

Molly Cadogan
Professor Jesse Miller
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Has Eating Been Dehumanized?

Food may seem like a simple topic of discussion, however there is controversy regarding its practicability and its sociability. Food is vital to keep us physically alive, but what about the mental, emotional, and social health needs? Eating a meal covers the whole health spectrum. Meals involve social interactions where one can express their opinion, share their emotions, and deepen a connection with who they eat with. Could humans live without these interactions though? In Lizzie Widdicombe's piece, "The End of Food" she discusses Rob Rhinehart who is living proof that you can stop eating meals and become a more productive individual. Rhinehart stopped eating food in the traditional sense over a year ago and instead consumes his invention Soylent, which gives humans their essential vitamins and nutrients. Soylent is a "over-all food substitute" which has real world implications(Widdicombe 11). It is cheap enough to mass produce and all of the variables in it are easily accessible, so Soylent could end world hunger, and be a great alternative for those who struggle financially(Widdicombe 17).

On the other hand, by relying solely on Soylent you lose a piece of what makes us human. Soylent strips humans of their creative and social aspects and instead saves them time to be more productive. In my essay titled "Chicken Parmesan", I discuss the emotions associated with food, a perspective Rhinehart does not have. These two sides create a strange paradox between food as a utility and food as pleasure. Soylent in theory is the perfect product, making humans more efficient, but human beings have a desire for social interaction, making Soylent a sub-par product for the human race.

Soylent has been crafted with the idea to make it easy for the working class. Similar products are marketed toward athletes to improve strength and performance or the elderly who can not chew their food, but Soylent is marketed for productivity and efficiency. All of your nutrients are conveniently in powder form which you simply need to add to water, and this beverage could replace a meal, allowing you to continue through your day without the hassle of a lunch break. While working individuals benefit, Soylent can be applied to a much larger scale and potentially end world hunger. Rhinehart himself says, “you could just drop in a shipping container[of Soylent to those who are malnourished around the world]” (Widdicombe 17). Soylent has the potential to solve an issue that has plagued the Earth for generations. Additionally, Soylent can replace peoples’ meals and they can save a decent amount of money. Rhinehart himself struggled with paying for food before Soylent telling Widdicombe, “the grocery bills were still adding up... ‘Food was such a large burden’”(Widdicombe 1). After consuming Soylent all of the time Rhinehart stated that is food costs, “dropped from four hundred and seventy dollars a month to fifty dollars”(Widdicombe 2). Those who have limited access to food would wide would significantly benefit from the decreased grocery bill and the nutritional aspect.

However, while this is great in theory, the issue is that Soylent is only a theoretical miracle worker. Soylent requires water, which sounds easy to those who can see where they have access to it in this moment, but not everybody has water on hand or even in reach. Additionally, who is going to pay for over the eight hundred million who are hungry. While fifty dollars a month is may be easy for someone with a paying job, but those who are hungry most likely can

not afford it, making the cost to end world hunger forty billion dollars per month, not including shipping. Realistically, Soylent could not solve world hunger, but it is good for daily life.

The average American would benefit from consuming Soylent since it is built for efficiency and to be a utility. Currently to avoid prepping and cooking meals Americans turn to fast food and taking meals to go instead of Soylent. While fast food may be quick and satisfying, the nutritional value of it is awful for your body. Soylent contains all “thirty five nutrients required for survival” while fast food gives you obesity and high cholesterol (Widdicombe 2). Additionally, eating fast food everyday for a month is more expensive, and it takes longer when you account for the line at the drive through. Not only that, but Soylent is able to be consumed faster because it requires no utensils and you just have to drink it, making it a better use of time. This is especially appealing to me as a college student because I have limited time to eat dinner, and occasionally the dining hall is closed by the time I get there. For example, a typically Monday for me involves waking up at 6:45 am, going to the gym, quickly changing and leaving to grab breakfast before class, then another class, get lunch, do homework, pick up a sandwich for dinner, go to work at 4:15 pm, eat the sandwich while I am at work, go to volleyball practice right after, shower around 10:30 pm, finish homework, and hopefully make it into bed before 12:30 pm. Since you can just drink it and you don't have to take more than three minutes to make it there is no reason not to have it. I could drink it as lunch, giving me more time to do homework so I can get to bed earlier, and I would be able to focus better at work since I can not multitask when my hands are preoccupied by the sandwich. You can easily drink it whenever you go, giving you zero excuses to skip a meal. By switching solely to Soylent there are various aspects of meals that you would come to miss(Widdicombe 3).

While Soylent may appear to be a perfect product, you are losing all flavors of food that one would greatly miss. Rhinehart has given Soylent no flavor, the only taste comes from, “a small amount of sucralose, to mask the taste of vitamins”(Widdicombe 6). So while you may be full, your tastebuds will be bored. In my essay titled “Chicken Parmesan”, I described why it is my favorite meal by using images that reminded me of the flavor. Flavor can be felt in my different ways for example, “I bring my plate to the table, the smells of the pasta sauce and garlic bread collect in my nostrils and my hands begin to warm from the plate.” Even thinking about how it smells makes my mouth water. I would be missing out on this if I was on Soylent. You would never get to try new food or experience new flavors like, “trying every ratio of chicken to pasta, and chicken and pasta and bread.” The variety of flavors create cravings, for example the thought of a cold glass of lemonade on a hot day satisfies your emotions, and while Soylent would give you what your body chemically needs, it would not release endorphins like the lemonade would. The ability to taste and be able to experiment with food would be wasted and there would be no point in cooking.

If I only consumed Soylent I would have never learned to cook. While this is somewhat appealing to never have to wait for a meal to cook, it’s those times where I was able to bond with my mom the most. We have cooked many meals together over the years, and some of the recipes have been passed down from her mom too. “ ‘I remember watching her cook and bake when I was young. I learned how to bake brownies and cookies by 11 years old’...Her experiences when she was my age made me value all of the home cooked meals we have together”. In my family cooking gets passed down every generation, and Soylent removes the connect I have with my family. My mom taught me how to cook around the time she was learning from my grandmother.

Hearing about how my mom is similar to her, makes me feel closer to her now that she is gone. SoyLent would take away the connection I have with my mom, and my grandmother.

SoyLent is not intended to be a social product, unlike a meal and cooking is. Eating is the time to connect with people, and humans are naturally social beings. While I understand the necessary times to have SoyLent, but I could never only consume SoyLent, or go a day without real food. Being in college now, it is hard to find time to eat, but the time I do have to eat with my friends are some of my favorite memories. For example, 3 days a week we all make time to get breakfast together and then disperse to our different classes. This is the only time I really have to see them during the weekday, so I greatly appreciate it and I enjoy listening to everyone's stories from their weekend or about what they are learning about. With SoyLent, I would not know them as well as I do now, since I would have no need to go to breakfast. I would sleep and take the mixture in a bottle to class to drink it, and never share another meal with them. Since I am very busy, if I lose my main social gathering college would be lonely, and quite frankly depressing.

The human experience of eating is much more complex than what SoyLent is making it out to be. While food is a utility, the overall experience of eating and having a meal can not be replaced by a powder concoction. SoyLent is stripping people of what makes them human, and turning them into one big chemical reaction, disregarding their soul. I understand that this was Rhinehart's intention when creating SoyLent, to create a product for, "our meals for utility and function", but if we are all work and no play are you living your life to the fullest(Widdicombe 2)? I believe while in theory SoyLent is perfect for certain situations, like poverty, one can not go

and live their life without flavor and experiences. Survival is necessary, but it is how you choose to survive which it what matters. Do you live a life full of flavor, or work your life away?

Works Cited

Widdicombe, Lizzie. "The End of Food." *The New Yorker*.

<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/12/the-end-of-food>. Accessed 12

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