What is that little extra? Exploring the social norms of tipping

In Quentin Tarnation’s film Reservoir Dogs from 1992, there is a scene where they characters are involved in a debate over tipping. In their own words

EDDIE: All right. Everybody cough up some green for the little lady. Come on. Throw in a buck.
MR. PINK: Uh-uh. I don't tip.
EDDIE: You don't tip?
MR. PINK: No - I don't believe in it.
EDDIE: You don't believe in tipping?
MR. BLUE: You know what these chicks make? They make shit. […]
MR. PINK: I don't tip because society says I have to. Alright, I mean I'll tip if somebody really deserves a tip, if they really put forth the effort, I'll give 'em something extra, but I mean this tipping automatically is for the birds. I mean as far as I'm concerned they're just doing their job.
MR. BLUE: Hey, this girl was nice.
MR. PINK: She was OK - but she wasn't anything special.
MR. BLUE: What's special, take you in the back and suck your dick?
[…]
MR. PINK: So's working at McDonald's, but you don't feel the need to tip them, do you? Why not? They're servin ya food. But no, society says don't tip these guys over here, but tip these guys over here. That's bullshit.
MR. WHITE: Waitressing is the number one occupation for female noncollege graduates in this country. It's the one job basically any woman can get and make a living on. The reason is because of their tips.

The dialog captures many questions around tipping. Why do customers leave tip, and why in some places and not in others? What does a waiter/waitress have to do in order to make a customers feel that they are given “something extra”? What are the gendered, and I would add racialised fantasies that workers have to live up too in order for customers to feel that they are given good service? In which ways does tipping shape, regulate and discipline the labour process? And how large share of a waitress earnings come from tip?

My interest in tipping emerged will researching what constituted working conditions for hotel- and restaurants workers in the city of Malmö (Mulinari 2007). Many experienced that tipping affected they ways in which they organized and performed their work and their relations towards booth customers, managers and co-workers. Managers for instance could
argue for lower salaries (when they were not formally employed) as tipping levels where supposedly high at a specific workplace. At one workplace the managers forced the employed to divide the tipping pot with himself, something that the people I interviewed found unjust, but as there are no formal rules around tip the Unions could not act.

In this text I will explore a theoretical frame that can be used in order to analyses the practice of tipping. The concept of moral and affective economy (Thomson 1971, Scott 1977, Sawyer 2007, Ahmed 2004a, b) I would suggest combined with a labour process perspective can be used in order to examine the power dimensions embedded in the phenomena as well as the ways in which emotions, bodies and feeling are interwoven into the labour process.

There is today an extensive research field that from different perspectives analyses the emotional aspects of the labour process (for overviews see for instance McDowell 2009, Bolton 2005). Scholarship shows that in low-skilled interactive service employment, the ability to ‘look good, sound right’ and being able to manage one’s emotions in ways conducive to the demands of the customer (Guerrier and Adib 2000, Nickson et al 2001) is central to the making of “good service”. Hall (1993) argues that women ‘do’ gender through the performance of gendered scripts of ‘good service’ that encourage waitresses to be friendly and flirty (Filby, 1992). Bridget Anderson (2000) illuminates how employers’ demands on domestic workers are shaped by colonial fantasies and regulated by employees’ ethnicity (see also Gavana 2010). This research has in different ways explored the increased role of norms, emotions and values within the service economy.

Inspired by this research I think that tipping can be used as a vantage point of entrance to explore how values, norms and emotions shape and affect economical interactions, and the ways in which emotions and morals affect labour process. Tipping as a practice also illuminates the ways through which values and emotions located in specific bodies are embedded into economic relations.

**Gender, race and labour process**

The contribution of feminist researchers to labour process theory cannot be underestimated. An early critique was the LPT inability to capture the ways in which skill was gendered (Philips & Taylor 1980). Harriet Bradley argued that changes in the labour process where
affected not only by class relations but also by gender relations. She wrote “The development of the capitalist labour process, therefore, must be seen as inextricably linked with the construction of sex-typed jobs (Bradley 1986:56). Cynthia Cockburn illuminated that gender conflicts and alliances where central in the shaping of workplaces and work organizations (1991). Together with Ormrod they also argued theology in itself is a gendered phenomenon (Cockburn & Ormrod 1993). Richard Jenkins (1986) argued that ideas around skill, qualifications and competence not only are gendered but also highly racialised.

Another central contribution to labour process theory from a feminist perspective is that it has expanded what is defined as work, and what we do at work. The role of emotions, values and norms within economic relations has been explored by gender researchers in analyses of the relationship between emotions, service and care work which as made labour process theory more adequate for studies of service interactive work. In her pioneering work The Managed Heart Arlie Hochschild (2003) introduces the concept of emotional labor in order to analyze the work made by air stewardesses. The concept not only made visible dimensions of work that often where marginal and invisible in labor studies, but also contributed to a deeper understanding of the importance of the doing of gender and sexuality within service work. Taking as a point of departure the concept of emotional labor, gender scholars have explored how clients and employers, desires and beliefs about sexuality, gender and race / ethnicity shape, influence and constrain employees working conditions and relationships (Hall 1993; Green 2000, Anderson 2000, Kang 2010).

Feminist studies of interactive service work within hotel- and restaurants have carried out a range of workplace analyses (Dayer, McDowell and Batnizky 2007, Bayard de Volo 2003; Bird and Sokolofski 2005) examining how the relationship between customer and manager demands, desires and fantasies affect the labour process. There has been a growing interested in the ways that the intersections of sexuality, race/ethnicity, gender and class shape both the organisation of service work, and the demands that customers and managers have on service worker (Durbin & Conley 2010, McDowell 2009; Nixon 2009, Wigt and Solomon 2008, Adib and Guerrier 2003, Mirchandani 2003, De Volvo 2003). Amel Adib and Yvonne Guerrier argue that service research that exclusivity focus on gender tends to make invisible the complex and often ambiguous relations people have towards work (2003:430). In her book *Workning bodies. Interactive service employment and workplace identities* Linda

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McDowell develops this argument further by arguing for the need of an intersectional perspective in analyses of service work (2009:74).

In many ways labour process inspired analyses of interactive service work have been crucial to explore the ways in which feeling and emotions are central to the labour process and the ways in which customers and managers regulate and discipline emotional display.

A feminist labour process theory offers many different things to analyses of tipping. It captures the ways in which managers and customers though the practice of tipping can affect and discipline the labour process. It also illuminates that concepts such as skill, knowledge, qualifications, and more modern ones like personal characteristics and service economy are embedded into power relations. Finally a labour process perspective in an analyses of tipping forces us to examine the ways in which the practice in different ways regulates and disciplines the labour process, and they ways in which employer, customers and managers negotiate is.

**Background**

Tipping is an expense that consumers are free to give. However, most consumers, in most countries in the world leave a tip (Lynn 2006); still the practice is organized in many different ways. For service workers in restaurants, bars and hotels tipping has historically been the only or a large share of the salaries that service workers gained (Lantz & Nyström 1968, Jarlhammar 2005). In Sweden early service employed had the “right” to obtain ten percent on the total bill. There was no fixed percentage for tipping, and the guest decided entirely what contribution they wanted to leave. As the unions grow stronger new agreements were reached that in different ways aimed to reduce the arbitrariness of service workers earnings. For instance employee would be paid ten percent on each bill and be guaranteed a minimum wage. Until 1993 a service fee was included into the bill, and managers held the responsibility of informing the customers of this fee. In 1993 one labor union (HRF) and the manager’s organizations (SHR) shared a collective agreement that all employees would have a fixed salary.

For those and other historical reasons (for instance that private service consumptions have been low in Sweden) tipping seemed to be rather marginal phenomena during a couple of
decades. However increased private consumption of service, tourism, expansion of informal employment (and therefore salaries and working hours) have affected and transformed tipping norms and practices (Jarlhammar 2005, Mulinari 2007).

**Research on tipping**

Research on tipping has mostly been done within Anglo-Saxon psychological studies, and more limited within behavioral economics (Azar 2003). While studies within the field of economics focus on the questions of why customers give tip, psychological and behavioral research explore the question of what forms of social interactions influences customers to provide different levels of tip. Although there is disagreement about to what extent tipping challenges the fundament of neoclassic scholarship (Bodvarsson & Gibson 1999, Altman 2005) there seem to be a growing consensus among researchers that the phenomenon demands analyses of the ways through which social norms and emotions, such as generosity and social pressure affect people’s economical behavior (Colin et al 2003, Azar, 2007a). According to Ofer H. Azar the phenomena of tipping shows the importance of social norms in motivating social behavior (2007:384). Lynn & McCall argue that even if there is a correlation between personal evaluated service and tip size, the correlation is weaker that one could expect (Lynn & McCall 2000:212). Factors that affect tipping are for instance, if waitress smile or introduce themselves by name (Garraity & Degelman 1990) and if they have physical contact with the costumers by touching their arms or shoulders (Stephen & Zweigenhaft 1986). Other factors affecting tipping that have been studied are the size of the group, bill size, if the customers come regularly and if it is lunch or evening (Lynn & McCall 2000). Of special interest to me are the studies that in different ways examine the relation between the doing of gender and ethnicity and tipping. Lynn and Simons (2000) explore the relationship between appearance and tipping and conclude that female waitress perceived as “attractive” are tipped more by male customers. This correlation could not be identified in relation to male waitress. Men, seem to give more tip than women, but only if the waitress are females (Lynn 1997). Lynn and Leodoro (2007) argue that black customers tip less if the waiter sits down and lean over the table. Lynn et al (2008) show that black waiters in general receive fewer tips than white waiters, from both white and black customs.
The strength of these scholarship lies partly in the rich empirical data offered, but also in the ability to place tipping in a complex web of social norms, financial transactions and personal interaction. Still this line of research need to be complemented with other perspectives as it is limited in many ways. One of its shortcomings is that it does not critically examines who the practice of tipping is embedded in specific labour process and that it is a specific forms of approbation of human labour, as it concepts like “quality” and ”service” for granted.

This research also often avoids critical analyses of the gendered and racialised power relations embedded in the phenomena in the interaction between customers, managers and workers, and the effects that it has in the organisation of work. The literature solely focuses on those groups of employees who receive tips, such as waiters, there is therefore a significant knowledge gap when it comes to questions of how tipping affects the dynamics between different groups of employees and the role that managers have in affecting tipping practices. In difference to economic and psychological reaches on tip, gender scholars analyzing the phenomena have examined the power relations embedded in the practice, and the resistance that workers in different ways make in relation to tipping.

**Emotions and labour process**

In here analyses of waitress labour conditions and resistance Greta Foff Paules (1991) argued that waitress hade some autonomy when meeting the customers as they could determine what type of emotional labour they should perform. Employees performed different kinds of emotional labour depending on how much they thought customers would tip.

Bayard De Volo (2003) study of front line casino cocktail waitress (among other things) examines manager’s willingness to employ what they defined as white women in the front affected tip distribution and the organization of work among different professional groups. One interesting aspect of De Volo’s research is that it captures how the practices of tipping affect both the relationship between customers and workers, managers and workers and between workers and workers. Rachel Sherman (2011) argues that one problem with analyses of service work is that it tends to focus on visible work (or work that customers want to see). In her analyses of how customers influence the emotional labour of cleaners Sherman shows that the cleaners work performance is affected by the possibility of getting a tip (if they meet the customers which they seldom do) as the possibility of getting it; is always (and still seldom) there. On the other hand room servants got a tip half of the times
they met the customer. According to Sherman the different access to tip affected they ways in which workers took responsibility for duties and shared and organized their collective work assignments.

Sherman argues that the dichotomy visible/invisible tends to make invisible the effect that customers for instance have on the emotional and physical labour of hotel cleaners work. Instead of defining some service work as visible and other as invisible she describes the work as being in a continuum of visibility and invisibility. A similar argument is made by McDowell et al emphazing that cleaners at hotels also make an emotional labour that often is made invisible as emotional work is linked to front line service work.

In a critical dialog with this dialog and through the interpretations of my empirical data, I would argue that the front-office/back-office dichotomy evolves not so much from where people work (physically), but how the work is defined. The work cleaners do is supposed to be invisible, and treated as such from customers and managers, even when it is visible. One could argue that visible and invisible places are not material facts; they are discourses on visibility and invisibility that express, shape and recreate relations of power within the workplace.

In analyses of tipping one should therefore not focus only on waitress, but in the interaction between different groups of workers. Questions such as who gets the tip, what arguments are used for different forms of organising tip distribution and what forms of conflicts or solidarity is created within the employed in relations to the practice? Feminist research on tipping has grasped the gendered dimension embedded into the phenomena, as well as they ways in which tipping both discipline workers embodied performance of service work and the strategies used in order to resist those demands.

Brewster and Mallinson (2009) argue the argument that analyses of tipping should be made from a labour process perspective. The authors make a critical reading of tipping research that examines racial difference in tipping patterns, and argue that this research has tended to ignore the role that the labour process plays in the ways that both customers and workers act.

A labour process perspective on tipping they argue is able to grasp how phenomena like technology, skills and interaction affect tipping. Most importantly it according to Brewster and Mallinson to illuminate the role that that managers have in maximizing profit “by
assuming control over the behaviors and activates of service. Such controls is achieved, in part tough the routinisation and standardization of service occupations tasks” (2009:1054).

The crucial point here is the role that managers have in tipping norms Managers not only affect the labour process, where people work within the organization, but also salaries, working hours, and customers.

A labour process perspective also offers an understanding of the role that technology will play in tipping. This is important as tipping practices are highly affected by for instance card technology. As an illustration, today in Sweden in order to make cards sell more secure all terminals have to have chip and pin terminals. This means that if you pay with a card you have to push both the amount and your pin number, and in the recipe you can after register a tip. The customer that wants to leave a tip needs to count it in the total purchase price, or leave cash.

Many owners oppose this change as it takes time for customs (special after a couple of bears) to dial all the numbers, some bars and night clubs have begun to install their own card terminals so people can pay in cash. This has according to the managers increased both consumption and tipping with 30 – 40 percent. HRF as well as SHR support the new non cash policy as it according to them creates a safer working environment (the non-cash policy is also interesting to examine form the perspective of managers, does managers control over tip and the distribution of tip grow as they have control over the terminals?). A labour process perspective offers essential theoretical tools in exploring tipping, especially by incorporating manager’s control, technology and skill in to the analyses.

However I would claim that in order to explore the moral and emotional aspects embedded in tipping one needs to combined it with theoretical tools that are able to grasp questions like, what norms (local and national) affect tipping, what do customers feel is good service? I think that the concept of moral economy and affective economy are analytical tools that in combinations with a labour process perspective can help us examine the complex web that tipping seems to be.

**Moral and affective economy – capturing the extra**
In the newspaper CITY (free newspaper in Malmö, Helsingborg and Landskorna) 12 people where asked when they tip (not if or why). Even if the answers showed some variations, all (except one) argued that they tipped when pleased with the service. One said *I think it is logical to tip for that little extra*, another stressed that tipping should be done because you want to: *You should tip because you want to show your appreciation not because you have to.*

How can we understand what customers defined as that little extra, or when they feel the need to show appreciation? One way of approaching those questions is through the concepts of moral and affective economy. The concept of moral economy was used by the British historian E: P Thompson, in his 1971 essay, ‘*The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,*’ in his analyses of the crowd’s resistance when confronting a changing economic and political landscape. Thompson argued that there existed a specific moral economy among the “crowed” that for instance determined reasonable prices, and a collective responsibility for survival. The author emphases the importance of a contextual concept of moral economy, that is able to grasp the specific moral of a particular community in a particular time and place. Even though Thompson uses the concept in order to examine a specific time (Mendell et al 1991) the transition from a paternalistic economy to a market economy the concept has been applied to a variety of topics. James Scott (1979) uses the term in his book *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Subsistence and Rebellion in Southeast Asia* (1979) where he explores peasant resistance against colonial and capitalist forms exploitation. According to Edelman one of “the enduring contributions” of Thompson and Scott, was to highlight the extent to which “market” is a political constructions and an outcome over social struggles (Edelman 2005:332). The moral economy’s theoretical frame is based on the assumption that economics are shaped by the wider social relations that surround the relations of production and distribution. Andrew Sayer asserts that 'moral economy' is the study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn those norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures (2004:2). He claims that “*economic relations [...] are structured by moral-economic norms about rights, entitlements, responsibilities and appropriate behavior* (2004:3).

As I read the concept, it can be used in order to explore the values and norms, embedded into economic transaction, that are in-between the formal and informal market, as tipping. In contrast to phenomena such as working hours and salaries often regulated by central
agreements or law, tipping is a practice that is determined by factors related to norms, emotions and values, still the practice is also affected by the formal regulations of the labor market, as well as regulated through the ways that the labour process is organized.

In some way the practice challenge the dichotomy between the formal/informal, economical/emotional and regular/irregular. To grasp the phenomena I want to explore for instance what is defined as a “reasonable tip” or reasonable service for tip, what conflicts or consensus are there is relations to those values, and how do they vary in relation to place, time and serving bodies? The concept of moral economy can be used in order to analyses the variations of norms and values in relation to tip. Andre Sayer argues that we only tend to notice the moral economy in times when it is contested. He uses the example the commodification of genetic data. In those cases where regulation is unresolved, the author’s claims that there is a certain kind of negotiation, bargaining is allowed (2004:5). Perhaps tipping practices is an economic phenomenon with not clear moral rules around, it is not regulated formally, and there seems not to be any dominant ideas about where you should tip, why, how much.

Some of the shortcomings of the concept have been pointed out by a number of authors. William James Booth (1994) argues that the idea of moral economy makes invisible the importance of moral and norms in today’s markets economy. Granovetter (1985) asserts that one of the shortcomings of both the concept of moral economy and embeddedness is that in it’s over focus on values; make invisible the institutional relations regulating the economy. Arnold (2001:94) therefore suggests in a similar vein that moral economy should be understood as something that “is embedded in concrete ongoing social relations, not in generalized, mechanical moralities or romanticized pasts”.

Despite its shortcomings the concept of moral economy is a fruitful analytical tool to depart from in an exploration of the complex web of interactions that the practice of tipping express and represent. Drawing from Thompson and others (Long and McNamee 2004; Banks 2006; Watters 2007) who have written about the idea of a ‘moral economy,’ the term can be used as a sensitizing concept. It can be applied to grasp the often invisible norms and values that seem to be circulating in tipping transactions. I hope that the concept will illuminate
contradictions, consensus and conflicts between customers, waiters and employers in relation to tipping, by making the values and norms that are in movement visible.

In former analyses of tipping from a labour process perspective or even feminist emotional perspective, the values and norms of managers and customers are often taken for granted, therefore I would argue that the concept of moral economy can be used to explore the values and morals attached to service demands, will at the same time focusing on the ways that those demands and fantasies affect employers labour process.

**Gendering and racialising the moral**

One shortcoming of the concept of moral economy is its lack of theorization regarding the role that particular (gendered) bodies play in economic interactions. As argued earlier the concept of emotional labour expanded the LPT by incorporating a new dimension to the labour process. There has been an extensive critique of the term emotional labour, especially for its tendency to create fixed binary opposition between private (authentic emotions) and public (alienated) emotions (Wouters, 1989; Mulinari 2007). In recent years, Sharon Bolton (2000, 2005) has critically reviewed Hochschild contribution. The author asserts that one of the central shortcomings of the concept is its inability to grasp resistance, marginalizing “the vitality and independence of outlook that participants bring to organizations and neglects their ability to carve out spaces for resistance and misbehavior’ (Bolton, 2005: 62). This critique is according to me crucial, but I would argue that the concept can be used by combining it with Sara Ahmed concept of *affective economy* that more critically examines the role of emotions and bodies in social relations. The concept of affective economy provides a fruitful space to think about agency grasping the ways in which emotions are inscribed in social forms of inequalities (Ahmed 2004a, 2004b). The author wants to analyze how emotions move between bodies and how emotions work to connect some subjects with some others and against others. She further argues, that emotions work as a form of capital, where feelings while appearing as isolated with a life of their own, hide how they are shaped by histories of production in terms of labor and time as well as circulation and exchange. Different bodies Ahmed asserts stick to different feelings and emotions. Central to the concept of affective economies is that emotions are not understood as belonging to individuals, their interior states or character, but with signs and how they work on and in relations to bodies (2004:194). The concept of affective economy can be used in order to
unpack how gender and sexuality is implicitly and explicitly embedded in economic exchange and the forms through which fantasy and desires are linked to economic values.

Concluding remarks

P: what do you like about your job
S: to meet people. The jobs in some strange way is like a theater play
P: how
S: You enter specific [mundering] attire. You put on your bar jacket, and then you have a attitude, always happy and nice because that is was generates money except form the salary, I am taking about tip. It something you put one. The role.
P: What role?
S: To be extrovert, nice even though you many times feel really lousy inside you have to put the role on.

Sven as worked as a waiter most of his life. When I interviewed him he worked at the bar in a fancy hotel. He had worked there for almost 30 years. The quote grasp the role that tipping can play in the organizations of the labour process, in this case by forcing the employed to be happy and nice, as he experience that this is what generated that extra pay.

In order to explore a practice (that is both formal and informal, both regulated and unregulated, both collective and individual) one needs a theoretical frame that locates an analysis of moral economies in a critical dialogue with gender scholar’s explorations of the connection between gender, power and emotions will provide a fruitful and solid point of departure for analyses of tipping.

The concepts of moral and affective economy can be sued in order to examine the ways through which values and emotions located in specific bodies are embedded into economic relations, will a labour process perspective locates the practice within a workplace frame where issues of power, management, skill and technology structure the analyses.
Reference


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i In the unions newspaper *Hotellrevy* a similar case is debated, as one member asked what the Union can do if the managers collects all the tips. The layer of HRF answers that the union cannot intervene in does cases as they defined tip as a gift, hence nothing that they have any opinions on. *Hotellrevy* 18 march 2008

ii As there is where little written about the phenomena it is difficult to get a historically overview