

welcome

THE PINK TAX

Feminism is on the rise all over the world, yet women still struggle to get their basic needs met. Along with workplace harassment and widespread bias trickling into every possible aspect of their lives, women also have the added strain of paying the pink tax.

Have you ever wondered why women's razors, shampoos, soaps, lotions and other hygiene products cost so much more than their male equivalent products?

It's because of discriminative consumerism, often known as the Pink Tax. "[It's convenient for unfairly taking advantage of women to make a profit," Angela Mustone, President of High On Love, a woman-owned luxury sexual wellness and cosmetic brand, told She's Single Magazine. "That kind of corruption is rampant in many forms, all around the world."

THE PINK TAX

Pink tax refers to the additional cost women have to pay for essentially the same products men use. For example, the same razor blade packaged in a navy blue or black cover sold to male consumers is sold at twice or even thrice rate to women after packaging it in a "girly" pink box.

California, which was among the first states to ban gender-discrim-

inative pricing, found that women have to pay about \$1,300 extra for the same products in 'prettier' packaging.

That's \$1,300 women can't invest in education, get interest on or put into their retirement funds. "[This] holds women back from making other investments or quality of life purchases. There is less "disposable" income because your disposable goods cost more," Cassandra Fay LeClair, Ph.D., a Communication



Studies professor who teaches pink tax at Texas State University.

LESS PAY, MORE FEES

The problem quickly compounds when you consider the sociocultural factors that already put women's financial positions in jeopardy.

Women in most countries are already making less money than men for the same work. Yet, in a tragic irony, they are expected to pay more for getting their basic needs met.

"If this gap continues to widen, women will never catch-up," Cassandra adds.

"JUST BUY MEN'S STUFF"

When activists and feminist organizations started speaking out about these discriminative practices and the urgent need to abolish it, men (perhaps well-meaningly) suggested: "Just buy men's stuff."

Many have switched to men's products as a result, Cassandra says. "However, there are some areas that do not impact men in the same way. Buying feminine hygiene products adds an additional expense for those who menstruate. In many areas around the country, those individuals are making do with makeshift pads because they do not have the budget for personal care items."

Most countries in the world tax female hygiene products even though they are a basic necessity every woman needs.

"The tampon tax is often incorrectly referred to as a luxury tax, Jennifer Weiss-Wolf, author of *Periods Gone Public: Taking a Stand for Menstrual Equity*, told Healthline. "Rather, it's an ordinary sales tax applied to all goods — but since only people who menstruate use feminine hygiene products, the tax disproportionately affects us."

Jennifer investigated the tax code for every state that didn't ex-

empt menstrual products to see what they did exempt, and found the list to be "ridiculous." The tax-exempt items, included in her book and the ones Healthline tracked down, range from marshmallows in Florida to cooking wine in California. For Maine, it is snowmobiles, barbecue sunflower seeds in Indiana, and gun club memberships in Wisconsin.

If barbecue sunflower seeds can be tax-free, why not super necessary products like tampons and pads, she rightly argues.

AXE THE TAX

To better understand the gravity of the situation and what steps can be taken to remedy it, we talked to Cassandra and Angela about what the government and NGOs (Non-Government Officials) around the world are doing and should do.

"Several countries have already taken a step in the right direction by abolishing sales tax on feminine hygiene products, and Scotland has even made these products free," Angela says. "The more press and media coverage shines on these new policies, the more it will inspire other leaders to do the same."

"Scholars have looked at this from a critical perspective for years, but the conversation is broadening [now], Cassandra says. "There is increased awareness and people are becoming more savvy consumers."

GENDER-NEUTRAL PRODUCTS

Cassandra presents a unique solution to the problem: gender-neutral packaging and marketing. "[Gendered marketing] leaves out individuals who may not feel like the men or women's products cater to them." Brands need to focus on manufac-



turing more inclusive products and "stop deciding that certain scents or

colors are inherently male/female," she suggests.

But neutral packaging isn't enough. "It could help level the playing field if the rebranded products were sold at similar price points, but until the male/female packaging ceases to exist, the pink tax will continue to be present," she adds.

Women's Role in bringing about equality: We need to be bitchy and cause a stir.

Sitting back and hoping things change won't work, women need to fight for their rights, Angela suggests. "In the same way that women

“WOMEN'S ROLE IN BRINGING ABOUT EQUALITY: WE NEED TO BE BITCHY AND CAUSE A STIR.”

have joined together to raise their voices in the fight for equal pay in the workforce, we need to let ourselves get worked up about the pink tax.”

We need to be bitchy and cause a stir, she adds. “That feels wrong to some of us because we’re conditioned to be nice and polite, but the unfortunate reality is that there are many more men in power than women, and we need to make noise if we are expecting a change on this topic.”

NOT JUST A
“WOMEN’S PROBLEM”

It is no longer just a “women’s problem.” Men have traditionally been considered the breadwinners, so women earning less was deemed acceptable because they were not in charge of providing for a family, Cassandra says. “That narrative is not a reality for many, especially in today’s world. [Now], more households need two incomes to survive.”

Women having to spend huge amounts of money on basic goods affects the family as a whole. Large families who depend on two incomes to run the household find themselves stretching the dollar because of this rampant inequality in capitalism.

Divorced mothers and single-parent families suffer disproportionately as well. The pink tax dips into the child’s educational funds and drains the emergency savings.

WHAT CAN WOMEN DO?

While continuing to take action against these malpractices, women can take a few simple steps to avoid or at least minimize the pink tax:

- Buy from brands that price their products fairly.
- Buy from the men’s section when appropriate.
- Support organizations that are actively fighting the pink tax.
- Opt for gender-neutral products whenever possible.
- Compare prices online before impulse buying the first product you see.

Things won’t change overnight, but they are getting better. And with hundreds of women and NGOs waging their heart and soul in this battle of prices, the utopia is getting closer every minute of the day.

BY SAKSHI UDAVANT

