

SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND PARENTAL VALUES:  
AN EXAMINATION OF APPROACHES TO  
BURUEAUCRATIC DISCRETION AT  
THE STREET-LEVEL

by

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## ABSTRACT

### SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND AND PARENTAL VALUES: AN EXAMINATION OF APPROACHES TO BURUEACRATIC DISCRETION AT THE STREET-LEVEL

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Scholarly literature on policy implementation at the street-level generally focuses on how workers act in response to external pressures. Pressures can include policy rules, organizational culture, and the identities of the clients. Academia has produced scant work, however, examining how the identities and backgrounds of street-level bureaucrats influence their approach to the discretion inherent in their jobs. This study seeks to fill that literary gap. Using semi-structured interviews with street-level bureaucrats in North Texas, the study yields two strong relationships. First, a relationship exists between the participants' socioeconomic backgrounds as children and how they approach discretion inherent to street-level bureaucracy. Secondly, certain family values stressed by participants' parents relate with a common approach to bureaucratic discretion. The family's decision making process, in particular,

showed the most significant relationship with what guided workers in their decision making process, how they used creativity at work, and whether or not they admitted to changing or ignoring policy. The findings call for an expansion of academic research into street-level discretion

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Bureaucrats rarely implement public policy exactly as legislatively designed. The gap between legislative intent and policy delivery occurs for a plethora of reasons, including: unclear language in the legislation, political pressure, organizational pressure, overworked and stressed case workers, the identity of the people the policy targets, etc. The vast majority of policy implementation literature seeks to explain the gap between legislation and implementation. A subset of researchers within the policy implementation community focuses on the persons who deliver the policy to its intended target. Today, the scholarly community recognizes these persons as “street-level bureaucrats,” a term first coined by Lipsky (1980). Lipsky defines street-level bureaucrats as “public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work” (p. 3). He believed that street-level bureaucrats wielded so much power because they forced themselves onto their clients. Street-level workers often directly insert themselves into their clients’ lives (think police officers) or societal conditions are such that clients have no choice but to seek out street-level bureaucrats (think welfare caseworkers). Scholars who examine policy implementation at the street-level regard the “substantial discretion” inherent to street-level work as the determining factor in the difference between legislative intent and policy implementation.

The majority of academic writings on street-level implementation use two broad groups of variables to explain street-level bureaucratic discretion: work pressures and stressors, and the identity of the clients served. One group of literature believes that organizational pressure, policy constraints, and job stressors impact how and why street-level bureaucrats act as they

do. The other group believes that the identities of a policy's target population embody the primary motivating factor for street-level action. Therefore, the relationship between the client and street-level bureaucrat is more important than the rules and regulations under which the worker operates.

Both sets of literature have merit. A detailed reading of each group is critical for a complete understanding of street-level implementation. However, I believe that both approaches overlook another crucial variable. To date, the literature on street-level bureaucrats treats workers as blank slates responding to external stimuli. Even though one group of authors recognizes the intricacies in the client-worker relationship, they only develop this concept as far as how the behaviors and identities of the clients affect the street-level bureaucrat. A miniscule number of studies discuss how the worker's background can impact how he/she approaches discretion. The goal of this work is to offer a different and more nuanced understanding of the complexities in the street-level decision making process.

I hypothesize that street-level bureaucrats from similar socioeconomic backgrounds and whose parents stressed similar values, will share similar approaches to bureaucratic discretion. To test this hypothesis I utilize semi-structured interviews with street-level bureaucrats in public and non-profit organizations. The independent variables are the workers' socioeconomic backgrounds as children, and a certain set of values stressed by their parents or caregivers. The dependent variable is the participants' views of, and approach to, the bureaucratic discretion they encounter on a daily basis. I detail the operationalization of these variables in the methods section. Should my hypothesis prove successful, one would see relationships in the views of bureaucratic discretion amongst different subgroups of participants.

The paper begins with a review of the relevant literature. I provide the reader with the theoretical foundation for the work, continue with a discussion of the previous work on the intergenerational transmission of values, and conclude with a review of scholarly writings on street-level bureaucracy. The paper continues with a thorough account of the methods I

employed during the study and a detailed look at the population I interviewed. I then detail the results of the interviews. In this section I examine the relationships between each subgroup of people and their responses to questions related to bureaucratic discretion. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the findings, the study's shortcomings, and implications for future research.

In full disclosure, I believe that it is important for the reader to know that I work as a street-level bureaucrat. Only one of the participants was aware of my work during the interview process. I undertook a study on this topic, in part, to develop a better understanding of how and why I make the decisions that I make at work. I also chose this topic because street-level bureaucrats hold enormous power in the policy process. While elected officials pass policy for the people, it is the street-level bureaucrats who deliver policy to the people. It is at the street level where clients interact directly with workers. Street-level bureaucrats are the gatekeepers. They ultimately decide who can access services, how quickly to deliver services, and how to enforce policy. While rules and regulations compel all street-level bureaucrats to act within policy parameters, studies repeatedly show the permeability of those parameters. Policy boundaries are elastic and bend to fit the confines of individual discretion. It is critical for any study of policy implementation to understand how and why discretion bends. This study adds another dimension to the body of work dedicated to understanding street-level bureaucrats.

CHAPTER 2  
REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Theoretical Orientation

The majority of scholarly work on policy implementation utilizes a positivist theoretical orientation (Frederickson & Smith, 2003). Within this tradition scholars view organizations, administrators, and workers as objective implementers of policy. Because they allow little room for subjectivity, positivist theorists believe that external factors like clearer legislation, political pressure, and proper levels of supervision will remove the space between legislative intent and street-level implementation. The positivist studies examining street-level policy implementation either imply, or outright state, that self-interest is the motivating factor in the decision making process for bureaucracies and bureaucrats. This tradition seeks to understand bureaucratic discretion for the purposes of controlling it. These scholars desire implementation to closely match legislative intent. Their suggestions for improvement in policy implementation usually call for more control over discretion.

James Coleman's (1990) work on social theory represents the most useful depiction of the positivist policy implementation tradition. Coleman clearly states that self-interest leads to the formation of ideas, actions taken, and controls how the bureaucrat makes decisions. He recognizes the practical fallacy of this approach, but justifies its use in theory. Coleman writes that the "social environment" is comprised of the "natural" and the "built" (p. 43). He writes that bureaucracies are artificially built environments. Coleman goes on to describe simple versus complex relationships. The former can exist without maintenance of a third party. The latter require a third party for continued existence. He argues that the bureaucratic structure exists to maintain the artificial relationships that develop between the worker and the client.

Coleman does not, however, recognize the complexities inherent in the relationship between bureaucrats and the clients they serve. Nor does Coleman recognize the nuances of why or how bureaucrats use discretion. He instead argues that bureaucrats will act in disregard of the interests of the organization only in “disjoin authority relations” where the subordinate has no interest in the outcomes their actions produce (p. 79). He goes on to write that the “bureaucratic personality” encourages strict focus on rules as opposed to broad organizational goals (p. 79). Organizational rules and regulations protect the bureaucrat from adverse outcomes. Notice that Coleman’s descriptions and conclusions focus on organizational interests and view the street-level worker as an automaton who either follows policies and rules or disregards them due to environmentally created flaws. Recommendations stemming from this theoretical approach focus on policy design and management strategies as effective controls for worker discretion.

While it is important for the reader to understand the underlying theoretical premise that dominates the field, I reject this approach in favor of the post-positivist tradition. Frederickson & Smith (2003) write that one can trace the roots of this tradition as far back as 1948 at the original Minnowbrook Conference. Scholars at this conference argued that public organizations and administrators are neither neutral nor objective. The post-positivist tradition stemming from this Conference steeped itself in both Thomas Kuhn (the idea that scholars can reach a new public administration theory via paradigm change) and Berger & Luckman (the idea that reality is socially constructed). This tradition argues for a dramatic overhaul in how the academic and political communities view policy implementation. Post-positivists contend that the basic focus of scholarly analysis should be the street-level bureaucrats who have face to face interactions with persons receiving services. They do not use organizations as their units of analysis. The post-positivist tradition also uses phenomenology, or the belief that only the actors’ interpretations, meanings, and views can help researchers understand actions. They also tend to use qualitative and naturalistic methods, allowing them to both reject objectivity while utilizing empiricism.

This study fits squarely within the post-positivist tradition. I do not go so far as to claim this work as post-modern, which tends to blur the boundaries between perception and reality to an extreme degree. However, it is clearly post-positivist. I utilize phenomenology, qualitative methodology, the same basic unit of analysis, and do not agree that scholars can study or measure the bureaucratic world objectively. I also recognize, as do Frederickson and Smith (2003) that the post-positivist approach is not without its problems. Two notable issues include a lack of generalizability due to purposive sampling and conclusions that yield indeterminate results due to “mutual causality” (p. 134). Despite the above concerns, I ask participants questions about their perceptions, attitudes, and actions. I also do not seek to confirm a previously developed theory, but am instead hoping to inspire a new direction to the field. Therefore, utilizing post-positivist theory fits both the questions I ask and the conclusions I am searching for.

## 2.2 Value Differentiation

My hypothesis assumes the validity of two interrelated ideas. First, persons raised in similar socioeconomic backgrounds share values. Second, parents impart values to their children. Taking these assumptions one step further, I put forth the notion that an individual's background dramatically affects a street-level bureaucrat's approach to the discretion inherent in his/her work. Separate works by Lareau and Kohn form the foundation of scholarly support for the above assumptions. In 1972 Kohn examined the shared work-related values in working and middle class families. He argued that middle class families encouraged self-direction and autonomy whereas working class families focused on following the rules. He traced this value emphasis to male employment. Kohn wrote that working class men held occupations where success required strict adherence to rules and regulations. In contrast, men in the middle class worked in professions where autonomy, independence, and self-direction lead to success. Kohn found that men brought these values with them home from work and imparted them to their children in an attempt to facilitate their children's success in future careers.

Kohn went on to test and expand his original findings in several studies. In 1979 a group of scholars including Kohn moved outside of the limiting focus on men. Miller et al (1979) found that women who worked in jobs with more independence and autonomy had greater levels of “psychological functioning” and women in jobs with lower levels of independence and autonomy had lower levels of psychological functioning (p. 66). By 1986 Kohn et al wrote confidently in favor of the existence of a causal chain from a parent’s occupational approach to a child’s values. They wrote “social stratification affects parental occupational self-direction; occupational self-direction affects parental values; parental values affect children’s values” (p. 99). Kohn’s work influences this study in that I accept his causal chain to a point. Therefore, my study starts from the premise that socioeconomic background (as measured in part by parental employment) affects how one views what is required for success at work. I also accept as correct Kohn’s assertion that parental values affect children’s values. Where I depart from Kohn is the direct application of his entire causal chain. I contend that socioeconomic status and parental values can act separately in influencing a child’s approach to work in adulthood. I take this one step further in arguing that one brings the values one learned during childhood into the workplace and this ultimately affects the worker’s approach to street-level bureaucracy. For example, because the working class ethos focuses more on following the rules, one would expect workers from this socioeconomic background to show discomfort in using discretion to veer off the policy path. In contrast, upper class persons place more emphasis on autonomy. Therefore, one would expect persons from higher socioeconomic backgrounds express high levels of comfort in altering or adjusting policy.

Annette Lareau (2003) offers a contrasting, but theoretically important, take on Kohn’s theory. Using naturalistic observation, ethnographic research, and interviews with twelve different families, Lareau found that middle class parents stress “concerted cultivation” with their children (p. 2). Middle class parents focused on the intellectual and social development of their children. These parents inserted themselves into their children’s lives, encouraged discussion

and dissent, created highly scheduled lives outside of the home, and tried to control childhood development. In contrast, working class and poor parents saw childhood development as a natural process outside of their control. Lareau refers to this parental approach as the “logic of child rearing as the accomplishment of natural growth” (p. 238). Working class and poor parents did not foster debates with their children. They focused on at-home activities with family members. These children were more likely to have free time to play at their leisure. Lareau also found a clear line of demarcation between adults and children in the poor and working class homes. Parents tended to blur that boundary in the middle class homes.

While Lareau recognizes Kohn’s ultimate conclusion that working class families stress an ethos of respect to authority and following the rules, her work asserts that the independent free time inherent to the lives of poor and working class children could foster higher levels of autonomy than middle class children who live in a constantly scheduled world. I believe that the divergence in findings in Kohn and Lareau’s writings occur because of methodological differences. Lareau’s use of qualitative methods offers more depth, while Kohn’s use of statistical analysis offers more breadth. Both theories show that socioeconomic backgrounds coupled with parental values can have a profound effect on childhood development and the values children take into adulthood. Their findings on the importance of parental values and class backgrounds are critical to this study. However, I depart slightly from Kohn and Lareau. I believe that while socioeconomic class does affect parental values, each variable separately influences how a child approaches work as an adult.

The academic literature supports the idea that people from different socioeconomic circumstances emphasize different values. Using data from a national survey data of Canadian adults, Grabb (1981) found that middle class respondents rank self-actualization as more important than working class respondents. He concluded that a person’s experience at work can help explain class differences in values. Grabb’s survey included questions I asked participants for this study, including question on: the freedom to do one’s job, frequency of



supervision, and if one could influence the decisions made by one's supervisor. Ginwright (2002) also focused on how occupation impacts values. He found that in his sample of forty African American parents, working class parents tended to see work as merely a job instead of part of one's identity. Working class participants viewed problems in terms of concrete issues while the middle class viewed problems as ideological. Scholarship has also found that working class persons are more likely to rank the need for belonging as more important than either the poor or middle classes. Lower income persons also tend to discuss safety and physiological needs as more important than the other groups (Gratton, 1980). Hong (2000) writes that independent of occupation, social class affects parental values. He contends that women from higher classes place more emphasis on autonomy than women of lower classes.

Several academic works found that socioeconomic background continues to impact persons well into adulthood. Hansen (1996) found that levels of social and cultural capital differ amongst persons from different class backgrounds. Her work showed that when persons from lower class backgrounds achieve mobility into the upper class they do not achieve the same level of esteem among their upper class peers as persons raised in the upper class. Kaufman (2003) similarly wrote that persons who achieve social mobility often form identities and take actions to endear themselves to the group they now belong to. This can occur in personal, work, or school settings.

My hypothesis also depends on the idea that persons whose parents imparted a similar set of values will approach street-level bureaucratic discretion similarly. Therefore, the intergenerational transmission of values is an important concept to this work. Several studies support this notion. Writing in the wake of William Julius Wilson's *The Declining Significance of Race*, Ogbu (1979) contends that "subordinate-group parents" impart values on to their children that teach them how to be successful in future subordinate roles (p. 3). He contends that these values are different than white-middle class values. Hitlin (2006) found that social values taught by parents influence children's career choices. He goes on to write that these social values

differ between classes. His work confirms Kohn's original findings. He writes that a parent's focus on either autonomy or conformity directly affects a person's ability "to experience self-direction within one's own occupation" (p. 28). In looking at the intergenerational transmission of poverty, Ludwig and Mayer (2006) found that parents transmit their preferences for work hours in how they model "work behavior" and "children model their work habits on their parents work habits" (p.185). Kasser et al (1995) found that children whose mothers they described as "cold" were more likely to value materialistic success as adults (p. 908). These children's mothers were also more likely to value conformity as opposed to self-direction. Johnson (2002) takes a slightly different approach. She argues that work values can change as a person ages; they are not irrevocably set in childhood. Her research found that young adults transitioning into the work world who came from higher socioeconomic backgrounds placed less emphasis on monetary rewards and job security and instead focused more on the level of influence their work had. Finally, Rogers et al (1991) found that parents who worked at jobs with different levels of control (i.e. control over nothing, objects, people, etc.) approach parenting differently. For example, mothers with lower levels of control at work were more likely to use physical discipline where mothers with higher levels of control were looser with rule enforcement. The authors go on to argue that these differences in parenting styles affect childhood development.

Despite the above examples, some scholarly writings on the intergenerational transmission of values have yielded decidedly mixed results. Black et al (2005) found no definitive causal link between parental education and a child's education. Mattei and Niemi's (1991) study produced mixed results when they attempted to examine the intergenerational transmission of political values. McBroom et. al (1985) found that who made the decisions in the family and whether or not families made those decisions collaboratively helped in explaining some of the variance in the intergenerational transmission of values. However, they tempered their ultimate conclusions by noting that influences outside of the family can have just a great of impact on a child's value development as what occurs inside the family.

Despite studies with mixed results, the literature ultimately demonstrates solid evidence of value differentiation between persons from different class backgrounds. Furthermore, parents successfully impart values to their children. For purposes of this study, the reader should note that a person's attitude towards work appears to be directly linked to their parents' attitudes toward work. While results on the intergenerational transmission of values often require nuanced explanation, the amount of support for this idea within the field provides a solid foundation for a link between parental values related to work and the work-related values children develop into adulthood. Where this project attempts to expand on the literature is in an examination of how the values children gain from their parents and from their socioeconomic backgrounds translate into street-level bureaucracy. Based on the literature, one would expect lower and working class participants to express an aversion to bureaucratic discretion and instead focus on strictly following policy. Also, one would expect participants who grew up in families where decision making was not collaborative, where parents were more authoritarian, and where the parents stressed following the rules over independent thought to favor literal policy enforcement over discretion.

### 2.3 Bureaucratic Discretion at the Street-Level

Scholars within the field of public policy recognize the crucial role street-level bureaucrats play in delivering legislation to the people. Despite this broad recognition, however, little agreement exists as to what successful street-level policy implementation looks like (O'Toole 1986, Sowa & Selden 2003, Brodtkin 1997, Lipsky 1980, Maynard & Musheon 1990, etc). Much of the literature views street-level bureaucratic discretion as the crux of successful or failed implementation. Therefore, the majority of scholarly work focuses on what motivates bureaucrats to act. In my readings, I found two differing theories on how and why bureaucrats act. The first group of literature examines the macro level factors influencing discretion. These include political pressure, composition of the particular bureaucracy, supervisory tactics, etc. The second group of scholarly work focuses on the micro level factors that influence discretion.

This group writes about the decision making process through the social reality that the street-level bureaucrat constructs. It includes studies on what is important to street-level workers, and how they describe their decision making process. Scholars from this group often focus on the relationships that form between street-level workers and their clients as well as how workers deal with policy pressures and stress inherent to street-level bureaucracy. I devote the first portion of this section of the literature to an overview of the macro level studies. While my study fits squarely in the micro level literature, it is important to understand macro influences on bureaucratic decision making.

One subset in the macro implementation literature cites the structure of the organization as the determining factor in bureaucratic decision making. Page (1946) argued that the informal structures within bureaucracies work in tandem with the overt hierarchies inherent to organizations. For Page, this combination allows for efficient decision making. In line with Page's focus on the organization, Golden (2000) states "research demonstrates that the norms, beliefs, practices, and values shared by members of an organization shape both their behavior and their decisions" (p. 25). She contends that agency history and a shared set of experiences unique to the culture of the organization drive individual behavior. Golden's research found that the administration's level of support for an agency directly influenced how members of the agency viewed their roles. If bureaucrats viewed their roles as positive, they were more likely to act in line with the wishes of the administration. Interestingly, she also found that political ideology factored little as a determining factor in bureaucratic decision making.

Other scholars claim that policy design and political pressure directly influence policy implementation. Bunker (1972) argued that successful implementation depends upon implementers of the policy possessing high levels of knowledge and training. However, Bunker defines implementers as high level bureaucrats within the organization, not workers at the street-level. His theory ignored discretion and policy interpretation at the street-level. Sussman and Rhodes (1982) believe that poorly written legislation accounts for the gap between

legislative intent and implementation. They write that Congress rarely offers guidance on how bureaucrats should implement policy and politicians pass policies based on the country's political whims. In their opinion this invites bureaucratic abuses of legislative intent. Continuing the macro level theme, Calvert, McCubbins, and Weingast (1989) focus their work on the link between the bureaucracies, the legislative branch, and the executive branch. They argue that the power of appointments and the threat of sanctions limit bureaucratic decision making.

Only a few studies attempt to bridge the gap between the macro and micro levels. In a study of street-level bureaucrats in Denmark, May and Winter (2009) offer a blend between the two approaches. They recognize the influence of street-level bureaucrats but argue that the attitudes of the actors at the top of the organizational structure affect how workers at the street-level interpret policy. Maupin (1993) further tries to bridge the gap between the macro and micro literatures. He found that agency attempts to control discretion always prove difficult due to vaguely written social policies. He argues that street-level bureaucrats will always have their own version of rationality which may conflict with organizational goals.

What is missing from the macro level literature, with the noted exception of the above works, is the recognition of the critical role of street-level workers in implementing policy. The first work to truly challenge the macro paradigm was Lipsky's (1980) seminal study which defined street-level bureaucrats. For Lipsky, street-level bureaucrats were just as important to the formation of policies as the legislators. He argued that work pressures and stressors caused bureaucrats to utilize discretion to make their jobs easier. For Lipsky this reaction on the part of the street-level bureaucrat effectively became policy. The overwhelming majority of the literature I found on micro level policy implementation cites Lipsky as the progenitor of the field. Interestingly, he takes a positivist theoretical approach and assumes that self-interest primarily motivates worker action.

In the wake of Lipsky's study a multitude of scholarly work focused exclusively on the motivations for discretion at the street-level emerged. Brodtkin (1997) found that the fiscal

capacity and available resources of an organization impacted discretionary approaches at the street-level. He argued that street-level bureaucrats do neither what they want, nor what their bosses' tell them to, they do "what they can" with the resources available (p. 24). Similarly, Keiser (1998) found that both internal characteristics of the bureaucracy such as resources and values, as well as environmental characteristics such as support from the legislature, influence how street-level bureaucrats exercise power over their clients. He basically found that bureaucratic resources are important and by extension legislatures are important because they decide how to fund a particular agency. Using experimental research, Scott (1997) found that the following factors, in order, influenced street-level decision making: levels of organizational control, the characteristics of the clients, and the characteristics of the individual worker. Keiser (1999) later found that variation in implementation of welfare policy at the street-level depended upon the area's level of need, the overall health of the economy, and state partisan politics. For Keiser, policy implementation at the street-level depends upon the organizational environment. He also found no difference between the implementation of regulatory policies and redistributive policies.

Within the micro level implementation literature is a subset of authors who focus on how the identities of the clients, and their subsequent relationships with street-level bureaucrats, influence discretion. In a more recent study Keiser et. al (2004) found that sanctions of non-whites on Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) increased with the total population of nonwhites until the nonwhites had enough votes to gain political power. Keiser ultimately concluded that partisan ideology at the legislative level influenced actions at the street level, but his work confirms that the identities of the clients matter. May and Wood (2003) found that building inspectors regulation styles were situationally dependent. Strictness of enforcement depended, in part, on the backgrounds of those being regulated. Factors taken into account by the street-level bureaucrats included a client's income, education, and attitude.

Maynard-Moody and Musheno (1990 & 2003) wrote the most prominent work in the area of micro level literature focused on the relationships between the clients and the workers. They found that workers based decisions to transcend policy restrictions directly on how they constructed the identities of their clients. Street-level bureaucrats molded policies to benefit clients they connected with and hid behind strict policy enforcement of clients they did not like. In Maynard-Moody and Musheno's studies, policy and organizational pressure provided little influence over the decision making process.

As noted above, academic research has produced several landmark studies on what influences policy implementation at the street level. Scholars have found that factors like politics, available resources, workloads, levels of supervision, relationships with clients, and identities of clients can all determine how street-level bureaucrats choose to implement policies. In addition, there are several studies that look at how the specific identities and backgrounds of the street-level bureaucrats affect bureaucratic discretion. Booher (2009) found that the religious identities of Evangelical Christian street-level bureaucrats profoundly impacted how the workers approached their clients and viewed discretion. Along the same line, Riccucci and Meyers (2004) wrote that to determine the link between passive and active representation amongst street-level bureaucrats one must begin with a person's "social origins" (for the authors, race and gender), then examine the worker's "values," then look at the "actions" a worker takes, and finally look at the "policy outcomes" that result from these actions (p. 587). They found that the link between social origins and values was higher with workers who exercised more discretion.

For purposes of this paper, it is important to note that scholarship recognizes that a street-level bureaucrat's background influences the decision making process. Watkins-Hayes (2009) examined how the identities of blacks and Latinos "inform their understanding of how they should do their jobs" (p. 286). She used participant observation, archival research, and in-depth interviews with over seventy workers. Watkins-Hayes discovered that blacks and Latinos

injected race into their discussions with their minority clients to get them to “invest in the process” (p. 299). She also recognized the importance of class. She wrote that her participants used class to both link themselves to clients in terms of their backgrounds, and separate themselves from clients in terms of their current status. However, she does not discuss how family values or how a worker’s socioeconomic background as a child could impact the approach to discretion. Sowa and Selden (2003) noted that the level of perceived discretion is positively correlated with the worker’s time at the agency, their level of education, and the number of minorities and women in the organization. Langbein (2000) also found that education levels impacted levels of discretion. She argued that the higher the education (i.e. more degrees above a bachelor’s degree), the more discretion the worker utilized.

Despite the copious amounts of literature on policy implementation, a gap exists. I was unable to find a single study which cited a worker’s socioeconomic background as a child or the values their parents stressed as influencing factors on decision making. Academic writings clearly demonstrate that socioeconomic backgrounds and parental values influence a person’s work-related values. Scholarly literature also shows that a multitude of complex factors impact a worker’s approach to bureaucratic discretion. To properly understand how and why street-level bureaucrats use their discretion, it is critical to determine if links exist between a worker’s background and their approach to discretion. The class under which one was raised, and the values imparted by one’s caregivers dramatically impacts the values one develops. This study attempts to link what the literature recognizes about value development with the complexities inherent in street-level bureaucratic decision making.



## CHAPTER 3

### METHODS

#### 3.1 Data Collection

As stated above, this study was based on eleven semi-structured interviews. I recruited participants using the UT-Arlington School of Urban and Public Affairs Alumni e-mail listserv. The listserv includes persons who graduated from either the undergrad or graduate program at School of Urban and Public Affairs at UT-Arlington. See Appendix C for the recruitment e-mail used. This listerv allowed me to reach thousands of persons whose college studies would naturally translate into jobs in the public or nonprofit sectors. The likelihood of finding street-level bureaucrats was higher within the group I chose to recruit from. Although many potential participants responded to my call, most either did not fit the criteria of the study or lived outside the Dallas-Fort Worth area. When a volunteer's description of their work appeared to satisfy the criteria for a street-level bureaucrat based on Lipsky's definition, I arranged to meet with them. After the interviews I utilized snowball sampling to obtain contact information for other potential participants. I decided to use snowball sampling to expand the participant pool beyond persons who graduated from UT-Arlington. This sampling technique was not random, of course, but I utilized this approach for several reasons: convenience, diversity of organizations in the sample, and uniformity in education levels of the participants. While the results are not generalizable to all street-level bureaucrats, they are nonetheless fairly representative of well-educated street-level bureaucrats working in government and non-profit agencies in the Dallas-Fort Worth area.

I chose qualitative methods via semi-structured interviews because as Esterberg (2002) writes this approach is useful in "exploring a topic in detail or in constructing a theory" (p. 87). This study seeks to do both. Esterberg also cautions the interviewer against revealing too much of himself in the interview. In line with this advice, I presented very little of myself to the

participants. However, I believe that my identity as a street-level bureaucrat helped me understand my participants' perspectives. My experience allowed me to better tailor my questions.

I utilized an interview guide for all the interviews (see Appendix A). However, as is the case with any semi-structured interview process, I adjusted and changed questions during the course of the interviews based on participant responses. I began the interviews with a discussion of the participants' jobs. I started with simple questions on how they came to work for their current organization and then moved into questions regarding the clients they serve and their decision making process. I reserved the last half of the interview for questions on the participants' childhood. I structured the interview in this way to allow time to establish rapport before moving into the more personal questions regarding family life and socioeconomic background. While all the interviews covered all the information listed in the final guide, Earl and Sam (participant code names) were not directly asked about using creativity in their work, or the final questions regarding their childhood and their jobs. These questions were not present on the original guide. However, both provided this information. I added these questions to the interview guide after participants mentioned using creativity at work and as means to comfortably end the interview. I recorded each interview on a digital voice recorder. I then listened to the interviews multiple times. During the first few listens I engaged in a detailed note taking process. I finally listened to the interviews a couple of more times to extract relevant quotes.

### 3.2 Measures

In my examination of the literature there were four groups of parental values which appeared to correlate directly with how children view work and develop work related values. The first value I examined was the family decision making process (see Appendix A, Questions 14, 18, 19, and 20). Responses ranged from homes in which participants stated that the children made most of the decisions, or no one did, to homes where one or both parents made all of the

decisions. For example, one participant stated “I would say they [the kids] were involved in the decision making process a lot.” Another stated:

“I kinda made my own decisions...my dad would always say Krystal there was no disciplining you, I would say something and you would say no! He just wouldn't do it, so I was pretty headstrong...I would just do whatever.”

Second, I looked at whether or not participants described their parents as more authoritarian or permissive (See Appendix A, Questions 14, 15, 19, and 20). I placed participants in either the authoritarian or permissive subgroup based not only on the direct question, but on types of discipline used in the home, and the overall household atmosphere participants described. I looked for examples in participant responses of how strictly parents enforced rules, what type of household structure they cultivated, and who made decisions within the home. For example, Doris said “authority, I'm the momma I'm the daddy...it was just everything, this is what it is, I'm the mom don't ask, did you just ask me why? Cause I'm the mom and I said so.”

Third, I divided participants into groups based on whether they felt that their parents stressed the value of following the rules or independent thought (See Appendix A, Questions 14, 18, 20).

Again, Doris stated,

“Independent thought, we were about as much independent thinkers as you can be...our [her parents] philosophy has always been to let ya'll do it...let ya'll make your decisions and do your thing and take our hands off the brakes.”

Finally, I placed participants into groups based on how they described their parents' views toward work, specifically whether or not participants' parents viewed their jobs primarily as a means to provide for the family or as passionate endeavors (See Appendix A, Questions 11,12, and 13). An excellent example of the former category again comes from Doris. She stated that her mother “felt like she had to work because she had three kids by 21, so it wasn't like something that she wanted to do it was like it pays the bills.” In describing his mother, Sean stated “for her work was something you had to do.” I used all the categories as ideal types and responses generally fell somewhere in between closer to one or the other.

The ratio of permissive to authoritarian backgrounds was 45% to 55%. A total of 55% of the respondents reported that their parents stressed independent thought over following the rules. Approximately 27% reported that their parents stressed following the rules and 18% offered no definitive answer. When asked to describe who made the decisions in the home, 45% of respondents reported that their caregivers made the decisions, 36% stated that the children made decisions for themselves, and 18% reported that decision-making was collaboration between children and caregivers. Finally 55% of respondents reported that their parents exhibited passion for their jobs and 45% reported that their parents viewed their jobs as a means to provide for their families. Table 3.1 shows the categorization for each participant's childhood family values using fictitious code names.

Table 3.1 Participant Childhood Family Values

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Authoritarian v. Permissive</b>	<b>Independent Thought v. Following the rules</b>	<b>Family Decision Making Style</b>	<b>Caregiver Approach to work</b>
Earl	Authoritarian	Following the Rules	Caregivers made decisions	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Sam	Permissive	Offered no definitive response	Children made decisions	Viewed as a means to provide
Perry	Permissive	Independent Thought	Collaboration between caregivers and children	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Kevin	Permissive	Independent Thought	Caregivers made decisions	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Janis	Authoritarian	Following the Rules	Caregivers made decisions	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Doris	Authoritarian	Independent Thought	Caregivers made decisions	Viewed as a means to provide
Sean	Permissive	Offered no definitive response	Children made decisions	Viewed as a means to provide
Krystal	Permissive	Independent Thought	Children made decisions	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Natalie	Authoritarian	Independent Thought	Caregivers made decisions	Viewed as a means to provide
Harper	Permissive	Following the rules	Children made decisions	Exhibited passion for their jobs
Pam	Authoritarian	Independent Thought	Collaboration between caregivers and children	Viewed as a means to provide

After examining parental values, I divided the group into different childhood socioeconomic backgrounds based on four variables: reported parental occupation (see Appendix A, Question 12), reported parental education level (See Appendix B), self-reporting (See Appendix B), and the participants' general description of their home life (See Appendix A,

Questions 16, 17, and 20). I want to reiterate that I group participants based on their childhood SES, not their current SES. Participants reported a wide variety of educational backgrounds for their parents and other persons with whom they grew up. This diversity allowed for an increased level of context in constructing the participants' socioeconomic status as a child. A lack of uniformity in this category was important to the study as parental education and occupation have been shown to affect children's values (see literature review). Parental educational backgrounds ranged from grade school education only all the way up to doctoral degrees. Parents of participants held jobs ranging from unemployed or disabled, to garbage collector, electrician, government employee, elementary school teacher, housewife, nurse, manager of a construction company, pastor, and college professor. Some came from backgrounds where the parents stressed education and some came from backgrounds where their parents did not stress the importance of education.

While scholars have long recognized occupation and education as reliable indicators of class, scholarship often views self-reporting as unreliable (Girod and Tofigh, 1965). However, this study relies on participant perceptions and therefore their perception of their socioeconomic status as children is important. Kaufman (2003) also used self-reporting of class in his study on how a person constructs their identities. He writes,

“instead of relying merely on external variables such as level of education or the amount of autonomy in the workplace, analyses of social class and social transformation should consider these external variables in the context of the individual's own understanding of his or her social-class standing and, equally important, how this social-class standing is manifested in everyday life” (p. 486).

I agree with his assertion and therefore chose to include self-reporting as a measure of an individual's class. Table 3.2 lists how I categorized each participant in groups based on socioeconomic backgrounds. Based on the above factors I determined 18% of the participants to have low income socioeconomic backgrounds, 27% to have working class SEBs, 27% to have middle class SEBs, and 27% to have upper middle class SEBs.

Table 3.2 Participant Socioeconomic Backgrounds

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Caregiver Occupations</b>	<b>Caregiver Education Levels</b>	<b>Self-Selection</b>	<b>Author Categorization</b>
Earl	Pastor and Teacher	Some college credit, but less than 1 year & Bachelor's Degree	Working Class	Working Class
Sam	Electrician, worked at a warehouse, and delivered newspapers & worked off and on at various jobs.	High School graduate and Associate's Degree	Low income	Low Income
Perry	College Professor & Leadership/Development Trainer for a Telecommunications Firm	2x Doctoral Degrees	Middle Class	Upper/Middle Class
Kevin	Pastor and worked out of the home	Bachelor's Degree and Professional Degree	Middle Class	Upper/Middle Class
Janis	Military Officer and Teacher	Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree	Upper/Middle Class	Middle Class
Doris	Coordinates paperwork between hospitals and doctors & Garbage Collector	Some college credit but less than 1 year and High School graduate	Low income for ages 0-10 and upper/middle class for ages 10-18	Working Class
Sean	Disabled & maid in a hotel/made donuts at a coffee shop	12 <sup>th</sup> grade no diploma and Nursery school to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Low income/working class	Low income
Krystal	ER Nurse and Construction Management	2x Bachelor's Degree	Upper/Middle Class	Upper/Middle Class
Natalie	Post office employee and department manager at Montgomery Ward	High School Graduate and 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Working Class	Working Class
Harper	Government Geologist	Master's Degree	Middle Class	Middle Class
Pam	Secretary for Immigration/Naturalization and Post Office Employee	1 or more year of college w/no degree & High School Diploma	Upper/middle class	Middle Class

After dividing the participants into subgroups based on socioeconomic background and parental values, I then examined the responses for each group to see how they described their daily activities, their clients, their levels of freedom from supervision, what guided their decision making process (personal discretion, policy, or supervision, etc.), and finally, how they described their use of creativity in their work and/or if they ever altered or adjusted policy. I utilized responses to questions 4-10 on the interview as my measure of a participant's approach to street-level bureaucratic discretion.

Once I classified participants into groups based on parental values and socioeconomic background I then ran cross-tabulations with their responses to questions on discretion to see if any patterns emerged. I looked for relationships between each parental value and each question on bureaucratic discretion. I then looked for relationships between socioeconomic background and each question on bureaucratic discretion. Several interesting patterns emerged.

It is important for the reader to note that this study uses attitudes as a proxy for behavior. While I did ask questions about instances regarding individual actions on policy, my goal in this study was to determine if a street-level bureaucrat's background could affect his or her approach to the discretion inherent in the work. The interviews sought to determine if persons from similar backgrounds viewed street-level bureaucracy similarly. While not necessarily the traditional approach to policy study at the street-level, using attitude as a substitute for behavior is not without precedent. Riccucci (2005) used this approach in her study of street-level bureaucrats implementing TANF policies in Michigan. She found that a worker's attitude toward TANF as a policy acted as a "reference point" in how they made their decisions (p. 102). For Riccucci, establishing a worker's attitudinal approach was just as important as examining the decisions they actually made. This study uses a similar starting point. A worker's



attitude toward street-level bureaucracy is just as important as how they actually implement policy. I employed methods to elicit responses that would allow me to measure these attitudes.

### 3.3 Sample Characteristics

This section provides the reader with a description of my data set and is only intended to highlight basic demographic features of the sample I studied. I originally interviewed thirteen participants for this study. I discarded two of the interviews because the participants did not meet the criteria for being a street-level bureaucrat, specifically neither had direct interactions with clients. The data comes from eleven semi-structured interviews with street-level bureaucrats across the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Interviews averaged approximately fifty-one minutes. I encouraged the participants to choose the location of the interview so that they would be most comfortable. However, because I asked questions about times when participants altered, adjusted, or disregarded policy as well as questions on the relationship between them and their supervisors, I specifically requested that the interviews be conducted at a location outside of their work. Only one participant insisted upon being interviewed at the office. I do not believe that this affected the responses I received. The other participants selected public places to conduct the interviews, usually either coffee shops or restaurants.

Due to the method of selection, all of the participants were highly educated. At the time of the interviews five had obtained a bachelor's degree and six had obtained a master's degree. As stated in the literature review, educational levels can affect how one utilizes discretion in a bureaucratic setting. I would expect different responses from persons who had obtained only a high school degree or had not graduated from college. Likewise, I would expect to find differences in the responses between persons who have a professional or doctoral degree and those who have a Bachelor's Degree. Due to the uniformity of the education levels of this sample, this was not an issue in this study. Five of the participants were male and six were female representing a surprisingly even distribution for purposive sampling. It should be noted that on the demographic survey, I asked participants for the number of years they worked in a

Table 3.3 Participant Demographic Information

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Experience</b>	<b>Age</b>
Earl	Black	Male	Master's Degree	3-5 years	31-40
Sam	White	Female	Bachelor's Degree	0-2 years	31-40
Perry	White	Male	Master's Degree	3-5 years	31-40
Kevin	White	Males	Master's Degree	10-15 years	Over 50
Janis	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Female	Bachelor's Degree	0-2 years	21-30
Doris	Black	Female	Bachelor's Degree	3-5 years	21-30
Sean	White	Male	Master's Degree	6-10 years	41-50
Krystal	White	Female	Bachelor's Degree	3-5 years	41-50
Natalie	White	Female	Master's Degree	16+ years	Over 50
Harper	White	Male	Master's Degree	6-10 years	41-50
Pam	Black	Female	Bachelor's Degree	3-5 years	21-30

social service setting. I amended this when out on the interviews. While all of the participants worked as street-level bureaucrats, not all of them worked in social services. I explained the discrepancy by asking them to list their time working in the public sector or in a non-profit job similar to their current roles. Table 3.3 lists each of the participants' demographic information.

Participants reported a variety of different household structures. As discussed in the literature review, differences in family structure can affect children's development and which values they emphasize later in life. Using family structure as an independent variable to examine street-level bureaucratic discretion is beyond the purview of this paper. However, I recognize that the differences in structure could, in part, explain the differences in approach to discretion. Participants were asked to check off with whom they lived for most of their childhood. Nine participants stated that they lived with their mother and father. Of those nine, one reported

growing up with a mother and step-father. One reported living with only the mother for a few years after the parents split up. Another lived with the mother for a few years, then the father for a few years, and would then switch back. Two participants had parents who died during their childhood. Four participants grew up with their mother and father in the same household. Two participants reported growing up with extended family in the home. In instances where participants described multiple caregivers utilizing differing values (or having differing SES levels), I placed participants into different groups based on with whom they reported spending the majority of their childhood.

Participants also worked for a variety of different organizations, including: The Texas Department of Agriculture, Meals on Wheels, a local non-profit domestic violence shelter, The United States Small Business Association, a local nonprofit childcare center, The Texas Department of Aging and Disability Services, a local city government, The Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, and the United States Social Security Administration. This diversity represents organizations at the federal, state, and local levels. Based on the patterns that emerged in participant responses, it did not appear to matter for this sample at which organization one worked for, what level of government one worked or, or whether or not one worked for a government or non-profit organization.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### 4.1 Parental Values

I divided the interviews into differing subcategories based on participant responses to different sets of questions. Of the eleven participants, two described the decision making process in their families as collaborative; both parents and children participated in the process. Perry stated “each of us children as well as the parents, all of us maintain our independence in decisions, yet we use consultation.” Four participants reported that the children primarily made decisions in the family. In these interviews children wielded high levels of autonomy and influence. The final five participants reported that one or both of their parents were responsible for decision making. These participants grew-up in families where children had little or no say on family decisions. Kevin stated “mom and dad would decide something and tell us what the decision was. There was no penetrating that.” Not only did the parents make the decisions, but those decisions possessed an impenetrable finality.

When asked about whether they would describe their parents as more authoritarian or permissive, four participants described their parents as permissive. These participants described growing up with little discipline. They were also quick to describe their parents as permissive. Five of the participants reported mixed results. They viewed one parent as authoritarian and another as permissive. Several of these participants expressed hesitancy in answering this question. They could not commit to describing their household as either authoritarian or permissive, but felt it necessary to articulate a divided description of how each parent acted. Of those five, I classified two of the participants as having permissive backgrounds and three as authoritarian. I based this decision on the participants’ descriptions of rule enforcement and discipline in the home. One of the five participants reported a

dichotomously mixed background. When asked about her parents, Sam reported “definitely my dad was authoritarian, absolutely because God said it is this way and this is what it’s going to be and you need to follow the rules...my mother...she’s as permissive as you can get.” I ended up classifying her background as more permissive than authoritarian based on the amount time she spent with each parent, how her parents enforced rules, and the high level of autonomy she exhibited as a child. Finally, two of the participants described their households as authoritarian. Like the participants who described their parents as permissive, this group responded quickly and assuredly.

I also asked participants to discuss which value they felt their parents stressed more strongly: following the rules or independent thought. Three participants unequivocally stated that their parents stressed following the rules. Janis laughed when I asked her this question and stated “following the rules, did you catch the Catholic part? Ok, just checking.” Six of the participants reported that their parents stressed independent thought over following the rules. Lastly, there were two participants who could not offer a definitive description of which value their parents stressed more. Each offered a token answer to the question, but all were hesitant and could not provide specific examples to back up their weak assertions.

The final parental value I asked participants to discuss involved how the participant’s parents viewed working. Five participants reported that their parents viewed work as a means to an end. For this group, a job was something one did to make money and support a family. While these participants reported that their parents may have liked work, they did not feel that their parents viewed work was an endeavor of passion, but instead one of necessity. This group had parents who worked to provide. Six of the participants reported that their parents expressed passion about their jobs and thrived in their fields. They talked specifically about how their parents enjoyed working in careers that contributed to society, had high levels of security, were intellectually stimulating, and allowed them to interact with others.

#### *4.1.1 Parental Values: Recognition of Discretion in Street-level Bureaucracy*

Participants were in general agreement about the freedom from supervision they had to do their work as well as the great deal of discretion they exercised in making work-related decisions. All eleven of the participants recognized that they possessed high levels of independence and autonomy in their jobs. When asked about freedom from supervision Earl stated,

“you are independent...you make your schedule for your cases, you plan your day, and most of the time we need supervision just for something we don’t understand, if you need help. But [usually] the supervisors just let us go.”

Perry said that he was “extremely autonomous, I have very little supervision, extremely, about the only supervision I really get is if I really screw something up and didn’t realize it.” Note that both responses directly mention low levels of supervision while alluding to the power of discretion in street-level bureaucracy. These workers only feel pressure from supervision when they do not understand policy or make mistakes.

Participants also understood that in their positions they have the power to determine if, how, or when clients receive services. While participants reported different levels of comfort with that power, and not all used their power the same way, all recognized its existence. This recognition most commonly manifested when participants talked about setting their own schedule, prioritization of certain cases over others, or in exerting influence over their supervisors. Krystal said “I do what I wanna do and go where I wanna go and for me that is what makes you a good case manager, you are able to structure your day and get everything done.” She understood that she is in charge of determining what gets done and when. Harper said that “I don’t like to use the word quotas but we have certain things that we are supposed to meet...you get to kinda choose how you do that.” He recognized that he decides how to meet policy goals. Kevin stated “I manage my manager, that’s what I’ve learned, that’s what I learned years ago, you manage your managers, you manage expectations and you won’t be micromanaged.” He overtly claims that he has the ability to control his managers. This means

that he decides what information to present and how to present it such that he can gain a favorable decision. Again, these types of responses were typical across all eleven interviews. Street-level bureaucrats understand that freedom, independence, and discretion dominate their daily decisions.

#### *4.1.2 Parental Values: What Guides the Decision Making Process*

##### *4.1.2.1 Family Decision-making Styles*

Participants who described the decision making process in their families as child-driven were more likely to use personal discretion as the determining factor in their decision making process. While two participants in this subgroup recognized policy as one of the determining factors, they were quick to eschew the use of policy in favor of using discretion. Sean stated,

“you are not going to find a consistent application of the rules, there is a certain amount of subjectivity in it, again we are not robots. How we apply those rules is going to vary from person to person because some people have a higher sense of justice or a stronger sense of justice than others. Some will say well here is the bar, I’m going to hold it very strictly and others will say, maybe be a little more relaxed.”

Harper said that “as far as what I do on a daily basis, it’s more or less a personal decision.” Policy and supervisor instruction did not guide these participants in their decision making process. Instead personal interpretations of policy, clients, and clients’ situations guided decisions for these street-level bureaucrats.

The participants who described the decision making process in their families as a mix of child and adult input offered a slightly different approach to making decisions. These participants recognized policy and discussed discretion in interpreting that policy. However, what was unique about this group was their emphasis on the role that supervisors play in how they make their decisions. Pam spoke of her discretion and her influence on her supervisors, but her supervisor’s opinion featured prominently in her answers. Likewise, Perry agreed that policy, supervision, and personal discretion influenced his decision making. However, Perry concluded with a lengthy discussion of the role that his supervisors play in how he makes his decisions. The interviews suggested that a connection existed between participants who grew-

up collaborating on decisions with their caregivers, and participants using collaboration with supervisors to make decisions in the street-level setting.

Policy featured prominently in the decision making process of participants who described one or both of their parents as the primary decision maker in the family. Like the other participants, this group also recognized the role that discretion and personal judgment played within their work. Several even expressed a great deal of comfort in utilizing personal judgment. However, when describing what influences how they made decisions, the majority of their focus was on policy, rules, and regulations. This subgroup rarely mentioned the importance of supervisory input. Natalie stated that “most of it is policy, um, some of it is you know numbers are numbers.” Kevin stated “there’s some pretty basic policy that we have to deal with...um policy helps make decisions.” When asked about influences on his decision making, Earls immediately said “form 7583, there is a set number of questions we have to ask. Every caseworker has to ask these questions, and depending on the answers, they give you a score.” These participants immediately quoted policy when asked about their decision making guides. While they may use other guides, including discretion, policy forms the foundation of their decision making process.

#### 4.1.2.2 Permissive or Authoritarian

Of the five participants who described their parents as permissive, there was little variation in what they cited as the primary factor that influenced how they made decisions. A significant majority (four of the five) focused on personal discretion. The participants in the majority were the same participants who stated that the children made the decisions within their families. The only noted outlier was Perry who described his parents as more permissive than authoritarian yet devoted a substantial portion of his discussion on decision making to the role of his supervisors. Despite his focus on supervision, Perry did discuss the importance of personal judgment and discretion in his decisions. Nevertheless, he couched the description of his decisions in terms of supervision.



Five of the six participants who described their parents as authoritarian utilized policy as the determining factor in how they made decisions. The one exception was Pam, who like Perry referenced supervisory input more often than either policy or personal discretion. None of the participants from authoritarian backgrounds cited personal judgment as their primary guide in making decisions. These participants discussed rules and regulations with much more intensity than did persons whose parents were more permissive.

If one views “permissive” and “authoritarian” as values on a continuum rather than a dichotomous relationship, one sees that participants who described their parents as more permissive were more likely to rely on personal discretion to make decisions. Likewise, the more authoritarian the participant’s background the more likely they were to rely on policy to make decisions. At the end of the authoritarian continuum, participants stressed rules with little mention of discretion or judgment. As one moves toward the middle of the continuum one still sees a reliance on policy, but participants begin to mention supervisors and discretion as important determinants in how they make decisions. Finally, in moving along to other end of the continuum one sees that participants begin to rely less on policy and more on their discretion to guide their decisions.

#### 4.1.2.3 Independent Thought or Following the Rules

This set of values yielded mixed results and I found it difficult to discern a clear link between parental emphasis on a particular value and what guided the street-level bureaucrats’ decision making process. Of the six participants who responded that their parents stressed independent thought over following the rules, three cited policy as their primary decision making guide. Two participants listed policy, supervision, and discretion as factors in their decision making. However, they emphasized the role of their supervisor. The last of the six cited personal discretion as her decision making guide. The responses of these six individuals suggested little connection between parental emphasis on independent thought and actions later as street-level bureaucrats.

Three of the participants reported that their parents emphasized following the rules. Two of the three stated that policy guided their decision making process and the last participant cited his personal judgment as guiding his decisions. There were two participants whose answers did not easily fit into either category. Both of these participants emphasized their use of personal judgment in making decisions at work. Given past research, I expected that street-level bureaucrats whose parents stressed independent thought would cite their discretion as their decision making guide.

#### 4.1.2.4 Views on Work

Like the question on independent thought versus following the rules, a participant's parents' views on work did not appear to correspond with which factor primarily determined how they made decisions. There were four respondents who stated that their parents viewed work simply as a means to provide for the family or to make money. Of these respondents two cited discretion and two listed policy as the most influential factors in their decision making. Seven respondents stated that their parents showed passion for their jobs and/or enjoyed them for a variety of reasons. Of the seven, one claimed policy as his guide, two emphasized their supervisors' role, and four cited personal discretion. The results were so varied that it is difficult to see any pattern between parental views on work and what guides the street level bureaucrats' decision making.

#### 4.1.3 *Parental Values: Creativity & Policy Alterations*

##### 4.1.3.1 Family Decision-making Styles

Five of the eleven participants reported that their mother or father made the decisions within their family. Only one of the five participants discussed a time where they altered, adjusted, or disregarded a specific policy. Many of these participants replied with firm aversion when asked about changing policy. Earl simply said "I don't bend rules." Janis stated "I'm pretty strict about not veering off the path with them (her clients) because I had the opportunity to work with some very seasoned case managers and they kinda helped me through my want to do

that.” Despite this distaste for changing policy, three of the five street-level bureaucrats in this category discussed using their creativity to work within the policy. While altering policy bothered them, utilizing critical thinking to work within the policy was a point of pride for these three.

Of the two participants who stated that the parents and children in their household made decisions together, both expressed comfort in utilizing creativity both within and outside of policy. One of the participants explicitly stated that she disregarded at least two of the agency’s policies regularly. The other took a less direct approach, but made it clear that he uses his creativity on a daily basis; “we have to figure out what is the task at hand, what is the problem, we have to take it, find it, structure it, figure out how to deal with it, do something with it, and structure the process...I think that there is a lot of possibility for creativity [in that].”

Finally, four of the participants described home lives where the children controlled the decision making. All four of the participants stated that they utilized creativity both within policy and outside of it. This group was far more enthusiastic and straightforward in answering this question than the other participants. Every participant in this subgroup cited specific examples of times when they were altered, adjusted, or disregarded policy. Some expressed disdain for strict enforcement of the rules and called for a situation by situation and client by client analysis of policy enforcement. When asked about disregarding a policy, Sam stated, “of course! I did and I got written up for it, but I don’t care.” She went on to cite a specific example saying “I’ll tell you another thing I think is crazy that I don’t do...[example of a policy that the respondent refuses to implement]...I don’t see how that helps the children in anyway.” I asked Sean about his comfort level in applying his judgment in a creative way that may disregard or adjust a policy. He stated,

“at the end of the day I have to ask the question about whether or not those clients’ needs are being met, and the rules though they generally apply, I have found too many exceptions...and because I have found too many exceptions where the rules do not apply, I’m forced as an individual really to look at the situation.”

For this group, the client's situation dictates how one applies policy. Policy becomes merely a guide for helping the client, not a strict directive that one cannot alter.

#### 4.1.3.2 Permissive or Authoritarian

Six of the participants described their homes as more permissive than authoritarian (including Sam whose description was ultimately mixed, but leaned more toward permissive). Of these, all six reported that they exercise creativity at work. Five of the six participants described instances where they adjusted or disregarded policy. The sixth did not give a specific instance of disregarding policy, but did offer a lengthy explanation of how his creativity (coupled with supervisor pressure) determined the entire trajectory of his decision. One of the six participants did not emphasize his use of creativity within policy parameters or outside of them. However, he did report that he gets to be creative. He denied disregarding any policies, but talked about how he can be creative to get certain clients the services they need faster than policy normally allows.

Five participants stated that their parents were more authoritarian than permissive. Results within this group were mixed. Janis and Pam reported that they have regular opportunities to be creative. Pam and Doris reported that there had been times when they had disregarded specific policy either to expedite clients' services or make their own job easier. Earl, Janis, and Natalie denied ever altering or disregarding policies either to help clients or themselves. Participants who grew up in more authoritarian households yielded inconsistent results on their utilization of creativity and their willingness to disregard policy.

#### 4.1.3.3 Independent Thought or Following the Rules

Six participants stated that their parents stressed the value of independent thought over following the rules. In examining the relationship between these values and creativity in implementing policy, I found it helpful to view the two values on a continuum. Four of six participants had parents who strenuously focused on the value of independence. Each of these four provided specific examples of times when they disregarded policy, and all but one reported

using their creativity regularly. One of the participants' parents focused on independent thought, but within a rules oriented framework. He was able to recognize his use of creativity but denied ever veering off the policy path. Finally, Natalie stated that her parents focused on independent thought, but she was unable to explain why she felt this to be the case, and she could not cite any specific examples. She saw a minimal role for creativity and was repulsed by the idea of altering or disregarding policy.

Moving along the continuum, two participants' responses did not really fit into either category. One reported that his parents stressed neither value and did not really care what the kids did. The other stated that her father was rules oriented, but she spent a significant amount of her childhood with her mother who did not care either way. These two participants provided the most vehement responses against strict interpretation of the rules and in support of utilization of creativity. Both provided examples of times where they had disregarded policy, recognized that it had backfired, and did not care. Each supported the idea of basing decisions off of personal judgment and on a situational basis.

Finally, at the opposite end of the continuum were the participants who said that their parents focused more on following the rules than on independent thinking. Results at this end were mixed. One of the participants' grew-up in a household dominated by a rules oriented ethos. His responses focused on policy, forms, rules, and regulations. He denied ever altering policy. Another reported that while she saw room for creativity in how she dealt with her clients and developed programs for their children, she denied adjusting or disregarding policy. She relayed a story of a time at the beginning of her tenure when she wanted to disregard policy to help a client, but stated that she learned not to give in to this desire. The last participant recognized the creativity in his job, saying "there is certain information that you have to cover, but as far as how you present the information, there is more leeway there." He also provided an example of time where he deliberately disregarded policy. The strength of the relationship become weaker the more one moves toward the rules-focused end of the continuum.

#### 4.1.3.4 Views on Work

This variable also yielded mixed results. Seven of the participants reported that their parents enjoyed their jobs, felt passion for their work, and had jobs that invEarlated them. Of those seven, four of the participants discussed using creativity in their work. Three of the four provided a specific example of a time where they changed policy during implementation. The one exception described his use of creativity as having nearly total control over the implementation process. Two of the seven participants in this category recognized their use of creativity in their jobs, but denied ever changing policy during implementation. The final participant reported no use of creativity in his work, and denied ever stepping outside the bounds of policy.

Four participants described their parents' approach to work as functional, i.e. the job was simply a means to an end. The purpose of work was not self-fulfillment, but instead money and the ability to provide. This group also yielded mixed results. One participant discussed his daily use of creativity and his ability to change or adjust rules to fit a client's particular situation. Two of the participants reported minimal or no use of creativity in their jobs, but both were able to immediately think of times when they did not strictly adhere to policy. The final participant minimized the role of creativity in her work and was very uncomfortable with the idea of changing policy during implementation.

#### 4.1.4 Parental Values: Conclusion

In summation, an examination of the relationships between parental values, the recognition of freedom inherent in street-level bureaucracy, influences on the decision making processes, and the use of creativity in interpreting policy, yields several clear patterns. First, parental values appear to have no connection with whether or not the street-level bureaucrat recognizes the level of freedom he/she has. This extends to the recognition of discretion in their work. Regardless their childhood family experiences, every respondent recognized that he or

she has high levels of autonomy and discretion in how he or she approaches clients, prioritizes the daily schedule, and delivers services.

Secondly, childhood family values appeared to guide the street-level bureaucrat's decisions making process. Participants raised in families in which the children made most of their own decisions tended to allow their personal judgment to influence their decisions. Those who grew-up in families in which both children and adults collaborated in the decisions cited their supervisors as more influential in their decision making process. Finally, participants who grew-up in families in which one or both of the parents made the decisions were more likely to report that policy guides them in making decisions at work.

Other family values provided some useful, but not conclusive, information. Respondents with more permissive parents tended to rely more on personal judgment where as respondents with more authoritative parents tended to rely more on policy. The values of independent thought, following the rules, and a parents' attitude toward work did not appear to strongly relate with the participants' descriptions of their decision making guides.

Finally, childhood family values also appeared to influence the street-level bureaucrats' recognition of creativity in their jobs and whether or not they admitted to changing policy during implementation. Participants who came from families in which they made the decisions, or decisions were made collaboratively with their parents were more likely to emphatically recognize their use of creativity and cite specific examples of times where they changed policy. On the continuum of stressing independent thought versus following the rules, participants closer to the former were more likely to discuss their use of creativity and cite examples where they changed policy. I found little connection between authoritarian versus permissive households and a participant's discussion of creativity and policy alterations. Likewise, parental views of work yielded weak correlations with a participant's proclivities to use creativity or change policy.

#### 4.2 Socioeconomic Background (SEB)

Based on participant responses, I categorized the interviews into four different childhood socioeconomic groupings: poor/low income, working class, middle class, and upper-middle class. As noted above in the methods section, I based these groupings on participant responses to the demographic survey. Most of the participants self selected into the categories under which I placed them. However, as participants began to discuss their childhood background, many provided a more in-depth analysis of their socioeconomic status that ran contrary to their self-selection. Like several other independent variables in this study, socioeconomic status (SES) should be considered on a continuum. While clear lines of demarcation do exist between some of the groups, this is not always the case. The most notable example of this is in the difference between working class and middle class. However, the literature suggests that the differences between these groups are significant.

Two participants seemed to fit best into the poor/low income category, and they both self-selected into the low income group as well. Sean stated “we were pretty poor, we didn’t have much, a lot of hand-me downs, Salvation Army, Goodwill stuff, it was pretty difficult.” Sam did not hesitate when selecting the low income box on the demographic survey. Next along the continuum were three participants who I categorized as working class. Two of the three self-selected into working class and the third selected low income for the first half of her childhood and upper middle class for the last half of her childhood. However, her answers to the demographic survey as well as her description of her childhood appeared most similar to those of the working class. Three of the participants had middle class childhoods. This was the most difficult group to categorize. Two of the participants self-selected into upper-middle class. Again, their responses to questions on the demographic surveys place them within the middle class. One of the three middle class participants could have been placed in the upper middle class, however the description of her childhood coupled with parental occupations more readily fit her within the middle class. This is a case where a different researcher looking at the same data



may disagree. Finally, I classified three participants as upper middle class. One self-selected into upper/middle class and the other two self-selected into middle class. It was clear that their backgrounds met the criteria for upper/middle class.

#### *4.2.1 SEB: Recognition of Discretion in Street-level Bureaucracy*

Similar to parental values, socioeconomic status did not appear to relate to participants' descriptions of their freedom from supervision or in their ability to recognize the discretion within their work. All of the participants understood that their roles as street-level bureaucrats afforded them high levels of freedom. Most recognized that they structured their days according to personal preferences and judgment. They reported to supervisors only when necessary, and were responsible for setting their schedule, prioritizing responses to clients, and deciding how they were going to respond to clients.

Unlike categorization based on parental values, I did detect slight differences in the descriptions of the discretion inherent in the street-level bureaucrat's work. Persons on the ends of the continuum (either poor/low income or upper/middle class) recognized their discretion not only in prioritization and how they approached clients, but in their ability to decide who gets what and when. In recognizing the discretion at their work, these participants also recognized their own power in delivering policy. An excellent example of this contrast comes in four quotes. When asked about his duties at work, Sean, a low income participant, stated "I will screen clients to determine their eligibility to determine if they are qualified candidates for the program." Note how he does not mention policy guidelines, but instead frames his work in the active voice. He says that he makes the decisions. Perry, a participant with an upper/middle class background stated "I did a significant amount of work on it [working with a client]...working on this, making some calls, figuring stuff out, doing a little research, you know just trying to get a grasp on what the situation was and what we could possibly do [for the client]." Sean and Perry framed their recognition of discretion in terms of what they can do for the client. In contrast, working and middle class participants tended to view discretion in terms of what the rules allow

them to do and not do. Doris stated that she decides “what to do first, who to call back, my boss is a very detailed high performance boss so I am very busy and I have very little free time with him, so we go through a lot of numbers in the office.” Earl said that “you have the freedom to decide what services you are supposed to give them, but everything is generated by the computer.” Working and middle class participants view discretion through the lens of policy and supervisory pressures.

#### *4.2.2. SEB: What Guides the Decision Making Process*

At the lower end of the SES continuum, one finds that personal discretion guides the participants’ decision making process more than either policy or a supervisor’s input. Persons from lower income backgrounds focus first and foremost on their discretion before consulting policy or checking with a supervisor. They tend to start their process with the individual situation instead of doing either what policy dictates or a supervisor says. Moving along the continuum, one notes that participants from working class backgrounds rely on policy to guide their decision making process. While all three recognized a role for discretion in their work, this role was usually relegated to setting a schedule or deciding how to interact with clients. When asked how they make decisions or what guides their decisions, each invariable pointed to policy or talked about policy guidelines.

Middle class participants were more varied in their responses. Janis cited policy as her guide, while mentioning that her supervisor and judgment play a role. Pam stated that her supervisor’s decisions combined with policy and discretion affect her decision making process. She talked specifically about a new policy her supervisor’s supervisor had decided to implement which would change the way she approached some of her cases. She recognized that her supervisors’ attitudes and priorities are important in how she makes decisions. Finally, Harper stated that his personal judgment guides his decision making. Janis, Pam, and Harper differed along the continuum within the middle class category. Because the variety of their responses

did not relate along the continuum, and appeared to be random, there does not appear to be a connection between what guides their decisions and their socioeconomic status as children.

Participants from upper middle class backgrounds also varied in their responses to what guides their decision making. Kevin focused on policy as what guides how he approaches cases and what he ultimately decides to do with cases. Perry talked about using his own creativity and initiative, but he related his decision making back to his supervisors. While briefly mentioning his personal judgment, he then went on to offer a lengthy description of the organizational structure, who he answers to, and the nature of those authority relationships. Finally Krystal, who was at the very high end of the continuum reported that she makes decisions situationally based on her judgment not only of the policy, but of her clients. She did not mention supervisory influence and only briefly mentioned policy constraints. She described policy more as a suggestion than something she strictly followed. Responses in this category were so varied that it was again difficult to draw any conclusions.

#### *4.2.3 SEB: Creativity & Policy Alterations*

Clear differences exist along the continuum in how participants discussed their use of creativity in their work and how they felt about ignoring, changing, or disregarding policy. The low income and high income ends of the continuum showed remarkable similarities. The low income street-level bureaucrats spoke of regular use of creativity. Both were able to think of times when they had bent a policy to help a client or had blatantly disregarded a policy. They expressed comfort in their approach to policy implementation in that they felt that policies often did not take into account the uniqueness of certain situations. For the low income participants, discretion and creativity were the means by which they made policy implementation fair. Likewise, the three participants in the upper/middle income category showed proclivities for utilizing discretion, creativity, and influence to mold policies in ways beneficial for the clients. While two of the participants did not explicitly state that they had disregarded or altered a policy, one noted that he could make his supervisor do whatever he felt was right for the client and the

other noted that his work with the client from beginning to end took shape based on his judgment and creativity. All five of the participants at the poles of the continuum expressed comfort in discretion, embraced the role of creativity in how they implemented policies, and four of the five outright stated that they had altered, adjusted, or disregarded policies depending on the situations presented to them.

Participants from working class backgrounds differed substantially in their responses from the low and upper income persons. Only one of the participants from the working and middle class subgroups recognized an instance where she had changed policy, and this was only in instances of providing information to clients. The other two participants were averse even to the idea of altering policy. Natalie said that it ran counter to the basic idea of working for the government and Earl was unequivocal in stating that he followed policy strictly, allowing no wiggle room in how he allocated services. None of the working class participants recognized the ability to work creatively at their jobs. Even Doris, who admitted to sometimes ignoring a policy, reported that she did not get to use her creativity in her work. Earl and Natalie were so focused on enforcement of policy that they found it difficult to cite instances where they utilized creativity at work.

The middle class background participants were more diverse in their responses than the other groups. Harper reported minimal use of creativity, but did note instances where he allowed for leeway in how he enforced policies. He expressed comfort in this approach. He based his utilization of discretion on the type of client he dealt with and their individual situation. Pam reported using creativity, but only in her interaction with the clients, not in her implementation of policy. She reported blatantly disregarding at least two policies she should be implementing in nearly all of her cases. She also developed justifications for doing this based on the functionality of the policy. Finally, Janis reported being able to be creative in her interactions with clients and in developing programs for those clients. She never mentioned being creative in

providing services for clients or in changing policies to help or hinder clients. Janis also denied ever altering or disregarding policies.

#### *4.2.4 SEB: Conclusion*

In summation, all participants, regardless of childhood SES, recognized that they had high levels of freedom from supervision in their work. All recognized the discretion inherent in their work. However, the ways in which they viewed that discretion differed depending on where they fell on the SEB continuum. Persons raised on either end of the SES spectrum (poor or rich) viewed discretion in terms of policy interpretation and implementation. Persons from working and middle class backgrounds (with some exceptions) tended to see discretion in terms of setting schedules, how they treated clients, and prioritizing cases.

There was a noticeable difference between low income and working class persons in what guided their decision making process. Participants from low income backgrounds cited personal judgment or discretion, where as participants from working class backgrounds cited policy. When one moves out further along the continuum, the only consistent finding was inconsistency. Wide variation existed amongst the responses from middle and upper middle class street-level bureaucrats. Some cited personal judgment as their guide in making decisions, others focused on the role that their supervisors played in shaping their decisions, and the rest claimed policy as the determining factor.

Participants who came from low and high income backgrounds were more likely to recognize their use of creativity both in how they approach clients and how they implement policies. Both were also more likely to think of instances where they altered or changed policy to benefit a client. These five participants exhibited a high level of comfort in the discretion inherent in street-level bureaucracy. Participants whose responses were closest to the middle of the data set (working class into the lower end of the middle class) were less likely to state that they were able to use creativity in their work. Those at the upper end of the middle class group reported using creativity in how they approached clients, but not in how they delivered or

implemented policy. Two of the working class and one of the middle class participants denied changing or ignoring policy. All three expressed discomfort at the thought of this. One of the working class participants and two of the middle class participants admitted to times when they ignored policy. Of those three, two chose to ignore policy when it benefited them or expedited one of their cases. Only one mentioned using discretion in implementing policy to benefit the client.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Through this study I hoped expand the literature on policy implementation at the street-level. Where previous works focused on organizational pressures, policy constraints, and the relationship between the client and bureaucrat, this work focused on the identity and background of the street-level bureaucrat. Several interesting patterns emerged from the data. First, all respondents regardless of socioeconomic background or parental values recognized the autonomy and discretion inherent within their work. The only noticeable differentiation was in how street-level bureaucrats of different backgrounds viewed this freedom. Persons from lower and higher classes tended to discuss discretion in terms of making decisions regarding policy. Persons from working and middle classes described discretion as how they prioritized work related tasks and set their schedule.

These findings are important for two reasons. First, scholarship recognizes the discretion inherent to street-level work, but only a handful of studies discuss whether or not street-level bureaucrats possess a level self-awareness such that they recognize the levels of discretion in their work. The results in this study confirm that street-level bureaucrats are fully aware of their autonomy. They understand the responsibilities and power that come with that freedom. Second, the differences in responses from persons with differing socioeconomic backgrounds match several patterns that emerged during the course of the study. The lower and upper classes tended to share a common approach to several work values related to discretion. Persons with working and middle class backgrounds also had more in common in their approach to discretion than they did with participants from either the lower or higher income backgrounds. Similarities between persons from different socioeconomic backgrounds first emerged as participants talked about freedom from supervision.

All the participants reported using personal discretion, policy, and supervision when making their decisions. However, when I divided the participants into subgroups, several clear patterns emerged concerning the factors the participants emphasized during their decision making process. First, certain parental values seemed to relate to the decision making process. Specifically, in families where the children made most of the decisions, respondents were more likely to cite personal discretion as the determining factor in their decision making process. Participants who grew-up in households where the decision making process was collaborative, and the children and adults worked through decisions together, were more likely to accentuate the supervisor's role in their decision making process. Finally, participants who grew-up in households where one or both of the parents made unilateral decisions were more likely to utilize policy in coming to decisions. Of course, these patterns seem relatively intuitive: respondents, who were allowed the freedom to make decisions while growing up, gained a comfort that carried into their adult careers. If a participant was raised collaborating in the family's decision making process with their parents (i.e. their first supervisors), logic follows that this decision making strategy would continue. Finally, if a participant grew-up in a household where parental policy dictated their decisions then falling back on policy rules and regulations would be a natural extension of learned childhood values. Clearly, how a family made its decisions showed the strongest relationship with which factor the street-level bureaucrat emphasizes in his/her decision making process: personal discretion, policy, or supervisors.

Aside from the family decision making process, the other questions on parental values produced mixed, and often jumbled, results. The study produced some relationships when I grouped participants into authoritarian versus permissive home backgrounds. Persons who described their parents as more permissive were more likely to focus personal discretion in their decision making process. Persons whose parents were the most authoritarian were also the most likely to describe policy as their decision making guide. In viewing this dichotomy as a continuum, the farther away from the ends one moves, the weaker the connections become.



This holds true when looking at creativity in the decision making process and the willingness to disregard or alter policy.

I also asked participants whether or not they felt like their parents stressed independent thought or following the rules. I expected this question to yield a strong connection in a person's approach to discretion in street-level bureaucratic work. It actually yielded the weakest set of relationships. The only discernable pattern was that persons from homes that stressed independent thought were more likely to utilize creativity, and alter or adjust policy to meet client needs. The final parental value, parental approaches to work, yielded no relationships with how participants made decisions, whether or not they used creativity in their work, and their comfort with changing policy. This surprised me as I formed much of the basis for this work on Kohn's idea that the job related values that were important to parents translated to children. Scholarship should still examine these value sets when studying street-level policy implementation. I do not believe that failure of the values to relate in this study resulted from choosing the wrong values to ask questions on. Instead, poorly worded questioning or a unique sample of people could have caused the weak results.

The next group of relationships I looked for focused on a participant's socioeconomic background and their approach to discretion in policy implementation. Low income persons were more likely to underscore their personal judgment as the deciding factor when implementing policies. These participants were quick to recognize the use of creativity in their work and were also likely to discuss specific instances when they altered, adjusted, disregarded, or ignored policy. Persons who grew-up in the more affluent backgrounds actually shared characteristics in their approach to discretion with persons from lower class backgrounds. Participants with higher income backgrounds readily admitted to using creativity in their work, usually in ways that benefited the client. The highest ends of the socioeconomic continuum also admitted to instances where they changed policy. They rarely changed policy simply to make work easier, and instead bent the rules based on their clients' needs.

Working class participants were more likely to rely on policy in making their decisions. They did not discuss instances of using creativity in their work as frequently as the other groups. Persons from working class backgrounds showed an aversion to altering policy. They were more rules focused. Results for middle class respondents were mixed. No clear relationship existed in which factor influenced their decision making. The lower end of the middle class group did not mention creativity in their work. Those participants with middle class backgrounds who did discuss creativity in their jobs only did so in the context of their interactions with their clients, not in how they implemented policy. Participants in the middle class group were also less likely to change policy. Those in the group who did alter policy usually did so in ways to expedite the job that they had to do. They did not change policy to benefit or harm clients.

Due to the methods employed, I cannot offer the reader a definitive explanation as to why socioeconomic background so strongly related with the participants' overall approach to discretion in street-level bureaucracy. However, I can theorize. First, the most interesting aspect of this relationship was the U shape. The similarities between the lower and upper class backgrounds suggest both a common household structure and similar levels of freedom. Participants from upper and lower socioeconomic backgrounds grew-up in homes with a less rigid structure. The organization under which they developed was not tightly regulated. This does not mean that the family lacked coherence or was dispersed. Instead, it means that persons in the family were allowed to act independent of the family. The family structure did not appear to guide the actions of these individuals. In addition, both groups were raised environments that were not focused on rules and regulations. Instead, family members made decisions based on the individual circumstances of a situation. They made their own decisions and did not look to policy or the presence of authority for support. The literature suggests that the children could have internalized the above values and then called upon them when implementing policy. These findings, in part, support Lareau's supposition that lower income households can foster independence, but do so in different ways from the middle class.

In contrast to the lower and upper class subgroups, middle and working class participants' parents fostered a more tightly regulated organizational home life. These participants were not free to make independent decisions based on their interpretations of a unique set of presented circumstances. Instead, participants from these backgrounds made decisions within the family's policy framework. Also, this group approached rules differently than the lower and upper class participants. Rules were guides not obstacles and therefore they governed their lives by a set of rules and regulations. Actions depended upon the set of rules under which a participant operated. Again, these values appear to translate into street-level bureaucracy as the middle and working class participants described a much more cautious approach to discretion. This finding did not surprise me, and it again appears to fall in line with Lareau's findings. The median of the SEB continuum depicts households that create environments where children learn to be comfortable with structure and organization. It is possible that this comfort transfers to their approach to work, therefore making them less comfortable exercising discretion in rule enforcement.

Another theory for the U-shaped distribution of responses could be the ways in which different classes view the most effective means of advancement. It is possible that the higher end of the SES spectrum believes that their innate abilities trump policy and that to help both the clients and themselves, they must be willing to set aside policy directives. It is also possible that the lower classes grew-up in an environment which repeatedly showed them that following the rules was fruitless so there is no advantage for them to play by the rules at work. In contrast, middle and working class participants grew-up in environments where following the rules was met with reward and advancement. It is possible, therefore, that due to their class backgrounds these participants believed that the best way to achieve is to strictly enforce policy. They would be far less comfortable eschewing policy for their own discretion.

This study has several deficiencies. First, the data come from a limited sample of a carefully selected group of people. The results are only generalizable to highly educated street-

level bureaucrats in Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. Second, this work focuses on relationships between variables, not statistical correlations. I utilized qualitative methods to aid in establishing a direction for the field. Quantitative methods may have been more effective in determining the causal link between one's background and an approach to street-level bureaucratic discretion. Third, it is impossible for one to truly examine each of the values I presented in a vacuum. It is more correct to state that all of the above variables influence how the street-level bureaucrat approaches discretion. Each of the variables ultimately affects each other and drawing lines between them is a relatively arbitrary process. Finally, I chose the participants' description of their parents' values and their socioeconomic background as independent variables. I argued that these two sets of variables lead one to possess a unique worldview which ultimately impacts one's approach to discretion. However, these are obviously not the only background variables which could cause a person to possess a unique approach to discretion. My study does not examine unique racial identities, gender differences, or generational differences. All of these factors could influence how one delivers policy, which is ultimately the point of the study. The scholarly community needs to undertake a detailed examination of how a street-level bureaucrat's identity affects his/her work.

Despite the problems noted above, this study allows for a more nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent to policy implementation at the street-level. There were three key findings worth noting. First, how families make decisions strongly related to the factors that guided a street-level bureaucrat's decision making process. While somewhat intuitive, how a child learns to make decisions appears to relate with how that child will make professional decisions once he or she is an adults. Second, socioeconomic background relates to one's approach to discretion. Class background appears to guide decisions, affect a participant's willingness to use creativity, and impact their willingness to alter policy. The socioeconomic background of the worker directly relates with discretion at the street-level regardless of policy and clients. Finally, lower and upper income groups share several characteristics in common

with each other in how they approach bureaucratic discretion. Both are more likely to disregard policy, use personal discretion in making decisions, and recognize their use of creativity in their jobs. Both groups make decisions based not necessarily on what makes their work easier, but instead on what they believe is best for the client.

Street-level bureaucrats do not respond only to political pressure, organizational rules, and policy regulations, nor do they act strictly on the identities they construct for their clients through daily interactions. Street-level bureaucrats instead bring their own identities to bear each time they make a decision. This has two implications. First, to harness the potential positive power of worker discretion, organizations and supervisors must know their workers, and then develop trainings which heighten a worker's awareness of how his or her social background impacts how he or she delivers policy. Finally, scholarship should expand its focus. In the last thirty years, academia has come to recognize the critical role that street-level bureaucrats play in the policy process. Studies have gone to great lengths to delve into why street-level bureaucrats do what they do. However, scholarship still too often treats street-level workers as objective entities who respond to external influences (such as policy, organizational structure, or the identity of the client served). The literature must expand and examine street-level bureaucrats as complex individuals whose backgrounds form their approach to discretion long before they begin working in bureaucracies.

APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

(These interview guide questions are a sample and may evolve based on participant responses).

1. Tell me how you came to work at (Name of Organization)  
Can you describe what you studied in college?
2. Describe a typical day at work
3. Tell me about the clients your organization works with
4. Describe how much freedom from supervision you typically have in an average workday
5. Can you describe what types of decisions you make on a daily basis regarding your work?
6. How do you arrive at your decisions?  
What guides you? (Supervisor, personal judgment, policy, etc.)
7. Does your supervisor ask for your input in making decisions?  
If so how?
8. Can you describe a time where you were free to use your own creativity to do your job?
9. Can you describe an example of time where you altered, adjusted, or disregarded policy?  
Did you feel comfortable doing this? Why or why not?  
What influenced your decision to alter, adjust, or disregard policy?
10. Can you describe a time when your decision to alter, adjust, or disregard policy backfired?
11. How did/do your parents or caregivers respond to your career/course of study in college?
12. What did/do your parents or caregivers do for work?
13. Do you remember how they felt about their jobs? If so, how did you know? If not, why not?
14. How were decisions made within your family?
15. Can you describe the type of discipline your parents or caregivers used?
16. Did you participate in any team sports as a child? If so, which ones?
17. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities as a child? If so, which ones?
18. Which do you feel like your parents/caregivers stressed more independent thought or following the rules? Why?
19. Would you describe your parent or caregiver's style of parenting as more authoritative or permissive?  
Why? Can you provide an example?
20. How do you feel that your childhood impacted your current approach to your work?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE



Participant Code #

Please place a check mark next to the blank space which best describes you. For non multiple choice questions, please enter the information in the black space provided.

**Age:**

21 to 30 \_\_\_\_\_

31 to 40 \_\_\_\_\_

41 to 50 \_\_\_\_\_

Over 50 \_\_\_\_\_

**Are you Hispanic or Latino?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

**How do you define your racial background? (Please check all that apply)**

American Indian or Alaska Native \_\_\_\_\_

Asian \_\_\_\_\_

Black or African American \_\_\_\_\_

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander \_\_\_\_\_

White \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed?**

Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS, BSW) \_\_\_\_\_

Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) \_\_\_\_\_

Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) \_\_\_\_\_

Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD) \_\_\_\_\_

**For how many years have you been employed in any social service related field (this can include internships)?**

0-2 years \_\_\_\_\_

3-5 years \_\_\_\_\_

6-10 years \_\_\_\_\_

10-15 years \_\_\_\_\_

16+ years \_\_\_\_\_

**What is the name of the organization for which you are currently employed?**

\_\_\_\_\_

**What is your job title?** \_\_\_\_\_

**With whom did you live for most of your childhood (Please check all that apply)?**

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Stepmother \_\_\_\_\_

Stepfather \_\_\_\_\_

Grandmother \_\_\_\_\_

Grandfather \_\_\_\_\_

Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**What was your mother's highest degree or level of school completed?**

No schooling completed \_\_\_\_\_  
Nursery school to 8th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
9th, 10th or 11th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
12th grade, no diploma \_\_\_\_\_  
High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED) \_\_\_\_\_  
Some college credit, but less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_  
1 or more years of college, no degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Associate degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS) \_\_\_\_\_  
Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD) \_\_\_\_\_

**What was your father's highest degree or level of school completed?**

No schooling completed \_\_\_\_\_  
Nursery school to 8th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
9th, 10th or 11th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
12th grade, no diploma \_\_\_\_\_  
High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED) \_\_\_\_\_  
Some college credit, but less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_  
1 or more years of college, no degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Associate degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS) \_\_\_\_\_  
Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD) \_\_\_\_\_

**If you did not live with your mother or father, what was your primary caregiver's highest degree or level of school completed? (Please answer this question only if your primary caregiver was someone other than your biological mother or father)**

No schooling completed \_\_\_\_\_  
Nursery school to 8th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
9th, 10th or 11th grade \_\_\_\_\_  
12th grade, no diploma \_\_\_\_\_  
High school graduate - high school diploma or the equivalent (for example: GED) \_\_\_\_\_  
Some college credit, but less than 1 year \_\_\_\_\_  
1 or more years of college, no degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Associate degree \_\_\_\_\_  
Bachelor's degree (for example: BA, AB, BS) \_\_\_\_\_  
Master's degree (for example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA) \_\_\_\_\_  
Professional degree (for example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD) \_\_\_\_\_  
Doctorate degree (for example: PhD, EdD) \_\_\_\_\_

Which best describes your family's socioeconomic status as a child: **Low Income**\_\_\_\_\_,  
**Working Class**\_\_\_\_\_, **Middle Class** \_\_\_\_\_, **Upper Middle Class**\_\_\_\_\_, **Upper Class**\_\_\_\_\_

**Please feel free to add any additional comments or questions below, and thank you for your participation in this study.**

APPENDIX C

SOLICITATION E-MAIL

Dear UT-Arlington SUPA Graduate:

My name is Jesse Booher and I am a graduate student at the University of Texas at Arlington. I am currently conducting a research project on how an individual's background (such as family and education) influences decision making in social service settings. My goal is two-fold: to foster a more nuanced understanding of complex decisions in the social services, and to understand the ways in which family background and work coincide.

If you work for a government or nonprofit organization and are in a non-supervisory role, I hope you will allow me to interview you about your experiences. The interviews should average about an hour and can be scheduled at a time and location of your choosing, preferably outside of your office.

If you would like to participate, please e-mail me back. I would also be more than happy to discuss the project further if you have any questions or concerns. My e-mail address is [jesse.booher@mavs.uta.edu](mailto:jesse.booher@mavs.uta.edu), and my phone number is 817-475-8540.

My thanks for your consideration

Jesse Booher  
Candidate, MA in Sociology & MA in Urban Affairs  
The University of Texas at Arlington

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## BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Jesse Booher graduated in 2008 with a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Sociology and Political Science from Austin College. In the summer of 2011 he completed two Master's of Arts degrees in Sociology and Urban Affairs at the University of Texas in Arlington. His work in graduate school has focused on policy implementation at the street-level, with a specific focus on the identities of street-level bureaucrats. Jesse currently works as an Investigator for Child Protective Services in Dallas Texas.