Nainita Madurai

The Convention of Unassigned Seating

In my high school we never had assigned seats, and yet by the second week of school everyone sat in exactly the same seats for the rest of the year. We chose seats around our friends and formed our small groups or cliques that were an essential social tool in high school. Occasionally someone would throw off the balance by sitting in a seat that was not “his”, but this action would be so noticed by all, even those whose seating arrangement had not been changed, that the same person would almost never sit in his “non-assigned” seat again. This social “rule” of sitting in the same place in a classroom is a convention that people feel a social obligation to follow. It displays the concept of implicit communication because it is not written or explicitly stated that a seat is assigned to each individual, but people still continue to sit in the same seat day after day. Each student is able to understand where to sit in order to be closer to his or her friends and to not get in the way of other groups trying to sit together, therefore coordinating with all of his or her fellow students. This coordination is implicitly known, but often people will explicitly point out that a seat is theirs because someone has taken it. This change in the norm is so unconventional that what is an implicit statement will become explicit for the sole reason of returning the seating situation back to normal.