

Prologue

I confess: I've always been obsessed with cosmetics. When I was a *Seventeen*-magazine-reading high school cheerleader desperate to fit in, the Osco Drug cosmetics aisle was my comfort zone. With each measured purchase — cobalt blue eyeliner, soft rose blush — I was one step closer to that girl I dreamed of: the confident, lovable version of me. I spent hours in the bedroom with powders, puffs and that old familiar pink metal can of Aqua Net Extra Super Hold, spraying, spraying, spraying.

Years later, I left behind old Osco for the softly lit aisles of sultry Sephora, her \$20 lip gloss seducing me to prove my worth. Heart racing, I toyed with the sparkling jars of Nars and MAC, playing math tricks in my head to figure out how I could possibly afford to stay loyal to the upper-end brand experience. These days, the pricey lip gloss lays gooey at the bottom of my bag. But just this morning, I lured myself out of bed with thoughts of orange sherbet shampoo and vanilla bean conditioner awaiting me in the hot shower.

Nowadays, my obsession is focused not so much on what beauty products can do to change me, but rather what I can do to change *them*. The cosmetics industry is in desperate need of a makeover. It is the unregulated, poorly studied chemical industry in a bottle. Toxic chemicals linked to cancer, birth defects and learning disabilities do not belong in products we smear on our bodies. Yet the world's richest cosmetics

companies routinely use low levels of hazardous ingredients even though safer alternatives are available. “Why are they putting these toxic chemicals in cosmetics? One, because they can; two, because it’s cheaper,” Jared Blumenthal, director of the environment department for the City of San Francisco, explained to the crowd assembled in Union Square for “Project Prom.”¹ The rally was organized by high school students who stood onstage alongside Blumenthal wearing prom dresses and combat boots to signify their war on toxic chemicals. “We are here to make a statement about our right to health,” said high school junior Jessica Assaf. “We’re here to say to the cosmetics industry, quit using crappy chemicals!” What an inspiring sight to behold: teenage girls aiming their combat boots at the billion-dollar beauty industry.

Our flashy beauty industry is a key supporting character in a drama that could be called “The Other Inconvenient Truth” — the messy problem that the material economy depends on toxic petrochemicals that are contaminating the human species and threatening our health. In Al Gore’s famous movie “The Inconvenient Truth,” the former US vice president warns that we must shift the economy to clean, renewable energy in order to avoid climate chaos. Similarly, we must also shift to non-toxic, non-polluting green chemistry technologies in order to protect our fertility and halt the growing epidemic of chronic diseases. Astonishingly, one in two men and one three women are diagnosed with cancer in the United States, according to the National Cancer Institute. Asthma, autism, learning disabilities and infertility have all been rising. Replacing toxic chemicals with safer alternatives can reduce the number of people who develop these diseases.

The inconvenient truths of climate chaos and chemical contamination arise from the same mistake: our over-reliance on outdated, polluting technologies based on non-renewable fossil fuels. The problem of petroleum-derived chemicals is just much more personal — we’re putting them on our faces and in our hair. Once you start asking questions about the products on the vanity table and under the bathroom sink it’s hard to stop. You begin to see the world through new eyes. “The way we’ve been trained to perceive these things since we were young, it’s all been subliminal. Whether it’s ‘hair so healthy it shines’ — no, I’m sorry, not healthy; and herbal essences — no, not herbal. I had no idea until I got hold of this campaign,” explained Kate Alver, a high school junior who volunteers with the Teen Campaign for Safe Cosmetics.

“I mean, you believe everything you hear, you believe everything you see, you think people are telling you the truth, you assume the best. You can’t. You need to learn to train yourself to question things. And when you really go deep into the question, you find out so much more. And it’s like a devastating effect, but obviously it’s something you needed to find out. It’s imperative for people to understand this.”

This is a story about creating the world we want to live in. It’s a story about the champions — the activists, moms, dads, scientists, politicians, workers, business owners, voters and smart shoppers — who are working toward a vision of a new green economy that is healthy for people and the environment. In the choices we make every day, starting with the products we put on our bodies, every single one of us can help turn that wheel of change.

Here’s to our health, and to the children for seven generations to come.

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