

The Hidden Cost of Womanhood

An investigation into the impacts of the 'pink tax' on Australian women and what this reveals about their social exclusion.

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Introduction

Australia prides itself on ‘a fair go’ for all. So why do women in Australia earn 13.4% less than men? Why are women over 55 years old the fastest growing demographic of homeless people in Australia? Why do women make up 50.5% of the workforce but only 32.5% of management positions?¹ Why do Australian women retire with 47% less superannuation than men, despite living an average of five years longer?² Why do women pay 29% more for razors, 16% more for body wash and 12% more for underwear?³ While these inequities frequently fly under the radar, a few extra dollars here and there for female-oriented products accumulates and meaningfully impacts women's lives. This relative overcharging of products marketed to women, which has been termed the ‘pink tax’, contributes to the social exclusion of Australian women.⁴

This Personal Interest Project will investigate the implications of the ‘pink tax’ for Australian women and how it perpetuates their social exclusion. Through integrating a cross-generational comparison of women and men as well as Generation X and Generation Z, I aim to ascertain the extent to which the ‘pink tax’ continues to socially exclude.

A range of secondary sources, including *The Pink Tax: The Persistence of Gender Price Disparity* by Mackenzi Lafferty, were beneficial in shaping my understanding of the social factors that led to and maintain the ‘pink tax’.⁵ I explore these socio-historical factors and surrounding concepts in Chapter 1. Research by AMP on gender-based pricing in Australian was valuable in detailing the everyday manifestations of the ‘pink-tax’.⁶ This source was key in Chapter 2, where I examine everyday examples of the ‘pink tax’, as well as their implications.

¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Gender Equity Insights 2021: Making it a priority*, 6 Mar. 2021, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/>>, accessed 30 Mar. 2021.

² Women In Super, ‘The Facts About Women and Super’, Women In Super [website], n.d., para. 2, <<https://www.womeninsuper.com.au/content/the-facts-about-women-and-super/gjumzs>>, accessed 2 April 2021.

³ A. Carey, ‘Research reveals blatant ‘gender tax’ added to Aussie staples’, *news.com.au*, Finance, 6 May 2019, <<https://www.news.com.au/>>, accessed 5 April 2021.

⁴ J. Wakeman, ‘Pink Tax: The Real Cost of Gender-Based Pricing’, *healthline* [website], 6 Aug. 2020, The ‘pink tax’, <<https://www.healthline.com/health/the-real-cost-of-pink-tax#The-pink-tax>>, accessed 15 Jan. 2021.

⁵ M. Lafferty, ‘The Pink Tax: The Persistence of Gender Price Disparity’, Bachelor of Arts in International Business and Political Science, Monmouth College, Illinois, p. 56-70, <<http://research.monm.edu/mjur/files/2020/02/MJUR-i12-2019-Conference-4-Lafferty.pdf>>, accessed 5 April 2021.

⁶ A. Carey, loc. cit.

Primary research was vital in extending my understanding of the manifestations of and comparative attitudes toward the ‘pink tax’, critical to Chapter 2. A questionnaire investigating Generation X and Generation Z’s perspectives regarding the ‘pink tax’ provided both quantitative and qualitative data insights into gender and generational similarities and differences. A qualitative content analysis of advertisements in newspapers at five year increments between 1980 and 2020⁷ revealed the evolution and continuation of gendered marketing, despite the inevitably subjective interpretation of this. Finally, personal reflection on my own experiences and observations assisted me in considering the modern experience and tangible impact of the ‘pink tax’.

The ‘pink tax’ has a direct financial impact on me as a woman and I strongly object to the gender inequity that it symbolises.⁸ In Chapter 3, I discuss what this financial inequality reveals about Australian society and possible future directions of this.

The ‘pink tax’ forms part of a broad pattern of structural inequality which I believe is unethical and under-considered.⁹ This PIP aims to address this by investigating the impact of the ‘pink tax’ on Australian women and how it contributes to their social exclusion.

⁷ Excluding 2005 and 2010 as the two databases I accessed did not have these years.

⁸ Primary Research: Personal Reflection

⁹ Primary Research: Personal Reflection

Conclusion

Endemic economic discrimination towards women, of which the 'pink tax' is symptomatic, became clear through this investigation. This discrimination has been entrenched in the history of Western society and has become part of the fabric of Australia's patriarchal culture. The 'pink tax' persists despite a developing awareness of, and objection to it. Its implications accumulate into substantial negative consequences, contributing to and maintaining the social exclusion of Australian women.

Historically, women have been economically subjugated through laws creating obstacles to financial independence by limiting property and banking rights. Feminist movements and shifts in social norms mean many of these legal barriers have been overcome, although the chasm between 'pink' and 'blue' still exists. Institutions, such as marketing and advertising companies, continue to hold power to create economic gender disparities through the subtle structural segmentation of markets, resulting in systemic inequality. This market segmentation is based on stereotypes of women being materialistic 'shoppers', providing justification for companies to produce a wider range of products for women. This marketing results in women deeming more products as essential for purchase, meaning that the 'pink tax' exists not only within individual product comparison, but also in overall money spent. The socio-historical construction of the 'pink tax' revealed that this 'tax', alongside other forms of gendered economic discrimination, have clearly contributed to and continue to sustain the social exclusion of Australian women.

The growth of technology has simultaneously made it easier and harder to compare prices. Although one can use the internet to find comparable prices, the personalised nature of algorithm-based marketing (which uses gender and other factors to target individuals) has created product echo chambers. However, technology has also played a pivotal role in raising awareness around the 'pink tax', which allows individuals to be more vigilant with their buying power.

Through my research for this PIP, I have discovered the extensive impact of the 'pink tax' on Australian women. Money lost due to unequal pricing magnifies existing social exclusion as it limits opportunities and props up misogynistic notions concerning the inherent incapacity

of women to achieve equal success in our capitalist society. In recognising this financial loss, as well as the harmful discourse it cultivates, the impact of the 'pink tax' on Australian women, and the role that it plays in their social exclusion, becomes evident.

Predictions concerning the future of the 'pink tax' suggest that a growing awareness of its existence and its negative impact, in tandem with a broader global social movement away from gender binaries and discrimination, will lead to the gradual extinguishing of this financial inequality. I look forward to a future in which marketing is based on our individual interests, wants and needs, as opposed to our genders, thus lessening the social exclusion of women in Australia. My research suggests that we all have a role to play, both at a micro level as individuals and at a meso/macro level as part of organisations, in limiting the hidden costs of womanhood and moving towards a 'purple' future.