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Ethnography Report

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<div align="center">Politeness of Paying in a Restaurant</div>

I chose to do my ethnography report on the politeness of paying in a restaurant setting. The questions that I posed for my ethnography report are as follows: 1.) How and when do servers at a restaurant give customers their bill? 2.) How and when do customers actually prefer a server to give them their bill?). The tools that I used to collect my data were informal interview questioning with multiple choice answers to choose from, informal interview questioning with written responses, and observing the actual act of a particular server at the Olive Garden restaurant giving the bill to their customers. The purpose of this ethnography report is to find out how servers and customers interact in terms of politeness, when it pertains to the customer paying for their bill. I truly believe that this sort of study could be very beneficial to a server and a restaurant, because individuals have different preferences for when and how their server gives them their bill. In addition, depending on when the server chooses to give their customer the bill can determine outcomes such as; how much a customer tips, if a customer returns to the restaurant, and what they will tell others about the quality of the restaurant etc. This may seem a bit irrelevant to some individuals; however, how a customer receives their bill can have a major impact on the server as well as the restaurant.

My own personal experiences as a customer as well as a server inspired me to do this particular ethnography. There have instances during my dining experiences where a server would

put my bill on the table while I was still eating and as a result I was somewhat offended;

however, there have also been cases where I was finished eating and was ready to leave the

restaurant yet my server had not given me my bill, which caused me to become a bit perturbed. I

worked as a server at the Waffle House diner for about a year, and I would always leave a

customer's bill on top of the napkin holder after I had served them their food and beverages. I

never observed any negative feedback from a customer when I did this; although, the setup of a

Waffle House restaurant is a bit different than that of a more conventional restaurant. The servers

at Waffle House are always in the vicinity of the tables that they are serving, because the tables

and the grill are parallel with one another. With that being said, a server could place a customer's

bill on the napkin holder which was at the back of the table in a subtle manner that wouldn't

disturb the customer; however, in most restaurants a server would have to walk up to a table in

order to place the bill on a customer's table sometimes creating a different response from the

customer.

While collecting my different data I observed a broad array of responses and behaviors

from my subjects. I conducted two different online surveys. I conducted my first survey using an

online survey forum that I posted to my facebook page, which posed the question (how do you

prefer your server at a restaurant to give you your bill?) with answer options of (a. leave it on the

table during the meal, b. wait till you ask for it, and c. it doesn't matter). I received ten responses

for this survey with seven responses with the answer of (b.wait till I ask for it), one response of

(a. leave it on the table during the meal), and one response of (c. it doesn't matter). To me, this is

an indication that most of my responders prefer for a server to wait until they ask for the bill;

however, during my observation of a server at the restaurant Olive Garden I found that out of ten tables that she served she placed the bill on the table during her customer's meal.

The second survey that I conducted was an online survey forum that I also posted to my facebook page, which posed the same question of (how do you prefer your server at a restaurant to give you your bill?) with a written response required. For this survey I received several responses with the common response of (I prefer my server to wait until I ask them for my bill, because when a server takes it upon their self to put my bill on the table it makes me feel rushed). No one likes to feel rushed while they are dining. For me, it completely ruins my entire dining experience when I feel rushed, as I'm sure is the case for a great deal of others. There were in fact a few responses that indicated a preference of (a server putting the bill on the table during their meal, because they hate to wait on the bill when they have finished eating and are ready to go). I know from personal experiences that waiting for a bill can be very frustrating. A customer may be in a rush to dine, because they need to need to make it to a seven o'clock movie at the local theatre. If they have to wait on their bill they may be delayed to whatever they have planned after their meal.

During my observation of a server at Olive Garden I asked my subject how do they determine when to put the bill on a customer's table. They responded that it depends on different circumstances such as; how busy the restaurant is or if they're serving a regular customer. They stated that most of the time they will wait until the customer is finished eating, then put the bill on the table; however, they also stated that sometimes they will ask the customer if they are ready for their bill too. I've learned that determining which approach of giving a customer their bill can be somewhat thought provoking. A server doesn't want to offend their customer or make

them feel rushed by putting the bill on their table during the meal; however, they don't want to inconvenience a customer by having them wait too long for it as well.

During this study I pondered different strategies that could be used universally as a polite way to give a customer their bill. My suggestion would be to ask the customer what their preference is as far as when they receive their bill when they take their customer's drink orders. It may seem a bit awkward, but it could potentially prevent a customer from being dissatisfied with their dining experience as well as providing a server with a definitive approach as to when they need to bring a customer their bill.