

At the Tipping Point:  
Intersections of Wage, Gift, and Solidarity in Halifax Restaurant Work

by

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**Abstract:** *Tipping is a social norm that is reinforced by many people's regular participation in it. Through semi-structured interviews, this exploratory, qualitative study how customers, servers, and managers understand, experience, and practice tipping in Halifax. My findings show the degree to which tipping complicates the understanding of restaurant establishments. While each perspective has been studied separately, little attention has been paid to how each groups' behaviours might impact the others' experience. The results show that tipping pulls restaurant culture away from a purely commercial, profit-driven logic, customers away from a purely exchange driven stance, and servers away from an individual wage framework and towards profit sharing. Furthermore, findings also indicate that gender and race normativity play a role in participants' understanding of the tip. Servers and customers can discriminate and be discriminated against based on gender and/or race through tips. Tipping illustrates the complex hierarchies and power dynamics within the institution of tipping.*

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## Introduction

Voices chat and glasses clink. You taste the first sip of white wine or feel the warmth of the plate that has just arrived at your table. Seemingly calm servers dash between the bar and their tables, trays full, and customers smile at the person across the table from them or concentrate as they receive their bill and confront the tip options on the credit machine.

Restaurants are rich in sensory and social experience. They are a site where class, gender, and race cross paths. As Beriss and Sutton (2007) state, “many of the central concepts used to define cultural worlds – such as the distinction between domestic and private life, or the rules surrounding relations with kin or with strangers – are challenged in restaurants” (p.1). Nowhere is this blurring of distinction more evident than in the practice of tipping. This thesis is about how people understand the tip and tipping practices in Halifax. Broadly speaking, I have been interested in the rich environment of restaurants because of my experience working in restaurants and bars for the past six years. Restaurants are not only places I go to work and earn money as a student, nor are they simply places I go out to with friends and family; they are places where I connect with co-workers and make deep long lasting relationships. Reflecting on why I enjoy working in restaurants made me want to better understand the relationship others have with this space in which personal and commercial experiences are so inextricable. Specifically, I wanted to better understand the relationship between people’s restaurant experience and the common practice of tipping. My research question became: *How do tippers, servers, and employers understand, experience, and practice tipping, and how does each groups’ behaviours impact the other’s experience?*

Tipping is an interesting phenomenon in that it so clearly “blurs the boundaries that are supposed to be kept separate, in a modern capitalist economy, between economic and personal,

public and private, commodity and gift” (Sutton 2007 p.191). Thus, the practice of tipping brings my work within the scope of the anthropology of money, the gift, and performance. The literature on tipping often relates the practice to Marcel Mauss’ pathbreaking work on the gift, defining the tip as a voluntary gift of money given by a customer to their server to show appreciation for the quality service they received (Azar 2005; Brewster and Mallinson 2009; Brewster and Wills 2013). By contrast, other literature argues that the tip is a means of power, where customer and employer flexibly measure the server’s service (Burgess 2012; Brewster and Wills, 2013). Servers too can hold some power and control in the tipping practice by performing for their customer in hopes of receiving a rewarding tip. White servers also limit the value of their service based on racial prejudices (Brewster and Mallinson, 2009). As a result, the tip creates power dynamics among all three groups. In order to answer my research question, I conducted semi-structured interviews with customers, servers, and managers to gain perspective on how all parties in the tipping practice understand and feel about the tip.

My analysis suggests that customers, servers, and employers tip for two main reasons: satisfaction and solidarity. While all participants in my research had experienced working in the restaurant industry, each customer said they mainly tipped based on how satisfied they were with their service and overall restaurant experience. Aware of customers’ motives, servers said they put on performances to increase their likability. As such, servers do more than just serving food. Servers and managers stated that they tipped mainly to show solidarity and help their fellow servers out financially. By including the managerial perspective, I was able to investigate how managers, who might be expected to have a more purely commercial perspective, nevertheless also participate in the blurring of boundaries in restaurant work. When servers and managers are customers at a restaurant, they understand the perspective of their server and therefore tip based

on solidarity rather than satisfaction. My findings suggest that this sense of solidarity is more important than the commercial perspective that makes tips a payment for good service. This thesis adds the perspective of all three groups involved in the tipping practice to the discussion of the tip in a way I have not seen reflected in other scholarship.

## **Theoretical Framework**

Most people in Canada are familiar with tipping and practice it regularly. Yet exactly why we tip is unclear. Because the tip is caught between being a gift and an economic exchange, I focus on Marcel Mauss' work on the gift and gift exchange as well as Karl Marx and his understanding of money and value, specifically in relation to how servers participate in wage work. If the tip is a recognition of value, it is also a symbol of power. I consider the power dynamics between customers, servers, and employers and the ways in which performance shifts power in the restaurant setting and within the institution of tipping. Erving Goffman's work on performance will be another key conceptual framework to draw on. Lastly, it is important to consider emotions and how the institution of tipping can impact the behaviour of both the server and the customer. My research helps us understand how people think about the tip itself, what the tip means to each group, and how the institution of tipping complicates our understanding of wage and compensation in one part of the modern service economy.

### ***The Gift and Mauss:***

Many studies have defined tipping as a voluntary gift of money given by a customer to a server to show appreciation for the quality of service received (Azar 2009; Azar 2005; Brewster and Mallinson 2009; Brewster and Wills 2013; Suarez 2009). While appreciation is perhaps a simplified reason and one of many reasons for tipping, we must first take a step back and ask,

what is a gift? The most influential investigation of the gift and gift exchanges in the social sciences is by Marcel Mauss. There are three fundamental stages of gifting according to Mauss: to give a gift, to have the gift received, and to receive a reciprocal gift (Wilk and Cliggett 2007). Wilk and Cliggett (2007) insist on the significance of examining gift giving because it allows us to see all aspects of human nature. Importantly, “gifts can be simultaneously understood as rational exchange, as a way to build political and social relations, and as expressions of moral ideas and cultural meaning” (p.155). Azar (2005) suggests that the tip can be understood as a rational exchange because, while tipping can exist for the purpose of monitoring service quality, it can potentially also improve economic efficiency. However, Brewster and Mallinson (2009) reveal in their investigation of racialized tipping differences that the tip can be understood as an expression of moral ideals and full of cultural meaning. Burgess’s study (2012) also supports understanding the tip as a gift in the context of cultural meaning. In contrast, Brewster and Wills (2013) demonstrate the ways in which tipping can build political and social relations by shifting agency and power from employer to employee and from employer to tipper. The literature listed above suggests that customers, servers, and managers are aware of how the tip can impact the relationships in restaurant businesses and what the tip actually means to each group.

Mauss argues that we give in the first place because the giving and reciprocating of gifts creates a link between the people involved (Wilk and Cliggett 2007). What is puzzling is the fact that tipping occurs after the service has already been provided. Tipping constructs the service simultaneously as a gift that the customer is reciprocating and work for which the customer is paying directly. Yet many studies report that people tip because “it is a good way of showing gratitude for the good service or cooking” (Azar 2005, p.1873). Tipping, like a gift, is a way for customers to reciprocate and show gratitude. In this context, tipping appears to be a social



exchange rather than an economic one. Suarez (2009), like Brewster and Wills (2013), explains that tipping is a social exchange because the obligation of the customer and the server are left unspecified during their interaction. He adds that “tipping present[s] a fundamental puzzle: it [lies] at the boundary of other critically different transfers, not quite a payment, not quite a bribe, not quite charity, but not quite a gift either” (p.311).

Giving and reciprocating gifts create a link between the people involved (Wilk and Cliggett 2007). Suarez’s (2009) exploratory ethnographic research in Vancouver restaurants supports this idea. His research specifically investigates the motivations underlying and influencing tip payment through his own experience and observations serving, as well as formal and informal interviews with servers and customers. He concludes that there are five different reasons as to why customers tip:

service-tipping to ensure good service and to discourage bad service; expectation-tipping to avoid social sanction, embarrassment, or other negative consequences from violating a social norm; sympathy-tipping to satisfy feelings of sympathy, compassion, or guilt; status-tipping to demonstrate or enhance social standing; and, lastly, bribery-tipping to secure some specific desire or preference. (p.314)

These five reasons for tipping are entangled in Mauss’ realm of gift exchange and reciprocity. Azar (2005) also concludes that customers tip because they want to reciprocate and show gratitude for good service or they feel compassionate towards the servers. Hart and Ortiz (2014), in their anthropological study of money, add that Mauss shows how “freedom, justice, and the person can be understood only within the specific monetary arrangements that give us our various social identities” (p.467). Tipping, if understood as a gift, can hold different meanings in

different countries, and even within the same countries can mean different things to different individuals. This research suggests five ways people are likely to understand the tip.

***Marx, Money, and Value:***

Research about money, payment, and labour cannot be done without considering the theories of Karl Marx. In his review of the anthropology of money, Mauer (2006) explains that the many different functions of money continue to be debated; “some scholars [emphasize money’s] function as a means of exchange, others [stress] its function as a unit of account, and others [refine] the Marxist tradition of money as the ur-commodity” (p.18). Giving a monetary tip to one’s server can be understood as a means of exchange and as a unit of account. For example, tipping can be an exchange for quality service, despite being a transaction that occurs after the fact, or it can be seen as an exchange for experience (Brewster and Wills 2013). A server not only provides the service of delivering a meal and beverage(s), but also presents themselves in a welcoming and kind way, contributing to the tipper’s overall experience. Furthermore, the tip is in itself a unit of account. As I will discuss later in this review, tipping is a way in which both the customer and the manager measure the value of the server’s work. In other words, tipping that satisfies the server must be comparable to what servers typically receive. Tips give servers the ability to compare their treatment with that of other servers and the customer’s generosity with that of other customers.

According to Marx, “capitalist moneys render everything quantifiable according to one scale of value and permit previously unthinkable comparisons among objects, persons, and activities” (Mauer 2006, p.20). Interestingly, some studies reveal how the server can limit the value of service they provide because they assume an inadequate tip will be given regardless of the quality of service. In their paper exploring racial differences in restaurant tipping, Brewster

and Mallinson (2005) found that white servers' racial prejudices lead them to discriminate against Black patrons. White servers create and place Black customers in a symbolically undesirable group, which 'inherently' determined them also as bad tippers (Brewster and Mallinson 2005). Ironically, by assuming who will give good or bad tips, servers are economically counterproductive because "doing so results in a reduction in the potential tipped income received due to the categorization of customers as undesirable" (p.1059). When servers categorize good versus bad customers, due to racist reasons or others, they also withhold their quality of service from the dining experience, which then decreases tip amount or likelihood. Brewster and Mallinson (2005) give a strong example of how servers may not understand how the tip is a reflection of the value or quality of their service. Similarly, Agius and Lee's (2006) ethnographic study on a Latino-owned and operated ethnic market found that Latina cashiers "deliberately [provided] better service to their White customers because they [felt] that the patronage of White, middle-class shoppers [raised] their occupational status as well as the status of their workplace" (p.197). Thus, the Latina cashiers place a higher value on their job when they serve White shoppers compared to Black and Asian shoppers.

Tipping represents a point of intersection between economic life and wage work and its supposed opposite, the gift, generosity, and discretion. It is a practice that allows customers to conduct themselves as though they are in a domain of gift-exchange when they may actually be in the domain of wage work, propelled by a capitalist economy.

### ***Power, Performance, and Goffman:***

According to Maurer (2006), anthropologists have found that "although money is powerful, it is met with appreciation, fear, and even ennui" (p.21). As mentioned above, tipping in the context of a gift can be much appreciated. However, that appreciation can stem from an

unequal power dynamic between manager, server, and customer. Money and power are always deeply intertwined. Several studies suggest that tipping establishes an unequal power dynamic between the customer and the server as well as between the server and their employer. While Burgess's (2012) study compares Australian tipping practices, or lack thereof, to that of America's and the historical influence that might have led to Australia's tipping practice, he discovers the power asymmetries behind the bar. Burgess argues that when employers hold more power, they are able to "devolve risk to employees, such that fixed wages are reduced and employees become more reliant on tips" (p.378). As a result, this devolution of risk increases the power of the tip and affects the relationship between the server and the customer. Tips soon become demanded or expected from the customers (Burgess 2012; Suarez 2009; Azar 2005).

Brewster and Wills' (2013) study also discovered the way in which managers use tips as a way to control and monitor their employees. Brewster and Mallinson (2009) agree that managers attempt to maximize profit by controlling the behaviour and activities of servers. Managers must rely on the institution of tipping because it indirectly controls servers' behaviours at the point of service delivery, thus making servers dependent on the transaction. However, Brewster and Wills (2013) assert that the power also lies with the servers, who are able to strategically control their interactions with customers, which encourages tipping. Here, Brewster and Wills cite Goffman's theory of impression management, a strategy used to define a situation and manipulate the outcome of the interaction (p.203). The server performs a sophisticated act, carefully crafted to guide the customers and their money into a tip. Goffman's theories reveal how servers see themselves in the context of tipping and the performance they are trying to give.

Servers have stated that they adapt their interaction style to maximize their likeability and compared themselves to chameleons (Brewster and Wills 2013). Servers are able to change their

behaviour and persona to correspond with what they perceived to be their guests' desires. By doing so, the servers consciously attempt to control and craft the service they deliver to further their own economic interest and receive a good, if not better, tip. Whyte (cited in Agius and Lee 2006) observes that waitresses manage their "status subordination by attempting to take the initiative in an interaction, set the tone, and thereby control the encounter" (p.200). Whyte adds that waitresses do this by the things they say, the way they use their voices, the expressions on their faces, and the way they act. If waitresses fail to seize the initiative, customers are likely to feel uneasy and thus treat waitresses as "subordinates, servants, or nonpeople" (p.200). Such research demonstrates that all customers, servers, and managers have some form of power in the restaurant experience, but this is further emphasized with the practice of tipping. Managers do not have the time nor the ability to oversee every customer-server interaction and experience, which also translates into their inability to control the service(s) being sold (Azar 2005; Brewster and Wills 2013). Servers, by contrast, experience power over their labour as a result of tipping being used as a source of managerial control (Brewster and Wills 2013). The manager grants the server a certain amount of freedom, so they can provide personalized, quality service in accordance with the customer's desire (p.195). Servers thus perceive themselves to have considerable influence on their interactions with customers and therefore feel empowered.

### ***The Tipping Point of Emotions:***

Emotions are key to understanding the performance servers execute and why we tip. Lutz and White (1986) explain that the study of emotion in the social sciences has been a materialist one (p.407) because emotions are treated as material things. Darwin (cited in Lutz and White 1986) outlines the relationship between emotion and culture (p.410). Emotions are functional as they organize human behaviour according to an environment's demands. Emotional expressions

are “seen as functioning primarily to signal the individual’s intentions, thereby informing others about one’s likely future actions” (Lutz and White 1986, p. 410). Suarez (2009), Nunan (2005), and Brewster and Wills (2013) demonstrate how emotions are used in restaurant environments and how emotions impact tipping. Arlie Hochschild’s (1979) concept of emotional labour, when “deep gestures of exchange enter the market sector and are bought and sold as an aspect of labour power,” (p.569) can be applied to tipping. Servers perform emotional labour and comply with rules, according to Brewster and Willis (2013). When a guest does not leave an “adequate tip’ it indicates and enforces the idea that a server can and should better control his/her emotions” (p.196). Emotions are not as natural, spontaneous, or involuntary as we typically assume them to be.

In Brewster and Wills’ (2013) findings, emotions and power are closely connected. At the same time, Brewster and Wills discover that servers can in fact draw on their customers’ emotions and cater to their needs, in hopes of getting a good tip in the future. Carefully managing emotions becomes part of serving because servers are not only selling the food and beverages they serve, but also the “emotional tonality” of the place (Little 2016). In this respect, money and value are present again in the tipping context. The research on emotions is relevant and important to look at because it is entangled in the institution of tipping from the perspective of customers, servers, and managers. Because emotions hold power, customers, servers, and managers may use or withhold emotions in their interactions with each other.

## **Methods**

I used an exploratory, qualitative research design to understand why people participate in tipping culture, and what experiences and feelings different individuals have about tipping

culture. I decided to focus on sit-down restaurants because of the amount of time customers and servers spend interacting with each other and building a relationship throughout the course of the service. In January 2021, I conducted ten semi-structured interviews via Zoom, an online video chatting platform. Ten interviews gave me a range of perspectives and were similar to the number used in Suarez's (2009), Burgess' (2012), and Brewster and Willis' (2013) studies. I interviewed three customers, four servers, and three managers.

Participants had to belong to one or more of the three categories mentioned. However, I did not exclude participants who belonged to multiple categories. Notably, all ten participants had experience in the restaurant industry ranging from five months to fifteen years, thus providing a wide range in the amount of experience participants had. The three participants who interviewed as customers had fewer years of experience and independently chose to participate in the study as customers instead of as servers. Additionally, not all servers or managers were currently working in a restaurant. They did however have at least six months of work experience within the past three years. I originally limited my study to the Halifax area to gain knowledge about local traditions and conditions here, as well as for convenience. While the majority of participants had dining, serving, and/or managing experience in Halifax restaurants, there were some exceptions. Two participants only had experience working in restaurants in BC, while another participant only had experience managing in the US.

Participants' ages ranged from nineteen to thirty-six years old, averaging 23.5 years. There was little noticeable difference by age in the responses given by participants. Participants varied in gender, race and ethnicity, and other social characteristics, which brought different perspectives and meanings to the table. My positionality as an Asian woman and an experienced server and manager is worth noting. When I began this project in September 2020, I had just

over one year of managing experience and more than six years of serving experience in restaurants and bars. This experience allowed me to build rapport with my participants.

I recruited participants through snowball sampling, which involved informing my friends, peers, and instructors of my research project and asking them to pass my contact information along to anyone who fit at least one of the categories. Similar to purposive sampling, snowball sampling permits in-depth analysis of typical cases, but one must be cautious about generalizing from this analysis (Wilkinson, Bouma, & Carland p.160-161).

The data gathering method consisted of qualitative, semi-structured interviews because they provide the best opportunity to find out what someone thinks or feels (p.254), while also providing participants with the opportunity to direct the conversation, identifying issues that are important to them. My interview guides were adapted for each group, as some questions were not applicable for one group. Because it can be tricky for people to talk about money, I also included vignettes in my interview guide. Vignettes are useful because they “offer the possibility of examining different groups’ interpretations of a ‘uniform’ situation,” (Barter and Renold 1999). They allowed me to explore tipping from all three groups’ perspectives and offered a focal point of comparison. I asked participants questions about their dining experiences at restaurants or their working experience as either a server or manager. However, the majority of the questions covered in the interview focused on how participants felt about the tip, how they understood the tip (as a gift or as an economic transaction), and the potential power dynamics involved in the transaction. In addition to my own experience as a customer, server, and manager, Suarez’s (2009) five reasons for tipping were helpful in the process of creating questions and vignettes for my semi-structured interview guide. I have attached my interview guide (Appendix III). Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes.



To conduct these interviews, I made arrangements with each participant about a time and preferred method of interview. All ten interviews were conducted via Zoom and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent. During each interview, I took notes in my research notebook. Immediately after conducting each interview, I wrote up a one-page memo containing basic information about the participant, a personal reflection of how the interview went, technical issues, things that stood out to me, and participants' body language throughout the interview. I transcribed each interview within 24 hours of conducting the interview. Then, I combed through my interview notes and transcriptions looking for common themes. I marked common terms used by participants, also known as "in vivo codes" (Jackson 2001, p.202), as well as sociologically constructed codes. I employed methods similar to those of Jackson (2001) and Tilley (2016), by highlighting key words used by participants, while also making notes in the margin and in a research notebook. Because all three customers also had some experience in the restaurant industry, there was an overlap in their answers with those from servers and managers. I was able to detect themes based on the similarities and differences in the experiences and opinions of customers, servers, and managers.

The risks or discomforts in my honours project were minimal. While the interview questions should not have caused any discomfort, participants knew that they did not have to answer any interview questions they did not want to. One main ethical concern in this research, as a result of using snowball sampling, was the risk that participants would know or be identified by a colleague in the Halifax restaurant industry. I took extra care not to reveal any information about participants and/or their interview answers, because by doing so could harm a participant who discloses an opinion that might be unprofessional, not representative of their place of work and/or identify the participant. All participants read and signed a consent form. Before each

interview and audio-recording began, I went over the consent form with participants, allowing them the chance to ask any questions. Additionally, I gave each participant a pseudonym to protect their identities and de-identified any personal information and details throughout my writing. Pseudonyms were created by assigning each participant who interviewed as a customer a name beginning with the letter “C”, each server a name starting with the letter “S”, and each manager a name beginning with the letter “M”. I decided to give names that started with the first letter of the participants’ category to make it easier to recognize what experience each participant represents in the tipping practice.

There were several limitations to my sampling method. First, this study focuses on a very small sample size. While there was a total of ten participants, there were only three to four participants for each group, meaning that conclusions drawn from these participants cannot represent all customers, all servers, or all managers’ experiences and ideas about tipping. Additionally, there were only two male-identifying participants, both of whom had experience in the restaurant industry, meaning there is a potential gap in knowledge about the male customer experience. Notably, there is also a limitation in understanding how someone with zero experience in the restaurant industry understands, experiences, and feels about the tip as all ten participants had some experience working in restaurants. Participants were predominantly white and female; thus, these findings cannot be considered to apply or be representative of everyone. However, they raise valid themes that can be explored.

## **Findings and Analysis**

This study explored how customers, servers, and managers understand, experience, and practice tipping and how each group’s behaviours impact the others’ experience. After

conducting interviews with three customers, four servers, and three managers, I concluded that tipping is clearly a social norm reinforced by many people's regular participation in it. However, the majority of participants said they had not given much thought to why tipping happens or had serious conversations about tipping in general. While servers and managers had different opinions on why people tip and what the tip represents compared to customers, some emotions and opinions overlapped between the three groups. For instance, while each customer said they tip primarily based on the quality of service they received, the servers and managers said they always tip, regardless of the quality of service, because they "understand what it's like to work in a restaurant." Three different themes emerged from the interviews: performance by servers given in hopes of securing a good tip, solidarity amongst people who have experience in the service industry, and the ways tipping is implicated in people's financial situations. This analysis section is divided into three sections. The first section, *Dinner and A Show* explores how customers' expectations and dining experiences are met through performance. Servers are able to change things about the service they provide in hopes of getting a good tip. In order to do so, servers must be able to read their customers. While this section may seem familiar and correspond with how most people understand the tip, it is more nuanced. The second section, *Paying It Forward*, focuses on the primary reason servers and managers tip in contrast to customers' primary reason for tipping. This section explores the deeper, layered meanings of the tip. Finally, *But Your English is so Good! Systemic Racism and Sexism*, confronts the structural problems in the restaurant industry such as racism and sexism and how both servers and customers can be discriminated against based on their race and/or gender.

***Dinner and a Show:***

When asked about the possible power dynamic between customers and servers, the majority of servers expressed feelings of powerlessness compared to customers because customers dictated the tip amount and, in turn, how much money the server would bring home that night. Sarah, who has just over a year's worth of serving experience, stated:

If a server comes into work and isn't having the best day and like naturally wouldn't be nice to the other servers, they *are* going to be nice to the customers because they know they're the ones who control their tip, therefore, how much money they're getting. So, I would say the customer holds more power.

While Sophie, who has been serving for roughly seven years, also brought up the saying, "the customer is always right" in regard to customers holding more power compared to servers, Scott, who served for four years, pointed to the obvious title of the job. He laughed and said:

The power dynamic is, if you pardon the pun, laid out on the table from the minute the customer walks in the room. It's right there in the name, server, where we are the etymology of the word. Like the lexicon just sort of lends itself to a subservient power dynamic. You are providing service, you are serving, you are a server [...] I always tell my friends we're food hookers. We're selling a performance, we're selling them food.

[The place I used to work at] would have predominantly out-of-towners coming on cruise ships and they'd be led in [to the restaurant] with bagpipes and lobsters and, you know, of course I laid on the Nova Scotian accent, right, you've got to.

The servers' observations about power also reveal the potential power or control servers have in the customer server interaction. Servers will put on a performance, such as a heavy Nova Scotian accent, to better the customer's experience. Alternatively, if a server is having a bad day, they

will not let that show in front of the customer to avoid negatively impacting the customer's experience, which could potentially decrease the tip left at the end. Instead, they will be “bubbly and put on this type of face or personality [before going] back to the kitchen and being like, ‘oh I really hate my life’” (Sophie). Customers expressed it was natural to have bad days, but that they wanted their server to stay professional or acknowledge the poor service. Clara gave an example of what she would want to hear from her server if she received bad service, “I’m sorry, I’ve been having a hard day. I hope you still had a good meal and that this didn’t deteriorate your experience.”

By putting on a show, servers create an enjoyable atmosphere for customers (Spradley and Mann 1975, 98). However, servers stated that they are also able to withhold service and a performance from customers, which gives them power. Sarah expressed that being able to make someone's dining experience less enjoyable on purpose is a form of “negative power”. By contrast, Sylvia, who has been serving for three years now, explained how withholding service or giving a lesser performance, especially to customers who she does not think will tip, allows her to conserve her energy for other tables:

Well, when I get, I don't want to sound like I'm pointing people out, but sometimes I'll get a group of girls, and they kind of look like that Instagram influencer, also kind of obnoxious, I know I'm not going to get a very good tip. So, I give them the service I can give without over exhausting myself because if I over exhaust myself to try and please them, and then get a tip that is low or [none] at all, I know I'm going to feel down. I'm saving my energy for friendly people in general.

By withholding service to their customers, servers are at risk of creating what Brewster and Mallinson (2005) call, a “self-fulfilling prophecy” (p.1063). Scott explains, “if a server is having

a bad day and they're like 'wow, I've been getting shitty tips all day,' it's because you've been having a shitty attitude, dude. And they're like, 'well I bet the next table won't tip either' [...] Yeah, all about them not trying to give the service they could and then ending up with bad tips."

When customers' satisfaction is important to gaining a good tip, servers were likely to smile through the "bad day" or a difficult customer while in the "frontstage space" (Goffman 1959). Many servers said that after getting a bad tip or dealing with a rude customer, they would go back to a co-worker and confide in them. Billingsley (2016) points out that because there are two different spaces within the same work environment in a restaurant, workers' "emotional labor with customers occurs in the frontstage, whereas the consequences of dealing with emotional labor are likely to take place in the backstage" (642). Having worked in a restaurant before, Clara agreed and said, "I know servers will talk amongst themselves and be like 'oh man that person couldn't even tip me fifteen percent. They only gave me five percent.'" Sophie, Sylvia, and Clara see the back area near the bar or kitchen as a space for servers to vent and gossip far from sight or earshot of customers. Christine was also aware of the gossip that occurs backstage between servers and emphasized that they do not want to be the "customer the servers talk about." Christine's concern shows that while servers put on a performance to please customers and increase their chances of a good tip, some customers also present themselves so that they are not the cause of their server's emotional labour. "It could just be my own self-consciousness coming through," Christine continued, "and my hopes that they'll like me, but I also feel like it's because I know how shitty it can be to be a server."

In all scenarios, in order to determine the type of performance and offer the atmosphere or experience the customer wants, servers must be able to "read their customers". When asked if they could predict whether or not a customer would leave a tip before giving them the bill, most

servers and managers said yes. Mia, who was in the restaurant industry for fifteen years and a manager for eight of those years, compared servers' dialogue to a script, rehearsed and repeated with each customer. Some servers felt they could make an accurate prediction simply from the first conversation, asking their customers questions such as "how are you folks doing this evening?", "are you in for a special occasion?", "it's a beautiful day, any plans later?". Servers said generally if a customer was friendly and engaged in the conversation, that customer was likely to tip. However, if the customer did not "bother making eye contact" or if the customer's body was turned away from the server, the customer was likely not to tip. The server thus has power by reading the customer's body language in addition to the information they learn from conversation, allowing them to perform and meet the customer's wants and needs. Sophie gave the example of how she would adjust her performance to customers who were on a first date:

Even if your customers are kind of awkward or quiet, or if they are on a first date and they're nervous and you can tell that, I think it's important to be able to read your customers as well and kind of know what vibe it is for the night [...] you can kind of alleviate [the awkwardness] and make light of the situation, make them feel more comfortable. I think being able to do that and reading social cues is really important and makes a good server.

Consistent with servers' understanding of how to cater to their customers, the participants who were interviewed as customers also highlighted this. Clara stated that she does not want a server who is just going through the motions of serving like a checklist, nor does she want "mechanical, robotic service". Instead, "it comes down to [the server's] performance," said Clara. She wants a performance where the server approaches her with a smile, takes the time to make sure she gets everything she needs, whether it is food related or anything else, is

knowledgeable about the menu, and, most importantly, is understanding. Clara stated that oftentimes, servers forget the customer's perspective and customers forget the server's perspective. Because of the nature of restaurant service and the face-to-face interactions that occur in the dining experience, customers and servers developed a relationship that is unique to wage work. Servers restore a fuller social exchange by performing and reading their customers in ways that other wage work systems do not usually allow.

***Paying It Forward:***

I found that servers and managers tip for a variety of reasons, which coalesced into three categories that I call *satisfaction-tipping* to express whether the service provided met the customer's expectations, *solidarity-tipping* to communicate a shared experience and understanding, and *finance-tipping* to financially support fellow servers. These categories reflect primarily the responses from servers and managers; however, customer interviewees shared similar reasons, since all three – Clara, Cassey, and Christine – have some experience in the restaurant industry.

*Satisfaction-tipping:* All participants were asked, “in your opinion, why do people tip?” (Appendix III). Customers, servers, and managers all began by explaining that the tip is given to show appreciation for the service and how satisfied the customer was with their dining experience. The tip is not only a reflection of the food, but also the server, the service provided, and the restaurant's overall environment. Matt, who has been in the restaurant industry for six years, justified that the tip can be broken into three categories according to the quality of service: first, “bad service”, where the server is “just a terrible server, forgetting to do things, not taking [the customer's] orders, long wait time,” corresponds to no tip or “maybe a ten percent tip,” ; “regular service,” is when the server is “doing literally the bare minimum. Going to say hi,



grabbing orders, checking in once or twice, giving the [customer] the bill, leaving. There's nothing special about it and it's basically going through motions and will probably receive the normal fifteen percent,"; and lastly, "great service," where the server goes "above and beyond and creates a personal connection with the customer and [the customer] comes back not only because of the food, but because they enjoyed their time there and their time with *you*." Great service would be rewarded with an eighteen to twenty percent tip.

Customers expressed awkwardness in the idea of not tipping, but never said they personally would not tip. Instead, they removed themselves and talked in the hypothetical saying, "if *someone* got bad service, they don't need to tip." Scott pointed out that although some people will say they are not going to tip, "as soon as that machine comes to you and you're presented with the tip options, you're going to toss your server a couple of bucks. You'd feel like a dick if you didn't." This potential guilt of not tipping, or being with company that did not tip, was also echoed in Vignette One (Appendix III). Mia, like Megan, Matt, Scott and Sylvia, said if she noticed that the company she was eating with did not tip, she would increase her tip. "That's just me knowing the culture," Mia added, "me knowing that that server isn't pocketing the full tip themselves, it's being divided by the bar, the kitchen, sometimes the management, you know." Thus, while customers generally believed that the tip was representative of their dining experience, servers and managers saw more importance in tipping for solidarity and financial reasons. Sylvia reminds herself that when it comes to tipping from people who have no restaurant industry experience, "common sense isn't as common as you think it is."

*Solidarity-Tipping:* When asked how their experience as a server or manager affects their tipping behaviour as a customer in a restaurant, servers and managers emphasized that they not only tipped consistently, but they also tipped more. Suarez's (2009) research found evidence of

*sympathy-tipping*, where participants “believed tips were at least partially given out of a sense of sympathy, and, at times, charity, guilt, or pity” (p.314). Additionally, servers described an “unspoken rule among current and former [...] restaurant workers” to tip well (p.318). Similarly, in my interviews, servers and managers described that they were happy to tip and emphasized the same unspoken rule. They saw a shared experience and appreciation for their server:

I tip 20 percent because I’m a server. When I’m serving, I expect at least somewhere between twelve and fifteen percent, ideally fifteen percent. I always tipped before [I was a server], but now I realize after you’re standing all day, you’re sometimes dealing with horrible people all day, drunk people, it’s really frustrating. So, I always try to tip 20 percent, even if I’m [receiving] subpar service. I’d try and be like ‘okay, remember the shifts you had where you were really upset, people weren’t friendly? You can still give an okay tip. They’re probably just having a bad day. You’ve had them too.’ (Sylvia)

Both servers and managers felt a sense of solidarity and pride in giving their server a higher tip when dining out. *Solidarity-tipping* is thus one way people with experience in the service industry communicate to their server that they have “been there before.”

Not only did servers and managers express understanding the ups and downs of restaurant work through their tips, but they also expressed solidarity in their actions. All servers and managers recognized the difficulty of having to reach over their guests to grab empty glasses or plates. When reading Vignette Two (Appendix III), multiple participants insisted that Kelly, the customer in the vignette, had restaurant experience because she moved glasses and plates to the end of the table. Matt exclaimed and smiled, “Nice! Yeah Kelly! Go Kelly!” as I read “after [the group] finished the appetizers, Kelly, who is sitting in the middle of the table, starts stacking the side plates and hands them over to the server when she comes by.” Participants also said they

would “obviously” help out like Kelly to make a server’s life easier. Scott even described these actions as an instinct. He laughed and explained that he was Kelly:

I did that shit last night. Me and the boys in the industry, we did the exact same thing. Plates go on the side, get the glasses down (gesturing the movements as he talks), that eighteen percent tip, and as I said earlier, our server was not that good, but you just do that. If I go into a restaurant, my whole-body kind of changes to get out of the way of stuff coming towards me and getting out of the way of the people carrying food. It’s just sort of been beaten into me over the years. [...] such big help. It’s happened to me [when I’m serving] and it’s beautiful. You love to see it. I don’t have to reach past, you know, Samantha and her big-ass purse to get the glasses. Oh, 100 percent, you love that.

Scott’s enthusiasm was shared by others. Matt said:

When you’re in a restaurant [as a customer], even if you’re celebrating your birthday or a friend’s birthday, you’re still going to be a server while you’re there. There are just certain things [I do] every single time I go out. It’s just second nature. It makes your table area cleaner, but it also makes [the server’s] job easier, they just grab it. Then they’re like ‘server?’ and [I] nod, ‘yup’ and exchange a smile.

The tip is thus an important symbol of solidarity, but it is also a symbol of financial understanding and support. When fellow restaurant industry workers tip generously, it demonstrates “how extravagant tips can be used to communicate a deep solidarity, recognition of exhausting physical, emotional, and intellectual work that goes into the food industry. A generous tip can go beyond professional courtesy and reflect a deep emotional bond” (Sutton 2007 p.199).

*Finance-Tipping*: Finance-tipping can be divided into three different understandings. While the first understanding of *finance-tipping* relates to the customer's financial ability, the second understanding considers how tips make up a large portion of a server's paycheck. The third understanding is connected to the practice of tip-out. All participants agreed that it was important to tip, however, they were divided when probed about how much people should tip and whether people should go out to eat at a restaurant if they cannot afford to tip. Customers, servers, and managers thought that the average person tips fifteen percent. Mia described the fifteen to eighteen percent tip as a "little area that most people are comfortable spending." Some servers and managers emphasized that the tip should be thought of as part of the final bill amount. However, others disagreed and believed that tipping depends on a person's financial ability and should not stop someone from going out to restaurants, even if they cannot afford to tip. Scott explained,

Here's the thing, I love tips because I made extra money from just sort of being charming and not a dick, you know, like, it was really nice, but I don't think anybody should ever expect to get tipped, ever.[...] I've met so many great people who are serving and they do rely on that extra money because [...] it can help a lot of [servers] out financially, but at the same time I would never be like, 'you should tip more' or even tell other people to tip.

Sophie shared Scott's opinion and never expects to be tipped and does not think the fact that someone can or cannot tip should be a factor. Similarly, Clara and Christine did not like the idea of anyone being excluded from a restaurant due to financial strain and should not stop anyone from going if they cannot give a fifteen percent tip.

By contrast, other servers and managers explained that tipping is necessary because when customers do not tip, servers lose money. Matt maintained that the tip is part of the bill a customer has to pay at the end of the night. If a customer has 20 dollars, that does not mean they should have 20 dollars' worth of drinks. Instead, the customer should have sixteen- or seventeen-dollars' worth of drinks, and consider the rest as a tip. Matt was not alone. Other servers and managers expressed frustration when talking about customers who do not tip because the customers do not understand that the tip makes up a large portion of the servers' paychecks. Mia gave several examples of how servers use their tip money: "The tip contributes to their rent, their car insurance, their parking pass, their gym pass, you know, their means of living". Notably, the customers I interviewed understood the financial implication of the tip. Christine recognized how essential tips were for servers:

I know a lot of people see [the tip] as a way to show appreciation for the job the server is doing and that is part of it for me as well, but now having worked as a server, I also have the experience of understanding that tipping is a large portion, if not most of the pay that server gets. So, I know [the tip] helps a lot.

People outside of the restaurant industry are often unfamiliar with the practice of tip-out, where servers give a percentage of their total tip earning from a shift to their coworkers. Members of front of house (FOH) such as hosts, bartenders, bar-backs, and bussers get tipped out as well as members of back of house (BOH), like line cooks and dishwashers. Tip-out amount can vary at different restaurants and can include or exclude certain members of both FOH and BOH. Most servers did not mind tipping-out their coworkers because, as Sylvia said, "I'm the one taking this money from you, but all this gift is being distributed to other members of the restaurant. [...] I'm not the one making the drinks. I'm not cooking the food [guests] are

coming in to eat. I'm just taking their orders" Similarly, Scott has "never, ever had a problem tipping out" his co-workers, especially since he started off in a BOH position. He pointed out that some servers have a problem with tipping out and is a "bone of contention at some restaurants with the worst culture. It can get fairly toxic, but the tip is sort of, like, extra, right... so I mean, let's share it around. Absolutely not a problem for me." Participants saw tipping-out as a fair practice because, while their FOH and BOH co-workers never interact with customers in the same way they do, the servers' ability to perform well depends on them. When servers and managers understand tipping-out in this way, they develop a solidaristic understanding of the enterprise that challenges the assumptions of wage work.

It is a common assumption that the money workers earn is for the work they do and that workers would seek to get as much money for their job as they can. Tip-out, however, is a kind of profit sharing among workers. It understands tips as profit rather than wages, or something perhaps in-between. Furthermore, it recognizes common entitlement to the tips because of shared effort. Tipping-out imagines that some portion of the restaurant's earnings belongs to the staff, rather than the owner. By sharing their tips, servers disrupt the terms of normal wage work.

When asked if participants thought of the tip as an economic transaction or as a gift, all participants had overlapping understandings. The primary reasons participants saw the tip as an economic transaction was because the tip contributes to servers' paychecks, compensating for low minimum wages, and because the tip was shared. However, when participants categorized the tip as partially economic and partially a gift, they based the gift portion on how much above fifteen percent the tip was. Sarah calculated the tip as a gift when she is tipped above fifteen percent because someone really "appreciated [her] service, had a good time talking to [her], really enjoyed the food," and wanted to thank her. Megan and Sylvia shared similar views that

the majority of the tip is an economic transaction because the tip is divided amongst co-workers in the tip-out process, and it contributes to servers' paychecks as compensation for minimum wage work. Scott expressed his frustration that nobody "should have to rely on tips." "I love tips," he smiled and laughed, "because I benefited so much from them. And I tip because I benefited so much from them. I'm paying it sort of forward." *Solidarity-Tipping* and *Finance-Tipping* overlap in Scott's understanding of tipping culture, demonstrating the complex reason as to why people tip. Ironically, Matt joked about how people in the service industry work hard to get good tips to support themselves financially, but that it is also "very dangerous because you tend to tip a lot higher. You understand what it feels like to get a tip, so when you go out to a restaurant, you reciprocate that action by [tipping your server well]. You just kind of pass [the tip] along. If I can make someone else's day, why not?"

*Solidarity-Tipping* and *Finance-Tipping* demonstrate a capacity for servers to show feelings and emotions about their work that are not solely about the exchange of their labour for money. Instead of being divisive, participants understood the tip in a manner that counters the individualistic assumption that underpins wage work. Tipping is a way to build mutual support and recognition among restaurant workers generally.

***But Your English is so Good! Systemic Racism and Sexism:***

Matt tips higher than the average fifteen percent not only because he is in the industry, but to push against the "prejudice of Chinese people not tipping." Matt and Scott stressed that one of the biggest issues with tipping and the industry as a whole, "as well as one of the biggest issues with humanity" (Scott), is racism. Earlier, I mentioned Brewster and Mallinson's (2009) discussion of the self-fulfilling prophecy in the context of white servers intentionally giving poor service to Black customers. For example, one way a server might 'read' their customers is to act

on their own racist assumptions about a table, which negatively affects the quality of service they give. If the customer engages in *satisfaction-tipping*, they might leave little to no tip due to the poor service. The customer's tip then enforces and affirms the server's racial stereotypes they began with, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Similar to Dirk's and Rice's study (cited in Brewster and Mallinson 2009), where they found white servers participating in the "server game of 'Pass the (Black) Table'" in order to avoid waiting on African-American customers (p.1056), Scott remembered, "[overhearing] fights of servers not wanting to take Asian or Black tables because they are traditionally bad tippers." Brewster and Mallinson (2009) argue that "because servers face wage uncertainty, in that they lack reliable knowledge about which patrons will leave satisfying tips, they statistically discriminate in their service delivery" (p.1060). A server's assumptions that they will be "stiffed" based on the race of their customers is another way a server can express agency and power. By withholding quality service from certain customers, a server continues to play the minimum "role required by [their] job" (Brewster and Mallinson 1062), while simultaneously focusing their energy on customers that they believe will tip more.

Matt understands that a lot of Asians just "don't know [how to tip] because tipping isn't part of their culture." He grew up in a country in East Asia and recalled that the first time he went out in Halifax, he did not tip because he "honestly didn't know. And I don't blame a lot of people that don't know that." In fact, Matt has noticed that over the last two years a lot of,

fobs (fresh off the boat) that come over from China are tipping more than average, like 20 or 25 percent because of the stereotype. Which is crazy and great in a sense [because] they're learning about the culture, but it's also sad because they have to compensate for not knowing the culture.



Racial minority customers are thus caught between leaving a perhaps undeservedly large tip to counter racial stereotypes and leaving a low tip that might accurately reflect the service received but also perpetuates race-based tipping stereotypes.

It is not only customers who are unfairly treated and served based on their race; so are servers. Scott expressed his advantages in the service industry as a straight, white man. He laughed and said,

I was never that good of a server. I was OK, I was fine, but I found I often got tipped far, far more than I should have been based on my serving abilities because people love a mid 20-year-old white guy. They just, they're not threatened by me, I am a cliché. You know, if I worked in the banking industry, they'd probably think I was trying to rob them. [...]. I had a very good friend of mine, Lisa, who is Cuban, French Canadian, and a lesbian and she just tried to keep all that hidden because people would just shaft her for absolutely no reason and [she was] ten times the server I ever was.

By comparing himself to Lisa, Scott highlights how he benefited from tips because of his gender and race. In a related observation, Matt said, “you get the highest tips being a female, blonde, white girl here in Halifax. You get generally higher tips. And that's just pure statistics rather than me being stereotypical, I'm not trying to be anything...” Both Matt and Scott thought of gender normativity as an advantage. Sylvia and Sophie also made the same observation, connecting their appearance to higher tip amounts. While Sylvia observed that customers who complimented her hair or makeup would usually tip her more than fifteen percent, Sophie hypothetically described how a man might tip a “pretty server that has her boobs out” 20 percent because he is attracted to her and sexualizes her. Furthermore, he is “going to joke with her and she will joke back”. The public nature of joking in restaurants and bars, according to Spradley and Mann (1975), is

“intentionally used to create an atmosphere for customers” (p.98) and thus part of the realm of performance, but more importantly “maintains the status inequality of female waitresses and reinforces masculine values” (p.100).

Like gender normativity, race also produces advantages for servers who are in the dominant position. Matt explained how he was working with his friend, a “straight, white male, decently good looking.” He continued,

Let me get on that tangent for a second. We've been serving [at this restaurant] for the same amount of time. We get the same number of tables, same clientele. It was a cruise ship. He worked one side, I work the other. He made twice as much tips as I did. Same service, but people are just like “oh wow your English is so good” and I'm like... I just, I can't even...

Matt validated his perception by building an experiment. The only variable in this story is the men's race. Matt models a comparison that validates his obviously strong perception that he is treated differently because of race. I was unable to find more research on the matter, but this would merit further study. Discrimination in restaurant tipping based on normativity needs much more investigation, partly because servers carry this burden of uncertainty in the tip, but also to validate the connection between servers who are discriminated against, if appropriate. Matt demonstrated his sense of injustice and his epistemological insecurities.

## **Conclusion**

My research suggests that customers, servers, and managers understand, experience, and practice tipping in all sorts of ways. The tip is caught somewhere between a gift and an economic exchange, personal and impersonal, gives and takes power, and enforces social hierarchies. My

findings suggest that tipping permits a kind of consciousness among servers that differs from the normal framework of wage work under capitalism. When servers skillfully craft a performance to encourage tipping, they bring their customer away from an exchange of service for money, and towards a relationship of hospitality. Tipping also pulls restaurant culture away from a purely individualistic, commercial, profit-driven logic, and workers away from an individual wage framework and towards solidarity and profit sharing. Managers, whose job traditionally is to extract profit and job efficiency from their employees, nevertheless participate in a solidaristic understanding of tipping. Rather than understanding tipping as a profit-making practice or as an individual compensation for individual performance, managers joined the servers and customers – who notably had restaurant work experience – and practiced tipping in a solidaristic and sharing manner. This understanding stems from shared experience in the restaurant industry. I think customers without restaurant experience might tip more heavily based on *satisfaction-tipping*, reflecting a fee for quality service. Without the shared experience of restaurant work and understanding the tip's financial importance, customers might continue to tip in a capitalist manner, exchanging money for service.

While moving away from the institution of tipping and towards a secure wage system that reliably compensates servers for their work would be financially advantageous for servers and less emotionally demanding for customers, it might also remove the solidaristic relationship of restaurant work as well as the element of profit sharing that emerges from the practice of tip-out. The logic of tip-out means that servers think about their fellow co-workers and their work, not the self-interest that underpins capitalist understanding of work. However, to the extent that tipping permits racial discrimination against both customers and servers, a reliable living wage structure for servers is preferable.

This study, which builds systematically on my own experiences as a restaurant worker, has shown me the complexities and tensions of the restaurant industry. Reflecting upon my restaurant work experience, I realize I do not just have experience as a restaurant worker, I have an emotional attachment to the communities I joined through restaurant work. My interest in restaurant work will continue, specifically in relation to workers being paid fairly, as I will continue working in the industry to support myself. This research is just one step towards understanding the complexities of the hospitality industry, in which money, people, and personal relationships are entangled. A direction for future studies could be a comparative ethnography of restaurant culture in tipping and non-tipping places. Additionally, perhaps further inquiry, where the three categories – customers, servers, and managers – are rigorously distinguished would provide a different understanding of the tip altogether. The tip is, in the end, ambiguous and an interesting practice because of its own contradictions in a capitalist world.

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## Appendix I: Consent Form



*Faculty of Arts and  
Social Sciences*

### Consent Form

#### Tipping Culture in Restaurants in Halifax: An Exploratory Study

You are invited to take part in research being conducted by me, Lydia Hanson, an undergraduate student in Social Anthropology, as part of my honours degree at Dalhousie University. The purpose of this research is to interview customers, servers, and managers to understand how they understand, experience, and feel about tipping culture in Halifax restaurants. I will write up the results of this research in a paper for my class, called the honours thesis.

As a participant in the research, you will be asked to answer a number of interview questions about your experience and feelings about tipping and about some short descriptions of imaginary tipping situations. The interview should take about an hour and will be conducted in a quiet location of your choice if COVID regulations permit. Otherwise, we can conduct the interview online on the virtual platform of your choice (for example, FaceTime, Zoom or Skype). There is a risk of loss of personal privacy from using internet-based communications. The risk is no greater or lesser than when using applications such as Skype and Zoom for other purposes. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded using the memo function on my personal, password protected iPhone or using an audio program called Audiohijack. A handheld recorder and/or the recording feature within Zoom or Skype may also be used as a back-up. I will tell you exactly how I will be recording the interview prior to the start.

Your participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer, and you are welcome to stop the interview at any time if you no longer want to participate. If you decide to stop participating after the interview is over, you can do so until March 1, 2021. I will not be able to remove the information you provided after that date, because I will have completed my analysis, but the information will not be used in any other research.

Information that you provide to me will be kept private and will be anonymized, which means any identifying details such as your name will be removed from it. Only the honours class supervisor and I will have access to the unprocessed information you offer. If I quote any part of your interview in my honours thesis, I will use a pseudonym, not your real name, and I will remove any other details that could identify you from the quote. I will describe and share general findings in a presentation to the Sociology and Social Anthropology Department and in my honours thesis. Nothing that could identify you will be included in the presentation or the thesis. I will keep anonymized information so that I can learn more from it as I continue with my studies.



The risks associated with this study are no greater than those you encounter in your everyday life.

There will be no direct benefit to you in participating in this research and you will not receive compensation. The research, however, will contribute to new knowledge on how customers, servers, and managers' understanding, experience, and practice tipping impacts one another. If you would like to see how your information is used, please feel free to contact me and I will send you a copy of my honours thesis after April 30, 2021.

If you have questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact me or the honours class supervisor. My contact information is [ly415257@dal.ca](mailto:ly415257@dal.ca). You can contact the honours class supervisor, Dr Martha Radice, at the Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Dalhousie University on (902) 494-6747, or email [martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca).

If you have any ethical concerns about your participation in this research, you may contact Catherine Connors, Director, Research Ethics, Dalhousie University at (902) 494-1462, or email [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca).

**Participant's consent:**

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study.

Name:
Signature:
Date:
Researcher's signature:
Date:

## Appendix II: E-mail Response to Inquiries from Potential Research Participants

Hi X,

Thank you for expressing interest in my research project! My name is Lydia Hanson and I am currently in my fourth and final year of my undergraduate degree. I am completing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Anthropology at Dalhousie University/University of King's College. My honours thesis is about tipping at sit-down restaurants and bars. Specifically, I am interested in understanding the different perspectives, feelings, and experiences of tippers (customers), servers, and employers. I am aiming to learn from people who have at least one of the three perspectives. I am looking to speak with the following kinds of people:

- People who are customers in restaurants
- People with serving experience in a restaurant or bar. They do not have to be currently employed as a server, as long as they have at least 6 months of serving experience within the past 3 years.
- People with management experience in a restaurant or bar. They do not have to be currently working as a restaurant or bar manager, as long as they have at least 6 months of managerial experience within the past 3 years

If you have any of these experiences, I would love to interview you about your understanding, experiences, and feelings about tipping. The interview would take around an hour, and it would be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. If you feel comfortable and provided covid 19 regulations permit, we can meet in person in a quiet, public location, such as a cafe or the Halifax public library. Otherwise, we can arrange an online interview via FaceTime, Zoom, or Skype.

If you decide you are interested in participating in my research project, your identity would be protected and kept confidential in every aspect of my research.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating or if you have any questions at all about my project. Additionally, if you have any questions or concerns about my research, you can also contact my supervisor, Martha Radice ([martha.radice@dal.ca](mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca)).

Thank you for your time,

Lydia Hanson  
[ly415257@dal.ca](mailto:ly415257@dal.ca)

## Appendix III: Interview Guide

### Introductory Remarks to Interviewees

Thank you for participating in my research project. I'd like to tell you about my research project and explain why I recruited you. I am conducting research on tipping. I am particularly interested in how the different people involved in tipping practice understand, experience, and feel about tipping and the culture and behaviour around it. So, I am interviewing customers, servers, and managers.

I'd also like to go over the consent form briefly with you... (refer to highlighted consent form). Do you have any questions for me before we begin the interview?

Okay, I am going to begin recording, is that okay?

### Vignettes and follow up questions

#### Vignette 1

Taylor, Alex, and Sam go out to eat lunch together. The three of them have been friends for a couple of years now. They decide to go to a new restaurant downtown. They are seated and served quickly. They really love the food and decide they should definitely come back again. The server comes by and delivers them their bills. The machine is first passed to Alex. Taylor, who is sitting next to Alex sees Alex hit the "No Tip" option on the credit machine. The machine is then passed to Sam, who hits the 15% tip option. Taylor decides to tip 20% and nervously smiles at the waiter. As they walk out of the restaurant, Taylor confronts Alex and says, "why didn't you leave the server a tip? The food was good and came super fast." Alex replied, "I don't know. The server didn't really do much."

1. How would you describe Taylor's reaction?
2. In what way did Alex and Sam influence Taylor's decision to tip the server?
3. Why do you think Taylor tipped 20%?

## Vignette 2

Kelly is going out for dinner with her friends to celebrate one of their birthdays. They sit at a big table for eight laughing and having fun. After they've finished the appetizers, Kelly, who is sitting in the middle of the table, starts stacking the side plates and hands them over to the server when she comes by. The server smiles and thanks her. Kelly and her friends finish the first rounds of drinks and as the server comes over, Kelly tells everyone to pass their empty glasses to the end of the table so the server can reach them all. At the end of the dinner, Kelly tips the server 25%, while all her friends only tip 15%. She also makes sure to thank the waiter on her way out.

1. Do you think Kelly's actions were surprising? Would you have seen them as helpful or out of place, and why?
2. Why do you think Kelly behaved the way she did?

## Conclusion Questions for all participants

1. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience as a customer/server/manager and tipping with me?
2. What are your preferred pronouns?
3. What is your age?
4. How would you describe your occupation? (ie. student, young professional, specific job/trade etc.)
5. Do you identify as Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour?

Thank you for answering my questions and sharing your thoughts with me today.

Questions for participants who identify as customers

1. How often do you go out to eat at a sit-down restaurant? What kind of restaurants do you eat at?
2. In your opinion, why do people usually tip?
  - a) How much do you consider to be an appropriate amount to tip? Why?
3. What makes a good server? What makes a bad server?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about how you decide on the amount you tip?
5. Are there certain behaviours that prompt you to tip your server more or less?
6. What does tipping mean, to you? Why do you tip?
  - a) Do you think of tipping as an economic transaction or as a gift to the server, or both?
7. Do you think tipping sets up a power relation between the customer and the server? If so, where do you think the power lies?
  - a) What kind of power does each person in the interaction have?
  - b) Does one person have more power than the other? In what way?
  - c) Do you ever feel powerless as the customer?
8. Have you changed your tipping practices during COVID 19, or more specifically since March 2020? If so, how?

Read Vignette 1 and follow up questions.

Read Vignette 2 and follow up questions.

Questions for participants who identify as servers

1. How long/how much experience do you have in the restaurant industry as a server? What kinds of places have you worked at? Where do you work now?
2. How has your experience as a server affected your behaviour when you are a customer?
3. In your opinion, why do people tip?
  - a) How much do you consider to be an appropriate amount to tip? Why?
4. In your opinion, what makes a good customer?
  - a) What makes a bad customer?
5. Are you able to tell how much a customer is going to tip before you hand them the bill? If so, how?
6. Do you think of tipping as an economic transaction or as a gift?
7. Do you think tipping sets up a power relation between the server and the customer? If so, where do you think the power lies?
  - a) What kind of power does each person in the interaction have?
  - b) Does one person have more power than the other? In what way?
  - c) Do you ever feel powerless as the server?
8. What changes in customers' tipping practices have you experienced since COVID 19, if any?

Read Vignette 1 and follow up questions.

Read Vignette 2 and follow up questions.

Questions for participants who identify as managers

1. How long/much experience do you have as a manager in the restaurant industry?
2. In your opinion, why do people tip?
  - a) How much do you consider to be an appropriate amount to tip? Why?
3. How does tipping culture impact your job? How does it affect the way you manage servers?
  - a) Do you ever get tipped as the manager?
4. Do you understand the tip as a gift or economic exchange, or something different?
5. Do you think tipping sets up a power relation? If so, where do you think the power lies?
  - a) What kind of power does each person in the interaction have?
  - b) Does one person have more power than the other? In what way?
  - c) Do you ever feel powerless as the manager?
6. How much do you interact with customers? In what kinds of situations?
  - a) Are they often positive interactions or negative?

Read Vignette 1 and follow up questions.

Read Vignette 2 and follow up questions.

**Appendix IV: Research Participants**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Number of years in the restaurant industry</b>
Clara	Customer	2 years
Cassey	Customer	6 months
Christine	Customer	5 months
Sarah	Server	1 year
Sophie	Server	7 years
Sylvia	Server	3 years
Scott	Server	4 years
Megan	Manager	3 years
Matt	Manager	6 years
Mia	Manager	15 years



## Appendix V: REB Final Report



### ANNUAL/FINAL REPORT

Annual report to the Research Ethics Board for the continuing ethical review of research involving humans / Final report to conclude REB oversight

#### A. ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

This report is ( <i>select one</i> ):				<input type="checkbox"/> An annual report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> A final report
REB file number:	2020-5391				
Study title:	Tipping Culture in Restaurants in Halifax: An Exploratory Study				
Lead researcher (named on REB submission)	Name	Lydia Hanson			
	Email	<a href="mailto:ly415257@dal.ca">ly415257@dal.ca</a>	Phone	(613) 331-6083	
Current status of lead researcher (at Dalhousie University):					
<input type="checkbox"/> Employee/Academic Appointment		<input type="checkbox"/> Former student			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Current student		<input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain):			
Supervisor (if lead researcher is/was a student/resident/postdoc)	Name	Martha Radice			
	Email	<a href="mailto:martha.radice@dal.ca">martha.radice@dal.ca</a>			
Contact person for this report (if not lead researcher)	Name				
	Email		Phone		

#### B. RECRUITMENT & DATA COLLECTION STATUS

<p>Instructions: Complete ALL sections relevant to this study</p> <p>Study involves/involved recruiting participants: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B1.</i></p> <p>Study involves/involved secondary use of data: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B2.</i></p> <p>Study involves/involved use of human biological materials: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <i>If yes, complete section B2.</i></p>
---

<b>B1. Recruitment of participants</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
--	---

B1.1 How many participants did the researcher intend to recruit? (provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)	9-12
B1.2 How many participants have been recruited? (if applicable, identify by participant group/method e.g. interviews: 10, focus groups: 25)	
a) In total, since the beginning of the study: interviews: 10	
b) Since the last annual report:	
B1.3 Recruitment for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	
B1.4 Data collection from participants for this study is: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> complete; or <input type="checkbox"/> on-going	

<b>B2. Use of secondary data and/or biological materials</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
B2.1 How many individual records/biological materials did the researcher intend to access? (provide number approved in the most recent REB application/amendment)	
B2.2 How many individual participant records/biological materials have been accessed?	
a) In total, since the beginning of the study:	
b) Since the last annual report:	

### C. PROJECT HISTORY

<i>Since your last annual report (or since initial submission if this is your first annual report):</i>
C1. Have there been any variations to the original research project that have NOT been approved with an amendment request? This includes changes to the research methods, recruitment material, consent documents, study instruments or research team.  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No  If yes, list the variation here: (You will be notified if a formal amendment is required)
C2. Have you experienced any challenges or delays recruiting or retaining participants or accessing records or biological materials?  <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No  If yes, please explain:
C3. Have you experienced any problems in carrying out this project?

<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:
C4. Have any participants experienced any harm as a result of their participation in this study? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:
C5. Has any study participant expressed complaints, or experienced any difficulties in relation to their participation in the study? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:
C6. Since the original approval, have there been any new reports in the literature that would suggest a change in the nature or likelihood of risks or benefits resulting from participation in this study? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No If yes, please explain:

#### **D. APPLYING FOR STUDY CLOSURE**

*Complete this section only if this is a FINAL report as indicated in section A*

D1. For studies involving recruitment of participants, a closure may be submitted when:  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> all research-related interventions or interactions with participants have been completed  <input type="checkbox"/> N/A (this study did not involve recruitment of participants)
D2. For studies involving secondary use of data and/or human biological materials, a closure may be submitted when:  <input type="checkbox"/> all data acquisition is complete, there will be no further access to participant records or collection of biological materials  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A (this study did not involve secondary use of data and/or human biological materials)
D3. Closure Request  <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> I am applying for study closure

#### **E. ATTESTATION (both boxes *must* be checked for the report to be accepted by the REB)**

I agree that the information provided in this report accurately portrays the status of this project and describes to the Research Ethics Board any new developments related to the study since initial approval or the latest report.

I attest this project was, or will continue to be, completed in accordance with the approved REB application (or most recent approved amendment) and in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2).

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### **SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Submit this completed form to Research Ethics, Dalhousie University, by email at [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca) at least 21 days prior to the expiry date of your current Research Ethics Board approval.
2. Enter subject line: REB# (8-digit number), last name, annual (or final) report.
3. Student researchers (including postdoctoral fellows and medical residents) must copy their supervisor(s) in the cc. line of the annual/final report email.

### **RESPONSE FROM THE REB**

Your report will be reviewed, and any follow-up inquiries will be directed to you. You must respond to inquiries as part of the continuing review process.

Annual reports will be reviewed and may be approved for up to an additional 12 months; you will receive an annual renewal letter of approval from the Board that will include your new expiry date.

Final reports will be reviewed and study closure acknowledged in writing.

### **CONTACT RESEARCH ETHICS**

- Phone: 902-494-3423
- Email: [ethics@dal.ca](mailto:ethics@dal.ca)
- In person: Henry Hicks Academic Administration Building, 6299 South Street, Suite 231
- By mail: PO Box 15000, Halifax, NS B3H 4R2