal.

Rape, robbery, assault, intimidation. These are some of the references which gypsy drivers bring to their jobs. Apparently no other qualifications are needed.<sup>192</sup>

The same language, and threatening images that fostered discriminatory service by the medallion drivers is used by the fleet owners to discredit the non-white, non-medallion drivers. In this sense the division is not between passenger and driver, nor simply between medallion and non-medallion, rather the attacks, whether against passenger or driver were largely determined by race.

The relationship between the traditional taxi service and these neighbourhoods was further complicated by fare hikes and regulations created to distinguish the medallion from the non-medallion cab. By 1970 regulations were in place requiring all medallion cabs to be painted yellow and banning all non-medallion cabs from using the colour.<sup>193</sup> The other distinguishing feature of the medallion cab was its fare schedule. The early 1970's also brought a forty-

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<sup>192</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 29.

<sup>193</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 29.

eight per cent rate increase for the yellow cabs, making non-medallion service one-third cheaper.<sup>194</sup> After the fare hike yellow cabs began filtering back into the neighbourhoods that they had previously shunned, but the passengers were now refusing to use the medallion taxis. Gordon and others contend that the preference for the non-medallion taxis was not simply due to lower fares. Gordon says:

Most residents of Harlem, Beford-Stuyvesant, and the South Bronx were choosing gypsies over yellow cabs, partially because of the lower cost, but also out of deep-seated resentment felt toward the medallion cab industry.<sup>195</sup>

Another member of the Rank and File Coalition who drove as a non-medallion driver before switching to a yellow cab said:

It was interesting to note how the people, especially in the neighbourhoods where gypsies worked, related to me when I was driving yellow and when I was driving gypsy; and it was really different. Tips were better when I was driving gypsy. There are a whole lot more fares. Even now when I'm in Washington Heights, or in Harlem, or in any black neighbourhood, you see a lot of people that you know they're waiting for a cab, but they're waiting for a gypsy. And I'm not totally sure whether it lies in solidarity with the gypsies for providing the service or the fact that gypsies are cheaper - probably some of both.<sup>196</sup>

Fleet owners and union officials further targeted the sense of competition and conflict between medallion and non-

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<sup>194</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 30.

<sup>195</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 30.

<sup>196</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 30.

medallion drivers to shift the focus and responsibility off unpopular, contract conditions and blame non-medallion drivers for yellow cabs lower booking and declining wages. In an effort to pit yellow cab drivers against non-medallion workers the union leaders sent the message that "gypsy" drivers were responsible for the drop in business.

We cannot permit the gypsies to tear at the guts of the taxi workers and we consider anyone who at this time wants our union to relegate this fight to the background will be aiding and abetting the enemy ... we didn't build a union to give people a license to steal. We didn't build a union to allow law violators to deprive us of an honest living. We do not intend to stand by while law violators become legalized at the expense of honest hard working taxi drivers.<sup>197</sup>

This rallying cry was printed in the union paper, *Taxi Drivers' Voice*, and is typical of the rhetoric used to shift the attention away from unpopular union decisions and focus the frustration of the union drivers on their non-medallion colleagues. While the union leaders and fleet owners relied on prejudice and racism to separate the drivers, at least one group of primarily younger, white drivers campaigned against unpopular union contracts and eventually confronted the divisive issue of non-medallion drivers. In their paper, *The Hot Seat*, The Rank and File Coalition printed two articles about drivers murdered at work. The larger article was about the killing of two yellow cab drivers, under it

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<sup>197</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 31.

was a smaller article about two non-medallion drivers who were also murdered. Then the Coalition stated:

While medallion and non-medallion drivers do the same job, take the same risks, and die for the same reasons, we are set against each other by the very people who profit off our labor: the bosses, [Mayor] Lindsay, Lazar, etc.<sup>198</sup>

Furthermore, the Coalition called for yellow cab and non-medallion drivers to unite against the "common enemy".<sup>199</sup> Clearly there is a strong sense of competing identity, as drivers within the industry struggle with notions of class, and race. While the case of New York City's "gypsy" drivers is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of how issues of race and racism have served to reshape the taxi industry, and pit drivers against neighbourhoods, and driver against driver, race also plays a part in how taxi drivers operate and interact in Halifax.

New York City's black and Hispanic neighbourhoods responded to the prejudice of traditionally regulated taxi drivers by establishing non-medallion taxi services from within their own communities and showing their commitment to this service once it was established. Similarly, race as a dividing line among workers is seen in the use of racist language and images by fleet owners and union leaders to keep the frustration of their workers focused on the

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<sup>198</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 35.

<sup>199</sup>Gordon, "In The Hot Seat," 35.

scapegoat non-medallion drivers. However, the rhetoric of race and intolerance did not convince all drivers that the divisions between medallion and non-medallion drivers were insurmountable.

Similarly, in Halifax, racist notions and stereotypes are applied by driver, passengers, and regulators alike. During the early 1990's discussion of mandatory language testing illustrates one example of proposed regulation that targets new Canadian or immigrant drivers. Although language testing was presented by City Council representatives as a measure to ensure quality passenger service it is undeniably also an issue of race. The connection between language and race is clear; the majority of drivers using English as a second language are also members of visible minorities. Although many drivers and aldermen alike argue that language testing is simply a quality assurance measure, other individuals in the industry see the racist overtones of such regulations. Speaking in favour of language testing Alderman Steve Adams, chair of the Taxi Commission, attempts to neutralize accusations of discrimination by saying:

We're not trying to single out any specific ethnic group. (English) is just a tool of the trade.  
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Similarly, taxi driver Shirley Comeau argued:

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<sup>200</sup>"Cabbies need English tests: taxi chairman," *Daily News* 15 December 1991: 3.

The object is to upgrade the level of professionalism in the taxi industry and language comprehension is only one part of that upgrading.<sup>201</sup>

Bud Alexander, a dispatcher at Yellow Cab, suggests that racism, not language is at the heart of some people's complaints.

Some customers tell us not to send a foreigner. Some people are prejudiced when they get in a cab with some of these fellows.<sup>202</sup>

Speaking of the challenge of working with English as a second language Alexander concedes that some drivers have difficulty, at first, communicating clearly with customers, but overcome these problems in time.<sup>203</sup> While many will argue that the attempts to enforce language testing is not discriminatory, any regulation that, by its very nature, would adversely affect only new Canadian and immigrant drivers is also, by its very nature, discriminatory.

In terms of better understanding the experience of women taxi drivers, race plays a crucial role in further texturing women's sense of identity and community. Racist stereotypes, such as the "black rapist" myth also play a particularly relevant role in the experience of women taxi

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<sup>201</sup>Shirley Comeau, "New Language Requirements Not A Witch Hunt!" *The Rooflight* 10(1): 3.

<sup>202</sup>"Leading taxi firm supports drivers' language testing" *Daily News* 10 January 1992: 18.

<sup>203</sup>"Leading taxi firm supports drivers' language training," *Daily News* 10 January 1992: 18.

drivers as they ply their trade in knowing that physical violence is a constant risk.

It is important to note that any suggestion that women commonly possess an intrinsic nature, or that women are inherently or fundamentally similar to each other and thus dissimilar to men, is an essentialist analysis. Leading critics of essentialist analysis, such as Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson, warn against any paradigm that involves false generalizations and universality and which deny crucial differences among women such as class, race and sexual orientation.<sup>204</sup> Any examination of women taxi drivers should consider that although these women share a common occupation and by extension may, at least, be perceived to share a common social-economic class, they do not necessarily share a common race. However, while it is important to recognize that all women do not share an identical culture it is more valuable to understand that the bonds and barriers between women are not clear-cut. The categories which divide and unite are themselves fluid and variable. If in one case women are divided by their class there is inevitably another in which class is divided by gender.

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<sup>204</sup>For critiques of essentialist analysis see Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson "Social Criticism without Philosophy: An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism," *Feminism/Postmodernism* ed. Linda J. Nicholson (New York: Routledge, 1990) 19-38; Linda J. Nicholson *Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family* (New York: Columbia University Press) 1986.



Efforts to explore the complex nature of these bonds and boundaries between women taxi drivers quickly reveal that there are remarkably few women of colour operating taxis in Halifax. However, the interview with Debbie is particularly rich with the conflicts and complexities that operate around these issues clearly illustrates the almost chaotic nature of gender, race, class, and occupational relations within this industry. Similarly, Annie Reddick-Simmonds's experience as a black woman driver allowed her to encounter some of the stereotypical attitudes of passengers in a manner that is unique to a black woman mistaken for a man.

While it is crucial to recognize the dangers of false generalization, it is equally important to consider the full extent of complexity and contradiction of gender, race, and occupational identity. Despite any divisions between women taxi driver there remains a common experience of occupational experience and culture that can at times serve to unite driver against passenger in the same way that race served in New York to pit medallion drivers against entire neighbourhoods.

**Classy Lady:  
The Experience of Gender and Class**

While a number of the women taxi drivers in Halifax may come from working-class homes, a number have been middle-class by virtue of marriage or education their class status as determined by their occupation is more complex than it may first appear. While many drivers will argue that they are independent operators; virtually small business owners or petit bourgeois; their actual occupational experience and expression may more closely to approximate that of the wage-earning working class. This chapter will consider role of class in influencing the expression of both occupational- and gender-culture.

During the early 1980's sociologists were increasingly aware of the role of class in the workplace and its effects upon workers' "interest articulation" and organizing capacities. Raymond Russell's article, "Class Formation in the Workplace: the role of sources of income", explores one aspect of class determination, remuneration, and its effects on drivers' organizations in Boston.<sup>205</sup> Russell finds that Boston cab drivers do not differ significantly in their degree of control in the workplace; however, they do differ greatly in the ways they derive income from their work.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup>Raymond Russell, "Class Formation in the Workplace," *Work and Occupation* 10(3) (1983): 349-372.

<sup>206</sup>Russell, "Class Formation," 364.

Russell contends that because the differences in the sources of income are linked to differences in ownership, the source of income, by definition, also defines differences in class.<sup>207</sup> These differences, moreover, can be seen in drivers association activities. Specifically, the mode or method of political expression varied among drivers along class lines, or according to the means of remuneration. Commission drivers, those paid a percentage of their total accumulated calls for the shift, tend to participate in unions. Owner-operators, those who owned their own taxi and, therefore, theoretically kept all the money earned from every call less the cost of their operation expenses, preferred participation in co-ops. Fleet drivers, who rent the cab for a flat fee from the fleet owner and then keep all the money taken in, tend to organize in trade associations.<sup>208</sup>

Russell's examination of taxi drivers is not concerned with issues of gender; yet, it offers a valuable analysis of the patterns of taxi organizations and how they are linked to the way drivers collect their income. Like so many other aspects of the industry, the mode or method of remuneration is not gender specific but has a significant effect on the cab driver's work experience and political expression whether the driver is male or female.

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<sup>207</sup>Russell, "Class Formation," 364.

<sup>208</sup>Russell, "Class Formation," 365.

By the end of the 1980's other researchers were calling attention to the role of gender in the experience of class in an industry with some structural parallels to the taxi industry. In their article, "Class and Gender in Fishing Communities in Nova Scotia", Martha MacDonald and Patricia Connelly call for a gendered class analysis that is more sensitive to gender and household relations as well as an individual's work history.<sup>209</sup> MacDonald and Connelly contend that household relations, gender relations, life cycle work patterns, and spousal work patterns are crucial for understanding human behaviour in the context of class struggle. There is a strong correlation between the workers in the fishing industry and those in the taxi industry with respect to the complexities of class identification. As MacDonald and Connelly point out, the difficulty is the position of the fishers. While workers in processing plants are seen as clearly working class, and owners of fish plants are seen as clearly capitalists, the offshore crew that straddle class lines. Although there is general agreement in the literature that offshore crew are essentially working class, in terms of ideology they may identify as petit bourgeois, holding on to the notion of the "independent" fisher.<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>209</sup>Martha MacDonald and M. Patricia Connelly, "Class and Gender in Fishing Communities in Nova Scotia," *Studies in Political Economy* 30 (1989): 61-85.

<sup>210</sup>MacDonald and Connelly, "Class and Gender," 62-63.

Similarly, dispatchers collecting an hourly wage and operating under the usual shift work structure are clearly seen as working class employees, and the owners of the taxi companies or brokers who invest in the equipment and "employ" the dispatchers and office staff are clearly capitalists; however, the class identification of the taxi driver is considerable less clear cut. Like the offshore crew, taxi drivers hold to the identity and the image of the "independent" worker. Supporting Russell's observations about the importance of how income is collected, it is, in part, the absence of a wage relationship and the image of the "independent entrepreneur" that confuses the class position of the taxi driver. While some drivers may still rent a car from another driver or fleet operator on a commission basis most drivers either rent a car at a flat fee or own their own car keeping what ever money they have collected after paying the car rent or the office rent and covering their other expenses. Similar to the fisher who takes a share of the catch for his or her earnings, the taxi driver who takes the day's fares home with her may identify as petit bourgeois rather than working class.

In fact, it is this character of independent work that attracts many people to the taxi industry in the first place. For example, Sharon Lantz, a twenty five year veteran, was attracted to an industry that did not include a

union because of the anger and frustration she experienced when work in her chosen field was halted by a strike.

[I began] [m]y first teaching job [and] [t]wo and a half months later they went on strike and from that point I said [I would] never work a job that I had to belong to a union. I was irked. Two young children and student loans. I was not impressed.<sup>211</sup>

Furthermore, Lantz also illustrates the tendency that Russell has observed among Boston drivers. As a long time owner-operator Lantz has also been exceptionally active in the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society. While demonstrating a clear disdain for union membership, that is popular among the commission drivers in Boston, Lantz has shown a strong commitment to the notion of a cooperative society focused on mutual benefit for Halifax taxi drivers.

According to Russell's observation, specifically that owner-operators prefer co-op membership while commissioned drivers prefer union membership, the tendency is to see union formation and membership as the true mark of the working-class identity and other expressions of collective initiative as symbols of blurred class identification. However, even cooperatives and trade associations can serve the same fundamental purpose of a union. A collective of workers united in an effort to improve the condition of the whole has the same basis quality of community consciousness

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<sup>211</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 3.

whether it is called a union, an association, a society, or a co-op.

According to an orthodox Marxist definition taxi drivers are clearly not among the working-class.

Those who work for wages, lack decisive control over their conditions of labour, produce a surplus for others who own the physical environment of production and its tools as well as working-class time on the job ...<sup>212</sup>

While it is important to recognize that while taxi drivers do not meet any of the criteria of the traditional Marxist definition of working-class neither do they enjoy any of the social status of either the petit bourgeois or the capitalist class. In his article, "Comment on the Personal Aspects of a Small City Taxi Service", David Trojan describes the "considerable confusion" experienced by passengers and drivers alike when they discover that Trojan the taxi driver is also a college professor.<sup>213</sup> Trojan contends that notions of class account for people's difficulty interacting with a taxi driver who is also a professor.

As long as the taxicab driver's status [is] unknown or accepted as lower than the rider's social status, there need be no confusion about

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<sup>212</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* 2nd. ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992) 23.

<sup>213</sup>David Trojan, "Comment on the Personal Aspects of a Small City Taxi Service," *Wisconsin Sociologist* 13 (1976): 132-138.

how to act in this customer-driver-business relationship.<sup>214</sup>

Similarly, many Halifax taxi drivers confirm that there are popular assumptions about the status and character of taxi drivers that preclude identification with the middle or upper class.

-a lot of people say that cab drivers are one of the lowest people on the world.<sup>215</sup>  
 -the hookers are above us, that's what every class of people think.<sup>216</sup>  
 -[people think] why don't you get a real job? [they think that taxi drivers are] doing nothing all day.<sup>217</sup>

While it is somewhat difficult to reconcile the unsavoury public image of the taxi driver with a petit bourgeois class identification, it is less difficult to understand that without the traditional wage relationship and with a considerable amount of freedom in the workplace, the taxi driver is seldom identified as an employee. Within this highly unstructured and unusual work environment the Halifax taxi driver chooses her own work hours, either uses the two-way radio and sits on the taxi stand to wait for a call, or cruises the streets looking for someone to hail the cab, or

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<sup>214</sup>Trojan, "Small City Taxi Service," 134.

<sup>215</sup>Interview with "Muscles", dispatcher and former Halifax taxi driver, 11 March 1995.

<sup>216</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 22 February 1995.

<sup>217</sup>Interview with Basil Surette, dispatcher and former Halifax taxi driver, 22 February 1995.



simply does not work at all. The choice clearly is up to the driver.

At the same time, the image of the completely self determined, independent driver should be tempered with consideration for the aspects of the industry that limit driver control. The taxi broker owns the radio, the city owns the licenses, either the fleet owner or the bank generally owns the car; therefore, despite considerable freedom the relationship between the driver and the means of production is clearly not direct.

Another aspect of working-class experience that is shared between taxi drivers and labourers is a strong sense of alienation. While competition among taxi drivers differs from competition among wage labourers the basic element of worker alienation remains. Drivers compete directly with one another for all their earnings while they are physically separated from one another in their vehicles. The use of "closed-radio" systems and I.D. numbers have further served to distance the communication among drivers and between the drivers and the dispatcher.<sup>218</sup> It is not difficult to understand how taxi drivers have come to be strongly associated with the image independent operator.

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<sup>218</sup>For a discussion of the alienation of the drivers within the Halifax industry see Kimberly Berry, "The Last Cowboy: The Community and Culture of Halifax Taxi Drivers," unpublished honours thesis Dalhousie University 1995, 71-86.

While Sharon Lantz exemplifies the paradox of independence and cooperation that characterize the work culture of Halifax taxi drivers her experience also serves to demonstrate that these issues are not clearly gender bound. However, there is a clearly gendered aspect to the experience of class among Halifax taxi drivers. The work-culture of taxi drivers is based firmly on the image of the masculine working-class culture.

The discourse surrounding nineteenth century working class masculinity and that used to describe taxi drivers is not dissimilar. One commentator describes the clientele of Joe Beef's Canteen, a haven for Montreal's poor and working-class during the late nineteenth century, as "unkempt, unshaven, fierce-looking specimens of humanity."<sup>219</sup> In his book, *The New York Cab Driver and His Fare*, Charles Vidich describes the taxi driver as "a crook", "a dock rat", and a "common whore."<sup>220</sup> Similarly, the industry's regulations regarding hair length, facial hair, and grooming indicate that authorities feel it necessary to regulate the appearance of the drivers. The rules in one broker's office include all measures of hair length and facial hair for men.

hair length ... can't be below the collar, men can't have sideburns below the ears, [men are also] not allowed [to have] a beard. They are allowed to have a moustache as long as it doesn't

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<sup>219</sup>Palmer, *Working Class Experience* 2nd. ed. 102.

<sup>220</sup>Charles Vidich, *The New York Cab Driver and His Fare* (Cambridge: Schenkman Publishing Company, 1976) 1-8.

go below the bottom of the lip. [They also] can't grow it down [past the bottom lip] or up [to create a handlebar moustache].<sup>221</sup>

The presence and enforcement of these regulations indicates that many drivers do not adhere to these particular standard of dress. This is not, of course, true of all drivers. Some drivers not only adhere to these grooming codes, but defend the regulations as a beneficial and necessary control.

If somebody gets in your taxi and you got your shorts on up to here, no socks on, you [have] bare feet and your balls hanging out, that looks nice now doesn't it?<sup>222</sup>

Not unlike Patrick Sherlock's observations of masculinity on the community college campus there is a strong notion that taxi drivers are distinguishable by their appearance. In his study "Experiences of Masculinity on a Community College Campus" Patrick Sherlock suggest that trade students are identifiable by their appearance.

Coveralls and work boots are the uniform of most trades, The tongue of the boots is usually sticking out ... [and the] students still tend to be big and powerful. It would not be unrealistic to line up all the students in the college and guess their class based on size and dress.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 22 February 1995.

<sup>222</sup>Interview with Patrick Mason [pseudonym], Halifax taxi driver, 7 March 1995.

<sup>223</sup>Patrick Sherlock, "Experiences of Masculinity on a Community College Campus," unpublished Masters thesis Mount St. Vincent 1994, 14.

All of these descriptions have a certain roughness and vulgarity in common that is often associated with working-class masculinity. Despite freedom from a wage relationship, the taxi driver remains tied to images of the unkempt, unshaven worker likely to expose the full extent of his manliness if his pants are too short.

Just as the male driver maintains a strong association with images of working-class masculinity, the woman driver is generally not associated with working-class feminine culture. As noted earlier, Pamela Sugiman found that women auto factory workers:

clung to highly conventional feminine images [and] during the Second World War the women's departments in the auto plants reflected a traditional feminine culture.<sup>224</sup>

The class identity of the taxi driver is difficult to categorize. Taxi drivers do not fit into the traditional orthodox marxist definition of working-class because of the absence of the wage relationship, and the degree of control and independence enjoyed by the taxi driver. Similarly, the method of remuneration and job control encourage a strong image of the independent, self-employed worker which in turn gives the taxi driver identification with the petit bourgeois or lower middle-class.

However, the taxi driver's popular image as the unkempt, unsavoury, quasi-criminal and the paradox of

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<sup>224</sup>Sugiman, *Labour's Dilemma* 73.

independence that keeps drivers subject to the control of the brokers, licensers, and regulators prevent the experience of a truly petit bourgeois class identity.

Furthermore, the taxi work-culture has a specific gender-class identity that is working-class masculinity. While the issues of remuneration, worker control, and interest articulation are relatively gender neutral, gender identity plays an important role in the expression of a characteristically working-class masculine work-culture. The degree to which women drivers operate within this work-culture identifies the degree to which these women's experience of class is gender bound but not limited by sex. In the case of women taxi drivers their class experience is gendered masculine because of the strong masculine identity of their work-culture.

**They Can Hack It:  
Transcending Stereotypes and Social Constructs**

While regulatory records and oral interviews do not indicate protracted or prolonged conflict surrounding the presence of women taxi drivers in Halifax, it is important to not overstate the integrated nature of gender within this industry. Women drivers have always been aware that their presence and performance is often judged unfavourably by fellow drivers, regulators, passengers, friends, and family. A number of the women interviewed recall the attitudes and the comments encountered as they entered the business.

I said to the person I was going out with, that I should drive cab. Of course these people, a typical man, he said no I don't think you should do that and that [was] all [that] I needed to hear.<sup>225</sup>

Well nobody else thought I was going [to pass the taxi licence exam] ... one of my sons [or] somebody in the house got theirs and they said I'd never make it [be]cause they didn't think I'd make it. And they tried two or three times and I went down and got mine the first time. Come home stick'n my chest out that day.<sup>226</sup>

Well, it's like when you first go into business, I mean it's like, oh yea, she got her own car, wait [un]til she has the first little bit of trouble - right. But I stuck it out.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>225</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 1.

<sup>226</sup>Interview with Annie Reddick-Simmonds, retired Halifax taxi driver, 17 February 1997: 16-17.

<sup>227</sup>Interview with Marilyn (Ginger) Protonentis, Halifax taxi driver, 13 February 1996: 7.

While a considerable number of women drivers in Halifax have joined the ranks of veteran drivers their presence behind the wheel has not lost its novelty for many passengers. At times people have reacted to women taxi drivers as though they were a circus freak show.

I felt like Yogi Bear in Jelly Stone Park, you know. You pull up to a red light and they're going 'look at the woman cab driver.'<sup>228</sup>

Similarly, passengers question women drivers about their working hours, job skills, and personal character. Many of these inquiries are characteristic of either paternalistic or chivalrous attitudes, often expressing concern for the safety of the woman taxi driver.

That [attitude] comes from generation to generation ... even young people that are in their twenties, twenty-five to forty age bracket, you know, I have [heard] comment[s] [like] 'what are you doing out here at this hour of the morning.'<sup>229</sup>

One woman driver recalls that comments from passenger concerned for her safety reached disturbing proportions after the murder of Ronald Henderson in 1986.

Do you remember when ... Ronnie Henderson [was murdered] ... being a female driver was like ... it was like being in a kind of a movie or something. I got so much pressure from the public, there was so much pressure from men and women alike ... that by noontime ... I used to have to come home. I couldn't stand it, I [would have] a

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<sup>228</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 2.

<sup>229</sup>Interview with Mary MacKay, retired Halifax taxi driver, 5 February 1996: 14.

headache [from] grind[ing] my teeth because every woman, every person, that came in the car had something to say about that. 'You shouldn't be out here. It's not safe. You shouldn't drive nights' ... 'Well, what does our husband think about it? ... do you have any kids?' I think if there were a thousand questions on a sheet of paper, they must have asked every one of them.<sup>230</sup>

Other comments that reveal popular notions about the importance of protecting women from physically dangerous or challenging work are frequently encountered. In the course of operating a cab drivers are often called upon to assist their passengers with items like groceries and luggage. However, for women drivers delivering this type of service can reveal passengers' attitudes toward the appropriate behaviour of women.

People take the luggage in for you and they don't think anything of it. And a lot of times I'll say 'I'll take that' especially if it's salty or it's dirty out and my car is full of salt or something [so that the passenger doesn't] lean against the car. [Sometimes they say] 'Well, it's quite heavy' and I say well, I've been driving for a long time, I know it's quite heavy but I'll get it in.<sup>231</sup>

One day when I got a call and the passenger [had groceries] ... when I got out of the car and help him with the groceries he said 'are you a cab driver? ... I expected a big person, a lot bigger than you are.' ... well I try to do my job, I like to help them but they say '[it's] okay, I [will] do it.'<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>230</sup>Interview with Mary MacKay, retired Halifax taxi driver, 5 February 1996: 12.

<sup>231</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 15-16.

<sup>232</sup>Interview with Thu Tran, Halifax taxi driver, 14 February 1997: 4.



While these drivers prefer to conduct their business as taxi drivers without the interference of traditional gender codes that prevent women from lifting heavy luggage, other women drivers prefer to use gender as a guideline for performing certain duties. Reddick-Simmonds has a clear gender code to help her determine whether or not to help passengers with groceries and luggage.

If it is a woman I'd help, if it was a man he's on his own. No way. ... and they took it really good.<sup>233</sup>

Similarly, some male taxi drivers express concern over women drivers having to perform such tasks as changing a tire.

Sharon Lantz remembers that one driver who was particularly adamant about this issue.

I got a flat tire down by the V.G. one day and called for another driver to come get my passenger and [another driver] came along, and by [that] time I got the trunk open, I've got my tire half out of the trunk ... I figure, if I'm gonna drive the car, I better be able to do some of the basic things and he said where's the driver who [took your passengers?], how long ago did your passengers get picked up? and I told him. He said that blankety, blankety, blankety, blank didn't come back to help you change this tire after he took your passengers? There's no need of a woman in this office ever changing a tire ... he gave me almighty, the almighty devil for going to change my own tire. But I had, I've had things like that happen ... that the men ... don't want to let me change a tire.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>233</sup>Interview with Annie Reddick-Simmonds, retired Halifax taxi driver, 17 February 1997: 14.

<sup>234</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 7.

This story is particularly interesting because of the dramatic difference in the attitude of the two men taxi drivers toward their woman colleague. Many drivers would expect that the first driver, merely as a gesture of good will, would return and assist the fellow driver with the flat tire. However, the second driver clearly expresses that in addition to any code of community support, women drivers should not have to perform a task so clearly within the masculine realm. Although traditional notions of gender can create protective or chivalrous attitudes among some, others are unable to take women taxi drivers seriously.

I [have] had three customers ... that would not drive with me because I was a woman. ... One, he was physically [ill] ... I've never seen a man turn white, but he turned white, he was so ill, I had to stop at the Armdale Rotary at Armdale Taxi and let him get into another cab. He apologized and everything ... he said 'you're a good driver, it's just me' ... [I would have been the same thing with] any woman [driver] ... it [didn't] matter [that] I was a taxi driver ... he couldn't drive with a woman. Figure that one out. ... I'd been in [the business] long enough to ... know [that] there [are] assholes ... he wasn't being an asshole, he was truly ... terrified.<sup>235</sup>

On another occasion the same driver had a male passenger who became violent and abusive.

I was taking [the passenger] over to Dartmouth, when we got in the middle of the bridge he [said to me] 'give me one good reason why I shouldn't get my fucking shot gun when you get me home ... and blow your brains out ... all women cab drivers are sluts ... this [was] a really old man ... he was really ranting and raving ... and he was the

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<sup>235</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 4.

old red neck type. ... he just went on and on about if you drove a cab, you were a slut - if you were a woman [cabdriver].<sup>236</sup>

It is interesting to note that the passengers making comments and asking questions are not distinguishable neither by age nor by gender. While many women drivers have encountered the negative response from male passengers toward women, Sharon Lantz contends that women passengers can be the most difficult to deal with.

Middle- [and] upper-class females are your worst enemies because, we [women taxi drivers, are] the personification of all freedom and they're stuck home with their 2.8 children, hubby, two car garage, right.<sup>237</sup>

As an example Lantz offers the story of two women passengers that she refused to serve because of their attitude toward women taxi drivers.

[It was in] March, [and the] NATO fleet [was] in. [It was] just before [the] Misty Moon moved off Gottingen Street. I [came] up there and all that's there was men and two women. I stopped for the women. and the men all were nice ... they made a point of putting the women into the car, right, so that's fine. I got as far as the Ahearn Manor and the one said, 'see Babbs, I told you there was a woman driving cab at night'. And the other one said 'well, I didn't doubt it but you know who would think' and [then] they started this whole question period where I didn't get a chance to [give] any answers. ... the first thing one said, 'well you must be a women's libber'. and before I could answer the question the other said 'well, of course she is', ... and then the other one said,

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<sup>236</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 7-8.

<sup>237</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 21.

'well, you must be, you can't be, she said are you married? No you can't be married. no decent married women would drive a cab at night'. Now Shirley would have ... reached around the seat and smacked [them] across ... the face, right. ... and then it proceeded to 'well, you know what any woman who works at night is, you know, she's nothing but a whore'. That did it. I pulled over to the side of the road. By this time I'm approximately to the corner of Uniacke and Gottingen and I said 'excuse me ... Now you have two choices here, one, you get out or two, you shut your mouth' ... [one of them said] 'You can't put us out' [those were] key words. ... well they got out.<sup>238</sup>

Regardless of who is posing the interrogating questions, or whether or not they are being paternalistic, abusive, or simply frightened at the thought of a woman driver, the women must navigate a course around the misconceptions and stereotypes that they are labelled with. Mary MacKay expresses the frustration that women drivers experience because of the consistent barrage of questions and comments.

And as far as any female driver, which you know we are in the minority, there's been many, many questions and many, many statements made over the years and too Goddamn much flak.<sup>239</sup>

Among the most interesting stereotypes that women taxi drivers encounter is their reputation for being sexually promiscuous. A number of passengers have the perception that, given the right offer, any woman cab driver will gladly render sexual services for hire.

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<sup>238</sup>Interview with Sharon Lantz, Halifax taxi driver, 20 February 1996: 21-23.

<sup>239</sup>Interview with Mary MacKay, retired Halifax taxi driver, 5 February 1996: 13.

On a single incident where a male customer assumed because I was a female taxi driver, that I would be prepared to take money for other services than transportation and I dealt with that very quickly. He was a charge customer and I told him that I would just call his wife.<sup>240</sup>

I had to answer [to a sex for hire proposition] once, ... but I didn't do it ... he said I'll give you the money instead of driving around [looking for a prostitute]. I said, no thanks.<sup>241</sup>

[On one occasion] there [were] three [male passengers], [and] we [found] two girls on the corner, so they're [the passengers are asking to proceed] to the hotel and I'm saying, hey, there's three of them and there's only two girls, but there's three girls in the car. so they're thinking [that I am the third woman prostitute], I said no, I stopped the cab, I said 'excuse me, they need a third girl'. They said no, no, [and] they're looking at me like I'm going up those stairs, I said forget it, I said listen, I drive a cab, I do not solicit, I said tell [them] they need another girl.<sup>242</sup>

More commonly the propositions from passengers do not exclude the element of sex for hire; however, the assumption remains that the woman taxi driver is willing, if not eager, to have sex with her passengers.

You know, women cab drivers are supposed to be easy, I mean there are some that are, they're noted for [it], you know, but I don't happen to be one of them.<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup>Interview with Linda Hyland, Halifax taxi driver, 21 June 1996: 10.

<sup>241</sup>Interview with Sharon Cormier, Halifax taxi driver, 24 January 1996: 8.

<sup>242</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 9.

<sup>243</sup>Interview with Marilyn (Ginger) Protonentis, 13 February 1996: 10.

[I've been propositioned] more so ... back in the earlier days and they'd always bring it across like it was a joke. You know, like, want to come in for a drink? or you know, I'll be here later, come on down and you know, or we're having a party, come on in, you know, it's happened.<sup>244</sup>

[Usually] it's like, do you want to come have a drink with us, carrying on type of thing, but this [one] guy was like 'busy tonight?', Well, to me it's never busy. I've always just come out no matter what ... 'If you're not busy, he named a number, come up to my apartment for awhile and I wasn't hearing, you know, I'm not hearing this right. ... I said disappointment [and] AIDS all in one evening, I don't think I could handle that.'<sup>245</sup>

I say I'm married, so I don't go out with other [men] even if they say just supper or just talk and I say sorry I have to work. One day the man he's not living here, he's living in Ottawa and he [was] here for business and he, I [did not] ask where he came from but he look[ed] like he came from China because he [had] black hair, he asked me.<sup>246</sup>

This perception of the "loose" woman is not limited to the passengers, in fact, many male taxi drivers have been known to promulgate stories of their female colleagues' sexual exploits.

They all think cab drivers are loose. They don't so much today as they did back then. They just figured that women cab drivers are easy targets, not only other cab drivers but the passengers, and they weren't, and the other category was you're a lesbian. It all depends on who's talking. If you

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<sup>244</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 3.

<sup>245</sup>Interview with Marilyn (Ginger) Protonentis, Halifax taxi driver, 13 February 1996: 10.

<sup>246</sup>Interview with Thu Tran, Halifax taxi driver, 14 February 1997: 12-13.

don't go out with the guy, you're a lesbian. If you go out with more than one guy, you're a slut.<sup>247</sup>

Some of the drivers, well they started stories around, they said that I was down, now if you can picture this, in my white Dodge, at the Vocational Centre on Trollope Street there, that's well named, I was in that in the evening, with my rooflight on, it was from the early evening I guess, before it got dark, I was there for two or three hours I guess, I must of tore off - my feet were out the window, I was laid out in the front seat of the car screwing. I couldn't sit in the front seat of the car with a man to screw if I wanted to, and I'm going to do it right there at the Vocational School with my legs out the window. I said, now you can't believe this ... but they spread that stuff around. They said that I screwed everything in sight and then when they figured that I didn't, then they said I was a lesbian, so you go through that stage too. And then as you get older, well, you see, now I'm too old, so then they go to the younger female taxi drivers.<sup>248</sup>

In the case of women taxi drivers, the popular focus on sexuality and promiscuity does not develop in a vacuum. In fact, the image of the automobile has a time honoured connection to images of the sexual female. Scharff discusses the association between the automobile and sexuality. Since the automobile was first introduced as a leisure pursuit of the American upper-class there has been a strong association between the power of driving and sexual prowess. Before women took the wheel themselves, travelling as passengers in their automobiles, they were "sexually

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<sup>247</sup>Interview with Mary Sheppard, Halifax taxi driver, 16 January 1996: 3.

<sup>248</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 11.

suspect" as creatures "vulnerable to the erotic power of the driver".<sup>249</sup>

The American public was titillated and alarmed by the question of what kind of relationship rich women had with their chauffeurs, servants whose sexual power as men (particularly as working-class men) complicated a job that required physical intimacy with leisure-class women.<sup>250</sup>

As the automobile became more accessible to all classes it was often categorized with movies and dance halls as a "triumvirate of hell" for American youth.<sup>251</sup> That people were using the automobile for as a new space for courtship and sex was no secret.

The pleasures of motoring ranged, after all, from a few minutes away from mundane responsibilities, to a stolen kiss away from prying eyes, to the utter abandonment of family and reputation in the name of love or adventure.<sup>252</sup>

Considering this time honoured association between the auto-culture and sexuality, coupled with the working-class image of sexual prowess, the fact that working-class women taxi drivers have been bestowed with an image of sexual excess is neither a coincidence nor a surprise.

There is a considerable difference, however, between the questions and curiosity expressed by so many passengers and the attitude of fellow drivers. While no amount of

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<sup>249</sup>Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 20.

<sup>250</sup>Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 20.

<sup>251</sup>Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 138.

<sup>252</sup>Scharff, *Taking the Wheel* 138.



experience will eliminate the gender-specific comments from passengers, most women drivers find that a degree of acceptance and belonging can be achieved among the other drivers. However, it often takes many years behind the wheel before women drivers graduate from rookie status and take their place among the seasoned veterans of the industry. Women drivers describe the struggle to gain acceptance among their male colleagues.

male cab drivers, ninety percent of them never thought a female was any good for anything anyway, some of those macho [men] ... when I first started ... working in this industry, I always thought or I thought at that time that I had [to] work twice as hard to be half as good, but I don't have that problem with that any more, because I've been out here twice as long as half of the drivers they have at Casino taxi. So I no longer have to ... work twice as hard to prove that I [am] half as good as the men.<sup>253</sup>

When I first started driving cab they said, oh, she'll never last three months, then they said she'll never last six months, and then they [have] come up, after a few years, and told me this, but it was only after I was in a few years that I got to be, sort of, one of the boys, this was after about ten years ... I only got accepted as a taxi driver by some of them after I'd been in for about twenty years. It's like when you move to a neighbourhood, especially an ethnic neighbourhood, they'll never consider you one of them until you've lived there sometimes all your life ... it's the same thing in the taxi industry.<sup>254</sup>

Again, it is important to recognize that to "be one of the

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<sup>253</sup>Interview with Mary MacKay, retired Halifax taxi driver, 5 February 1996: 14.

<sup>254</sup>Interview with Shirley Comeau, Halifax taxi driver, 23 October 1995: 34.

boys" is crucial to being accepted as a taxi driver, rather than just someone who drives a taxi.

Women have made remarkable inroads in a number of traditionally male dominated occupations. The results of these inroads are often the topic of interest and debate as scholars question how the presence of women has changed the arenas they have entered. In the case of women taxi drivers, the presence of women drivers has not necessarily reshaped the industry in a gender specific manner; however, the ability of women taxi drivers to stake a claim within the masculine occupational-culture of taxi drivers prompts questions about how the taxi arena changes popular concepts of gender identity and experience.

The presence of veteran women drivers in the taxi industry illustrates that women can undoubtedly survive within an industry that is characterized by its image of rough and ready, street-smart men. Furthermore, the prominence of women such as Shirley Comeau, Sharon Lantz, and Linda Hyland in the initiation and organization of the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society indicates that women drivers constitute a powerful presence within the taxi community. Women drivers have become leaders in the effort to represent drivers with a united voice.

Despite their ability to adapt to their work environment and the work-culture there are clearly some conflicts between the image of the feminine woman and the

able taxi driver. The patriarchal attitudes of both passengers and fellow drivers frequently leave women drivers labelled as either vulnerable women, victims in a dangerous and unfriendly workplace or as morally corrupt, promiscuous vamps. While many women drivers struggle against the tides of traditional gender codes some operate within them even as they ply their trade as public chauffeurs.

In most cases, however, these conflicts are more paradoxical than real. As a social construct, the notion of gender relies on codes of conduct, social discourse, and the construction of the "Other". Similarly, as a social construct, the masculine culture of the taxi industry can be and is adopted by women drivers. Meeting the demands of masculine ideals of independence, bravery, and camaraderie, women drivers are able to negotiate a place within the taxi culture, often identifying themselves first as taxi drivers and then, as women. Essentialist theories of gender experience that view masculine and feminine as mutually exclusive and biologically determined understate the complex, textured nature of gender culture and ignore the ability of individuals to negotiate their way into, and adapt within these cultures.

### Bibliographical Description of Sources

Despite the challenge of obtaining both secondary and primary material relating directly to the work, and gender experience of women taxi drivers in Halifax there is an abundance of material that if taken together, provides a wealth of information on, and insight into the occupational experience of women taxi drivers.

The initial search of relevant material began with a survey of the secondary sources that deal directly with the taxi industry and taxi drivers. The majority of these studies are American sociological studies focusing on occupational behaviour and adjustment of taxi drivers. A number of these studies are based on data gathered through participant observation and few of them even passively deal with the issue of gender in the taxi industry. Described more fully in chapter one, the unpublished scholarly studies of the taxi industry in American cities include: **James Henslin's "The Cabdriver: An Interactional Analysis of a Occupational Culture" Washington University 1967; Charles Morris's "Some Characteristics of Occupational Choice and Adjustment in a Sample of New York City Taxi Drivers" Columbia University 1951; Richard Schlosberg's "A Descriptive Analysis of the New York City Taxi Industry" Hunter College 1975; and Schlosberg's "Taxi Driving A Study of Occupational Tension" The City University of New York 1980.** While none of these studies deal with the issue of gender they represent the collection of scholarly research on the taxi industry and include one of the most prolific authors on the taxi industry, James Henslin. Despite the absence of any published material on the industry, it is Schlosberg's work that deserves the most attention. The evolution of his understanding of the industry as a class experience can be seen in his doctoral dissertation.

In addition to the survey of these studies of taxi drivers an in depth examination of a number of primary sources was conducted. Among the most accessible primary sources are the municipal records which include the **Halifax City Council Minutes**, the **Taxi Commission Minutes**, the **Taxi Commission Files** and the manual for the **City of Halifax Drivers Education Course**. These records document the actions and activities of the regulatory bodies of the taxi industry. More than any other source material, municipal records offer the invaluable documentation of the chronology of changes in legislation. As a chronological record municipal documents also serve as a valuable indicator of historical experience and conflict. The records document a number of initiatives of drivers in their attempts to shape their industry and exercise greater control over their work experience. Similarly, documentation of driver initiatives

and the debate between drivers and regulators act as a valuable indicator of where the greatest areas of conflict lie. However, it is important to note that all of these are records generated by, and for, the regulatory bodies and as such they do not represent the voice of the drivers in the same sense as documents produced by and for the drivers. Similarly, documents such as **Yellow Cab Limited - Rules and Regulations** offer useful insight into the drivers work environment and labour relations with the brokage office; however, again this document reveals the interests and concerns of the brokers rather than the drivers.

Primary source documents such as the **Memorandum of Association of Halifax Taxi Bureau Society**, and the **Nova Scotia Taxi Union Constitution and By-Laws** represent the voice of the taxi drivers. Particularly useful to this project, as a primary source that is greatly influenced by the contribution of women taxi drivers, is the newsletter of the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society, the **Rooflight**. Although the collection held at the Public Archives of Nova Scotia is incomplete it includes fifty- one consecutive issues from August 1983 to November 1994. In addition to this varied collection of primary source material the thesis also relies heavily on the information gathered in oral interviews with a number of taxi drivers. A detailed description of the interview groups and the informants is found later in this chapter.

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### **Newspapers, Newsletters, and Magazines**

Indicative of the masculine tradition of taxi driving internationally, the mere presence of a woman taxi driver in any city has often been considered news. Most newspaper and magazine reports concerning women taxi drivers present the drivers as a novelty; however, a minority of publications including *Kinesis* have recognized some of the complexities of gender and class within the contested workplace.

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"Cabbies need English tests: taxi chairman." *Daily News*. 15 Dec. 1991: 3.

"Cabbies prime targets of crime." *Mail Star*. 6 Dec. 1996: A13.

"Cab Firm Fires Women Drivers." *Winnipeg Tribune*. 27 Aug. 1958: 1.

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"Women Can Hack It." *Free China Review*. June 1988: 12-14.

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## Interviews

This thesis draws upon the information collected in two separate sets of oral interviews. The informants from **group one** were interviewed in 1995 for an earlier research project. Although the first set of interviews were conducted for a different project some of the same information has been used in this study. The informants in **group two** were interviewed as part of the research conducted specifically for this project. Therefore their interviews are considerably more relevant to this study. The interviews for the second group were conducted at various times from the fall of 1995 until the spring of 1997.

In addition to the time difference between these two groups of informants, there is also a considerable difference in the composition of the two groups. Group one consists predominantly of men and includes a number of individuals who represent the taxi offices and the regulatory body of the Taxi Commission. Group two, consistent with the focus on women taxi drivers, consists mainly of women taxi drivers. However, the informants come from a variety of diverse occupational experiences within the taxi industry. Ruth Doleman operated a taxi service with her husband in the town of Lockport, Nova Scotia. In a work environment that is markedly different from most of the Halifax taxi drivers, Doleman's passengers were screened by her husband, and she never needed to be concerned with the maintenance and repair of the vehicles, because her husband also saw to that. Similarly, Cheryl Weeks, who operates a taxi/limousine service with two friends, relies almost exclusively on prebooked calls from regular clients travelling to and from the airport. Neither Doleman nor Weeks work with the same degree of risk or uncertainty that is characteristic of the Halifax taxi industry.

### Group one:

Bacardax, Lorne, interviewed by telephone, Halifax, February 1995. Bacardax is the manager of Yellow Cab and the brief interview that was conducted pertained exclusively to the business history of Yellow Cab. Bacardax had collected information regarding the incorporation of the taxi company and the number of company owned cars in operation at the time. Bacardax is not a taxi driver, nor was he interviewed regarding his relationship to taxi drivers as an office manager. It was the understanding of the author that Bacardax



was not willing to be interviewed regarding his relationship with taxi drivers or the taxi office.

Chisholm, Bruce, interviewed at Dalhousie University, Halifax, 11 April 1995. Chisholm began driving taxi when he was 19 years old. At the time of the interview in 1995 he was 43 and driving for 24 years. Chisholm has driven for both Dartmouth and Halifax taxi companies and has in recent years become more active in the United Cab Drivers' Association and as an independent driver activist.

Clark, Percy, interviewed at his home in Halifax, 28 February 1995. Clark began driving in 1934 and had been retired for a couple of years when he was interviewed in 1995. Forced into retirement because of health reasons Clark's work experience included the driving during World War II and encompassed approximately sixty years experience.

Gillis, Robert, interviewed by telephone, Halifax, 11 March 1995. Gillis was the son of J.W. Gillis, a previous owner of Yellow Cab. Although Gillis never drove taxi he was familiar with some the business history of the company and spoke of the some the problems with maintaining company cars.

Herritt, Philip, interviewed by telephone, Halifax 29 March 1995. Herritt, a retired taxi driver and ex-office manager was interviewed regarding office practices, such as the maintenance of call sheets and the installation of the current radio equipment.

Hiltz, Charlie, interviewed at Fairview Villa, Halifax, 7 March 1995. Hiltz, a retired taxi driver was a resident at the Fairview Villa nursing home. Like Clark, Hiltz's taxi experience includes the wartime period, and witnessed a number of changes in the industry.

MacInnes, David "Darky", interviewed at his home in Halifax, 11 March 1995. MacInnes began driving taxi in Halifax in 1941 after being examined and turned down for military service. At the time of the interview MacInnes was not driving taxi because of illness. However, MacInnes was able to return to driving cab for a brief time before he recently passed away. Like Clark, MacInnes's taxi experience includes driving with the Wartime Taxi Association during the Second World War. Both Clark and MacInnes witnessed significant changes in the evolution of industry and although few

in numbers both recall the presence of women drivers from the beginning of their careers.

Mason, Patrick (pseudonym), taxi driver, Halifax, March 7, 1995. Mason was present at an interview with another driver, and although s/he was willing to share some of her/his experience as a driver s/he did not wish to be identified.

"Muscles", interviewed at Tim Horton's on Young Street, Halifax, March 11, 1995. The informant has requested to be identified only by his nick-name, "Muscles". Muscles began driving taxi in Dartmouth in November 1979. After driving in Halifax for some time Muscles began dispatching part-time in 1986 and stopped driving completely in February 1990. Muscles continues to work as a dispatcher, although he has never returned to driving cab.

O'Toole, Matthew, interviewed in Fairview Villa, Halifax, 11 April 1995. At the time of the interview, O'Toole was a resident at Fairview Villa and has been retired for some time. Like Clark and Hiltz, O'Toole's taxi experience includes operating a taxi in wartime Halifax.

Robb, Gordon, interviewed in his home in Cole Harbour, 6 March 1995. Robb began driving taxi in August of 1969 and was among the original four founders of Union Taxi in the 1970's but eventually left the taxi business to drive a bus.

Roome, Ramsey, interviewed in his home in Timberlea, Nova Scotia, 8 March 1995. Roome is a retired salesman for Isnor Motors. Although he never worked directly in the taxi industry he is familiar with some of the history of Isnor Motors including a livery and taxi service.

Schneider, Jack interviewed in his home in Halifax, 11 March 1995. Schneider began driving taxi in 1954.

Sheppard, Mary, interviewed at Tim Horton's in Clayton Park 22 February 1995. Born in 1947 Sheppard began driving taxi in 1968. Not particularly active in any of the driver organizations, Sheppard has among the most experienced women taxi drivers in Halifax with almost thirty years behind the wheel.

Surette, Basil, interviewed at Tim Horton's in Clayton Park 22 February 1995. Surette began driving in 1964 stopped driving taxi in 1988. In addition to almost twenty five years experience behind the wheel, Surette also has extensive experience as a dispatcher.

Thompson, Leon, interviewed in his home in Halifax 7 March 1995. Thompson began driving cab in the 1960's renting a car until 1969 when he put his own car in the business.

Westall, Noel, interviewed in his home in Halifax, 13 March 1995. After his service in the military during World War II, Westall became a police officer with the Halifax Police Department. During the 1970's Westall served as a member of the Taxi Commission.

White, Les, interviewed by telephone, Halifax, 10 March 1995. White is a previous owner of Airport Transfer and Yellow Cab and the interview related specifically to the business history of Yellow Cab and Airport Transfer. Like Bacardax and Gillis, White has never driven a taxi.

#### **Group two**

Awalt, Debbie, interviewed in Tim Horton's on Joseph Howe Drive, Halifax, 19 November 1996. Born in 1952 Awalt lived in both Halifax and Dartmouth while growing up and left Halifax to go to Europe after she completed grade twelve. Awalt returned to Halifax ten years later and worked at a number of different jobs in restaurants and retail stores. In 1985 Awalt wanted to make some extra money so she began driving her partner's taxi part-time when he wasn't working. After five years driving part-time Awalt stopped driving taxi; however, her partner remains in the business. Never owning her own car or renting from a fleet owner or other driver Awalt's experience in the business was very closely connected to her relationship with her partner. As a part-time driver Awalt's place in the taxi community is also markedly different from many of the other informants.

Comeau, Shirley, interviewed in her home in Halifax 23 October 1995. Comeau began driving taxi in May 1973. Also forced to stop driving because of medical reasons, Comeau was only retired for a few months when she died 2 November 1995, approximately ten days after she was interviewed. In addition to 22 years experience Comeau is among the most active members of the Halifax Taxi

Bureau Society and was widely recognized in the taxi industry as a veteran driver and industry activist.

Cormier, Sharon, interviewed at Tim Horton's on Young Street, Halifax, 24 January 1996. Born in 1948 Cormier began driving when she was 27 years old in 1975. Cormier had returned to driving two weeks before the interview after suffering a stroke in February 1994.

Doleman, Ruth, interviewed in her home in Dartmouth, 11 March 1996. Born in Victoria, British Columbia in 1920 Doleman came to Lockeport, Nova Scotia as a child with her family. Married in 1941, Doleman and her husband opened a general store in Lockeport and later established a small taxi service in the mid 1950's. The taxi service often transported the captains and crew of fishing ships. Many crew members who landed in Lockeport needed to return to their homes in other communities such as Lunenburg and Canso. Doleman's husband also offered an inexpensive taxi service to Halifax one day a week. Doleman drove a second taxi in the Lockeport/Halifax service when there was sufficient demand. However, she did not become involved in transporting the crew members from the fishing ships. After her husband suffered a stroke in 1976 Doleman assumed most of the driving until they sold the store and the taxi service in 1977 or 1978.

Hyland, Linda, interviewed at Tim Horton's Quinpool Road, Halifax, 21 June 1996. Born in 1950 Hyland became acquainted with a number of taxi drivers while working as a waiter and began driving taxi as an alternative to working in the food and beverage industry. When Hyland entered the business in 1981 she bought her own car and soon became involved as an executive member of the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society.

Lantz, Sharon, interviewed at Robin's Doughnuts on North Street, Halifax, 20 February 1996. Born in 1949 Lantz began driving taxi in the early 1970's. Although Lantz does not recall the exact year that she began driving taxi at the time of the interview she had been driving for approximately 24 years. Along with Comeau, and Hyland Lantz was among the first and most active members of the Halifax Taxi Bureau Society. Lantz continues to be recognized as a vocal activist for the industry and drivers.

Lewis, Frank, interviewed at Tim Horton's on Green Street, Halifax, 13 February 1997. Born in Trinidad in 1949, Lewis came to Halifax in 1975. Trained as a stone

mason Lewis worked for National Sea Products for a number of years before he began driving a taxi in Halifax with Maple Leaf Olympic during the late 1970' or early 1980's. After two years of persistent effort, Lewis received a radio from Casino taxi in 1996. Lewis is one of two black drivers interviewed in this study and one of four drivers who have immigrated to Canada.

MacKay, Mary, interviewed in her home in Dartmouth, 5 February 1996. Born in River Bourgeois, Richmond County, Cape Breton in 1939 MacKay came to Halifax after finishing grade 10 in 1955. MacKay and her second husband were both driving taxi when they bought Sackville Taxi from Donnie Pye in 1974. MacKay and her husband had to close the office shortly after the take over when their contracted dispatch service raised their fees over three hundred percent without warning. MacKay then began work with Diamond Taxi until she moved to Dartmouth and began to work with Casino Taxi in Halifax in 1976. With the exception of a brief seven month period when MacKay stopped driving and went back to work as a waiter she worked with Casino Taxi until she and her current partner retired from driving taxi on 20 January 1996.

Markie, Jim, interviewed at his home in Millbrook, Nova Scotia, 20 August 1996. Born in Sheet Harbour in 1942 Markie left Nova Scotia for Ontario, while in his early twenties. While in Ontario Markie worked in a number of different factories producing a number of different products including urethane, plastics, and fire hydrants. When Markie returned to Nova Scotia in 1991 he began driving taxi for Layton's in Truro. After some time working with the brokerage office Markie tried to operate independently. At the time of the interview Markie was also working as a medical driver serving the Millbrook community. Markie is the only Mi'kmaq driver interviewed in this project. Attempts were made to interview two Mi'kmaq drivers in Halifax; however, Bernadette Prosper declined to give an interview and Noel Sillaboy was unable to give an interview due to illness.

Pictou, Phillipa, interviewed at the office of Tawaak Housing Association, Halifax, 7 November 1996. Although Pictou has no direct connection to the taxi industry in Halifax she works closely with the Native community in the metro area. I was particularly interested in better understanding the demographics of the urban Native community in an effort to appreciate the absence of more native women taxi drivers in Halifax.

Protonentis, Marilyn "Ginger", Halifax taxi driver, 13 February 1996. Born in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia in 1948 Protonentis left home at age fourteen and was married to her first husband when she was sixteen. Although Protonentis's second husband drove a taxi in Halifax, she did not enter the business until after her third marriage ended and she had returned to Halifax, with her daughter, in 1983. Protonentis was already acquainted with other drivers, such as Sharon Cormier, when she began driving taxi in 1988.

Protos, Louis, interviewed at his home in Long Island, New York, 31 August 1996. Protos emigrated from Greece with his family in 1953, when he was ten years old. In 1964 Protos began driving taxi part-time while he also worked for his father in his restaurant, later he worked as a full-time taxi driver with his own car and stopped driving in 1973. Although not in the business as long as some of the other informants, Protos was an active member of the earlier Halifax Taxi Association.

Reddick-Simmonds, Annie, interviewed in her home in Halifax, 17 February 1997. Born in Truro, Nova Scotia in 1928, Reddick-Simmonds came to Halifax in 1953. Reddick-Simmonds first job in Halifax was as an assistant cook at the Nova Scotia Home for Coloured Children. It was not until the early 1970's that Reddick-Simmonds began driving a taxi in Halifax. Although not categorized as a traditional "part-time" driver, Reddick-Simmonds also worked in the kitchen at Windsor Park during the time she drove taxi. Reddick-Simmonds stopped driving taxi in 1980 after suffering a heart attack. Despite lacking the years of experience that some other women drivers have, Reddick-Simmonds experience is invaluable. She is one of only two black women taxi drivers that have been identified in Halifax. The other, Debbie Dixon, died before this study commenced.

Sheppard, Mary, interviewed at her home in Lower Sackville 16 January 1996. Born in 1947 Sheppard began driving taxi in 1968. Not particularly active in any of the driver organizations, Sheppard has among the most experienced women taxi drivers in Halifax with almost thirty years behind the wheel.

Smith, Gary, was interviewed at his studio on Quinpool Road, Halifax, 7 March 1996. Before Smith opened his photography studio he became acquainted with a number of the taxi drivers in Halifax; however, Smith was interviewed regarding his contact with taxi drivers as a photographer. All Halifax taxi drivers require passport photos for the annual licence renewal.

Smith's studio is among a number of studios that perform this service for the drivers; therefore, Smith has the opportunity to become acquainted with a number of drivers and has a good sense of the diversity and demographics of the industry.

Tran, Thu, interviewed in Tim Horton's on Green Street, Halifax 14 February 1997. Born in 1957 in Vietnam, Tran immigrated to Canada with her husband and three children in November 1979. Tran and her husband both worked on the production line at National Sea Products the plant closed in the 1980's. Tran began driving taxi in 1989, four years after her husband began driving. Compared to veteran drivers such as Sheppard, Comeau, and Lantz, Tran is relatively new to the taxi industry.

Weeks, Cheryl, interviewed in Tim Horton's on Quinpool Road, Halifax, 13 August 1996. Born in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia in 1945 Weeks trained as a medical records librarian at the Infirmary Hospital in Halifax. After four years out of the work force to work at home caring for her children Weeks began re-training in business courses and accounting. However, in the fall of 1989 Weeks began driving taxi when her best friend and her husband entered the taxi business servicing the airport and Halifax County. Weeks and her two friends now operate First Choice Cab and Limousine Service. Unlike the majority of the women drivers in Halifax, Weeks operates almost exclusively on advanced booking and airport service, her clientele consists largely of repeat customers.

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