

# Servers perceive well-dressed diners as better tippers, study finds

May 1 2017

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Dae-Young Kim, an associate professor of hospitality management in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, and his doctoral student, Kathleen Kim, have found that restaurant servers often use stereotypes to determine which customers will leave better tips. Credit: University of Missouri-Columbia

With tipping a central part of the American restaurant industry, better service often is attributed to whether or not a server believes a customer will be a good tipper. Now, researchers at the University of Missouri have found that restaurant servers often use stereotypes to determine which customers will leave better tips. Dae-Young Kim, an associate professor of hospitality management in the MU College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources, says that servers believe well-dressed customers are the most likely to leave good tips. The researchers say this could result in those well-dressed diners receiving better service.

"Everyone uses first impressions to make snap judgements," Kim said. "For [servers](#), especially busy servers, they often have to make decisions about how to best devote their time and energy, so they look for ways to identify which customers will reward them the most for their service. The more professionally dressed a [customer](#) is, the more likely a server is to stereotype them as a good tipper, regardless of their race or gender."

Kim and his doctoral student, Kathleen Kim, surveyed 222 current and former restaurant servers. The researchers showed the participants pictures of people of different races, genders and attire and asked the participants to indicate who they believed would leave good tips and poor tips.

The researchers found that the race of customers did not significantly affect servers' perceptions of their likelihood of tipping well. However, compared to white customers, well-dressed minorities were identified as more likely to leave good tips, while casually dressed minorities were identified as more likely to leave poor tips. Also, regardless of race, well-dressed men were identified as more likely to leave good tips compared to women, while casually dressed men were seen as the least likely of any group to leave good tips.

"It is clear that restaurant servers use stereotypes and first impressions to determine which customers will receive good service," Kathleen Kim said. "These findings show [restaurant](#) managers the importance of proper training for servers so all customers receive good service. This study also shows potential issues with the tipping culture that exists in American restaurants. While the tipping culture can motivate servers to provide quality service to some customers, it may result in unequal [service](#) for others."

The study, "The Effects of Visible Customer Characteristics on Servers' Perceptions of Tipping: Potential Threats to Service Interactions," was coauthored by Gumkwang Bae, from Dong-Eui University in South Korea. The study was published in *Cornell Hospitality Quarterly*.

Provided by University of Missouri-Columbia

Citation: Servers perceive well-dressed diners as better tippers, study finds (2017, May 1)  
retrieved 17 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2017-05-servers-well-dressed-diners-tippers.html>

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