

# Study shows that, in restaurants, race matters

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A new study from North Carolina State University shows that more than one-third of restaurant servers discriminate against African-American customers.

"Many people believe that race is no longer a significant issue in the [United States](#)," says Sarah Rusche, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at NC State and co-author of a paper describing the study. "But the fact that a third of servers admit to varying their quality of [service](#) based on customers' race, often giving African-Americans inferior service, shows that race continues to be an issue in our society."

Researchers wanted to determine the extent to which customers' race affects the way they are treated at [restaurants](#), so the researchers surveyed 200 servers at 18 full-service chain restaurants in central North Carolina. The majority of the servers surveyed – approximately 86 percent – were white.

Survey results showed that 38.5 percent of servers reported that customers' race informed their level of service at least some of the time, often resulting in providing inferior service to African-American customers. Findings show that many servers perceive African-American customers to be impolite and/or poor tippers, suggesting that black patrons, in particular, are likely targets of servers' self-professed discriminatory actions.

The survey also found that 52.8 percent of servers reported seeing other

servers discriminate against African-American customers by giving them poor service at least some of the time. Findings also show that restaurant servers share anti-black perceptions through racist workplace discourse, indicating a considerable amount of talk about the race of their patrons. Only 10.5 percent reported never engaging in or observing racialized discourse.

"'Tablesides racism' is yet another example in which African-Americans are stereotyped and subsequently treated poorly in everyday situations," says Rusche. "Race continues to be a significant barrier to equal treatment in restaurants and other areas of social life."

**More information:** The paper, "Quantitative Evidence of the Continuing Significance of Race: Tableside Racism in Full-Service Restaurants," was co-authored by Dr. Zachary Brewster of Wayne State University and is published online in the *Journal of Black Studies*.

Provided by North Carolina State University

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