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# “Hey Cabbie! Where are you From?” An Examination of Everyday Racism in Toronto’s Taxi Industry

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**“HEY CABBIE! WHERE ARE YOU FROM?” AN EXAMINATION OF EVERYDAY  
RACISM IN TORONTO’S TAXI INDUSTRY**

By

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A Major Research Paper  
presented to Ryerson University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in the Program of  
Immigration and Settlement Studies

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2008

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# **“HEY CABBIE! WHERE ARE YOU FROM?” AN EXAMINATION OF EVERYDAY RACISM IN TORONTO’S TAXI INDUSTRY**

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Master of Arts  
Immigration and Settlement Studies  
Ryerson University

## **ABSTRACT**

Using an anti-racist Marxist lens, issues of social exclusion and settlement are broadly highlighted taking into account racism in an industry that is most commonly noted for its ease of entry for immigrant professionals. This study attempts to build on previous studies of Toronto’s taxi industry (Hathiyani, 2006; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008) to focus specifically on racism. This research paper examines the extent to which ‘everyday racism’ is both a by-product of and a critical ingredient in perpetuating structural racism, using Toronto’s taxi industry as a case study. Drawing on interviews from 18 fulltime taxi drivers who identified as racialized groups and were born outside of Canada, it describes the familiar tensions associated with experiencing and responding to instances of racism in a precarious industry. In the absence of an association, anti-discrimination or workplace rights to protect the driver against racial abuse and harassment, drivers are forced to negotiate their responses on an individualized basis. Drivers linked everyday racism to both class position and structural racism within the industry. These findings strongly demonstrated inadequate policies to protect drivers from everyday racism in the workplace as a result of both structural racism and a neo-liberal climate. This warrants further inquiry as Toronto’s taxi industry is a major employer of racialized, immigrant men.

Key words: racism, immigrants, precarious work, Toronto

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# Chapter 1

## *Introduction*

One of the most difficult issues of long term settlement has been labour market integration. This has been much of the focus of recent critiques of the Points System and immigration policies in Canada as the selection criteria used to gain entrance is often insufficient to gain appropriate employment (Hathiyani, 2006; Reitz, 2007). As a result of the difficulty finding appropriate employment, many immigrants make a living working in another industry or profession. Often those who have difficulty finding employment in their field earn a living working in more vulnerable industries in the interim. Some immigrants find themselves working in this new industry for extended periods of time as a result of their skills being under-recognized and under-utilized. It is not uncommon to see a new immigrant who worked as an engineer, doctor, or researcher etc, end up underemployed as a taxi driver, factory worker, etc. Hathiyani (2006) explains that jobs such as driving a taxi are often seen as a last resort for earning a living. However, it is their ease of entry into this industry is why it is made up predominantly of recent immigrants.

For many immigrants ease of entry into vulnerable industries is a result of layered discrimination. Discrimination refers to the many acts and practices toward members of a specific group that create disadvantage on the basis of completely unsubstantiated assumptions about the group's shared physical and cultural features (Galabuzi, 2006). Discrimination tends to occur as a result of initiatives favouring those within the dominant category, typically those are Caucasian and who are from European source countries, which may purposely or

inadvertently create barriers to labour market integration for some. This usually happens in the labour market as employers favour domestic education and work experience (Liu, 2006; Reitz, 2007). Many of those who have settled in Canada are from non-European source countries and have to contend with the intersection of racism as a barrier to labour market integration. Racism is described as a system in which one group of people exercises power over another group or others on the basis of socially constructed distinctions of physical attributes (Galabuzi, 2006). Often times, racism or perceived racism has played a role as a barrier to employment for immigrant professionals to find employment in their profession in Canada (Hathiyani, 2006). Therefore, both within and across industries, structural racism within the labour market can serve to prevent those subject to it- from gaining access to their profession and it can also serve to keep them in a position that still privileges the dominant race.

The process of racialization involves the delineation of group boundaries and identities by reference to physical and/or genetic criteria or by reference to race (Satzewich, 1998). It assigns individuals different positions in a hierarchy. Racialized groups, for the purpose of this research, will be defined as individuals whose social identity is devalued in the context of the dominant culture (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003). As a result of this process of racialization, which will be discussed in depth in a subsequent section, diversity in the workplace can serve to create and maintain social hierarchies within an industry. Social hierarchies determine which group has political, economic, and socio-cultural power within an organization or industry. Social hierarchies occur when the instigators' pursuit of social power is enabled, through an organization's implicit or explicit support for discrimination, as indicated through poor enforcement or absence of non-discrimination policy or racist norms within the industry (Cortina, 2008). Thus, the implications of structural racism can be revealed in the

working conditions in the industry or, more specifically, the working environment's approach to everyday racism.

Everyday racism is both a by-product and a critical ingredient which perpetuates structural racism. Although everyday racism and structural racism are distinct, everyday racist acts are only possible because of the structures that enable them. Scholars have analyzed the role of racism and discrimination in the workplace. There is a growing priority for employers to recognize inequities that occur as a result of racism or discrimination and develop anti-oppressive policies within the organization. However, some industries benefit from the social hierarchies that occur in the absence of anti-oppressive policies. As a result, social hierarchies that favour the dominant group and those in positions of power often get perpetuated through racialized communication (Deitch et al, 2003).

In order to understand the significance of everyday racism and its relationship to structural racism, in the process of labour market integration of racialized immigrants, this primary research will engage specifically with the taxi industry in Toronto. The taxi industry in Toronto is a major employer of racialized, specifically immigrant men. It also is perceived to be an industry which individuals enter in the interim while job searching or because they have been unable to secure employment in their profession in Toronto (Hathiyani, 2006). There is a growing amount of literature on the marginalization experienced by taxi drivers in urban cities, such as New York City and Toronto. In the taxi industries in both New York City and in Toronto, the majority of taxi drivers self identify as an immigrant and consider themselves to be part of a racialized group (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Hathiyani, 2007). As there are many parallels in the taxi industry in New York City and in Toronto, I will be use the existing research from New York City to provide a more

comprehensive understanding of racism in this industry in Toronto. In both of these urban centres, the industry is comprised predominantly of immigrants from non-European origins who have chosen self employment as drivers. Also, the taxi industry in both urban centres has experienced deregulation which has been exacerbated by neoliberalism. This research has implications for understanding how political mobilization and municipal government involvement could assist in mediating the vulnerability of drivers to instances of everyday racism.

Thus, my main question is in what ways does racism impact the working conditions of taxi drivers? Related to this question: what forms of resistance occur? The intent of this research is to use the Toronto taxi industry as a case study to understand the intersection of neoliberalism and racism in making possible precarious forms of work. I argue that everyday racism, through communication in the taxi industry, serves to perpetuate social hierarchies within this industry and has been exacerbated through changing regimes of workplace governance. These questions are important in terms of policy and practice as the taxi industry in Toronto is a large employer of immigrant men of non-European background.

In the following chapters I begin with a description of the structure of the Toronto taxi industry in order to set the context and then go on to survey the literature as it relates to neoliberalism and precarious work, drawing in some detail on literature on the taxi industry in New York. Following this, I outline the theoretical framework of the paper in terms of the relationship of everyday and structural racism, the intersection of race and class, and resistance, using an instrumental Marxist approach to link these; and describe the methodology used for this study. The final chapters discuss the research findings and the conclusions of the study.

## Chapter 2

### Setting the Context

#### *The Toronto Taxi Industry: History and Major Players*

In order to understand how racialized communication may serve to perpetuate marginalization and reaffirm social hierarchies, it is important to lay out the historical context. The historical context of the industry allows the reader to understand the changes within the industry itself which has enabled the existence of structural racism. Essentially, the taxi industry in Toronto has changed the manner of distribution of capital. It has been re-regulated in a manner that has made the certain sectors of the industry more precarious and put drivers most categories of drivers at an economic and social disadvantage. This disadvantage has influenced how the drivers perceive themselves within the industry and how they are able to respond to the deteriorating working conditions. This is especially relevant in light of the changing composition of the drivers within the taxi industry and the capacity to respond to instances of racist communication when they experience this from a position of economic and social disadvantage.

The taxi industry in Toronto has had two significant changes in its history that have had a major impact on the industry on the distribution of capital within the industry. The first was in 1963, when the Metro Licensing Commission (MLC) allowed licenses to be sold on the open market (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). It was the logic of the license as a commodity: the ability to sell the license on the open market transformed it into a capital asset, with a value created by a supply controlled by the Commission. The second change, occurred in 1974, when the commission legalized long-term leasing, this was done with the perception that for many drivers this would be a cheaper alternative to daily renting of taxis, and would allow them to

achieve the status of entrepreneur rather than driver/employee (Abraham, Sundar, Whitmore, 2008). Combined, these changes had the effect of making the ownership of the plate an investment opportunity.

Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore (2008) explained that the increased price of ownership of a plate was beyond the reach of an average driver and thus there was an increase of speculative or absentee owners/buyers. At one point, ten families and individuals owned more than 300 of Toronto's plates (Abraham, Sundar, Whitmore, 2008). In this case, leasing was brought into effect as a way of providing drivers with industry security and a route to entrepreneurial capital. However, driver acceptance of this structure has the effect of producing greater gaps in social hierarchies, whereby owners benefited economically and drivers were at economic risk in the industry. Taxi drivers, as independent contractors, under the guise of self employment, allowed flexibility in the industry to owners who were leasing out their vehicles and/or permits, to by pass the associated employee benefits and protection (Arum, 2004). It is this level of flexibility which has ultimately both contributed to and reinforces the vulnerability of drivers in this industry.

One of the initiatives that attempted to increase the flexibility and capacity of drivers to assume a position as owner/operator is the Ambassador Class plate / license. As an initiative designed to decrease the exploitative nature of leasing in the industry in Toronto, the Ambassador program was enacted in 1998. The program was based on a recommendation of the Toronto Task Force to Review the Taxi Industry aimed at reducing the monopoly of the leasing system through creating a parallel and steadily increasing class of owner-operator drivers (Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore, 2008). However, due to the regulations enacted by the city to exert control on the profit exercised, as standard plates had become a commodity, these

Ambassador plates could only be driven by the plate holder and neither leased nor transferred, and were to be returned to the City at the time of the owner's retirement or death (Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore, 2008). Drivers also were required to undergo training and were subject to strict quality standards.

The main issue with the Ambassador Class plates was that it did not change the capital associated with owning a standard plate as intended and has created a situation of disadvantage for Ambassador plate owners. The standard plates continued to exist and be leased, which created a two-tier system. This was because, although no new standard plates were issued, they could be sold or transferred individually to those with a Toronto taxi license or purchased by companies who own a number of plates. According to data from the City, as of October 2006, there were 3480 Standard Taxicab Owner Licenses, 1403 Ambassador Taxicab Owner Licenses, and 85 Accessible Taxicab Owner Licenses (Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore, 2008). This has essentially caused a crowding of the market, and with the introduction of Ambassador plates, while the standard plates were still in circulation, has created a two-tier system of ownership in the industry. This was an example of how re-regulation within Toronto's taxi industry has served to increase the economic vulnerability of drivers, with the intent to increase the flexibility of ownership.

The Ambassador program has also had the outcome of further fracturing the industry, so that each category of driver – Standard plate owner-operator, Ambassador plate owner-operator, lease driver, and shift driver- has somewhat different interests and conditions of work, making it harder to work out a common organizational platform.

### *Economic vulnerability of drivers as independent contractors*

Presently, all taxi drivers in Toronto have high fixed expenses which they are required to pay prior to earning their own income. Therefore, within this hierarchy of driver types there are two consequences that may impact all four types of drivers to a different extent: one, driver income is low, and two, drivers are at a high risk of losing money (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). Ambassador drivers, as they are in business for themselves, bear the full risk of loss in the operation of the taxi as they have to pay all the cost without the ability to take on another driver. Lease drivers are more economically dependent and have less power within the social hierarchy of the taxi industry as they risk losing the right to drive because they do not own the plate (or what New York City taxicabs would call medallion) (Mathew, 2005; Abraham, Sundar, Whitmore, 2008). Toronto city bylaws specify that the plate owner must also own the car, so in addition to the leasing fee of the plate, the driver must sign over ownership of the car to the plate owner to comply with this by-law. The lease driver is required to pay lease for plate, financing payments for car through owner, including maintenance required and a monthly fee to a brokerage in order to get dispatch calls (Abraham, Sundar, Whitmore, 2008). Plate lessors bear none of the economic risk, receive payments from lessees regardless of business and enjoy a guaranteed income (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Mathew; 2005). Lease drivers with a second driver are able to offset the economic risk and costs as having a second driver as a Shift driver allows Lease drivers to supplement their income through a rental fee paid by the Shift driver (ibid). Shift drivers then most closely resemble employees, but pay the rental fee for the shift and must return the taxi with a full tank of gas (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Mathew; 2005). Therefore, there is less economic risk compared to other forms of driving,



however, the rental cost is high and driver must acquire high number of fares to make any income; shift drivers tend to have the lowest incomes in the industry.

Brokerages in the taxi industry have two roles; it operates a dispatch service, and it controls a number of plates, each one attached to a vehicle (some plates the brokerage owns, some they have control of through investors, acting as a “designated agent” for those investors) (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). In these cases the brokerage leases out the plate and car on a short term basis for Shift drivers or a long term basis for Lease drivers. Brokerages provide dispatch services for the benefit of drivers to whom it leases taxis and for owner/operators who both pay a flat rate of \$450 approximately a month for its use (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). Dispatch provides access for drivers to more fares and drivers choose whether or not the investment in accessing a greater number of fares will be greater than the monthly cost of this service. Owners and lessees are required to paint their cars according to brokerage affiliation, for example; Beck’s green and orange car colours, or Diamond’s black and orange cars.

The majority of Ambassador Taxicab owner/operators also pay fees to a brokerage for dispatch services, although some operate as independents (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). Dispatch services are a primary source of communication between the brokerage and other drivers that are tied to the brokerage. Dispatch is beneficial for drivers to increase their income as it provides them with the opportunity to obtain calls from passengers who have contacted the brokerage for a fare. The dispatch is operated through the brokerage and drivers can communicate with the dispatch operator and to other drivers (Mathew, 2005). However, it can be considered a means through which drivers can be exposed to racism and racialized communication as it is the primary means of communication between those in the taxi industry.

### *Changing composition of drivers*

Recent studies in New York City and in Toronto (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008) demonstrate that racialization is relevant to the changing ethno-racial profile of drivers prevalent in the taxi industry. The taxi industry in both urban centres has recently attracted a majority of its drivers from immigrant groups. Hathiyan (2007) research specifically analyzed employment barriers experienced by immigrant professionals to practice their profession and which led them to find employment in the Taxi industry. The majority cited racism as the greatest barrier to entering the job market, including the notion of 'Canadian experience' being used as a screen for racial discrimination. Drivers described other barriers such as; the lack of the right English accent, non-recognition of qualifications from certain countries, with an undertone of discrimination (Hathiyan, 2007). The Toronto area taxi drivers' who were the respondents in his study had been confronted with both individual (everyday racism) and systemic racism, experiencing comments from passengers and noticing systemic barriers when attempting to find work in their profession.

Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore (2008) argue that this change in ethno-racial profile is due to the ease of entry in terms of starting capital, coupled with the deteriorating working conditions causing native-born individuals with other opportunities to leave the industry. Therefore, this systemic issue may contribute to experiences of everyday racism and the inability to resist instances of marginalization. Further, Arum (2004) argues that it is because self-employment occurs in an unregulated market that individuals face the absence of protections and safeguards provided by the modern state and bureaucratic organization. Without this protection, for those who are self employed, inequalities flourish, women and racialized groups often face greater obstacles and risks to successful self employment. Drivers have described experiencing

an erosion of worker rights including, overt racist remarks by passengers, police, and city officials when drivers have attempted to reassert their rights (Mathew, 2005; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Hathiyan, 2007).

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

#### *Parallels with New York City's Taxi Industry*

The taxi industry in Toronto has many parallels to New York City which is why literature from New York City's Taxi industry is crucial to informing our understanding of the industry in Toronto. New York City's Taxi industry experienced a deregulation of the industry in the 1970s which resulted in the exploitation of taxi drivers in the 1980s and 1990s. Much of the exploitation of drivers occurred in the context of neoliberal economic organization whereby the deregulation of the industry resulted in those who existed on the margins, such as brokerages, having the capacity to profit immensely (Mathews, 2005; Das Gupta, 2004). Consequently, drivers, who were overwhelmingly immigrant men from the Third World, were experiencing both systemic racism and economic exploitation as a result of this deregulation (Mathew, 2005). Neoliberal climate has had a similar impact on Toronto taxi drivers, although the industry itself has experienced what can better be described as a re-regulation rather than a deregulation. This will be explained further in this section.

The taxi industry in New York City in the 1970s experienced the first influence of the phenomenon of privatization, with the re-organization of the market for taxi medallions as in Toronto. Taxi permits took the form of numbered medallions and could only be issued by the city. This allowed the city government to keep track of the number of cabs that were out on the streets and regulate their volume accordingly (Mathew, 2005). Although, medallions had been in place since 1937 in New York City the regulation of these medallions was implemented by the police department. However, in 1971, the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) was created

as a mayoral commission that would administer and regulate the taxi industry (Mathew, 2005). This was much the same as the Metro Licensing Commission (MLC) in Toronto that was established in 1963.

Mathew (2005) argued that the TLC's creation set off a chain of events that transformed the industry's organization, in favour of business capitalists, from commission to leasing over the course of the 1970s. This event was paralleled in Toronto in 1974 and resulted in making the industry more precarious. This was accomplished through providing, on the one hand, leasing as a profitable option for medallion owners, and on the other hand, not providing incentives or instituting rules that would assist in the survival of the commission system (Mathew, 2005). The commission system ensured that the driver had some guaranteed income as the driver and fleet owner split the meter by a pre-agreed ratio. Mathew (2005) argued that the TLC was able to accomplish the deterioration of the commission system in New York City, as leasing was inserted as an option, not on the grounds of better practice but under the guise of providing choice. Choice in this context ignored or presumed irrelevant the fundamental differences in power between owners and drivers, pitting them against each other. The implications of this decision in both New York City and Toronto resulted in taxi drivers being at a significant disadvantage.

In this case, power differentials created social hierarchies within the taxi industry and affected whose choice shaped final outcomes and whose did not. In the case of leasing in New York City, drivers were opposed to this, and yet the taxi ownership was able to eliminate commission through the guise of choice in four or five years (Mathew, 2005). Leasing also provided economic benefit to medallion owners, thus- reinforcing the ties between business capitalists in the industry and public administration of the industry through the TLC. The same

was true for plate owners in Toronto. Much of this had more detrimental implications for taxi drivers. Arum (2004) confirmed that the economic shift towards deregulation increased beginning in the 1970s and its progression in the United States led to a growth in labour market inequality for certain groups engaged in self-employment. It is important to acknowledge that although much of the academic research is focused on the industry in New York City it is structurally very similar to the taxi industry in Toronto and serves to inform the capacity for explaining the deterioration of working conditions in both cities.

Mathew (2005) described the case of the taxi industry in New York City as an arena of social inequality due to the exploitation involved in modern business, which create a more fragmented and precarious industry. The vast majority, of this largely immigrant workforce, are lease drivers who cannot afford the cost of \$300,000 for the taxi medallion, hire their cabs on a daily or weekly contract from the brokerage. In this relationship when the driver entered into the agreement with the broker, the broker was guaranteed protection for five years while the driver had no protection should the broker find a more lucrative deal elsewhere (Mathew, 2005).

Although, the cost of a plate in Toronto's Taxi industry was not quite as high, at approximately \$80,000 in 1997, (drivers state that it is now in the region of \$130,000) it was still too costly for many drivers. These medallions, or plates, are government-created pieces of paper that nominally represent the right to operate a taxi. In practice, however, medallions in New York City or plates in Toronto became similar to share certificates or bonds, putting a capital value on the shortage of taxis (Corcoran, Toronto Globe and Mail, April 5, 1997).

*Neoliberalism, precarious work, and the taxi industry*

With the growth of multinational corporations, technology and global business communications, there were growing pressures on governments to adopt orthodox liberal policies in the 1980s and 1990s that prioritized privatization, deregulation, and the promotion of free trade and global investment (Cohn, 2000). Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be benefited and advanced by the liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework. According to this theory the state cannot possess enough information to second-guess the market, in part because interest groups will distort and bias state interventions for their own benefit (Harvey, 2005).

Within the taxi industry, leasing signified the core of neoliberal economic practice and its logic to shift risk downward to the most vulnerable. Although, leasing was introduced prior to neo-liberalism, once its ideals took hold, it created a context which made it difficult for taxi drivers to assert themselves contributing to their vulnerability in the industry. Supporters of neoliberalism reject the notion that free market policies contribute to inequality- moreover they argue that private initiative and free enterprise, rather than government intervention and regulation, will result in full employment, rising wages, and a high standard of living for the average person (Cohn, 2000). Contrary to this notion, the deregulation of the taxi industry in New York City in 1971-1979 from unionized workers to self employed contractors had lead to the loss of health insurance, unemployment insurance, retirement funds, and the right to bargain collectively. With this shift, drivers no longer had wage-hour protections or social insurance programs, even when they share many unstable workplace conditions with low-wage workers (Das Gupta, 2004).

Mathew (2005) saw the shifting of risk to the taxi driver as following the same logic as “when multinationals outsource their production to the Third World under the aegis of globalization, and the effective change was that the risk of production is shifted downward to a Third World worker”(p.81). Thus, the taxi driver in New York and the growing segments of the Third World labour became connected more than by their ethnicity, by the position they held in the vertical mosaic of neoliberal economic organization. The structure of the taxi industry in the 1980s reflected the globalized world of finance capital, wherein the institution of the brokerage spiked their earnings by leveraging information they acquired that drivers lacked. The brokerages were able to profit and exploited drivers in this manner because they operated on the margins- by leasing the medallion from the owner and then re-leasing it to the driver and making a cut out of this-because they were not selling the medallion but the use of the medallion (Mathew, 2005). Mathew’s research demonstrated that by legalizing leasing the Taxi License Commission had made the broker’s exploitation possible and any effort to regulate futile. This was because the city posited itself as a “regulator” but by facilitating a series of independent contractor relationships this makes its role as regulator ambiguous.

In Toronto, leasing was introduced in the 1970s, and by the end of the 1990s, reforms were made to ameliorate its worst effects. While this may seem contrary to the reigning logic of neoliberalism, closer examination of the motives behind the reforms reveal its conformity with the logic. The structure of the industry in Toronto was reformed in an attempt to improve the industry as many stakeholders linked low driver income to a lesser quality of service (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). While the intentions of this reform were to focus on the driver’s economic demands and interests by allowing for city regulation of the industry through the enactment of Ambassador Class Program in 1998, this occurred in a climate of neoliberalism,



where the neoliberal state will tend to side with a good business climate as opposed to the employment rights of its workers (Harvey, 2005). This climate was visible in the city bylaws and the five principles under which the Toronto Task Force to Review the Taxi Industry organized its 50 recommendations in a 1998 report. Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore (2008) demonstrated the bias in bylaws is reflective of a neoliberal climate as these principles from the report, the City's Task Force recommendations in 1998 and bylaws passed from 2000 did not consider the economic or social welfare of the drivers. Some exceptions occurred only when the driver interests overlapped with city-wide interests amongst brokerages, owners, and garages. Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore's (2008) research reflected drivers awareness of their vulnerability in this industry and when asked their perception of City council and bylaw officers, 67% of drivers thought City council worked against driver interests. Moreover, this neoliberal climate influenced the precarious nature of the industry whereby it has become one of the most highly regulated workplaces in the city and yet, there was no minimum wage or benefits for drivers.

Precarious work was loosely defined as a result of neo-liberal global economic restructuring, with its demands for flexibility and the rise of the service economy which have contributed to; contract, temporary, part-time, piecemeal, shift work, or self-employment becoming increasingly the norm in certain sectors (Galabuzi, 2006). The effect of precarious work was essentially an intensification of work, whereby many were either working longer hours or working multiple jobs (ibid). Other characteristics included low pay, no job security, poor and often unsafe working conditions, excessive hours, and low or no benefits. Drivers surveyed in Toronto worked on average 70 hours per week, with those who were shift drivers working on average 77 hours per week and making approximately \$2.83 per hour (Abraham, Sundar, &

Whitmore, 2008). Examples of this type of employment have become a fast growing feature of the Canadian labour market since the mid 1970s (Fudge and Vosko, 2001). This increase was most evident by the end of the 1990s as a greater proportion of the people were either contract employed, self-employed, or doing temporary work than at the beginning of that decade (Galabuzi, 2007).

Fudge and Vosko (2001) described the onset of precarious work through the evidence of the breakdown of the Standard Employment Relationship (SER) in a regulatory market which was typically 'primary' wage earners who benefited from labour regulation derived from a regime of worksite based collective bargaining. What is happening now is the breakdown of this –as a result of neoliberalism- causing a trend towards Non-Standard Employment Relationship (NSER). These developments have led to what Fudge and Vosko (2001) focus on as the feminization of employment. They described this as a growing proportion of work arrangements (wages, benefits etc.) that typically were associated with women and other marginalized workers. Deregulated labour markets, like in the case of the Taxi industry in New York City, tended to be associated with a trend towards job and wage polarization (Peck 1996 cited in Fudge & Vosko, 2001). Toronto's Taxi industry has not experienced deregulation but a partial re-regulation which has contributed to the formation of NSER which has contributed to the vulnerability of drivers in Toronto.

It was the absence of these regulations that contributed to the re-segmentation where those who were in disadvantaged groups remain concentrated in areas or industries of precarious employment, or what Vosko (1998) referred to as numerically flexible positions. This implied that the industry or firm would use temporary, casual or independent contract workers as a labour supply designed to be flexible to meet fluctuating demand. Galabuzi (2006) confirmed that the

concept of flexible work have become popular with globalization which can be challenging for low income workers, especially those with the most marginal hold on the labour market. Moreover, he stated that this dramatic increase in self employment and contract work has had the most dramatic effect on racialized group members. The demands for an urban “globalized” economy had noticeably exposed racialized groups to precarious employment. Galabuzi (2006) argued that for the historically vulnerable groups, globalization has and continues to exacerbate the impact of racial and gender discrimination in the labour market. So not only does deregulation, as economic restructuring, polarize the labour market but it also creates employment structures that have changed the Standard Employment Relationships and intensified the working experience through longer working hours and multiple contract jobs (Fudge & Vosko, 2001; Galabuzi, 2006).

Racialization increased the political marginalization of drivers. Examples of this were both evident in Toronto and New York City according to the literature. In Toronto, drivers expressed their inability to speak out in different ways, due to their lack of influence at City Hall or in relation to the police, to the lack of respect from City officials, the police and the public. Drivers in Toronto, attributed their lack of political voice to a lack of respect based on their economic and social status –as low-income racialized workers (Abraham, Sundar & Whitmore, 2008). An example of this occurred recently in the failure to make protective shields mandatory in Toronto’s taxicabs. Proponents of the shields argued that the cameras that were instituted do not prevent attacks but only provide post-facto evidence of the attack. This debate was revisited after the homicides of two taxi drivers in less than a year (Morteza Khorassani in September 2005 and Mahmood Bhatti in May 2006). It was after the second homicide that a motion was passed in City Council to prepare a report regarding the process of applying and funding a

mandatory taxi shield program. However, the proposal for the \$10,000 study was cancelled before debate, with the claim that the installation of mandatory shields would convey a “terrible image” to visitors of Toronto (The Globe and Mail, February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). This demonstrated that the city was influenced by the perception of Toronto’s visitors in a manner that would put driver safety at risk.

Similarly, the lack of ability to demonstrate their political voice due to the drivers’ economic and social position was evident in New York City. In New York City, city officials and the municipal government denounced the taxi demonstration across the Queensboro Bridge to Fifty-Ninth Street because it was, they claimed, a small group of driver who were out to ensure they could drive around the city recklessly without repercussions (Mathew, 2005). Drivers in New York City were portrayed as “taxi terrorists” concerned with ripping passengers off and as a result city council and Mayor Giuliani were insisting that driver were a threat to public safety. However, the goal of the Taxi strike was not to rip off or inconvenience passengers but to educate the passengers and talk to them as equals about racism and driver issues. These examples demonstrated the priority towards the desires of the white middle class at the expense of drivers’ politically voicing their right to work without experiencing racism and racialized communication. Throughout the 1990s the Taxi and Limousine Commission (TLC) in New York City acted in everyway possible to promote the middle-class passenger’s comfort acting as a complaint registration body (rather than a commission to regulate the taxi industry), with the capacity to devalue the safety and dignity of immigrant workers (Mathew, 2005). This example demonstrated the intersection of politics and economics in this industry which acted to disadvantage those working as drivers within this industry.

In Toronto, the city by-laws do not encompass the economic and social concerns of drivers and prioritize instead the concerns of passengers (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). Moreover, despite being highly regulated in terms of bylaws, Taxicab Passenger Bill of Rights seems to favour passengers, as none of the regulations serves to protect or benefit the driver. According to several researchers, despite the regulations in the industry, it manifests as precarious work as the drivers under the guise of self-employment experience economic vulnerability, powerlessness, low pay, no job security (Galabuzi, 2006; Vosko, 1998; Fudge & Vosko, 2001). This becomes problematic in the taxi industry because self-employment undermines the potential of equity legislation. Fudge and Vosko (2001) explains that this is in part because under legislation across Canada collective bargaining depends upon the existence of an on-going employer-employee relationship (ibid). Taxi drivers are considered independent contractors and as such are not protected by employment standards legislation, such as having a minimum wage (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore). Racialized workers are greatly represented in this industry and in precarious employment because of their vulnerability to the restructuring of the economy. The government policies created and enacted under this influence result in open conflict with government employees, trade unions, and the welfare state (Cohn, 2000).

## Chapter 4

### Theoretical framework

#### *Everyday racism and systemic racism*

To adequately identify issues of everyday racism within the context of the taxi industry in Toronto it is paramount to decipher what is meant by this concept. Everyday racism is comprised of subtle, persistent discriminatory acts experienced by members of a racialized group on a daily basis (Deitch, Barsky, Butz, Chan, Brief, & Bradley, 2003). Essed (2007) argues that personal confrontations of racism overlap and reinforce other experiences of racism. Present day experience reminds one of similar past experiences of racism and influence's expectations of tomorrow. This can often lead to a deeper understanding of racism in daily experiences of drivers such as; vague feelings of oppression, of eurocentrism, and of cultural deprivation (Essed, 2007). I will be incorporating this concept of everyday racism to describe the pervasive capacity for systemic discrimination to occur on a daily basis for those who self identify or are perceived to be a member of a racialized group in a re-regulated industry.

Specifically, this paper will focus on racist speech and racialized communication. Racist speech can involve either direct comments (race-related derogatory labels) or indirect utterances (not race-related; rather constituted stereotypic derogation) (Leets, 2003). This second type of racialized communication pertains more directly to taxi drivers who self identity as racialized minorities and immigrants in Toronto. An example of this is when drivers in Toronto experience verbal assumptions of their lack of knowledge of city and by laws by police or passengers, which is mentioned in the results of Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore's (2008) research, although there little research in Toronto about this. According to the literature in New York City, most racist

remarks described in the ethnographic research involved stereotypic derogation, such as, comments about being un-American (Mathew, 2005; Das Gupta, 2004).

Bannerji (1995) explains that everyday racism through the notion of “common sense”. She develops her argument using Gramsci’s (1971) concept of common sense as essentially the submerged part of our visible ideology. Common sense is understood to represent the distilled truths or logic of centuries of experience, an idea or practice then that contradicts this common sense is an appeal over the logic of what all reasonable people know to be right or proper. As such it becomes un-thought out, leaving room for contradictions, myths, and rumours (ibid). She claims that whereas clearly stated racism exists, more problematic is the common sense racism or, what Leeds et al refers to as everyday racism, which holds the norms and forms put in place by a few hundred years of pillage, extermination, slavery, colonization and neo-colonization. Racism becomes an everyday occurrence and “normal” way of seeing. This understanding of racism means that everyone is differently burdened by the history of racism and all other discriminations in society. Dei (1996) echoes Bannerji’s explanation of “common sense” racism and argues that there is a need to (re) interrogate these existing common sense understandings of how racism and other forms of oppression function to serve and deny certain interests in society.

This understanding of the everyday or “common sense” notion of racism is firmly rooted in an anti-racist framework (Bannerji 1995; Dei, 1996; Essed, 2007). Anti-racism is a critical discourse of race and racism in society and the continuing racializing of social groups for differential and unequal treatment (Dei, 1996). As such; it seeks to fracture the political, economic, and ideological status quo and challenge individuals and institutions to side with the forces of social justice, peace, and human dignity. Dei (1996) explains that the discourse of anti-racism is to explicitly name the issues of race and social differences as issues of power and

equity, as opposed to cultural and ethnic matters. This particular type of framework seeks a broad definition of race and racism that goes beyond the understanding that phenotype is the only signifier of difference. The logic of the anti-racist framework is that race is understood, and analyzed within the context of historical processes such as; European colonization, cultural and political imperialism, and enslavement of the world's indigenous and non-white peoples (Bannerji, 1995; Galabuzi, 2006; Dei, 1996). This is then juxtaposed to uncomplicated notions of racial domination and difference based on phenotype and “natural” difference (Dei, 1996). It is through an understanding of how historical processes influence common sense notions of race that leads to an awareness of tensions, conflicts, and contradictions that are inherent. When we put power relations at the centre of the discourse on race and social difference, we can see the race has become an effective tool for determining the way capital is distributed.

The purpose of utilizing an anti-racist framework here is to draw on the connection required between understanding how everyday racism moves beyond the narrow pre-occupation with individuals discriminatory actions to analyze the means by which racist ideas and individual actions are entrenched and (un) consciously supported by institutional structures (Simmons, 1994; Lee, 1994 in Dei, 1996). In terms of the taxi industry in Toronto there are various issues of inequality which must be grounded in the individual and collective lived experience. Dei (1996) analyzes the more theoretical question: how does racist ideology and other ideologies serve to secure social relations in the service of modern capital? This provides some insight into my research question which will analyze in what ways racism impacts the working conditions of taxi drivers. Dei states that the reality of our current society is that the ideological and cultural practices of the dominant groups do have material consequences for subordinate groups. Both research in Toronto and other urban centres of similar demographics and structure, like New



York City, show that drivers are experiencing deteriorating working conditions and tend to experience economic, social, and political marginalization (Das Gupta, 2004; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Mathew, 2005).

### *The intersection of race and class*

The intersection of both class and race is crucial when examining instances of racism in the everyday and systemic level of the taxi industry. The anti-racist framework delves into the ideological conceptions of race critically by interrogating not only the racist theories that have been passed on as facts but also the social and institutional practices that systemically deny material goods and access to valued goods and services of society (Dei, 1996). Bannerji (1995) reaffirms the importance of understanding the complexity of the social determinants; of race, class, and gender. Specifically, race can be combined with other social relations of power which can mediate and intensify each other (Bannerji, 2005). The focus of this paper will be on instances of racism with an understanding that class is implicated in the industry itself, as a vulnerable and low paying industry. Essed (2007) uses the example of Rosa N's experience of racism as a cleaner in the hospital setting as racism structured by class exploitation and of class oppression permeated by racism. Vulnerable industries, such as the taxi industry, tend to doubly disadvantage those who are confronted with the impact of class oppression in everyday racism.

As Galabuzi (2006) argues it is precisely the intersection of race and class that is leading to the growing social exclusion of racialized groups in Canada. He provides a more detailed analysis of the process of racialization subsequently. He argues that the impact of neo-liberal global restructuring is leading to the preponderance of precarious forms of work and declining power of labour, and the retreat of the state from economic and social regulation. This occurs in

combination with the increase North-South migration and the historical processes of racialization in the Canadian labour markets causing racialized groups to be more vulnerable to labour market segmentation and lowered socio-economic status. It has been demonstrated that today's racialized immigrants are placed into a hierarchy of stratification of labour that imposes differential levels of exploitation in support of capitalist accumulation (Galabuzi, 2006).

### *The process of racialization*

The process of racialization involves the delineation of group boundaries and identities by reference to physical and/or genetic criteria or by reference to race (Satzewich, 1998). Racialized groups for the purpose of this research will be defined as individuals whose social identity is devalued in the context of the dominant culture (Deitch et al, 2003). As a result of this process of racialization, diversity in the workplace can serve to create and maintain social hierarchies within the taxi industry. Social hierarchies determine which group has political, economic, and socio-cultural power within an organization or industry. Social hierarchies occur when the instigators' pursuit of social power is enabled, through an organization's implicit or explicit support for discrimination, as indicated through poor enforcement or absence of non-discrimination policy or racist norms within the industry (Cortina, 2008). Mathew (2005) makes a similar argument through the concept of liberal racism in the taxi industry in New York City. He states that liberal racism functions by taking any two people or groups of people who have radically dissimilar levels of social power and claiming that they are "equal". Social hierarchies in the taxi industry can put the racialized group at a disadvantage, increasing the potential for individuals to experience an erosion of work rights, including discrimination at the workplace. Similarly, Henry, Tator, Mattis, and Rees (2000) cited in Galabuzi (2006) use the concept of democratic racism to understand how and why racism continues in Canada. Like Mathew's

(2005) liberal racism, democratic racism is the justification of the inherent conflict between the egalitarian values and the racist ideologies reflected in both individual and collective mass-belief. Henry et al (2000) explains that the arguments which serve to justify democratic racism are used to demonstrate faith in the principles of an equalitarian society while acting to undermine and sabotaging those ideals.

Differential outcomes in employment have been attributed to racially discriminatory systemic practices in the labour market such as; differential treatment in recruiting, hiring, and promotion. More specifically, this can involve the differential evaluation or effective devaluations of internationally obtained credentials and demands for Canadian experience (Galabuzi, 2006). Becker's (1993) employed the concept of human capital to refer to investments in activities such as schooling, on-the-job training, medical care, migration and others that influence future monetary or psychic income by increasing the resources in people; this analytic approach is informed by neoliberalism. From this immigrant status often is understood as a proxy for lower quality of human capital.

This is particularly relevant to the taxi industry as there is a significant number of drivers who have entered into the taxi industry as a result of economic discrimination (Hathiyani, 2006). Galabuzi (2006) argues that economic discrimination occurs when the value of an applicant's qualifications from a certain country or region is unclear and employers make assumptions about the employment capacity either wilfully or because they are unable to access information regarding international credentials. Exclusionary discrimination occurs when members of a group are not hired or paid commensurate wages, or once hired, not promoted regardless of their experience or qualifications. Galabuzi (2006) states that both exclusionary and economic discrimination have been documented among racialized group members and may explain the

similar outcomes of internationally trained and Canadian-trained racialized members in the Canadian labour market.

*Inequalities and structural racism in the taxi industry -A Marxist approach*

This paper reviews systemic racism in the taxi industry, as the conscious or unconscious policies, procedures, and practices that exclude, marginalize, and exploit racialized people, in this case the drivers. Systemic racism is supported by institutional power and by powerful (often unexamined) ideas which cause racism to appear normal and justified (Lopes & Thomas, 2006). Systemic racism is analyzed through the lens of instrumental Marxism, whereby social hierarchies are established and those who are acting in roles of power in the taxi industry demonstrate personal ties between business capitalists and public officials. A political economy approach more broadly analyzes the ways in which political and economic forces intersect, the study of confrontation between states and markets, power and wealth (Aitken, 2008). Instrumental Marxism argues that those who are appointed to positions of power in the state system often have been drawn from the world of business and property (Cohn, 2000). Webb (2004) argues that the industry's voluntary use of codes and standards (through Taxi and Limousine Commission in New York City and Metro Licensing Commission in Toronto) mute the struggles over risks, harms, jobs, and profits inherent in decision-making concerning environmental, human rights, and worker safety issues. Debates surrounding racism, justice, and poverty are then transformed through the use of these codes and standards in matters of market preference and managerial expertise, enabling inequality and repression to be perpetuated, and disguising their role in that perpetuation (Webb, 2004). The taxi industry in both Toronto and New York City have experienced social hierarchies reinforced by policies, procedures, and

practices that benefit business capitalists within this industry. At this same time, these policies and practices serve to marginalize drivers, who may not capitalize within this industry.

In the instrumental Marxist analysis of capitalism, capital is understood not only as an economic entity, but as a social force. Bramann (1984) articulates capital through the Marxist framework as figuring into not only the production and distribution of goods and services, but also in the formation of social organizations, legal structures, political activities and individual behaviours. Thus, within the Taxi industry, capital plays a larger role in maintaining and perpetuating inequality as it is a source of power. Bramann (1984) explains that Marxists depict capital as power to attempt to demonstrate how the various aspects and phases of capitalism are bound to evolve in a predictable way. It is through this logic that I will argue that the systemic racism in the industry is made possible.

Although his research does not speak to this issue directly, Bramann (1984) explains that racism under certain circumstances can work to the advantage of capitalist entrepreneurs when it has been developed under various special historical and geographical conditions. Historically, capitalism became possible only when there were sizable masses of dispossessed people who had to sell their labour power to owners of the means of production to make a living (Bramann, 1984). The example of this that he gives to illustrate his point is in the early decades of the US land was cheap and available to anyone, so people worked for themselves, but when land was scarce and larger influxes of immigrants entered to try to make a living, entrepreneurs had access to a pool of labour. This logic translates to the taxi industry as the MLC has limited the plates available to drivers, specifically by allowing only Standard plates to be considered transferrable and without allowing any new Standard plates into circulation in Toronto. This makes those who are Standard plate owners, have access to an additional labour pool to operate their means of

production. This labour pool tends to be Lease and Shift drivers who make up the labour force, selling their labour power to make a living. The limited number of plates available in Toronto keeps the industry profitable, for if too many workers earned enough to acquire the means of production themselves, capitalism (or profit within this industry) would collapse. Bramann (1984) explains, on the same note, people who do not own the means of production, and are forced to sell their labour power to someone else will just get what they need to live and thus are forever dependent. This structure essentially demonstrates the structure of the industry and the social inequality and hierarchy among drivers and those who own the permits.

The re-regulation of this industry in Toronto with the introduction of the Ambassador plates has contributed to the flexibility of the industry. This flexibility has allowed for drivers to be self-employed and considered small business owners. However, it is not that many of the drivers lack the capital to acquire a plate to own the means of their production but that the plate is only valuable if it enables them to lease it out. The plates that are available for ownership are typically Ambassador Plates; these are non-transferrable and do not provide the returns on their investment that is possible with the Standard plate. Harvey (2005) argues that neoliberalism, in certain industries, has the effect of creating what Marx called a “reserve army”, the effect of which is to undermine the power of labour and permit capitalists to make profit. This applies to the taxi industry drivers, because they are considered self-employed, but most are financially dependent on the Standard plate owner through which they acquire the means of production required to make a living. The economic implications are that lease and shift drivers who work in these conditions are deemed ‘independent contractors’ who have no workers rights due to the deregulation of their industry which is coupled with not having the benefits of owning the means of their production.

With this industry in its current state of re-regulation as a result of its re-structuring toward self-employment, drivers are not considered workers and thus are vulnerable to racism both within the structure and in the workplace communication they experience as drivers. Galabuzi (2006) and others (Vosko 1998, Fudge & Vosko, 2001; Essed, 2007) argue that because of neo-liberal global re-structuring there has been a shift in the type of work, towards a growth in precarious work. This neo-liberal influence has caused greater gap in the social marginalization of racialized groups to low paying occupations, and low income sectors (Galabuzi, 2006). This appears to be true of the taxi industry in Toronto, as drivers are predominately self identified as immigrants and consider themselves to be members of racialized groups (Abraham, Sundar & Whitmore, 2008). During this time of re-regulation, working conditions have caused a shift in the demographic of drivers in the taxi industry. This in part may be a result of internationally educated individuals and racialized groups difficulty in finding employment in their profession, as systemic racism seems to be cited as the most difficult barrier in the labour market and which caused drivers to enter into the taxi industry (Hathiyani, 2007). Because of this, drivers may experience everyday racism as a result of their experiences with the barriers and challenges of structural racism which led them to this industry.

This theoretical framework will be used to structure and identify values, organizational structures and behaviours that perpetuate systemic racism and other forms of oppression. Through this theoretical framework, race is understood as a social construct, in the sense that it is not fixed and static, it works in broadly predictable ways and through well rehearsed narratives to position Whites as superior to non-Whites (Howard, 2004 cited in Dei, 2007). It is the critical analysis and identification of the power of white racial identity provided through this framework that will link the concept of racism to extend beyond the micro level to an ideology. From this

ideology the systemic implications of racialization are negotiated and can be reaffirmed in everyday experiences of racism.

### *Racism and resistance*

Resistance in the taxi industry will be reviewed in the context of the capacity for drivers to respond to instances of racism that occur within the industry. Resistance can occur in collective action by those who are in positions of exploitation which can be understood in the political mobilization of taxi drivers to protest against exploitation in the industry or to create unions or associations that would provide them with a collective voice (Mathew, 2005; Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore, 2008). But this type of collective action can be difficult and the nature of resistance is largely influenced by existing forms of labour control and by the beliefs about the probability and severity of the retaliation (Scott, 1985). Therefore, drivers because of the regulations within the industry may experience perceived restrictions on their capacity to resist instances of racism on a collective scale.

This is why it is important to consider resistance that occurs on a more individualized and ‘everyday’ basis. Scott (1985) identifies the importance of understanding everyday forms of resistance, which is described as the prosaic but constant struggle between the workers and those who seek to extract labour, taxes, rents, and interest, from them. In the case of the taxi industry, and for this research, this would involve the drivers’ response to instances of discrimination and racism from passengers, brokerages, dispatch, and police. Scott (1985) describes in the context of everyday peasant resistance what he refers to as the ordinary weapons of powerless groups. Examples of these are foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson, sabotage etc. Resistance to instances of racism can be the conscious



suppression of anger, and for some this is the constant process of patience and control with the knowledge that open aggression or response could lead to retaliation (Scott, 1990). These forms of resistance represent a form of self-help with little coordination or planning, as much of the everyday resistance occurs between revolts to defend its interests as much as is possible (Scott, 1985).

These everyday forms of resistance are unlikely to do more than marginally impact the various forms of exploitation that drivers encounter but this type of resistance should not be considered trivial. Scott (1985) argues that everyday resistance and collective resistance are both intended to mitigate or deny claims made by super ordinate classes or to advance claims with regards to those classes, even though everyday resistance differs in its implicit denial of public and symbolic goals. Everyday resistance is often covert, informal, and mainly concerned with actual gains (Scott, 1985). Examples of everyday resistance found in the New York City taxi industry research show that some drivers resist by challenging passengers' xenophobia and nativism, educating, or deflecting questions about their country of origin (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005). In responding to racism and discrimination at this level they are doing so at the risk of passenger complaints, subsequent harassment from the license commission and monetary loss. This type of resistance has not been explored in Toronto's taxi industry but I will argue that the drivers who experience everyday racism with respond in a similar manner as the drivers in New York City. This is due to the structural similarities of these industries, insofar as they carry similar levels of risk in exhibiting everyday resistance because of the passenger bill of rights, licensing commission, and the vulnerable nature of the position.

*Exploring the extent of everyday racism through verbal communication in Toronto's taxi industry*

Much research demonstrates that everyday racism is prevalent in the taxi industries in many urban centres (Mathew 2005; Das Gupta, 2004). However, Toronto's taxi industry has yet to be reviewed in terms of the extent of everyday racism through verbal communication (ie over the dispatch, or between individuals within the taxi environment). Many drivers experience the economic effects of racism as a result of passengers' identification of drivers as associated with "terrorist-ridden" Muslim majority countries, recounting passengers' refusal to ride with them or pay the fare (Das Gupta, 2004). Post 9/11 the public perception of Muslims, South Asians and Arabs as terrorists caused increasing economic loss and a greater sense of insecurity in an industry that already risked violence and meagre earnings (Das Gupta, 2004). The effects of racialization in this industry greatly influenced the drivers' exposure to economic hardship. Since there is a lack of protection for drivers due to the deregulation of the industry, there was a higher instance of violence and racism by both passengers and police. Violence from passengers, over-policing, and a lack of dignity for workers is symptomatic of deeper issues of systemic economic exploitation, which depends on racializing immigrant workers in particular ways (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005). Drivers may attempt to speak out against racism and violence but this can increase economic hardship. Such instances resulting in passenger complaints can lead to court summons, fines, and licence suspensions as a result of failure to deliver adequate service according to the passenger bill of rights (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005; Facey, 2003; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). This can influence how a driver will respond to instances of racism while at work.

## Chapter 5

### Methodology

#### *Research Design and Methods*

To address the extent to which racism and resistance to it, exists within the Taxi industry in Toronto I will be using a qualitative research design to gather information. Qualitative data gathering involves documenting real events, and recording what drivers had to say regarding this topic. Qualitative research uses a language of cases and contexts to examine social processes and case in their social context, in addition to interpreting and creating meaning in certain settings (Neuman, 2006). Numerical representations, as found in quantitative data, are unlikely to reflect a realistic picture of what these individuals thought (Bidhendi, 2007) about racism, as a part of their lived stories of facing the challenges of working within their industry. This type of research looks at motifs, themes, distinctions, and ideas instead of variables, and in so doing adopt a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory is used when a qualitative researcher develops theory that built from data or grounded in the data acquired (Neuman, 2006).

The context is critical, an adequate review of the structure of the taxi industry, and the social location of those who interact within it, is necessary to understand the meaning of a social action or statement (Neuman, 2006). If I were to remove an event, social action, answer to a question, or conversation from the social context in which it appears, social meaning and significance are distorted. By relying solely on qualitative approaches (e.g., interviews, case stories) I could run the risk of “romantically tying up the participants’ opinions” of the industry with “my own” (Silverman, 1998, p. 14 in Bidhendi, 2007) socio-political worldviews. This is why when interpreting the data I will have to take into consideration my own social location as a

Canadian born, Caucasian female, with educational, socio-economic, and cultural privileges, as well as the influence this might have on participant responses.

The interview data came from a non representative sampling of self-identified immigrant taxi drivers who also identified as being part of a racialized group or had experienced racism within the taxi industry. As it is difficult to attain a representative sampling, which is a sample that best represents all the elements in the population (Neuman, 2006) I used various sampling techniques to increase the number of participants who were able to contribute to the research data. This type of research sampling and recruitment flexibility is necessary to obtain an appropriate sample because initial efforts often are not as successful due to the nature of the industry. This issue was also confirmed by limitations in Hathiyan's 2006 research on taxi drivers in Toronto.

The initial strategy I used was sequential sampling as was suggested due to the nature of the questions posed to drivers in their work environment. Privacy was a concern in terms of drivers if the interview were to take place while the driver may be in his work environment. To avoid this, sequential sampling was used to find as many relevant cases as possible, until time or resources are exhausted (Neuman, 2006). An information sheet was made (Appendix) regarding a description of the research and potential participants which included my contact information. I approached drivers directly at various locations such as taxi stands downtown, at taxi driver meeting places, telling them about the study while they were waiting for a fare and giving them the flyer to contact me. The response from this strategy was very poor with no calls received from a respondent willing to participate in an interview. Similar responses were found in Hathiyan's 2006 study of the taxi industry and it was suggested that snowball sampling might better suit this study.

The next strategy to recruit participants was snowball sampling. When initially proposed for this study as a method to recruit participants, it had been suggested that snowball sampling using key informants may be problematic. But considering the nature of this industry, snowball sampling worked best for this study. This was also found in other studies of drivers in the taxi industry in Toronto (Hathiyani, 2006; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). Snowball sampling is where the researcher gets participants using referrals provided by key informants or participants who are directly or indirectly connected to the previous participants (Neuman, 2006). This method was used to acquire the majority of the participants. During the time of the research, I became affiliated with several drivers and researchers who were organizing a group to attempt to bring forth issues that concern drivers in Toronto. I discussed my research with some of the drivers who referred me to individuals who might be interested in being participants of this research. These individuals introduced me to various drivers to whom I explained the study. The subsequent interviews were conducted in the places which drivers suggested or felt were most convenient for them. Most of the interviews were conducted in the taxi car itself as drivers preferred to participate in the interview while waiting for a fare. Some drivers preferred to conduct the interview in a coffee shop and two preferred telephone interviews.

Convenience sampling was also used to acquire participants whereby I would haphazardly talk to drivers about this research while they were waiting at the taxi stand and inquire if they were interested in participating. Some drivers agreed and a few interviews were conducted on the spot with these drivers, as they felt comfortable completing the interview in their cab while waiting at the taxi stand. Most of these participants were familiar with previous research completed in the industry such as Abraham, Sundar and Whitmore's recent work.

Others provided contact information and suggested I call to arrange a more convenient place or time.

The purpose of this variety of methods of recruitment was to acquire narratives from drivers who are currently working fulltime (35 or more hours per week) in this industry. Interviews with drivers, who self-identify as members of racialized groups and as immigrants, would assist me in gathering narratives from those who are working within the industry in Toronto and are vulnerable to instances of everyday racism through verbal communication they experience at work. For the purposes of this study, I did not interview drivers who do not self identify as part of a racialized group and an immigrant as their narratives cannot adequately capture the experience of internalization of racist communication. In terms of subject characteristics, I recruited 18 subjects who are over the age of eighteen, and self identify as fulltime taxi drivers in Toronto, immigrants and member of a racialized group. To ensure these characteristics were met, I inquired about the amount of hours per week the driver works and what type of driver they consider themselves to establish their individual narrative within their social location in the industry. It is important to acquire this information, because the perception of marginalization and to what extent they acknowledge instances of everyday racism may be linked to their perception of power associated with their location in the social stratification within the industry.

### *Research Limitations*

Qualitative research involving a non random sample carries with it certain limitations depending on the specific methods used. Snowball sampling used here carries with it an element of bias. Efforts were made to protect the confidentiality of those who participated by contacting

them independently to inquire regarding their consent to participate. This bias again was reduced as the interviews were conducted independently for each participant. The researcher also inquired into the location of the interview, as the drivers often stated a preference to conduct the interview in the cab, which has video surveillance. This could be problematic; however, not only is the driver cognisant of this fact, but the cameras themselves do not record audio and are not viewed unless there is a major crime in the taxi.

Another limitation is the time and scope of this research, as it puts a limitation on the time to recruit and interview participants. I was able to conduct 18 interviews, however, within the taxi driver population in Toronto this is a fairly small sample size. Therefore, this does limit the ability to generalize my results as it does not include all taxi drivers who identify as immigrants and members of a racialized group or have experienced racism while driving a taxi in Toronto. However, given that it was impossible to get a list of all immigrant drivers who position themselves in these categories these methods were probably the best strategy given the limited time and scope of this paper.

### *Participants*

The names of the participants will not be used. The data obtained by each participant will be given a number to which their specific comments have been associated with to protect their identity.

#### Taxi Driver #1 (TD1)

48 years old, married man originally from Ghana and has resided in Canada for 12 years. He has worked as a fulltime shift driver for the past 5-6 years. Highest level of education is Bachelor of Science and was previously working as a Teacher in Ghana.

#### Taxi Driver #2 (TD2)

63 year old single man originally from Iran and has resided in Canada for 20 years. He has worked fulltime as a shift driver for 16 years. Highest level of education is a Bachelor of Arts in Business Management and was previously working as a Merchant. He speaks 2 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #3 (TD3)

41 year old single man originally from Ethiopia and has resided in Canada for 14 years. He has worked fulltime for the past 5 years as an owner/operator Ambassador driver. Higher level of education is College-Network Help Support diploma. He speaks 4 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #4 (TD4)

44 year old married man originally from Ethiopia who has resided in Canada for the past 21 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for the past 15 years and is currently an Ambassador Driver. Highest level of education is University (1<sup>st</sup> year) in an Electrical engineering diploma program. He speaks 3 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #5 (TD5)

50 year old separated man originally from Ethiopia and has resided in Canada for the past 20 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 19 years and is currently an Ambassador driver. Highest level of education is high school and he speaks 3 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #6 (TD6)

51 year old married man with three children originally from Afghanistan but has resided in Canada for 19 years. He works fulltime as a shift driver but has previously worked as a lease



driver. He has been driving taxi for almost 17 years. Highest level of education is Bachelor of Science studying to be a teacher. He speaks 4 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #7 (TD7)

42 year old married man originally from Somalia but has resided in Canada for the past 20 years. He has been driving fulltime as a shift driver for 16 years. Highest level of education is college in agriculture. He speaks 4 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #8 (TD8)

45 year old married man originally from Ethiopia but has resided in Canada for the past 20 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 15 years and is currently an Ambassador Driver. Highest level of education is college: welding and tool and die course. He speaks 2 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #9 (TD9)

52 year old married man originally from Somalia but has resided in Canada for the past 20 years. He has been driving fulltime for 18 years previously a lease driver but since 1995 has been an Ambassador driver. Highest level of education is 1<sup>st</sup> year University majored in Math. He speaks 4 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #10 (TD10)

48 year old single man originally from Ghana but has resided in Canada for almost 20 years. He has been driving fulltime for 10 years and is currently an Ambassador Driver. Highest level of education is high school and he previously was a truck driver. He speaks 2 languages.

#### Taxi Driver #11 (TD11)

35 year old single man originally from Egypt but has resided in Canada for the past 12 years. He has been a shift driver for the past 2 years. Highest level of education is completion of university. He speaks 2 languages.

Taxi Driver #12 (TD12)

47 year old married man originally from Ghana but has resided in Canada for the past 21 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for the past 18 years and is currently an Ambassador driver. Highest level of education is elementary school and previously was in the Army in Ghana. He speaks 3 languages.

Taxi Driver #13 (TD13)

37 year old married male originally from Ethiopia but has resided in Canada for 16 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 11 years and is currently an Ambassador Driver. Highest level of education is University and he speaks 4 languages.

Taxi Driver #14 (TD14)

58 year old married man with children originally from India but has resided in Canada for the past 37 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 25 years and is currently an Ambassador Driver. Highest level of education is Bachelor's degree in Political science and he speaks 4 languages.

Taxi Driver #15 (TD15)

37 year old single man originally from Bangladesh but has resided in Canada for the past 17 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 15 years and is currently a shift driver. Highest level of education is as a network Engineer. He speaks 2 languages.

Taxi Driver #16 (TD16)

41 year old married man originally from Aromia part of the Ethiopian empire but has resided in Canada for the past 21 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for the past 14 years and is currently an Ambassador driver. Highest level of education is one year of college and he speaks 5 languages.

Taxi Driver #17 (TD17)

47 year old married man originally from Ethiopia but has resided in Canada for the past 17 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for the past 8 years and is currently an Ambassador driver. Highest level of education is high school in Canada and he was an elementary school teacher in Ethiopia. He speaks 3 languages.

Taxi Driver #18 (TD18)

44 married man with children originally from Eritrea but has resided in Canada for the past 20 years. He has been driving a taxi fulltime for 10 years and is currently a shift driver. Highest level of education is 2 years of college –computer technician. He speaks 5 languages.

## Chapter 6

### Findings

For the purpose of this research all of the respondents were self identified as born outside of Canada and a member of a racialized group. They were originally from one of nine different countries namely; Ethiopia, Eritrea, Somalia, Bangladesh, Iran, India, Ghana, Oromia (which is an ethnic region of Ethiopia), Egypt, Afghanistan and the majority of these individuals had resided in Canada for at least 10 years. All of the participants were male and age 37 to 63 years, which is fairly representative of the industry. Hathiyan (2006) found that one of the largest brokerages had only 2 women drivers out of almost 1500 drivers; the very low female participation in the industry was speculated to be due to safety concerns with male passengers. As the industry is predominately male dominated, and coupled with the fact that gender of the drivers would provide additional complexity to some of the participants responses and examples of discrimination in the industry, women were not recruited as participants for this particular study.

#### *Purpose of research, expectations, and organization of findings*

The purpose of this research was initially based on previous research regarding the taxi industry (Mathew 2005; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Hathiyan, 2006; Das Gupta; 2004) in areas where the industry is dominated by drivers who are immigrants and part of a racialized group. There has been some research that has looked at working conditions of taxi drivers in Toronto (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008) and on access to profession barriers which cause immigrants to seek out taxi driving in Toronto (Hathiyan, 2006). Both studies alluded to structural racism as an issue many drivers encounter in Toronto. The purpose of this

research was to explore this area further. In New York City, many taxi drivers described specific instances of everyday racism that they experienced while in the taxi, communicating with passengers, police, and city officials (Mathew, 2005; Das Gupta, 2004). This particular area of everyday racism had not been explored in Toronto. Moreover, I wanted to understand, if this type of racism was occurring to some drivers, to what extent drivers had experienced it, how did this occur within the taxi industry (was it perpetuated or enabled by structural racism?), and how they were able to respond.

My initial expectations for this research were quite varied due to the nature of the topic and my approach. I had anticipated that everyday racism would be an occurrence within the taxi industry in Toronto as it had been an issue which had surfaced in the working conditions of the taxi industry (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008). But, I was unsure if everyday racism could be adequately captured through participants' interviews both because of the fundamental everyday-ness of everyday discrimination which may lead some drivers to fail to note consciously regularly experienced incidents and connect them with racism (Deitch et al, 2003) and because everyone is differentially burdened by the history of racism (Dei, 1996). Since this research is analyzed through an anti-racist approach, I had expected that the facets of my own social location may also influence it in various ways. I am a young, White woman with no obvious ties to the taxi industry in Toronto. So I had initially anticipated that the willingness of driver's to disclose their experiences of racism might be lessened because of my own social location. For this reason, as much as possible prior to completing the interviews I involved myself in the industry with researchers and drivers who were attempting to organize a group tentatively named Taxi Driving Force. Being able to convey this to drivers I believe increased the level of comfort and disclosure. In an additional attempt to explain my interest in this

research and my own class and social location I would mention my father's work as a long time taxi driver in my hometown. This brief communication of my own social location was to engage drivers and hopefully increase their level of comfort in communicating with me. This indeed, was influenced by my initial expectations that drivers would be less likely to communicate openly with this topic.

The organization of the findings will explore the social construction of racism reflected in the rich and varied definitions of racism provided by the drivers. Secondly, I will explain the context of the incidents of racism which were typically described and the influence of social location in the lived experience of drivers. Specifically, there was a strong intersection of class and race for drivers, whereby class position conditioned and structured racism in the industry, and racism served to justify continued class-based exploitation. Findings demonstrated this clear intersection in the differential treatment of drivers by passengers, police, and the recent changes in industry structure. From this lived experience, drivers also described the complex nature of responding and methods of dealing with racism at work.

### *1. Drivers' experience and analysis of racism*

#### *Defining racism*

Racism is a socially constructed term and as such its definitions tended to be widely varied. Racism as a socially constructed term referred to its ideologically motivated nature and its power to create social categories and reproduce social, political, and economic inequalities as normal, which generates social relevance for the classifications in a manner that naturalizes differential treatment (Galabuzi, 2006). These social categories tended to be based on physical attributes. This was found to be true of drivers who were asked to describe racism. TD2

explained racism as “not respecting another race or gender”. Social, political, and economic inequalities were highlighted as an outcome when TD11 described racism quite simply as “some person who thinks another person is less than him”. Another driver described racism as occurring in two different ways: “bad racism which has hate in it but there is also the other kind where an individual has had a bad experience with someone of a particular race or group and then they generalize that all people [of that race or group] are like that” (TD3). This variety in definitions reinforced Essed’s (2007) argument that personal confrontations with racism often influence and reinforce definitions and experiences of racism. Racism was varied in its definition, which reflected the ways in which it was experienced by participants.

Racism is described as a construct that affects each individual in a different manner. One of the initial challenges of completing this research was the influence of my own social location on the level of disclosure and comfort participants had to openly discuss racism at work. This fact was observed by one driver in an attempt to describe the pervasive nature of everyday racism. One driver said “racism is subtle...It’s everyday from the police, the way people act. Because you are Caucasian you can’t see it. People don’t respect us they treat us like garbage” (TD8). Simply put, this explained that as a member of the dominant racial group in Toronto I have, whether I recognize it or not, the privilege of Whiteness which confers a social location from which racism may not be adequately understood. This was a research challenge for those who proceed with an anti-racist framework because, “try as I might to recognize whiteness as a structural power relation that confers cultural and racial privilege, the phrase, spoken declaratively by the racially privileged, can become a form of white defensiveness” (Roman, 1993 in Bannerji, 2000).

## *Experience of racism*

### Passengers

The experience of everyday racism for taxi drivers varied according to the context of the communication, often precipitated by negative communication with passengers.

Passengers were described as using both indirect and direct racist comments. Typically, racist comments towards drivers, according to many of those who were interviewed, began as a result of negative or miscommunication. A driver respondent recalled one passenger who was upset and wanted him to take the shortest route to her destination, “she said why did you come here? She was mad [because of a construction delay] ...she said get out you people come from Africa. I say so what I’m from Africa”(TD10). One driver stated “Sometimes it happens a customer gets mad for some reason, either he/she doesn’t understand the city or thinks we are going the wrong way. Then they give you a hard time. They say you are going the wrong way you’re trying to make more money, wasting my time. But at the night shift I faced severely bad things like racism, like oh you’re from Afghanistan; you’re a bunch of terrorists, this stuff” (TD6). Negative communication occurred also when passengers were intoxicated, most often occurring to drivers who worked the night shift. One driver described that “some people think you are nothing, you are like garbage...one time a guy was drunk and he throw up inside my car ...I ask him for money to clean the car and he said that’s not my job. I ask him for money to clean the car but he didn’t. I said well I’m not going to give you change –it was \$17.00. The guy was mad you nigger blah blah blah”. Another driver confirmed this type of racist communication when some passengers were intoxicated “passengers –they call us fucking immigrant when they drink”(TD11). Most passengers who made racist remarks to drivers, according to those who participated in this study, did so, as a result of a situation where negative or miscommunication had escalated.



Most drivers had difficulty clearly defining racism as a concept and their descriptions of racism often reflected the indirect nature of racism they had experienced with passengers. Deitch et al (2003) argued that racism was not disappearing but instead becoming more indirect and covert in the ways it was communicated. TD6 stated “rarely people are stating their racism clearly, calling you ‘Hey you Paki’ for example or you are a nigger. This stuff rarely happens. But –of course if the thing goes too far they do use it because they don’t care. But usually they do it differently. Like –oh you’re from Afghanistan, great country, can you bring me back some hash from there, some opium?”. This confirmed what Leets (2003) had mentioned in terms of drivers’ experience of racism as more likely indirect comments, which are not race related but rather stereotypic derogation. Stereotypic comments were also found to be common with drivers in New York City (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005) re-affirming a parallel in the racist treatment that drivers experience in Toronto.

## Dispatch

One of the methods of communication used by a lot of drivers who were not ‘independent’ was a dispatch system. In the literature in New York City taxi drivers had been exposed to racism through the radio dispatch (Mathew, 2005). This was problematic because drivers pay a monthly fee for service and it was designed to increase their ability to acquire orders. Dispatch was used “only for business purposes, to take orders-no communication between drivers”(TD4). There were two forms of dispatch: radio dispatch and computerized dispatch described by drivers. The computerized dispatch system involved solely giving addresses through dispatch; if there’s a problem the driver has to contact the brokerage on his cell. Thus this type of communication was an unlikely source of racist comments. In terms of racism on the radio dispatch, some drivers stated this was also unlikely for two reasons: new

regulations and the changing demographics of dispatchers. First, “they have special rules on the dispatch”(TD9). Another participant stated that “[racism] or bad words not allowed-it’s prohibited, it’s the cleanest communication between two people on earth” (TD8). As well, “every conversation is taped so [racism] doesn’t happen directly- because it is controlled by the company (TD4). Therefore, this communication did not, for most drivers who used it, seem to be a source of racism.

This was not to say some driver respondents did not experience other forms of abuse with dispatch. A couple of drivers mentioned indirect racism whereby some dispatchers would trash talk newer drivers “[dispatcher] doesn’t understand the [driver] who they are communicating with then gets agitated and says I should be staying in school...or get the grade 12 or something...that you should know second language and those things”(TD7). Therefore, the dispatch system appeared to be improving in terms of racialized communication with drivers, but there were several issues that drivers mentioned as alternative forms of power abuse.

Dispatchers using the radio were required to adhere to regulations according to the brokerage but there were issues of power and abuse of power that were described by some drivers. This may be an alternative attempted by some dispatchers to reaffirm social power within the taxi industry as power often gets perpetuated by racialized communication (Deitch et al, 2003). As one driver respondent mentioned “dispatchers nowadays don’t use unacceptable things –where they get frustrated they don’t call names. I mean there is a different form of abuse” (TD16). The dispatch “treat us badly in a different way”(TD4). One respondent stated that it was common to get cut off the radio for any reason “I had to ask some questions and the dispatcher said I have to say yes sir. I said please you don’t tell me what to say. Well he says if you don’t say please or yes sir I’m going to have to cut you from the radio for two hours”.

(TD9). Or some dispatchers stated “if you don’t know what they’re saying and you ask them to repeat and they don’t like –they throw you off the air” (TD5). Another driver respondent pointed out an important fact that drivers were paying for this service “we are paying them. We are not their employees. I pay for this, 450 dollars per month for this radio. So they should be very nice to us but they are not...if you say a word you are off the air”. (TD6). Some drivers referred to corruption with some dispatchers. Both TD1 and TD17 explained that some dispatchers give fares to their friends or to their own people. It was for these reasons that most independent drivers, who participated in this research, chose not to use a dispatch system.

## Police

Drivers described instances of the intersection of class and race in their experiences of racism with some police officers. This differential treatment by police was most evident when drivers were driving their private cars from when they were driving their taxis. Some drivers explained that police acted differently toward them “using bad languages which they don’t use for ordinary people. I drove my private vehicle and police officer was talking to me nicely and then when I-same person, sat behind the wheel and then they started using coarse language ...you f-ing cabbie...so it’s discrimination of the job” (TD6). Some driver respondents described clearly the subtle generalizations which some cab drivers experienced from certain police officers “they pull us over for any reason they ask all kinds of questions like ‘and you guys’ things ...what does that mean? You guys as cab drivers or you guys as black people...you don’t know what to do. Because he mentioned where’d you get the license? Yeah I got my license in Canada. Because he mentioned I’m from somewhere [else]” (TD18). These procedures and practices by some police officers exploited racialized drivers. Some drivers described that a few police had directly used racial slurs “why didn’t you move nigger” (TD4) or asked where they were from when

issuing tickets “police asked me for my driver’s license and then asked where I was from ...he said unless you tell me he’s going to give me plenty of tickets”(TD16). These were specific instances of everyday racism that some drivers explained they had encountered but it was this differential treatment in everyday examples of racism that helped to explain how a low position can condition their racialization.

### *Explaining racism*

Several drivers described their experiences of racism with passengers as varied but that direct racism was much more common when the driver was communicating with passengers at night. Much more common, according to TD1, was indirect racism or “giving irregular comments for example when you pick up a fare and they get mad about something so they tell you go back to your own country-like there’s some impression that Canada belongs to white people”. TD18 also identified racism in a similar way noting that some passengers often used indirect ways to identify him in terms of his physical or cultural traits. He explained “Racism in Canada-you can’t say there is no racism; you can’t say always there is always racism. It varies person to person you know? Sometimes they just ask you nothing before they say ‘where are you from’ before even saying hi or something like that. They ask –where you from? I say sometimes-what are you panicked or something? Because my colour or something...Cause I scare you?”. Statements like this demonstrated the ambiguity of everyday racism because drivers cannot be certain with negative treatment they received was due to their race or gender or for another reason.

Interestingly, these comments might be used as indirect forms of racism to avoid the breach of social norms associated with more direct racist speech, as was found with European

Americans in Leets & Giles, 1997 (Leets, 2003). Through this logic Leets (2003) found that direct racist statements would be less polite whereas, indirect racist statements were more polite. This correlated with Deitch et al (2003) who noted that everyday encounters were part of the lived experience of racialized group members; these were not rare instances but were familiar and recurrent patterns of being devalued in varied ways and contexts. TD9 confirmed this analysis as racism was “subtle. It’s not in front of your face. You know it-you feel it. It’s everyday from the police, the way people act”. These types of comments, both direct and indirect forms of racism were reflected in Mathew’s (2005 and Das Gupta’s (2004) interviews with New York Drivers which paralleled experiences of drivers in this study.

Some drivers attempted to justify the racism they experienced as a result of passengers being upset either prior to entering the taxi or during the taxi service. This was a justification that some drivers used to explain the use of racism which seems to be juxtaposed to uncomplicated notions of racial domination and difference based on phenotype (Dei, 1996). One respondent stated “I might make a call where I feel there’s going to be less traffic-it might be huge traffic. Then the person gets upset and then starts you know-you don’t know this kind of it. I’ve seen some people even call me nigger” (TD7). Another participant confirmed “the majority of negative communication is usually a racial thing” (TD8). One participant added “racism doesn’t just happen from nowhere. It has to be some reason that guy picked a racist comment. Either he asked you to take him somewhere if you don’t ...or if you say something or there’s a misunderstanding –at that time racism starts” (TD5). These examples demonstrated that some drivers attributed and justified passenger use of indirect or direct racist treatment to the driver communication or the taxi service. This showed that the nature of this work as passenger-centred may have allowed drivers to perceive racism as part of the response to taxi service that does not

meet with passenger expectations. Leets (2001) noted that repetitive experiences with racism (both direct and indirect comments) reduced racialized group members evaluations of harm and increased levels of desensitization for those in her study. This may explain some drivers association of racist treatment by some passengers as “one of the hazards of the job” (TD1).

Further, drivers who explained instances of everyday racism with passengers always qualified their examples in their definition of racism. Most drivers in the study explained that particular comments made by passengers were not typical and that most passengers were courteous. For example, “about customers-most of them are nice people, especially in the daytime. Only sometimes it happens the customer gets mad for some reason”(TD6). Another driver explained that it was important to acknowledge the volume of passengers they meet, as a reason there was bound to be some negative communication. He stated “there are so many passengers you meet with. And they have too many faces. Too many characteristics. There is some that tell you -you shouldn’t be here at all...and that we should go back to where we came from”(TD7). Another respondent stated the “majority of customers are good”(TD8). One driver interviewed mentioned the driver’s responsibility to recognize fares that were good from those that were bad. He states “Toronto people are nice people sometimes we get a bad fare too but you have to know which fare is bad and which fare is good. Mostly, 95% of people in Toronto are nice”(TD14). Another driver pointed out that “racism exists everywhere...some bad apples exist and they target drivers because they can’t do anything”(TD6). One driver explained that racism as a concept was fairly new to him qualifying his understanding and experience of it in Canada. He stated “the word racism, for me, I don’t even have it in my own native language-I don’t have the word racism because it didn’t exist.”(TD9). Therefore, most participants in the

study recognized the need to qualify the everyday racism to what they experienced in the industry and to the extent that it occurred under certain circumstances with certain customers.

Drivers also understood racism as tied to the historical construction of Canadian national identity as European in origin. Much of what was described by drivers as everyday instances of racism was the question: where are you from? Often this resulted in driver frustration and feelings of discrimination as it is used to affirm that they are from somewhere else and to differentiate in a way that reaffirms their ‘outsider’ status. Most drivers who participated in this research mentioned that both passengers and police had asked this question in communication with drivers in the taxi. Drivers described this often both as either a negative type of communication they experience or as racism. A typical example of this from a few drivers was “sometimes [passengers] they don’t say hi-just where are you from? When they hear your accent”(TD12). Another driver reflects “sometimes passengers when they get mad they say go back to your country-like there’s some impression that Canada belongs to white people” (TD1). This example spoke to Dei’s (1996) and Bannerji’s (1995) explanations of common sense racism, whereby a history of colonization has given way to norms of racism and other forms of oppression which function to deny certain interests in addition to a sense of national belonging.

A couple taxi driver respondents explain further that there is a difference between curiosity and racism, “if you want to ask somebody that you talk to them nicely first-after that for curiosity you ask them where they’re from right? But people just come up –Hey cabbie where you from? And to me it’s unacceptable”(TD5). A few of the driver respondents explained that this question was irrelevant to the service that is being provided or their driving “a police officer asked me where you from? I said what does that mean? You stop me that I follow too close why you ask where I’m from-does it have anything to do with this?”(TD10). With customers “people

want to interview me all the time....where am I from etc...it's very common to get asked where you are from-which implies really, if you look behind it- it means something else to me it means I'm from somewhere else which doesn't offend me but my son has the same reflection as I do and he is born here and he will be asked those same questions" (TD16). According to Mahtani (2002) this question assumed foreign-ness, because notions of Canadian nationalism were constructed based on historical notions of British or French ancestry. Therefore, it became increasingly complicated to identify as Canadian in a country where ethnic differences between citizens were racialized (ibid). Another driver mentioned a similar incidence with a police officer "where'd you get you license I say I get my license in Canada-but he mentioned I'm from somewhere else. Another driver drove this point home "where are you from? [Saying this] before they sit down, customers feel they are starting a conversation but it's not-it's offensive. To open the door to racism the first question is -where are you from?"(TD13).

Another driver argued that this question ultimately affirmed that there was a notion of a Canadian national identity based on which that question "where are you from?" excluded those who visually may not fit this identity. If we were to understand national identity within its socio-historical context in Canada its definition for some was arguably influenced by the migration and establishment of a white settler colony during the onset of this term's definition. This was understood in present day notions of how participants perceived what it meant to be Canadian and notions of authenticity. One respondent explained that a police officer threatened to give him lots of tickets if he did not answer where he was from and he was taking this to court. He states "I was ready to show my citizenship because I told him where I was from. But I was going to show the judge that on my citizenship it does not say first class or second class citizen. It says



Canadian citizen” (TD16). Thus it was perceived by some drivers that this question can and does open the door to discrimination based on national identity.

## *II. Racism and the structure of the taxi industry*

Drivers tended to describe racism as it related to the taxi industry. There was a clear interconnection between everyday instances of racism and systemic racism in the industry. The purpose for using an anti-racist framework was to demonstrate the connection in everyday racism and how it extended beyond individual discriminatory actions to analyze how they were entrenched and supported by institutional structures (Simmons, 1994; Lee, 1994 in Dei, 1996). One driver explained that the taxi industry structure and its recent reforms in the form of the Ambassador program reflected the structural racism that immigrants deal with at work, “it’s the politics of economics of immigrants in this country when their [immigrants] names appear they call a reform. And that reform has restrictions on the plate. With the issue to the drivers who are new immigrants to this country” (TD7). Moreover, any regulations were put in place to the advantage of the customer and not the driver. One driver explained “Any regulations we have controls me-what to do and what not to do. But not much what I have as a right. There’s not much rights for the driver”(TD9). Most drivers in this research mentioned that there were few rights the drivers had. One driver alluded to the physical representation of the Passenger Bill of Rights in the taxi as the interconnection of structural and everyday racism that occurred. He argued “We don’t have any rights completely because as you see there’s the passenger’s rights over here, but have you see any driver’s rights? The way you have read your rights –if you always read my rights –it will stop the problem. Right now when a customer comes-he or she thinks they own you”(TD7). This industry represented Cortina’s (2008) argument that social hierarchies were encouraged and social power was enabled, through an organization’s implicit or

explicit support of discrimination. This was evident in the taxi industry through a lack of discrimination policy or protection act for drivers and racist norms in the industry. Drivers made clear links of their experiences of everyday racism as conditioned by the way in which the industry was structured.

Drivers repeatedly connected their racist treatment by passengers to their low position in society. More than one reported not being subjected to the same treatment from members of the public when not at work. One driver stated “discrimination of the job exists in large by police officials, by city officials, by everybody. If we go to a bank and I’m a taxi driver and I want a credit card- oh sorry we don’t have such a thing for taxi because we don’t have a pay check”(TD6). One driver interviewed mentioned that “if you are looking for a job, it’s not respected as work experience”(TD2) which can be an issue for drivers who are trying to look for work in other industries. Another driver explained “people think when you drive a taxi-that you are out of your mind...that you cannot do an office job”(TD10). This logic spoke to the economic discrimination that has led a significant number of drivers to enter into this industry in the first place (Hathyani, 2006, 2007). Another confirmed “because the way people look –they judge you by what you do. I say one day to my friend I want to go to Canoe restaurant and then I have on my table taxi driver...if you see a person on the street and they don’t see you in the cab it’s totally different (TD16). This demonstrated that drivers attributed their experiences of racialization and racism in the industry as connected to the social status of their job title.

A few drivers analyzed this intersection of race and the lowered social status of their work “a lot of people think you are doing a tough job they think the last thing they would do is drive a taxi. Because of this, they think you don’t know anything –like how to read and write I mean. Passengers don’t feel the need to censor themselves at all –they think your language is

limited. Passengers talk as if you don't know anything...and are shocked when you show you do" (TD3). Bannerji's (1995) explanation of the common sense racism held that norms and forms were put in place through a history of colonization. This was how Galabuzi (2006) posited that economic discrimination occurred, the value of qualifications from a certain country or region were unclear, and assumptions were made about employment capacity. Another driver stated that passengers can make these types of conclusions based on the drivers' accent "if you have an accent they think you don't know anything" (TD9). One respondent explained that [passengers] try to undermine you. It's like –don't tell me or shut up cab driver you don't have any education"(TD17). These examples that some drivers provided demonstrated that the differential treatment was influenced by the intersection of race and class in this industry.

Drivers described the experience of racism as more acute in the taxi industry than in others they had worked in because of long hours and consistent exposure to a wide variety of individuals (TD4). Some drivers observed and experienced racism not only in relation to themselves directly, but in relation to how police reacted to their calls about victimization. Another respondent explained that the police responded much more quickly and took the matter more seriously if the passenger who perpetrated the crime was black than if he was white. A case was more quickly recorded and a 'profile' created from the black perpetrator while the white ones were rarely followed up on (TD11). As a racialized non-black driver, it was revealing how he was treated as an ally when the perpetrator was black, but not when the perpetrator was white. Also, another driver described how slow some police are to respond to situations when a cab driver contacted them. An example of this occurred to a driver who called the dispatch to call the police that a woman was trying to commit suicide by jumping to the rail near Danforth and Victoria Park, "it takes two hours for the police to come there...I was talking to the woman as a

friend –please don’t do that...when the police come I left because I wasted two hours of my time. Anybody else call a situation like that –police will come within three minutes”(TD6). Another respondent confirmed the slow or no police response to fare disputes as well “it’s not good for cabs, it’s not fair. If I call the police I have to get it before I get hit or I hit somebody because there’s an argument. Police need to give consideration-when we call you we mean we need you, cause we couldn’t work for free” (TD9). This differential treatment by police can create further issues for drivers as they were unable to access police services when necessary.

Moreover, the racism from the police was experienced even more frequently and intensely than from the public, because it often cost them time and money. This was described by drivers in several ways. One driver noted that although some police officers were good, some “just want to give you a ticket to show you who they are. Ok. They want to show they’re the boss and I respect that... but they give you tickets sometimes with no reason”(TD5). Some other drivers stated “police are very biased against taxi drivers...I was pulled over for turning right on a red but it wasn’t me...when I tried to explain the police officer said I stopped you so I have to give you a ticket”(TD8). Or they make judgements about taxi drivers “they don’t know what happened or who is at fault but they said you are the taxi driver, you are a careless driver, oh we know how you drive”(TD6). Another driver confirmed that some police were targeting drivers at times “they try to give us tickets, they check bumper to bumper everything-it’s crazy at least a minimum of two tickets”(TD15). This targeting was evident in another driver respondent’s comment “some police officers don’t issue tickets to the [non-taxi] drivers that park in our taxi stand rather than giving the ticket to those people they give it to us”(TD14). Another driver confirmed this “because I’m a cab driver they give me a ticket and give the private car a warning-its discrimination, no right to explain they tell you to shut up”(TD17).

It was the excessive regulation of the taxi industry in Toronto which had resulted in the police having ample scope for harassment. The layered effect of race/class based discrimination was evident in one driver's experience "cops are less outwardly racist" but he noticed that he got hassled more than other white taxi drivers –on the taxi stand the cops tried to give him a ticket and let the others go with a warning (TD1). One driver explained that tickets often cost drivers more than the ticket, "a police officer pulled me over for following too closely, he asked my license and how many points I had. I said I don't have any points and when he came back from his car he asked me where you from? I said what does that have to do with it and he gave me a ticket for following too close. I tried to take the case to court...because that had nothing to do with the reason I was stopped...after three months the case was withdrawn" (TD10). Sometimes drivers questioned their experiences with some police officers because "they stop you for no reason and they see your license and check everything –you think maybe it's something because I'm black or maybe is he doing his job, maybe he's checking something else. (TD18). Another driver recalled picking up an elderly lady and being asked to move his car by a police officer because of construction, "he asked for my license ...but didn't give me anything at the time. I asked why you just took it and gave it back, he said: I was just looking at it. And later that day a ticket was delivered to my house. So I'm going to court for that" (TD17). This was echoed in previous research (Das Gupta, 2004; Mathew, 2005; Facey, 2003; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008) whereby drivers' attempts to speak out against racism can result in an increase in economic hardship as a result of court summons, fines, and licence suspensions.

This differential treatment by police was also due to the city and industry by laws. One cab driver highlighted a different issue with the overcrowding of taxis "I've been driving for twenty years...the tickets I have its more than the hairs on my head...to be honest I think one

ticket is unfair. It's my mistake the problem is the taxi stands unfortunately it's not enough, we drive six cylinder car you push the gas you're losing a dollar. You are not picking up you have no choice but to stop. You stop way behind the cab stand designated area and the police ticket you. The police aren't wrong but unfortunately I cannot drive either. That's why everyone sees the police after us" (TD9). Another driver stated "police are strict –we are serving the population but it shouldn't be like that" (TD17). This reaffirms Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore's (2008) findings that drivers perceive City council by-laws as working against driver interests, further reflecting their social and economic vulnerability in this industry. Some drivers felt the cost of the ticketing of both police and licensing commission officers. One driver stated "a lot of police give taxi drivers a hard time, they give a lot of tickets...every driver has about 50 tickets a year...also the office of the commission, they come and give you tickets –oh you taxi's dirty yeah I just washed it-Oh you haven't washed it good"(TD11). Drivers' already low level incomes were further compromised by the financial costs of the tickets, and/or the time in court to fight tickets.

The race and class position of drivers in the public, including their interactions with police, was due to the structure of the industry. Drivers often felt that they had no voice in the decision making for drivers. This is due to the breakdown of a Standard Employment Relationship (Fudge & Vosko, 2001) which would typically involve labour regulation based on a regime of industry based collective bargaining. This coincided with Mathew's (2005) understanding of neoliberal economic organization whereby the logic was that the most vulnerable in this industry became connected by more than their ethnicity but by the position they held in the vertical hierarchy of neoliberal economic structure. Also there was, according to the drivers interviewed, no attention to drivers' needs in policies such as taxi stands, and there

were no by laws to protect them as they were all geared towards the customers “see the customer can report you, but you can’t report to nobody” (TD5). Drivers, because of low income and lack of resources often do not report, or file a case with regards to racist treatment. One driver stated “some police target immigrants who cannot challenge in the courtroom because of the language they have –as a second language and they don’t know the law to defend themselves” (TD7). As the taxi industry has been re-structured towards self employment, based on a neo-liberal logic of flexibility, drivers were not considered workers and thus were vulnerable to racism within the structure.

One or two drivers made the point that when the police ticket them, it was often not because the individual officer wanted to harass them but because the by-laws were against them. Several drivers explained that “we don’t have any rights, so we don’t report. The By-laws are regulated and controlled against us. The Charter of Rights is gone for us”(TD8). But since there is no human rights, workplace safety or labour laws for taxi drivers there is no structural system in place to which drivers could lodge their complaint or case. This same finding was echoed in Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore (2008). Fudge and Vosko (2001) explained that due to the structure of the industry, self-employment undermined the potential for equity legislation. This was arguably because legislation required the existence of an ongoing employer-employee relationship. Thus drivers were not protected by employment standards legislation (Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008)

Drivers were well aware of their rights in the taxi industry and basically, these were very few according to those interviewed. One driver stated “the only rights I have to my knowledge it’s when the person becomes aggressive, obnoxious then I can say please take another car. The second thing is if the person refused to pay me when I meet him in another two years or year I

can say I'm not going to take him" (TD7). Other drivers mentioned that with driver's complaints or if drivers' report an incident it was not given much attention "with public complaints [police] never listen to drivers because it's like a low low low level of people so they don't have to listen to them" (TD7). The intersection of independent contractor status with a lack of workplace rights, no place to report, the economic vulnerability of the position and the differential treatment of police officers made drivers feel increasingly vulnerable in an already precarious industry.

### III. *Intersection of class & race:*

#### Class position conditioned/structured racism

The findings based on the taxi drivers interviewed suggested that there was a very clear intersection of race and class. One way in which this occurred is the way that class position conditioned drivers' racialization. This correlates with Bannerji's (2005) understanding of 'race' as inextricably tied to class, as 'race' is argued as a collection of discourses of colonialism and slavery, which are firmly rooted in capitalism. She argues that race and class are inseparable as much in the extraction of surplus value in capitalism as it is a common sense practice in social life. Thus, race and class, or more specifically "economic participation, the value of labour, social and political participation and entitlement and cultural marginalization and inclusion are all part of this overall social formation" (ibid). Within the industry, definitions of racism included notions of class based discrimination as a form of indirect racism. Several drivers observed the intersection of race and class in their definition of racism. One driver explained "the racism I'm encountering is totally different because everybody has some sort of biased outlook in that they associate you with the job you do. If you see a person on the street and they don't see you in a cab it's totally different ...because people judge you by what you do" (TD16). This



differential and unequal treatment described demonstrated the logic of an anti-racist approach in this research, as issues of race and social differences were represented as issues of power and equity, as opposed to cultural and ethnic matters (Dei, 1996).

In an anti-racist approach, racism coupled with classism placed the majority of drivers at a disadvantage. Another driver respondent confirmed this statement “racism comes from any source, not only the colour, the job, or whatever you do and somebody take it as like some other business. People think when you drive a taxi-that you are out of your mind that you are not human, as low [class], you are not equal (TD10). This intersection of race and class in some respondents definitions of racism was highlighted “because I’m a cab driver they give me a ticket and give the private car a warning-its discrimination [we] have no right to explain, they tell you to shut up” (TD17). Respondents’ definition of racism demonstrated the layered discrimination that influenced how they perceived their lived experience within the industry. This research echoed Essed’s (2007) case study of Rosa N’s experience of racism as a cleaner in the hospital setting, as it appeared in this industry as well, to be structured by class exploitation; doubly disadvantaging those were confronted with the impact of class oppression in everyday racism. This revealed racism as structuring and legitimizing class inequalities.

The other way in which drivers asserted that there was systemic racism and classism within the industry was in the way drivers saw race as structuring class or, more specifically, racism as structuring the industry. Several drivers’ comments indicated that they perceived that systemic racism had resulted in increasing economic loss and exposure to economic hardship. The documentation around the 1998 reforms leading to the introduction of the Ambassador program suggested that it was motivated by a desire to improve the burden of leasing and reduce the concentration of capital in the industry. However, several drivers perceived them as instead

motivated by the changed identities of those who were applying for plates (the shift from Steve and John to Omar and Mohammed) and the desire to keep individuals with those identities from achieving the same economic status as the earlier plate holders. This seemed to coincide with Bannerji's (1995) argument that instances of racism are often contrived in common sense logic, whereby such systemic discrimination becomes un-thought out. This left room for contradictions, myths, and rumours in this industry as we saw several drivers in this study stating that for white people there were Standard plates and for immigrants Ambassador plates. One driver addresses what was perceived by a lot of drivers to be systemic racism in the industry "It's a two tier licensing system in Toronto. In 1998 they made changes because the names changed ...the type of plates available are "valueless" because you can't take on another driver, you have to drive till you die, then they take back the plate you can't sell it or give it to family. This is big discrimination most people immigrants who are drivers and this is when they changed the system" (TD8). Thus drivers did express a clear indication that the everyday racism they experience was linked to what they understood was the structural racism of the industry.

#### *IV. Strategies for coping and resistance*

Most drivers had experienced instances of everyday racism as a result of what they saw as structural racism in the industry. These experiences varied in terms of frequency according to the drivers who were interviewed, however, for most drivers this results in emotional stress and hardship. This finding was echoed in previous studies in New York City and in Toronto (Das Gupta, 1994; Mathew, 1995; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Facey, 2003). Particularly, this was emotionally stressful for some drivers because of industry regulations being geared to the disadvantage rather than the protection of drivers. Because of this, some drivers "did not want to provoke. There is a fare is always right policy-they could call back the company"(TD1).

Another driver stated “I don’t get angry anymore-I just avoid listening to it. Otherwise I would have to go home because I can’t drive” (TD3). There was a consensus among a few drivers that “you have to be patient in this business or there’s conflict” (TD4) and that “ignorant people are one of the hazards of the job”(TD1). Moreover, there was no authority to report these issues drivers face at work “I report to my friend I talk to him. I release my stress. That’s all I do”(TD5). Thus, because there was no authority with the taxi industry to which drivers can assert themselves with regards to working conditions such as, harassment and verbal abuse taxi drivers have adapted alternative work strategies to deal with racism.

One of the work strategies used by taxi drivers who participated in this research was being patient. A reason for being patient and avoiding conflict was explained by a respondent “the driver, and the passenger don’t have a witness, so in those cases how can you prove the person, when the case gets at a high level the person would deny and since you don’t have witnesses they have to let the person go”(TD10). Therefore some drivers chose to “let it go” rather than report it “this stuff is very tough...its money because you are working for yourself. You are wasting your time [reporting] that’s why most drivers let it go”(TD10). Another driver explained that he felt he could not respond to instances of discrimination by the police because “he tells me shut up or I give you five tickets, I’m a nice guy I give you one ticket. If you talk too much I give you five tickets. So I keep quiet (TD11). This demonstrated that some drivers felt that there were certain officers that do discriminate against some taxi drivers but because the police were in a position of authority drivers felt they were unable to respond because of financial costs associated with tickets. Scott (1985) argued that the nature of resistance was often influenced by existing forms of labour control and by the probability and severity of the retaliation. Similarly, because drivers were self-employed responding by being patient or letting

it go can avoid conflict and/or losing the passenger fare or time taken away from work; however this was often at the expense of drivers' emotional well being. Therefore, some coping strategies were often as much about managing emotions as about managing financial and legal costs.

Other drivers tended to discount some instances of racism. This may demonstrate a tendency for some to normalize some instances of everyday racism that occur in the industry. One driver stated "He says this I say that I'm not racist, he's not racist. It's normal. It's human nature to try to make the other person feel bad. Unfortunately in Canada it is a crime."(TD9). Another driver confirmed this "I don't really consider calling nigger racism because I'm already adapted for that"(TD13). This represented that the everyday nature of this type of racism may be more prevalent than drivers recalled. It also re-affirmed that resistance occurred on an individualized and everyday basis (Scott, 1985). Thus it became difficult to evaluate the extent to which it was actually occurring.

Another way some drivers explained responding to instances of everyday racism was through various forms of resistance. One driver mentioned he would sometimes "try to cut the communication to the person saying enough's enough. I don't want to discuss it with you and I'm not happy to have any more discussion related to that matter but if you want to change the subject that's fine" (TD6). This type of communication was a response to racism. Some drivers used patience as previously mentioned and control as a conscious suppression of anger with the knowledge that open aggression or a response could lead to retaliation (Scott, 1990). If it were to escalate a few drivers responded that they would say "please get out of my car" even if they don't get the fare (TD2,TD6, TD17). Another driver responded by making jokes "like if you can guess where I'm from it's a free ride if not double the fare. Or change the subject"(TD13). One driver asserted that it was the service that should be the focus and not the identity of the driver "I

try to explain, as much as I can, it doesn't matter who I am the service is what you got. Let's talk about the service...you know have a positive attitude with this"(TD18).

Drivers' experiences and explanations of their responses and methods of resistance to racist treatment tended to be very much circumstantial but demonstrated how the emotional burden of everyday racism can build up. This also demonstrated the differential burden of the history of racism, as these norms were derived from a history of slavery, and colonization (Bannerji, 1995). As one driver admitted "I'm not a slave here, I'm not taking shit you know? I'm going to take action I have to get them out of the taxi cab. Too much in my car---I can't take it. I just swallow inside till I blow up"(TD5). He further elaborated the difficulties that can result from the stress of everyday racism which can motivate resistance "some people are good but you know when the bad comes they make you miserable. You start to hate yourself --you understand?"(TD5). Another driver confirmed the emotional burden of class based discrimination some drivers experienced "my children are ashamed to tell their friends and their teacher their father is a cab driver-they say don't come to the school in the taxi bring the private car. It looks shameful-that's why I'm determined to stay in this job till the end of my life-I'm not going to quit. Till it gets fixed"(TD6). This finding was echoed in previous research in both New York City and in Toronto (Facey, 2003; Mathew, 2005; Das Gupta, 2004; Abraham, Sundar & Whitmore, 2008). Therefore, there was the motivation with drivers to respond to situations of racism or discrimination based on class as a result of emotional stress placed upon them in this industry.

However, driver responses and resistance to racist treatment at work were influenced by the risk involved in responding in certain ways. The risks that drivers mentioned to me were often related to physical conflict or financial loss. Examples provided by one driver (TD1)

demonstrated this with an example of being held at knife point over a fare. Another risk he stated is that a fare refused to pay. Because of this he didn't bother arguing with clients but he'll say you don't know the history of the country. Specifically, he "lets go after understanding they are ignorant"(TD1) or similarly, "when the person becomes some kind of racist mentality-he is an immature person...If I respond I don't get anything out of it"(TD18) . Several drivers confirmed the influence of physical threat and conflict was there.

Specifically, some drivers mentioned their feelings of risk involved in responding based on their, or others, previous experience in resisting racist treatment. One driver stated "sometimes they fight with you; they punch you from the back...after September 11<sup>th</sup> it happened a lot. Or when they see my name they try to fight. And then sometimes I try to hide my name and then the police give me a ticket. So either way you can't run from the situation (TD5). Previous research demonstrated the pervasive impact of 9/11 on the treatment of some drivers in the taxi industry (Das Gupta, 2004; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Mathew, 2005). There were also statements that demonstrated continued vulnerability which influenced the methods of resistance to racist treatment. A few drivers discussed with me their attempts to read the person's behaviour, personality, and if they are of physical risk to driver. One driver stated "First of all you have to assess-by the time the person opens the door: Can he walk properly? Is his supper drank[Is the passenger intoxicated]? Did he have anything look like bottles, knife, baseball bats, guns? ...You have to make a discussion and the level of language gives you so many things" (TD10). This influences drivers approach "I have to keep quiet because it's night time and someone in your cab is swearing at you if you talk back maybe they have a weapon"(TD12). These strategies and experiences described by most drivers who were interviewed confirm previous research that drivers in the taxi industry in various urban areas are victims of various

criminal acts and abuse (Facey, 2003; Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008; Mathew, 2005; Das Gupta, 2004; Moracoo et al, 2000). A few drivers mentioned that slow police response influences their response to racism “[passengers] know we don’t have rights-someone can kill you- police don’t show up for one hour when it was a big car accident. If it was a private car they would come.”(TD17). Therefore a couple of drivers suggest the alternative is to stay calm and finish the trip because police response time is slow and it is not worth the additional perceived risk.

The various methods of responding to racism also show that driver decisions about how to respond or resist is very much an individual one, and no collective resistance has been possible because of the absence of collective organization.

#### *Recommendations and conclusions from drivers*

Many suggestions and recommendations were made by the current fulltime taxi drivers who participated in this research, regarding the Toronto taxi industry. Most drivers did have recommendations based on their experiences which are crucial to the improvement of the working conditions in the taxi industry. From an anti-racist perspective it was crucial to have involvement from those working in the industry to identify the issues that were adversely impacting drivers and allowing everyday racism to flourish. Dei (1996) stated the reality of contemporary society was that ideological and cultural practices of dominant groups have various material consequences for racialized and other subordinate groups. Therefore to provide recommendations for this industry we had to take this into consideration. Because of this we needed to understand how race is organized, structured, and reproduced in addition to understanding the material well-being of drivers as they occupy a lowered and precarious status

within this industry. Dei (1996) maintained that such an understanding can be the driving force for a progressive politics of anti-racism organizational change.

One driver suggested that it was a lack of transparency in the taxi industry, in the system, which had led to instances of racism –because when people see there are problems in the system they take advantage (TD6). This was due to the neo-liberal style structure of the industry, with the majority of the workers being in a precarious position, allowing for racist treatment to flourish. Galabuzi (2006) confirmed that the concept of flexible work had become popular with globalization which can be challenging for low income workers, especially those with the most marginal hold on the labour market. Moreover, he stated that this dramatic increase in self employment and contract work has had the most dramatic effect on racialized group members. This neoliberal climate had caused the city to organize by-laws and the taxi industry to prioritize regulations in favour of passengers at the expense of employment rights.

Thus, racism helped to legitimize the structure of the industry which created a group of low income, vulnerable workers because the workers were predominately from immigrant and racialized groups. Also, some drivers mentioned there were several generalizations and negative stereotypes about cab drivers which contributed to the racist treatment, class based discrimination and stressful working conditions of drivers. One driver stated “they think we’re all Muslim, terrorists, dumb. They think we’re all the same, it is very stressful. Why do they see us like enemies-we work hard and we are living straight lives (TD9). Another driver defended the negative assumptions regarding taxi drivers “they say taxi drivers are illiterate I can say we are the most educated people. Each taxi driver can easily speak three or four languages. Drivers from Africa they can speak four or five languages. They are very educated persons. But how come they say we are illiterate when we get the taxi license. We pass the English exam. I’ll show



you doctors driving taxi, engineers driving taxi, architects, lawyers, businessmen because we don't get jobs according to our ability that's why we're earning a living driving a taxi"(TD14).

Therefore it was recommended that the industry would be improved by attempts to address larger issues of racism in society, such as international credential recognition (as demonstrated by Hathiyan, 2006), taking on racial profiling by public and police and address policing practices (as was previously recommended by Abraham, Sundar, & Whitmore, 2008)

Thus, due to larger issues of oppression, particularly the intersection of race and class, a real improvement to the industry would only come if the industry was regulated in favour of the drivers such as by-laws, policing, employee status, association representation. More specifically, some drivers recognize the influence of the Passenger Bills of Rights and recommended that it had to change "when people see [the Passenger Bill of Rights] they think they can do whatever they like"(TD9). A Driver Bill of Rights would provide knowledge to drivers regarding their rights in the industry. It would serve to inform passengers of drivers' rights while providing taxi service. Visually represented in the cab, a Driver Bill of Rights may also contribute to regulating class based discrimination that most drivers perceived as an issue in the industry.

Other drivers proposed the idea of developing a collective voice to assert themselves in a decision-making capacity "currently we are very fragmented we need a union or association"(TD9) other driver suggests "mandate the taxi advisory committee with the city –to discuss our problems and talk to councillors...they don't listen to us-they don't call a taxi meeting they change the laws themselves" (TD14). Philips (2007) argued that there has been an increase of minority professional associations set up as a result of the negative experiences of those who have encountered discrimination, with the objective to increase legitimacy and

decrease discrimination in the workplace. She argued they tend to have the capacity to provide critical support by maintaining a critical distance from employers (Ibid.).

Other drivers also mentioned the importance of municipal government involvement, which is recommended in terms of police communication and relationship with the taxi industry and its drivers. Several drivers in this study mentioned experiences with and concerns of certain officers' abuse of authority. One driver stated "the police here are above the law. The law is for everybody everywhere but here the police are above the law" (TD11). The relationship between drivers and police was often described as problematic by drivers because of real and perceived power dynamics which driver felt that they were at a disadvantage to receive police services and equal treatment. This recommendation has since been viewed by Toronto City Council through members of the Taxi Driving Force and the dissemination of Abraham, Sundar, and Whitmore's 2008 Report. As a result, the City of Toronto Police Services Board established a Working Group to review the recommendations pertaining to the police in the Report and to identify how the police services can improve its relationship with the taxi drivers in the City of Toronto (Canadian Taxi Drivers Association, 2008).

Although much more research should be done to evaluate the extent and pervasiveness of everyday racism, its existence was clear in each respondent's experience with it. This study demonstrated that everyday racism was apparent to drivers who for the majority linked it to issues of systemic racism that both allowed for it and perpetuated it. Thus although it occurred on an individualized basis, much of the recommendations involve changes to the structure of the industry to prioritize the drivers. This industry continues to be precarious and continues to place drivers in a vulnerable position as they are unable to collectively organize, perceiving themselves as politically voiceless. This is coupled with the fact that there is currently no authority to which

they are able to report abuse and race related harassment. This type of harassment exists in the absence of a driver's bill of rights or industry specific regulations pertaining to passenger conduct and work place health and safety. Moreover, the logic of race and class in the social location of the majority of drivers seems to play into the de-prioritization of these types of industry standards. Given that the taxi industry in Toronto is a significant employer of immigrant and racialized men, improving working conditions in the industry would help to address broader issues of social exclusion and the racialization of poverty.

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## *Appendix I-*

### Interview Questions

#### Social Location

- 1) Age:
- 2) Gender:
- 3) Country of origin:
- 4) How many years have you been in Canada:
- 5) First Language (other languages spoken):
- 6) Family status:
- 7) Highest level of education completed:
- 8) A) Are you trained in another profession:  
B) Why aren't you working in this profession?
- 9) How did you find out about taxi driving:

#### Social position/status in the taxi industry

- 1) What type of driver are you currently?
- 2) How many years have you been driving taxi?
- 3) Do you drive part-time or full-time?
- 4) Do you drive for a brokerage? (if so which, have you driven for others in the past?)
- 5) Do drive for a garage? (if so which, have you driven for others in the past?)

#### Open Ended Questions

- 1) What are the methods of communication that are used in the taxi?
- 2) What is the purpose of using the dispatch as a means of communication?
- 3) Have you ever experienced negative communication while driving in the taxi (including through dispatch)?
- 4) How do you define racism?
- 5) What comments in the taxi environment (by police, passengers, through dispatch, other individuals) do you associate with instances of racism or stereotyping?
- 6) Have you heard racism on the dispatch? Please describe.
- 7) Have you experienced racism while in the taxi? Please explain.
- 8) What are responses you would take as a driver?
- 9) What are the risks involved with responding in certain ways to racism, as a driver?
- 10) What are the perceptions of work rights with regards to racism in the taxi industry? If this does happen who would you report it to? How is it regulated or controlled?

## *Appendix 2-*

### **Ryerson University Consent Agreement**

#### **Racism and racialized communication in the work place**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to be a volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

**Investigator:** Jessica Walters- Ryerson University student completing Master of Arts in Immigration and Settlement Studies. She is completing the Major Research Paper under the supervision of Dr. Aparna Sundar, Politics and Public Administration Department at Ryerson University.

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to identify instances of everyday racism that can occur in the taxi industry in Toronto. The focus of this research is to access the perspective of drivers who self-identify as both immigrants and part of a racialized group to assess the extent to which drivers experience everyday instances of racism or racialized communication while they are at work. Secondly, this study will address the response that driver's might have or would take in these situations.

**Description of the Study:** This study will gather narratives of individuals who are working as drivers in the taxi industry in Toronto through open ended interviews. These interviews will take 30-45 minutes in duration and will be completed at a mutually agreed upon location and time. Interviews will be recorded as an audio file to facilitate a conversational approach, the interview will later be transcribed and the audio file will be erased. During the interview the researcher will ask 10 questions related to perceptions of everyday racism in the taxi industry, communication at work, stereotypes in the workplace, and responses to racism.

**Risks or Discomforts:** There may be some discomfort associated with discussing racism and racialization in the workplace. As a result, the participant should aware that participation in the interview is completely voluntary, and if (s)he feel discomfort associated with responding to the questions or uncomfortable continuing the interview(s)he may discontinue participation, either temporarily or permanently. The researcher will ensure confidentiality by keeping recorded information in a secure area, which is solely accessed by the researcher. During transcription and subsequent analysis interview responses will be associated with a particular number to protect the identity of the interviewees.

**Benefits of the Study:** The potential benefits of this research are extend the knowledge of impacts of everyday racism through communication on drivers. Moreover, from this everyday racism can mediate social inequality and thus studies like this can identify and build a collective voice for drivers who have experienced marginalization through an erosion of worker rights. Drivers can contribute their voice to the capacity to identify racialization through communication in the workplace and provide recommendations to influence social change within this industry. However, the researcher cannot guarantee that the participants will directly benefit from information provided in this study as social change takes time.

**Confidentiality:** The researcher will record interviews by audio file which will be numbered. These audio file will be transcribed and the responses participants provide will be identified by the interview number to protect the identity of the individual.

**Voluntary Nature of Participation:** Participation in this study is voluntary. Your choice of whether or not to participate will not influence your future relations with Ryerson University [include the names of



other institution(s) involved in the research]. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to stop your participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are allowed.

**Questions about the Study:** If you have any questions about the research now, please ask. If you have questions later about the research, you may contact.

Jessica Walters  
Email: [jessica.walters@ryerson.ca](mailto:jessica.walters@ryerson.ca)

If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study, you may contact the Ryerson University Research Ethics Board for information.

Research Ethics Board  
c/o Office of the Vice President, Research and Innovation  
Ryerson University  
350 Victoria Street  
Toronto, ON M5B 2K3  
416-979-5042

**Agreement:**

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this agreement and have had a chance to ask any questions you have about the study. Your signature also indicates that you agree to be in the study and have been told that you can change your mind and withdraw your consent to participate at any time. You have been given a copy of this agreement.

You have been told that by signing this consent agreement you are not giving up any of your legal rights.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

### *Appendix 3-*

#### **Information Sheet: Everyday Racism –A case study of Toronto’s Taxi Industry**

**Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this research is to identify instances of everyday racism that can occur in the taxi industry in Toronto. The focus of this research is to understand the perspective of drivers who self-identify as both immigrants and part of a racialized group to understand the extent to which drivers experience everyday instances of racism while they are at work. Secondly, this study will address the response that driver’s might have or would take in these situations.

**Description of the Study:** This study will gather narratives of individuals who are working as drivers in the taxi industry in Toronto through open ended interviews. These interviews will take 30-45 minutes in duration and will be completed at a mutually agreed upon location and time. During the interview the researcher will ask 10 questions related to perceptions of everyday racism in the taxi industry, communication at work, stereotypes in the workplace, and responses to racism.

If you are interested in participating in this study please contact:

Jessica Walters M.A Candidate, Ryerson University

Email: [Jessica.walters@ryerson.ca](mailto:Jessica.walters@ryerson.ca)

Telephone: 416 519 4123