



The Pink Tax: The Persistence of Gender Price Disparity

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Abstract

The pink tax is an extra amount that women pay daily as consumers for products and services that are similar or equal in merit to comparable men's products. Due to gendered services and products such as "BIC for Her Pens," women are being subjected to unfair price standards. The question "Why is the pink tax continuing to persist within society and contributing to gender price disparity?" will be further examined in this research. Economic gender discrimination is persisting within society due to the ingrained acceptance of cultural expectations of the genders. Cultural expectations are propagated by the media and directly marketed to females. Legislation within the U.S., both at the federal and state levels as well as abroad, outwardly accepts the gender-based discrimination of consumers. Current trade policy and the higher tariff rates of women's imported goods also help to explain the persistence of this discrimination. Process tracing is used in order to dissect the causation of the pink tax throughout history. Case analyses are used to represent the vast effects of pink sales. This research will provide awareness of a tax deemed 'hidden' within the daily lives of women.

Research Question

“Why is the pink tax continuing to persist within society and contributing to gendered price disparity?”

PART I: Introductory Material

I. Introduction

I-1. Research Significance

Women’s products are more than twice as likely to be priced higher than comparable men’s products to the degree that comparable products targeted to opposing genders are only equal in price approximately 40% of the time (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). The pink tax can be understood as the extra tax that women must pay within their daily lives as they consume products that are “necessary” in pursuance of society seeing them as appealing and feminine. Many are unaware or uneducated regarding the reasoning and persistence of this tax within society; therefore, it is branded as a ‘hidden’ tax. The tax is instituted in such a way that women are charged extra for products and services targeted toward the female gender. These products tend to be of equal or lesser merit than comparable products targeted to men. For this research, women’s products are generally labeled as “all products” that are campaigning to ‘help’ women. As pink has been outwardly regarded in society as the hue of femininity, most of these products consist of pink packaging and/or features. From women’s razors to “BIC for Her Pens,” this tax is subjecting women to unfair price standards. It is debated from where this tax specifically stems within history, but its origin does not change the implications to all females regardless of their affinity for feminine appearing products. Therefore, the question, “Why is the pink tax continuing to persist within society and contributing to gendered price disparity?”, will be further examined within this research. All females are in some way experiencing discrimination in the form of gender pricing, making this research intrinsically significant.

I-2. Overview: Why the Pink Tax is Persisting

From the blatant branding and marketing ploys of large corporations that continue to project gender expectations on all ages, to societal pressures on women to uphold certain physical characteristics in fear of the possibility of being unworthy of success, societal structures and norms are a huge contributing factor of this commonly accepted discrimination. Furthermore, specific laws and trade policies beginning with the importing of products from abroad also can be blamed for the continuing economic strain and disparity for female consumers.

Therefore, both state and federal laws within the U.S. are also examined, as well as laws abroad, which showcase small steps toward solutions to this injustice. Instances of import tariffs are further examined as well, specifically within the fashion industry. The pink tax is measured in numerous ways. For the purpose of this research, the tax is measured in terms of how much more money it is forcing a woman to spend if she does indeed choose to buy products specifically targeted toward the supposed needs of the female gender. These everyday items include, but are not limited to: clothes, office supplies, basic self-care items, and some services such as vehicle maintenance, dry cleaning, public transportation and hair styling (Rapier, 2018). Many women who are aware of this tax have simply begun buying products targeted to the male gender, but this is not a true solution. True solutions include: the de-gendering of basic products, seeking legislative action to extinguish gender discriminatory laws which allow for gendered price discrimination and fixing, the education of consumers, and changing import tariffs to alleviate financial burdens on women. The persistence of consumer price disparity of women must be identified and de-rationalized for true change to take place and further the equalization of genders.

I-3. Research Outline

The first part of this research will begin by providing concise background of the pink tax including a clear definition of the tax, as well as a differentiation from the luxury tax. The research will continue by then clearly defining the parameters of societal persistence of the pink tax. Part two of the research will identify the main factors which are contributing to the persistence of the pink tax. These contributors include the historical bias of the color pink as well as the history of economic disparity among those identifying with the female gender, legislation and court rulings, and gendered tariffs rates. This section will also consider a causal analysis, which is further explored through specific case analyses. The contemporary cases being scrutinized involve “BIC For Her” pens, gendered dry cleaning rates, and a look at buying ‘blue’ products in order to attempt to avoid the pink tax as a female. Lastly, before concluding, Part three of this research will consider next steps in the life of the pink tax, including ways forward to achieve possible solutions and the significance of publicizing individual experiences with the pink tax.

II. Background

II-1. Defining the Pink Tax

Goods that fit the parameters of the pink tax all share one commonality: they are being directly branded and targeted to fit the supposed needs of those identifying with the female gender. Often, such goods are categorized with pink packaging or detail on the product itself. Whether this is from product design or

branding, the color pink is pivotal in the marketing techniques of big companies. In comparison, identical men's products of another color, tend to be of the same, or even better, quality and cost less. This is very important, as many women simply accept the fact that these items are pricier and continue to purchase them without questioning why. In fact, products like "BIC For Her" pens are discriminatory and are comparable to the luxury tax on necessary women's hygiene products, such as tampons. The pink tax, however, expands beyond goods and enters the realm of services, as it also can be more expensive for female dry-cleaning fees, oil changes, etc. In fact, according to NYC.gov, as described by Zelniker, "Young girls' clothes cost 4% more than boys' clothing. Women pay 7% more than men for accessories such as tote bags and watches, 8% more for clothing and 13% more for personal care such as deodorant" (2018). These differences cannot be justified. Companies are simply extracting more resources from women while creating these products in a way that is not significantly different than the production process of comparable men's items (Zelniker, 2018).

The purpose of this research is to provide awareness to a tax that regularly goes unnoticed within the daily lives of women. By understanding the current disparity being subjected against female consumers, social and economic change can take place. As consumers hold significant power over the market and have the ability to shape the flow of products with their needs and desires, female consumers, by standing up and educating each other, can target the non-existent legislative barriers in place to protect them from gender pricing and forge ahead demanding the creation of consumer protection.

II-1(A). The Luxury Tax

The luxury tax is not directly associated with the pink tax. The tax is in place as tampons and other feminine hygiene products are as viewed as luxury goods. While this tax is far more recognized within society and regularly sparks outrage, little has been done to eradicate the tax. New York alone has eradicated the luxury tax (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). "The objective of selective consumption taxes includes, but is not limited to, discouraging undesired consumption" (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). As these products are for health purposes, the discouragement of such items is mind boggling, as there are clear repercussions to not correctly caring for menstruation. Consequently, men's health care products, such as Viagra, often are included under health care plans. This is clearly discrimination based on sex. The luxury tax regularly takes in revenue for the government. California lawmakers estimate that women pay \$20 million a year in California alone as a result of the luxury taxation on feminine hygiene products. Consequently, from a legal standing, the pink tax is not a true tax as it is not payable to the government and its purpose is not to raise government revenue (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018).

II-2. Societal Persistence

The pink tax can be understood as a selective consumption tax, as it targets specific goods and services. This allows and cultivates the placement of a discriminatory effect on a certain portion of the population (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). The pink tax has popular root in the notion, ‘shrink it, pink it and women will buy it at a higher price’ (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). As the pink tax’s validity has been proven, it is therefore regularly known that women are often pushed into purchasing products that are targeted to their gender. In doing so, female consumers end up paying far more for goods and services than those targeted to men. Specifically, when a product targets men, it can be envisioned as blue. Yet these differences in visibly marketed goods are not the end to this tax. Women regularly pay more for services comparable to men’s services, whether this be oil changes or dry cleaning. This is daunting with the consideration that most products marketed separately based on gender are practically the same quality except for packaging (Vermond, 2018). Gendered products that are intrinsically different, such as those pertaining to certain areas of health, disregard quality similarities. This phenomenon starts at an early age as female economic disparity is made known through children’s products as well. The data showcases, “young girls’ clothes cost 4% more than boys’ clothing...and women pay 13% more for personal care such as deodorant” (Zelniker, 2018). This is a tax that is affecting women throughout their entire lives and yet it is so often ignored and viewed as a cultural norm.

II-2(A). The Color Pink

In understanding how the pink tax persists, one must consider the historic significance of its name. Throughout history, the color pink did not always represent femininity. In fact, in the past pink was regularly worn by men and the embellishment of masculine attire with embroidered flowers was not unusual. It was not until post-World War II that pink became a ‘girly’ color (Stamberg, 2014). The fashion designers of the time, along with propaganda aimed to disband the masculinity that women had fared during war time, succeeded in returning women to their role of feminine housewife. When men first left for war, war propaganda featuring Rosie the Riveter, showcased a woman donned in blue ready to support the war effort and replace vacant jobs left behind by men in the service. Subsequently, when the war ended, the propaganda took a turn and then showcased women returning to the role of supportive housewife. Around this time, fashion designer Dior created the new look for women, which played off historical feminine shapes and helped to bring pink on the scene for women’s attire. The pink tax takes root in the fact that the color pink is a strong symbol of femininity, yet, historically, pink has been linked to the male gender as well as infancy.

The separation of pink and blue between the genders is a relatively new concept. Before the twentieth century, babies were regularly dressed universally

in white, while pink and blue were interchangeable as nursery colors (Paoletti, 2012). During such a time, blue was preferred if given the choice for girls as its dainty look was thought to be more appropriate for the then believed lesser gender (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). However, with historic tidings came opportunity for companies to take advantage of the new post WWII color schemes. Through advertising, propaganda and the resulting societal pressures that have ultimately created gendered color norms, pink and blue began to infiltrate society as the new representations of gender. Both colors were no longer interchangeable for infants, which ultimately reduced the possibility for the use of hand-me-downs, thus increasing the need and profits of clothing and subsequent department stores.

II-2(B). Gender Expectations

The trickle-down effect of an increase in infant industry based on gender ultimately altered the expectations of the genders starting at an early age. However, instances of societal expectations being directly advertised to genders are not a new concept. In the 1600s, the British government distributed propaganda in the form of pamphlets to citizens which directly identified and declared what appropriate clothing as well as behavior was acceptable for each gender (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). This instance of an increased infant industry has trickled down throughout society in order to further gender biases within society and increase societal expectations among the genders. Because of toys targeted to children at a young age as being feminine or masculine, whether it be GI JOE or Barbie, the ultimate pink icon, children are ingrained at a young age to understand the 'norms' of their assigned gender in which society expects them to grow into. However, according to research done regarding color preference among genders, it was, in fact, found that women naturally favor hues regarded as 'reddish-purple' (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). This research, done by respected neuroscientists Anya C. Hurlbert and Yazhu Ling, also found that men are naturally attracted to colors within the range of blue and green (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). Whether these preferences happened subconsciously due to society's expectations or evolutionary constructs passed down due to women gatherers hunting for reddish-purple hued berries, we cannot determine. The latter seems unlikely given the deeply seated societal pressures of women to prefer pink in order to increase consumer interest and peak profits.

II-2(C). Gendered Marketing

While the persistence of the pink tax has root in societal and cultural norms, it is businesses which are directly passing on the economic disparity to consumers. This does not mean businesses are necessarily seeking out direct attempts of sexist discrimination when marketing to consumers. Often, brands are just seizing the opportunity to overprice female items in a continuation of what has now been contrived as a norm of female consumption. As described by Anthony

company founder Tony Sosnick, brands want to charge more for comparable men's products but realize that men simply will not pay. Sosnick continues by asserting, "the market isn't at a point yet where men spend what women spend on products" (Vermond, 2018). Society has slowly created deep inherent biases that convince women such products are necessary, thus compelling women to be less price sensitive than men. These biases for the most part are left untouched by men. Consequently, men's products often remain in neutral packaging that specifies the product's offerings. Said product may even come in a squeeze tube while women's products continue to be in glass bottles and eye-catching expensive packaging that is meant to draw out emotion for the female consumer in order to prey on the insecurities of believed gender expectations. This is not just speculation. New York's Department of Consumer Affairs found in a study of 800 comparable gendered products that packaging is the main source of differentiation amongst these products (Vermond, 2018).

Product differentiation is a common marketing strategy that sellers use when advertising their goods or services to a particular target market. In order to make such a distinction, the altering of a product's packaging and/or color will ultimately increase the cost of production (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). The choice to distinguish packaging amongst comparable items in order to target different genders through cultural stereotypes would therefore increase the cost. It is more expensive to produce a small amount of a pink product than it is to produce a large amount of another color such as black or blue. Packaging is, of course, not the sole provoker and only issue in need of correction in order to alleviate the pink tax. Services as well as articles of clothing untouched by packaging are still included in the issue.

All these antics, as well as perceived expectations from news and media, are teaching women from a young age the expectations of them due to their inclusion in the female gender. Women are programmed to believe that their natural appearance will not be good enough and the only way to be accepted is to purchase these pink products branded to them. It goes unspoken the pressure that women feel in their daily lives to live up to society's expectations of their appearances. Often women believe that their success is directly reliant on their appearance. These expectations go hand-in-hand with gender pricing as women are taught from a young age to purchase pink items and appear feminine.

II-3. The Method

The research methods used for this research on the pink tax include a mixture of scenario building and process tracing in order to consider each possible cause contributing to the persistence of the pink tax. Process tracing allowed for the dissection of the causation of the pink tax throughout history using various causal mechanisms that have come together in order to create an environment that

has allowed for gender price discrimination. This method revolved around three major chosen case studies that consider the pink tax in terms of both goods and services, as well as how the tax may impact the future. The narrative of causation showcasing the evolution of this tax began with understanding the history of the gendered significance of the color pink. Historic evidence of discriminatory economic policy based on gender was also evaluated. Evidence of the luxury tax on feminine hygiene products further differentiates the pink tax as its own separate entity. In determining the effects of tariff policy on these “pink” products and the possibility of further price disparity as the Trump Administration aims to increase Chinese tariffs, the future was able to be considered.

PART II: Causal Analysis

III. Arguments

III-1. Argument1: History of Economic Disparity of the Female Consumer

Today, we can understand why the pink tax persists by considering past female economic disparity. Even though many outward instances of discrimination are erased, economic disparity still holds true through instances of the pink tax and other taxation directed at women. For example, luxury taxation in the form of sales tax of tampons and other feminine products increases the economic disparity of female consumers as women are forced to pay more for necessary products that are already gender specific (Ooi, 2018). Furthermore, the wage gap between men and women is still prevalent, along with occupational segregation by sex, which also contributes to a difference in earnings (Fuchs, 1998). Consumer price disparity can be further differentiated through the ‘cost of being female’ that derives from society’s cultural norms. For example, these underlying biases regularly lead to an undervaluation of female capability that also contributes to circumstances surrounding the economic disparity experienced by women (Sayers, 2012). Societal norms help the pink tax phenomenon to continue as they are associated with the overall cost of belonging within the female gender.

Throughout history, women have suffered through deep economic disparity. Within ancient Egypt, women were able to hold financial rights alongside men, such as owning property (Mcgee & Moore, 2014). Over time, women became viewed as property of men, first by her father and then her husband, and economic rights dissipated within many cultures. Economic policies throughout history would right themselves, but slowly over time. The U.S. did not allow women to open bank accounts without permission of her husband until the 1960s and it was not until 1978 that it became illegal to fire women for being pregnant (McGee & Moore, 2014). These historic instances of political and economic disparity directed toward women are now eradicated and ended over time, but,

as with any injustice, shadows remain in society, whispering of the norms that once were. Such norms, as previously described, continue to be held in place by societal structures of gender and expectations of such roles. Brands insisting on the constant representation of gender roles and expectations in society project expectations on citizens, forcing consumers to continue to buy into the cycle of fear of not fitting in and succeeding.

III-2. Argument 2: Legislation and Court Rulings

Companies are aware of the disparity being placed upon their consumers. For this reason, companies such as Steve Madden are taking the pink tax to court as they set out to identify why clothing prices of similar quality differs according to genders. Some U.S. States are doing so as well. As United States federal law does not currently prohibit discriminatory pricing by gender, a few states such as California, Massachusetts and New York are trying to change this in order to prevent pink tax discrimination within consumer services such as haircuts and dry-cleaning services. Meanwhile, no such laws exist prohibiting gender pricing at all in Canada (Vermond, 2018). In 1995 in California, a law was put in place which prohibits gender-based price discrimination in services. (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). New York followed a few years later. Massachusetts has in place a Public Accommodations Act, which actively prohibits gender pricing specifically for cosmetology services (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). While these examples all exist at the state level, action is currently being attempted on the federal level by Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA). Speier is spearheading The Pink Tax Repeal Act. This bill ultimately would make it illegal to charge different prices for comparable goods and services based solely on gender (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). This action is much needed after the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear appeals from Rack Room Shoes Inc. and Forever 21 Inc., as these companies attempted to challenge the ruling given by the Court of International Trade stating U.S. tariffs on apparel and footwear are not discriminatory (Taylor & Dar, 2015). As discriminatory intent could not be proven, this case was originally lost. However, it was found that differing tariff rates are placed on products based on gender.

III-3. Argument 3: Gendered Tariff Rates

Gender based pricing directly hurts women's buying power, and while one explanation of the pink tax's persistence in society is understood as marketing derived from cultural normalities, another explanation considers the effects of consumption from a global view. Tariffs on imported goods often vary based on a product's designation by gender. "On average, clothing imports for women are taxed at a higher rate than clothing imports for men—15.1% compared to 11.9%" (Joint Economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). Such markups from international trade implications are directly passed on to female consumers.

Specifically, tariffs have a harsh effect on the fashion industry and are regularly criticized by companies such as Under Armour and Steve Madden. In fact, companies such as Steve Madden and Columbia Sportswear have taken this fight to the courts as they battle against tariff rates that are actively increasing the gender price disparity (Barbaro, 2007). The disparity among tariffs, as described by Barbaro, “an imported wool suit is 8.5% for a woman and 0% for a man”, further elaborates the way in which these taxes elevate the pink tax within society (2007). This issue is not just within the U.S. as the European Union is aiming to increase tariffs on fashion items imported from the U.S. by 25% (Wightman-Stone, 2018). This issue is likely to worsen as consumers across the board, male and female alike, are set to feel a further economic burden as a result of the trade war ensuing with China. Prices are already rising, and the Trump Administration remains confident that this will have a limited impact on households (Tankersley & Rappeport, 2018). Yet, with inflation set to stay the same, it can be further understood that the price disparity against female consumers will only worsen. After all, tariffs are not created equal. As described by Barbaro, “The fees tacked onto clothing, shoes and swimwear as they enter the country’s ports may be the last legal form of sex discrimination in the United States” (2007). Tariffs are regularly considered sexist as gender differences among tariffs dates back to the mid-1800s (Barbaro, 2007). While arguments for the difference claimed protection for the American textile manufacturers from imports, international trade courts have not been able to identify a valid reason for the blatant discrimination showcased within the tariff system.

When selling goods within the U.S., tariffs increase the cost to consumers. However, global producers will not simply lower prices for U.S. consumers to pay the same as other international consumers. Therefore, U.S. consumers are already paying higher prices for imported products in comparison to other international consumers. When tariff rates then increase based on gender, U.S. female consumers pay even more (Dar & Taylor, 2015). However, female consumers cannot simply opt out of this by purchasing domestically. “Tariffs protect domestic producers from competition, thereby raising the price of the product, regardless of whether it was manufactured at home or abroad” (Dar & Taylor, 2015). Evidence shows that costs to consumers outweigh the revenue generated from tariffs as well as the benefits originally intended for domestic producers.

IV. Case Analysis

IV-1. “BIC For Her” Pens

Specific cases of the pink tax can be examined further in order to showcase the widespread effects of the daily persistence of consumer disparity to females. Firstly, the office supply company, BIC, recently released, “BIC For Her Pens”, which were significantly increased in price in comparison to the company’s other

gender-neutral pens. The only addition seemingly better for the writing needs of women, was the color pink clearly pronounced on the product as well as the packaging, along with more delicate writing instead of the company's usual font choice. This product was immediately received with backlash as consumers were able to distinguish this inequality in a much swifter manner as a product such as a pen can bring forth no argument of gender specifications, unlike razors or hair care products. However, such products exist across the board, even when considered so outlandish and unfair. Women are regularly being subjected to price hikes within every aspect of daily life for products such as the BIC For Her Pens that have no real benefit to the female gender. The 'fashionable' and feminine pen created by BIC can, in fact, cost up to 70% more than a gender-neutral pen being marketed by the same company. A product such as this one, although not directly targeted at children like toys and clothes, is in fact still contributing to societal pressures on children to conform to desired gender roles brought forth by large companies. This product is, after all, a common school supply. The sad reality is that we, as a society, cannot even escape the pink tax within the office supply aisle. Branding tactics along with pink taxation hikes have clearly penetrated societal structures and now exist all around us as cultural norms. Little girls should no longer be taught through viral media marketing that it is necessary to spend extra in order to obtain a certain colored pen. Surrounding oneself with BIC For Her Pens and other pink items should not be the only option and the only way to 'fit in' to a decided gender role according to frequent advertisements. This case has clear internal validity as there is strong evidence of price discrimination in relation to gendered products. Evidence to the validity of the pink tax is clear.

IV-2. Gendered Dry Cleaning Rates

Secondly, in consideration with the flow of the tax into the world of services, laundering can be further examined. The story of New York activist, Ms. Floyd, is therefore examined. Floyd, who attempted to have both her and her husband's near identical shirts laundered at a local dry cleaner was met with the realization that the cleaning of her shirt would cost more than her husband's. This left her flabbergasted as both shirts were of the same material and design, with her shirt even being smaller in size (Buckley, 2009). Stories from individuals such as Ms. Floyd further prove the existence of gender pricing within industries offering both goods and services. As specified by Ms. Floyd, not all dry cleaners partake in gendered pricing. This may leave room for the argument of selection bias. However, dry cleaners do subject customers to some form of gendered pricing as a whole. The state of Vermont found the trend of varying laundering services so perplexing that it launched an official inquiry. It was found that women are regularly, "charged up to \$5.20 more than men per shirt" (Yazıcıoğlu, 2018). This disparity continues as Yazıcıoğlu describes the Vermont inquiry as finding, "The average dry-clean cost of a men's shirt was \$2.06, whereas it was \$3.95 for a women's shirt" (2018). Just as Ms. Floyd found, these prices were upfront charges

while not including further costs that may have incurred due to intricate shirt designs or embellishments. These prices are set up clearly defined by gender as the investigation showcased. Businesses advertised these figures without having even seen any articles of clothing. In retribution, dry cleaners the state inquiry asked the cleaners to clearly define the purpose of these gendered upcharges, however, just as Ms. Floyd had experienced, no true justification could be made. As this case showcases, services are a huge consideration within the parameters of the pink tax.

IV-3. Buying ‘Blue’ Products

Lastly, a case examines an improper solution to the pink tax. Lia Grimanis, a woman participating in a photoshoot for a magazine is quoted by Vermond as saying that she was given advice to simply use men’s products instead of women’s while on set (Vermond, 2018). This advice, given by the onsite male make-up artist, is arguably, far from a true solution. Firstly, Grimanis quoted the product in question, a facial exfoliate, as being cheaper as well as better in quality than her usual ‘pink’ facial exfoliate. Far less of the male product was needed in order to perform well. By simply switching to men’s products for a cheaper and out performing solution, women are in no way addressing the issue of the pink tax head on and, instead, are attempting to excuse themselves from the problem all the while leaving it to continue and wage against other female consumers. While it is true that the buying power of enough female consumers making the switch to men’s products will have an eventual impact on brands, it is not a quick solution and in no way evokes a response from other female consumers to actively join in this change. Secondly, Grimanis, by choosing to purchase male products, is not truly alleviating her needs as a consumer. While the packaging of men’s products is usually in a darker hue, so are other aspects, such as the scents (Vermond, 2018). Simply put, female consumers should be able to purchase products targeted to them at comparable prices to the alternative men’s products. If women simply choose to consume male targeted items no issues will be fixed.

V. Opposition

While many may consider the pink tax an avoidable expense, as women technically have the option to consume male products, a consumer choosing to buy ‘blue’ instead of buying for the specific needs of ‘her’ specific person is unfairly limited. If said consumer finds a ‘pink’ product to her liking, then she should reserve the right to buy such a product as a consumer without fear of an increased price simply because such a product is specifically targeting to her by gender.

PART III: Next Steps and Conclusions

VI. The Future

The future, without any legislative action, is likely to showcase further disparity as prices often derive from the trickle-down effects of international trade through means such as tariffs. Fashion designers such as Steve Madden are working to warn consumers early that prices for products such as handbags will likely be going up (Wolf, 2018). This cost increase will be in response to the Trump Administration's looming trade war with China (Goodman, 2018). Steve Madden sourced 93% of products from China last year alone (Wolf, 2018). Therefore, a 10% hike in tariffs will only work to increase the already prevalent price disparities for women. Furthermore, as Trump refuses to adjust for inflation pending this threatened trade war, an increase in tariffs, combined with women's smaller pay and gender price discrimination, will see the buying power of female consumers dwindle even further (Goodman, 2018). This is serious, considering families now tend to depend on the income of females within the home. While women's earning power is greater than ever before, according to statistics examined by the Joint Economic Committee within the U.S. Congress as of 2016, it is still less than men's earning power. Data examining the trends of women in the labor force is only available from 1967 and on due to previous economic and legislative barriers. After only a mere 50 years, remnants of a disparaging past society are still seen within our culture. Women are said to, "make 85% of all consumer purchases in the United States...three in four women report that they are their home's primary shopper" (Joint economic Committee: U.S. Congress, 2016). As female consumers now have such a large fiscal impact on a household, the pink tax is therefore not only restricted to women, but is trickling down to the financial well-being of American families.

VII. Solutions

VII-1. Educating Consumers

True solutions to the persistence of gender price disparity derived from the pink tax have begun already with legislative movements and public outcry. However, this must continue. Without the education of female consumers, society cannot tear down and construct new societal norms that allow for equality among consumers. Across the world today, female consumers are using social media to educate fellow women and supporters of the situation. It was France's State Secretary for Women's Rights that posed the question, "Is pink a luxury color?" on twitter, thus sparking debate back in 2014 (Zelniker, 2018).

VII-1(A). Significance of Publicizing Individual Experiences

Numerous hashtags exist spreading the word. #PinkTax and #GenderTax have had success on outlets such as Twitter in promoting knowledge of the hidden tax across the globe in countries such as Spain and Ireland (Vermond, 2018). Women sharing posts showcasing price differences experienced firsthand has a huge impact, although it may seem a simple solution. Activist organizations are also doing their part to educate women. In Canada, where no laws are in place to prohibit gender pricing, organizations such as Girl Talk HQ work to educate women in order to promote legislative change (Zelniker, 2018). Many women are unaware of the true legal justifications currently being made which allow the pink tax to remain. Many women simply accept prices as ‘the way things are’ and do not look further to consider why. By educating consumers that there are currently no federal limitations on gender price discrimination and tariff discrimination by gender, further societal unrest can and will create true change.

VII-2. Purchasing Unisex Products

Voices are being heard and, while many companies continue to blast advertisements showcasing a separation of girls’ and boys’ toys with an increase in price for pink, elsewhere, other companies are creating genderless products including toys, clothes and even unisex perfumes (Vermond, 2018). The world is becoming far more educated and understanding of gender-bending and this is impacting the market in a way that impacts the pink tax. After all, if there is a need for something and that need is voiced, it will appear in the market due to innovation and the entrepreneurial attitude of those in the business world. With enough demand, we can force new products to be made. In doing so, society will slowly see a change in cultural norms as well. Instead of purchasing ‘blue’ and using men’s products, consumers can support companies that offer genderless skin care products, toys, etc.

VIII. Conclusion

The persistence of consumer price disparity against women has been identified and not rationalized. Now, through the spread of education and awareness, true change can begin to take place and further the equalization of genders. Economic gender discrimination by means of the pink tax begins with the lack of formidable legislation fully protecting against the opportunity for gender pricing. The use of extensive advertisements and media outlets demanding certain physical expectations of women throughout history and still today, has left society with gender stereotypes that force female consumers into becoming less price sensitive. Cultural norms press the belief that these higher prices are not only business as usual, but also a necessary cost for women to remain successful. Furthermore, trade policy and the higher prices of women’s imports in comparison to that of men’s imported goods must be openly addressed as a leading reason for

the persistence of female economic disparity. Goods should be able to enter the United States in a gender-neutral fashion.

Trump's proposed trade war against China will ultimately bring ramifications to female consumers within the U.S. as already higher costing products will see a spike in price with no adjustment for inflation to correct for such a disparity. This phenomenon can only be corrected through social change and awareness of the culturally accepted gender discrimination. Companies, such as Steve Madden, are helping to bring awareness to this issue and are fighting for equality through their protests against tariff rates. Today, legislators are attempting to enact The Pink Tax Repeal Act. However, this is not enough. Current state laws only prohibit gender pricing for services, and these exist in a mere few U.S. states. No laws are in place at all in some countries, such as Canada. Furthermore, the proposed Pink Tax Repeal Act does not fully address the disparity being promoted through means of international trade. Women are educating each other as well as supporters through various social media outlets and activist organizations. While buying genderless products is likely the way of the future and a solution, these products are not yet always readily available. However, switching to these genderless brands will impact the market and make way for more genderless products to come as consumers dictate innovation. Still, just as men do, women should reserve the right to buy products allocated specifically for their gender without overpaying. The subduing of price differentiation due to extensive marketing and packaging needs will help to eradicate the pink tax. Many taxes that have been created for various reasons throughout history have often been the cause of discrimination of a sect of society. Such taxes were eradicated with time and are now seen as inconceivable in today's society due to their ludicrous intents. We can hope that one day soon, an individual will read about the pink tax in a history book and think it utterly inconceivable as well within their modern society.

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