Effect on Restaurant Tipping of Male and Female Servers Drawing a Happy, Smiling Face on the Backs of Customers' Checks

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Research has shown that a server's smiling can increase restaurant tips and that a server's writing "thank you" on the backs of checks can also increase tips. In the current study, these two approaches were combined. An experiment was conducted in which a male or female server drew a happy, smiling face on the backs of checks before delivering them to customers, or simply delivered checks with nothing drawn on the back. It was predicted that this tactic would increase tips for the female server because of an increased perception of friendliness, but would not increase tips for the male server because such behavior would be perceived as gender-inappropriate. Results were consistent with predictions.

Approximately 1.3 million people in the U.S. serve as waiters and waitresses (*Statistical Abstracts,* 1990), and these servers depend on tips as a major source of income (Lynn & Mynier, 1993; Schmidt, 1985). For these individuals, therefore, knowledge about factors that affect customers' tipping behavior is valuable. Such knowledge, based on social psychological research, has grown over the last several decades and indicates that various factors can indeed affect tipping behavior.

One set of factors affecting tipping concerns characteristics of the dining party, including party size, method of payment, alcohol consumption, and mood (Cunningham, 1979; Freeman, Walker, Borden, & Latané, 1975; Lynn, 1988; Lynn & Latané, 1984). A second set concerns characteristics of the server, including attractiveness, dress, and gender (Lynn & Latané, 1984; May, 1978; Stillman & Hensley, 1980). Finally, a third set of factors affecting tipping concerns server-diner interactions (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Garrity & Degelman, 1990; Hornik, 1993; Lynn & Latané, 1984; Lynn & Mynier, 1993; May, 1978; Rind & Bordia, 1995; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986; Tidd & Lockard, 1978).

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Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 1996, **26**, 3, pp. 218-225.

Studies examining server-diner interactions have found that increased tipping can result from servers briefly touching their customers (Crusco & Wetzel, 1984; Hornik, 1993; Stephen & Zweigenhaft, 1986), making additional nontask visits (May, 1978), squatting during their initial interaction with customers (Lynn & Mynier, 1993), personalizing their interaction by giving customers their first name during the initial contact (Garrity & Degelman, 1990), displaying a maximal smile upon the initial interaction with customers (Tidd & Lockard, 1978), and writing "thank you" on the backs of checks before delivering them to customers at the end of their interaction (Rind & Bordia, 1995).

The current investigation was an extension of the Rind and Bordia (1995) and Tidd and Lockard (1978) studies. Rind and Bordia examined the effects of the common practice of a server writing "thank you" on the backs of checks and found that a server got more tips when she wrote "thank you" than when she did not. Tidd and Lockard examined the effects of smiling on tipping behavior and found that a server received more tips when she displayed a maximal smile with closed teeth showing than when she displayed a minimal smile with no teeth showing. The current study combined the ideas from these two studies by making use of another common server tactic: drawing a happy, smiling face on the backs of checks before presenting them with the back side up to customers at the end of the server-diner interaction.

An experiment was conducted in which a male or female server either did or did not draw a happy, smiling face on the backs of checks before delivering them to customers. One possibility for the effects on tipping behavior was that this manipulation would increase tips, regardless of the gender of the server because it would indicate the server's friendliness, which has been shown to be a fairly strong predictor of restaurant customers' tipping behavior (Lynn, Zinkhan, & Harris, 1993). Another possibility, however, was that this manipulation would be effective for the female server, but not for the male server, because, although drawing a happy, smiling face might be perceived by customers as perfectly natural when done by the female server, it might be perceived as strange when done by the male server. The resulting negative impression in the case of the male server would then be likely to counteract any benefits of perceived friendliness in terms of increasing tips (cf. Jones & Pittman, 1980; Tedeschi & Riess, 1981).

Research on gender differences in expressing emotions and on perceptions of the appropriateness and social desirability of the expression of emotions by males and females (e.g., Allen & Haccoun, 1976; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972) suggests that the second possibility discussed above is likely to obtain. In a study designed to assess the validity of various gender stereotypes, Allen and Haccoun (1976) found that the most

consistent gender difference in their sample of college students was in the area of expressiveness: Female subjects were more emotionally expressive than were male subjects across a range of emotions. This finding indicates that emotionally expressive behavior is more normative for females than for males. This gender difference may be relevant to people's judgments about individuals who are emotionally expressive. This possibility was supported by Broverman et al. (1972), who found in their sample of college students that warmth and expressiveness were perceived to be socially desirable attributes for females, but not for males. Using a second sample of practicing mental health clinicians, Broverman et al. found further that perceptions of individuals' mental health were consistent with these gender stereotypes—that is, individuals behaving in a gender-inappropriate manner were viewed as less mentally healthy. This research suggests that the expressive behavior of drawing a happy, smiling face would be likely to be perceived as gender-appropriate and socially desirable when done by female servers, but as gender-inappropriate and less desirable when done by male servers. The resulting negative impressions in the case of males servers, but not in the case of female servers, who draw the face would then be expected to counteract any perceptions of friendliness which drawing the face might create. From these considerations, it was hypothesized in the current experiment that drawing a happy, smiling face would increase tips when done by the female server but not when done by the male server.

Method

Subjects

Eighty-nine dining parties eating lunch at an upscale restaurant in Philadelphia served as subjects. The restaurant was located on the campus of Temple University and attracted faculty, other university personnel, and students. The dining parties consisted of a total of 193 customers, with a mean of 2.17 customers per party ($SD = .98$).

Procedure

The experiment was conducted over a 3-day period from Monday through Wednesday during December 1994. A female and a male server, both in their twenties, acted as the experimental accomplices. The servers worked the lunch shift from 11 a.m. until 3 p.m.

Each server was given a stack of fifty 3 × 5 cards. Half of these cards were blank and the other half had a happy, smiling face drawn on them. This face consisted of a circle with two dots representing eyes and a upward curved line

below the dots representing the smiling mouth. The cards were thoroughly shuffled, such that the order of blank and face cards was random. At the end of a dining party's meal, when it came time for the server to present the dining party with a check, the server reached into his or her pocket and randomly selected one of the cards. This procedure ensured random assignment of dining parties to the experimental and control conditions. If the server selected a card with a happy, smiling face, then he or she drew this picture on the back of the dining party's check, and then delivered it back-side up so that the dining party would see the drawing. If the server selected a blank card, then he or she simply delivered the check back-side up without drawing anything on it. To avoid potential confounding, servers were instructed to behave in the same way, regardless of condition, when delivering the check. Each server delivered the check with a neutral facial expression, while saying "Here's your check," and then immediately left to avoid further contact with the dining party. After the dining party left, the server recorded on the same 3 × 5 card used to determine the dining party's condition the amount of tip left by the party, the amount of the bill before taxes, and the number of customers in the dining party. The dependent measure was the tip percentage.

Results

As a result of the randomization procedure, the 89 dining parties were not evenly distributed among the two experimental and two control conditions. The number of parties in the male control, male experimental, female control, and female experimental conditions were 21, 23, 23, and 22, respectively. The mean bill amount per dining party was \$15.86 (SD = \$10.35), which worked out to be a mean of \$7.31 per person. Tip percentages were calculated for each dining party by dividing the tip size by the bill amount and then multiplying this quotient by 100. The tipping results are presented in Table 1.

It was hypothesized that drawing a happy, smiling face would increase tips when done by the female server, but not when done by the male server. To test these two predictions, two orthogonal contrast analyses were performed.[2] First, for the female server, the mean tip percentage in the face condition (M = 33.04) was contrasted with the mean tip percentage in the control condition

[2]The error term for these contrasts was derived from a 2 × 2 (Smiling Face: Absent or Present × Server's Gender: Male or Female) ANOVA. This ANOVA yielded a nonsignificant main effect for the smiling face, $F(1, 85) = .13$; a significant main effect for server's gender, $F(1, 85) = 23.69$, $p < .001$; and a Significant Smiling Face × Server's Gender interaction, $F(1, 85) = 4.00$, $p = .049$. This interaction is consistent with the experimental hypotheses, and is explained more fully by the contrast analyses.

Table 1

Mean Tip Percents as a Function of Drawing a Happy, Smiling Face on Checks and Server's Gender

Condition	Server gender	
	Male	Female
Control		
M	21.41	27.78
SD	12.64	7.77
n	21	23
Happy, smiling face		
M	17.78	33.04
SD	5.57	14.02
n	23	22

($M = 27.78$) using weights of 1 and -1, respectively. The resulting contrast was significant, $t(85) = 1.68, p < .05$, one-tailed, effect size $r = .25$, supporting the hypothesis that drawing a happy, smiling face would be an effective tactic for the female server. To test the second prediction, for the male server, the mean tip percentage in the face condition ($M = 17.78$) was contrasted with the mean tip percentage in the control condition ($M = 21.41$) using weights of 1 and -1, respectively. The contrast was nonsignificant, $t(85) = -1.15$, $p > .50$, one-tailed, effect size $r = -.17$. This result shows clearly that drawing the happy, smiling face did not increase tip percentages for the male server, supporting the second prediction.

The relationship between party size and tip percentage was also examined. In accord with findings in previous research (Freeman et al., 1975; Lynn & Latané, 1984; May, 1978; Pearl & Vidman, 1988), dining party size was negatively correlated with tip percentage, $r(87) = -.19, p < .05$, one-tailed. Lynn and Bond (1992) have shown that correlations between dining party size and tip percentages can be biased because of the use of tip percentages as the dependent measure. They presented a method for correcting the tip percentage: corrected percentage tip = (T - A)/B, where T = the tip, B = the bill, and A = the *y*-intercept when predicting T from B. The correlation between corrected tip percents and dining party size was nonsignificant, $r(87) = -.02$. To examine the relationship between tipping and dining party size further, we

calculated the semipartial correlation between these two variables, adjusting tip size by holding bill amount constant. This correlation was also nonsignificant, $r(86) = -.04$.

Discussion

The results of the experiment suggest that adding a happy, smiling face to the backs of checks before delivering them to customers can increase tip percentages for female, but not male, servers. For female servers, this procedure is not an unusual practice in restaurants. Female servers sometimes draw the face underneath a "thank you" message, or they may just draw the face alone. This practice, when done by female servers, is likely to be seen as normal by customers (Broverman et al., 1972) and as an expression of liking and friendliness. A perception of friendliness, in turn, is likely to increase tips—an effect that has been observed in a variety of tipping studies (Lynn & Mynier, 1993). In the current experiment, the female server's customers spent in a 3-day period a total of $625, which is equivalent to $1,041 in a 5-day work week. By the simple addition of a happy, smiling face on all checks, the server would have increased her tips from $289 to $344 in the 5-day work week, which represents an increase of $55, or 19%—a substantial return on the low-cost investment of drawing a face on the backs of checks. For the more than half million female servers in the U.S., systematic use of this technique could mean millions of dollars of extra income annually.

For male servers, on the other hand, drawing a happy, smiling face is probably uncommon practice in restaurants and is likely to be perceived as strange by customers. Expressive behaviors of this type, although perceived by members of our society as appropriate for females, are perceived as less appropriate for males (Broverman et al., 1972). Rather than inducing customers to see a male server as friendly, this procedure may be more likely in general to induce customers to form the impression that the server is strange. This negative impression, in turn, is likely to be neutral at best with respect to effects on tipping, and at worst could even boomerang. In the current experiment, the tip percentage means were in the direction of a boomerang effect in which the mean tip percentage was less in the happy, smiling face than in control conditions, although this result was not significant.

The current study also examined the relation between dining party size and tip percentage. Previous studies have found an inverse relation in which tip percentages decreased with increased party size (Freeman et al., 1975; Lynn & Latané, 1984; May, 1978; Pearl & Vidman, 1988). Lynn and Bond (1992), however, argued that this relation could be attributable to a statistical artifact associated with the use of the ratio variable of tip percentages. They showed

that, for example, a reanalysis of Lynn and Latané's (1984) data revealed no relation between tip percentages and dining size when the tip percentages were corrected. The current study found the predicted inverse relation before correcting tip percentages, as in the Lynn and Latané (1984) study, but found no relation when tip percentages were corrected, as in Lynn and Bond's (1992) reanalysis. The current result, along with Lynn and Bond's analyses, thus adds to the weakening of this relationship.

The current experiment was conducted in an upscale restaurant on a university campus in a large Northeastern city using only one pair of male and female servers. The generalizability of the current findings thus needs to be examined in future research by varying location and restaurant-type factors and by using different male and female servers.

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