

Effect of Server Introduction on Restaurant Tipping

Kimberly Garrity
Douglas Degelman
Southern California College

The effect of a server introducing herself by name on restaurant tipping was investigated. Forty-two, 2-person dining parties were randomly assigned to either a name or a no name introduction condition. The use of a buffet brunch reduced contact between server and diners and held bill size constant. Results indicated that having the server introduce herself by name resulted in a significantly higher tipping rate (23.4%) than when the server did not introduce herself by name (15.0%), $p < .001$. Tipping rate also was affected by method of payment, with diners who charged the meal having a higher rate (22.6%) than those paying cash (15.9%), $p < .001$. The findings suggest the importance of initial server-diner interactions. Possible alternative explanations and suggestions for future research are provided.

- (1) Empirical research on restaurant tipping has tended to focus either on characteristics of the dining party, such as gender, number in the party, method of payment, and alcohol consumption (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Cunningham, 1979; Freeman, Walker, Borden, & Latane, 1975; May, 1978; Stillman & Hensley, 1980), or on characteristics of the server, such as attractiveness, dress, or gender (Lynn & Latane, 1984; May, 1978; Stillman & Hensley, 1980). (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986), as does the number of nontask server visits (May, 1978). Although employees perceive a relationship between service rendered and earnings (Bennett, 1983; Shamir, 1983), several studies have found the quality of the service rendered to be unrelated to tipping rate both in a restaurant setting (Lynn & Latane, 1984; May, 1978) and in a taxi setting (Davis, 1959; Karen, 1962).
- (2) Very little research has addressed the potentially important role of server-diner interactions on tipping. It has been shown that when a server physically touches a diner it has a significant effect on tipping rate
- (3) One aspect of the server-diner interaction which has not been empirically studied is the initial contact of the server and diners. In a classic work on the restaurant industry, Whyte (1948) suggests that it is

Reprinted with permission from *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 20(2): 168-172. Copyright © 1990 by V.H. Winston & Son, Inc. All rights reserved.

This research was submitted by the first author in partial fulfillment of course requirement in Experimental Psychology at Southern California College. The second author served as research adviser and course instructor. The authors wish to thank the management of Charley Brown's of Huntington Beach for their cooperation and members of the Spring, 1988 Experimental Psychology class at Southern California College for their assistance.

Correspondence concerning this article should be sent to Douglas Degelman, Department of Psychology, Southern California College, 55 Fair Drive, Costa Mesa, CA 92626.

the responsibility of the server to "seize the initiative in customer relations — to set the pattern for the relationship. This she does by the things she does, the things she says, the way she uses her voice, and the expression on her face" (pp. 110-111). Since characteristics of the initial contact have been shown to have an impact on other social situations, such as the counselor-client relationship (Angle & Goodyear, 1984), it is possible that various elements of the initial contact between server and diners could significantly affect tipping behavior.

(4) The purpose of the present study was to systematically examine the effect of server introduction (name introduction or no name introduction) on tipping behavior. Method of payment (cash or charge) also was recorded to allow an additional test of an earlier finding that diners who charge tip more than those who pay cash (May, 1978).

Method

Subjects

(5) Forty-two, 2-person parties eating Sunday brunch at Charley Brown's Restaurant in Huntington Beach, California on April 10 and 17, 1988 were used as subjects.

Setting and Procedure

(6) Sunday brunch at Charley Brown's is a buffet at which the diners serve themselves. The bill for each 2-person party was \$23.21. The server used in this study was a 22-year-old female who had been in her current position for approximately 4 years.

(7) Twenty-one dining parties were randomly assigned to each of two interaction conditions. In both conditions, the server approached the diners, smiled, and greeted them. In the name condition, the server said, "Good morning. My name is Kim, and I will be serving you this morning. Have you ever been to Charley Brown's for brunch before?" In the no name condition, the same greeting was used omitting, "My name is Kim."

(8) After making sure that the diners understood that the brunch was a buffet, the server's responsibility was to respond to special requests (e.g., silverware, sauces, etc.) and to provide beverages. When the diners were finished with their brunch, the server presented the bill, saying, "I'll take that as soon as you're ready." One dining party in the name condition was excluded from the analysis because the server discovered that she

had served them before. One dining party in the no name condition was excluded from the analysis because one of the diners asked the server what her name was.

Results

(9) Since a preliminary analysis of the data revealed no significant effects of day of testing across conditions, the data were collapsed across day of testing. Amount tipped was used in a 2 (introduction condition) \times 2 (method of payment) analysis of variance. Diners in the name introduction condition left significantly larger tips ($M = \$5.44$, $SD = \$1.75$) than those in the no name introduction condition ($M = \$3.49$, $SD = \$1.13$), $F(1,36) = 24.02$, $p < .001$. With the constant bill amount of \$23.21, tipping rate for the diners in the name introduction condition was 23.4%, while for the diners in the no name introduction condition the tipping rate was 15.0%.

(10) Diners charging their brunch left substantially larger tips ($M = \$5.24$, $SD = \$1.84$) than those paying cash ($M = \$3.68$, $SD = \$1.29$), $F(1,36) = 15.35$, $p < .001$. The tipping rate for diners charging brunch was 22.6%, while for diners paying cash, the tipping rate was 15.9%. There was no statistically significant interaction between introduction condition and method of payment, $F(1,36) = 0.707$, $p > .10$.

(11) The major finding of this study was that having the server identify herself by name resulted in a large, statistically significant effect on tipping behavior. At least two explanations for this effect exist. First, it is possible that server identification provided a social cue to the diners about the "class" of the restaurant, which created an atmosphere in which larger tips were perceived as being expected (see Snyder & Monson, 1975; Snyder & Swann, 1976). An alternative explanation of the findings of this study are provided by Latane's (1981) Social Impact Theory. To the extent that the manipulation of server name introduction affects the salience or strength of the social source (the server), the theory would predict larger tips when the server introduces herself by name than when she does not do so.

(12) The server in the present study was necessarily aware of the experimental condition of each dining party. Although a minimized contact approach was used in this study (Rosenthal, 1976, p. 374), it is suggested that future research on server identification consider having the maitre d' give the server's name to the diners. This would further reduce the likelihood of experimenter effects.

(13) The effects of other initial contact variables on tipping remain to be determined. As Whyte (1948) has suggested, the nonverbal behavior of the server (including facial expressions, posture, and eye contact) as well as the server's verbal behavior during the initial contact (content and length of the verbalization) are deserving of further study.

(14) It also remains for further research to examine the effects of server introduction on tipping in other types of restaurants, with other servers, different party sizes, different meal arrangements, and so forth. Finally, restaurants represent only one of many settings in which tipping is prevalent. Further research in other settings is necessary to identify the extent to which the findings of the present study can be generalized.

References

- Angle, S.S., & Goodyear, R.K. (1984). Perceptions of counselor qualities: Impact of subjects' self-concepts, counselor gender, and counselor introductions. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 31, 577-580.
- Bennett, H.L. (1983). Remembering drink orders: The memory skills of cocktail waitresses. *Human Learning: Journal of Practical Research & Applications*, 2, 157-169.
- Crusco, A.H., & Wetzel, C.G. (1984). The midas touch: The effects of interpersonal touch on restaurant tipping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 10, 512-517.
- Cunningham, M.R. (1979). Weather, mood, and helping behavior: Quasi-experiments with the sunshine samaritan. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 37, 1947-1956.
- Davis, F.S. (1959). The cab driver and his fare: Facets of a fleeting relationship. *American Journal of Sociology*, 65, 158-165.
- Freeman, S., Walker, M., Borden, R., & Latane, B. (1975). Diffusion of responsibility and restaurant tipping: Cheaper by the bunch. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 1, 584-587.
- Karen, R. (1962). Some factors affecting tipping. *Sociology and Social Research*, 47, 68-74.
- Latane, B. (1981). The psychology of social impact. *American Psychologist*, 36, 343-356.
- Lynn, M. (1988). The effects of alcohol consumption on restaurant tipping. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 14, 87-91.
- Lynn, M., & Latane, B. (1984). The psychology of restaurant tipping. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 14, 549-561.
- May, J.M. (1978). *Tip or treat: A study of factors affecting tipping behavior*. Unpublished master's thesis, Loyola University of Chicago.
- Rosenthal, R. (1976). *Experimenter effects in behavioral research*. New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc.
- Shamir, B. (1983). A note on tipping and employee perceptions and attitudes. *Journal of Occupational Psychology*, 56, 255-259.
- Snyder, M., & Monson, T.C. (1975). Persons, situations, and the control of social behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 32, 637-644.
- Snyder, M., & Swann, W.B. (1976). When actions reflect attitudes: The politics of impression management. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 34, 1034-1042.
- Stephen, R., & Zweigenhaft, R.L. (1986). The effect on tipping of a waitress touching male and female customers. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 126, 141-142.
- Stillman, J.W., & Hensley, W.E. (1980). She wore a flower in her hair: The effect of ornamentation on nonverbal communication. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 1, 31-39.
- Whyte, W.F. (1948). *Human relations in the restaurant industry*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Factual Questions

1. The relationship between restaurant tipping and what characteristics of the server have already been studied?
2. Previous research has found what relationship exists between the quality of service rendered and the rate at which customers tip?