

My personal philosophy is similar to Systems Theory; I believe that everything is connected. From our bodies, to the earth, to our governing tactics, to our industries, to how we think, to our language, we are undeniably intertwined. So many lines have been drawn to try and divide and isolate people. Culture, class, religion, age, sexuality, education, morals, stereotypes and gender create such impenetrable walls between people that sometimes it feels like one might live in a separate world than everyone else. Our media thrives off our differences and makes them even more prominent. But if we look closely, we see that everything has an effect on everything else. One person can change the life of another. For example one store's going out of business can put a person out of a job, which leads to the loss of a home. One president can ruin a country and sacrifice hundreds of people; a single action can change someone's world.

My essential question is how can we erase these divisions and bring people back to nature and to our connected state of mind? More specifically, what brings people together? What is it that all people do and has the potential to unite us? From these questions one of the most prominent and enticing answers that arose was simple: food. So from there I came up with the question: what has been the role of food in uniting people? Food is an essential part of life; it creates life, sustains life and in many cultures is involved in traditions that have been going on forever.

My family has been driven and connected by food my entire life. My parents own a cooking oil business, grape seed oil, which promotes healthy living, is environmentally sound, is made from a recycled product and produces a recyclable product. From being involved in their work, I have learned a lot and grown an interest in the making, history and effect of food on people. My dad was a certified chef by seventeen years old and has traveled the world working in the food industry his whole life. He and my mom cook our meals everyday from fresh healthy ingredients, a lot of which we grow ourselves, and have always encouraged me to be apart of this family cooking ritual. This upbringing has made it obvious to me that food is very important in people's lives.

Coming to The Oxbow School has influenced my opinions on food and the corporations behind a majority of it. In Agro-Ecology class we learned so much of what certain foods are made of, how certain crops are grown, and how it affects our bodies, our environment and how we view our foods, not to mention how hard it is to find something healthy to eat in a regular supermarket! Agro-Ecology taught me a lot about our diets as Americans and how it has corrupted our society and family unit, not to mention our health! This class influenced me on my topic and gave me a lot of sources to go off of as well; *The Omnivore's Dilemma* showed me how oblivious and ignorant we are, as Americans, to our own problem, and how no one seems to know how to fix it. American food has become a sort of enemy in many health critics' eyes. And yet, even the worst types of food can bring a family together.

Food unites people, from everywhere, of every culture, of every religion and of every class. To break bread with someone is to show respect and peace to the other individual; it can be a time when everyone is equal. We all eat the same basic things and there is no difference between people when it comes to our basic nutritional needs. Eating a meal as a family has a huge impact on all members and on the whole family as a unit; “Studies show that the more often families eat together, the less likely kids are to smoke, drink, do drugs, get depressed, develop eating disorders and consider suicide, and the more likely they are to do well in school, delay having sex, eat their vegetables, learn big words and know which fork to use” (Gibbs). Families that eat together have created a safe environment at home where all members feel free to act as themselves and feel they are being listened to. This in turn creates a family that communicates with one another, happy healthy children who do well in school, and a home environment where everyone is included (Gibbs).

In the early U.S., dinner was seldom a ceremonial event; only the very wealthy had a separate dining room and would eat together. Then later on it became fashionable, and the family unit was strong. “In colonial times, American meal patterns followed European practices, in which the extended family participated in meals, which occurred three times a day; the standard meals were breakfast, dinner, and supper”(Oxford). With new innovations and technological revelations “The traditional meal pattern began to change during the mid-nineteenth century, due in part to the growth of cities and the shifting of occupations of American men. The first meal to change was dinner. As towns and cities grew, it became more difficult for workers to return home for dinner at midday as the distance between home and the place of work increased...Dinner, the most important meal of the day, moved to the evenings” (Oxford). In fact, “Not until the mid--19th century did the day acquire its middle-class rhythms and rituals; a proper dining room became a Victorian aspiration” (Oxford). But soon things changed; “the frequency of family dining fell about a third over the next 30 years. With both parents working and the kids shuttling between sports practices or attached to their screens at home, finding a time for everyone to sit around the same table, eating the same food and listening to one another, became a quaint kind of luxury” (Gibbs). The structure that made home “home” no longer had that feeling when families did not eat together. Families have also stopped the tradition of eating the home cooked meal; a great deal of Americans eat pre-made processed foods, and a lot of the time everyone is eating something different, even if they are all sitting around the same table. There is a special feeling when a group of people sit together and eat the same home-cooked meal. It’s a connection that you just can’t get from microwavable macaroni (Gibbs).

In comparison to America’s evolving family traditions, in Japan, eating with one’s family is a normal everyday occurrence. “More than 80% of them usually have dinner at home with their families” and an even more shocking comparison is that they prefer to make their own

meals than to eat pre-made like it seems most Americans do. Their main ingredient, which is included in every meal, is rice.

I chose rice and sugar as my medium. This is because I know that rice is a huge staple crop that feeds many people and is fairly unprocessed. It's a grain, and I can go so many places with a grain. I can grind it; I can cook it; I can pound it and I can sprinkle it; and if I do any of these steps in any order I get a new outcome! It's also a beautiful light white color that is easy to work with and can be dyed with food coloring. Sugar, the second ingredient I chose to focus on, is also a main ingredient of world foods today, but a lot of its fame is not painted in a positive light. Sugar is so readily available now that it is consumed way too much and in way too many things. As a material for my art making it is a curious food, it can be liquid, solid, powder and crystals. I can heat it and melt it down and then mold it into whatever I want.

Rice feeds around 50% of the world population, grows on six of the seven continents, and is the grain with the third-highest worldwide production. It is gluten free making it a good alternative for people who cannot digest wheat, can be stored easily and has many uses. In Asia, rice is eaten with every meal and is the main supplement in traditional diet. Not only does it satisfy nutritional needs but it also provides the starches and calories to keep someone alive. Rice's domestication has been around for ages and dates back in Asian culture to 12,000–11,000 BCE (Rice).

Rice has special cultural references as well and in many ancient documents, mostly correlating with Asia, it is intertwined in the customs, language and arts of Asian culture. Rice is a symbol of fertility, beauty, sensitivity, prosperity, energy, and life. Rice is mentioned in the Vedas in Sanskrit and is said to be first grown on the grave of an ancient goddess named Samyam Sri who was killed by the other goddesses as a way of protection from the god Batara. Because of this story rice in Indonesia is now called Samyam Sri. Rice is often directly associated with prosperity and fertility, therefore there is the custom of throwing rice at weddings; it is also said to be the link between heaven and earth (Simmons). In India it is as common to say, "Have you eaten?" as a greeting as it is to say, "How are you?" People eat food in celebration, in mourning, everyday and for every occasion.

Sugar has become a large part of our population's diet that has brought about both many new foods and diseases alike. Adult onset diabetes is now called Type Two Diabetes because more cases are now found in children, and obesity is a huge problem in America. "USDA recommends that the average person on a 2,000-calorie daily diet include no more than 40 grams of added sugars, that's about 10 teaspoons," but in 2000 the average person consumed 52 teaspoons a day. Sugar is so readily available in our society today and sometimes we don't even know it's there; sugars are added to foods that we would have never guessed, such as pizza, bread, hot dogs, boxed mixed rice, soup, crackers, spaghetti sauce, lunch meat, canned

vegetables, fruit drinks, flavored yogurt, ketchup, salad dressing, mayonnaise, and some peanut butter. Along with new sugary foods, sweet foods now have so much more sugar than they used to. One can of soda contains more than the daily-recommended amount of sugar (USDA).

Our bodies are biologically programmed to respond to sugars and fats as if we would not get the chance to eat them again in a long time, this means we eat as much of the sugary sweet goodie as we can as fast as we can, because hundreds of years ago, getting the chance to eat sugar was a rare occurrence. Along with there being so much more sugar available, not all of it is made from sugar cane. In fact a majority of it is high fructose corn syrup. High fructose corn syrup is an extremely processed product made from corn that is not suitable to eat unprocessed, the corn it is made from has huge environmental impact and on top of it all it's just a lot sweeter.

From this research paper and project I've learned so much about our cultures influence on people about how they should eat, what they eat and when they eat. I've also discovered where and what we are influenced by. There are so many differences and similarities between different countries eating habits and I've learned why some of them are like that. I've even looked into how our food rituals affect our families and individuals. I want to continue researching my topic forever. It's a topic that never ceases to give new information, and one can always learn something even from looking into a cookbook and making a dish themselves. Food is the ultimate giver of life and it always will be, and depending on how you prepare, eat and celebrate your food, life can be renewed and full everyday.

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