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Beyond the Tipping Point: The Role of Status in Organizations' Public Narratives to Mobilize Support for Change

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Abstract

What status mechanisms underlie actors' public narratives to mobilize change? This study examines the public narratives of a set of United States restaurant actors (2005–2016) that tried to eliminate tipping, a change which challenged a deeply ingrained social custom, took some power away from customers, and could potentially reduce servers' income. Through a qualitative analysis of the narratives using a status lens, I reveal actors' complex discursive status work to frame the elimination of tipping as a change that promotes compensation fairness, the professionalization of service work, cultural authenticity, and equality. This study delineates the recursive relationship between narrative and status: actors' narratives are enabled by a rich repertoire of status hierarchies; narratives may also drive status in the sense that by organizing loose elements into coherent stories about status distinction or status problematization, narratives provide motivations for a change that may reinforce or challenge existing status hierarchies. I conclude by discussing this study's implications for the literature on status, narrative, change, and legitimation.

Keywords

change, eliminating tipping, narrative, restaurant work, status

The United States restaurant industry employs about 10% of the US workforce and contributes to about 4% of GDP (National Restaurant Association, 2017). Over the past few decades, it witnessed the proliferation of food-themed media programs, the rise of celebrity chefs, restaurateurs, and food critics, the rapid expansion of culinary education institutions, and the growing body of restaurants that treat the creation of a dish as a cultural, creative, and artful endeavor. These trends indicate that restaurants, as organizations, and chefs, as professionals, seem to enjoy a much more prominent cultural presence and higher status than before.

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That said, from an economic perspective, for the majority of chefs/cooks in full-service restaurants, their work is still characterized by low wage (median salary for chefs and head cooks is $45,950 in 2017) despite high pressure and long hours (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017; ROC United, 2010), and the industry faces a severe drought of kitchen talents (Sherman, 2015; Wildes, 2008). Chefs/cooks' compensation had been partly limited by a long-standing legislation (the 1974 amendment to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, in effect till 2017[1]) that prohibited employers from mandating tipped employees (e.g., front of house staff such as waiters and waitresses), for whom the federal minimum wage is lower, to share tips with un-tipped employees (e.g., back of house staff such as chefs, cooks, and dishwashers). According to sociologist Gary Alan Fine (1996, p. 99), who conducted extensive ethnography in restaurants, "Cooks have status while servers get the cash."

In the mid-2000s, a small but growing number of US full-service restaurants decided to move away from tipping—a deeply-entrenched American institution that symbolizes consumer power and reward for performance (Hemenway, 1984; Segrave, 1998). As labor legislation further tightened[2] the prohibition on tip-sharing in 2011, more and more restaurants joined the no-tipping camp, especially between 2013 and 2016. This also coincided with the rapid rise of minimum wage in several states, which increased owners' labor cost and further widened the pay gap between front and back of house staff (referred to below as FoH and BoH). As *The New York Times'* restaurant critic Pete Wells (2013) described, "a tip-reform movement is under way."

While no-tipping may seem a bargain for customers, a closer look at these restaurants suggests that customers may end up paying the same or even more, because most of these restaurants either replaced tipping with a mandatory service fee or increased menu price by 10% to 30%. Since this fee is not a tip, owners can use it to compensate staff and get ahead of the rising minimum wage. BoH can share part of the fee to get a higher salary, while FoH receive a salary that could be similar to or lower than their previous income (base salary plus tips).

Considering that this change challenged a well-established social custom, reduced (or did not add) financial incentives for servers, and took away some power from customers, it was a risky move—restaurants usually operate with thin margins and would soon be unsustainable if they could not mobilize support for this change. Since this change primarily affected two groups (BoH and FoH) with opposite positioning in terms of occupation status and compensation, it provides a rich context for examining an under-explored but potentially powerful mechanism of change mobilization: discursive status work. Using an in-depth qualitative analysis, I seek to explore the following research question: What status mechanisms, if any, underlie restaurant actors' public narratives to mobilize change? By *actor*, I refer to the restaurant business as a "collective actor" (Pedersen & Dobbin, 1997) that communicates with the public via channels such as statements on its website and spokespersons talking to popular media. By *public*, I refer broadly to internal and external social groups such as BoH, FoH, customers, other restaurants, critics, media, and government agencies.

Change narratives can be a particularly rich channel for status work. Through "narrativization" (Thompson, 1990, p. 61), loose elements, salient or inconspicuous, taken-for-granted or contestable, are organized into stories that can powerfully "magnetize" (Shenhav, 2015, p. 1) and "transport" (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701) audiences to focus on certain values and moral orders (Harré, 1983; Vaara, Sonenshein, & Boje, 2016; Ylijoki, 2005), potentially making certain status hierarchies more or less salient in audiences' minds. Building on and going beyond status and change research that examines the influence of status as actors' structural attributes (e.g., Battilana, 2011; Sherer & Lee, 2002) and status dynamics between dyads (e.g., Buchanan, Ruebottom, & Riaz, 2018; Kellogg, 2012; Ybema & Byun, 2011), this study contributes insights on how actors utilize diverse status mechanisms to mobilize change amid a complex web of social groups. My analysis

reveals that in their narratives, actors associated various status implications with tipping, proposed to align or exchange compensation with status positions, and switched between mechanisms of status distinction and status problematization. A status lens also has implications for the change and legitimation literature, delineating what status hierarchies the narratives "unfreeze" or "freeze" that can potentially make legitimation strategies more powerful in mobilizing change. Furthermore, a status lens helps to shed light on the subtlety with which the status mechanisms were conveyed, which varied across narratives, contexts, and actors. These findings suggest important dimensions that may fine-tune actors' discursive status work and influence narrative effectiveness toward different audiences.

Understanding this no-tipping phenomenon from a status lens can provide insights and inspirations on the strategies that actors use to improve the status of restaurant occupations and alter existing institutional arrangements and inequalities. This study's implications also go beyond the food industry, as addressing income disparity, managing inter-occupational relations, and improving occupational status are pervasive concerns in many organizations and industries, especially where the front-versus-back of house metaphor applies.

Theoretical Background

Status refers to an actor or social group's "effective claim to social esteem in terms of positive or negative privileges" (Weber, 1978, p. 305) or, in other words, the extent that one is respected by others (Magee & Galinsky, 2008; Ridgeway & Walker, 1995). It is a positional construct that cannot exist in a social vacuum, but always in a status hierarchy, the "rank ordering of individuals or groups according to the amount of respect accorded by others" (Magee & Galinsky, 2008, p. 359). As actors' interactions with and influence on one another are structured by status hierarchies, and as organizational and institutional changes often involve (attempted) changes in existing status hierarchies, status is a critical dimension to examine in change processes (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009).

A substantial body of research on status and change focuses on how status, as actors' structural attribute, is associated with factors such as actors' likelihood, willingness, and ability to initiate or implement change (Battilana, 2006, 2011; Lockett, Currie, Waring, Finn, & Martin, 2012; Sherer & Lee, 2002). Different from this focus on actors' structural positions, some studies examine how actors utilize status mechanisms in their communication to maintain or change existing status hierarchies (e.g., Delmestri & Greenwood, 2016; Sauder, 2005; Ybema, Thomas, & Hardy, 2016). For example, Ybema and Byun's (2011) study in a multinational corporation revealed how actors drew symbolic boundaries between "self" and "other" around national differences. Kellogg (2012) found that when reformers faced severe status threats, high-status defenders could effectively divide the reformer alliance by linking the reform with a characteristic of the low-status group.

Building on this line of research, I raise several important but under-explored dimensions that can advance scholarly understanding of how discursive status work unfolds in change mobilization and provide implications to the broader literature on status, narrative, change, and legitimation. First, in existing studies on change and status, the analytical focus is primarily on the cultural, symbolic, or ideological contestations between social groups (e.g., Kellogg, 2012; Hardy & Maguire, 2010). Dynamics in the economic domain or the interplay between social and economic domains might be overlooked. On the other hand, a substantive literature examines how socioeconomic status, often measured as the combination of income, education, and occupation, is related to a multitude of issues such as educational and career outcomes (e.g., Leibbrand, Massey, Alexander, & Tolnay, 2019; Wu & Bao, 2013). While actors' social standing is often closely intertwined with their economic condition, a distinction between these two dimensions, discussed by

Weber ([1920] 2009) as status position (referring to social prestige and honor) and class situation (referring to economic condition and interest), could be helpful in disentangling the mechanisms for mobilizing change. In particular, in the restaurant industry, both these two dimensions are important and sometimes at odds with one another. As Pete Wells (2013) described, "the restaurant business can be seen as a class struggle between the groomed, pressed, articulate charmers working in the dining room and the blistered, stained and profane grunts in the kitchen." BoH and FoH's opposite positioning in their occupational status and compensation makes this distinction useful in analyzing change narratives.

Second, a burgeoning body of research examines the discursive strategies of legitimation that actors utilize to make a change legitimate—socially acceptable and appropriate (Dalpiaz & Stefano, 2018; Feix & Philippe, 2020; Glozer, Caruana, & Hibbert, 2019; Kim, Croidieu, & Lippmann, 2016; Luyckx & Janssens, 2016; Vaara, Tienari, & Laurila, 2006). While this stream of work has flourished, scholars have not explicitly examined the role of status in legitimation narratives, or if change agents are motivated to achieve not only legitimacy but also high status. Since status and legitimacy are distinct constructs that are not always correlated (Washington & Zajac, 2005), a status-focused analysis could yield important insights that add nuance to the literature on discursive strategies of legitimation.

Third, existing status research often examines status work around a dyad and how one is praised or downplayed against the other, for example, reformers versus defenders (e.g., Kellogg, 2012; Ybema et al., 2016), women versus men (Buchanan et al., 2018), and Japanese versus Dutch employees (Ybema & Byun, 2011). But actors' discursive status work may exhibit different dynamics when they face a web of social groups with intricate relations. For example, BoH and FoH are both restaurant employees and need to collaborate closely, but at the same time may compete over the distribution of tip; owners need to properly compensate staff, but also need to get customers on board for the change and remain profitable. As public narratives could be read by anyone inside or outside the organization, change agents need to attend to these relations and may utilize a more diverse set of status mechanisms to enlist support from as many social groups as possible. Therefore, research is needed to expand from the dyadic focus.

Lastly, existing studies that examine status work tend to focus on the content of actors' narratives and pay less attention to the subtlety with which the status mechanisms are deployed (i.e., whether the status hierarchies are subtly implied or explicitly discussed). For some exceptions, Buchanan et al. (2018) mentioned that due to concerns for political correctness, media's discourse around gender-based status differences was always implicit; Lockwood (2016) revealed that elite hotels tended to use subtle material cues to remain flexible and appeal to a variety of guest tastes. When actors' purpose is to mobilize change, however, the level of subtlety may vary and could be vital for narrative effectiveness—if too subtle, audiences may not recognize the status implications; if too explicit, some may feel offended and alienated. Practices (customary and expected ways of doing things) in food consumption are rich with salient or inconspicuous status cues (e.g., Bourdieu, 1984; Goody, 1982; Johnston & Baumann, 2007); studying the level of subtlety in this context is a promising step toward developing theory about the strategies and effectiveness of discursive status work.

Research Methods

The empirical basis of this study consists of the public texts that restaurant actors produced at the organizational level regarding the elimination of tipping—restaurants' or their spokespersons' statements that were published by themselves (e.g., on website or menu pages) and by popular media. This type of data (versus interviews or observations) is appropriate because my theoretical

focus is on the role of status in actors' public-facing narratives, not their internal dynamics. I examined actors that tried to eliminate tipping during the period of 2005 to 2016. I did not include no-tipping restaurants before 2005 (since the 1980s) because they were rare instances far from the current trend. The year 2005 was chosen as the starting point of investigation because the no-tipping actor that year attracted much media attention and was frequently referenced later on. The later years were when no-tipping became widely discussed and achieved some momentum.

Data sources

I collected data from multiple sources, as shown in Table 1. First, to better understand the historical, legislative, and cultural contexts that the phenomenon was situated in, I started by exploring broadly in relevant legislations, books, media articles, research reports, and industry conferences to learn about tipping, tip credit, minimum wage, and restaurant work.

Second, to identify the no-tipping restaurants, I conducted searches in major national and local media (e.g., *The New York Times, The Chicago Tribune)* as well as food-themed media (e.g., Eater.com, GrubStreet.com), using combinations of keywords such as "restaurant," "eliminate/no tipping," "service fee," "hospitality charge," and "gratuity free." This was supplemented by several more targeted approaches: I searched for no-tipping restaurants in states outside of heavily-reported and food-centric areas (by searching specific state names with the keywords); as the majority of no-tipping restaurants are in the upscale sector, I checked the websites of restaurants on the recommendation lists from well-established review guides *Zagat* and the *Michelin Guide*[3]; I checked with industry insiders through informal conversations during conferences; I also contacted restaurants directly to verify when information online was unclear. I identified a total of 121 full-service restaurant actors between 2005 and 2016 that tried to eliminate tipping. If an actor has multiple locations (identical or different concepts) that eliminated tipping, it is counted once because the narrative was issued by the same actor and/or shared across locations. As the restaurant industry is volatile with a high failure rate, and some small restaurants are difficult to trace (e.g., not featured in media, no website, or no indication on the website), it is possible that some no-tipping restaurants were not identified. However, since my focus is on public narratives, not the amount or internal dynamics of all no-tipping restaurants, this sample is rather representative for answering the research question.

Third, to collect restaurant actors' public narratives, I gathered each actor's public texts related to no-tipping that were published by itself (e.g., website introductions, menus, statements, or letters to customers) and by popular media (e.g., media quotes and interviews with the restaurateur or spokesperson). I also recorded the year that the texts were published. For a better understanding of these no-tipping restaurant actors' narratives and status positions, I collected information about their service type, size, price range, location, and owner background, which is summarized in Table 2.

Data analysis

Narratives usually contain a beginning, a middle, and an end (Polkinghorne, 1988), take a "story format" (Dailey & Browning, 2013, p. 23) to imply desired values and actions (Browning & Morris, 2012; Swap, Leonard, Shields, & Abrams, 2001), and have the potential to "structure perceptual experience" (Bruner, 2004, p. 694). Benford (2002, p. 54) distinguished between two narrative types: participant narratives (what individual actors tell about their or others' movement-related experiences) and movement narratives (collectively constructed by actors "about the movement and the domains of the world the movement seeks to change"); in particular, movement narratives

Table 1. Overview of data sources.

Sources for understanding the historical, legislative, and cultural contexts of the no-tipping phenomenon and for situating emergent findings	
Legislations	-The Fair Labor Standard Act of 1938, as amended (relevant sections on minimum wage, tip credit, and tipped employees) -The Williams v. Jacksonville Terminal Co. 1942 case -The Cumbie v. Woody Wo, Inc. 2010 case -State minimum wage regulations -The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (relevant section on tipped employees)
Books and media articles	-Segrave, K. (1998). *Tipping: An American social history of gratuities*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland -Fullen, S. L. (2005). *The complete guide to tips and gratuities*. Ocala, FL: Atlantic Publishing Group -French, C., & Butler, R. (2011). *Tips on tipping: A global guide to gratuity etiquette*. Bradt Travel Guides -Media articles on tipping, the elimination of tipping, and minimum wage
Research reports	-Research reports from the "Tipping Bibliography" compiled by Professor Michael Lynn at Cornell School of Hotel Administration https://static.secure.website/wscfus/5261551/7127703/tip-bibliography.pdf
Industry conferences	Notes from conference sessions and informal conversations with industry insiders -Union Square Hospitality Group's Hospitality Included Guest Town Hall, New York City, USA, 2015 -The Tipping Conference, New York City, USA, 2016 -6th MAD Symposium "Mind the Gap", Copenhagen, Denmark, 2018 (food industry symposium with themes on community, equality, restaurant work, and social change)
Sources for identifying no-tipping restaurant actors	
	-Searched in popular and food-themed media -Searched in Google.com for no-tipping restaurants outside of heavily-reported states -Checked through the websites of restaurants on Zagat and the Michelin Guide's recommendation lists -Checked with industry insiders during informal conversations at conferences -Contacted restaurants to verify when information online was not clear
Sources for collecting the public change narratives of no-tipping restaurant actors	
Restaurants' texts published by themselves	-320 webpage captures from restaurant websites, restaurants' or restaurateurs' blogs, letters to customers, pictures of menus and bills, and Twitter or Facebook statements
Restaurants' texts published in popular media	-237 articles that contain restaurants' statements and/or quotes (non-repetitive), from major national (e.g., *The New York Times, The Wall Street Journal*), local (e.g., *The Seattle Times*), and food-themed media (e.g., Eater.com, Grubstreet.com)
Year of texts	Most texts specified their publication dates. For those that did not, I used: -The Wayback Machine (an initiative of the Internet Archive that provides webpage captures at different points in time) -Google.com's "inurl:" function (shows the publication date of webpages)
Sources for examining the background information of no-tipping restaurant actors	
	-Searched in restaurants' websites, popular and food-themed media, state business databases, and LinkedIn.com (a professional networking website) to identify restaurants' owners and check owners' professional background -Reviewed restaurant information in *Zagat* and the *Michelin Guide* -Searched in Yelp.com (a crowd-sourced business review website) for price ranges

Table 2. Summary information of restaurant actors that tried to eliminate tipping (2005–2016).

Type	Each of the 121 actors owns at least one full-service establishment (i.e., customers place orders and are served at the table, and pay afterward) The sample does not include actors with only: -Limited-service establishments (i.e., customers order and pay at the counter) because tipping is not customarily expected in such places -Drinking establishments (i.e., the focus is on alcoholic beverages, with no or limited food options)
Size	87 actors (71.9%) are single-location or have only one location that eliminated tipping 3 actors (2.5%) have one concept in multiple locations that eliminated tipping: Joe's Crab Shack (tested no-tipping in 18 of its then 130 locations), Ootoya (all 3 locations), and Lanesplitter Pizza (all 3 locations) 31 actors (25.6%) have two or more different concepts that eliminated tipping (e.g., Sushi Nozawa, Union Square Hospitality Group)
Location	Joe's Crab Shack tested no-tipping nationally; Sushi Nozawa has no-tipping locations in both NY and CA. 33 actors' no-tipping locations are in CA (27.3%), 32 in NY (26.4%), 9 in WA (7.4%), 7 in IL (5.8%), 6 in MN (5.0%), 5 in OR (4.1%), and the rest 27 are in Washington, DC or one of 16 other states
Price range	The number and percentage of actors that are or have their most expensive concept in the following price ranges (per person, based on Yelp.com): $ $10 and below 1 actor (0.8%)* $$ $11 to $30 55 actors (45.5%) $$$ $31 to $60 31 actors (25.6%) $$$$ $61 and above 34 actors (28.1%) *Only Haymarket Café is in the "$10 and below" range, but six months after it eliminated tipping, it ended full-service and switched to limited-service
Owner background	Based on information from restaurant websites, media articles, state business databases, and LinkedIn.com: 89 of the 121 actors (73.6%) have a (co)owner who is the chef and/or has prior chef/cook experience 32 actors (26.4%) do not fit the above criteria. Among them, two are owned by part of their workers, one is a community-owned cooperative, and two are owned by publicly traded companies Public information about whether a (co)owner has FoH experience is limited, partly because many do not mention their past FoH experience

contain at least two sets of middles and endings, one about the problematic status quo, and an alternative that leads to a more desirable ending.

Different from customary content analysis, narrative inquiries focus on texts that contain "stories," or an inner logic that is worth being examined (Riessman, 2002). As the public-facing texts of no-tipping restaurant actors usually already contain well-crafted and coherent stories, my role was to discern the broader patterns within them (what Polkinghorne termed as "analysis of narratives," 1995), not to configure fragmented elements into a story ("narrative analysis"). I used insights from methodological discussions regarding narratives (Boje, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1995), studies that involve narrative data (e.g., Hardy & Maguire, 2010; Martens, Jennings, & Jennings, 2007), and exemplary "analysis of narratives" studies (e.g., Ruth & Oberg, 1992) to guide my analysis, which unfolded in three stages. First, I examined the public texts of each actor to discern the various elements that comprise no-tipping stories, such as key actors, problems of the tipping system, proposed actions, invoked values, and desired outcomes. I coded these emerging stories

with descriptive categories, and then gradually moved toward more abstract and high-level categories. In this iterative process, four main narrative types emerged, which I label as: N1, improve compensation for BoH; N2, make service work more professional; N3, adhere to cultural traditions; and N4, remove a discriminatory practice.

To better understand these narrative types, I constructed a timeline in Figure 1 to track the key events in the no-tipping phenomenon, and listed the number of restaurant actors that used each narrative type by year in Table 3. I conducted a series of Fisher's Exact Tests to check if the proportions of actors who used a particular narrative type are significantly different across years, between actors of different price ranges, between actors with only one no-tipping location and actors with more than one no-tipping locations, and between actors whose (co)owner has chef/cook experience and actors whose co(owner) does not have chef/cook experience. The differences are not significant at the $p < 0.05$ level.

In the second stage of analysis, I re-examined the texts in each narrative type to reveal the status mechanisms that underlie the four narrative types. I used foundational work on status (e.g., Ridgeway & Walker, 1995; Weber, 1978) and studies that analyzed status mechanisms through texts (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2018; Johnston & Baumann, 2007) to guide my analysis. I first identified the basic elements related to status hierarchies and class relations: 1, all the actors, social groups, or categories that were mentioned; 2, whether they were mentioned on their own or in relation to others; 3, status cues that indicate what kind of status hierarchies were constructed between them (e.g., mentions of education, social esteem, professionalism, or words such as "better" and "lead"); 4, mentions of class relations between social groups. I then analyzed actors' attitude toward the status hierarchy (reinforcing or problematizing), and how this attitude was conveyed (subtle or explicit). I also considered factors outside of the texts, such as cuisine type, context (e.g., restaurant website or popular media), and the amount of texts the actors produced. I then synthesized the above information and also drew from the status literature to theorize the status mechanisms that underlie narratives.

In the third stage, I zoomed out of the socially-constructed realities portrayed in the narratives to situate them back in the broader historical and industry contexts, paying attention to the role of media in this process and implications for the restaurant industry. Aware of the socially-constructed nature of status, I reflected on my assumptions and how I might have engaged in "status work" myself when analyzing and presenting data, and remained mindful to remedy these effects. Attending industry conferences for seminars and conversations with industry insiders enabled me to verify emergent findings. While the above three stages are presented linearly, the analysis progressed rather iteratively: I went back and forth at various points between the narrative data, the literature, and conversations with industry insiders and other scholars to examine my interpretations.

Findings

My analysis reveals four main narratives types from actors' public texts regarding the move to no-tipping: N1, improve compensation for BoH (57.9% of the actors used this); N2, make service work more professional (44.6%); N3, adhere to cultural traditions (9.1%); and N4, remove a discriminatory practice (9.9%); 36.4% of the actors utilized more than one narrative type. These narratives resemble "movement narratives" (Benford, 2002) that contrasted the status quo (tipping) with the proposed alternative action (no-tipping) to mobilize change. As more actors joined the no-tipping camp and as legislations became more constraining in later years, the narratives showed more "mobilizing" characteristics, referencing leaders in this movement and talking about the industry as a whole. A status-focused examination brings to light several status mechanisms that underlie these narratives, which are illustrated in Figure 2. In the following, I first introduce each

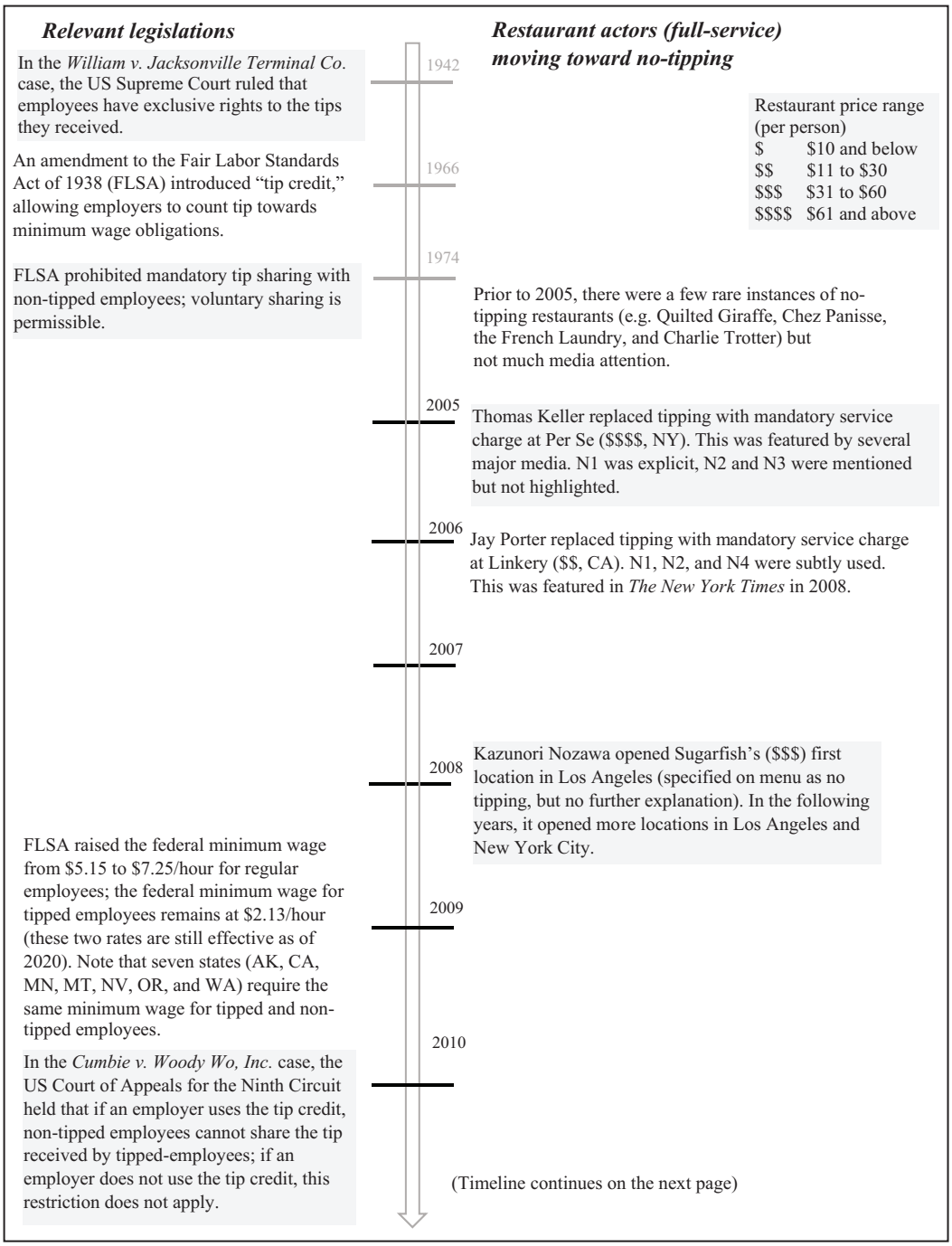

Figure 1. *(continued)*

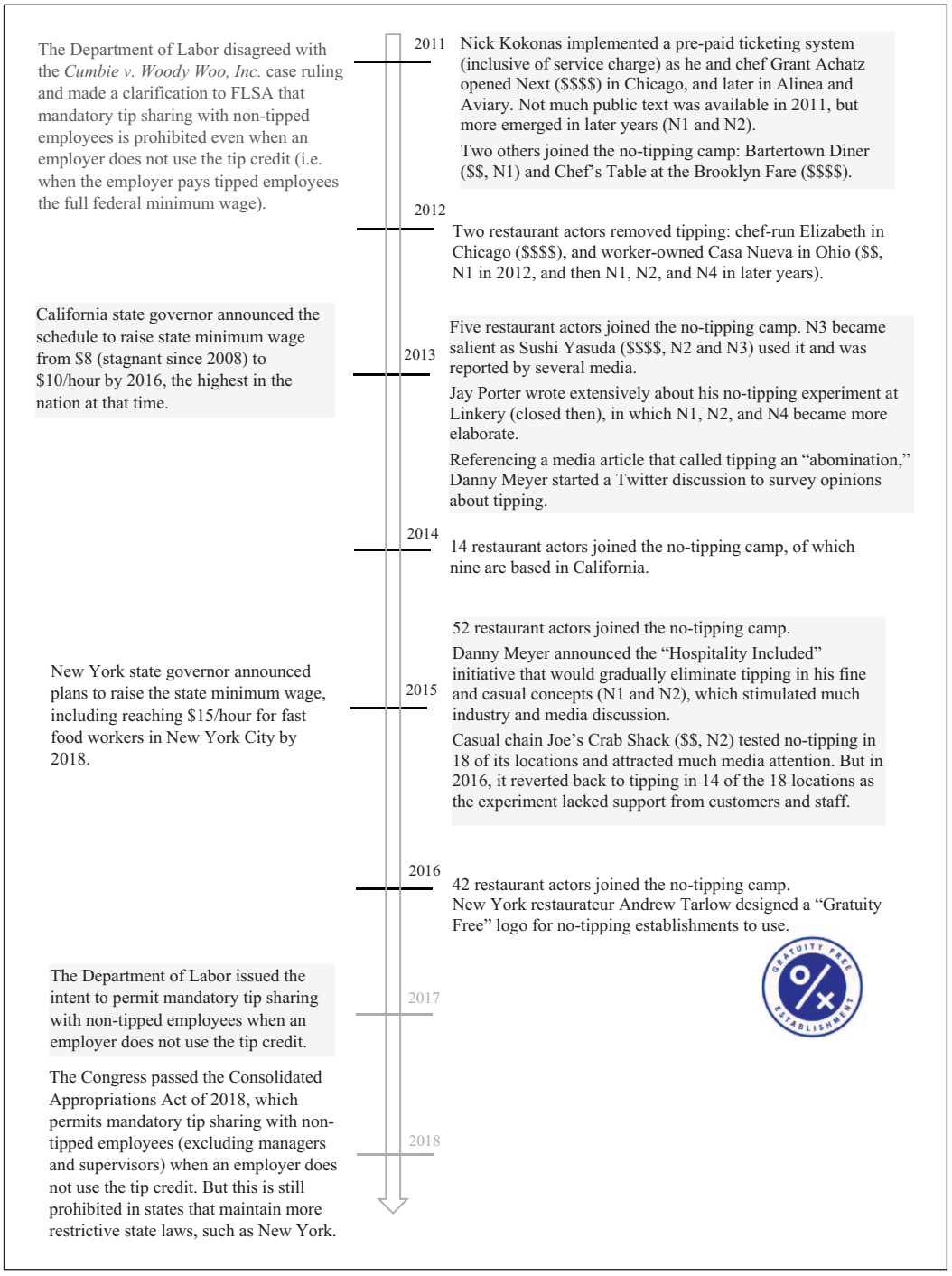

Figure 1. Timeline of key events related to the elimination of tipping.

Table 3. The use of each narrative type by year.

	Number of actors that used each narrative type				Number of actors that joined the no-tipping camp each year
	N1: Improve compensation for BoH	N2: Make service work more professional	N3: Adhere to cultural traditions	N4: Remove a discriminatory practice	
2005	1	1	1	0	1
2006	1	1	0	1	1
2007	0	0	0	0	0
2008	0	0	0	0	1
2009	0	0	0	0	0
2010	0	0	0	0	0
2011	1	0	0	0	3
2012	1	0	0	0	2
2013	2	2	1	0	5
2014	8*	5*	3	1	14
2015	32	24	2	7	52
2016	24	21*	4	3*	42
Total	70	54	11	12	121
Percentage	57.9%	44.6%	9.1%	9.9%	

*Denotes a year that includes one actor who eliminated tipping in a prior year but did not use the narrative until that marked year.
Actors' use of each narrative type is counted once in the first year that they used a certain narrative type. A few high-profile actors (e.g., Linkery, Union Square Hospitality Group) used the same narrative type multiple times in different years.

narrative type with exemplary texts from my data, and then elaborate the underlying status mechanisms. Table 4 in the Appendix provides additional exemplary texts that showcase the narrative types and indications of movement mobilization.

N1: Improve compensation for BoH

The most prevalent narrative type, N1, focuses on improving compensation for BoH: under the tipping model, BoH's compensation is limited, and restaurants have a hard time attracting kitchen talents; by replacing tipping with a higher menu price or service fee, owners can redistribute part of this fee to BoH for them to have a higher income. N1 was used by both fine and casual restaurants and appeared on restaurant websites and in media. N1 was already salient in 2005, when the high-profile fine-dining chef and restaurateur Thomas Keller implemented service charge in his New York restaurant Per Se and addressed the industry's problematic pay gap:

> Historically in restaurants, the service staff is awarded significantly higher wages than cooks and other staff who prepare the food on which a restaurant's reputation is based. The gap in pay is so great that it is becoming increasingly difficult for young cooks to pursue their passion at the rate of pay restaurants are able to afford. (media quote, $$$$: $61 and above per person)

This motivation remained strong over the years in the narratives. However, the narratives differed in whether and the extent to which they explicitly emphasized the contribution of BoH and the

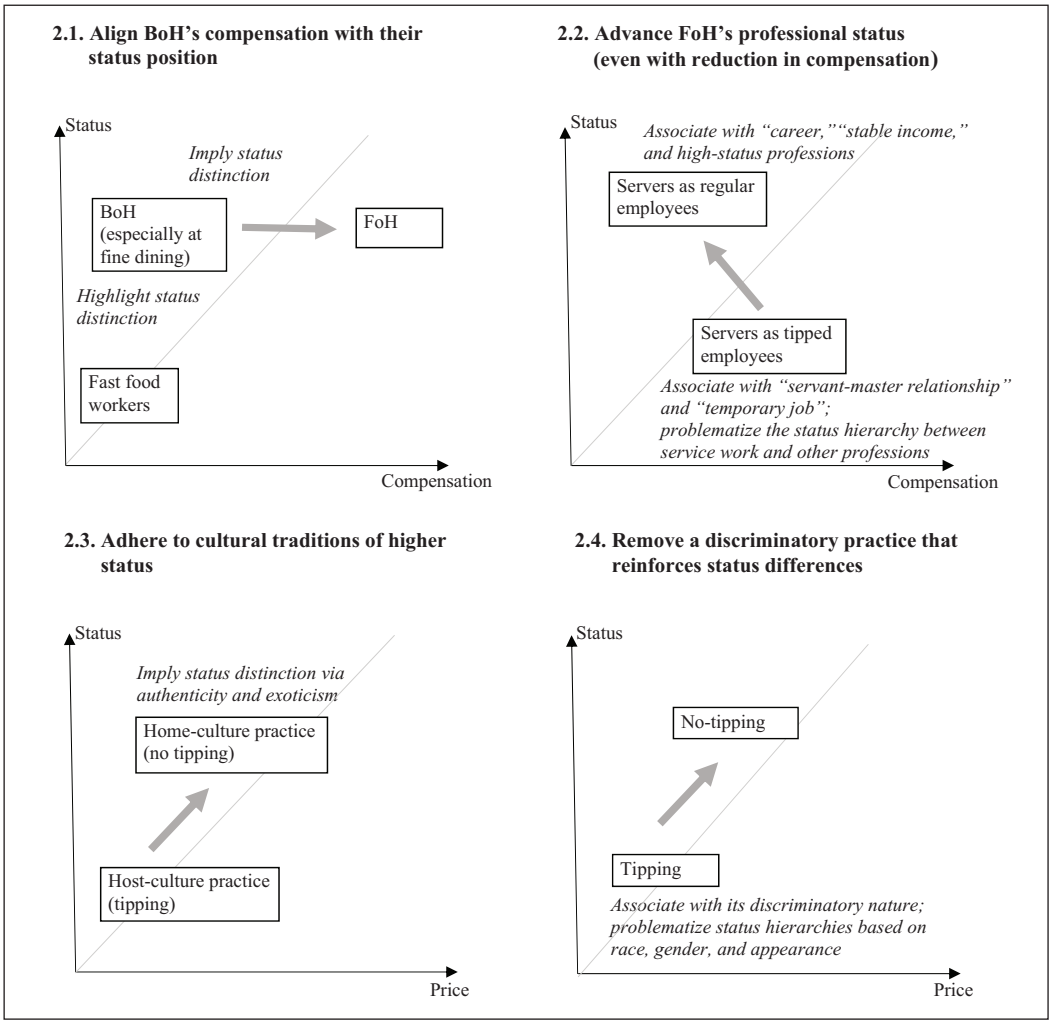

Figure 2. Status mechanisms in four no-tipping narrative types.
The positioning on the compensation or price dimension may differ in specific scenarios. In some rare scenarios, for example, a restaurant owner may guarantee FoH a high salary that will be the same as their previous total income with tips (though this is very difficult to achieve); a customer may be quite generous in tipping (e.g., 30%) so that the total price for the meal is actually lower with the no-tipping model (e.g., 15% service charge).

income disparity between FoH and BoH. For example, Jay Porter, the owner of a casual California restaurant Linkery ($$: between $11 to $30 per person), eliminated tipping in 2006 and wrote in the restaurant blog that "Our service revenue, like our profits, is distributed among everyone who works here (which is not allowed with tips)." It only hinted that BoH could now share the service revenue, but did not emphasize BoH's contribution or the income disparity. Later on, Porter's tone became more explicit:

> From the perspective of the business, the cook and dishwasher are just as important to the guests' experience as the server is. In fact, they may be even more important, particularly if your restaurant's reputation is based on its food. But, now your cooks are making less than 1/3 of what the servers are making. The cooks'

> wage is so low that talented cooks won't be able to live on it, and they will probably leave the industry. (2013, restaurateur blog)

As another example, the following three actors' quotes varied from being relatively subtle, to explicitly addressing the income problem head-on, and extending beyond the restaurant industry:

> Rony (executive chef) and I feel strongly about the fact that we have a really good group of people working with us and we want to do whatever we can to keep them. (2015, Atera, media quote, $$$$)

> I mean, everyone deserves to make a lot of money, and my front of the house is very important to me, and they all do a great job. But especially in a fine-dining restaurant like Annisa, (servers) are making three and a half to sometimes five times as much as the back of the house. (2016, Annisa, media quote, $$$$)

> Income inequality is a huge problem and every industry is going to have to start re-examining how it pays everyone, from its CEOs to its janitors. Currently, restaurants are forced to follow a feudal practice that encourages an unequal distribution of wages. (2014, Dirt Candy, media column, $$$: $31 to $60 per person)

Comparisons were made not just between BoH and FoH. In 2015, as New York state proposed to raise minimum wage for fast-food workers to 15 dollars by 2018, Danny Meyer, the high-profile NYC restaurateur who announced the plan to gradually eliminate tipping in all his fine and casual dining concepts, made explicit comparisons between fine-dining chefs/cooks and fast-food workers:

> . . .this means that if non-fast-food operators don't raise their employees' wages, they'll face the possibility of an exodus of staff to the greener pastures of McDonald's and Burger King. . . fine dining has an obligation to lead fast food in everything, whether it's how we source ingredients, how we hire, how we train, how we design, how we interact with our communities—we can't have a situation where we are asking someone to pay $40,000 to go to the Culinary Institute of America to then work for $12.50 per hour when they could work in fast food for $15. (2015, media quote)

Status mechanisms at play: Align BoH's compensation with their status position; imply or highlight status distinction (illustrated in graph 2.1 of Figure 2).

In both of the above two comparisons, actors emphasized chefs/cooks as playing a vital role in creating the dining experience and contrasted it with the low compensation chefs/cooks received relative to other social groups, providing motivations to align chefs'/cooks' compensation with their status position. But there are clear differences in how the status hierarchies were utilized. The comparison between BoH and FoH could be used by both fine-dining and casual-dining actors and could appear in any context (e.g., media report, restaurant website). While chefs/cooks are generally considered as having higher occupational status than servers (Fine, 1996), many actors avoided drawing explicit distinctions about the nature of work and accentuating the status difference between these two occupations. They tended to imply the merits of chefs/cooks without downplaying servers, or emphasize the team as a whole and how the two groups are both integral to the restaurant, invoking values such as teamwork and equality to motivate changes in existing class relations.

In contrast, the comparison between fine-dining chefs/cooks and fast-food workers was made by a high-status actor in media interviews. He was explicit in highlighting the status distinction between the types of organizations that these two groups work for (e.g., "fine-dining has an

obligation to lead fast-food in everything"). By juxtaposing chefs/cooks' education and training with the rising minimum wage for fast-food workers, the mismatch between status positions and compensation was made more salient. While this comparison was made by several other fine-dining restaurateurs at industry conferences, it was rarely mentioned in media interviews or on restaurant websites. A possible explanation is that since it compared two categories with very different price ranges and clientele, it could come off as divisive and elitist.

N2: Make service work more professional

N2 shifts emphasis from BoH to FoH: under the tipping model, servers receive a low base pay from employers, and their total income is unstable and heavily reliant upon customers, which carries the unprofessional implication that they would not work as hard had there been no tip; in comparison, switching to no-tipping can make service work more professional—servers will be evaluated and compensated by employers just like regular employees, receive a stable living wage plus benefits, and can treat this more like a career than a temporary job for cash. The elimination of tipping, then, was proposed as a cultural change that marked "the beginning of the professionalization of the industry" (2014, Aster, media quote, $$$$). N2 was used by both fine and casual restaurants and appeared on restaurant websites and in media.

Professionalization was implied in the early narratives. In 2005, Per Se's spokesperson mentioned in a media report that a stable salary plus benefits would create a more professional environment and increase motivation. In 2006, Linkery's blog stated that "We no longer work to get tips from our guests, we instead work to provide both excellent food and professional service, because that is our business." These early N2s implied to customers that when the tip-incentive is removed, service would still be good or even "more professional."

In later years, more actors began to directly question the negative implications of tipping and highlight the professional implications of no-tipping. Some discussed the restaurant service occupation in a more general sense (than only focusing on their own restaurants). For example, Camino's owner Allison Hopelain stated that:

> In this day and age, and in this area, it's a little different, but I think there's still that holdover of waiters being seen as servants. Now this can shift that a little bit. (2014, media quote, $$$)

Restaurateur Nick Kokonas referenced other professions when talking about the implications of no tipping:

> What we'd really love to be able to do is treat employees as professionals, no different than lawyers or doctors or accountants, and pay them an annualized salary and a bonus, and give them markers and performance reviews and goals, and all of those things that professionals get in other fields. (2014, media quote, $$$$)

> Does a white-collar professional work less hard at work because they do not receive tips? It's about treating restaurant service as a profession. (2015, media quote, $$$$)

This idea of "professional" grew more salient via restaurateur Danny Meyer, well-respected for his expertise in hospitality. In 2005, he alluded to the servant–master implication of tipping (but did not mention "professional" specifically) when *The New York Times* asked for his view on Per Se's switch to no-tipping. Ten years later, when he finally moved toward no-tipping, his announcement placed "professionally" saliently alongside "equitably," "financially," and "competitively," and

stated that the new model provides "clear paths for professional advancements." He also more explicitly addressed this in multiple media interviews:

> It (tipping) can be a good thing for servers who want to work on commission. It's a bad thing for servers who want to make a profession out of it. (2015)

> I never liked the master/servant relationship that tipping implies. (2016)

> I don't know too many tipped professions where, as a parent, I would say, "I really want my child to go into that profession." It just feels unprofessional. It's sad. It's not that I want my kids to be doctors and lawyers—we don't have any in our family—but would you tip your doctor? Would you tip your lawyer? Would you tip your architect? Would you tip the airline pilot? Implicit in the very custom of tipping is that the person on the receiving end would not have otherwise done as well for you, had you not tipped. It's just. . .it's icky. (2016)

While the rapid rise of the minimum wage (especially for tipped employees) was considered by media and industry experts as the main driver of this no-tipping phenomenon (e.g., Lynn, 2016), it was rarely directly referenced on restaurants' websites as playing a major role in their decision toward no-tipping. It was mentioned in some media interviews and conference discussions, usually in response to questions. When mentioned, the rising minimum wage was framed as a contextual background, often subsumed under the broader goal to pay servers a stable living wage and make their work more professional.

Status mechanisms at play: Advance the professional status of BoH (even with potential reduction in compensation); associate with high-status implications or disassociate with low-status implications; problematize the status hierarchy between service work and other professions (illustrated in graph 2.2 of Figure 2).

In N2, actors emphasized the professional status that the service occupation would gain by getting rid of tipping and downplayed the potential reduction in income. They utilized the power of association from "status contagion" (e.g., Podolny & Phillips, 1996; Wry, Lounsbury, & Greenwood, 2011), which could be drawn at both directions—negative associations with the old practice of tipping or positive associations with no-tipping. For example, some made explicit the negative status connotation of tipping (e.g., "servant–master relationship")—an unequal and feudal relationship signaling class division. Some described no-tipping with characteristics of high-status professions (e.g., "annualized salary and a bonus," "performance reviews"), or simply juxtaposed the service occupation with high-status professions to expose the oddity and low-status implications of tipping. These associations problematized some existing status hierarchies (between customers and servers, and between service work and other occupations), providing motivations to advance on the status hierarchy by disassociating with a low-status practice (even if this means a reduction in income for FoH).

N3: Adhere to cultural traditions

N3 references no-tipping as the custom and tradition back in the cuisine's home country, and hence the actor wants to follow this custom (versus the American custom). It appeared on restaurant websites and in media, and was often used in combination with N1 and N2. The contrast between the American practice and the non-American practice was hinted at early in 2005—French

restaurant Per Se's director of operations explained in a media report that "It's the gratuities or, as in Europe, the service charges, that truly support the staff." But this "European style" was only mentioned in passing and not highlighted.

In 2013, N3 became salient when Japanese restaurant Sushi Yasuda ($$$) highlighted no-tipping as the cultural tradition in their home country and was reported by several media:

> The reason we did it that way was because in Japan, that's how it's done. (media quote)

> Following the custom in Japan, Sushi Yasuda's service staff are fully compensated by their salary, therefore gratuities are not accepted. (menu and receipt)

This narrative was used mostly by restaurant actors of Asian origins, and was used by both fine-dining and casual ones. For example:

> Gratuities are not expected or accepted at Masa. Reflecting the Japanese custom, exceptional hospitality is an integral part of the Masa dining experience and is provided to every guest. (2016, Masa, website, $$$$)

> I came from Japan, and I have some ideas and I have some points of view. Usually we don't take tips in Japan. (2014, Riki, media quote, $$)

Status mechanisms at play: Adhere to cultural traditions of higher status; imply status distinction through cultural authenticity and exoticism (illustrated in graph 2.3 of Figure 2).

In N3, actors utilized status in quite subtle ways. First, the narratives were usually very brief, focused on the restaurants' home-culture traditions, and did not mention the host-culture practice to make explicit comparisons. Yet by claiming to follow the home-culture tradition, the status hierarchy between home-culture and host-culture practices was implied. Second, adhering to the home-culture practice invoked the value of maintaining cultural authenticity, and the Asian or European origin of this practice might also lend an exotic appeal that would motivate American customers to support no-tipping. Cultural authenticity and exoticism are two dimensions that food critics often use for valorizing food and subtly showcasing taste and status distinction (Johnston & Baumann, 2007).

As N3 relies on actors' cultural origins, restaurants serving American food can reference other countries' practices to normalize no-tipping, but won't be able to invoke the value of cultural authenticity; European-origin restaurants have less ground to use this narrative than Asian-origin restaurants, as while nowadays restaurants in most European countries use the no-tipping model, tipping was the tradition there before it was eliminated (Jayaraman, 2015). But even if the restaurant does come from a no-tipping culture, it may not necessarily use N3—for example, not many Asian restaurants other than Japanese ones used this. This might be related to the status positions that actors command in the US restaurant field: there are way more Japanese restaurants in the upscale sector and holding Michelin stars than restaurants of other Asian origins. The higher status of Japanese restaurants might contribute to them being more ready to or capable of deploying N3 than other Asian restaurants.

Lastly, while N3 may give the impression that these actors have always firmly insisted on their cultural tradition, this is not always the case—several actors did not start with the no-tipping model (e.g., Yasuda opened in 2000 and eliminated tipping in 2013). This suggests that while cultural tradition could be an important factor that drove actors to eliminate tipping, it could also be a strategic and convenient resource for mobilizing support.

N4: Remove a discriminatory practice

N4 also exposes the inequality underlying tipping, not in the income disparity between FoH and BoH, but in how servers treat customers and how customers tip servers: customers tend to give smaller tips to servers of certain social categories than others, and the same tendency exists in the quality of service that servers provide customers. Therefore, tipping is far from an effective way for consumers to motivate servers and reward good service, but a practice that often reflects, accentuates, and perpetuates the racial, gender, or age inequalities in the broader society, and hence should be eliminated.

This narrative, utilized by both fine and casual dining restaurants, was less salient than other narrative types as it mostly stayed in the background—appearing in media interviews and blogs but rarely at prominent customer-facing places such as menus or websites' main pages. N4 wasn't salient in early years. In 2006, Linkery's owner Jay Porter referenced a research finding in his restaurant blog that "female servers drawing smiley faces on the check has been shown to increase tips by 18%," suggesting the loose connection between the amount of tip and the quality of service. Although he touched on gender's role in affecting tip, he did not delve further into these dynamics.

In 2013, Porter more explicitly addressed the often discriminatory nature of tipping in his widely-read column:

> It also creates an environment in which people of color, young people, old people, women, and foreigners tend to get worse service than white males. In a tip-based system, nonwhite servers make less than their white peers for equal work.

Several other restaurants also directly and critically addressed this issue in later years. For example:

> tip based on factors of appearance much more so than service quality creating a system rife with injustice and discrimination. (2015, Preservery, restaurant blog, $$)

> The whole act of tipping is something we feel from a basic level is, to some degree, racist, chauvinistic. (2016, Bar Noroeste, media quote, $$)

Status mechanisms at play: Remove a discriminatory practice that reinforces status differences; problematize status hierarchies based on diffuse status characteristics (illustrated in graph 2.4 of Figure 2).

The above-mentioned "diffuse status characteristics" (Berger, Cohen, & Zelditch, 1972; Berger & Fişek, 2006) such as gender, race, ethnicity, and age have little to do with merit or competence. Their effect on the amount of tip or the quality of service calls into question the economic rationale of tipping as an effective motivation and timely reward for good service. By problematizing these existing status hierarchies and the discriminations they engender, N4 drew a moral boundary (Lamont & Molnár, 2002) between people who support and who resist the elimination of tipping, providing motivation to equalize status positions (e.g., between people of different races or gender) by removing a practice that reinforces those status differences.

The discriminatory nature of tipping is discussed by many research studies (e.g., Lynn, 2006; Lynn, Pugh, & Williams, 2012; Wang, 2014) and media reports (e.g., Ferdman, 2016; Wells, 2013). In comparison, among restaurant actors, N4 didn't become salient until later, was used by fewer actors than N1 and N2, was often placed after N1 and N2, and appeared more in media interviews

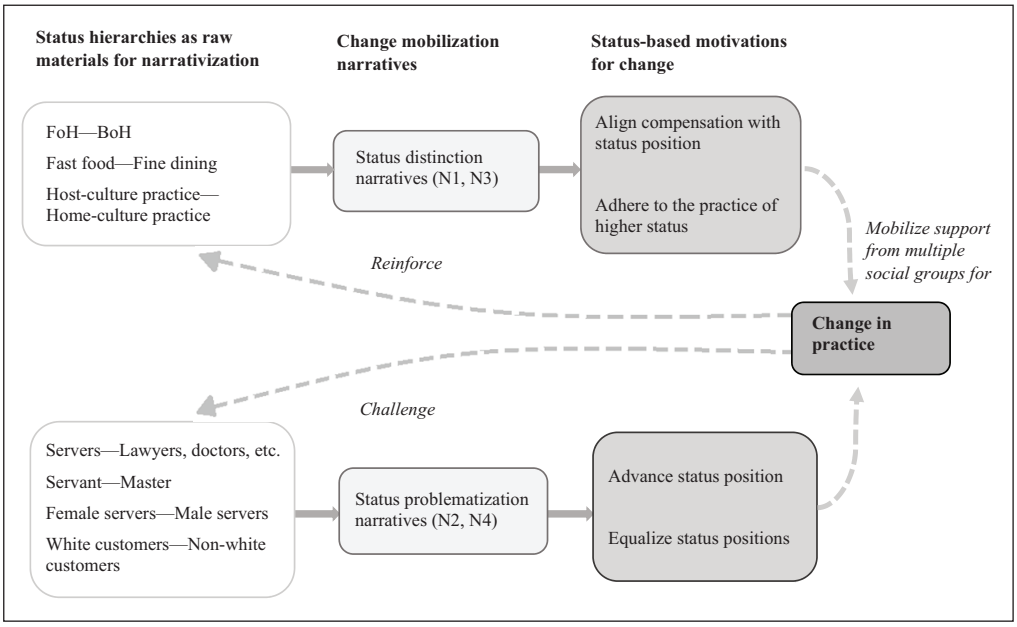

Figure 3. Framework of discursive status work in change mobilization.

than in restaurant menus or websites' main pages. One explanation could be that restaurants had their clientele in mind and might consider N4 potentially offensive to patrons, and hence did not put N4 front and center in prominent places (e.g., the aforementioned restaurant Preservery placed N1 on its website's main page, and only used N4 in its blog post, which was less visible).

Discussion

This study reveals the intricate status mechanisms that underlie actors' public narratives to mobilize change, through which no-tipping is positioned as a superior practice that supports compensation fairness, professionalization, cultural authenticity, and equality. Figure 3 illustrates a framework of such discursive status work. A variety of status hierarchies, not limited to the ones that actors themselves are situated in, serve as raw materials for narrativization. Drawing on these materials, actors' status distinction narratives (N1 and N3) use the high status of a social group or the new practice on certain status hierarchies to justify the change; status problematization narratives (N2 and N4) argue that the existing practice reproduces problematic status hierarchies and hence needs to be eliminated. These narratives provide powerful status-based motivations (e.g., to align compensation with status position, to advance status position) that can potentially mobilize the public to support the new practice. Such narratives may not only mobilize specific social groups, but also a much broader audience (e.g., N1 may mobilize not only BoH, but also anyone who respects and wants to support chefs). Furthermore, this framework points to a recursive relationship between status and narrative: status hierarchies enable actors to construct narratives for mobilizing change; reversely, as the dotted feedback arrows suggest, the change in practice may reinforce the status hierarchies in status distinction narratives, and challenge the status hierarchies in status problematization narratives (e.g., by altering FoH's position on the professional status hierarchy, or by removing the ground that reproduces the status hierarchy between customers of different races).

These narratives emerged and evolved in the backdrop of a long-standing legislation that prohibited mandatory tip-sharing with non-tipped employees and the rapid increase of minimum wage in recent years. While many social movement and co-optation studies (e.g., Dubuisson-Quellier, 2013; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) discuss how businesses *react* to changes initiated by activists and often struggle between economic interests and social responsibilities, this study presents a reverse case: many actors that deployed these narratives were not quietly going no-tipping to circumvent legislative constraints, but were proactively using status-laden discursive strategies to justify an alternative model of organizing as the ideal and future for the industry. Their narratives coalesced to build a sense of community and collective action in a traditionally competitive industry. Even for some actors that later switched back to tipping, they still expressed continued support for the change (e.g., Fedora's owner Gabe Stulman stated that *"it [no-tipping] has the potential to change hospitality for the better. . .We hope it's the future for more restaurants, including our own."* 2016, media statement). An important legislative change that took place after these narratives was that the US Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, which no longer prohibits mandatory tip-sharing with non-tipped employees (excluding managers and supervisors) when the employer does not use the tip credit (but this is still prohibited in states that maintain more restrictive state laws, such as New York). This is a drastic departure from the Fair Labor Standards Act's long-standing position. For restaurant actors in states that comply with the federal law, this shift could be viewed as a substantive victory for BoH; at the same time, it also dissolved the ground on which the primary no-tipping narrative (N1) was based and might discourage these actors from adopting or staying with the no-tipping model.

Similar to what existing studies suggest about media's power in shaping public perception (e.g., Deephouse, 2000; Perrault & Clark 2016), media played an important role in propelling these no-tipping narratives. As media often featured no-tipping restaurants and their narratives in a timely and elaborate fashion, and many of the reports (e.g., Ferdman, 2016; Wells, 2013) strongly supported no-tipping, it helped to garner attention from a much larger audience, give credit and further explanation to actors' claims, facilitate a sense of collective action, provide a more critical repertoire of discursive strategies, and connect to broader societal values. Through media, these narratives likely made the limitations of legislations more widely known, and brought the discussion of professionalization into the spotlight for the traditionally overlooked restaurant service occupation. On the other hand, media might have also weakened restaurants' narratives: as media frequently introduced the rising minimum wage as background information, it might lead readers to discount restaurants' narratives and consider no-tipping as simply a convenient solution driven by financial interests.

This study offers several implications for existing research on status, narrative, change, and legitimation. First, drawing on the distinction Weber ([1920] 2009) made about status and class, this study enriches the change and narrative literature that focuses primarily on the cultural, symbolic or ideological aspects of change (e.g., Suddaby & Greenwood, 2005; Washington, 2004), as well as the substantive body of work on tipping that focuses on the economic interactions between servers and customers (e.g., Lynn, 2018; Lynn & Brewster, 2015; Rogelberg, Ployhat, Balzer, & Yonker, 1999). The distinction between status and class provides novel insights to existing work (e.g., Sonenshein, 2010) that drew from Lewin's (1951) change model of "unfreeze-change-refreeze": the actors attempted to change existing class relations (e.g., BoH cannot share the tips received by FoH; FoH's compensation are subject to the whim of customers; owners do not have full control in compensating their employees); to facilitate this change in class relations, actors tried to "unfreeze" some status hierarchies (e.g., service work has lower status than some other occupations; male and female servers receive differential treatments), or actually "freeze" some other status hierarchies (e.g., chefs have higher status than fast-food

workers; a culturally authentic practice is more celebrated than a generic practice). This distinction between status and class helps to delineate what exactly actors "unfreeze" or "freeze" to facilitate change, and that the "freezing" of certain status hierarchies could potentially motivate the "unfreezing" of class relations. Furthermore, mapping the status positions and economic conditions (as shown in Figure 2) helps to reveal the different natures of the narrative types: N1, N3, and N4 all proposed directions in which higher status corresponds to higher economic condition (as reflected in compensation or menu price); in contrast, N2 suggested a different direction—to strive for higher status even with a potential reduction in income. For actors that utilized both N1 and N2, this means they proposed different directions for different social groups. Whether N2 is effective and whether its effectiveness varies across audiences deserves further exploration.

Second, a status lens offers different and important insights to the vibrant body of work on the discursive strategies of legitimation (e.g., Glozer et al., 2019; Vaara et al., 2006), which also investigates how actors attempt to garner support for new practices. In N2, drawing on other professions to prove the desirability of no-tipping could be viewed as "normalization" (rendering something as normal or natural), one of the main legitimation strategies (Vaara et al., 2006:13); a status lens, however, suggests that actors did not just reference any no-tipping profession, but focused on referencing high-status professions to make no-tipping a high-status indicator. Similarly, while any actor can draw on other countries' practices to "normalize" no-tipping, only some can use N3 to imply status distinction through cultural authenticity, offering customers a status motivation to endorse the no-tipping model. N1 and N4 to some extent used the legitimation strategy of "rationalization," which focuses on a practice's utility or function (Vaara et al., 2006, p. 17): chefs' compensation does not match their contribution; tipping is not an effective way to reward performance.[4] But other than invalidating the economic rationale of tipping and tip distribution, N1 and N4 were also made more powerful by highlighting the status hierarchy between chefs and fast-food workers or problematizing status hierarchies based on diffuse status characteristics.

Third, to the literature on the discursive use of status, this study showcases the complexity of actors' discursive status work to mobilize change within a web of interrelated social groups. In previous studies (e.g., Bucher, Chreim, Langley, & Reay, 2016; Kellogg, 2012; Ybema & Byun, 2011), the main strategy is to define or differentiate one group from the other in order to defend or contest existing status hierarchies. Since the goal is not to mobilize support from the other group, the actors in these studies do not need to be that concerned about whether their narratives distanced or offended others. However, in the current study, the actors relied on the continued patronage of customers and the smooth collaboration between FoH and BoH. While they still invoked status dyads as in previous studies, they deployed a much wider repertoire of dyads and status mechanisms to appeal to the different orientations of various social groups (e.g., the four narrative types targeted very different issues, and some actors used more than one type). Furthermore, as the narratives are public and could be heard by any social group, actors may need to be careful that the narratives they use to elevate one group does not alienate another group that they also rely on. For example, while BoH might have higher status than FoH, in N1, most actors avoided drawing explicit status distinctions between them.

Lastly, my analytical focus on the role of status in public language enabled me to elaborate on the varied subtlety with which the status mechanisms are utilized. In existing work that investigates status or power dynamics in discursive strategies (e.g., Buchanan et al., 2018; Kellogg, 2012; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2011), the language around status tends to be consistently subtle (e.g., media discourse on gender and competence; Buchanan et al., 2018) or explicit (e.g., counter-tactics against hospital reform; Kellogg, 2012). In comparison, my analysis shows that in actors'

narratives, subtlety could vary across narratives, contexts, actors, and over time. Across narratives, as N1 and N3 used status distinction to justify changes in class relations, they tended to be quite subtle to avoid sounding elitist and alienating. N2 and N4, on the other hand, problematized existing status hierarchies (e.g., between service work and other occupations, or between female and male servers), in which explicit language could more powerfully draw audiences' attention to the underlying problems. Across contexts, language on restaurant menus or website's main pages (formal and customer-facing) tended to be subtler than that in media and conference discussions. Across actors, while most were near the subtle end of the spectrum, a few were explicit, for example, Jay Porter was previously a writer and computer consultant, whose outsider perspective might have enabled him to be more critical; Danny Meyer's high status as the hospitality expert could lend support to his strong claim regarding professionalization. Over time, N2 and N4 grew more salient and critical in questioning tipping's low-status implications. These findings are helpful for predicting subtlety in other contexts (especially in cultural industries) and the effectiveness of actors' narratives (based on the match between subtlety and context).

Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations and suggests the need for future research to further investigate the intricacy of status mechanisms in change processes. Since the study relies solely on public texts at the organizational level, it does not give insights on restaurants' internal narratives and status dynamics; voices of other key audiences such as FoH, BoH, consumers, pro-tipping or ambivalent restaurants, and policymakers are also absent. As audiences play important roles in evaluating narratives and granting status (Hodson & Sullivan, 2012), future research could unpack how these audiences react to, endorse, or counteract these narratives. For example, as fine-dining places require more professional knowledge in serving customers, N2 may resonate more with FoH at these places than FoH at less upscale places; but N2 may also be less effective because the potential income reduction might be larger at fine-dining places. Furthermore, more research is needed to understand the effects of various status-ridden change narratives. For example, future research can examine in an experiment setting if the type and combination of narratives, the subtlety of narratives, and the status of restaurants may influence outcomes such as customer rating, FoH retention rate, and restaurant revenue. Lastly, it may also be fruitful to take a more critical lens (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007) to examine how restaurants' public narratives are reflected (or not) in their ways of organizing and control, especially regarding their construction of higher professional status, the contrast between fine-dining and fast-food workers, and the emphasis on values such as teamwork and equality.

Conclusion

This study applied a status-focused analysis of change mobilization narratives in the restaurant industry, a field that weaves together multiple social relations (e.g., employment, production, service, and consumption) and is paradoxically forward (vibrant with innovations and can wage substantial influence on society) and backward (plagued with deep-structured issues such as gender/racial inequality and compensation disparity) at the same time. My analysis advances scholarly understanding of status and change by elaborating on the complexity of actors' discursive status work in change mobilization and the recursive relationship between narrative and status. The complexity is reflected in the diverse status hierarchies and mechanisms utilized, the interplay between status hierarchies and class relations, and the varied subtlety with which the status mechanisms are conveyed.

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Notes

1. The US Congress passed the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2018, which no longer prohibits tip-sharing with regularly non-tipped employees (excluding managers and supervisors) when employers pay tipped employees the full federal minimum wage. But this is still prohibited in states that maintain more restrictive state laws, such as New York.
2. In 2011, the US Department of Labor made a clarification (29 C.F.R. § 531.52) to FLSA that even if employers pay tipped employees the full federal minimum wage, they still cannot mandate tipped employees to share tips with un-tipped employees.
3. *Zagat* is a restaurant guide that provides a mix of user-generated content and its own insights. The *Michelin Guide* is a restaurant guide that provides reviews generated by its anonymous inspectors.
4. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Danny Meyer (the major no-tipping proponent since 2015) also used the "rationalization" strategy when he reinstated tipping in July of 2020: emphasizing the difficulty in keeping the no-tipping model financially sustainable, especially with pandemic-induced precariousness. While he still used some language about status, it was repurposed to argue for policy changes to allow tip-sharing with BoH and a wage system that reduces FoH's reliance on tips. This indicates that actors' discursive status work could be quite strategic and flexible, contingent upon actors' purposes, financial bottom line, and industry environment changes.

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Author biography

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Appendix

Table 4. Additional exemplary texts.

N1: Improve compensation for BoH
We have tried to instill a sense of teamwork at Camino—a place where each member of the team—waiters, bartenders, cooks, hosts and dishwashers—is all involved in serving our guests. And yet, we have been paying them as if we are running two separate businesses. (2015, Camino, restaurant website, $$)
But the reality in most other restaurants is, the workload is the same, except that in most cases you end up with cooks working in the back making $12 an hour, and people in the front making $20 or $30 an hour. How can there be such a class difference? It's such a touchy subject. (2015, Travail Kitchen & Amusements, media quote, $$$$)
Why would you ever want to work in a high-end restaurant when you can get paid more to make tater tots? (2015, USHG, media quote, $$$$)
. . .when we started hearing about the $15-an-hour minimum for fast-food workers, cooks who trained at fine culinary institutions were up in arms. (2016, USHG, media quote, $$$$)
N2: Make service work more professional
We believe in what Danny Meyer calls "enlightened hospitality" —that providing good service is its own reward. We want our staff to provide the best possible service, but we want the motivation to provide this great service to come not from the hope of a big tip but rather from pride in a job well done. (2014, Comal, restaurant website, $$$)
The hope was to professionalize their jobs and make their method of compensation more in line with nearly every other profession out there. (2016, Le Pigeon, media quote, $$$$)
"I hope it works and I hope everybody else can do the same," he said. "I hope we don't have people (in the service industry) saying, I want to get a 'real' job. This is a real job." (2016, Canary, media quote, $$$)
N3: Adhere to cultural traditions
They add that eschewing tipping "is also a common custom in Japan, where the Ootoya brand was born." (2016, Ootoya, media quote, $$)
Lord Stanley is following the European standard of service in which gratuity is included, therefore tipping is neither required nor expected. (2015, Lord Stanley, menu, $$$)
In Japan, it's typical for this kind of restaurant to charge a table charge. We can be little more creative with that than other restaurants. (2014, Ippuku, media quote, $$$)
N4: Remove a discriminatory practice
We know through studies at Cornell University that the amount of money left as a tip has very little to do with service. It has more to do with your accent, your race, and your gender, as a server, and so I would prefer to compensate my staff. (2015, Craft, media quote, $$$$)
"Tipping makes no sense," she says, pointing to studies that show that blondes make better tips than brunettes and that white servers earn more than black servers. "It's sexist and it's racist and it's a trick" (2015, Dirt Candy, media quote, $$$)
By removing tipping, Piallat said, she's also removed racism and discrimination, much of it on the part of her staff. "Everyone thinks that the servers are being judged, but the servers are judging just as much, or if not worse," said Piallat. (2016, Le Pigeon, media quote, $$$$)

(Continued)

Table 4. (continued)

Indications of movement mobilization
William Oliver's wants to bring professionalism to the forefront of the restaurant service industry. . . William Oliver's hopes the local community will support their endeavor and that this change will happen soon industry-wide. (2015, William Oliver's Publik House, restaurant press release, $$)
It's so great to see that kind of leadership out there [referring to Danny Meyer]. This isn't a story about greed, about increasing profits. It's about creating an equitable workplace, and about the well-being of our industry. (2015, Alma, media quote, $$)
Welcome to the future @dhmeyer, this is important — glad to have USHG with us. (2015, Alinea, restaurateur Twitter, $$$$)
My end goal is to change the industry, not to make the most money that I can. (2016, Camino, media quote, $$$)
We want to create a healthier paradigm for the industry, one where we take better care of our employees. We want to be a frontrunner in this hospitality revolution and reinvent the business model for all restaurants. (2016, Bel Air Bar & Grill, media quote, $$$)
One of the unexpected benefits that have come from discussing these changes, Sagaria said, is that it is bringing normally competitive industry players together. "We're talking openly about these challenges," he said. "It's not happening in isolation." (2016, Union Square Hospitality Group, media quote, $$$$)
As an alum of Danny Meyer's restaurant group (based in NYC), I've decided to join his gratuity-free movement, and eliminate the awkward, antiquated practice of tipping here at Barcito. (2016, Barcito, restaurant website, $$)