

The New York Times

To the Editor:

Re "[Quandary Over Tips: How Much Is Enough?](#)" (Food, April 20):

A few weeks ago, our high school's Ethics Bowl team sat in a room in Chapel Hill, N.C., at the National High School Ethics Bowl championship — a competition where teams deliver presentations on ethical dilemmas and field questions from a panel of judges.

In this particular round, we were to present about the restaurant industry's tipping model. Was it ethical? Here's what we found. Tipping evaluates service workers on an entirely subjective scale determined by each individual customer. As a result, white men are disproportionately rewarded over Black women and other people of color, studies have shown. Servers who have certain traits — such as blond hair and smaller body sizes — are tipped more.

Additionally, the inherent power imbalance of tipping models is particularly harmful for female servers. Because their ability to make a living wage depends on the customers, they're more likely to endure inappropriate behavior from patrons. One study showed that reports of sexual harassment among female servers are more prevalent in states without a mandated minimum wage for restaurant workers.

In a model that is meant to reward workers for good service, we're actually perpetuating cycles of discrimination, penalizing historically marginalized groups for their appearance and subjugating women to inexcusable treatment by their customers. So instead of talking about how much we should tip, let's talk about getting rid of tips.