

Is Botox Feminist?

At the dawn of 2017, women still make less and pay more to look better. There's even a name for it—the pink tax. But there's one unlikely sector of the beauty market that may just have our best interests at heart. Lindsay Van Gelder explains.

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y now you know the tedious choreography of the grooming gap. It starts with the dance of different gender expectations: Women need to pluck, tweeze, wax, highlight, polish, moisturize, powder, pencil, shadow, line, and gloss to feel put together in situations where even our gay BFFs can usually phone it in with a shave and a splash of cologne.

Even worse, we spend more than just time in front of a mirror. From dry cleaning to haircuts, women are often charged a so-called pink tax of higher prices. Even when boy stuff and girl stuff are close to identical (pain relievers, shampoo, razors, shaving cream, even deodorant), they cost more if the products are swaddled in pink and marketed to women. A recent report by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs found that women shell out 8 percent more for similar clothing and 13 percent more for similar personal-care products. The list goes on: Prescription drugs (ahem, Viagra) are exempt from sales tax in



many states; tampons are not.

You can buy the steel-gray men's razors in the manly packaging, of course. But what you can't always do is look as if you've given up. (Obviously, sometimes, that's perfectly fine.) If anything, we can be hit up for the pink tax because we can't afford to be grooming dropouts. A recent study by Andrew Penner, a professor of sociology at the University of California, Irvine, and Jaclyn Wong, a Ph.D. candidate in sociology at the University of Chicago, found that there is nothing a woman can do—including being born gorgeous—that matches the power of working really hard to look good.

"Our research started out with the question of whether attractive people make more money than their average counterparts, and there was no surprise there," explains Wong of the study, published in the journal *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*. "Then we looked at gender differences, and we were surprised to find there were none—being attractive helps men in the workplace as much as it helps women."

But do you make more money if you're born a hottie or if it's something you've cultivated and

considered conventionally unattractive, the boost in salary between the well-groomed and the poorly groomed was one and a half times that of their male counterparts. Fair or not, if you want to succeed in business, be prepared to keep spending money on looking put together...and the pink tax that often goes along with it.

But maybe we need to take a more historic view, suggests Kristen Barber, an assistant professor of sociology at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, and the author of *Styling Masculinity: Gender, Class, and Inequality in the Men's Grooming Industry* (Rutgers Press). "It isn't so much that men aren't paying as much as women as that they're paying for products they haven't purchased in the past—there's an array of new products targeted to men that aren't new to women," she explains.

Women didn't fully adopt cosmetics until World War II, when cosmetics "became patriotic and tied to womanhood," says Barber. Even Rosie the Riveter (Rosie the Riveter!) wore lipstick, blush, and mascara. If women were going to work in the factories, build war machines, and make ammunition, they still had to look like women, dammit! Which is to say: They had to look like the female

Representative Jackie Speier of California and 24 cosponsors have also proposed a House bill to kill the pink tax nationwide.

And in fact there are a few tiny—but substantial!—corners where men already pay more than we do. Call it the pink rebate. For instance, male underwear is pricier, according to the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs report. (Although men don't have to cough up for bras, and obviously the underwear in question is not Kiki de Montparnasse.)

Botox for men costs about twice as much because "men have stronger muscles, and in order to relax them, it takes literally double the number of units," says New York City dermatologist Whitney Bowe. The double-chin melter Kybella also takes about twice the number of vials for men, she adds, and in her experience, the CoolSculpting mini procedure—which targets the neck and chin and is often used in conjunction with Kybella—requires only one or two treatments for women but two to four for men.

Waxing is often more expensive for men because they tend to be hairier, and "the hairs are much coarser," explains Lidia Tivichi of the Maris Dusan salon in New York City.

It comes down to this: Anything that forces professionals to take more time based on men's physical characteristics is going to cut women a break. At the same time, anything that can be slapped with a pink label is fair game. It's an injustice to be sure. So write your congressperson. Chip away at the unfairness of it all. And in the meantime, you might want to check out those steel-gray razors—they're not half bad.

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worked on? This is where gender differences reared their unequal heads in the study. Although poor grooming handicapped both genders professionally, good grooming—everything from wearing heels to having a nice haircut—dramatically sealed the deal for women and mattered far more than natural beauty. In fact, among women

ideal promoted by a patriarchal society. Call it patriotic womanhood. It ushered in new consumer habits, and before you knew it, cosmetics became synonymous with womanhood. In fact, grooming was so successfully intertwined with female beauty, Barber adds, that there's now a fast-growing industry dedicated to rebranding it as both "manly" and necessary to compete in business. Until guys are as willing to suffer for beauty as we are, "men's products are going to cost a little bit less to encourage men to buy them," she says.

Several states have passed or are considering passing legislation to level the "paying" field.