

The Effect on Tipping of a Waitress Touching Male and Female Customers

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TOUCH HAS BEEN DESCRIBED as both the most basic sensory process and as the earliest and most elemental form of communication (Major, 1981). Whereas the early literature was mainly descriptive, more recent studies have treated touch as an independent variable. Most of this research, American in origin, has demonstrated positive effects from the incidental touch of another. For example, Fisher, Rytting, and Heslin (1976) reported that male and female college students who were "accidentally" touched by library clerks when their library cards were being returned gave higher ratings to both the clerks and the library than did a control group of students who were not touched.

Crusco and Wetzel (1984) have investigated the effect of touching on the tipping behavior of customers in restaurants. After collecting the money but before returning the change, waitresses either touched customers on the shoulder, touched them on the palm of the hand, or did not touch them at all. Although they found that those customers who were touched did tip more than those who were not, they found no differences based on the type of touch (shoulder versus palm of hand) or the gender of the customer. They did not, however, control for the number of people being served, or for the gender of those in the party being served.

The purpose of the present study was to replicate and extend Crusco and Wetzel's (1984) research. We assumed that, when serving a man and a woman who have come to a restaurant together, the gender of the person touched by a waitress would be a relevant variable. Because American males generally respond less positively to being touched than do females (Stier and Hall, 1984), and because a waitress touching a male customer with a female companion might arouse jealousy on the part of the female companion and dis-

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comfort on the part of the male customer, we hypothesized that it would be more profitable for a waitress to touch the female than the male.

In the present study, the subjects consisted of 112 pairs of customers in a restaurant in Greensboro, NC; each pair included one male and one female. Individual customers, pairs of men, pairs of women, and groups of three or more were excluded from the study. The 112 mixed-sex dyads were randomly distributed into three conditions. In 28 cases, after the diners had received their food, the waitress touched the female diner on the shoulder briefly and lightly while asking if everything was all right (Female-Touch condition); in 28 cases, the waitress touched the male diner in the same way, asking the same question (Male-Touch condition); and in 56 cases, neither was touched while the question was being asked (No-Touch condition). In all three conditions, eye contact was avoided during this interaction. As was the case in Crusco and Wetzel's (1984) research, the dependent variable was the percentage of the bill that was left as a tip.

The average tip in the Female-Touch condition was 15%; the average tip in the Male-Touch condition was 13%; the average tip in the No-Touch condition was 11%. A one-way analysis of variance comparing the three conditions was significant, $F(2, 109) = 13.79, p < .01$. Tukey's Honestly Significant Difference Test revealed that the difference between the Female Touch and the No-Touch condition was significant, but that the differences between Male Touch and Female Touch and between Male Touch and No Touch were not significant.

The main effect for touch, then, in this study, was based on the touching of the female customer rather than the touching of the male customer. This finding provides support for the view that waitresses in the United States may enhance their incomes when they touch the female rather than the male in serving male-female couples.

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