

# Feminine products are no need for embarrassment

BY RILEY SPIVEY  
ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR

While stigma surrounding menstruation and period products has always been an issue in American society, it has been brought into the light due to COVID and the surge in social media communication. It has shed light on women struggling to purchase these essential products and the misconceptions surrounding menstruation. These misconceptions often stem from a lack of knowledge or a lack of teaching that limits an individual's ability to attain information on something that affects around half of the population.

Stigma often begins in middle and high school years when young girls are first starting their periods. I think nearly every girl can relate to hiding their tampon or pad when walking to the bathroom to avoid strange looks in the classroom or hallway. In addition, it is all too common to not use the word menstruation in public areas, and instead using sayings such as, "strawberry week" in Austria, "I'm with Chico" in Brazil, and "Granny's stuck in traffic" in South Africa. While this may seem harmless, it is reinforcing a harmful idea that periods are shameful and something to hide rather than a natural bodily function.

Due to conversations being suppressed, it is commonly believed that menstruation is unclean, even if it serves an important purpose, and this often leads to girls feeling ostracized or confined to private spaces when on their periods. In many cultures, it is common for women to be

considered impure during their periods and are not allowed to be in the same house/area with a man. These issues often stem from a cultural myth that has yet to be accepted as inaccurate.

Gender-based pricing is also known as the pink tax and the tampon tax. The pink tax is an upcharge on products aimed at women that often only have cosmetic differences than products aimed traditionally at men. The pink tax is not actually a tax, but an income generating scenario for private companies to make more money off of what they considered the moneymakers. This tax often costs women over \$1,300 a year and impacts all daily life from shopping to dry cleaning. Manufacturers heavily market to female consumers in their gender-normative sales practices with the use of bright pink or purple packaging, and sweet scents like peony, vanilla and even "fruity bubble in paradise." The pink tax does not only affect women, The New York City Department of Consumer Affairs study found that toys marketed towards girls cost 2 to 23 percent more than toys marketed towards young boys that are the same but in different colors.

The tampon tax is a 30-50 percent tax on period products despite the attempt to ban the tax country wide. This tax is often excused on the basis that menstrual products are a luxury item, but male-based contraceptives are easily accessible even if they are not necessary for the health and hygiene of a person. The tampon tax hinders many lower class women and girls from obtaining needed hygiene products and in turn can inhibit them from going to work or school. Many coun-

tries, including Australia, Kenya, India, Jamaica, Malaysia, and South Africa have implemented laws saying menstrual products are to be tax free, making them more easily accessible to young girls and lower class women.

Implementing courses in public schools to education children about menstruation and how to handle it would help with the embarrassment and shame that often comes with starting your period for young girls; and putting products such as tampons or pads in school bathrooms and other government facilities could also make products more easily accessible for young girls and women. Ending the pink tax and tampon tax for easier access to lower class women and girls would also be beneficial.



The amount of menstrual products and the pink tax can be confusing and frustrating. Illustration by Megan Tomlinson