Abstract:

Most Western countries have laws that prohibit the serving of alcohol to intoxicated and underage patrons in nightlife venues such as pubs and nightclubs. Despite laws and the implementation of server training programs, several studies have shown that intoxicated patrons are still likely to be served. This think-piece article attempts to shed new light on the tendency among bartenders to overserve patrons. Based on a selective review of the literature, we argue that future research on bartenders is in need of theoretical development and guidance as well as more rigorous cross-national comparisons. We propose that Michael Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucrats can deepen our understanding of bartenders and their serving practices. Bartenders may be conceptualized as street-level bureaucrats whose jobs are characterized by continuous interactions with different citizens asking for their attention and services. We argue that, just like street-level bureaucrats, bartenders have to deal with numerous people and their demands, and must make swift decisions based on their own discretion. Bartenders are encouraged by their managers to sell as much as possible, but at the same time they are supposed to obey the law against overserving alcohol to intoxicated and underage patrons. Previous research provides many examples of how bartenders develop shortcuts and bend rules in order to make their jobs more manageable and deal with the contradictory pressures they experience. The paper provides theoretical tools to understand how and why bartenders develop routines that are different from those intended by policy makers.

Keywords: Bartenders, serving practices, drinking establishments, alcohol, street-level bureaucrats.

Introduction

Bartenders and their trade are surrounded by much concern, critique and controversy in the research literature. Several studies have shown that the occupation of bartenders carries a range of risks, including those associated with working late hours (Mandler, 2016), consuming large amounts of alcohol during and after working hours (Moore, Cunradi, Duke, & Ames, 2009), being exposed to cigarette smoke (Larsson, Boëthius, Axelsson, & Montgomery, 2008), being confronted with threats and violence from patrons (Tutenges, Bøgkjær, Witte, & Hesse, 2013), and engaging in unprotected sex (Hughes & Bellis, 2006). Other studies have focused on the risks that bartenders impose on others through "irresponsible serving", which includes the serving of alcohol to individuals who are intoxicated or under the legal drinking age (Buvik & Rossow, 2015).

Bartenders play a central and multifaceted role in nightlife venues. Not only do they serve beverages and food, they also assist with providing entertainment, monitoring patrons and calling for assistance in case of emergency (Leo, 2013; Stubbs, 2001). Many preventive programs have therefore sought to involve bartenders in order to improve the health and safety conditions in pubs, bars and nightclubs. The most extensively used and evaluated of these are the server training programs – also known as Responsible Beverage Service (RBS) programs – the purpose of which are to improve server practices to prevent illegal sales of alcohol to underage and intoxicated customers and to intervene if intoxicated customers attempt to drive a vehicle (Warpenius, Holmila, & Mustonen, 2010). However, in many cases, bartenders have proven difficult to collaborate with; they are not easily rallied around the causes of health and safety promotion. There have been widespread problems with bartenders not attending training sessions, disregarding instructions and continuing to serve irresponsibly, even after having been through extensive training programs (Haggård, Trolldal, Kvillemo, & Guldbrandsson, 2015; Lauritzen & Baklien, 2007; Rossow & Baklien, 2010).

Several studies indicate that RBS programs have little or no effect on intoxication levels and on bartenders' tendencies to serve alcohol to intoxicated or underage patrons (Graham, 2000; Ker & Chinnock, 2008; Rossow & Baklien, 2010; Stockwell, 2000; Wallin, Norström, & Andreasson, 2003; Warpenius et al., 2010). However, it has been found that the effect of RBS programs may be improved if they are combined with control measures, law enforcement and, eventually, sanctions (Babor et al., 2010; Stockwell, 2000; Warpenius et al., 2010). Although the extent of overserving has

been registered in many studies, few attempts have been made to understand what happens in these situations where alcohol is ordered and served.

Based on a selective review of the literature and our own research, this think-piece article attempts to shed new light on bartenders, their serving practices, and how they respond to laws and social norms. Whereas most other studies of bartenders are survey-based, city- or country-specific, and descriptive, ours is a comparative and theory-driven discussion of why bartenders in so many countries continue to serve alcohol to underage and intoxicated patrons, despite regulations and widespread interventions. More specifically, we draw on Michael Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1971, 1980, 2010), which offers a bottom-up approach to analyze how public employees negotiate the pressures and demands made upon them by various legal, organizational and client factors (Brodkin, 2003; Lipsky, 2010; Piore, 2011). Street-level bureaucrats, as described by Lipsky, typically have discretion in exercising authority and making decisions while interacting with citizens; however, their jobs are also characterized by heavy workloads, limited resources and vague or contradictory goal expectations. To cope, these bureaucrats often resort to strategies of creatively bending rules, redirecting resources, or following self-made routines to speed up the processing of citizens. Lipsky (1980) states that street-level bureaucrats often behave in ways that are unsanctioned, sometimes even contradicting official policy.

In this think-piece, we argue that bartenders may be conceptualized as street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980). This conceptualization may seem peculiar to many alcohol and drug researchers, who are used to read and write about bartenders as distinctly private agents working in a distinctly non-public sector of the economy, often referred to as the "night-time economy" (see for example, Hobbs et al., 2003). So before we delve into our argument proper, we would like to emphasize that, unlike traditional bureaucrats, the great majority of bartenders work for commercial companies that serve private interests and aim at profit-making. Bartenders do not work for the authorities in the capacity of bureaucrats; and yet, so we argue, bartenders have a number of characteristics in common with street-level bureaucrats. In short, our review shows that bartenders often are under considerable pressure from both the management and customers to sell as much alcohol as possible, while, under the law, they are bound to serve alcohol in a responsible way. Much like street-level bureaucrats, therefore, the work of bartenders is governed by conflicting demands and contradictory objectives. Moreover, bartenders' decisions about whether to serve alcohol are based on discretion and their leeway for individual choices is extensive. To make their job more manageable, they develop strategies for dealing with such contradictory aims and pressures—strategies that are fundamentally different to and more various than those intended by policy makers.

The Theory of Street-Level Bureaucrats

Michael Lipsky (2010) defines "street-level bureaucrats" as public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who exercise discretion in their work (2010, p. 3). These bureaucrats are not top-level policy-makers, but front-line policy-implementers, such as doctors, police officers, school teachers and social workers. What characterizes the work of street-level bureaucrats is a steady exposure to citizens who are in need of services and resources over which they, the bureaucrats, have control, influence or possession. Rather than passive instruments of predefined policies, street-level bureaucrats actively co-author the policies that they carry out in their day-to-day interactions with citizens. The doctor decides whether a patient should be prescribed medicine, the police officer decides whether or not to lay criminal charges against a wrongdoer, and so forth. The deciding power of bureaucrats is therefore considerable. This represents a form of freedom but also pressure, since the needs of the citizens tend to be far greater than what the bureaucrats can actually meet (Hudson, 1997).

According to Lipsky's (1980) early definition, street-level bureaucrats are employees in the public sector. However, in an anniversary edition of his original book from 1980, Lipsky points to the similarities between employees in parts of the public and private sectors, arguing that his theory is applicable in studies of both public organizations as well as private and non-profit organizations (2010:216). The street-level perspective has since been used in studies of different non-public organizations in which the employees have functions akin to traditional bureaucrats, such as delivering services to many customers or clients and being responsible for making discretionary judgments as these services are being performed (Brodkin, 2003, 2012; Piore, 2011; Hupe & Buffat, 2014). As Brodkin (2015) makes clear, the working conditions of street-level bureaucrats are not exclusively characteristic of public organizations, but may also be found in certain strictly private organizations and also in organizations that are both privately and publicly governed.

Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucrats, also referred to as street-level workers or practitioners (Brodkin, 2011), has been applied, for example, in studies of the police (Buvik, 2016; Holmberg, 2000; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003), social work (Evans & Harris, 2004), politicians (May & Winter, 2009), the public sector (Piore, 2011), parking guards (Marusek, 2012), labour inspectors (Nielsen, 2015), civilian inspectors (Wilkinson & MacLean, 2013), local council officers (Pennay, 2012), liquor

inspectors (Buvik & Baklien, 2014), drug treatment (Frank & Bjerge, 2011), and veterinary inspectors (Thomann, 2015). These studies illustrate how service workers negotiate situations of having to operate quickly and efficiently while being pushed and pulled in from many directions. The citizens try to have things their way, but the service workers also have to take account of various formal rules, their professional training, organizational routines, and cultural expectations, as well as prevailing moral standards of right and wrong. Lipsky's theoretical framework avoids the pitfalls of reducing individuals to hyper-rational agents or passive cultural dupes—a framework that has informed numerous studies of jobs and institutions, mainly in the public sector.

Lipsky observes that the situation of street-level bureaucrats tends to be marked by overwork, repetitive tasks, ambiguous objectives and insufficient resources. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) describe street-level bureaucrats as the coal miners of policy: they do the hard, dirty, and dangerous work of the state (2003, p. 157). Public service goals tend to be vague and conflicting, and they often have an idealized dimension that make them difficult to manage and hard to achieve. As Landeau (1973) puts it, the goals that service workers pursue are "more like receding horizons than fixed targets". The normative judgments of street-level workers exist in the tension between institutionalized rules and norms – both formal and tacit – and the situation presented to them by citizen-clients (Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2012).

Street-level workers creatively develop routines to make their jobs more manageable, to reduce work-related stress and to simplify processes of decision-making. Lipsky (2010) mentions the case of teachers who are supposed to respond to the needs of the individual child, but in practice, the demands and complexities of their jobs require of them to develop techniques that enable them to respond to children as a class. Various coping strategies are thus implemented as individual workers try to bridge the gap between the demands of their jobs and the resources that they have at their disposition (Hupe & Buffat, 2014). Street-level bureaucrats also have a tendency to structure their environments to make tasks more familiar, less puzzling and thus more manageable (Lipsky, 2010:83). Winter (2002) describes how these coping strategies may bias the implementation process in a way that hampers the achievement of policy goals (2002, p. 2).

As noted by Hupe & Buffat (2014), street-level bureaucrats over time modify their initial job expectations, for instance by becoming less idealistic and more pragmatic in the way that they see themselves and the work that they perform. The research literature gives several examples this. There are the domestic violence case workers who avoid learning about service needs that they find difficult to address (Lindhorst & Padgett, 2005), and the disability assessors who reduce complex

individual situations by means of 'tick box' thinking (Gulland, 2011). A study of Norwegian police officers in a nightlife setting, demonstrates how police officers strategically ignored minor incidents, such as alcohol-related nuisance and disorder (Buvik, 2016). As noted by Lipsky (2010), the police cannot possibly make arrests for all the infractions they observe during their working day. In this way, simplifications, shortcuts and rules of the thumb are developed.

Other researchers have argued for a more nuanced view of why and how bureaucrats use coping mechanisms. Loyens (2015) describes five different ways of coping. The first strategy is the "skill of powerlessness," which involves the realization and acceptance that one's work sometimes amounts to little more than to shuffle papers. A second strategy is emotional habituation, which implies to get used to unfair treatment of clients and be emotionally numb to the clients' situation. A third strategy is to consider your job as a link in a chain and do your job from a sense of duty, and not feel personally responsible for being unable to help clients. A forth strategy is to bend the rules, i.e. not to arrest an offender in order to save time. The last strategy is to bond with the victim, which implies to be more conscientious about the client than the law.. Nielsen (2006; 2015) adds that bureaucrats develop coping mechanisms to minimize frustrations, but these mechanisms may also serve to maximize the satisfactions associated with their jobs. Street-level bureaucrats are therefore not just compelled, but also enticed, to develop coping strategies.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) demonstrate how street-level bureaucrats improvise in order to make their job more meaningful and pleasant. Street-level workers are often pragmatists who take pride in being experienced and "street-smart". Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2012) contend that the practices and behavior patterns of street-level bureaucrats are characterized by pragmatic improvisations and freedom of action. They have to be creative in their encounters withclients and always alert to what is possible to achieve within the bounds of given frames of action.

Lipsky observes how high caseloads affect the time available for decision-making and street-level bureaucrats must make quick decisions. They believe themselves to be doing the best they can under adverse circumstances, and they develop techniques to salvage service and decision-making values within the limits imposed on them by the structure of the work. When individual routines are further developed in the workplace, they become part of the corporate culture and the actors will act in accordance with this perception of reality.

To fill a gap in the literature, we seek to understand and explain why bartenders continue to serve alcohol to underage and intoxicated patrons, despite regulations and widespread interventions.

Based on a selective review of the literature on bartenders and on theories of street-level bureaucrats, we find two dimensions of Lipsky's theory to be of particular relevance for the study of bartenders. First, we will discuss how bartenders' working environments affect their room for maneuver and how they develop coping strategies to deal with their demanding working conditions. Second, we discuss how bartenders deal with the conflicting goal expectations that come from their management, patrons, and the law. Together, these two dimensions contribute to an understanding of how separate actions of bartenders evolve into cultural serving practices and street-level alcohol policy.

Workplace environment and coping strategies

Bartenders work in environments that have been described as "affectively charged" (Duff, 2008), "intoxigenic" (Forsyth, Lennox, & Emslie, 2016) and with "liminal" properties (Hobbs, Hadfield, Lister, & Winlow, 2003; Tutenges, 2012). Drinking establishments are places that patrons visit to indulge in collective drinking, disinhibition and enjoyment. Many bartenders share the patrons' taste for joyous inebriation (Mandler, 2016) and they are exposed to much the same energies, temptations and risks that patrons are. However, while patrons can leave the premises whenever they have had enough, bartenders have to stay until their shift is over. Theirs is an intense workplace, especially during peak hours where numerous patrons require service, the drinking is fast-paced, and the noise and conflict levels high (Buvik & Rossow, 2015; Hughes et al., 2014). This intensity permeates and shapes the working life of bartenders.

Many bartenders see it as part of their job to lift the mood among their patrons and colleagues. They are not merely "servers", but also entertainers and providers of alcohol-centered "fun" (Buvik & Baklien, 2015; Tutenges, Mikkelsen, Witte, Thyrring, & Hesse, 2014). This may be part of the reason that bartenders so readily serve alcohol to intoxicated and underage patrons. Hughes and colleagues (2014) found that there is an increased risk for bartenders to overserve if they work in poorly managed venues characterized, for instance, by low cleanliness, crowdedness, and high levels of noise. However, another study did not find an association between overserving and crowding (Buvik & Rossow, 2015). In interviews with bartenders, one of the reasons that they give for overserving is their difficult working conditions, such as dim light, loud music and stress (Buvik, 2013; Buvik & Baklien, 2015).

To refuse service may puncture the mood and limit the drunken "fun", and it may also generate conflicts with patrons who expect to be served, whether or not it is against the law (Beale, Cox, Clarke, Lawrence, & Leather, 1998; Keeffe, Russell-Bennett, & Tombs, 2008; Ng, Russell-Bennett, &

Dagger, 2007). Similar mechanisms have been found in a study of civilian liquor inspectors in Norway (Buvik & Baklien, 2014). When a guest is visibly intoxicated, the liquor inspector is supposed to report it. Later, this report may be the basis for sanctions against the venue, such as revocation of the liquor license. However, the Norwegian law does not include a clear definition of intoxication, and violations of the law can be hard to spot in places that are crowded and where most people have consumed alcohol (Buvik & Baklien, 2014). Liquor inspectors do not want to spoil the mood in drinking establishments and this makes them hesitant of reporting bartenders who serve alcohol to intoxicated patrons (Buvik & Baklien, 2014). According to the Norwegian legislation, every venue with a license to serve alcohol must be inspected at least once a year, and there has to be at least three times as many inspections as there are venues with licenses. Drinking venues are therefore constantly under threat of inspection; but it is rare that this threat materializes into sanctions against venue owners and, by association, managers and bartenders (Buvik, 2013; Buvik & Baklien, 2014; Lipsky 2010).

For many bartenders, peak hours constitute something of a sensory overdrive with sustained exposure to loud music, noise, heat, light shows and orders from all sides (Powers & Leili, 2016). In the long run, such sensory overdrive can be exhausting and take its toll on health (Tutenges, Bøgkjær, Witte, & Hesse, 2013), and it can also thwart rational thinking, lower conflict resolution skills, and amplify the difficulties of assessing the age and level of intoxication of patrons (Hughes et al., 2012). Studies have found that bartenders may witness, or become physically involved in, violent confrontations between patrons, and it is common for them to be verbally assaulted and threatened (Tutenges, Bøgkjær, Witte, & Hesse, 2013). The bartender job thus requires high stamina, skill and discipline. However, bartenders and other workers in the night-time economy tend to be young and with low education, limited training and little prior working experience (Trygstad et al., 2014). There are also many shortcomings regarding employment contracts and breaks during working hours, and the wages are generally low.

Street-level bureaucrats develop a range of strategies to cope with their demanding jobs (Lipsky, 2010). Based on previous bartender studies, we would like to highlight two major types of coping strategies which are employed by bartenders in their daily struggle to perform their intense and complicated work. The first of these strategies is to bend the law and serve all guests, regardless of their age and level of intoxication. This procedure may contravene the law, but it reduces the stress and complexity of constantly having to assess the age and intoxication-level of patrons who place orders for alcohol.

By serving all patrons, bartenders do not have to slow down to assess patrons, and they can avoid conflict with underage or overly intoxicated patrons who demand to be served. Several studies indicate that refusing to serve a customer can easily lead to conflict, which is what bartenders wish to avoid (Leo, 2013; McKnight, 1991; Stockwell, 1992). In addition, bartenders are naturally concerned with getting tips and, therefore, the use of server interventions is not appealing because that can directly influence their earnings (Powers & Leili, 2016). Moreover, serving staff lack significant incentives to serve alcohol responsibly, not least because of the dearth of enforcement targeting overserving (Lenk, Toomey, Nelson, Jones-Webb, & Erickson, 2014; Toomey et al., 2016). Studies have shown that both bartenders (Buvik, 2013; Leo, 2013) and liquor inspectors (Buvik & Baklien, 2014; Toomey et al., 2016; Wilkinson & MacLean, 2013) experience difficulties in assessing and documenting intoxication. When unsure whether or not a client is intoxicated, the easiest strategy may be to comply with the client's wishes to be served. Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) give examples of how street-level bureaucrats look for quick solutions to long-term problems. The indiscriminate serving of alcohol to all patrons is an example of one such quick solution: it ensures swift and smooth interaction in the short term; but in the long term it may increase the number of overly drunken, unruly and violence-prone patrons (Graham & Homel, 2008; Green & Plant, 2007; Hughes et al., 2014).

Several studies show that employees in the hospitality industry have high alcohol consumption, including at work (Conway & MacNeela, 2012; Hughes, Bellis, & Chaudry, 2004; Norström, Sundin, Müller, & Leifman, 2012; Tutenges, Bøgkjær, et al., 2013). We consider this as the second major coping strategy that bartenders use after and, in certain countries, during working hours. Conway and MacNeela (2012) explain that bartenders' tendency for high alcohol consumption may be a reaction to high stress levels on the job, easy access to alcohol, and liberal norms that encourage excessive consumption. The high consumption of alcohol may also be a way for bartenders to make themselves more festive and outgoing and thus contribute to the intense mood of their workplace (Tutenges, 2013; Mandler, 2016). A US study shows that bartenders who have high alcohol consumption and often get drunk are more likely to serve intoxicated people (Reiling & Nusbaumer, 2006). Participation in a social environment where both work life and leisure time are characterized by heavy drinking normalizes high levels of intoxication. The fact that many bartenders consume alcohol during working hours poses a risk to their own safety and to that of their colleagues and patrons.

To sum up, the literature gives several examples of how bartenders work under conditions that can be very intense, and which require of them to process the orders of numerous patrons while being

festive, cheerful and friendly. Under such conditions, bartenders may feel inclined to set aside the commands of the law in order to instead meet the expectations and desires of their patrons. Whereas the law and public authorities feel abstract and absent in many nightlife environments (Søgaard, Houborg, & Tutenges, 2017), patrons are very much present and their commands loud and obvious.

Conflicting goal expectations

Bartenders are pushed and pulled from many sides. The alcohol legislation forbids them to serve alcohol to intoxicated and underage patrons; the patrons will often demand to be served, no matter what age or how drunk they are; and the management in drinking venues may also put pressure on bartenders so that they sell alcohol to everyone because this may amplify the turnover (Leo, 2013). Just like the street-level bureaucrats described in Lipsky's work, bartenders have to rely on their own judgment and discretion when they navigate and negotiate between conflicting expectations and goals. The exercise of discretion significantly influences their behavior and routines.

As mentioned, many countries have laws that prohibit the serving of alcohol to intoxicated patrons and minors (Babor et al., 2010; Lenk et al., 2014; Mosher et al., 2009). Legislation dictates that the serving of alcohol must be conducted in such a way that harmful effects are limited, and political and social considerations are safeguarded. Nevertheless, public service goals tend to have an idealized dimension that make them difficult to achieve, and confusing and complicated to approach. Sober/drunk is not a clear-cut dichotomy, and the wording of the alcohol legislation is open to interpretation (Endicott, 2001; Pennay, 2012; Wilkinson & MacLean, 2013). One of the challenges is that many factors contribute to alcohol intoxication. These include pharmacological tolerance, genetic differences in sensitivity to alcohol, physiological conditions, cultural norm as to what is considered acceptable behavior and psychological factors including expectancy and affective environment. The distinction between "visible intoxication" and "obvious intoxication" is far from clear (Brink & Erickson, 2009). The use of discretion is necessary because the law is vague and its objectives are divergent and ambiguous. Even the clearest of rules and procedures can never cover every individual or every situation that arises.

Studies of bartenders indicate that they tend to be skeptical about alcohol legislation (Buvik, 2013). They regard the legislation as too strict, and overserving may be interpreted as a form of resistance against the law. Because of their skepticism about the law, they may regard breaches of the law as

justified. And the shortcomings of the law may become a legitimizing explanation for serving intoxicated patrons (Järvinen, 2005). Nielsen (2015) explains that the decisions made by bureaucrats are heavily influenced by their relationship with clients and, importantly, the degree to which they and their clients have convergent or divergent interests. Bartenders and customers share many interests (e.g. they want to have a pleasant time) and many bartenders will serve alcohol to even the most drunken of clients, as long as the clients remain non-confrontational and pleasant to be around (Buvik, 2013).

Lipsky writes that one can expect noncompliance from lower-level workers if they feel that their interests differ significantly from the interests of those at higher level (Lipsky, 2010). Criticism of the law and other authorities may inspire bartenders to replace the law with their own norms, which are rooted in a liberal drinking culture. This is in line with Maynard-Moody & Musheno (2000) who describes how street-level workers often base their decisions on beliefs and normative choices about what is fair, rather than what is dictated by rules and official procedures.

Studies suggest that bartenders have high status among youth; bartenders working at cocktail bars, for example, are generally considered as "hip" and "cool" (Neff, Wissinger, & Zukin, 2005; Ocejo, 2010). Nevertheless, bartenders may not always have the upper hand in their interactions with patrons and are sometimes shown little respect. Many bartenders learn from managers that, "the customer is always right" (Matulewicz, 2015); but obviously customers are not always right when they dance on the tables, yell abuse, walk away from bills and so forth. Bartenders often have to deal with ethical dilemmas of whether or not to condone, tolerate or oppose transgressive behavior from patrons; but there tends to be little time and few guidelines to help the bartenders making the right, or least bad, choice.

Discussion

This think-piece article attempts to shed new light on the tendency among bartenders to overserve patrons. Existing literature on bartenders often follows a quantitative, problem-focused approach, examining bartenders' failure to serve responsibly (Buvik & Rossow, 2015), their tendency for heavy drinking (Conway & MacNeela, 2012; Norström, Sundin, Müller, & Leifman, 2012; Tutenges, Bøgkjær, et al., 2013), or their poor collaborative skills (Haggård, Trolldal, Kvillemo, & Guldbrandsson, 2015; Lauritzen & Baklien, 2007; Rossow & Baklien, 2010). In the literature, there is no shortage of empirical studies documenting the overserving of intoxicated guests. We argue that Lipsky's bottom-up perspective can provide a foundation from which to deepen our understanding of bartenders'

serving practices. The acts of individual bartenders form patterns, which are enmeshed with corporate ambitions, the law, and local drinking cultures. Lipsky's framework can help unravel the intricate connections and mutual influences between individual bartenders and the wider economic and sociocultural structures of which they form a part. Based on a selective review of the literature and our own research, we argue that future research on bartenders is in need of theoretical guidance as well as more rigorous cross-national comparisons.

Lipsky (1980) writes that street-level bureaucrats encounter many dilemmas in their face-to-face interactions with the public, and he observes that their work tends to be characterized by large workloads, limited resources and vague or conflicting goal expectations. These characteristics also apply to the work of bartenders. Bartenders operate at the very front-line of alcohol supply to the public. It is they, the bartenders, who interact most directly and intensely with alcohol consumers: they take orders, serve alcohol and intervene or call for help in case of emergency. Moreover, in most venues, it is mainly up to the bartenders to estimate whether patrons are old and sober enough to purchase alcohol. The decisions that bartenders make have direct influence on the level of harm among patrons (Graham & Homel, 2008).

However, bartenders work in places that are designed for excitement, immoderation and disinhibition. These are intense places that can be demanding and, at times, grueling to work in. Bartenders are under pressure from the emotional intensity of their workplace, and they are under conflictual pressure from various stakeholders, including their managers who want them to up the sales, patrons who want swift service, and the authorities who prohibit the serving of alcohol to people who are underage or overly intoxicated.

Lipsky's street-level theory has been widely applied in the study of public workers; but it has, to our knowledge, never before been used to study staff working in nightlife venues. There are certain differences between bureaucrats and bartenders, which are important to bear in mind. Despite increasing focus on "costumers" in welfare policies, the clients in street-level bureaucracies tend to be non-voluntary and they tend to be in need of help to solve problems, as opposed to customers in drinking venues who are there out of their own free will and because they want to have fun. Users of the welfare system may not have the option to go to another public unit to get services, whereas the customers in drinking venues almost always have the choice to go to another venue. In addition, the clients´ perceptions of bartenders and traditional bureaucrats are also quite different. Bartenders tend to be regarded as "cool" whereas traditional bureaucrats rarely have that status. In addition, unlike customers at a bar, "customers" in the welfare system are seldom treated as if they were

"always right". Finally, bartenders have discretion to decide whom to serve alcohol, which is quite different from the services delivered by traditional bureaucrats. Traditional bureaucrats hold the key to social security benefits and their decisions can affect people's living conditions. Bartenders on the, other hand, administer the provision of alcohol and mainly affect people's level of drunkenness and enjoyment.

In spite of these differences, however, we hope that this think-piece has shown that street-level theories are valuable for the study of bartenders' behavior and, in particular, bartenders' tendency to overserve. As shown by Lipsky (2010), street-level bureaucrats develop routines and coping mechanisms in their daily struggle to perform their oftentimes intense and complicated work. These routines and mechanisms may involve rule-bending, and the work of the street-level bureaucrat, including bartenders, is sometimes at odds with the law and is rather unbureaucratic or even rebellious (Brockmann, 2015).

Some of the key debates within street-level research are about the factors that primarily influence processes of decision-making. Lipsky regards the street-level bureaucrats as *state agents* whose task it is to implement the policies of the authorities, and he argues that the bureaucrats act in response to rules, procedures and law. Within this view, street-level bureaucrats are the extended, albeit unruly, arm of the law (Wagenaar, 2004, p. 651). In contrast, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000; 2012) argue that it is more fruitful to look upon street-level bureaucrats as *citizen agents*. Citizen agents act in response to individuals and circumstances, and their decisions are based on normative choices, not in response to rules, procedures, or policies. Within this view, street-level bureaucrats have more freedom to act based on improvisation and creativity in order to respond to the needs of individuals. Citizen agents define their work in terms of relationships with clients, not rules. Street-level actors in a nightlife setting may be closer to citizen-agents than state-agents. As described by Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2000), street-level identities are shaped by workers conflictual relationships whit what they call *the system*. They see themselves as independent moral actors and in opposition to the system, not unlike bartenders' skepticism to the alcohol legislation and liquor inspectors (Buvik, 2013).

Lipsky argues that "the decisions of street-level bureaucrats, the routines they establish, and the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work-pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out" (Lipsky, 2010, p. xiii). Several others support Lipsky's line of reasoning that the street-level bureaucrats' position in the implementation process is unique and very influential

(Meyers & Vorsanger, 2012). In line with this, Hupe and Hill (2007, p. 283) point out: "to a certain extent, they are policy formers rather than implementers". The coexistence of law abidance and cultural abidance defines the tensions of street-level work (Brodkin, 2011).

Street-level practitioners in the nightlife setting are relatively autonomous in the performance of their jobs. Discretion and creative solutions are important components of street-level logic in the nightlife context. Street-level alcohol policy is made case by case and from nightspot to nightspot. As Bastien (2009, p. 665) states: "Policy formation does not come to an end when a bill becomes a law. Street-level bureaucrats also play a role in shaping public policies through their daily use of discretion." Street-level bureaucrats, including bartenders, do not only implement an alcohol policy that is determined at the national or municipal level; they develop their own alcohol policy.

This paper highlights a street-level alcohol policy that sets the permissible limit for intoxication far above that set by the law and public health recommendations. In this way, bartenders support and maintain the liberal drinking culture. This is in line with Lipsky (1980), who states that street-level bureaucrats behave in ways that are unsanctioned, sometimes even contradicting official policy, because the structure of their jobs makes it impossible to fully achieve the expectations of their work. Studies have found that bartenders are skeptical of the existing alcohol laws, which they find too vague and restrictive. Bartenders note that during weekends everybody is drunk, and that they cannot deny service to all drunk patrons. The decisions of street-level actors in a nightlife setting are strongly influenced by discretion, cultural norms, and improvisation. The non-achievement of the authorities' aims is, in part, a result of the situational conditions in which street-level bureaucrats operate (Brodkin, 2012).

Alcohol policy is typically studied at national, regional, and municipal levels. Nevertheless, alcohol policy is heavily influenced by decisions and procedures made at street level. The routines and patterns of behavior that develop amongst these street-level bureaucrats are an important part of the alcohol policy implemented at street level. The goal attainment of alcohol legislation depends on the daily decisions made at street-level. Thus, bartenders should be considered as a resource in preventing overserving and alcohol-related harm.

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