

# Restaurants cherry pick parties by size

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Wait times quoted by restaurants typically increase depending on the size of the party. Though large parties are often given longer wait times, the actual time spent waiting to be seated turns out to be shorter than the time estimate from the host or hostess, according to a report in the most recent edition of the Journal of Service Research.

One of the main reasons behind this discrepancy is the practice of "cherry picking" or "serving the high value customers and denying service to low value customers." For restaurants, cherry picking consists of quoting longer-than-expected wait times to those they wish not to serve. Using a survey of over 250 restaurant employees from various restaurants worldwide Cornell University Professor of Operations Management Gary Thompson found the practice of cherry picking customers by party size to be fairly common. This is due to the fact that smaller parties typically spend more per person than do larger parties, which tend to share menu items. Similarly, large parties take longer to serve than small parties because they socialize more during the meal.

As a follow up to the survey, using a [simulation](#) of restaurant conditions, Thompson examined the advantages of cherry picking. It makes good economic sense for a restaurant to cherry pick when there is excess demand, meaning that there are a sufficient number of small parties to displace any business lost from large parties.

"Cherry-picking appears to be most useful in small [restaurants](#) in environments where customers have limited [tolerance](#) for waiting for a table," Thompson said.

But in fact those long [wait times](#) quoted to large parties might not turn out to be so long after all, especially if there aren't many other small parties competing for seats and service.

Provided by Boston College

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