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COM243G

Reader Response: Week 3

The readings this week, those being: *Sugar-coating Science How the Food Industry Misleads Consumers on Sugar* and *Nutrition Scientists On the Take from Big Food* ideas are not new to me. My dad has always been interested in living as healthy as he can and from a young age I was always told to not eat processed foods and to not drink soda and so on, but even with what I would consider being an informed food shopper who has tried to eat healthy, it is insane to me the level of manipulation and misleading that has been able to be done to our perceptions of healthy vs unhealthy eating, and the ways that these massive companies change the narrative around sugar in foods. The ways in which these large food corporations use deceptive and targeted marketing to exploit us is truly astounding and has dire consequences for the health of so many. Additionally, these Corporations have invaded what used to be reliable scientific communities who would study food by using their money and sponsorships to promote their own products and agendas, undermining organizations like the American Society for Nutrition (ASN) role as a reliable source of evidence-based nutritional information.

One way in which nutrition advice is influenced by corporations is in the form of big food partnerships where massive food corporations like Kelloggs or Kraft donate money to organizations like the American Society for Nutrition. The insidious ways that the American food industry pumps money into enticing people to consume their brand of

sugary food and drinks is astounding and the top 10 major brands are responsible for the majority of the sugary products consumed in the USA. In 2012 the advertising expenditure of these companies exceeded 6.9 billion dollars (4) to dominate the market. Through clever uses of PR campaigns, advertising, and marketing these companies are able to exert heavy influence over the market and the flow of information and shape the narrative to better fit their corporate interests, manipulating the general public's perception of their dietary decisions, even among the most health-conscious individuals. Personally, it seems hard to escape seeing these ad campaigns whether it be online or on billboards the advertisements are endless.

The shady influence of these mega food corps don't stop there as they often use deceptive marketing tactics like false or misleading claims on packaging, appealing to fit cultural narratives or using influence of others, or creating fronts to promote their brand. Companies are using terms like: "healthy," "natural," "naturally sweetened," and even "lightly sweetened,"(5) to deceive the consumer into believing a food is healthier than it truly is. Personally I have fallen for these marketing ploys, in my mind vitamin water is a better option than soda even though they have the same sugar content proving that these marketing tactics work. Other marketing tactics like targeting their messaging to fit cultural narratives It can also be easily seen today in the companies who participate in pride month despite their owners also donating to organizations or politicians who directly oppose the normalization of the LGBTQ+ community and these companies are only participating in pride month as a cheap marketing tactic to help relate their brand with a more progressive audience. Other intentionally misleading information is spread by front groups who are funded by these food corporations to promote, and act as their

spokesperson for their product in a less direct manner to seem more legitimate in their claims about a food's value to the consumer.

All of these false or misleading claims that the PR machine run by these mega food corporations are leading to disastrous results in public health, as “scientific evidence increasingly confirms a relationship between sugar consumption and a rise in the incidence of chronic metabolic diseases—obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, high triglycerides, and hypertension” (1). And one of the worst and most surreptitious aspects of these misleading claims is who the advertisers of these large food corps are targeting. Sugar preys on our most basic instincts and acts almost like a drug releasing the feelings of happiness and fulfillment when we consume sugary products, advertisers know this and often target vulnerable individuals, those being children, minorities, and low income families. Additionally, advertisers know that in most households women are the primary household food choice makers and thus they prey on gender inequities and body image insecurities as well. For me the targeting of these vulnerable individuals by the advertisers is nothing short of evil, as they know what the health risks their products pose and yet still choose to target those who might be most susceptible to falling for their misleading marketing tactics and it truly sickens me to learn about their exploitation of these groups.

In the second reading, *Nutrition Scientists On the Take from Big Food*, it also covers the corporate donorship and control over institutions which the general public would treat as trustworthy sources and details the levels of entertainment between corporate sponsors and the American Society for Nutrition (ASN). The sponsorship directly funds research and has influence over the topics that will be discussed and

researched but also national policies including the defense of highly processed foods and sugar, like how in 2014 the ASN published a “18-page scientific statement in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition (one of its own journals, and also one of the top 100 most influential journals in biology and medicine) titled “Processed foods: contributions to nutrition”” (9). The conclusion that can be taken away from the close relationship between the ASN and its corporate sponsors is that they are too intertwined in their interests like the saying “one hand feeds the other” we cannot reliably trust that the ASN truly has the public health at the top of their mind when it comes to its narrative.

In conclusion, I believe that there needs to be legislation that holds these supposed medical sources accountable and limits the influence that these large food corporations have on the nutritional scientific community. Additionally I believe that limits should be placed on the types of wording that can be used in advertisements to limit confusion or false narratives that companies try to add to their products in order to make them more appealing to the mindful consumer, and it should be abundantly clear when organizations like ASN might have conflicting interests due to their sponsorships so that any of their content is made clear that it may contain biases due to their funding. Also I believe that targeting ads to children or vulnerable minorities is damaging to the health of the country and should similarly be banned. The media and the FDA should also consider making more stories and better informing the public about the dangers of some food and drinks to help better educate the public about potential dangers in the food that they consume. I would also like to ask the author of *Nutrition Scientists On the Take from Big Food* what steps are currently being taken to limit the influence of ASN if

the general consensus is that it is a compromised institution. I would also like to ask if there is any better research or informational outlet for those who wish to be more accurately informed.