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Abstract

Due to discrimination, waiters are less likely to provide good customer service to their black dinners solely based on the assumption that they are poor tippers. The theory of discrimination is the foundation of this observational study where attentiveness is measured to reflect waiters' avoidance of African American diners. Assuming waiters start with their preconceived notions about Black customers, this research will use the critical race theory to determine if waiters are less attentive to African American diners. To further understand the subtle discriminatory behavior of waiters toward African Americans, this study analyzes observational data from a sample of waiters (N=40). Findings reveal a subtle difference in attentiveness between races and a higher frequency of waiters' interaction with White diners compared to African American diners. The study contributes to our understanding of social context of discrimination and the experiences of African Americans in restaurants.

Introduction

Racism and discrimination continue to be salient issues in contemporary society especially in the restaurant industry. In the context of restaurants, African Americans are still discriminated against as waiters provide less customer service due to the assumption that they are poor tippers.However, the reason of that assumption is partially due to the often inadequate service they receive. Also, due to the long history of racial oppression and the continuous race relations in the US, many servers have internalized racial status beliefs which makes African Americans more vulnerable to subtle forms of discrimination when dining in restaurants. Existing survey conducted by Lynn and Brewster tested people's knowledge of tipping norms to show the ethnic differences in tipping. The comparison of blacks' and whites' responses were significantly different as 37.4 percent of Blacks said that the customary restaurant tip in the United States was 15 to 20 percent compared to 71.2 percent of Whites. Additional research state that waiters construct a racist workplace culture through the use of stereotypes, bluntly racist comments, and code words, and racial profiling (Brewster 2015). Brewster mentions in "The Effects of Restaurant Servers' Perceptions of Customers' Tipping Behaviors on Service Discrimination" that servers' sensitivity to demographic tipping differences affects them in ways that they provide poor service. Though most studies highlight the presence of discrimination in the restaurant industry, there's a lack of quantitative study that reflects waiters' discriminatory behaviors toward African Americans. The theory of discrimination is the foundation of this observational, quantitative study where attentiveness is measured to reflect waiters' avoidance of African Americans. Waiter's attentiveness to Black diners gives an insight to the subtle discriminatory behavior.

Methods

This observational quantitative research design is used to analyze waiter's attentiveness to African American diners. The target behavior in this observational study is the attentiveness. Through data collection, a duration data sheet is used to record the onset and offset time, and a tally system. The duration data sheet is used to record the time of the target behavior which consists of the number of times the waiter comes to the table, and their absence. The data sheet will include the waiters' and diners' demographics, and the onset – offset. By observing waiter's interaction with tables of two diners, 40 diners in total will be observed including 20 African Americans and 20 White diners. The onset is recorded as the time the waiter leaves the table after serving the meal marking the beginning of their absence. The offset is the time the waiters return to their table. The recording will stop here and this process is repeated until the diners leave. Through the onset and offset, I will be able to determine the average duration of the waiter's absence at tables with black customers during each service. Another part of this study includes a tally system. This will record the number of times the waiter comes to the table since they ordered their meals. A descriptive statistical analysis will be done to carry out the results. This method will help retrieve the average absence time from each group (African American, and White diners) and later, the results will be compared to find the central tendency of waiters' attentiveness to African American diners. In addition, descriptive statistics will provide a summary that makes comparison of servers waiting time when working with a table of African Americans.

Results/Discussion

Waiters' attentiveness to customers is measured by how frequently they approach the diners from the time they sit to when they leave. Waiters' attentiveness is measured through their avoidance of diners from the time they leave the table after bringing the meals to the next time they return. The results of this study indicate that waiters spend less time with African Americans compared to White diners. The data was collected using a data collection sheet. This helped to record the waiter's and diners' demographic (White Male Server, White Female Server, Black Male Server, Black Female Server), (Black Female Diners, White Female Diners, Black Male Diners, White Male diners), the waiters' absences from each category of diners and the frequency at which waiters approached diners. The data collected was first divided between African American diners n=20, and White diners n=20. Results show that the average time waiters spent away from White diners was 25 minutes while they spent an average of 29 minutes was spent away from African American diners.

Image 1 shows the average time (in percentage) waiters spend serving groups of African Americans and White diners. By comparing the average avoidance time among each group, it was recorded that after African American diners received their meals, waiters spent 53 percent of their time (shown in yellow) away from the table with African Americans, while they only spent 47 percent (shown in black) of their time away from White diners. Further analysis on waiters' attentiveness to African American diners reveal the disparity in serving time toward African Americans and White diners.

Figure 1. Server's attentiveness to African American diners

36.4 %
46.1 %
17.5 %

■ Black Female Servers
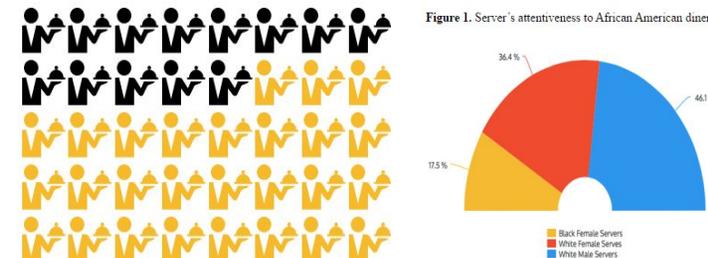■ White Female Serves
■ White Male Servers

Figure 1 represents servers' attentiveness to African American diners. Though there was not substantial information on Black male servers and their interaction with Black Female diners, the average time White Male Servers spent away from Black Female diners was longer. On average, while Black Female Servers spent 17.5 percent of time away from Black Female diners after they received their meals, White Female Servers spent 36.4 percent of time away, and White Male Servers spent 46.1 percent of time from African American female diners. The average absence time waiters spent from each group (African American, and White diners) reveals the difference in attentiveness.

Conclusion

Race affects everything in society and this study shed light into the interaction between African American diners and White diners. The results confirm the hypothesis that White waiters spend less time with African American diners than with their own counterparts and are therefore less attentive to African Americans. The limitations of this research include the lack of diversity amongst waiters in the selected restaurants, low count of serving staff and rotating shifts. To improve this research, it is necessary to increase the number of waiters that are observed which should also include African American waiters. Further study can seek to address whether waiters' attentiveness contributes to diners' tipping behaviors.

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