

COLD OPEN

[Should sound like we're in a Target-esque store]

JED: Hmm. Hmm. Hmm.

BRIDGET: Hey Jed, what'cha doing?

JED: Oh, hey. I'm trying to figure out what's different about these jump ropes. They seem exactly the same...except for the color. One of them is pink. One is blue.

BRIDGET: Oh, I didn't know you were in the market for a jump rope!

JED: Well I really wanted the pink jump rope but it's slightly more expensive than the blue one. So I know it's probably more responsible if I buy the cheaper one...but I really like the pink one. Why does that one have to cost more?

BRIDGET: Hmm. That is weird. They really do seem the same. Anyway, I got what I came here for,[SHAKES BOX]. Oops, probably shouldn't do that. OK, I'm going to go check out now!

JED: Okay, I'll catch up with you later. [muttering to self] Pink? Blue? Pink? Blue?

<OPENING THEME MUSIC>

Intro:

JED: Welcome back to Million Bazillion, where we help dollars make more sense. I'm Jed.

BRIDGET: And I'm Bridget. We're here to answer the questions you have about money and how it works. Let's hear today's question:

ISABELLA Question: I'm Isabella and I come from California. And my question is, why are women's accessories or attire so much more expensive than men's?

BRIDGET: So Jed, I think you and I both agree on why we HAD to answer this question for today's show.

JED: Yep. I heard this was a thing years ago. But I totally thought we'd fixed it! I had no idea that it's STILL happening.

BRIDGET: Exactly. I was shocked. And Isabella wasn't happy when she first figured this out either:

ISABELLA QUESTION_FOLLOWUP: Well I visited some websites and I saw that some women's clothing were more expensive than men's clothing. I thought it was unfair.

BRIDGET: It seems TOTALLY unfair! Hold up, is THAT why the pink jump rope cost more??

JED: Wait, you think the reason it costs more is because it's pink??

BRIDGET: Well, yeah, Isabella noticed things designed for women can cost more than things for men...and a lot of times, companies make pink versions of things because they think girls will buy it.

JED: That's silly. I happen to love pink -- where did this idea that pink is just for girls come from anyway? What HUE-bris! Color me not impressed!

BRIDGET: Oh I know, let's ask my new smart speaker! I just got it today. Sidekick, activate.

[SOFT TECH-ISH DING]

JED: Sidekick? Not Siri or Alexa or Google?

BRIDGET: Yeah, I saved money by getting an off-brand version. It is good at very specific things, like it can find the perfect song for any situation, and it can name every species of jellyfish, but... it's lousy at telling the weather.

JED: Really? Hello Sidekick, what's the temperature outside?

SIDEKICK: Hello. It's 87 degrees and snowing in your living room.

JED: Wow.

BRIDGET: Let's stay focused. Hey Sidekick, where did the idea that pink is just for girls come from anyway? (BEAT OF SILENCE) Sidekick Sidekick?...

SIDEKICK: That's a great question. Someone should answer that. Hey Siri?

JED: Great speaker, Bridget.

<ASKING RANDOM KIDS NOT SO RANDOM QUESTIONS>

NARRATOR: Now it's time for Asking Random Kids Not So Random Questions! Today's question is...What's an unfair thing about money that you wish you could fix?

KID MONTAGE

NARRATOR: That was TK TK TK. This has been Asking Random Kids Not So Random Questions!

<END ARK>

BRIDGET: Okay, so let's get back to what Isabella noticed and her question about why it happens. SOMETIMES...things that are meant for women and girls...cost MORE than the same or REALLY similar item meant for men and boys. There's even a phrase for this. It's called...are you ready for it?

JED: Lay it on the people, Bridget!

BRIDGET: It's called the pink tax.

JED: Pink Tax! To be clear, this is not an official tax like sales tax. It's not something the government is *making* some people pay.

BRIDGET: Right, the phrase "pink tax" is just a way we describe the extra money that companies sometimes charge for products they think women will buy.

JED: That's bananas. And higher prices don't just happen on pink things.

BRIDGET: They just *call* it the pink tax because a lot of the time, the stores suggest that something is a "girls" version...and it often is pink but sometimes it's purple, or has flowers on it or...there's something about it that makes us just understand -- THIS is supposed to be for girls. Anyone who wants to buy these versions is going to end up paying more.

[SOFT TECH-ISH DING]

SIDEKICK: Ahem.

JED: Sidekick! You're back!

SIDEKICK: Yes, and I have an answer to that question you asked before. About why pink items are thought to be for girls and not boys.

BRIDGET & JED: Okay, let's hear it. Yeah, let's go. Awesome.

SIDEKICK: [SOFT TECH-ISH DING] [PAUSE] In the beginning, pink was a color both men and women liked to wear. Kids were usually dressed in white...easier to bleach clean. In the early 1900s, department stores tried to convince people to buy specific colors for boys and girls. They may have thought that if people had to buy separate clothes for their boy and girl children, the stores would make more money. For a while, different stores had different opinions about whether pink was a boys color or a girls color.

JED: Ohh, so they just wanted people to buy more! Devious!

BRIDGET: Yeah - Stores are always figuring out new ways to sell us stuff or to get us to spend more money.

SIDEKICK Cont: Sometime after World War II, stores started to sell clothes and toys that were pink for girls and blue for boys. . . Since then, for whatever reason, the idea stuck.

JED: I wish it would get *unstuck*. boys colors', girls' colors, what a limited way of looking at the world. Anyway, thanks, Sidekick.

SIDEKICK: You're welcome. Now would you like some facts about pink flamingos? They are actually born grey or white but turn pink thanks to reddish pigment in the food they eat.

JED: Thanks, that's interesting. Super random, but interesting.

BRIDGET: I know. Is it a bug or feature? Anyway -- Jed, want to play a quick game? (Of course.) I'm gonna give you some examples where the "girl" version costs more than the "boy" version. And I want you to guess how much more the girl version costs. Okay? These are all from an official report from some economists who studied this...You ready?

JED: Let's do it.

BRIDGET: Hey Sidekick - do you have any game showy music we could use here?

SIDEKICK: Of course.

[MUSIC + SOUND DESIGN - feel a bit like a game show]

BRIDGET: I have here, two bike helmets. One is blue, one is pink. They are pretty much the same in every other way. What's the price difference?

JED: Okay, let's say...pink helmet is...\$3 more.

BRIDGET: Ooh, good guess! The girl's helmet is \$30, the boys helmet is usually \$27, so you're right!

JED: I'm happy that I got it right but this is so absurd, they do the exact same job, protect your head...they're just different colors!

BRIDGET: Okay next...Two BLUE polo shirts...one for men, one for women. Same size.

JED: Huh...these shirts look REALLY similar. I don't know, like a dollar more for the woman's version?

BRIDGET: Nope, \$5!

JED: It's almost the exact same shirt!! Like same fabric and everything!

BRIDGET: Welcome to my world. Okay, how about these nearly identical packages of ballpoint pens. They've each got two pens per package, with black ink. They're that super fun kind where you click top down to get it to work. Only difference is, one is called "FOR HER". Guess the price difference.

JED: [Let's out one of those low slow exhales] I'm not sure why the company making the pens would need pens "for her." Is this a trick question?

BRIDGET: Nope! The pens "for her" cost an extra \$2.50. But that makes them cost twice as much as the other pens!

JED: WHAT? From where I'm sitting...this makes no sense!

BRIDGET: I know. So these are all different examples of the pink tax. Some people might not even realize there's another cheaper option unless they go looking for it.

JED: Man, a couple dollars here, a couple dollars there...that's really going to add up if you're always paying just a little bit more for stuff.

BRIDGET: And actually, hang on..., SIDEKICK, [SOFT TECH-ISH DING] is there a girl's version of your smart speaker?

SIDEKICK: Yes, there is a version of me that is decorated with flowers and unicorns and is called Sidekick: Girl Version.

BRIDGET: [exasperated] Oh gosh. I'm almost afraid to ask...what does it cost?

SIDEKICK: It costs 25 percent more than I do.

BRIDGET: That is just -- so frustrating!

SIDEKICK: Would you like to play a weirdly specific but topically appropriate punk song to help you express your feelings?

BRIDGET: Uh, yes. I would! You have one?

SIDEKICK: Playing "Attackin' Pink Taxes with My Pink Axes." [MUSIC, NO LYRICS YET START TO FADE UP]

BRIDGET: Rock on, Sidekick!

<<PINK TAX PUNK SONG>>

*You say you want me to pay. MORE!
That's why I'll kick down your dumb DOOR!
Bury my axe in your pink tax. SCORE!
Then we'll see who's gonna feel MORE!*

Never never gonna never gonna gonna pay (x3) WHOO!

[INSTRUMENTAL PART OF SONG, OVER WHICH, JED SAYS:]

JED: All right, I gotta go find out why this pink tax is happening. And why haven't we stopped it yet! I'll have more...after this break!

[FADE MUSIC INTO MIDROLL]

---MIDROLL---

JED: And we're back. OK, so far today, we've seen that the girls' version of things often cost more than the boys' version. And that seems kind of messed up. Let's get into Isabella's question: why does this happen?

BRIDGET: Yeah, because there aren't any laws that say women have to pay more for things than men.

JED: Maybe there's some supervillain who just wants to make things super unfair for women.

(DRAMATIC MUSIC)

SUPERVILLAIN: I have succeeded in my nefarious plot to make lady shaving razors more expensive! Now, to take over the world! MUAH HA HA HA!!!

SUPERHEROINE: Stop **villain!** I'm here to foil your evil plans! Though, I'm unclear exactly **why** you're doing this. It just seems really petty and mean spirited. What's **wrong** with you?

SUPERVILLAIN: I don't have to justify myself to you! (THEY BICKER)

(MUSIC ENDS)

JED: Mmm, probably not.

BRIDGET: Someone who knows more is Sandra Abeles (ah-BELL-az) She helps run the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection and she worked on a study all about the pink tax. Keep in mind, sometimes it's hard to know exactly why something costs what it does. But Sandra says there are a few reasons why this price difference might exist, like the cost of making it.

ABELES 1: So the cost of the materials that are used, or how much it costs to manufacture a product

JED: Like if the factories are set up to make a lot of, let's say, black hammers, they can do it pretty cheaply. But when they want to make a bright color one, then they have to shut things down, change out some equipment. That costs them more, so they make those things more expensive.

BRIDGET: Or another thing that could make one version cost more than another could be that one one has a little bit more going on stylewise.

ABELES 2: if you take a product that might have, let's say, some ruffles or additional details, or it might have different kinds of fabric used in it, you could understand that that might be more expensive to make, and therefore, the producer is going to cost is going to pass that cost on to the consumer. So you'll pay more for a product that either has more details or is a little bit more fancy.

JED: And...there might be something else going on here. Remember that example we talked about earlier, two cotton t-shirts, one for men and one for women? The women's version cost \$5 more? Well it's possible the store set the price of the shirts based on WHO they thought would buy it, and how much the store thinks that buyer would be willing to spend.

BRIDGET: Right, that is called Price Discrimination. When a company sets different prices on an item for different groups of people.

JED: Like, charging different prices on movie tickets for kids, adults and senior citizens. It's all a way to sell more, depending on who's buying.

ABELES 4: And I think retailers and the companies that sell you products, they have more information than ever, about the people who are buying their products and how much they're willing to spend, what their patterns of buying are, what their preferences are.

JED: They may know that women are willing to pay more for certain items...or that men aren't willing to pay as much, so they need to charge less to sell more. As long as stores can keep selling pink versions at a higher cost, they'll probably keep charging more for them.

BRIDGET: [GETTING ANGRIER] So look, I understand that stores exist to sell things and they want to make as much money as they can. But I still have questions and maybe you do too. Like, why assume that only women would want the extra special details? Don't they think girls like other colors? Have they heard of orange? Why assume that ONLY girls would want the pink version? Also, we're like half the population, so why is that the women's version is the "special one"? And if we're going to pay extra anyway, can we at least get some more pockets?

JED: Yeah, I'm sorry that this happens. Even if there isn't an evil maniac purposefully trying to overcharge women and girls (QUIET MUAH HA HA), women will still end up paying extra money for the things they buy -- one estimate is about \$1,300 a year. That's a lot of money!

BRIDGET: We'll talk about some ways to fix this...That's coming up next.

MUSICAL INTERSTITIAL

JED: Alright so today we got a question that an observant listener sent our way...she noticed that sometimes, women's clothes and accessories are more expensive than REALLY similar versions made for men. So we looked into why that was.

BRIDGET: The answer isn't totally satisfactory. Because the bottom line is...girls are often asked to buy things that are more expensive than very similar items meant for boys. A lot of times, it doesn't seem like there's a good reason for it. And those extra dollars really add up!

JED: So what can we do about it? Let's ask Sidekick! Sidekick, how can we stop the pink tax?

[SOFT TECH-ISH DING]

SIDEKICK: You want to mop up pink slacks?

JED: No, what? I want to know how to stop the pink tax.

[SOFT TECH-ISH DING]

SIDEKICK: There are no stores called Stinky Max in your area.

BRIDGET: I read online that it's easier for it to understand your question if you ask it in a little elf voice.

JED: [in little elf voice] Sidekick, what can we do to stop- [normal voice] You know what, it's not worth it. This is the worst purchase...

BRIDGET: Well, fortunately there are some people who have been trying to make this price difference disappear. So we thought we'd call back Isabella who asked this question -- and tell her about it...Hey Isabella.

ISABELLA 0701 1: Hiii.

BRIDGET: Okay, so...here we go. I'm going to tell you some of the different things people have done to try to get rid of the pink tax. Ready?

ISABELLA 0701 2: Yeah.

BRIDGET: : One thing people have tried to do about the pink tax is to fight back...by writing papers! And gathering data and proof that this was happening.

JED: Good old research, the secret weapon against tyranny!

BRIDGET: And then some companies saw that research and said, Hey, this isn't good! And they decided that from then on, they would charge the SAME price for a product, whether it's the girl version or the boy version. Companies like an online grocery store, an eyeglass company, the list goes on.

JED: Seems like an easy fix...the people who set the prices have a lot of control over...um, the price.

ISABELLA 0701 3: Well not all stores would agree because they still want income. Just like one person can't make them change their entire price.

JED: That's a good point.

BRIDGET: It is, because it's true, some companies just say, we're not going to change our prices. If you want the cheaper version, just buy the not so colorful one. What do you think of that, Isabella? Would you want to buy just the blue version of things from here on out?

ISABELLA 0701 4: Well, like, it isn't fair because what if like, I wanted the pink version? I can't just wear the blue version for the rest of my life.

JED: Yeah, like my jump rope! I just like the way the pink one looks when it's sitting there... not getting used. I need to exercise more.

BRIDGET: OK, here's another one. In the state of New York, lawmakers have actually made rules that make it illegal to charge more for services or products aimed at women. Maybe more states could pass similar laws?

ISABELLA 0701 5: Well, it could be but what if it costs more to make it, the woman's instead of the men's? So that couldn't solve all of it. / Maybe we could report the companies that did price unfairly.

BRIDGET: Yeah, good suggestion. And honestly, it's probably going to take a lot of different ideas working together to do away with the pink tax all together.. But this is a good start- noticing it and pointing it out so we know it's happening. SO thank you for asking this question.. In the meantime, it's okay to be a little angry. Maybe listen to a little music to let off steam...Hit it, sidekick!

[SOFT TECH-ISH DING]

SIDEKICK: Hitting it.

<<RETURN of PUNK SONG - as Interstitial >>

*You're the one, you're the one who's gonna pay
Messin' with me on choppin' day
I'm the hunter and you're my prey.
This pink axe is gonna slay.*

BRIDGET: So Jed, can I tell you what I learned today?

JED: Take it away.

BRIDGET: Sometimes there are things about the way money works that aren't fair. And even more frustrating, we KNOW it's not fair, but we're not even close to fixing it. If you notice these things, it's OK to point them out. Sometimes, saying something isn't fair... is the first step to changing it. The second step is working together, right Jed?

JED: That's right because it can take a lot of people working together to make a difference. But they CAN do it.

BRIDGET: So trust your gut. And never stop asking questions about the world around you. Chances are, you'll end up teaching the grownups-in-your-life...a few things too.

--MILLION BAZILLION THEME MUSIC CLOSE--

JED: Thanks for listening to Million Bazillion -- where we help dollars make more sense...

BRIDGET: In our next episode, we're learning all about the art on our money...and how it stops thieves and counterfeiters in their tracks!

JED: If you're not done learning about the pink tax, we've got a tip sheet with episode extras and a Million Bazillion comic for kids and their grownups. Get it delivered to you as a newsletter when you sign up at Marketplace dot org slash BONUS. Plus you'll be the first to know when we've got new episodes, and other fun stuff from the Million Bazillion Team, like our new t-shirts!

BRIDGET: Special thanks to Kimberly Adams, Marissa Cabrera, Reema Khrais, and Jeff Peters, for lending us their voices. Our Pink Tax Punk Song was performed by Coco Sanchez and Lulu Bloom Ducett <doo-SET>

JED: Million Bazillion is brought to you by Marketplace
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I'm your host, Jed Kim...
The senior producer is my co-host, Bridget Bodnar
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JED: To all the grown-ups listening right now – we hope that you and the kids in your life are having some good conversations about money thanks to Million Bazillion. We created this podcast to help kids get an early start on learning about the economy – and to keep it going, we're counting on your support. Donate today at marketplace-dot-org-slash-givemillion, and thanks for chipping in to make our work possible.