McDonald's Activity Plan

An in-class activity for introductory anthropology courses. The activity can be adapted for synchronous on-line learning by using breakout rooms.

Time: Approximately 40 minutes.

Intended Learning Outcomes

By the end of this activity, students should be able to

- Define and apply relevant terminology such as sustainability, globalisation, ethnocentrism, and cultural relativism;
- Reflect on ethnocentrism in relation to food;
- Compare, contrast, and evaluate a set of sustainability claims; and
- Work collaboratively to come to a consensus.

Supplies

- Online or printed worksheet (see: https://forms.office.com/r/V7kZ881zpJ)
- Website or other online content with instructions and links (see: (https://onlineacademiccommunity.uvic.ca/emcguire/mcdonalds-flip/)

Steps

Begin with a brief review of concepts and terminology as needed – this depends on your course and students. The micro-lecture might draw ideas from JSTOR Daily's *Fast and Pluribus: Impacts of a Globalizing McDonald's* (Han 2023). This article compares an ethnographic case study from Japan with a geographic example from Ecuador. (10 minutes maximum)

The tasks are presented as follows:

1. Form teams of 3-5 students.
2. All students should access online instructions that include relevant links.
3. Teams need to designate someone to record answers in the online worksheet. The questions are presented in the worksheet AND in the instructions, so that it's easy for the group to follow.
4. Part 1 has basic questions then gets students looking at international McDonald's menus. This is where they engage with the strange and familiar and hopefully notice any arising ethnocentrism.
5. Part 2 asks students to review and evaluate McDonald's claims around sustainability actions. The goal is to generate discussion and hopefully consensus around a set of options. There are better answers, but a case can be made for most of the answers provided.

End the activity, or begin the next session, with a review discussion that highlights common answers.

The Questions

My questions relate to some of my intended learning outcomes for the course overall and for the sustainability module. I'm trying to invite them to have some fun while also reviewing core concepts like ethnocentrism. Your questions may vary!

The starting questions can be simple, just to get students started. For example: When did McDonald's first open? When did McDonald's first open in Canada? In how many countries can you find a McDonald's restaurant?

Menu item questions

1. List three examples of things you think of as typical/iconic McDonald's menu items. The sorts of things you'd think "everyone" would recognize or that your team thinks would be found in most McDonald's restaurants around the world.

2. Look up a McDonald's menu from another country, preferably one people in your team haven't been to before. (Go to a search engine and type "McDonald's menu" + a country name like: McDonald's menu Japan or McDonald's menu Ukraine. There are loads of countries to choose from. Which country did you pick?

3. As a team, list two menu items on that country's menu that look really familiar to you. The sort of thing you'd expect to find in a McDonald's in Victoria (city of your university).

4. As a team, list two menu items on that country's menu that look really different to you. Things you would **not** expect to find in a McDonald's in Victoria.

5. As a team, take a look at see which items you think might trigger an *ethnocentric* response in you or people you know. If there's nothing, why do you think that's the case? If there is something, what factors do you think are involved? (Topics that might help you include foodways, globalisation, worldviews, social inequality, etc. Use your course concepts to go beyond an easy answer.) [**NOTE:** If I were assigning a grade, this would be a graded question.]

Sustainability questions

6. Team members should do some googling to look up what claims McDonald's is making about their approaches to sustainability. As a team, form a **consensus** about which ONE of their claims from the list below is likely to have the **largest positive** environmental impact. Why did your team choose that option?
   a) Sustainable beef production
   b) Responsible antibiotic use
   c) Use of cage-free eggs
   d) Sustainably sourced coffee
   e) Sustainable fish harvesting

7. As a team, form a **consensus** about which ONE of their claims from the list below is likely to have the **smallest impact** or could be seen as "**green-washing**". Why did your team choose that option? (Uses identical list.)

8. Optional: What differences do you notice when you look specifically at the Canadian sustainability information located at: https://www.mcdonalds.com/ca/en-ca/our-purpose-and-impact/our-planet.html Why do you think the message is different? [**Note:** This question is a good filler for teams who finish early.]

Grading

I have used a variety of grading options requiring varying degrees of labour. The easiest is a simple participation mark (i.e. 1 mark for submitting any kind of answers). I have also used simple scales like exceeds expectations, meets expectations, does not meet expectations, followed by examples of good responses for students to compare their own work against. The most time consuming option is to

individually grade each response. It can be valuable, but is not necessary for a low-stakes activity like this. If I were to attach grades to specific items, it would be those questions that require critical thinking, such as the last question under Menu items and the *why* questions under Sustainability and I would look for meaningful answers rather than "right" answers.

Possible Variations

I have an optional add-on if there are times when the session moves too rapidly or I just want to extend it further into sustainability issues. The quick facts multiple choice can be dropped at the beginning and students can move directly into the menus. In the sustainability section, students can also review the carbon footprint of a popular menu item, such as the Big Mac. A good starting point for this is the CDA blog post "Where does your Big Mac come from?" (https://www.cda.co.uk/blog/where-does-your-big-mac-come-from/), which is UK specific. Students in other countries might be asked to attempt to research the component sources for Big Macs served in their country, while UK students might do it for a different menu item.

There may be another, more culturally relevant restaurant or chain that suits your needs for this activity. For example, if clothing is a more appropriate topic for your course, you might look at NPR's Planet Money Makes a T-shirt (https://apps.npr.org/tshirt/#/title) and pick a clothing chain or a type of garment as the focal point of the exercise.

Source:

Han, D. (27 Feb 2023) Fast and Pluribus: Impacts of a Globalizing McDonald's. *JSTOR DAILY*. https://daily.jstor.org/fast-and-pluribus-impacts-of-a-globalizing-mcdonalds/