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 **Streetwise: How Taxi Drivers Establish Their Customers'
Trustworthiness (review)**

Thomas J. Fararo

Social Forces

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REVIEW

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Reviewed by:

Thomas J. Fararo

This book, a volume in the Russell Sage Foundation Series on Trust, is a theoretically motivated empirical study of how taxi drivers in two cities, Belfast and New York City, use cues and other signs and signals to assess the trustworthiness of customers. Taxi drivers in the city of Belfast in Northern Ireland must be alert to the implications of sectarian strife, and drivers in both cities realize they are potential targets for robbery. At the same time, both legitimate customers and mimics of customers are at least partially aware of these signs and so can make use of them to serve their own ends. Thus, although the analysis pertains mainly to the perspective of the driver, those of customers and their mimics are also analyzed. The fourth logically possible role, mimic of driver, would become empirically relevant in other places, such as Baghdad.

From the standpoint of the taxi driver, the problem begins with whether or not the caller or hailer of the cab is a real customer or instead has some nefarious intention in mind and is only mimicking a genuine customer. Even after a person becomes a passenger, the problematic character of the situation may continue because of the inherent uncertainty in the trustworthiness categorization in most cases. So not only are precautions taken, but screening and probing are found to be common practices in both cities.

These processes are described in parallel chapters dealing with the two cities. Part I presents the Belfast case study, Part II presents the New York City case. These comprise the main body of the book and are bracketed by the introductory chapter that presents the analytical framework and a concluding chapter that, among other aspects, has a comparative focus. The empirical research involved structured interviews and participant observation in each city, with a focus on sign presentation and interpretation accompanied by related reasoning processes of the subjects interviewed and/or observed. Thus, in a broad

sense, the emphasis is on the everyday rationality of the behavior of the various actors.

It is apparent that the book has been written to reach a wide audience and not merely those familiar with the extensive literature on trust, which includes prior contributions by Gambetta. This stand-alone element is fused with an analytical approach to theorizing that makes use of what the authors call "signaling theory," described in the opening chapter. A key idea is that actors in such roles as taxi [End Page 363] driver have ideas about properties of persons that, in the situation and in the prospective role, are relevant to the trust problem. For example, in Belfast, not just sect membership but also age, gender and other attributes are relevant "trust-warranting" properties from the standpoint of drivers in relation to prospective or actual passengers. While age and gender can function as observable cues as to relative risk, this is not true of many other relevant properties, such as sect membership. So non-observability of most trust-warranting properties is an important feature of the social situation and motivates the search for reliable signs of such properties. In general, then, actors in a trust er role seek cues and other signs or signals as to the possession of properties that are relevant to trustworthiness of others in relevant roles. They do so in the context of using cogent reasoning that is reality-based, e.g., reflects the statistics of various events implicating various types of actors in terms of their attributes. This is shown in the concluding chapter, called "Street Wisdom Appraised," which makes the case that cues and other signs used by drivers (and prospective passengers) are grounded in social knowledge processes that actors employ generally and that are instantiated in each of the two cities studied.

The final chapter also arrives at the conclusion that the empirical case studies provide evidence in favor of the key empirical hypothesis that follows from the signaling theory, namely that taxi drivers seek signs of trust-warranting properties and, moreover, engage in...

of and coping strategies for dying and surviving. Perhaps what helps is simply discussing a taboo topic and presenting the parameters of inevitable events – in other words, making individuals think unwanted thoughts about the ramifications of their parents' demise. This *Death of a Parent* does well, often in the well-selected words of the bereaved. It concludes with a most useful section, "Advice to Those Assisting the Bereaved," from those who know best.

Streetwise: How Taxi Drivers Establish Their Customers' Trustworthiness

Diego Gambetta and Heather Hamill

Russell Sage Foundation, 2005. 243 pages. \$39.95 (cloth), \$19.95 (paper)

Reviewer: Thomas J. Fararo, *University of Pittsburgh*

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who do taxi drivers trust, the letter of credit is uneven.

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