

Black–White Earnings Gap among Restaurant Servers: A Replication, Extension, and Exploration of Consumer Racial Discrimination in Tipping*

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There is a rich history of social science research centering on racial inequalities that continue to be observed across various markets (e.g., labor, housing, and credit markets) and social milieus. Existing research on racial discrimination in consumer markets is, however, relatively scarce and that which has been done has disproportionately focused on consumers as the victims of race-based mistreatment. As such, we know relatively little about how consumers contribute to inequalities in their roles as perpetrators of racial discrimination. In response, in this article, we elaborate on a line of research that is only in its infancy stages of development and yet is ripe with opportunities to advance the literature on consumer racial discrimination and racial earnings inequities among tip-dependent employees in the United States. Specifically, we analyze data derived from an exit survey of restaurant consumers ($N = 394$) in an attempt to replicate, extend, and further explore the recently documented effect of service providers' race on restaurant consumers' tipping decisions. Our results indicate that both white and black restaurant customers discriminate against black servers by tipping them less than their white co-workers. Importantly, we find no evidence that this black tip penalty is the result of inter-racial differences in service skills possessed by black and white servers. We conclude by delineating directions for future research in this neglected but salient area of study.

Introduction

There is a rich history of social science research centering on advancing our understanding of the causes and consequences of the racial inequalities in the United States that continue to be observed across various markets and social milieus. A sizable portion of this body of empirical and theoretical work has focused on identifying, isolating, and understanding the effects of discrimination on inter-racial disparities in employment, housing, and credit markets (Pager and Shepherd 2008; Quillian 2006). Considerably less research has been carried out to advance our understanding of racial discrimination in consumer markets and that which has been done has disproportionately focused on the consumer as the victim of race-based mistreatment (Brewster 2012; Brewster and Rusche 2012; Gabbidon 2003; Gabbidon and Higgins 2007; Harris 2003;

Harris, Henderson, and Williams 2005; Yinger 1998). As such, we know relatively little about how consumers contribute to inequalities via their differential treatment of service workers on the basis of their race or ethnicity (e.g., consumer discrimination, c.f., Pager and Shepherd 2008:182).

While employers and co-workers continue to be a salient source of racial inequities in labor markets (Pager and Shepherd 2008), in his classic work, *The Economics of Discrimination*, Becker (1971) predicted that consumers would increasingly become the most persistent source of racial disparities in earnings. Yet, given difficulties associated with isolating the effects of consumer racial discrimination on employees' earnings from other confounding factors including establishment (e.g., size, location, etc.), environmental (e.g., urban, suburban, rural), and most notably, employee (education, income, abilities/skill, etc.) characteristics, scholarship advancing our understanding of this source of racial earnings disparities has been limited (Nardinelli and Simon 1990). Further, given difficulties associated with measuring consumer discrimination, much of the extant empirical work in this area has only been able to draw inferences about such discrimination indirectly by assessing the effects of the racial composition of establishments' customer base on employment outcomes among minority workers (Holzer and Ihlanfeldt 1998; Ihlanfeldt and Young 1994). The lack of existing scholarship on the ways in which consumers' actions toward service employees are deleteriously shaped by service providers' race is particularly problematic given that over 80% of all wage and salaried workers are employed in service-providing sectors in the U.S. economy (Henderson 2013).

In response, this article advances the scholarship on consumer racial discrimination by analyzing data derived from a large exit survey of restaurant consumers ($N = 378$) in an attempt to replicate, extend, and further explore the recently documented effect of service providers' race on restaurant consumers' tipping decisions (Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya 2005; Lynn et al. 2008). We find evidence suggesting that white and black restaurant customers discriminate against black servers by tipping them less than their white co-workers. Most notably, we provide compelling evidence demonstrating that the black tip penalty is not the result of inter-racial differences in service skills possessed by black and white servers.

Background

The most developed body of empirical work that has directly tested for consumer racial discrimination is in the area of sports economics. As Parrett (2011:88) has pointed out, the popularity of studying consumer discrimination in the sports market can be attributed to two characteristics of this market. First, information about athlete's productivity/skills (e.g., performance statistics)

can be easily ascertained and statistically held constant when modeling the effects of athletes' race on study outcomes. Second, under many conditions (e.g., purchasing sports cards, game attendance, viewing games on television, voting for all-star teams, etc.), the consumer is the sole actor, thus allowing researchers to easily isolate the explanatory effects of consumer bias and discrimination from other sources of mistreatment (e.g., employer and co-worker discrimination, see Becker 1971). This body of literature has produced interesting (and mixed) results (cf. Broyles and Keen 2010; Depken II and Ford 2006; Foley and Smith, 2007; Kanazaw and Funk 2001; Tainsky and Winfree 2010) but has little practical implications beyond the niche sports market. Moreover, with few exceptions (e.g., minority athletes' salaries), consumer discrimination in the sports market does not have a direct adverse effect on the providers of service, or in this case entertainment. If *ceteris paribus*, for instance, the sports card of a black professional athlete is worth less than that of a white athlete (Nardinelli and Simon 1990), the proprietors of the sports card companies might suffer economic loss that in the absence of consumer discrimination, they would have otherwise secured but the players themselves are not likely to take note.

Recently, however, a promising line of research on consumer racial discrimination has emerged around the custom of tipping (Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya 2005; Lynn et al. 2008). Research on customers' proclivities to discriminate in their tipping behaviors according to the race of their service provider is likely to be a particularly fruitful line of inquiry to advance our understanding of the causes and consequences of consumer discrimination. Like many consumer behaviors in the sports market, tipping service providers is discretionary and the sole actor involved is the consumer, thus allowing for direct tests for consumer discrimination. Unlike consumer behaviors in the sports market, however, tipping in the United States is a pervasive consumer behavior (Lynn, Zinkhan, and Harris 1993). During an average month, over 90% of the adult population dines out at least once (Scarborough Research Group 2006) and nearly all of them leave a gratuity at the end of their meal. Further, aside from restaurant servers (and bartenders), there are over 30 additional professions in the U.S. economy, wherein millions of customers are routinely expected to leave a tip after they have received services (e.g., bellmen, taxi drivers, barbers, hairstylist, food delivery drivers, etc.; see Lynn, Zinkhan, and Harris 1993) and many of the recipients of these tips are racial minorities. In fact, there are over 1.3 million African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, or Latinos working as restaurant servers, bartenders, barbers, hairstylists, cosmetologists, or taxicab drivers in the United States and all of these individuals are economically dependent on gratuities and thus vulnerable to economic loss by way of consumer racial discrimination in tipping.¹

Although tipping is an ideal and salient context in which to systematically study the causes and consequences of consumer racial discrimination, only two studies adequately assessing the effects of service providers' race on customers' tipping behaviors have been published. In their analysis of 1,000 customer gratuities given to taxicab drivers in New Haven, Connecticut, Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) found that black drivers were given significantly smaller tips than were white drivers and this was true for both white and black customers. The Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) study not only revealed for the first time the presence of consumer discrimination in tipping but also a pattern that was in contrast to existing literature highlighting consumers' preferences for same-race service providers (Hekman et al. 2010; Juni, Brannon, and Roth 1988). While the researchers controlled for the effects of a host of factors that have been shown to affect customers' tipping decisions, they were not able to rule out the possibility that the observed driver race effect on tipping among white and black customers was the result of inter-racial differences in service quality provided by taxi drivers. In other words, it is possible that the lower tips given to black taxi drivers reflect unobserved inter-racial differences in service skills rather than consumer discrimination (Holzer and Ihlanfeldt 1998; Johnson and Neal 1998).

In a second study, Lynn et al. (2008) analyzed 140 tips given to restaurant servers working in a full-service restaurant in the Southern region of the United States in an attempt to replicate the previously documented seller race effects on tipping taxicab drivers. In this case, however, the authors included a composite index measuring restaurant servers' skills constructed from customers' ratings of their servers' appearance, friendliness, attentiveness, and promptness. Net of the effects of service skills on customers' tipping decisions both black and white restaurant patrons were found to tip black servers less than they did white servers. The authors further noted that the server race effect was moderated by customers' perceptions of their servers' job performance (e.g., service quality) and dining party size such that the disparity in tips given to white and black servers was greatest among larger groups of diners and when service performance was rated highly.

According to Lynn et al. (2008), these findings are consistent with what we know about implicit or unconscious manifestations of racial biases in the United States. Research on implicit racial attitudes has found, for instance, that under some conditions, both blacks and whites in the United States have an unconscious bias for whites over African Americans (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, and Monteith 2003; Correll et al. 2002) and that these biases are likely to unconsciously affect people's interactions with black Americans in adverse ways (Dasgupta 2004). However, in a subsequent analysis of the data used by Lynn et al. (2008), Lynn and Sturman (2011) decomposed the measure of

service skills and found evidence of intraracial bias in customers' ratings of their servers' promptness and attentiveness such that subjects rated these dimensions of servers' performance more favorably when they were waited on by a server of the same race. This finding suggests that the relatively inferior tips given to black servers by black customers may not be attributed to negative same-race biases as had previously been thought.²

Given the paucity of existing research on this topic, we aim in this article to advance our understanding of consumer racial discrimination in tipping in several ways. First, we attempt to replicate the Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) and Lynn et al. (2008) findings in a different region of the United States by analyzing a relatively large sample of restaurant consumers ($N = 394$) who were solicited to complete a survey about their dining experiences after exiting a full-service restaurant located in a large city in the Midwest. Second, we further explore the mediating effects of service skills in the relationship between servers' race and customers' tipping decisions by including in our analysis indicators of nuanced hospitality-enhancing server behaviors. Specifically, whereas Lynn et al. (2008) controlled for the effects of service skills with a four-item index measuring service quality constructed from subjects' holistic evaluations of their servers' appearance, friendliness, attentiveness, and promptness, we include two additional measures of service quality derived from questions that asked customers to report whether their server extended to them objective cues of hospitality that are conventionally required (e.g., my server smiled, maintained eye contact, etc.) or optional (e.g., my server made me laugh) and which have been shown to be predictive of customers' tipping behaviors (Lynn 2005; Lynn and McCall 2009).

This advancement is important because holistic measures of service quality, like that used by Lynn et al.'s (2008), may be weak predictors of customers' tipping decisions (Lynn and McCall 2000) relative to the more nuanced server behaviors assessed in this study, and to the degree that black servers exhibit such cues of hospitality less than their white counterparts, it might explain why they are given smaller tips by both black and white customers. If this is the case, what has previously been interpreted as evidence of consumer racial discrimination might reflect inter-racial differences in the way servers carryout their occupational roles (e.g., service skill differences). Lending credence to this possibility, in a large survey of restaurant servers, Lynn and McCall (2009) found that relative to their white counterparts, ethnic minority servers were statistically less likely to report utilizing some of the techniques that have been shown to positively affect customers' tipping decisions. Specifically, the authors found that non white servers were less likely than white servers to report that they use upselling techniques, tell jokes or stories, complement customers' food choices, and squat next to their tables.

In this article, we also advance the literature on consumer racial discrimination by taking an exploratory approach in an attempt to identify the boundary conditions for server race effects on customers' tipping decisions. In particular, we chose variables with previously demonstrated effects on tipping—customer race, customer age, dining party size, bill size, and patronage frequency, food quality, service quality, and nuanced server behaviors—and tested their roles as potential moderators of server race effects on tipping behaviors. Finally, we advance the literature on consumer racial discrimination in tipping by delineating several salient directions for future research and highlighting the practical importance associated with pursuing this line of inquiry.

Method

Sample

Customers were approached after stepping out of a moderately priced restaurant located in a large northern city and asked whether they would be willing to complete a short questionnaire about their dining experience that evening. To be eligible to participate in this study, subjects must have eaten dinner at the restaurant in question and paid a bill. Data were collected in August and September of 2012 between 5:30 pm and 9:00 pm (Monday–Saturday).³ Of the 821 customers that were solicited to participate, 515 agreed to complete the questionnaire, thus resulting in a 63% participation rate. After deleting cases wherein the subject either failed to indicate how much they tipped their server ($N = 52$), was part of a party of 6 or more (for whom automatic gratuities are typically added to the bill; $N = 22$), or was determined to be disengaged from the survey (because he or she agreed or strongly agreed both that the server made them feel like an inconvenience and made them feel comfortable and welcome; $N = 47$), the sample consisted of 394 customers.

While <8% of these remaining 394 cases had missing values on any one of the independent or control variables in this study, multivariate listwise deletion across these variables would result in the loss of an additional 21% of cases ($N = 82$). Thus, to retain these cases, a multiple imputation procedure was used to estimate values for observations with missing data on each of the independent variables included in this analysis (for a detailed discussion of multiple imputation, see Schafer and Graham 2002).

Dependent Variable

Respondents were asked to indicate in dollars and cents how large their bills and tips were. These variables were used to calculate our dependent variable—tip percentage. Occasionally, respondents would report tips in percentage rather than dollar terms. In those cases, the reported percentages were used.

One observation with a tip percentage of 286 was recoded as 42 (just above the next largest tip percentage) to avoid problems with significant outliers.

Primary Independent Variable

Our primary independent variable of interest in this study was measured by asking respondents to indicate whether their server was black ($N = 73$), white ($N = 314$), or other ($=7$). Server race was coded to reflect whether or not the server was black (no = 0, yes = 1). There were at least four black and four white servers working at the restaurant over time periods surveyed. To the researchers' knowledge, there were no servers of another race employed in the restaurant during the study period. Thus, there is some ambiguity surrounding the race of the server who waited on the seven subjects who indicated that their server was of another race. Given this ambiguity, we defined the server race variable as black versus non black—effectively combining the seven “other” cases with those where the server was white. To test for robustness, we also estimated our models after omitting these seven cases and found that our substantive conclusions did not change from those reported in the main text below.

Mediating Variables (Server Skill)

Following Lynn et al.'s (2008) operationalization of service quality, subjects were asked to indicate on a nine-point scale how much they disliked (1) or liked (9) their servers' appearance, friendliness, attentiveness, and promptness. Answers to these four questions were averaged to form an index measuring customers' holistic evaluations of the overall service quality provided to them by their server on the evening they were surveyed (Cronbach's alpha = .89). Scores were averaged across the three available items for two respondents who failed to provide information on one of the items used to create the service quality index. Subjects were also asked to indicate (using a 5-point scale) how much they disagreed (1) or agreed (5) with statements specifying that their server smiled throughout the encounter, gave his/her name when greeting them, maintained appropriate posture, squatted or sat down at the table when taking their order, appeared distracted (reverse coded), recommended a food item when taking their order, complimented them on their choice of a particular dish, joked around and made them laugh, maintained eye contact when talking to them, thanked them for visiting the restaurant, made them feel comfortable and welcome, made them feel like they were inconveniencing him/her when they made a request (reverse coded), met their service expectations, and was authentic and seemed to sincerely care about their dining experience.

A factor analysis of these items using generalized least squares extraction and promax rotation produced two clear factors.⁴ The first factor was

comprised of smiling, giving name, correct posture, eye contact, thanking, made me feel comfortable, made me feel inconveniencing, met expectations, and seemed authentic. These items were averaged to form a second index measuring customers' evaluations of their servers' skill, which we labeled "subtle service behaviors" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$). Twenty-five cases had information on at least six of the items used to create the subtle service behavior index but were missing values on one or more of the remaining three items. In these cases, index scores are based on the information the respondents provided. The second factor was comprised of recommended food items, complimented choices, and joked/made laugh. These items were averaged to form a third index measuring customers' evaluations of their servers' skills, which because the items had substantially lower means than the other items were called "rare service behaviors" (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). Scores were averaged across the two available items for respondents ($N = 2$) who failed to provide information on one of the items used to create the rare service behavior index.

Control Variables

Our analyses also include controls for a number of exogenous factors that have been shown to be associated with tipping behaviors. First, subjects were asked to indicate (using a nine-point scale) how much they disliked (1) or liked (9) the food's appearance, taste, portion size, and value for the money. Answers to these questions were averaged to create an index measuring customers' evaluations of food quality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). Using the same nine-point scale, respondents were asked to indicate how much they liked/disliked the dining room lighting, temperature, noise level, and crowd level in the restaurant on the evening they were surveyed. Responses to these questions were averaged to create an index measuring customers' evaluations of atmosphere quality (Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$).

Second, a dummy variable (female = 1) controlling for the effects of servers' gender is included in the analysis. Third, respondents were asked to indicate how many adults, teenagers, and children under 12 were in the dining party. Responses to these items were summed to provide a measure of dining party size. Fourth, respondents were asked how often they eat at the restaurant wherein they were surveyed. They were prompted to report the number of times per week, month, or year, and to indicate which time period they used. Responses were converted to times per year and log-10-transformed to provide a measure of patronage frequency.

Finally, respondents were asked to indicate their sex, race, age, educational attainment, and income. Customer sex was dummy coded to reflect whether or not the customer was female (=1), while customer race was coded to reflect whether or not the customer was black (=1).⁵ Additionally, respondents were

asked to indicate the year they were born (used to calculate age), highest education level obtained (1 = less than high school degree, 2 = high school degree, 3 = associates or trade school degree, 4 = college bachelors degree, and 5 = graduate degree), and their annual income (1 = below \$30,000, 2 = \$30,000–\$49,000, 3 = \$50,000–\$69,000, and 4 = \$70,000 or more).

Results

In Table 1, we present summary statistics for the full analytic sample and for split samples by the race of customers' server on the evening they were surveyed. As shown in this table, the average respondent in our full sample is 43 years old, college educated, female (57%), white (63%), and earns slightly <\$50,000 annually. On the evening that they were surveyed, the typical respondent dined with one other person and was served by a white (81%) male (58%). The average bill size was \$44.00 and the typical respondent tipped their server roughly \$9.00, or 20% of their bill, following a service encounter, wherein they evaluated the service, food, and atmosphere quite favorably. Importantly, we also show in Table 1 that customers who were served by a black waiter/waitress tended to leave smaller tips as a percentage of their bill compared to those who were served by a white waiter/waitress. Although the bivariate mean difference in percent tip by servers' race was only marginally significant ($p = .12$), it would not appear that this difference can be attributed to the service skills possessed by black servers because customers with a black server tended to report that their waiter/waitress exhibited significantly higher levels of subtle service-enhancing behaviors ($p < .10$) and to have provided overall better service quality ($p < .05$) compared with those who were served by a white server.

To further explore the relationships between tip percent, servers' race, and our measures of servers' skills, these data were analyzed using OLS multiple regression (Table 2). Percent tip was first regressed on server race and all the control variables (model 1) before adding our measures of server skills (model 2) and the product of servers' race and customers' race (model 3). As shown in model 1, black servers in our sample received statistically smaller tips than did white servers ($B = -1.26$, $p < .10$), and as we inferred from the analysis of mean differences in Table 1, this effect cannot be attributed to a poor job performance on the part of black servers. In fact, and as shown in model 2, after controlling for all three service measures, the server race effect on percent tip became more pronounced ($B = -1.49$, $p < .05$).⁶ Furthermore, adding the product of server race and customer race to this latter model produced a non-significant interaction term ($B = -0.657$, $p = .649$), indicating that both white and black consumers discriminated against black servers by tipping them less.⁷

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics for Full Sample and by Race of Customers' Server

	Min.-Max.	Full sample (N = 394)		Black server (N = 73)		White server (N = 321)		Mean difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Principle variables of interest								
Percent tip	4.65-42.00	20.27	5.76	19.33	6.45	20.49	5.58	-1.16
Server black (yes =1)	0-1	0.19	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rare service behavior index	1-5	2.86	1.32	3.03	1.24	2.83	1.34	0.20
Subtle service behavior index	1.22-5	4.28	0.78	4.43	0.65	4.24	0.78	0.19 [†]
Service quality index	3.5-9	7.96	1.13	8.23	1.03	7.89	1.15	0.33*
Control variables								
Customer age	19-81	42.89	23.49	44.33	13.44	42.56	13.37	1.77
Customer education	2-5	4.00	0.92	3.91	0.94	4.02	0.91	-0.12
Customer income	1-4	2.79	1.13	2.81	1.00	2.79	1.15	0.02
Customer female (yes = 1)	0-1	0.57	-	0.60	-	0.56	-	0.04
Customer black (yes = 1)	0-1	0.37	-	0.41	-	0.37	-	0.05
Patronage frequency (log-transformed)	0.00-2.41	0.61	0.59	0.73	0.61	0.59	0.59	0.14 [†]

Table 1
(continued)

	Min.-Max.	Full sample (N = 394)		Black server (N = 73)		White server (N = 321)		Mean difference
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	
Bill size	3.50-150.00	43.89	23.49	48.27	27.30	43.15	22.33	5.13 [†]
Dining party size	1-5	2.28	0.89	2.25	0.91	2.28	0.89	-0.04
Server female (yes = 1)	0-1	0.42	-	0.19	-	0.47	-	-0.28***
Atmosphere quality index	2.75-9	7.26	1.30	7.25	1.28	7.26	1.30	-0.01
Food quality index	3.75-9	8.14	0.92	8.34	0.76	8.09	0.95	0.25*

Note: [†]p < .10; *p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Table 2
Metric Coefficients from OLS Regression Analysis Predicting Tip Percent

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Principle variables			
Server black	-1.26 [†] (0.737)	-1.50* (0.726)	-1.22 (0.930)
Rare service behaviors index		0.431 [†] (0.233)	0.440 [†] (0.234)
Subtle service behaviors index		0.538 (0.511)	0.529 (0.512)
Service quality index		0.668 [†] (0.341)	0.668 [†] (0.341)
Customer black	-2.23*** (0.603)	-2.17*** (0.592)	-2.05** (0.646)
Customer race × Server race			-0.657 (1.44)
Control variables			
Atmosphere quality index	0.018 (0.235)	-0.340 (0.245)	-0.339 (0.246)
Food quality index	-0.185 (0.334)	-0.607 [†] (0.345)	-0.611 [†] (0.345)
Customer female	0.180 (0.600)	0.002 (0.589)	0.001 (0.590)
Customer age	-0.079** (0.024)	-0.079** (0.024)	-0.079** (0.024)
Customer education	0.211 (0.321)	0.295 (0.316)	0.296 (0.316)
Customer income	0.145 (0.308)	0.111 (0.300)	0.100 (0.301)
Patronage frequency (log-transformed)	1.39** (0.484)	1.21* (0.481)	1.23* (0.484)
Dining party size	0.193 (0.349)	0.229 (0.342)	0.214 (0.344)
Bill size	-0.042** (0.013)	-0.043** (0.013)	-0.043** (0.013)
Server female	-1.67** (0.587)	-1.50* (0.583)	-1.48* (0.585)
Constant	26.00*** (2.97)	23.05*** (3.07)	23.07*** (3.07)
R-square	0.14	0.19	0.19

Note: [†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

In further attempts to identify moderators of the server race effect, the product of server race and each of the primary independent (e.g., service quality, rare/subtle service behaviors) and control variables were separately added to model 2 (Table 2). In these analyses, we found that the only reliable moderators of the observed server race effect were customers' rating of service quality ($B = 1.42$, $p < .05$) and atmosphere quality ($B = 1.14$, $p < .05$) such that the black-white server difference in tip percentages was greater when customers' rating of service quality and satisfaction with the restaurant's atmosphere were lower (see models 4 and 5 in Table 3). Given the number of interactions tested ($N = 14$), the two significant interactions that we did observe could be Type 1 errors; thus, we encourage readers to interpret these effects with caution. Nevertheless, given the scarcity of research on consumer discrimination in tipping behaviors, we further explored them by estimating the effects of a three-way interaction between server race by customer race by service quality (model 6, Table 3) and of server race by customer race by atmosphere quality (model 7, Table 3). As shown in models 6 and 7, the coefficients of the three-way interactions involving service quality ($B = 3.49$, $p < .05$) and atmosphere quality ($B = 2.02$, $p < .10$) were both statistically reliable. Figure 1 offers a graphical display of the nature of these three-way interactions. As shown in this figure, both service quality (Panel A) and atmosphere quality (Panel B) affect tip percentages for black customers served by black waiters/waitresses more so than others.

Discussion

Given the shortage of direct empirical tests for consumer racial discrimination, we advance this line of inquiry by replicating two previous studies that found statistically significant effects of service providers' race on customers' tipping behaviors. Like Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) and Lynn et al. (2008), we too found evidence that consumers discriminate against black service providers by leaving them smaller gratuities. This finding coupled with Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) and Lynn et al.'s (2008) results adds to our confidence that this phenomenon is not unique to specific locales (e.g., South, Northeast, Midwest) or to differences in design and/or execution across studies. Moreover, we found that the effect is not mediated by customers' holistic ratings of service quality or their perceptions of nuanced hospitality-enhancing server behaviors.

These findings indicate that inter-racial differences in service skills are not able to account for restaurant customers racially discriminate tipping practices. To the contrary, we found that to the degree that there are inter-racial differences in serving skills, black servers in this study are perceived to provide better service relative to that provided by their white co-workers (see also Brewster, Lynn, and Cocroft 2014). Given these findings, it is not surprising that after controlling for the effects of all three indices measuring service skills,

Table 3
Metric Coefficients from Exploratory Moderation Analyses Predicting Tip Percent

	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
Principle variables				
Server race × Service quality	1.42* (0.678)		-0.507 (1.03)	
Server race × Atmosphere quality		1.14* (0.543)		0.117 (0.787)
Server race × Customer race × Service quality			3.49* (1.40)	
Server race × Customer race × Atmosphere quality				2.02 [†] (1.10)
Server black	-13.14* (5.61)	-9.70* (3.98)	3.01 (8.64)	-2.03 (5.84)
Customer black	-2.19*** (0.589)	-2.21*** (0.589)	3.86 (4.23)	2.80 (3.47)
Service quality	0.465 (0.352)	0.638 [†] (0.338)	0.799 [†] (0.416)	0.629 [†] (0.338)
Atmosphere quality	-0.380 (0.245)	-0.559* (0.265)	-0.362 (0.244)	-0.264 (0.334)
Server race × Customer race			-28.82* (11.56)	-15.01 (8.05)
Customer race × Service quality			-0.767 (0.533)	
Customer race × Atmosphere quality				-0.689 (0.475)
Constant	24.67*** (3.15)	24.76*** (3.16)	22.89*** (3.45)	23.08*** (3.40)
R-square	0.19	0.19	0.21	0.20

Notes: Models include each of the covariates in the main analysis and our measures of rate and subtle hospitality-enhancing server behaviors.

[†] $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

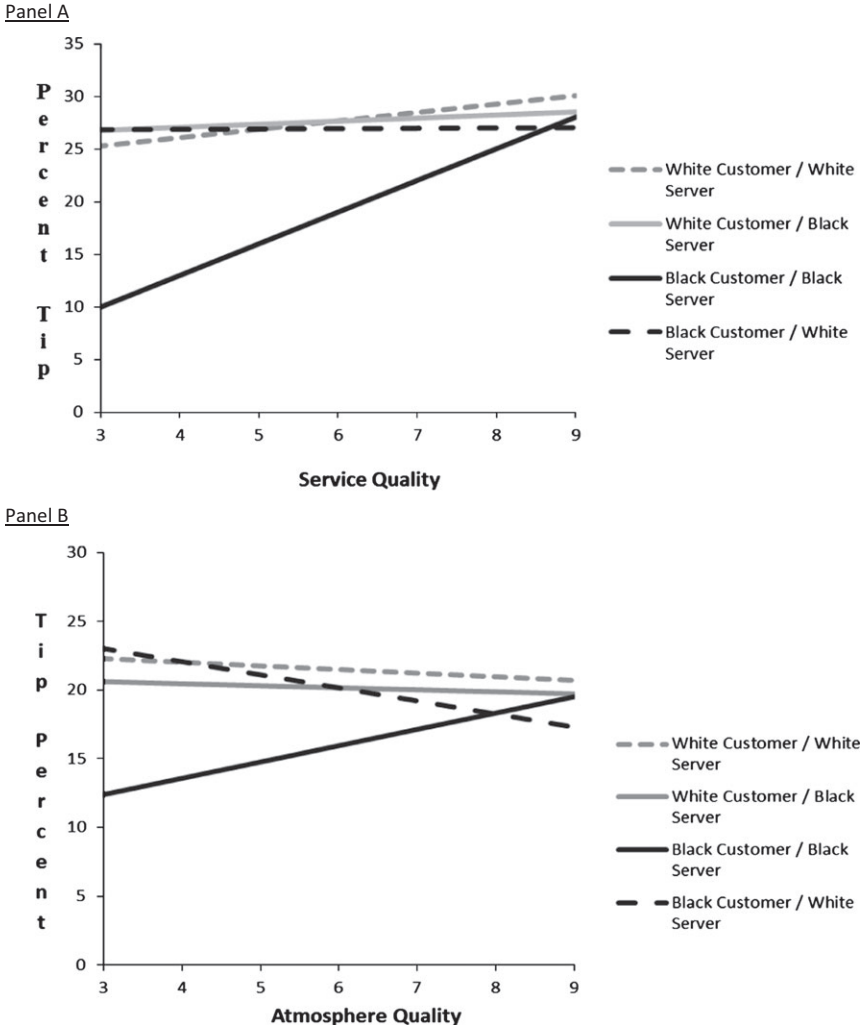


Figure 1 Graphical Display of Three-way Interaction Effects between Servers' Race, Customers' Race, and Service Quality (A)/Atmosphere Quality (B) on Tip Percent.

we found that the disparity between tips given to black and white servers was enhanced rather than attenuated. Consistent with these results, Coleman (2003) found that rather than decreasing the wage differential between black and white

men, controlling for the effects of employers' ratings of employees' skills resulted in an increase in the racial wage gap. The Coleman (2003) study is particularly noteworthy because in contrast to more general indicators of skill (e.g., education, experience, etc.) used in existing studies of the racial wage gap (Fugazza 2003), it, like our study, included a measure of employee skill that is constituted by the perceptions of the same individual whose job is to not only evaluate workers but also establish wages and allocate raises.

One might, however, rightfully question whether these results reflect impression management demands such that by asking customers to report the race of their server they were sensitized to the issue of race and thereby encouraged to evaluate black servers' performances more favorably than those of white servers. While we cannot unequivocally refute this critique, we found that black servers were rated more favorably than white servers across each of the three unique indices measuring service skills and one of those measures (the standard service quality index) was obtained from respondents before they were asked about their servers' race.

If social desirability biases in reporting were a major issue in these data, we would expect customers' positivity toward black servers relative to white servers to be greater when responding to questions about their servers' performance that were presented to them after they had been sensitized to the issue of race. To the contrary, we found the net difference in customers' evaluations of their servers to be the same when comparing the standard service quality measure obtained before questions about server race and the subtle server behavior measure obtained after a question about server race ($\beta = .04$).

Interpreted along with the results of the Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) and Lynn et al. (2008) studies, we feel confident in our finding that restaurant consumers are discriminating against black servers by tipping them less and that the causal mechanism is not inter-racial differences in the way servers deliver service. The causal mechanism(s) operating nevertheless remains elusive and should be the focus of future inquiries. To encourage and direct such research efforts, we explored the moderating effects of other salient predictors of tipping decisions. We found in this exploration that the server race effect on customers' tipping decisions was not sensitive to servers' gender, customers' demographics (e.g., gender, age, race, education, and income), table characteristics (e.g., patronage frequency, size of dining party size, and bill size), or to subtle/rare hospitality-enhancing server behaviors.

However, we did find evidence suggesting that the black–white server difference in tip percentages was greater the less favorably customers assessed the overall level of service quality and the restaurant's atmosphere on the evening they were surveyed. Further, we found that these interaction effects might be driven by black consumers' propensities to discriminate against black servers

more so than white servers when they are less satisfied with these aspects of their dining experience (e.g. service quality and atmosphere). Given the exploratory nature of our interaction analyses, we refrain from speculating on these two- and three-way interactions in much detail, but we do draw from them to inform the directions for future research that we delineate below.⁸

Directions for Research and Applied Implications

Research on consumer racial discrimination in tipping is only in its infancy stages of development, and as such, this line of inquiry is ripe with opportunities to advance our understanding of this unique source of racial inequities in earnings. In this section, we outline some directions that we feel are particularly salient in order to advance this line of inquiry. Given that our study constitutes only the second test for consumer racial discrimination in tipping behaviors in the restaurant context, we begin by encouraging replication efforts so that the boundaries of our findings can be established. The need for such work is underscored by the inconsistencies between the results we report and those reported by Lynn et al. (2008). In contrast to results reported by Lynn et al. (2008), we did not observe a reliable interaction between servers' race and dining party size, and the interaction between servers' race and service quality that we observed in this study was in the opposite direction than was reported by Lynn et al. (2008).

Additionally, while the tip penalty levied on black servers in this study appears to generalize to taxi drivers (Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya 2005), we do not know whether a similar pattern would be observed in other tipped professions (e.g., bellmen, barbers, hairstylist, cosmetologists, food delivery drivers, etc.) or among other customers of color (e.g., Hispanics, Asians, etc.). Researchers should also identify and test potential organizational-level characteristics that either curtail or facilitate consumers' propensities to discriminate racially in their tipping decisions. Given that existing research has found racial earnings inequities to be the greatest in relatively high-status (and high-paying) professions (Grodsky and Pager 2001), future research might start by exploring whether African Americans and other servers of color who work in expensive restaurants are at a greater risk of consumer discrimination in tipping than their counterparts working in the moderately priced establishments that have been studied to date.

Importantly, we encourage concerted scholarly efforts to be devoted toward identifying the causal mechanism(s) that underlie customers' propensities to tip black servers (and potentially other servers of color) less generously. A priority on this front should be to systematically test the effects of implicit racial biases on customers' tipping decisions (Lynn et al. 2008). The literature on implicit racial biases provides a sound theoretically informed explanation for racial discrimination in tipping. Researchers have found, for instance, evi-

dence of implicit preferences for whites to be manifest in the attitudes and behaviors of both black and white experimental subjects (Ashburn-Nardo, Knowles, and Monteith 2003; Correll et al. 2002). Further, research has found the effects of implicit racial biases to be particularly evident in spontaneous decisions that are made under pressure (Dovidio, Kawakami, and Gaertner 2002; Fazio 1990; Kawakami, Young, and Dovidio 2002).

Tipping decisions are not only made quickly at the end of the dining encounter but are also to some degree made without much thought. Many of the server behaviors that have been shown to be predictive of greater tips are, for instance, likely to operate outside of the customers' consciousness (e.g., repeating orders, predicting good weather, squatting next to the table, c.f., Lynn and McCall 2009). Further, consumers tend to round up or down from the calculated tip percentage that they leave their servers, and such adjustments appear to be made without much conscious deliberation (Lynn et al. 2008). Thus, it makes theoretical sense that tipping decisions might be unconsciously influenced by implicit racial biases such that black servers would come to realize smaller tips relative to their white counterparts.

Tipping decisions do of course require some conscious deliberation. After all, most people adhere to the 15–20% prescriptive tipping norm in the United States (Lynn and McCall 2000), which requires deliberative calculations. While most consumers are not likely to consciously consider the race of their server when calculating the size of gratuity that they will leave extant evidence suggests that the adverse effects of implicit racial biases on deliberative actions, like tipping, may be induced when such actions can be “justified on the basis of some factor other than race” (Dovidio et al. 2002:90; also see Dovidio and Gaertner 2000). Although not supported by Lynn et al. (2008), effects of implicit racial biases harbored by restaurant consumers on the deliberate dimension of tipping decisions would be consistent with our finding that the black–white difference in tip percent increases as customers are less satisfied with the service and atmosphere quality. If server race effects on tipping can be replicated in online hypothetical service scenarios using photographs of the servers, then the ability of customers' implicit racial biases to explain racial discrimination in tipping behaviors could easily be tested, by asking subjects to take the race IAT as part of the larger service study and we encourage such efforts.

Further, stereotypes of black Americans as lazy and underserving of sympathy or assistance continue to be a salient source of racial resentment in the United States. Such stereotypes have been shown to underlie many Americans' opposition to redistributive policies like welfare and affirmative action programs (Bobo 2001, 2011; DeSante 2013). Thus, explicit and/or implicit racial attitudes might also lead customers to associate black servers with a lack of deservingness of financial help and as such, leave them smaller tips than they

otherwise give to more deserving white servers. Lending credence to this possibility, Lynn (2009) found that a large percent of consumers report that they are motivated to tip in order to help servers make a living (72%). To the degree that black servers are perceived to be less deserving of such help as a result of the enduring and systemic anti black stereotypes that are interwoven into the fabric of our society and embedded in the cognitions of many consumers, the patterns observed in this study make perfect sense. If black servers are thought to be less deserving of “help”, we would, for instance, expect customers who are motivated to help servers make a living to reward white servers more than black servers for exceptional service and to punish blacks more than whites when service is less than exceptional (cf. DeSante 2013).

While assessing the effects of implicit and explicit racial attitudes on tipping decisions is a fruitful direction to take this line of research, we note that additional causal mechanisms are likely operating and should be theoretically identified and tested in future studies. It is plausible that future studies will find that the operative causal mechanisms are different among white and black customers. For instance, Lynn and Sturman (2011) suggested that black customers might think that lower tips will be more acceptable to black servers and as such, feel less social pressure to tip them as much as they do white servers. While the authors did not elaborate on why African Americans would feel less social pressure to tip black servers the same as they do white servers, we posit that such differences might stem from black customers awareness of servers’ perceptions of them as being inadequate tippers (Brewster and Rusche 2012). Given such awareness, it is likely that some black customers feel pressure to “over” tip white servers in an attempt to combat such stereotypes.

Consistent with this possibility, Lynn (2009) found that blacks were more likely than whites to say they tipped to improve their group’s image. Further, if black customers’ efforts to manage impressions of their racial group via their tipping practices are perceived to be less necessary when their server shares their racial identity, it would explain why black customers’ tipping decisions are positively associated with their perceptions of service quality and satisfaction with the restaurant’s atmosphere only when they were waited on by a black waiter/waitress. We further note that although neither of the three-way interactions between servers’ race, customers’ race, and food quality ($B = 2.75, p = .127$) and between servers’ race, customers’ race, and subtle hospitality-enhancing server behaviors ($B = 2.68, p = .241$) were statistically reliable, the nature of these effects likewise suggests that black customers might discriminate against black servers, but not white servers, by tipping them less when they are less satisfied with the food quality and when black servers convey fewer hospitality-enhancing behaviors. These findings thus suggest that when served by a white server, black customers may deliberately refrain from “punishing” their waiter/waitress

by leaving them smaller tips in response to being less than satisfied with their dining experience for fear that doing so would be attributed to their race (e.g., “blacks don’t tip,” cf. Brewster and Rusche 2012) rather than the aspects of their dining encounter with which they were dissatisfied. While there are anecdotal reports that support the plausibility of impression management concerns as a salient source of blacks’ tendencies to over tip white servers, relative to black servers, this explanation warrants further research.

Pursuing these and other lines of research on this unique type of consumer racial discrimination is not only necessary to advance our understanding of its causes and potentially far reaching consequences, but is also needed to inform business decisions among employers who rely on tipping as a compensation structure. Racial discrimination in terms and conditions of employment is unlawful in the United States under Title VII in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Supreme Court ruled in *Griggs v. Duke Power Company* (1971) that this statute prohibits business policies and practices that have a disparate impact on protected classes even if those policies and practices appear at face value to be neutral and are not intended to discriminate (Twomey 1998; Yinger 1998). If consumers do tip on the basis of race (or sex⁹), then the practice of tipping may have an adverse impact that the courts would deem unlawful (Wang 2014). This means that restaurants and restaurant chains relying upon tipping to partially compensate their employees could someday be subject to expensive class-action lawsuits alleging racial discrimination in business practices (Ayres, 2008; Lynn et al. 2008; Wang 2014). Information about whether, when, and how servers’ race effects consumers’ tipping behavior would help restaurant managers and other business operators that rely on tipping as a source of employee compensation to better assess this risk.

Conclusion

Research on racial inequities in the labor market has generally found residual earning disparities between whites and nonwhites even after controlling for a host of salient individual and establishment-level characteristics associated with employability and productivity (Leicht 2008). The net gap in earnings is often attributed to discrimination that stems from explicit and implicit biases harbored by employers. A considerably smaller body of research has also implicated consumers’ racial biases and the resultant discriminatory market behaviors in the residual earnings gap, but direct tests of this source of racial earnings inequity are rare. In response, we capitalized on an opportunity to directly investigate consumer racial discrimination by assessing the effects of restaurant servers’ race on consumers’ tipping behaviors.

Our results replicated those of two prior studies that found evidence of racial discrimination in the tipping behaviors of black and white taxi (Ayres,

Vars, and Zakariya 2005) and restaurant consumers (Lynn et al. 2008), thus suggesting that the effect is indeed a real phenomenon. Additionally, we extended this line of research by assessing the mediating effects of a wider range of server skills than had been considered to date and which had been shown to be predictive of customers' tipping behaviors. Our results provide compelling evidence that customers' tendencies to tip black servers less *vis-à-vis* white servers cannot be attributed to inter-racial differences in service skills as approximated by three independent measures of perceived service quality. The causal mechanism(s) underlying this black tip penalty nevertheless remains elusive, thus underscoring the need for additional research on this unique source of racial earnings inequity. Like all social inequities, the underlying causes of such disparities are likely to be multifaceted and complex. Thus, we encourage interdisciplinary scholarship on consumer racial discrimination in tipping practices so that this source of racial inequity in earnings might be further understood and ultimately eradicated.

In closing, we hope that this article heightens scholarly interest in consumer racial discrimination more generally. Beyond tipping, there is a seemingly infinite number of unexplored ways that implicit/explicit racial prejudices may become manifest in customers' interactions with service providers of color. For instance, despite the commonly adopted organizational maxim that "the customer is always right," there is growing body literature indicating that customers may not only be wrong but in some cases outright unjust, aggressive, and abusive toward their service providers (Berry and Seiders 2008; Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004). Further, such acts of mistreatment have been linked with a host of adverse effects including employee emotional exhaustion, burnout, stress, feelings of degradation, and even physical harm (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004; Harris and Reynolds 2003). Yet there have been limited attempts to test whether incidents of such mistreatment systematically vary by service providers' race or ethnicity. A rare exception to this observation is Grandey, Dickter, and Sin's (2004) research on call center employees, or service representatives, in a large utility company. The authors found that employees were on average verbally attacked by angry consumers ten times a shift. Importantly, and as contemporary theories of racism would predict (Dovidio and Gaertner 2000; Dovidio et al. 2002), the frequency of incidences of consumer hostility was found to be statistically greater among Hispanic *vis-à-vis* non-Hispanic service representatives, thus suggesting that consumers "who have the opportunity to 'punish' someone do so to a greater extent if the person seems to be a minority member" (Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004:411). Additional research exploring the varied ways in which consumers might differentially treat service workers on the basis of their race or ethnicity is clearly needed, and we hope this article encourages such efforts.

ENDNOTES

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¹Authors' calculations from Bureau of Labor Statistics, <http://www.bls.gov/>.

²In a third study, Parrett (2011) analyzed survey data collected outside of five Virginia restaurants and found no effect of servers' race on customers' tipping decisions. Parrett's sample was, however, quite racially homogenous. In fact, of the 295 cases in the analysis that included measures of customers' and servers' race, there were only 18 observations with nonwhite customers and 15 with nonwhite servers. Further, given the lack of minority representation in these data, Parrett was not able to compare tips given to white servers with those given to blacks servers, as had been done in the Ayres, Vars, and Zakariya (2005) and Lynn et al. (2008) studies.

³Published findings from these data were also reported by Brewster, Lynn, and Cocroft (2014) although the focus of this other study was not on consumer racial discrimination in tipping practices.

⁴Two items—sat down and seemed distracted—did not load highly on either factor and were eliminated from further analysis.

⁵The attribute set for our measure of customers' race included an "other" response option. Thirty subjects identified with this "other" racial category. In the analysis, these subjects were coded as non black (=0). However, to test for robustness, we estimated our models that included dummy variables for both black (=1) and other (=1) customers with the reference group being White customers (=0) and found that our substantive conclusions did not change from those reported in the main text.

⁶The correlations between the three service measures were all positive and statistically reliable (at $p < .001$) as you would expect. However, the three measures did capture unique aspects of service as the service quality index correlated with the rare service behavior index only .33 and with the subtle service index only .63. Furthermore, the rare service behavior index and the subtle service behavior index correlated with one another only .41. All three measures correlated with percent tip at .14, $p < .01$.

⁷Lynn and Sturman (2011) found a server race by customer race interaction effect reflecting a positive same-race bias on ratings of situational dimensions of service (i.e., server attentiveness and promptness) but not on personal dimensions of service (i.e., server appearance and friendliness). In an effort to directly replicate this effect, we subdivided the service quality index into separate indices of situational and personal dimensions of service and then regressed each on all the control variables, server race, and its interaction with customer race. Similar analyses were done on the rare service behavior index and the subtle service behavior index in an attempt at conceptual replication. None of the server race by customer race interactions were significant—for situational service index ($B = 0.106$, $p = .74$), for personal service index ($B = -0.14$, $p = .60$), for rare service behaviors ($B = 0.44$, $p = .21$), and for subtle service behaviors ($B = -0.08$, $p = .66$) (see also Brewster, Lynn, and Cocroft 2014).

⁸One intuitive interpretation of these three-way interactions is that they reflect out-group favoritism among black customers (Dasgupta 2004). However, in the absence of additional research, we feel that such a conclusion would be premature. Had we found evidence of out-group biases in African Americans' subjective evaluations of the service provided to them by white relative to black servers we would be more comfortable elaborating on implicit out-group favoritism as a potential explanation underlying these findings. Given that this was not the case (cf. endnote no. 7), we present this finding as a point of reference for future research on this topic.

⁹While not our focus, customers in our study were observed to tip female servers significantly less than their male co-workers. While this finding is consistent with those produced from a large survey of restaurant servers (Lynn and McCall 2009), it deviates from most studies, which have found non-significant server-gender differences in tip earnings (Lynn et al. 2008; Parrett 2011) or have found that female servers garner larger tips than their male co-workers (Davis et al. 1998). Additional research is clearly needed to clarify the equivocal nature of this finding.

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