Sharing Meals Online May Reduce Loneliness and Improve the Dining Experience

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BOURNEMOUTH, UK (RPRN) 04/04/14 — An online eating trend that began in Korea has become a worldwide laboratory for experiencing and studying social bonding. 'Muk-bang', or sharing meals remotely with others through live video streaming on one's personal computer, is a unique 21st century way to build communal spirit, a practice the ancients called 'breaking bread', according to Sarah Mendel and Christine Yang of the World Mind Network, a co-sponsor of the study. Dine with the World is a collaboration of students from Harvard, Tsinghua University, Hong Kong University, Can Tho University in Vietnam, Oxford, Delhi, Seoul National University, the University of Witwatersrand and others intended to explore and enjoy this phenomenon.

Expected to join the project are students and family members from Tahiti, Turkmenistan, France, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Cayman Islands, Kenya, Ecuador, Argentina, Guiana, Jamaica, Madagascar, Indonesia, the Philippines, China, India, and the Seychelle Islands.

Some students are doing this just for fun; others have found ways to incorporate this experiment into classroom projects in Sociology, Psychology, Nutrition, Anthropology, Global Studies, and even Theater.

Among the questions being explored are: Is it possible to experience an enhanced sense of community while dining with others online? Is interest in healthier eating contagious? Do solitary diners who enjoy meals with others online feel less lonely? If so, is this effect increased while viewing several eaters from other nations on one's computer screen at the same time?

A special effort is being made to involve online diners from pairs of countries which are currently experiencing conflict, including Russians and Ukrainians, Sudanese and South Sudanese, Israelis and Palestinians, South and North Koreans, Hindus and Muslims from India, and Sunnis and Alawites from Syria.

For the most part, students who participate do not need extra time for this activity, as they merely eat a regularly scheduled meal in front of a computer or cell phone screen. They can chat or text with other participants or observers.

Special emphasis is placed upon consuming foods which are healthy, and produced with

ecologically sustainable methods.

For more information, or to volunteer, visit dinewiththeworld.net, or contact worldmindnetwork@gmail.com.

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