

BUF4700 – Spring 2023
Response Paper – *Toxic Beauty* Documentary

Cosmetics are widely used every day and have become an integral part of our daily routines. The documentary film “Toxic Beauty” highlights that many cosmetics we frequently use contain numerous toxic chemicals that can harm our body cells (Toxic Beauty, 2019). Cancer-causing chemicals and pollutants are found in various aspects of our lives, such as food, water, and several common products. However, cosmetics and personal care items are among the least regulated consumer goods.

While many ingredients found in these products may pose little risk, exposure to some can lead to severe health problems, including cancer. Toxic chemicals that ought to be prohibited include Formaldehyde, Paraformaldehyde, Methylene glycol, and Quaternium-15 – all common preservatives in cosmetic ingredients (Faber, 2020). Moreover, Mercury is another dangerous chemical found in cosmetics that can inflict damage on the kidneys and nervous system (Faber, 2020). Phthalate derivatives such as Dibutyl and Diethylhexyl disrupt hormones and negatively impact the reproductive system (Faber, 2020). Additionally, Isobutyl and Isopropyl parabens are present in many cosmetic products and can disrupt hormones while endangering the reproductive system (Faber, 2020).

Dr. Smith stated that concerns over cosmetics now surpass those regarding the tobacco industry (Toxic Beauty, 2019). Based on data collected between 2016 and 2020, there were 10.3 new ovarian cancer cases per 100,000 women per year while the death rate was 6.3 per 100,000 women per year. In 2020 alone, about 236,511 women in the United States were living with ovarian cancer. One contributing factor to ovarian cancer diagnoses is baby powder – a product often used by women for its fresh scent reminiscent of childhood.

Dr. Cramer's research documentary suggests that the application of talcum powder to the genital area or on sanitary napkins, diaphragms, or condoms might lead to ovarian cancer if it travels through the vagina, uterus, and fallopian tubes to the ovaries (Toxic Beauty, 2019). Talcum powder is derived from talc, a mineral comprised primarily of magnesium, silicon, and oxygen. The powder is adept at absorbing moisture and reducing friction, making it valuable for maintaining dry skin and avoiding rashes. Talcum powder is a prevalent ingredient in many cosmetic products like baby powder, adult body and facial powders, as well as other consumer goods. Research has indicated that talc can be carcinogenic due to its heavy metal and silicate content (Toxic Beauty, 2019).

Apart from the potentially harmful baby powder, deodorants have also been identified as toxic cosmetic products. Studies have found that deodorants may contribute to an increased risk of breast cancer diagnosis. Deodorant and antiperspirant products often contain chemical toxins such as Paraben, Triclosan, Phthalates, and Propylene Glycol (Medicine, 2022). Paraben can disrupt your body's natural hormone production by mimicking estrogen and is present in numerous personal care items; however, no concrete evidence has proven its direct link to breast cancer (Medicine, 2022). Triclosan is an anti-bacterial pesticide found in various home products such as antibacterial soaps, toothpaste, makeup, etc. (Medicine, 2022). Research on many household objects containing plasticizers like phthalates has yielded inconclusive results; hence most phthalate-containing products have been removed for consumer safety (Medicine, 2022). Although propylene glycol is commonly used in antifreeze preparation, no studies have connected it with cancer development (Medicine, 2022). Global organizations have approved its use in everyday products like food, medicines, and cosmetics.

Numerous American women visit the salon on a bi-weekly basis, with some even going weekly to have their nails done. This experience allows them to unwind, relax on a cozy spa chair, watch television, and engage in lighthearted conversations with others as their nails are being tended to. The outcome is not only noticeable in the appearance of their hands but also in their uplifted spirits, making it ideal for a girls' day out. The pursuit of gorgeous nails has given rise to a booming nail salon sector, with establishments appearing on every major street throughout the country. However, there is a concealed danger related to manicures and pedicures specifically, the nail polish utilized in salons. A majority of nail care items contain varying levels of toxic and potentially dangerous substances (Quach, 2015). These chemicals can range from carcinogens like formaldehyde to others that interfere with the endocrine system (Quach, 2015). Experts have singled out toluene, formaldehyde, and dibutyl phthalate known as the "toxic trio" due to their significant health effects as three particularly concerning chemicals for salon workers (Quach, 2015).

After watching and analyzing the documentary, I researched one of my skincare products, Philosophy Renewed Hope in a Jar moisturizer. I found it to be 91% Top Allergen Free and free of Gluten, Coconut, Nickel, Top Common Allergy Causing Preservatives, Lanolin, Paraben, Topical Antibiotic, MCI/MI, Soy, Oil, Dye, and SLS, as well as Teen Safe. According to the company, they promote their brand as clean beauty, vegan, and recycled. In my opinion, the film provides useful information for consumers to be aware of the cosmetic chemicals in their daily life. As long as we research and check the products before purchasing and usage, it should not have a significant impact on our daily life.

References:

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