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### Gatorade: The Modern-Day Water

As with many typical Chinese families who grew up in the Mid-south area, my grandparents owned and ran their own grocery store as their first job in America. Growing up in the family grocery store changed my perspective on new products major food companies would come out with. The massive variety of colorful Kool-Aids, carbonated sodas, and sports drinks were not just pleasing to the eyes; they were new flavor adventures waiting for me to explore. Every Sunday, right after church, my family would stop by the grocery store for lunch, and I would always grab a bottle of Gatorade for the ride back home. As a child, Gatorade was a customary beverage option, whether it was after a competitive game of cops-and-robbers in the cereal aisle or time for a mid-afternoon snack. As I have grown older, I have learned that Gatorade was a drink made especially by the researchers at the University of Florida for athletes who have just exercised; however, I have noticed people in today's culture embracing the same view of Gatorade as I had as a child. With the overwhelming emphasis on athletics and healthy living in America, people have started drinking Gatorade more as a refreshment with a meal or snack rather than as a hydration booster in an intense workout. Today's society has accepted a more habitual consumption of the sports drink Gatorade because of its tremendous fascination for maintaining active lifestyles centered around sports.

Similar to the ancient Greeks, today's society has a profound fascination with the idea of Man overcoming the physically impossible, elevating the view of particular sports brands and

products to new heights in today's culture. The ancient Greeks strived to be remembered and honored by people long after death through the spectacular deeds they completed. This attainment of renown and glory through the accomplishment of great deeds was the prominent goal for practically every character featured in Homer's epic the *Iliad* and a variety of Greek myths. With this way of thinking ingrained in the Greek culture, people found such admiration for characters, such as Achilles and Hercules, for overcoming physically brutal feats such as single-handedly defeating a whole army and slaying a nine-headed hydra. In the same way, people today have taken up the view of athletes as modern-day heroes. Because athletes have the ability to score winning goals or turn the whole game around for their team, they are esteemed greatly by their fans and hold a status of superiority in people's minds.

Major sport-affiliated brands have made huge profits off this generation's focus and high affirmation for athletics and all-star athletes. In particular, *First in Thirst* author Darren Rovell cites that Gatorade, with its sponsorship with the NFL, NBA, and many other professional athletic teams, continues to thrive astoundingly compared to other sports drink brands in today's culture (4-6). Setting Gatorade apart from the rest of the market is how iconic the large orange coolers and green paper cups have become in the sports world. Gigantic coolers of Gatorade sit on the benches of every professional team in the country and are frequently dumped upon the coaches of championship-winning teams. Seeing these images broadcast on sports networks and advertisements everywhere has transformed the public's view of Gatorade into a "Drink of Champions" (Rovell 2). Those marketing the major sports drink brand have taken note of its position in the public eye and have adjusted their commercials to one of the most effective demographics—young sports enthusiasts. According to Judann Pollack's article, "Gatorade Frost Hopes For Cool \$100 Mil In Sales," when Gatorade launched commercials in 1997 for its newest

performance drink, Gatorade Frost, it specifically targeted television networks broadcasting to children with growing interests in sports. Estimating revenue of more than one hundred million dollars from the release of this one product clearly shows that the company was and still is highly aware of the impact it has on the younger generation (4). Portraying athletes as actual heroes when they drink Gatorade has catalyzed its large success as a sports drink company. Even its theme, “Life is a sport, drink it up” encourages people to value sports and physical prowess as a superior aspect of life. The culture today holds a more acceptable view towards Gatorade as a casual beverage option because it has cultivated a sports-minded generation of young people through strategic marketing and advertisement, even if these people have little to no interest in sports.

This admiration for athletics translates into the desire to imitate athletes as role models. Caught up in their aspirations, individuals begin drinking Gatorade since they continually see their favorite athletes drink Gatorade and be very successful at their sport. However, with such publicity, Gatorade has partly lost its appeal as a sports drink alone. The performance drink, which was specifically invented by the University of Florida’s scientists for the improvement of hydration and physical endurance for top-notch athletes, has been reduced to merely another beverage option because the brand has become such a major icon to the public. Rovell admits that during his middle school cross-country days, he drank Gatorade, not for the competitive edge it claims to provide, but because the athletes on television had convinced him that champions drink Gatorade (1-2). Drinking Gatorade has transformed into more of a social behavior than a hydration supplement. For Rovell and many other children in this generation, Gatorade allows them to share a special bond with the athletes they greatly admire, even if they will never be able to meet them or compete on that same level. Furthermore, in *American*

*Terroir: Savoring the Flavors of Our Woods, Waters, and Fields*, Rowan Jacobsen identifies food as a defining factor of life. Jacobsen explains that food connects people to a certain time and place in their lives on earth and that the love for a specific food develops because food carries meaningful stories to people (12). This idea makes a reasonable claim that people will unquestioningly accept Gatorade because it is deemed good by the athlete-heroes they have always looked up to. This feeling of a personal connection to their heroes when they drink Gatorade accounts for this casual consumption of Gatorade.

Along with this increased consumption of Gatorade has come about a massive push to live active lifestyles; however, this push has actually contributed negatively to the overall health of America. Removing soft drinks from schools and keeping sports drinks, such as Gatorade, that contain substantially as much sugar, bears physiological consequences for today's culture. The main reason soft drinks, such as Coca-Cola and Dr. Pepper, instead of Gatorade have been banned from some schools is because they carry a negative, junk-food connotation. It is possible that the omission of Gatorade from the schools' sugary drink ban stems from the culture's automatic association of Gatorade with healthy lifestyles. When people think about drinking soda, they think of the buttery popcorn at the movie theater or the big, juicy hamburger they usually eat with it; however, when they think about Gatorade, they often think of it as the drink that helps them stay in shape. Many youth today mistakenly perceive the act of drinking Gatorade alone as a health benefit. For example, studies from Maria Clemmitt's article "Sugar Controversies" show that even drinking Gatorade for ordinary meals has led to excess sugar consumption by the youth. With Gatorade instead of soft drinks, children can still satisfy their sweet tooth and even believe they are healthier in doing so, making Gatorade the modern-day water of today's generation. Adding sugary drinks to their diet has, therefore, caused obesity

rates in young children and teenagers to triple since 1980. Abstaining from drinking soft drinks and opting for Gatorade may cause an individual to feel as though he or she is living a healthier lifestyle since Gatorade is a drink for those who are physically active. In reality, Gatorade consumers may be packing on empty calories.

Drinks, in general, are often disregarded in the average American diet since they can be consumed at any time of the day—not just during the three main meals of the day. When these drinks contain massive amounts of sugar, they must be factored into one's diet and exercise habits. Clemmitt indicates that most Americans count their caloric intake exclusively from solid food, which satisfies people's appetite and provides a full feeling after consumption. This leads people to excessively consume high contents of calories and sugar in drinks, such as Gatorade, without realizing the cost of calories in their diet ("Sugar Controversies," n.p.). Because the majority of regular Gatorade drinkers today are not burning off these extra calories along with the calories in their food, they tend to struggle with obesity and face the risks of heart disease and developing Type 2 diabetes. For this reason also, Gatorade—a drink with a high concentration of sugar—may be considered a major factor in the obesity epidemic today.

The high concentration of sugar in Gatorade not only adds excess calories to a generation already struggling with obesity and maintaining a healthy diet, it also has the potential to permanently degrade one's dental health. Though Gatorade has compensated for the high calorie count by releasing the low-calorie G2 series, the company still has not accounted for the high sugar level in its sports drinks. Dr. Barry M. Owens and Dr. Michael Kitchens conducted an experiment testing the erosive potential that drinks can have on the tooth enamel surface. Owens and Kitchens tested the corrosion of tooth enamel caused by Diet Coke, Coca-Cola, Gatorade, and Red Bull—all very acidic drinks loaded with refined sweeteners. Their studies showed that

Gatorade and Red Bull, which contained comparably lower acidity levels than the carbonated Diet Coke and Coca-Cola, actually resulted in more damage to teeth because they contained more sugar. While the carbonation in sodas eventually balanced out the high acidity of Diet Coke and Coca-Cola, the higher sugar content in Gatorade only increased the acid's penetration and dissolution of tooth enamel, causing devastatingly more damage to the tooth (7-9). Their results show that carbonated sodas are not the only culprits of the widening health problems in America. Gatorade often goes completely unnoticed as a major factor putting America's health at risk and continues to exist in stores and schools everywhere because it is largely accepted by the public and associated with a healthy lifestyle.

The excessive consumption of such a sugary drink coupled with the knowledge that Gatorade has these corrosive effects multiplies the concern for the health of future generations. Owens and Kitchens' studies particularly targeted the potential dissolution of tooth enamel in young people, ranging from adolescence to young adulthood from drinking Gatorade, yet they especially emphasized an exponential risk for younger children. Gatorade can cause permanent damage to younger children's porous, immature tooth enamel, which is still developing and building up the tolerance to high levels of acidity (9). Gatorade's acidity can already cause great damage to teeth with fully developed enamel; its effects on teeth with minimal, growing layers of enamel will cause extreme dental sensitivity and future problems eating different foods. With a young generation that upholds athletes as the highest of role models and is continually targeted by large sports companies, it is logical to conclude that young people will favor Gatorade over many other drinks and that this increased consumption of Gatorade may escalate to disastrous health consequences for the future generations of America.

Nonetheless, Gatorade has proven itself to be the supreme performance drink despite its potential health risks. Multiple championship-winning teams can testify to the considerable improvement in physical performance Gatorade provides when consumed for its intended purpose. Gatorade was first created in 1965 by researchers at the University of Florida College of Medicine to provide the Gator football team with a substantial drink that would immediately replenish the large amount of bodily fluids lost during long periods of physical exertion. Within a year of hydrating at practices and games with this new sports drink, the Florida Gators football team had gained national recognition and even had their quarterback, Steve Spurrier, awarded with the Heisman trophy that season. Many of the players on that 1966 team credited Gatorade for giving them the extra edge needed in the second half to make several come-from-behind victories (Rovell 19-28). Regardless of the debate over whether Gatorade had merely given the team a psychological placebo to win the game or if it had provided a real physiological advantage over their opponents, Gatorade had boosted the team's confidence as players, and maintaining this belief in themselves to overcome the seemingly impossible allowed them to accomplish much more than the clinically-proven benefits a typical, generic sports supplement would provide.

Various studies have also shown that drinking Gatorade does provide benefit to those participating in prolonged exercise and that certain circumstances should be considered by those wanting to drink Gatorade. For example, an experiment conducted at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire compared the physiological effects of drinking water versus the effects of drinking Gatorade. The researchers confirmed that Gatorade offered slightly better hydration than water during exercises that required more endurance (Danielson et al. 20-21). Their results

show that the Gatorade success stories were not fully based on its hype; Gatorade will still provide a physical edge to those who drink it.

Moreover, a study by Robert Murray in *Sports Drinks: Basic Science and Practical Aspects* reveals that drinking Gatorade appropriately during workouts is actually very beneficial to an individual's health. Murray notes that everyone is different and must individually decide whether the particular activity requires the major replacement of electrolytes and carbohydrates that sports drinks provide. A time when an individual must successively compete in multiple games or matches is an appropriate time to drink Gatorade. Murray concludes that a large carbohydrate intake within the first two hours of exercise is even highly recommended in the rest and recovery process and for proper muscle glycogen resynthesis (22). A speedy muscle recovery is a main priority for those successively competing in sports within short periods of time, and Gatorade has proven to provide the right amount of electrolytes, carbohydrates, and vitamins for this speedy recovery.

Drinking Gatorade is beneficial when participating in prolonged exercise, but regularly drinking Gatorade for a personal connection to an athletic role model or drinking Gatorade under the false perception that one is living a healthier life is actually highly degrading to an individual's overall health. Its image as a drink for champions has radically changed people's dietary habits, and its high calorie and sugar content has drastically affected many people's entire lifestyles because of obesity, diabetes, and dental sensitivity. Regardless if individuals drink Gatorade to stay hydrated during intense bouts of exercise or drink simply to indulge in the sugary drink reminiscent of their childhood, they should always stay mindful of their health and realize that the negative consequences of anything consumed without reasonable moderation will often outweigh the bulk of any positive benefits the drink might offer.



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