**SUPER SIZE ME REVIEW**

After reading the list of approved films to choose from, I was ecstatic to see that the movie “Super Size Me” was among the options. Not only have I seen this film a few years ago, but it was one of the most interesting films I had ever seen and I was thrilled to be given the opportunity to write about it. Before I was educated on the issue of modern day consumption, I watched this film with interest and discovered all the flaws in our modern day foods and the system. Not only was I shocked, but completely appalled to the point that I boycotted food for weeks!

The movie focuses on the hot topics of obesity in America, fast food, modern day dieting and the American food culture and begins with children singing about fast food corporations such as pizza hut and McDonalds and shows them proclaiming “I love food and you love food” at a children’s camp. This may seem harmless at first, but when you start to realize that our American culture revolves almost entirely around food (holidays, special occasions, birthdays, etc…) it may seem quite scary that we are teaching our children to be obsessed with food before they can even truly understand the concept.

The narrator proceeds to inform the viewer of the history behind our new idea of the American food culture and the devastating effects of fast food. America is all about bigger and better; we have the biggest “houses, cars, food and of course people”. Our food sizes keep getting bigger and bigger which makes us grow larger and larger. Take for example the big gulps (1/2 gallon of soda) we see today which are now being accommodated by larger cup holders in our huge SUV’s. We have quickly become the fattest nation in the world with 60% of all US adults being overweight and since 1980, obesity in America has doubled; what an achievement! And yet each day, 1 in 4 Americans visits a fast food restaurant fully knowing how these kinds of foods affect our health. (SSM)

 

This epidemic is now spreading worldwide. McDonalds feeds 46 million people everyday within 100 countries, across 6 continents via over 30,000 locations! They actually account for 43% of the fast food market and are showing up everywhere; even in hospitals… How ironic!

There are 400,000 deaths per year associated with related illnesses of obesity and it is second to smoking as the major cause of preventable death in America. In 2002, a few people got fed up with the fast food companies selling the community food that makes you fat, is bad for you and causes these illnesses and unnecessary deaths and they sued McDonalds based on two teenage girls’ stories. One girl was age 14, 4’10’ and 170 lbs! The second girl was age 19, 5’6’’ and a whopping 270 lbs! (SSM)

Lawyers from McDonalds called the case “frivolous”. Their Rebuttal: “the dangers of their food are universally known and these kids can’t prove that their weight/health problems were caused solely by a ‘McDiet’”. The Judge however, said that if the plaintiffs could prove that “McDonalds intends for people to eat its food everyday for every meal and that it is unreasonably dangerous, they may be able to state a claim”. Therefore Morgan Spurlock (director, writer and main character) subjects himself to a one month McDonalds binge to see just what would happen if he ate McDonalds for every meal of every day for 30 days.

Prior to beginning the binge, he went to four different doctors (a general practitioner, cardiologist, gastroenterologist and dietitian) to get medical supervision for this serious, and potentially dangerous, experiment. They gathered his stats which showed that he was in perfect/outstanding health, had no high sugar levels, all his organs were functioning perfectly, was 185.5 lbs with 11% body fat, had above average fitness levels, had a cholesterol level of 168 and blood pressure of 120/80.

One condition of this experiment was that if he was asked to supersize his meal, he was required to say yes as most people who are asked to super size their meal do say yes to the offer. Another condition was that since the average American does not exercise, neither would he for the full 30 days. He was also required to lessen his allowed walking distance everyday to a limited 5,000 steps (the average steps taken daily by the average American) and since there were three McDonalds within one mile of his home, it was very easy to get the food he was required to eat. As a matter of fact, there are 83 McDonalds in Manhattan which equates to four McDonalds per square mile! McDonalds has more locations than KFC, Popeye’s, Taco Bell and Wendy’s combined! (SSM)

This may not come as a surprise to you, but the average American eats out 40% of their meals. As adults, we are able to decide whether or not we can suppress our cravings. However, it is a much bigger social issue when McDonalds lures in kids with playgrounds, happy meals, birthdays, clowns and cartoons. The question is, is it ethical to market children to eat toxic food? It is hoped for that once these children grow up, they will remember the nice feeling of being with their parents, playing in the playgrounds and being happy at McDonalds and therefore they keep coming back when they are older and addicted. Not only do these addicts keep coming back, but they will bring their own children with them continuing the cycle. (SSM)

In the very near future, obesity will overtake smoking as the leading cause of preventable death in America. The movie brings up the interesting concept of how people confront smokers and explain to them that they are killing themselves. However, no one would ever think of confronting an overweight person and explain to them just how obesity is killing them. It is interesting that one is socially acceptable while the other is not; yet they are equally harmful addictions. (SSM)

Over last 20-25 years, the numbers of overweight children and adolescence has doubled. This is troublesome because being overweight leads to problems later in life including but not limited to: hypertension, coronary heart disease, stroke, gallbladder disease, osteoarthritis, sleep apnea, respiratory problems, endometrial cancer, breast cancer, prostate cancer, colon cancer, insulin resistance, asthma, reproductive hormone abnormality, polycystic ovarian syndrome, impaired fertility and adult onset diabetes. (SSM)

If this trend continues, 1 in every 3 children born in the year 2000 will develop diabetes in their lifetime. Currently, 1 in every 20 people has Type 2 diabetes (that’s 17 million people) and 17 to 27 years of lifespan is lost if a child develops Type 2 diabetes before the age of 15! Not to mention the fact that direct medical costs doubled over a 5 year span (1997 – 2002). In other words, the American fast food culture is truly an epidemic. (SSM)

Despite these facts, the average American child will see 10,000 food advertisements every year. Even if that same child ate all three meals a day with their parents and were shown good eating habits, that would only add up to roughly 1,000 times of the child being told how to eat properly; bottom line, parents cannot win the battle. Especially when McDonalds is spending 1.4 billion dollars a year worldwide on direct media advertising and the 5 fruits and 3 vegetables a day campaign is only spending a measly 2 million dollars a year on direct media advertising! (SSM)

The film did a very interesting experiment with children to prove that this is a very serious problem for our nation’s children. They showed the children pictures of famous faces to see what ones they knew. The following was found:

* Some of the children knew George Washington,
* None of the children recognized Jesus,
* A few of the children knew Wendy, but
* All the children knew exactly who Ronald McDonald was!

Many people argue that this epidemic of obesity is due to the personal choices of the people who are overweight. So, Spurlock headed out to McDonalds locations to get the nutritional information of their menu items so he could make informed decisions. However, when he asked for the nutritional information, only half of the locations had take-away pamphlets, very few had the information posted on the wall and 1 in every 4 had absolutely no nutritional information what-so-ever! So the question becomes, how can people exercise personal responsibility when the companies are not giving people the tools to do it?!

At the end of the experiment, it was found that Spurlock now weighed 210 lbs (gained 24.5 pounds), his liver turned into fat, his cholesterol went up 65 points (ending at 230), he was two times more likely to get heart disease, he gained 7% body fat (from 11% to 18%), he was two times more likely to have heart failure, was much more moody, depressed and exhausted than normal, acquired massive headaches, had craving for the fast food but would get sick after eating it, had inflammation and hardening of the liver and his liver was affected in the very same manner it would have been affected had he gone on a 30 day alcohol binge! Across the span of his 30 day binge, he consumed 30 pounds of sugar (one pound per day) and 12 pounds of fat! (SSM)

 In all, this movie is truly eye opening to the idea of the American fast food culture and how these foods are literally killing us. Something needs to change and as the movie states, “one of us has to go first (die first), it will either be McDonalds or US”. I for one choose McDonalds!

\*\*SSM = Super Size Me (the 2004 film)