The Food that Fooled the First Lady

Sometimes, looking in hindsight to a problem, the solution seems obvious. Yet, often, we forget that the people at the time could not see what we see; that the solution was right in front of them, all they needed to do was look. Sometimes an answer is just within reach, yet others try to hide it for their own benefit. These people might be government, industries, churches or the rich and they often have a reason for wanting to hide the information. This can especially be seen with in science research. With money and discovery on the line, pressure can be enough to make one cheat the rules and ignore consequences. There is crisis' involving information taking science back because one discovery was discounted or later found to be bought off. Other times, it is too late and the damage is done. Preventative steps must be taken to keep the consequences from effecting anything else, including people. This is what corrupt science does; it crosses a line that while benefits the actuator, results in harm than for the good. The groups use it no matter how harmful it may be if it appears good for them and will often try hard to protect their product with false advertising if they believe that it will live longer. Corrupt science is everywhere, mainly through bias, but it can happen when a company buys the services of researchers to
turn attention of their product to a more “urgent” topic, sometimes more viable. This, in fact, is taking place now.

Even as careful as they are, people in high places can be incorrectly swayed by the influence of corrupt science. In 2008, President Obama began his term with his wife, First Lady Michelle Obama, for eight years over the United States. With a campaign of her own in mind, Michelle Obama began to work on lowering the rate of obesity in the United States (Let’s Move). Originally the plan, as she discussed in her speech pertaining to sugar, was to find the source of obesity. She believed that it had to do with sugar and that it started from a young age. She was not wrong. With her confidence, she began to crack down on youth advertising, instead placing children show characters on healthy foods, like carrot and broccoli. Then something happened. Her focus towards food stopped. She began calling her campaign “Let’s Move!” Her plan was to get kids to exercise and burn the extra calories. Michelle would hold fundraisers to create better gyms for grammar school children (Let’s Move). So, what happened? It turns out, in 2010, Coca-Cola, along with the United States sugar industry approached the First Lady with pledges of support. They would give her their resources and funding to help kids. With that, her focus turned from food to exercise and the SpongeBob on the Captain Crunch cereal box was saved (Fed Up).

So, what was wrong with what had happened? The First Lady may have been unaware of it, but she had been fooled by the rule of sugar companies, something, according to National Public Radio (NPR), had been happening since the 50’s. when the companies had agreed to work with her, they had been experts in turning the attention to exercise instead of sugar (50 years). Mainly, that calories taken in should equal calories out, or else
weight gain happens, thus Michelle Obama’s worry; obesity could be solved if only one chose to lift the foot off the couch and to outdoors (Let’s Move). And it is not as though the companies are wrong either. People need to exercise, watch what they eat, and choose carefully what they eat. It was what the companies were hiding from the First Lady or the United States that would have shown its true colors.

There are several problems with sugar. The first is that it is incredibly addictive to the body, according to a report released by Fed Up. They tested rats with a high dependence on cocaine to see if sugar could change their behavior. After being fed sugar water for 2 weeks, the rats were given a choice between the weed and the sugar water. 85% of the rats returned to the sugar water (Fed Up). Sugar companies seem to know this fact. Sugar is sweet and we want to eat it whenever it is placed in front of us. Like any sport, the younger a person starts, the better their skill by the time colleges start to look at them. It is the same concept with sugar. The younger they can advertise to the better, that way the sugar can stick till adulthood, when habits become harder to waive (Fed Up).

Another problem is that sugar is dangerous if overconsumed, which in the United States is common among the variety of processed foods and available (O’Connor). The sugar company of America’s run in with Michelle Obama was not its first time handling the government. A common argument was that there has been no science to prove that sugar is the main cause of a diabetes and obesity, only that if a person chooses to eat more than their body can handle, (the person’s agency working, as they like to point out) then the fault belongs to the person who could not retain their appetite from the food. With everybody’s ability to handle differing amounts of sugar, the controversy between the percentage per
person could not be decided and so, to this day, the label on the food has no percentage to know whether one is going above the daily recommended value the sugar companies reject or if they have eaten enough (O’Connor).

This brings up another point. Without the percentage, you will be unaware of how much sugar you do consume. The recommended value is 25 grams. To put this in perspective, a can of Coca-Cola contains 45 grams of sugar. 48 grams equals about three cups, so a can of Cola has about the same amount of sugar 24 homemade cookies. And that is only 16 ounces of liquid. One is known to get thirsty too, so more than a single can could be consumed, which is over 125% the suggested daily consumption (Fed Up). Cities along the east coast have noticed this problem spread through the United States especially through the fast food chain. New York City and Chicago, particularly had problems spending on health issues centered around sugar (O’Connor). New York decided that exercise simply wasn’t enough. They placed a ban on selling drinks over 16 ounces to costumers. Chicago did not achieve as much. Coca-Cola got to them first. They donated $3 million to renovate gyms and the law did not pass (O’Connor).

Why is it that helping with exercise and research towards helping larger people is so bad? The reason is choice. While many people, according Fed Up, would rather have a candy bar instead of a nice green salad, it goes the same when given the choice between exercise or something to better spend their time on (Fed Up). Yet this does not occur to the person when they think they will go to the gym later enjoying the candy bar. They think that if they can get to that gym later, then they can allow themselves to eat more freely and often than do, they don’t go and only pile on the calories. This has been happening since the 50’s.
A study came out that stated that fatness could be relieved once one exercised as a solution. Who came out with this study? The Sugar Research Foundation, funded by the main sugar company the time (O’Connor).

While sponsored by the sugar industry, the science began to sway to ideas the company wanted. They had published this information in a Journal of Medicine in 1967 in order to promote the idea (50 years). While earlier in the century, Americans were being encouraged to consume low-in fat diets, a sudden business opportunity in the eyes of the company. Knowing that food still needed to taste good and stick together, they found ways to implement sugar into all low-fat foods. Because of this action, the sugar capita tripled. With the new money coming in and fears still produced by consumers that sugar was bad, the research foundation put out an award of $50,000 to any experimentation to swerve focus or turn it away from the thought of bad sugar (50 years). With the research, there was a craze to prove the sugar companies wrong in their use of sugar as good for the public, yet studies began to be rejected. One by a Harvard student showed that giving a low fat, high sugar diet to rats caused them to change negatively, yet the idea was dismissed because “humans would never consume such a diet.” (O’Connor). It turned out that Coca-Cola took advantage of the exercise is good for all because they too began to fund similar research.

A group called Global Energy Balance Network hired four scientists to work and control the work of the company. Their income was around $3 million each (O’Connor). They worked to help show how exercise was the way to go for any problem in fatness. They were the ones who “helped” Michelle Obama in her campaign to fix America. They were the ones who helped provide research for new facilities in Chicago. In fact, last year each
scientist came out and spoke out about how sorry they were for what they had done, for providing work that kept focus away from the true purpose. As each denounced their company, one by one they lost their degrees in their specialized field of study. The company, as it turns out was funded by none other than Coca-Cola (O'Connor).

Coca-Cola is aware that if enough people are concerned with a product, then they stop buying it as much. This can mean a huge drop in profit and so they go out of their way to make sure this cannot happen. Their slogan reads, “Helping Families Get Fit.” Their whole purpose was to shift blame for obesity away from bad diets (O’Connor). They have released reports saying sugar is okay to consume more than in a soft drink. They do so for the money and the profit. With each of the reports and help they provide to steer direction away from what they know their main ingredient does. They have led astray cities, such as Chicago, to return to fatness and exercise. They have caused schools to avoid fixing their menus of sugary drinks and more on school equipment. Washoe county is an example of a consequence provided from research by Coca-Cola.

With the help of the district and the Coca-Cola company, P.E. became a requirement in all schools, especially high school. By spending money on equipment, schools could not afford to fix their lunch, until this year, when Coca-Cola was found using corrupt science. What looked as positive, the schools banned all sugary drinks, food and the sharing of the food, with the hanging threat of an expensive fine per child caught doing so. Even with good intentions, the plan had loop-holes (Want). If a company previously had a deal with the county, then they were allowed to continue selling their product, like Coca-Cola, still sitting
in vending machine outside waiting to be consumed allowing its addictiveness take hold of
the younger generations.

This isn’t the first time this has happened in history either. There has been corrupt
sciences with the tobacco product. Today, science knows that tobacco creates a slew of
complications for the body. It causes cells to die quickly, which can lead to cancer, an older
appearance and it blackens the lungs and teeth. Tobacco is generally considered lowly and
loathsome to people and nasty looks are often thrown towards those who choose to act in
using tobacco. At the beginning of the 20th century, the idea that tobacco might be bad for
one’s health was hardly a thought that crossed a mind. At the time, ads and commercials
demanded a person had a right to smoke or that it was manly to chew. ‘It soothes your
throat!’ “It cures aches!” “It has beautifying power!” “Einstein smokes it, why don’t you?”
Doctors endorsed ads explaining the health benefits of the product (Tobacco). Tobacco
companies paid celebrities to share the excitement and fun one could have by smoking. In a
way, it was a symbol of power. Intelligent people, the rich, the famous, the brave all do it!
You should too! With the push of all the positive of the product, there is hardly any time to
think that it might be bad for you. This is what the companies did. And to see it work for
them. Over many years, even in the 90’s smoking was a popular end of the day, cool
activity, though the threat was known (Tobacco). There are now warning signs that tell you
the product could kill you, at your own choice and risk. Much like how the sugar companies
say how it is the consumer’s choice to make the decision, should there be a label along the
candy bar that your health is instantly wavering once you eat it? Much like how tobacco’s
dangers were kept from the public, sugar may take just as long to slow the urge to eat it down.

The sugar industries cover up of sugar is just one of several corrupt science stories for money and interest. I, myself am an aspiring scientist and can see the damage that these companies make by simply choosing to make a business deal rather than a safety law. With just one slip up, and people don’t just stop trusting the product, they stop relying on any scientists results, which can frustrate my own results when they are not under a company’s demands. It ruins a scientists reputation, especially when the First Lady cannot trust that a scientist can reliable aid her in a way to make America better.
Works Cited


“Want to Learn More about Small Farming?” Washoe County Food Policy Council, wcfpc.org/.