

Personal and Social Tipping Norms: Race and Sex Differences

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Abstract

Tipping is both a personal and social norm, which can also vary according to the consumer's racial background and sex. This study investigated the extent to which restaurant guests' personal and social tipping norms vary based on race (White vs. African American) and sex. The researchers used a consumer panel comprised of 623 participants in 2016. A two-by-two ANOVA was conducted to examine race and sex effects on personal and social tipping norms. The results demonstrated both main and interaction effects of race and sex in personal and social tipping norms. Based on the results, the researchers discuss implications for scholars, restaurant owners, and managers.

Keywords: personal norm, social norm, tipping, race, sex

1. Introduction

1.1 Restaurant Tipping

Tipping is a standard practice to which many restaurant guests adhere by leaving money for restaurant servers after their service experience. Although a significant stream of research on the topic suggests that the service received motivates guests to tip (Conlin, Lynn, & O'Donoghue, 2003; Lynn, 2006a; Lynn, 2009; Lynn & Sturman, 2010; Whaley, Douglas, & O'Neill, 2014), a growing body of literature indicates that tipping is a commonly-practiced social norm regardless of the quality of service received (Azar, 2010; Whaley, 2011; Whaley et al., 2014). Interestingly, Koku (2005) proposed that tipping in restaurants differs from tipping in other service encounters outside the restaurant industry. Moreover, Koku (2005) claimed that the norms of restaurant tipping might signal a guest's appreciation for previously received services.

Given that restaurant tipping is a social obligation or construct, this research proposed that tipping is a case both of personal and social norms. Azar (2007b) posits that tipping is personal in the sense that consumers give servers money, although they are not legally obliged to do so. However, if the restaurant or service provider includes a gratuity (i.e., tip) in the guest's check as a request to receive its services, then the tip must be paid. Tipping is social in the sense that tipping is expected and sometimes required, in most restaurant settings to avoid feelings of regret, shame, or even guilt (Azar, 2004). Researchers have found that feelings of obligation, regret, and concern for one's self-esteem motivate consumers to engage in restaurant tipping (Azar, 2007a; Azar, 2010; Whaley et al., 2014).

Simultaneous production and consumption are key contributors to the service exchange from which the provider cannot separate him/herself (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Further, the way a service provider delivers the service is more critical than the kind of service s/he provides (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). Therefore, interactive bond forms between the service provider and the customer. The academic literature on restaurant tipping is vast and well-developed: including motivational factors previously studied, such as the service received (Lynn & Grassman, 1990); the social obligation to tip restaurant servers (Azar, 2010), and the ambient conditions' effect on tipping behavior (Whaley, Kim, & Kim, 2019). There are no clear findings on the relationship between tipping and the service received. Tipping is poorly-related (Lee, 2015), unrelated (Lee, 2015), or positively-correlated with the service received (Whaley et al., 2014). The personal connection that the server forms with guests during the restaurant experience is a crucial motivator in consumers' willingness to return and engage in post-consumption behaviors (Whaley, Lee, & Kim, 2019).

Restaurant service requires service workers to be gregarious and engaging; however, as with all products and services, restaurant guests differ in preferences, and in many cases, consumer tipping behavior differs by race (Brewster & Nowak III, 2018). Further, researchers have posited that tipping behavior can change based on the guest's sex, and that of the restaurant server (Whaley, 2011; Whaley et al., 2014). For example, Koku (2005) found that gender made a little difference in tipping behavior in restaurants, but not in-service encounters outside the restaurant industry. Thus, it is both timely and necessary that scholars re-examine restaurant guests' tipping behavior, most especially the effects of race and sex interactions or preferences during the dining experience. This exploration is particularly important because consumer preferences change constantly.

To this end, the concept of *habitus* may shed light on both racial and sex preferences and behaviors in a social context. *Habitus* helps explain sociological experiences by examining social structures, and the particular behavior patterns that groups exhibit as free agents when they come into contact with these social structures (Grenfell, 2014). Thus, *habitus* entails examining a behavior within a certain context with certain actors, with respect to both their responses as a group and as individuals (Grenfell, 2014). With respect to consumer tipping behavior based on racial motives, *habitus* implies that groups, or subgroups of individuals, will behave in the same way based upon past and present social structures when interacting with others (e.g., "actors" such as restaurant servers).

Tipping is both a social construct and socially-imposed obligation (Azar, 2010). The current literature remains limited in determining whether restaurant tipping is a personal choice, a norm, or a socially-imposed norm, and the extent to which these norms affect racial tipping behavior. Accordingly, this study examined sex and racial differences in tipping norms that consist of both a personal and social norm. The findings offer researchers new perspectives from which to understand race and sex's main and interaction effects on consumer tipping behavior. Discussion and implications provide specific information on how restaurant owners and managers can better serve their guests based on race and sex.

1.2 Conceptual Framework

Consumer patterns of tipping behavior continue to change and evolve, and restaurant guests may choose a restaurant experience based on a personal norm or a socially-imposed norm, whether they are dining alone or with others out of obligation to be apart of a group.

1.2.1 Personal Norms

According to Berenguer (2010), personal norms are "internalized rules of conduct that are socially learned vary among individuals within the same society and direct behavior in a particular situation" (p. 111). In contrast to social norms, personal norms relate to preferences caused by one's internal disposition (Kallgren, Reno, & Cialdini, 2000), in which one's judgment, rather than others' influence, affects behavior (Doran & Larsen, 2016).

Azar (2007a) argued that guests who engage in poor tipping behavior might feel guilty if they do not tip when a server has tried to connect with them during the dining experience. The argument suggests an individual's moral beliefs may influence h/her norms (Han et al., 2019). Mulinari, Guest, and Isaksson (2019) argued that tipping represents a type of moral economy in which guests feel empathy for the server, or are concerned to *do the right thing*, by leaving him/her a tip. As such, it can be postulated that restaurant guests' guilt might affect their moral code, and ultimately, their tipping behavior.

While the tipping literature reveals that personal preferences influence tipping norms, interpersonal preferences for restaurant servers have been found to motivate consumer tipping behavior as well (Azar, 2007a). For example, Conlin et al. (2003) reported that the server's friendliness was a key characteristic of servers who received a substantial number of tips. Additionally, a sex-specific (i.e., females) touch on male consumers' hands, while returning the change, motivated male consumers to tip more than when the female server did not touch the male consumer (Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986). Indeed, servers who display a positive response while engaging in reciprocal interactions invoke gratitude and appreciation for their efforts (Fehr & Falk, 2002; Teng & Cheng, 2013). In this study, personal norms related to tipping deal directly with a personal connection with the server, sex preferences, and the service received.

1.2.2 Social Norms

Tipping in the United States is a common practice and social norm (Azar, 2010). Kim and Kim (2019) believe that social norms have a significant effect when individuals observe each other during the act of giving. In the context of restaurants, Whaley, Lee, and Kim (2019) suggest that consumer compliance with the social norm of tipping influences selecting the same server on future visits.

While personal norms require introspection, social norms require the observation of a specific behavior by others (Elster, 2007; Schram & Charness, 2015). Many researchers have studied the social characteristics of the tipping

behavior between guests and servers (Azar, 2007a; Brewster & Mallison, 2009). According to Azar (2010), 84.7% of survey respondents tipped to conform to the social norm. When a guest complies with social norms by leaving a flat dollar tip, or percentage tip, his/her emotions may not be congruent with the practice of tipping in that guests may feel negative feelings due to the receipt of poor service, but leave a tip regardless of the server's poor efforts. *Social norm theory* implies that restaurant guests may experience negative feelings such as shame, regret, or the fear of being judged by others (Azar, 2004). That is, if consumers consider not leaving a tip for the server after a dissatisfying experience, then they may experience the previously mentioned emotions (Azar, 2004). In this study, social norm refers to the pressure to tip, the obligation to tip when dining with family or friends, and the obligation to tip, even when service is bad.

1.2.3 Racial Differences in Norms

Tip amounts and the service received at restaurants may depend on a guest's race. Lynn and colleagues found that African-Americans tip differently than Whites, but the motives were inconsistent across a variety of different studies; for example, some studies found that African-Americans are unfamiliar with the norm of tipping restaurant servers (Lynn, 2000; Lynn, 2004a, 2004b; Lynn, 2006a; Lynn & Thomas-Haysbert, 2003). Other researchers have claimed that a majority of servers believe that African-Americans are poor tippers, and consequently, servers provide them poorer service (Banks et al., 2018; Lynn & Thomas-Haysbert, 2003). Lynn (2000) administered a survey and found that restaurant servers perceived that African-Americans (94%), Hispanics (70%), and Asians (27%) were poor tippers.

In contrast, none of the restaurant servers who participated in the survey claimed that Whites were poor tippers (Lynn, 2000). Similarly, Lynn and Thomas-Haysbert (2003) examined the differences between African-American and White groups using a phone survey ($n = 1,837$) and found that African-Americans' patterns of tipping less than Whites was attributable to price sensitivity (i.e., disposable income). Brewster and Nowak III's (2018) recent study also indicated that African-American consumers tip less than White consumers, but the magnitude of the tip differed by a small margin of 3.5%. The authors argued that African-American guests might be unaware of the injunctive norm (e.g., fifteen to twenty percent) and descriptive tipping norms. Lynn and Brewster (2015) explained that a descriptive norm is one that specifies the way an individual is expected to behave, while an injunctive norm is specific to one's "attitudes or behaviors that are perceived to be acceptable, expected correct, or otherwise socially approved" (Lynn & Brewster, 2015, p. 69).

Other researchers have reported that African-Americans do not practice the social norm of tipping for a variety of reasons. These include a lack of awareness of the social norm percentages, or being from single-family homes without disposable income (Lynn & Thomas-Haysbert, 2003). Also, service providers' racial prejudices against African-Americans motivate African-Americans to tip differently than others (Dirks & Rice, 2004a; Dirks & Rice, 2004b). These findings infer that tipping is a habitual behavior, or a social structure, that reflects the individual's history, and is composed of the set of internal dispositions referred to as *habitus* (de Morais Sato et al., 2014).

In Banks et al.'s (2018) study, ethnic minority servers reported that their tips are more often below the standard tipping norm. Their result supported many previous findings that restaurant guests' implicit attitudes about a server's sex or ethnicity affect tipping behavior (Ayres, Vars, & Zakariya, 2005; Brewster & Lynn, 2014; Lynn et al., 2008). For example, Ayres et al. (2005) found racial disparities in tipping taxi cab drivers in Connecticut. White cab drivers were tipped one-third more than African-American cab drivers, but African-American cab drivers believed that African-American passengers would tip them approximately 58% less of the time than would White passengers. Brewster and Lynn (2014) also found that when such variables as age, gender, education, and income were controlled, African-Americans tipped 2% less than Whites and Hispanics. In another example, Lynn et al. (2008) found that White and African American servers' tip percentages differed when guests rated the service received as less than perfect to perfect. White servers' tips increased from 16.8%, when service was less than perfect, to 23.4% when it was rated as perfect, while African-American servers received 16.6% of the bill both when service was less than perfect or perfect (Lynn et al., 2008).

Banks et al. (2018) suggested that if ethnic minority servers feel that restaurant guests display conscious or unconscious biases during the dining experience, then the servers may deliver less than desirable service. This scenario creates a self-fulfilling prophecy in which ethnic minority servers, who deliver poor service to the guests, receive tips less than the traditional norm (e.g., fifteen to twenty percent, Banks et al., 2018). While specific instances indeed exist in which servers attempt to influence guests' tipping behaviors by providing quality service, some guests may tip marginally or nothing at all. Lynn (2006a) provided a variety of reasons why African-Americans do not follow the normed percentages that other consumers do. In summary, ethnic

minorities may tip less for reasons such as experiencing discriminatory service, having households comprised of lower income-earning families, and being less familiar with and committed to the fifteen to twenty percent tipping norms (Lynn, 2003; Lynn, 2006a, 2006b).

1.2.4 Sex Differences in Norms

The literature on sex differences in tipping is limited. However, research in sociology and consumer behavior has suggested that the two sexes differ significantly, and certainly, tip differently. Researchers have reported that male guests typically tip more when dining alone than female guests (Maynard & Mupandawana, 2009; Parrett, 2006; Lynn, 2006b). On the other hand, studies also have suggested that hairstylists' female clients tend to tip more than their male counterparts (Schwer & Daneshvary, 2000).

Trivedi and Teichert (2019) found that normally, women are influenced more than men by a smiling model in advertisements. The authors claimed that women might be influenced to a greater extent by a restaurant server's emotional affect (e.g., warm and kind servers). Research has also revealed that females rely more on others than their male counterparts. Specifically, females strive to establish connections with others more than males do, because they focus on developing relationships and want to have pleasant interactions with others (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997; Cross & Madson, 1997; Ndubisi, 2006). Further, women are more empathetic than men, as they are willing to help others in need (Mestre, Samper, Frias, & Tur, 2009). These findings suggest that female consumers tend to exhibit loyalty toward a group of individuals, and thus, they may feel more obligated to tip when they are with friends or family members.

1.3 Research Objectives

Based on the literature discussed above, it appears that race and sex influence tipping norms. Therefore, this study addressed the main effects of race and sex on personal and social tipping norms. Although the literature does not suggest that race and sex interact with tipping norms, we examined these two variables' effects on personal and social norms. Thus, the study had the following three objectives:

- 1) To examine whether race has a main effect on personal and social tipping norms.
- 2) To examine whether sex has a main effect on personal and social tipping norms.
- 3) To examine whether race and sex have interactive effects on personal and social tipping norms.

2. Method

2.1 Sample and Data Collection

The questionnaire was developed with Qualtrics in the springtime of 2016 and distributed to an online consumer panel recruited via eRewards, an online market research firm. The survey contained questions about respondents' current tipping practices (e.g., "Do you tip when dining out?" and "How much do you tip when dining out?"), tipping norms, and demographic information. Of a total of 892 surveys collected, we analyzed surveys of 623 respondents, who constituted the two largest racial groups: White (n = 381) and African-American (n = 242). Table 1 provides the respondents' demographic profiles. The majority of the respondents (98.1%) tipped when dining out. The greatest percentage of respondents tipped 15% (36.5%), followed by 20% (32.2%), and 10% (12.1%).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

	Level	n	%
Sex	Male	289	46.4
	Female	334	53.6
Race	White	381	61.2
	African-American	242	38.8
Age	18–25	51	9.0
	26–35	145	25.6
	36–45	169	29.9
	46–55	115	20.3
	56–65	86	15.2
	66 or older	51	9.0
Employment	Not employed	65	10.4
	Retired	102	16.4
	Full-time	319	51.2
	Part-time	69	11.1
	Self-employed	27	4.3
	Other	36	5.8
Income	Less than \$12,000	49	7.9
	\$12,000~\$20,999	44	7.1
	\$21,000~\$40,999	139	24.1
	\$41,000~\$52,999	67	11.6
	\$53,000~\$67,999	75	13.0
	\$68,000~\$111,999	122	21.1
	\$112,000~\$156,999	46	8.0
	\$157,000 or more	34	5.9

2.2 Measures

Personal and social tipping norms were the study's main constructs. Because no scale items of personal and social norms were found in the literature, we derived relevant items from the literature. We performed content analysis to categorize the items into personal and social tipping norms. We used established measures from Whaley (2011) and Whaley et al. (2014) and solicited experts' (n = 3) opinions to modify and categorize items like personal and social tipping norms.

3. Analysis

A two-way ANOVA was performed with the main effects of the race (White and African-American) and sex (male and female). Table 2 presents the ANOVA results, and Table 3 shows the means of the personal and social norms for the two racial groups and sexes. As shown in Table 2, the ANOVA demonstrated race's main effects on server sex ($F_{df} = 14.160, p < .001$), and tipping obligation when with family/friends ($F_{df} = 10.548, p < .001$). Similarly, there were main effects of sex based on the sex of the server ($F_{df} = 24.015, p < .001$), and tipping obligation when with family/friends ($F_{df} = 6.430, p < .05$). These findings suggest that a server's sex influenced African-American and male consumers' tipping behavior more than that of White and female consumers. Further, African-American and male consumers felt more obligated to tip, when dining with friends and family than did White male counterparts.

Table 2. General linear model result: F-statistic

	Race	Sex	Race x Sex
Personal Norm			
When a server established a personal connection, it influences my tipping.	.81	.95	.02
A server's gender influences my tipping behavior.	14.16***	24.02***	4.90*
My tipping behavior is directly related to the service received.	.03	.19	.002
Social Norm			
Sometimes I feel pressured to tip.	.06	.46	6.41**
I feel more obligated to tip when dining with friends and/or family.	10.55***	6.43*	2.51
I feel obligated to tip even when service is bad.	2.45	.84	.44

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Table 3. Means

	White		African American	
	Male (n = 157)	Female (n = 224)	Male (n = 132)	Female (n = 110)
Personal Norm				
When a server established a personal connection, it influences my tipping.	3.01	3.08	3.08	3.13
A server's gender influences my tipping behavior.	1.76	1.51	2.23	1.66
My tipping behavior is directly related to the service received.	3.29	3.32	3.28	3.31
Social Norm				
Sometimes I feel pressured to tip.	2.13	2.28	2.31	2.06
I feel more obligated to tip when dining with friends and/or family.	2.11	2.05	2.45	2.16
I feel obligated to tip even when service is bad.	2.34	2.45	2.27	2.29

Finally, these two variables (race and sex) had interaction effects on the sex of the server ($F_{df} = 4.901, p < .05$) and tipping pressure ($F_{df} = 6.413, p < .01$), as shown in Figures 1 and 2, respectively. Specifically, server sex was much more likely to influence African-American male consumers' tipping, while this difference was not apparent among White consumers. Further, African-American male consumers felt more pressure to tip than did their female counterparts, while this pressure was greater for White females than male consumers.

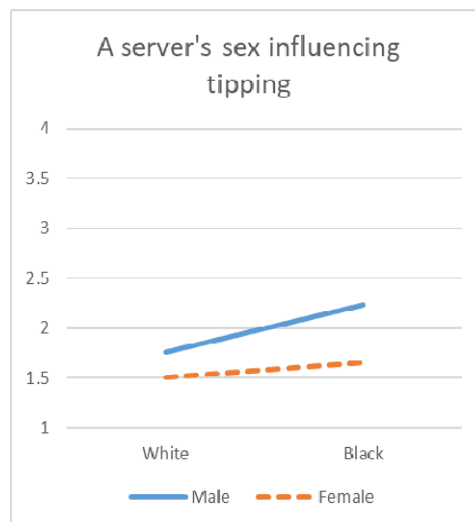


Figure 1. Interaction effect on server sex influence

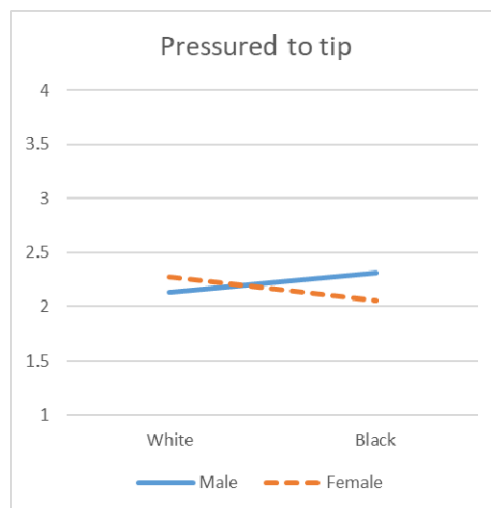


Figure 2. Interaction effect on tipping pressure

4. Discussion and Implications

This study used an online consumer panel of 623 respondents to examine sex and race differences in consumer tipping behavior to further elucidate the main effects of personal and social norms on consumer tipping behavior. The findings demonstrated that these tipping norms differ between African-Americans and Whites, as well as men and women.

Restaurant servers work for tips, and it is still unclear how to motivate different races to tip them. If African-American men do not know about the tipping norms for poor, mediocre, or excellent service, then perhaps specific tip percentages should be notated on each restaurant's bill, the menu, and other marketing literature that restaurants provide their guests. While many restaurants include these percentages for their customers' reference, many do not. This finding is particularly important for all restaurants which employ servers to accommodate guests. Moreover, given that restaurant tips are not required in many establishments (other than with catering banquets and large groups), restaurants should make the expectation of tipping entirely clear to the guests. Also, restaurant managers must train all servers to interact with their guests continuously to gauge the rapport they establish with them. If African-American consumers do not enjoy their experience with one specific server, then it may be necessary to change servers or have another server check in during the experience, to heighten the rapport.

Additionally, the sex of the server was found to influence African-American males to tip; however, the finding is problematic in that restaurants may not have the ability to employ servers of only one or the other sex. Regarding the finding that African-American males feel a greater sense of obligation to tip, perhaps servers in restaurants that include a gratuity, on large parties, should inform the dining party at the beginning of the meal of such arrangements to make everyone comfortable by mitigating this feeling and making the guests comfortable. The finding supports earlier reports that the sex of the server plays a role in tipping (Kim, Nemeschansky, & Brandt, 2017). Servers need to be cognizant that African-American males feel more obligated to tip when in a group setting, and thus, interacting with all members in the group is critical and proves strategically beneficial for servers.

Concerning the feeling of internal pressure to tip, African-American males and White females scored the highest. Servers must seek to make an authentic connection with these groups, and make them feel genuinely comfortable. When servers return the change or the credit card slip, they may offer additional service or move away from the guest to reduce the pressure on them. Further, managers may employ technological devices (e.g., handheld mobile POS devices) to give the guests further privacy, as tipping is a personal choice in an attempt to mitigate the feelings of conforming to the social norm. Finally, the findings of this study can be used for practical purposes, such as diversity training and diversity initiatives which focus on the equal treatment of clientele based on race and sex.

5. Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations that offer opportunities for future research. First, the literature includes no scale items of personal and social tipping norms. Therefore, we could not test the scale's validity; future research should focus on developing such scales to increase their validity. Second, the numbers of White and African-American respondents were uneven: 61% Whites and 39% African-Americans. Thus, future research should use more even sample sizes of these two racial groups. Third, African-Americans were the only racial or ethnic minority group included in our study. Future studies should expand their samples to include Hispanic- and Asian-Americans to test the ability to generalize our findings to other racial or ethnic groups. Finally, tipping norms can be examined cross-culturally to determine the way norms vary by culture. Nonetheless, we believe that personal and social restaurant tipping norms continue to evolve, and need continuous scrutiny. We hope that this study encourages other researchers to continue their interest in this subject.

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