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## CULTURAL STUDIES

### I'm Sitting Here, but Why?

By JUDITH NEWMAN

I WASN'T the most popular kid in high school, so I'm always happy, if a little startled, to be invited to a party. It doesn't matter whether I can go, or even whether I want to. Thank you for inviting me. You've made my day.

But as the summer party season gets into full swing, I and so many other partyers (even those who weren't big dorks) have another source of social anxiety: arranged seating. Whether the event is at the White House or your own house, arranged seating is an occasion for major tea-leaf reading. Who's sitting where? Why? What's the agenda? ...

... So perhaps in this summer party season, we should all admit to our own ambivalence about strong-arming our guests into a particular party pattern, at least at relatively small gatherings. Certainly this seemed to be the case a few years ago with a successful sports coach who is not known for his sociability, but who nevertheless was giving an intimate dinner party at his home. Greg



Roman Muradov

Nichols, a neighbor and president of Lucky Dog Vodka, was among the guests.

"I really didn't know this guy and wasn't sure why I was there, but I liked him a lot and I was glad to be invited," says Mr. Nichols, who was joined by various local luminaries.

As people arrived, the coach hadn't shown up yet, so the guests milled around for a bit before they were all called to the table. Finally they all sat down, and the host came in. "He started to sit down, looked us over, then got this look in his eye," Mr. Nichols recalls. "Then he said: 'I'll be right back. I just want to take a quick shower.'"

He never returned.

*Judith Newman is the author of "You Make Me Feel Like an Unnatural Woman: Diary of a New (Older) Mother."*