

PERSPECTIVES



BY CAMILA DOERFFLER

Imagine being discriminated against for existing. Imagine paying more for everyday necessities just for being female. For simply trying to live with the hand life dealt you. Millions of women go through this every. Single. Day, and our society is turning a blind eye to this issue.

Laura Strausfeld is a woman of many wonders. She is the associate director of institutional relations at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University's law school, the founder and executive director of her own law firm, Period Law, and one of the most prominent advocates for the abolishment of the pink and tampon tax. But what are these taxes?

"There's the tampon tax and the pink tax. The pink tax is not a real tax, it actually refers to the extra cost women pay to buy products that look identical to those sold to men, but it might be pink instead of blue," says Strausfeld, like razors or toothbrushes. "The tampon tax is the actual, real tax that states collect on purchases of menstrual products."

In 2016, Strausfeld filed a lawsuit, and she, along with her team, sued New York state for taxing menstrual products. "The legislature had been introducing bills for twenty years to get rid of the tax, and it was only after we filed a lawsuit," that the law was abolished, "we, meaning a group of people who were buying these products, women who were unhappy about it." The vote was unanimous and her lawsuit ended this tax against women in New York.

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— LAURA STRAUSFELD, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF INSTITUTIONAL RELATIONS AT THE BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY'S LAW SCHOOL, THE FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF HER OWN LAW FIRM, PERIOD LAW, AND PROMINENT ADVOCATE FOR THE ABOLISHMENT OF THE PINK AND TAMPON TAX.



Thankfully, Florida abolished the tampon tax in 2017. Unfortunately, 21 states are still not pink-tax-free.

People in power have shown time and time again that they are uncomfortable with the idea of this topic, let alone discussing it. "There haven't been enough women and people who menstruate in positions of power who pass laws and sales tax laws," Strausfeld says. "Even the women who have been there are kind of reluctant to talk about this issue." One thing Strausfeld noticed through her advocacy, men in power were not aware, "If people who are menstruating don't have access to these products, they will bleed through their clothes." How has our society become so oblivious that a portion of our population doesn't even know how bodies work? Thankfully, there is hope, and it starts with Laura Strausfeld's father.

Since so many people are uncomfortable with talking about this, why isn't Strausfeld? Well, from a very young age, her dad has been having these discussions in a very normal way. "My dad was a doctor, an obstetrician, which means he delivered babies. And I used to go to the hospital and see the babies. He just always talked very openly and not in a way that was embarrassing at all about everything medical," Strausfeld says. "And as I grew up, my friends would have some issues. I would just say, 'Hey, just call my dad and he'll answer your question.' So I was very used to speaking frankly about these things." However, it isn't just Strausfeld who has personal experience with this matter. Women around the world who are just trying to live in peace are affected by

this tax, including my mother.

"Until very recently I wasn't even aware this was a thing, I just bought tampons and pads and whatever I had to do," Veronica Poses says. "It's almost worse that we don't know about it, it's like a sneaky tax." These taxes also affect women in poverty, women in shelters, and women who are underserved. "There was a time in my life when I was a young person going to school and working, and having enough money for basic things was hard and elusive, and having to pay more money for items that I need to live my daily life seems like a very unfair and unjust thing, especially if it means corporations and multi-million corporations are making more money, often off of broke young people like I used to be," she says. Even my father recognizes the injustice of it all. "It's wrong that a 13-year-old girl has to explain this to a 53-year-old man who's never heard of this before," Alex Doerffler says.

Teenage girls are a part of the population who are especially outraged, appalled and fighting for change. "I think it's disgusting and I think elected officials need to do a much better job of making sure what everyone is paying is equal," says eighth grader Charlotte Arel. "It would be great if these taxes went toward better healthcare for women ... but they don't."

Why must it be this way? Why do women have to be punished for things they cannot control time and time again? Instead of going forwards, it feels like we are going backwards. Or even worse, standing still.

