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Has Eating Been Dehumanized?

Food may seem like a simple topic of discussion, but is in 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 this interaction 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 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 human experiences.

Soylent has been crafted with the idea to make it easy for the working people. All of your nutrients are conveniently in powder form which you simply need to add to water, and this beverage could replace a meal. While cubicle workers benefit, Soylent can be applied to a much larger scale and potentially end world hunger. While world hunger is a large task to take on Soylent in theory can be shipped worldwide for a relatively low cost. Additionally, focusing on the homeless population and those who need food stamps or are in need of assistance can use Soylent to replace their meals and they can save a decent amount of money, and they would be obtaining the necessary vitamins and minerals. When the creator of Soylent, Rob Rhinehart started consuming Soylent all of the time he stated that his food costs, "dropped from four hundred and seventy dollars a month to fifty dollars"(Widdicombe 2). Those who have limited or no access to food would wide would significantly benefit from the decreased grocery bill, and along with this you can conclude that if you are receiving all of your minerals and nutrients you will spend less on medications and doctor bills.

However, while this is great in theory, the issue is that Soylent is only a theoretical miracle worker. Shipping Soylent to places who lack food, for example Africa, sounds great but that will not solve their problems. 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. From the time it takes to prepare, cook, eat, and clean up your meal you have lost valuable time in the day to get actual work done. For example, in the same amount of time it takes to put into a meal, one could have Soylent, go to the gym, take a shower, and still have some time to relax. Another issue facing American meals, is the increase in fast food and taking meals to go. While fast food may be quick and satisfying, the nutritional value of it is awful and your body feels the lack of nutrients. Rhinehart even says living off fast food for a week made him feel like he, “was going to die”(Widdicombe 1). Soylent is cheaper than eating fast food everyday for a month, and you can make it in under the time it takes to go through a drive through. Additionally, Soylent makes a work lunch more productive. Soylent is able to be consumed faster because it requires no utensils and you just have to drink it, this makes your working lunch more productive because you have more time to focus solely on work. Along with that you are receiving vital nutrients, and your body will perform better compared to eating fast food. The worst issue is skipping a meal. Your body is running off of no fuel, making you lack energy, and this can be detrimental to your body and your day. This is especially appealing to me as a college student because I have limited time to eat dinner at night, and occasionally the dining hall is closed by the time I get there. 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. 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.” You would also lose the joy of 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. Soylent is not made to make connections, but instead is made to be a utility.

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. Widdicombe asked Soylent fanatics about any social changes since drinking Soylent and their response was, “you fart pretty bad”(Widdicombe 16). This turns out to be big issue, and one kids stopped going to class because of it. However, they still socialize with others who drink Soylent and they discuss the different formula options. Some may find this appealing, however I prefer to talk about real food while

eating real food. 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. I would sleep through breakfast and take the mixture in a bottle to class or drink it while doing homework in the morning. Since I am very busy, if I would lose all social contact with the world if I only consumed Soylent.

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. Eating is intended to be a social experience, where you can experiment with food, and meet new people along the way. 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? 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.

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 February 2019.