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Intro to Sociology

Writing assignment 6: Cultural Capital and Dining

Dining etiquette and table manners are an important first impression as it is lasting. It is said that people from the upper class, or with upper class backgrounds, have better knowledge, behavior, attitudes, and experiences to ensure their success. For example, showing standard table etiquette can reflect that you are civilized, cultured, and respectful. However, someone from a lower class standing could learn and perform these behaviors to project that they are at a higher standing than they truly are.

Some of the key norms include elbows, cellphone and purse off the table, napkin on your lap, no chewing gum, waiting until the host picks up their fork before eating, and fork tongs down when taking a bite. The tongs face down because “it’s just more civilized looking” [3:12]. I contribute that to looking smaller and not hitting other diners when taking a bite because when eating with your left hand, to put the food in your mouth with the fork tongs up, one has to push their elbow out, looking larger, bulkier, and less elegant.

During my childhood wasn’t explicitly taught table etiquette this intense, but was taught, elbows off the table, napkin on the lap, fork on the left, knife on the right and such. More interesting is that my family (mom, dad, brother, and sister) are all righties, but I am a lefty so, they would always make me sit on the outside of a bench or booth, or on the end of the table. Because of this, I started to keep my elbows in as much as possible when eating, since there would always be a fuss about hitting elbows. Ironically, it was everyone else who would over exaggeratedly push their elbows out when using a knife, not me. I think my knowledge of these etiquettes somewhat reflects my class background. My family has always been middle class, so we have a dining room with a fancy dining table and place mats and such for nice dinners. However, I would say I was taught as much as everyone else lower than upper class would know. I say this because they are the smaller points of a highly detailed list of manners to follow and just enough to act fancy, and “pretend” you are in a higher class.