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What is a kitchen?

The human race is constantly changing and becoming more advanced, so it is no surprise that what we eat has advanced with us. From when man created fire, to the invention of the microwave, to today, where we can be given a meal in our car in under 3 minutes, man has changed the definition of cooking, making it quick and easy. In the article, “Out of the Kitchen, Onto the Couch” by Michael Pollan, Pollan discusses the shifts in cooking from the time of the neanderthals, to Julia Child and her cooking show, and then today where it is a televised cooking is a competition like “Cupcake Wars” or “Hell’s Kitchen.” Pollan takes a stance by saying cooking has made us who we are and it shows where we will go. After careful review of Pollan’s opinions and my peer’s favorite meals I have come to the conclusion, that what Pollan claims is correct. Cooking has changed overtime, making humans more advanced, however where cooking is going is not giving us more culture, but instead stripping away what we have known, slowly dehumanizing those who will come after us.

The creation of fire differentiated us humans from our animal ancestors, allowing us to have higher level thoughts and create civilization. An anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss views cooking as, “a metaphor for the human transformation of nature into culture”, meaning cooking has made us the society we are today(Pollan 17). Cooking food over a fire created “meals” in a sense because meals are basically a time where individuals eat together. Eating together lead to the exchange of knowledge and advances in science and technology. Tools were made, written

language came about, and according to anthropologist Richard Wrangham, “around that fire, we became tamer”(Pollan 17). Our animalistic behaviors faded and we became more of an intellectual. However, what made us the intelligent, social species we are today is also stripping us of that.

The discovery of fire expanded our minds and our palettes for a period, more recently though cooking has been in a decline, taking away the culture formed by our cavemen ancestors and enhanced with Julia Child’s cooking show “The French Chef.” Once cavemen learned to cook they explored what they could cook overtime and discovered many different combinations of food. After a period of time, individuals stayed within the lines of what they knew how to cook, which Julia Child sought to change. As described in Pollan’s piece, “[Julia Child] took the fear out of cooking” and empowered those who watched her(Pollan 4). In one of her more famous episodes Child attempts to flip a potato pancake and she states, “you just have to have the courage of your convictions” meaning you can not do it half way, if you are going to flip a pancake you must flip it(Pollan 5). Child did not have the courage to and flopped the flip, but she effortlessly showed how you can still use what you made. She sent the message to viewers that cooking is intended to be messy and you will make mistakes, giving her viewers the idea that cooking can be for anyone who puts their all into it. This view of cooking is longer present today, as shown by my peer’s favorite meals.

In Galen’s Arnold’s piece titled, “Favorite Meal” he describes his relationship with cooking and meals, which goes to further support the rarity cooking for future civilizations. Arnold describes how he moved a lot for hockey purposes, and while staying with the Harries family, “the practice of eating home cooked meals together as what appeared to be a true family.

This was something my family rarely actually does. Only on special occasions like holidays and birthdays will you find myself, my parents, and my older brother eating together at the same table”(Arnold 3). While some families still keep the tradition of eating a home cooked meal together, like the cavemen did, Arnold was not used to this type of lifestyle. Special events were the few times where he could eat a meal with his immediate family, and this itself says a lot about where our culture is going. Family values have changed since Julia Child was popular, and Arnold is a prime example. Working and being able to sustain yourself financially have become more important than being with those who love and care for you. Arnold later states how he did not have a favorite food and food did not make him feel more at home. “The food itself was not what reminded me of home and made the Harries’ feel like an extension of my own, but rather it was the effort they made to make that feeling possible.”, food and meals have a different connotation and meaning to the younger generations(Arnold 5). There is less sentimental value and importance to being together as a family today than it was a hundred years ago.

My classmate, Sydney Wolf supports the decline of cooking in her essay, “Favorite Meal” where she discusses her favorite meal of pizza and buffalo wings, which “come in two boxes”(Wolf 1). While Wolf states early on that this is a meal she eats when her family does not feel like cooking, she goes on to describe it as an event meal. Wolf states, “ As my mother mentioned pizza and wings are a treat for our family. Pizza and wings are a meal we frequently ate for family events such as dinner parties or holidays”(Wolf 6). Compared to the time of Julia Child where family events and parties were a time to display your cooking ability and the time and effort put into making a delicious dish, Wolf makes the point to not cook on special occasions and instead provide food for guests in, “a cardboard box, 15 in x 15 in x 2 in...[and]

the second a small, square styrofoam take out container”(Wolf 1). Meals from boxes either picked up or delivered have become the norm, while cooking for yourself is more of a rarity. Wolf’s contrast to Julia Child demonstrates where society will be going in terms of cooking. Cooking will be almost entirely replaced with fast food restaurants and ordering out, instead of utilizing the kitchen in your own home.

Scott Matthews, a former Eng110 student has a different perspective on favorite meals, as his is not even eaten in the comfort of his own home. In Matthews’ piece titled, “A Meal of a Lifetime” Matthews orders steak and lobster from a “typical steakhouse” in New York City(Matthews 2). Matthews’ favorite meal like many other Americans has been shaped by the concept of a menu. Matthew states, “The waiter handed us the menu, and we all began to browse over the different foods we could get.” and just like that you can not eat what you crave, but instead must pick an option provided(Matthews 2). The decline in cooking leads to the increase on relying on outside sources for our meals and they have become structured and specific to allow little choice of the individual. For example, an individual has an idea of what they want to eat and can then pick a specific restaurant that caters to that, like Matthews went to a steakhouse, and then once there you have a limited option of what you can order. You can only order what is listed making you settle for what there is in front of you instead of actually imagine what you want. Restaurants have specifically crafted the modern American’s taste buds and craving by doing so and people have been supporting them in their quest to deliver their food to you.

As many around the world will tell you the stereotype of Americans is that they are fat and lazy and this is because of how restaurants have in the past catered to what Americans wanted, and society today now wants what restaurants make. “We let corporations do the

cooking, they're bound to go heavy on sugar, fat and salt; these three tastes we're hard-wired to like" Pollan describes in his article(Pollan 19). These ingredients make the public want more, and while Americans use to be able to cook what restaurants make, they no longer can because of the chemicals and "secret sauces" that society is ridden with. Since restaurants have advanced in what they cook with to make it cheaper and more efficient, fast food chains are quite popular offering Americans a quick meal solution in which they do not have to put any effort in to receive the reward. This causes people to buy meals instead of make them themselves, which has a direct correlation with the obesity rates in America. The less involved the individual is, the less emotions are involved in it and the less they actually think about what is going into their body. When you cook you can specifically see what vegetables, meats, or grains, are going to be entering your body, however when you pull up to a drive through you have little to no idea about what is in what you eat, and sadly this is where we are going.

As Pollan described in his work the number of people cooking is at an all time low, meaning outside sources are taking the place, and this will be detrimental to the future generations. What once brought people together is the same thing that will ruin us. Cooking has brought Julia Child and her wholesome approach to meals and cooking, while today her culture is no longer present. When describing the change in society today Pollan sums it up perfectly when he states, " These shows stress quick results, shortcuts and superconvenience but never the sort of pleasure— physical and mental — that Julia Child took in the work"(Pollan 5). The pleasure of cooking a meal for yourself will be unknown to future generations, and all they will have to go off of is the prerecorded televised version of cooking. The competitive cooking shows mirror modern

society, today people want quick, convenient, and any shortcuts they can get to be more efficient. Fast food and ordering out is how individuals achieve this, making the kitchen obsolete.

While people today love watching cooking, they have no interest in doing it themselves. Fast food and other restaurants have taken the place of the kitchen, and will destroy everything cooking has given to us. Cooking over a fire created humans by, “allowing our brains to grow bigger” and giving us “the practice of eating together”(Pollan 17). Society has evolved since then, making humans more and more advanced, but when will it end? The more advanced we get the less human we become. Meals and food have become a quick and efficient process where no effort is needed from the individual to enjoy food. Even individuals my age are becoming detached from food, and have no need to learn how to cook. If we don't start cooking again, it will not be there for generations to come, and who knows how long it will take them to rediscover the essence of being human.

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