

# Inequality in Women's Consumption in Daily Life

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**Abstract.** In contemporary societies, the pervasive issue of gender inequality continues to pose significant challenges, with women frequently encountering systemic discrimination and biases that affect numerous facets of their lives. This research specifically centers on the phenomenon known as the "Pink Tax," which pertains to the unequal pricing of products targeted at women for their daily needs. By delving into the repercussions of this inequality, examining the primary areas where it manifests, and analyzing the contrasting spending patterns between men and women that contribute to this discriminatory practice, the study aims to shed light on its profound impact. Moreover, this research is not limited to merely highlighting the problem; it also endeavors to present practical and actionable suggestions to address and rectify this pressing issue. By reflecting on potential solutions and offering innovative ideas, the study aspires to contribute to the ongoing efforts in dismantling gender-based price disparities and fostering a more equitable marketplace.

**Keywords:** Gender discrimination, pink tax, gender branding, inequality.

## 1. Introduction

Women's consumption inequality has persisted throughout history, reflecting greater sociocultural inequities between genders. Despite substantial progress in the women's rights and gender equality movements, the persistence of a phenomena known as the Pink Tax highlights the pervasiveness of gender-based economic inequities. This study paper dives into the complex relationship between gender, consumption, and the Pink Tax, providing a thorough examination of the phenomenon's influence and ramifications on women's daily life.

The study of women's consumption inequality seeks to discover the differences that women confront in numerous parts of their daily life. From the things they buy to the services that they use, women frequently face discriminatory behaviors that result in higher prices and fewer options. The Pink Tax, in particular, refers to the higher cost that women frequently face when purchasing goods and services marketed to them, despite the fact that they offer no substantial changes in functionality or quality when compared to their male counterparts [1]. This issue not only reinforces gender stereotypes, but it also contributes to the persistence of systemic economic inequities.

This research paper aims to shed light on the numerous elements of disparity in women's consumption by investigating the underlying causes, effects, and potential solutions. By analyzing various case studies, economic theories, and empirical evidence, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Pink Tax and its implications for women's economic empowerment.

By shedding light on the Pink Tax and inequality in women's consumption, this research paper aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse surrounding gender equality. It serves as a call to action for policymakers, businesses, and consumers to recognize and rectify the systemic biases that hinder women's economic autonomy. By addressing these issues, we can strive towards a future where gender-based disparities in consumption become a relic of the past, fostering a society that embraces true equality and inclusivity.

The research presented in this paper represents a stepping stone towards understanding and dismantling the barriers that hinder women's economic empowerment. It is my hope that this research inspires further investigation, dialogue, and action, ultimately leading to tangible change and progress in achieving gender equality. The research question is: how does gender inequality impact women's consumption patterns in their daily lives?

## 2. Problem Description

The problem of "Inequality in Women's Consumption in Daily Life" highlights the disparities women face in their consumption patterns compared to men. According to research conducted by The Balance, women, on average, are charged approximately 13% higher prices compared to men for comparable products [2]. These inequalities are influenced by socio-cultural factors, such as societal norms and traditional gender roles, which shape women's purchasing decisions and consumption behavior. Economic factors, including access to education, employment opportunities, and financial resources, also play a significant role in women's consumption choices and economic autonomy. Moreover, marketing strategies and media portrayals often perpetuate gender stereotypes, further influencing women's consumption behavior. Price discrimination in certain consumer goods and services exacerbates the inequality experienced by women. Additionally, the intersectionality of race, ethnicity, and class amplifies the effects of consumption inequality for marginalized women.

Conducting research on this issue is essential to promote gender equality and empower women as consumers. Moreover, it can have a positive impact on various aspects of societal well-being, economic empowerment, and business strategies. Through a better understanding of the root causes and consequences of consumption inequality, society can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for all individuals. This research can inform policy development, drive advocacy efforts, and raise public awareness, contributing to a cohesive society where every member is valued and treated with dignity. Ultimately, by addressing the problem of consumption inequality, we strive to create a fairer and more just world, where women and all individuals can equally participate in daily life and economic decision-making.

## 3. Analysis on Problems

To dive further into understanding the problems, we will divide it into three parts: First, how does gender inequality impact women's consumption pattern in their daily lives? Second, what are the key areas of consumption in daily life where gender-based inequalities exist for women? Last, how does the spending pattern of women differ from men in terms of essential goods, leisure activities, and luxury items?

### 3.1. Gender Inequality's Impact

Gender inequalities continue to cast a long shadow over various aspects of society, influencing everything from economic opportunities to the pricing of everyday consumer goods. According to the California Department of Consumer Affairs, it was estimated that women effectively pay a gender tax of \$1351 annually, with that figure rising to approximately \$2294 when accounting for inflation in 2021 [3]. This financial burden is known as the "pink tax," a discriminatory pricing practice where women are charged more for goods and services compared to men. Moreover, not only women's daily needs products are being charged higher than men, but some necessities for women, like pads and tampons, are also being charged extra. In the United States, sales taxes are charged for menstrual products in states, county, and/or city governments [4]. This results in women in the United States spending an estimated additional \$150 million per year on menstrual products [5]. Such higher costs have led to the emergence of "period poverty," where approximately 25% of women and girls are believed to be unable to afford menstrual products [6]. The pink tax is just one of the many ways gender inequalities persist in society, impacting women's economic well-being and everyday lives. These disparities not only affect women's purchasing power but also contribute to broader social issues such as economic disparity and health inequity. Addressing and dismantling the pink tax is a crucial step towards achieving a more just and equitable society for all genders.

This additional financial burden is compounded by the persisting gender wage gap, as women continue to earn less than their male counterparts. Based on U.S. Department of Labor, in terms of earnings relative to their male counterparts, white women made approximately 84.6 percent, black women earned around 89.9 percent, Asian women earned about 81.0 percent, and Hispanic women

earned approximately 88.3 percent in 2020 [7]. These disparities are not just numbers; they represent real-life consequences for women and their economic well-being. The combination of the extra charge and the gender wage gap means that women face not only higher prices on products but also reduced earnings throughout their careers, which can lead to profound and long-lasting financial repercussions.

### 3.2. Key Areas of Consumption

Based on the research conducted by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs, a startling trend of gender-based pricing disparities have been unveiled, with personal care products being among the worst offenders. The study revealed that women were consistently burdened with higher premiums in 42% of cases, while men faced such discrepancies in only 18% of instances, with 40% of products showing an equal price for both genders.

For example, among personal care items, the discrepancies were particularly striking, and examples like razors highlight the issue vividly. Products like razors, which are essentially the same in terms of functionality, carry a higher price tag for women due to seemingly arbitrary features such as moisturizing strips. Such features are included in men's razors as well, yet women are forced to pay more for the very same items. On average, women's personal care products were found to be a staggering 56% more expensive than the equivalent products marketed to men, with a troubling 13% price disparity overall.

Hair care items were another category that exhibited significant gender-based pricing differences. Women, unfortunately, ended up paying a staggering 48% more than men for similar products. The issue was exacerbated by the fact that men's hair care products often come as "2-in-1" combinations, bundling shampoo and conditioner in a single package. In contrast, women's products were typically sold separately, compelling them to pay for two separate items instead of one, further perpetuating the unjustified cost gap [8].

Indeed, gender discrimination in pricing has been discovered to be prevalent across a diverse array of products. From scooters and baby clothes to razors and socks, it has become evident that consumers are facing differential charges based on their gender. Particularly concerning is the clothing sector, where shirts stand out as a significant category with a price disparity ranging from 13% to 15%, with women's shirts bearing a higher price tag. Furthermore, girls' arts and crafts, as well as toys, have shockingly reached a staggering 17% price difference when compared to their male counterparts [8]. Regrettably, women often find themselves at the receiving end of these unjust price discrepancies.

### 3.3. Spending Pattern

The production of the pink tax is influenced by various factors, foremost among them being gender socialization, socio-economic conditions, and patriarchal structures [9]. These powerful forces have played a significant role in giving rise to the pink tax. One key aspect is that women often find themselves allocating more of their budget to cover gender-specific expenses, while cultural norms frequently assign them the responsibility of household shopping. Moreover, differences in leisure activities further contribute to this phenomenon, with men tending to spend more on entertainment such as sports events and video games, while expenses on social outings and hobbies may vary due to individual preferences and societal expectations.

Another contributing factor is that men, in general, may place less importance on their image compared to women, often opting for products that serve multiple purposes. This, in turn, has led to the emergence of toiletries and makeup brands specifically targeting women, thereby driving up prices since manufacturers know these products are often deemed a "must-buy" for women. Consequently, the pink tax continues to persist, perpetuating the disparity in pricing based on gender and exacerbating the financial burden on women.

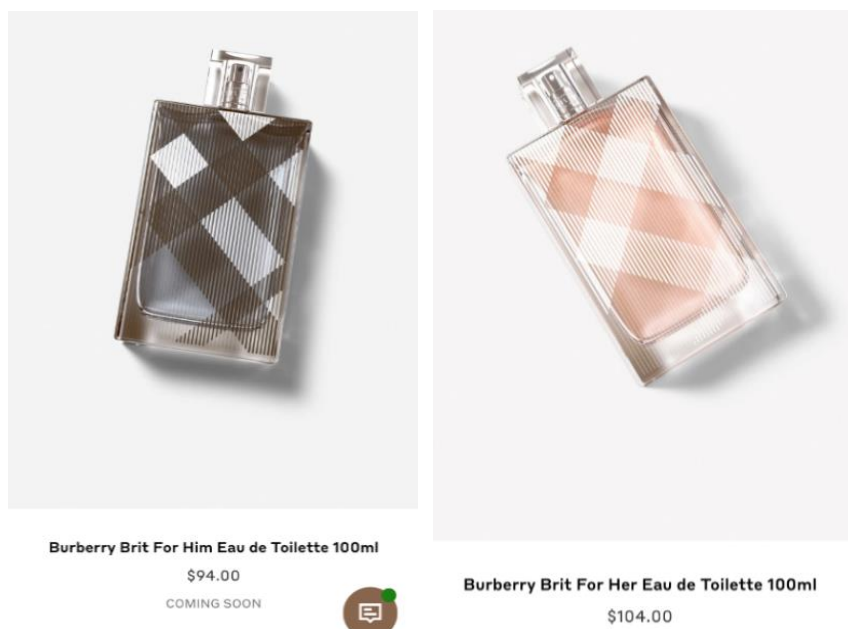
The makeup predicament experienced by women is deeply rooted in societal norms and prevailing beauty standards that exert significant pressure on them to adhere to specific ideals of attractiveness. This phenomenon has persisted across various cultures and historical eras, resulting in a widespread

expectation for women to prioritize their appearance and embrace makeup as a conventional means to attain these beauty ideals.

Notably, the media and advertising industries play a pivotal role in perpetuating these notions by portraying heavily made-up models as the standard of beauty. Moreover, workplace expectations and traditional gender roles further compound the pressure on women to incorporate makeup into their daily routine. This collective influence contributes to an economic impact, as the makeup industry predominantly targets women, leading to additional expenses for those who feel compelled to uphold a particular standard of grooming.

A salient issue highlighted by the makeup predicament is the existence of a double standard, wherein men generally encounter far less pressure to utilize makeup as part of their appearance. Consequently, women often grapple with societal expectations, whereas men are afforded greater leeway in their grooming choices.

The propensity of women to predominantly purchase luxury items compared to men can be ascribed to a complex interplay of social, cultural, and psychological factors. Rooted in long-established gender roles, women encounter societal expectations that accentuate personal appearance and aesthetics, consequently exerting greater pressure to invest in luxury goods like high-end clothing, accessories, and beauty products. Furthermore, luxury brands employ targeted marketing and advertising strategies aimed at women, perpetuating the perception that luxury items are more relevant and desirable for them. Women's emotional and psychological connection to luxury items, which they often view as symbols of status, self-expression, and empowerment, also contributes to the heightened demand. In addition, income disparities and the prevalence of luxury items as gifts for special occasions play a role, with women's higher disposable incomes and the tradition of gifting influencing their increased engagement in luxury purchases. Moreover, within certain circles or communities, peer influence and social norms may further reinforce the emphasis on luxury acquisitions among women. It is crucial to recognize, however, that individual consumer behavior is intricate and shaped by diverse factors beyond gender, including personal values, lifestyle choices, and cultural backgrounds (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Example, Designer Perfume of Burberry (photo taken from its online shop)

#### 4. Suggestions

To address the pink tax issue and promote gender equality in daily product consumption, a comprehensive approach is essential. In this paper, three main area of approach will be discussed. They include: raising public awareness, policy advocacy, and comparison shopping.

#### **4.1. Raise Public Awareness**

Public education is a powerful tool in addressing gender-based discrimination, including the pink tax, and initiating discussions about its implications. Awareness campaigns play a crucial role in bringing attention to this issue, as many people may not be aware of its existence. By putting the pink tax at the forefront, the public can recognize the inequalities women face in the marketplace.

As individuals become aware of the pink tax, they are empowered to make informed decisions about their purchasing choices. Informed consumers can actively support brands that promote fair pricing and gender equality, thereby creating a demand for more equitable products and services. This increased awareness also puts public pressure on businesses and policymakers to address the issue. Companies that engage in gender-based price discrimination may face backlash or reputational damage, leading to changes in their pricing practices.

Moreover, sustainable change often requires a shift in societal norms and attitudes. By raising awareness, we can challenge ingrained stereotypes and perceptions about gender roles, ultimately leading to more equitable treatment in various areas, including product pricing. The pink tax serves as just one manifestation of broader gender inequalities. By raising awareness of this issue, we contribute to larger conversations about gender equality, fostering a more inclusive and fair society for everyone.

#### **4.2. Policy Advocacy**

In addition to awareness-raising efforts, policy advocacy plays a critical role in addressing gender-based pricing discrimination and promoting lasting change. While raising awareness is important for bringing attention to the issue, it may not be sufficient to address the root causes of gender-based pricing disparities.

Policy advocacy focuses on urging lawmakers to implement regulations that explicitly prohibit gender-based price discrimination and eliminate taxes on essential feminine hygiene products. By advocating for legislative and regulatory reforms, policy advocates seek to create systemic changes that benefit all consumers, not just in the short term but also in the long run.

Specific policies and laws can provide legal protection to consumers against gender-based price discrimination. These regulations establish clear guidelines, giving individuals a stronger basis to challenge discriminatory pricing practices and seek remedies when they encounter such instances. With legal protections in place, consumers have more confidence and support to assert their rights, leading to increased accountability for businesses engaging in discriminatory practices.

Furthermore, policies can set up enforcement mechanisms to monitor and penalize companies found engaging in gender-based price discrimination. This creates a deterrent effect, encouraging businesses to comply with fair pricing practices to avoid potential legal consequences. By setting clear consequences for non-compliance, policies promote a level playing field and discourage discriminatory behavior.

Importantly, policy changes have a greater likelihood of long-term sustainability compared to voluntary actions by individual companies. While some businesses may voluntarily adopt fair pricing practices, this approach can be inconsistent and may not address the issue comprehensively. Legal measures, on the other hand, endure beyond changing market trends or management decisions, providing a more stable and enduring framework for addressing gender-based pricing discrimination.

#### **4.3. Comparison Shopping**

Comparison shopping is a valuable tool that empowers consumers to protect themselves from price discrimination and the pink tax. In many societies, men are often offered better deals and pricing, which has been highlighted in studies such as one conducted by a professor at Yale Law School, who discovered that white men are frequently offered the best deals in car dealerships [10]. By engaging in comparison shopping and comparing prices of similar products targeted at different genders, female consumers can effectively identify instances of gender-based price disparities. Armed with

this information, consumers can make more informed purchasing decisions, avoiding discriminatory pricing practices and seeking fairer options in the market.

When consumers engage in comparison shopping, they become aware of price differences and can choose products that offer better value and fair pricing. This empowers them to make economically advantageous choices and avoid falling victim to discriminatory pricing practices. As more consumers adopt comparison shopping, businesses may face increased pressure to reevaluate their pricing strategies. The demand for transparency and equitable pricing can prompt companies to adjust their practices to avoid losing customers and maintain a positive reputation.

Furthermore, comparison shopping allows consumers to support brands that do not engage in gender-based price discrimination. By favoring companies with fair pricing policies, consumers actively contribute to a market environment that promotes gender equality and fair treatment. Sharing comparison shopping experiences can also play a significant role in raising awareness among peers and communities. Word-of-mouth and social media platforms become powerful tools to spread information about the pink tax and encourage others to engage in comparison shopping as well.

## 5. Conclusion

The pink tax is a persistent issue that perpetuates gender inequality in daily product consumption. It is evident that tackling this problem requires a comprehensive and collaborative effort from various stakeholders. By raising awareness, advocating for policy changes, promoting transparency, and encouraging consumer activism, we can make strides towards reducing the pink tax. Furthermore, corporate responsibility, support for fair businesses, and data collection play vital roles in holding companies accountable and fostering a more equitable marketplace. Collaboration with NGOs, media representation, financial literacy, and workplace support for women are additional avenues to drive positive change. As we unite in this endeavor, we can break down barriers, challenge stereotypes, and ultimately pave the way for a fair and inclusive society, where gender-based pricing discrimination is a thing of the past. Together, we can create a world where all individuals can access products and services at fair prices, regardless of their gender, fostering a more just and equitable future for everyone.

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