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“Girls will be served until you have to carry them out”: Gendered serving practices in Oslo

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ABSTRACT:

Research on heavy drinking among women implies that this behavior is deviant and criticized by society, which would suggest that intoxicated women are more likely than men to be denied alcohol at drinking establishments. However, a recent Norwegian study shows that it is more likely for intoxicated women than intoxicated men to be served alcohol. This paper explores gender differences and overserving within licensed establishments. The data consist of qualitative interviews with bartenders and pseudo-patrons. The latter were actors who were seemingly intoxicated while attempting to purchase alcohol at drinking establishments. Our analysis suggests that there are three main reasons why alcohol is served to intoxicated women. First, female patrons are profitable for drinking establishments because their presence causes male patrons to remain at the venue and spend more money. Second, female patrons are regarded as being sexually available to other patrons and staff in the barroom, which is a heavily sexually charged scene. Third, female patrons are considered harmless and their presence even dampens male aggression. In contrast to these explanations, there is some concern for the safety of intoxicated women. The nighttime economy in Oslo seems to combine a strictly gendered perception of male and female patrons with a new acceptance of female binge drinking. The overserving of female patrons can be regarded as a consequence of the combination of these two seemingly contradictory tendencies.

Keywords: *Drinking establishments, intoxication, nighttime economy, overserving, pseudo-patrons, women*

Word count: 5820

INTRODUCTION

Intoxication is traditionally viewed differently in females than in males. Heavy drinking among men is more often excused or neutralized, whereas similar behavior on the part of women is viewed as deviant and is criticized (Montemurro & McClure, 2005; Simonen, Törrönen, & Tigerstedt, 2013). Further tension arises in relation to public intoxication, which tends to be less acceptable for women due to connotations of promiscuity, loss of femininity, and concerns about their increased vulnerability to unwanted sex (Bogren, 2008; Plant, 2008; Young, Morales, McCabe, Boyd, & d'Arcy, 2005). Moreover, stereotypes of women drinkers as being more sexual are well documented in the literature (Parks & Scheidt, 2000; Wilsnack, 1991). Nevertheless, gender differences in the acceptability of intoxication vary by culture. Norway has a gender-egalitarian culture but we do not know if intoxication is viewed differently for females compared with males in the nighttime economy. In the UK, for example, young women play an active part in a new and widespread culture of intoxication but drunken women are still regarded as unfeminine (Griffin, Szmigin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, & Mistral, 2013).

It is prohibited by law to serve intoxicated patrons in many countries, including Norway (Buvik & Baklien, 2014; Gosselt, Hoof, Goverde, & Jong, 2013). Yet many studies based on purchase attempts by pseudo-intoxicated patrons demonstrate that patrons who are clearly intoxicated are still likely to be served (referred to here as overserving) (Gosselt et al., 2013). However, little is known about how bartenders may interpret or respond differently to intoxicated males and females.

Most previous studies have used male pseudo-patrons (for an overview see Gosselt et al., 2013). Three US studies used both male and female actors but they did not address gender differences in the likelihood of overserving (Lenk, Toomey, & Erickson, 2006; Russ & Geller, 1987; Toomey et al., 2008). Two studies reported no significant association between

the patron's gender and overserving (Goodsite, Klear, & Rosenberg, 2008; Graham, Miller, et al., 2014). However, a recent Norwegian study of 425 purchase attempts by pseudo-intoxicated patrons (Buvik & Rossow, 2015) revealed a statistically significant gender difference, with overserving of female pseudo-patrons more likely than for male pseudo-patrons (88% vs. 77%).

The aim of this study was to explore gender differences and overserving among licensed premises in Oslo. Drawing on interviews with bartenders and pseudo-patrons—the latter to understand better their experiences of being overserved and their interpretations of these experiences—we sought to reveal the reasons why bartenders overserve intoxicated female patrons.

The nighttime economy in Oslo

The Alcohol Act limits the availability of alcohol in Norway. After 18:00 on weekends, the law forbids off-premise alcohol sales and the only way to buy alcohol is at licensed drinking establishments. There are about 300 such venues in Oslo, spread relatively widely throughout the downtown area, most of which are bars and pubs, although some have mixed profiles (such as operating as a café during the daytime or as a restaurant in the afternoon, with dancing at night). There are just four or five venues that are strictly nightclubs.

The Alcohol Act forbids any type of alcohol advertising and promotion, such as special offers and happy hours. Persons who are obviously under the influence of alcohol should not be given access to the establishment. Liquor inspectors routinely visit drinking venues and more than 3000 liquor control visits were conducted in Oslo during 2013 (Næringsetaten, 2014). The rather strict Alcohol Act is in contrast to a drinking culture where visible intoxication is accepted and sometimes expected. It is common to see intoxicated individuals

at drinking establishments on weekends and several Norwegian studies show that bartenders serve customers who are clearly intoxicated (Buvik & Rossow, 2015).

Drinking establishments can cause harm by encouraging or facilitating severe intoxication. Police statistics show that most of the violence in Oslo is related to licensed premises. In a high proportion of cases, both the victim and the perpetrator are intoxicated (Grytdal & Meland, 2011). The international literature reflects similar findings. While harmful in itself, excessive intoxication is also implicated in a range of risky behaviors. Drinking establishments are common settings for aggression and injury, especially among young men (Dumas, Graham, Maxwell-Smith, & Wells, 2015; Graham, Wells, & Jelley, 2002). Bars are one of the primary arenas where young men play out status scripts leading to physical aggression (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, Dumas, & Wells, 2014). Conflicts involving females occur less frequently and are less problematic than those involving men (Forsyth & Lennox, 2010). Women's intoxication has been linked to women's sexual victimization and women are more likely to be victims of sexual aggression when they are drunk (Parks, Hsieh, Bradizza, & Romosz, 2008). This makes it important to study how bartenders deal with intoxicated female patrons.

Gender double standards at drinking establishments

Previous research has highlighted gender double standards at drinking establishments (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Lyons & Willott, 2008). Traditional gender discourses imply that binge drinking and public intoxication are considered masculine behaviors, while the drinking woman is stereotyped as being promiscuous and of poor character (de Visser & McDonnell, 2012; Wells et al., 2014). Representations of women's intoxication vary by culture; moreover, they are changing and are under constant renegotiation. Griffin and colleagues (2013) explain that young women face a difficult set of dilemmas and that they

navigate in contradictions associated with hypersexual femininity and the culture of intoxication in the British nighttime economy. Young women are expected to drink like men, act sexy and avoid risks at the same time. Szmigin and colleagues (2008) describe young adults' drinking behavior as a form of planned letting go, balanced with a kind of self-control. The bar environment sets the stage for casual sexual encounters through patrons' often-permissive social expectations (Parks, Hsieh, Collins, Levonyan-Radloff, & King, 2009).

Scandinavian countries have high gender equality (Borchorst, 2011). The 2014 Global Gender Gap Report benchmarked countries' gender gaps on economic-, political-, education-, and health-based criteria in which Norway holds third place in the overall rankings (Forum, 2014). Norwegians are generally positive toward gender equality and men and women have equal status in most settings. Norwegian women's alcohol consumption has increased over several decades but women still drink less and less often than men (Vedøy & Skretting, 2009). Gender differences remain smaller in Norway than in other European countries (Andersson et al., 2013; Mäkelä et al., 2006).

In light of the Norwegian gender-egalitarian culture with its liberal norms for intoxication, the aim of this study was to explore how gender influences bartenders' serving practices. Drawing on interviews with bartenders and pseudo-patrons, three common explanations for overserving female patrons were revealed. To demonstrate the complexity of these issues, we illustrate how bartenders expressed concerns for drunken women's safety. We also discuss and contextualize the findings in light of heteronormative gender discourses and new drinking cultures.

METHODS

The current study was based on data from a larger multimethod study of Oslo's nighttime drinking culture (Baklien & Buvik, 2014; Buvik, 2013; Buvik & Baklien, 2014; Buvik & Rossow, 2015). Qualitative interviews were conducted with individuals on both sides of the bar: 16 interviews were with bartenders employed at mainstream bars and clubs in Oslo; eight individual and four group interviews were with actors who impersonated intoxicated patrons attempting to purchase alcohol at drinking establishments.

The first interviews, with six male and two female bartenders (aged 25–35 years), were conducted during the fall of 2011. We used a semistructured guide with some primary topics: patron's intoxication level, refusing patrons, allocation of responsibilities, the Alcohol Act, the inspection authorities, bartenders' own alcohol consumption, and industry affiliation. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes. Although gender was not a main topic, it emerged as an important theme during these interviews.

During the fall of 2014, after our focus had been drawn to the issue of gender differences, we interviewed four male and four female bartenders (aged 21–35 years). These interviews were similar to what Tjora (2012) refers to as focused interviews (cf. also Merton & Kendall, 1946). They were kept short (30–45 minutes) and focused strictly on gender differences regarding overserving with only a couple minutes at the beginning spent on general issues and background information. Gender difference in overserving was presented as a “probe” (Tjora, 2012, p. 128); we asked whether the bartenders could recognize gender differences in overserving in their everyday work and how they understood it. All 16 interviews took place at an office in Oslo.

We did not interview intoxicated patrons because their intoxication levels may have blurred their awareness of bartenders' and other patrons' responses. Instead, we interviewed actors whom we used as pseudo-patrons to make purchase attempts at drinking

establishments while enacting scripts that, according to the law, should have led to the denial of alcohol sales. The procedure is described in detail elsewhere (Buvik & Rossow, 2015). Although actually sober, these actors appeared clearly and visibly intoxicated and we assume that both bartenders and other patrons treated them as truly intoxicated. Although pseudo-patrons have been used in several studies, the actors' own experiences and interpretations have not been described (see i.e. Gosselt et al., 2013; Toomey et al., 2008; Wallin, Gripenberg, & Andreasson, 2005; Warpenius, Holmila, & Mustonen, 2010). Their experiences while acting intoxicated at numerous nightspots during face-to-face interactions with bartenders revealed perspectives and interpretations of great interest for this study.

We interviewed seven actors by phone. One male actor was interviewed twice. The eight interviews followed a structured, open guide and lasted 20–25 minutes. In addition, we conducted four group interviews with the same actors, two males and two females in each group. The interview topics allowed the actors to elaborate on their experiences and to gather their descriptions of different situations. The group interviews, based on a semistructured guide, were guided by the authors and lasted approximately one hour. The fact that the actors were friends and had close ties and that the researchers knew the actors through several studies created a casual and friendly atmosphere during the interviews.

The Data Protection Official for Research approved the research project (approval number 28178) and interviewees participated voluntarily based on informed consent. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The interviewer acted as a coproducer of knowledge and the interviewer and the informant created meaning together and negotiated various explanations for serving outcomes (Holstein & Gubrium, 2011; Järvinen, 2005). In addition, self-reflection was used to supplement interview data. Self-reflection involves researchers using personal experiences and observation to interpret meaning from the social world they are studying (Berg & Lune, 2004). The lead author's own experience as a

bartender over an eight-year period was used to provide in-depth reflections and potential meaning from interviewees' disclosures.

Data were analyzed using an inductive approach (Patton, 1990) to the identification of themes. Patterns and categories were allowed to emerge through a detailed reading of the raw data. Minor and major themes were identified and we included both categories and concepts developed and articulated by our informants as well as categories for which the informants did not have labels or terms. Through an interactive process of data analysis, we derived three dominating rationales for overserving female patrons: intoxicated patrons provide profit, intoxicated women are perceived as sexually available, and intoxicated women are regarded as harmless. Bartenders' experiences, interpretations, and explanations corresponded with those of the pseudo-patrons.

RESULTS

Based on how bartenders and pseudo-patrons accounted for gender differences in overserving, we highlight three possible understandings of why women are more likely to be overserved. It is important to note that the categories sometimes overlap and blend into each other. First, female patrons are especially profitable for drinking establishments, because they cause male patrons to spend more money. Second, female patrons are regarded as sexually available to both patrons and staff. Third, female patrons are considered harmless and even dampen men's aggression. In contrast to these three explanations, the data also demonstrate some concerns for intoxicated women's safety.

Intoxicated women provide more profit

The main purpose of a bar is to sell alcohol and thus the desire to earn money outweighs concerns about overserving. However, bartenders reported that they expected more gains by

overserving women than by overserving men. According to the bartenders, female patrons are especially important for drinking venues for two main reasons. To reach a high turnover, women are needed in the bar; otherwise, men will go elsewhere. At the same time, bartenders noted that men spend more money when women are present. One male bartender stated:

Girls will not be denied until you actually have to carry them out. It has simply to do with money. Because, the problem today is that it is so expensive to have a bar in Oslo. The rent expenses for our venue are extremely high.

Another bartender told a story about a club where he used to work that had few female patrons: “So we got hold of some sweet girls that we paid to stay there and then the guys bought them alcohol and drinks. Bought and bought and bought and bought. These ladies were a very good investment.” Below, a female bartender (B) and the interviewer (I) discuss how female patrons can be profitable for the club:

B: Many girls go out with an idea that they should get sponsored drinks. I see it all the time. I also have several friends who never spend any money when they go out. But they are equally intoxicated!

I: That’s interesting. So it’s a kind of financial gain for the club to have some girls there, because men buy them drinks...

B: Yes, for sure. You must have girls at a bar. That’s true. Otherwise, men don’t go there either.

According to bartenders, female guests are profitable for drinking establishments because most barflies are men, and women are needed at the club to keep the male customers happy. Bartenders regard female patrons as “bait” to attract male guests. It seems that older sexist assumptions and practices—in which men are supposed to buy women drinks—remain very much alive in Oslo’s nightlife economy. One male bartender raised another topic and described how male guests want female patrons to become intoxicated:

The girls just sit there. There are always some guys who go to the bar and buy shots for the ladies. They want the girls drunk. So, the girls sit on a chair, not moving at all and drink all the beverages until they suddenly just say, “stop”... and they are throwing up under the table or falling asleep, or something.

Another bartender described intoxicated women as being more social and chatty, which led to more men wanting to buy them drinks. They said that management’s economic interests were important and influenced their attitudes and practices. Aside from making quick money, continuing to serve intoxicated women created a generous bar climate, which was of great importance to the bar staff. Bartenders shared other strategies used to attract female patrons such as allowing pretty females entry without a cover charge. The need to pay rent and salaries led to overserving both male and female patrons, though intoxicated women were particularly profitable. Bartenders’ justifications for overserving intoxicated female patrons draw on traditional and gendered perceptions of how men and women interact in a bar scene.

Intoxicated women are perceived as being sexually available

According to both bartenders and pseudo-patrons, intoxicated women are regarded as being sexually available. Bartenders stated that women attracted more patrons, as one female bartender noted: *“It’s a better night if there are many girls at the club, because then there is less competition for the women.”* A male bartender said:

It’s obvious that at a club with lots of girls, there will also be high pressure from the boys. Everybody enters a club full of girls! It’s always an underlying motive to pick up a girl. Maybe something happens... It’s their hope for the whole evening.

The female pseudo-patrons described several occasions when male bar patrons tried to pick them up. One said: *“Men in the bars laughed and smiled at us and invited us to join*

them.” We should mention that the female pseudo-patrons were attractive. They said they felt like easy targets because they appeared to be intoxicated. Another said:

Men made passes at us all the time, men ranging from being in their fifties to boys our own age. And it's strange, because it is never like that when we have a night out as ourselves. Because we were clearly and visibly drunk, maybe we were regarded as easy targets. They watched us. Every man in the venue saw us. We felt very uncomfortable.

It is interesting that the female pseudo-patrons' experiences of attempted pickups only occurred when they were performing high levels of intoxication and that they interpreted this as a sign of men regarding them as easy targets. Further, the female actors found it more difficult to reject men when they had to act intoxicated:

It was pretty challenging. I guess that's the only thing that's hard to deal with regarding the experience, men trying to pick us up. One of them insisted on buying us a beer and was not willing to give up. And everyone else in the bar was watching us. So I had to keep up the very drunken appearance and try to reject him at the same time.

The female pseudo-patrons' accounts of trying to reject unwanted sexual advances while maintaining their appearance of drunkenness illustrate the demands made on young women. The female actors in this study said that it was difficult to reject men because men stereotyped them as drunk and available. They also felt that they were regarded as being a positive element in a masculine arena. One said: “*At some venues, if it was quiet and the venue had few patrons, it seemed that the bartender regarded me as kind of funny. I brought some life and action. We were sort of an attraction.*” This quote illustrates how young women are on display at the bar scene and how this can feel demanding. The female actors felt that male bar patrons looked at them with special interest. A female bartender confirmed this when she spoke about a male guest who lacked the courage to pick up girls: “*But after three large beers, he suddenly dares to speak to the prettiest girl. That's how drunken men are and*

that's why it's hard to go out when you're a girl." The male actors did not describe similar experiences. They told a few stories about visiting venues where a large proportion of the patrons were older women (over 40 years); however, such examples were rare. The male actors joked about these situations and claimed that they did not regard them as unpleasant.

In bartenders' interviews, another sexual game emerged, namely one between the bartender and patron. According to one: *"Even if you don't intend to go home with the girl you're serving, you have in mind that the chance exists."* He narrated episodes where female patrons had gone home with him after work. Another male bartender (B) who used to work as a bouncer told stories about female patrons using different approaches to enter the club:

B: I received many offers when working as a bouncer, I assure you... (laughs)

I: How?

B: No, well, you know... If you're 18 and want to enter a club with a higher age limit, you know... I have been offered blow jobs and everything... (laughs). Everything is possible...

I: To get into the club?

B: Yes, to get into the club.

On the one hand, bartenders describe female patrons as "bait" and a form of entertainment to attract males in the heterosexual nighttime economy. On the other hand, some bartenders, both male and female, tell stories about how female patrons use their femininity to achieve goals, whether to enter a club or get another beer. The dialogue below is from an interview with a female bartender (B) who found it difficult to assess female patrons' intoxication level, because they sharpen up at the bar counter:

B: Girls are better actors than men.

I: To pretend that they are sober?

B: Yes, they enter the club, smile nicely to the bouncer, show their cleavage, they come in, go up to the bar, show some cleavage again, smile, removing the attention from what is actually happening.

I: Yes, so girls can play a little more on looks, you think?

B: Yes.

I: Or use flirtation?

B: Yes, I feel like this is a regular story at the drinking venues. I know that there are quite young girls who have been inside the clubs with higher age limits. I know that they let in pretty girls.

I: Why do you think they want the pretty girls inside the venue?

B: Because boys want girls and boys have money. Simple and easy. It's that simple and disgusting. At the end of the day, everything is about the money.

The bartender summarizes it as “simple,” as in normative or taken for granted, but at the same time as “disgusting.” She reacts to how girls use femininity to obtain benefits and emphasizes the connection between the gendered bar scene and the desire for economic profit in the nighttime economy.

The sexual game in the bar scene, between patrons as well as between bartenders and patrons, indicates that the nightlife is characterized by traditional ~~heteronormative~~ gender norms. A picture emerges of a gendered scene where men try to pick up women, where flirting is a part of the rules, and where highly intoxicated women are stereotyped as easy targets, all of which contradicts and undermines the notion of Norway as an egalitarian society in gender terms.

Intoxicated women are perceived as harmless

Bartenders view women as harmless, usually well-mannered, and unlikely to cause trouble.

When we asked about experiences with alcohol-related problems, problematic male patrons were a recurrent theme, with male troublemakers seen as being more aggressive. One male bartender said: *“To deal with a drunken patron who’s a big man is not much fun. Fights and threats are quite common.”* A female bartender claimed that intoxicated male patrons sometimes *“turned into fucking Vikings.”* Another female bartender elaborated on the topic:

Men are more provocative than women. I’ve never experienced any trouble with women here. I think it’s because men are aggressive, slightly more aggressive by nature. And it’s very easy for us to say no to men, because it prevents trouble.

Based on bartenders’ experiences, the majority of incidents of aggression in bars involve men. When we asked bartenders about female troublemakers, they often had to think for a long time and were not sure that they had an example. The bartenders spoke of male aggression *“happening on every shift.”* Concerning the reason it was easier for female patrons to be overserved, a female bartender said:

There’s no fooling around with the girls. There will be no problems for the venue but it’s often problems with the guys when they’re drunk. So, I believe that you refuse more boys than girls when you only see it from that perspective.

A plausible explanation for overserving may be that intoxicated women are not considered a threat for aggression and violence. The bartenders experienced male patrons as being more troublesome. If their decisions to serve intoxicated patrons are based on assessment of harm risk, it is reasonable to deny intoxicated men. One of the female pseudo-patrons had this impression: *“Men and intoxication, you expect violence perhaps and that it gets noisier. The girls bring more laughter, a different type of intoxication.”* In other words,

there is no fear linked to overserving a female patron. The presence of women may also reduce friction between male patrons. One male bartender said:

There is always a desire for more female patrons at the club, you know. I think it leads to less trouble. The boys get more to compete about, it's not like everybody has to pick up the same girl. It will be a better night if there are as many girls as boys, because there is less friction between the boys.

This statement shows the bartenders' argument that it is positive to have "enough" women at the club. More women mean less competition, less trouble and a better evening. According to bartenders, the presence of women can reduce male aggression. The bartenders feared that male patrons could ruin a good atmosphere, create trouble, or trigger a fight. According to their experiences, women are less violent and their presence may reduce friction between men, which contributes to a positive environment.

Concern for female patrons

Although this paper highlights three common explanations for overserving female patrons, the picture is more complex. Despite the rationales given for serving intoxicated female patrons, the data also demonstrate that there are some concerns for intoxicated women's safety. One male bartender said: *"When boys start to get very drunk, you're afraid they'll get into trouble but when girls start to get drunk, you think more that they are somewhat defenseless, that they can do stupid things."* When he later talked about "stupid things," he referred to walking home alone and the risk of sexual abuse. One consequence of this concern is that it focuses on the "risks" drunken women face and the "stupid things" they may do, glossing over the actions of those who are responsible for sexual assaults. Drunken young women are therefore cast as particularly responsible for the "risks" they face.

One female bartender was especially worried about female patrons if they were very intoxicated and walked home alone. She spoke of about several episodes where “creepy men,” described as “wolves,” encircled intoxicated women sitting alone on the sidewalk: *“wolves there to take advantage of it, simply to make an assault.”*

However, the female pseudo-patrons did not perceive much concern from bartenders. These female actors stated that they were sometimes shocked when a bartender served them, given their clearly intoxicated behavior. This may be an indication of the changing gender stereotypes around male and female intoxication. The female pseudo-patrons expected more care or concern but only experienced this a few times. One female pseudo-patron highlighted a rare example of care from a male bartender:

The bartender was a very cute Swedish guy. He looked at me with sad, pitying eyes and told me that he could not serve me. Then he took my hand as if he was a priest and said “I’m so sorry but you cannot get anything here.” He was very nice and he felt very sorry for me. Whether he wanted to make it easier for me to be denied, or whether he worried about me because I was so drunk, is hard to say. But he called for the doorman and asked him to escort us out.

This was one of the few occasions when the female pseudo-patrons felt that somebody worried about their intoxication and ability to take care of themselves. Concern for the safety of intoxicated females comprised a small portion of bartenders’ stories. They considered male and female intoxication similarly and did not criticize female intoxication. In their interviews, accounts based on economic motives were more significant than moral-based reasons for denying service to intoxicated women.

DISCUSSION

This study demonstrates how traditional gender norms are both reproduced and challenged at drinking establishments. On the one hand, drinking establishments still seem to be regarded as a male environment. According to the interviewed bartenders and pseudo-patrons, the social dynamics between men and women at drinking establishments continue to be based on traditional gender norms. On the other hand, it seems that old perceptions about female alcohol consumption and binge drinking have weakened.

Bartenders see their patrons through binary traditional gendered glasses. The bartender must keep patrons satisfied to retain them at the venue and maximize income. Denial of service can conflict with the patrons' expectations and make them irritated or quarrelsome. According to bartenders' experiences, there is a larger risk that male patrons become troublemakers. Their views are confirmed by previous research showing that female bar patrons are less likely to engage in macho behaviors that can lead to threats, challenges, or intimidating behavior (Graham & Homel, 2008). Research has also shown that intoxicated men are more likely to behave aggressively and obnoxiously (Graham & Homel, 2008; Wells, Tremblay, & Graham, 2013). Bartenders reported that female conflicts occurred less frequently and were less problematic than those involving men. When bartenders regard female patrons as harmless, they see no reason to deny serving them.

The female pseudo-patrons felt that they were regarded as an attraction and as a kind of entertainment for bartenders and male guests. Using Mackiewicz (2012) expression, they were on display at the bar scene. Her informants reported that male patrons' gazes in a bar context could feel demanding. The female pseudo-patrons in our study were uncomfortable when acting intoxicated because this made it harder to communicate rejection. They felt stereotyped as sexually available because of their intoxication. Fjær and Pedersen (2015) report similar findings in their study of high school graduation celebration. A gender

difference was clearly inherent, with men being active and women attractive. As shown by Griffin and colleagues (2013), the juxtaposition of hypersexual femininity and the culture of intoxication produces a particularly difficult set of dilemmas for young women. Zajdow and MacLean (2014) describe how young women struggle to find the balance between “control” and a “loss of control” that might place them in complex and difficult situations. One such dilemma is illustrated by the female pseudo-patrons’ complaints that they felt like easy targets for unwanted sexual advances. As shown by Graham and colleagues (2014), not all sexual contacts are positive and consensual, and aggression related to sexual advances is a common experience. The more intoxicated the woman is, the higher her risk of sexual victimization (Graham, Bernards, Abbey, et al., 2014). In particular, intoxicated women leaving bars unaccompanied face a great risk of being targeted (Fox & Sobol, 2000). Lindsay (2009) shows that for men, the negative implication of losing control was the prospect of physical violence. For women, however, a loss of control could result in unwanted sex or sexual assault.

Our study demonstrates that bartenders see the bar as a sexual scene, a stage for casual sexual encounters, both between patrons and between patrons and staff. As Stubbs (2001) found in his studies of male Canadian bartenders, several had experienced having patrons offer to engage in sexual activity with them. Based on the sexual game between male and female patrons, bartenders do their best to keep both genders satisfied, which leads to a practice of overserving female patrons, partly to keep them at the venue. As one of the male informants in the study by Parks and Scheidt noted: “if there’s no woman in the bar, I ain’t going to be in that bar” (2000, p. 933). Clearly, traditional cultural associations between alcohol and gender have not disappeared (Griffin et al., 2013).

Although female public intoxication has traditionally been regarded as unwanted, deviant, and stigmatized (Bogren, 2011; Montemurro & McClure, 2005; Simonen et al., 2013), our

study highlights a shift away from the construction of alcohol consumption and intoxication as an exclusively male activity. In a Scandinavian gender-egalitarian cultural context with liberal norms of intoxication, bartenders perceived female intoxication as normal and nothing to worry about. Nevertheless, when the female pseudo-patrons are treated as “easy targets” by male patrons because they are considered “drunken slags,” female drunkenness is still heavily stigmatized.

The picture is, however, complex. Images of women’s intoxication are changing and under constant renegotiation. As several UK studies have described, getting drunk is an accepted, expected, and even normalized part of a night out in the culture of intoxication. However, female drunkenness is still heavily stigmatized (Griffin, Bengry-Howell, Hackley, Mistral, & Szmigin, 2009; Griffin et al., 2013; Mackiewicz, 2012). The same is found in Scandinavian countries. For example, according to Simonen (2011), young Finnish women distanced themselves from binge drinking in 1985 but identified with it strongly 20 years later. There are also signs that for women, this culture of intoxication incorporates drinking as a sign of independence and self-confidence. Demant (2007) showed that women use alcohol as a marker of playfulness. It seems that bartenders’ accounts of female intoxication follow what Demant and Törrönen (2011, p. 1244) call “a feminization of the public drinking situations in the Nordic countries.”

In Sweden, Bogren (2008) has argued that even if drinking patterns and normative gender discourses have changed, the image of drinking women as sexually licentious still exists. In a study of Swedish youth, Abrahamson (2003) found that female intoxication was perceived as morally questionable. The same was noted by Demant (2007) in his study of Danish teenagers, where discourses on drinking were tightly interwoven with the normative cultural understandings of gender (see also Measham, 2002). Traditional gender discourses are still present even though it is legitimate for women to drink to intoxication.

Our study does not answer the question of whether bartenders' expectations of female patrons have changed over the last few decades. Perhaps female intoxication has been met recently by greater moralization. Bartenders may be among the first to adopt new conceptions of alcohol as a gender symbol. They are accustomed to seeing both men and women intoxicated and may be the first to adopt new trends in nightlife. Bartenders are part of a party culture in which female binge drinking is no longer perceived as being deviant. At the same time, it is important to note that just because female binge drinking occurs and is not viewed as particularly unacceptable, this does not mean that it is no longer perceived as being deviant. As Skeggs (1997) pointed out, respectability remains the cornerstone of acceptable femininity, even as women are more engaged in the culture of intoxication.

Our study highlights some of the diverse and conflicting ways in which female intoxication at drinking establishments is evaluated. The rich qualitative data we obtained from both sides of the bar provide a good starting point to develop larger studies to increase knowledge about gender and serving practices at drinking establishments. Overserving can result in significant harms, and knowledge about why women are overserved is important. Our study has implications for Responsible Beverage Serving programs and other types of server training that ought to focus more explicitly on the overserving of vulnerable female patrons. Reduced overserving could also decrease the dangers women face when they consume too much alcohol, such as becoming a target for sexual aggression.

CONCLUSION

The nighttime economy in Oslo seems to combine a strictly gendered interaction between male and female patrons with an acceptance of female binge drinking. To some extent, the overserving of female patrons can be a consequence of these two seemingly contradictory tendencies. Female bar patrons are stereotyped and considered bait and a form of

entertainment to attract and pacify males in the gendered nighttime economy. Knowing this improves our understanding of the demands on young women as they attempt to navigate dilemmas concerning alcohol consumption and getting drunk. At the same time, our findings contradict and undermine the notion of Norway as a highly gender-egalitarian society.

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