

Should Men Pay Bills?

– Financial Disparities in Heterosexual Relationships

Tianle Yao^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Math, University of California, Davis, Davis, U.S.A*

a. tinyao@ucdavis.edu

**corresponding author*

Abstract: This study investigates the enduring norm and rising debatable question of whether men should bear the financial burden in heterosexual relationships – “Should men pay bills?” – analyzing the gender dynamics through the lens of financial disparities. Drawing on a survey of 231 participants across diverse demographics, primarily from China, this study explores how societal norms and economic inequities influence heterosexual relationships and contribute to traditional gender norms. By dissecting factors such as the gender wage gap, the “pink tax,” and the division of labor in non-reproductive tasks, this paper highlights the economic and cultural forces impacting traditional gender roles. The survey reveals that men are generally perceived and often function as the primary earners, influenced by stereotypical gendered norms and expectations, resulting in women encountering economic disadvantages due to lower earnings and greater financial commitment to personal care. This study also examines societal pressures that dictate spending patterns, especially among women, on aesthetics, which contribute significantly to their financial and emotional strain. The findings suggest a critical need to reassess the traditional financial roles in relationships and push toward more equitable financial practices. The findings prompt a reconsideration of gendered financial responsibilities and advocate for a shift towards more equitable practices.

Keywords: Gender Studies, Gender Wage Gap, Pink Tax.

1. Introduction

“Should men pay the bill?” A debatable question that reflects the gender dynamics in heterosexual relationships in today’s world. In a world where gender roles are continuously evolving, the answer to this seemingly simple question reflects the long-standing norms and economic disparities that influence gender dynamics in heterosexual relationships. The practice of men paying for dates, rooted in historical precedents of male economic dominance, continues to be debated about fairness and gender equity in contemporary society.

By analyzing responses from 231 participants, this paper explores the relationships between gendered economic disparities and expected gender roles, examining how the norm of “men pay bills” is a bargained consequence of the persistent wage gap. In the subsequent sections, through literature reviews and data analysis, we will discuss the broader societal impacts of these financial dynamics.

2. Literature Review

The study by Emmers-Sommer et al. [1] offers insights into the “script” of first dates, specifically regarding who pays and the resulting sexual expectations. Their research highlights that traditional dating scripts often dictate that men should pay for dates, a norm that still holds substantial influence over dating behaviors and expectations. The study found that when men pay for the date, they have higher sexual expectations, which are rooted in traditional stereotypical gendered roles. This expectation exemplifies the broader financial disparities that women face in various aspects of life.

The “pink tax” is one of the reasons that cause the financial disparities between genders. It is a phenomenon in which women often pay more than men for the same products and services: the New York City Department of Consumer and Worker Protection compared 800 products with distinct male and female versions and found that women’s products cost on average 7 percent more than similar products for men [2]. This issue isn’t just about products but also includes services like haircuts and dry cleaning. Additionally, studies like those by Goldin et al. [3] have found that women earn less than men over time, especially after having children or getting married, because they may need to work less to take care of their families as expected by society. This leads to smaller paychecks and impacts their earnings for their whole lives, especially in jobs that don’t support working part-time.

Despite more women working and making important financial decisions at home, unfair pricing and lower earnings continue to enlarge the financial disparity and reinforce hegemonic masculinity and femininity. Even though there are laws trying to fix these issues, like the Pink Tax Repeal Act, they haven’t done enough yet. More needs to be done to really change the unfair pricing and pay gaps that hold women back, as noted in works by researchers like Fahs [4] and Gagne & McGaughey [5].

3. Data and Result

The findings I presented in this article are derived from an analysis of 231 survey responses gathered through an online survey designed by the author. The survey was conducted in both English and Chinese languages to ensure accessibility and to capture a diverse range of cultural perspectives. Despite the linguistic differences, the content of the questions remained consistent across both versions.

The survey was structured into several parts: demographic backgrounds to provide contextual information; financial dynamics to assess perceptions of the gender wage gap and the pink tax; division of household chores to examine labor distribution; and personal care section to understand societal pressures on appearance.

3.1. Demographic and Descriptive Analysis

This section must be in one column. Of the 231 respondents, a significant majority (219 individuals) identified with Chinese demographics. For these 219 respondents, the distribution of survey responses varies significantly across China, with the highest concentration of respondents in Beijing and Guangzhou as shown in Figure 1.

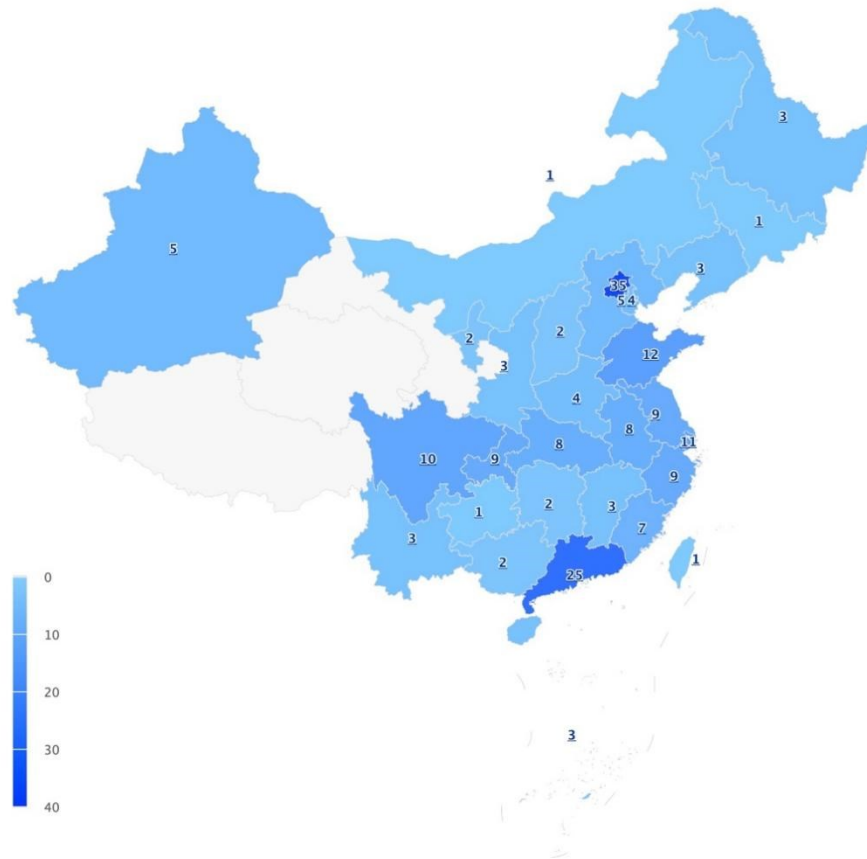


Figure 1: Distribution of Survey Respondents Across Different Provinces and Cities in China

The gender distribution was approximately 68.95% women and 30.14% men. The predominance of women in the survey could suggest women's greater interest in the survey topics.

As shown in Figure 2, the age range of respondents ranges from 18 to 59 years old. The distribution is skewed towards younger respondents, particularly in the early to mid-20s.

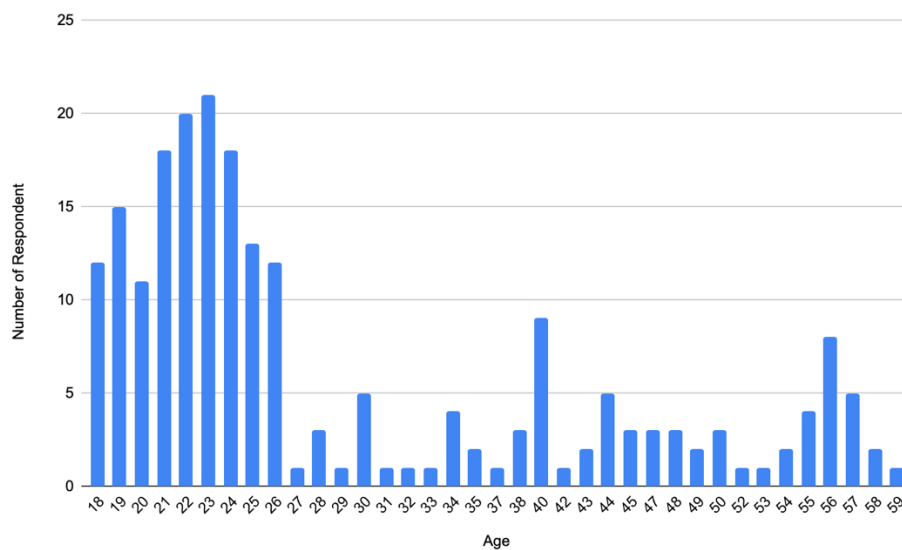


Figure 2: Age Distribution of Survey Respondents

Regarding the employment status question: 55.71% of the respondents are students, while only 33.33% were employed full-time, reflecting the younger dynamics of the survey participants.

The income data revealed diverse income levels as shown in Figure 3; the bulk of respondents appear to be clustered in the lower- and middle-income ranges, which aligns with the younger age demographics of the respondents.

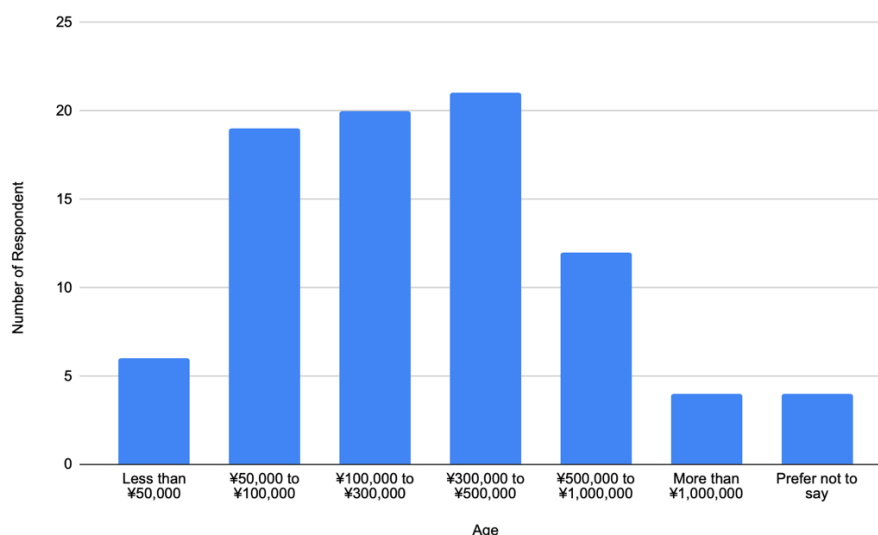


Figure 3: Income Distribution of Survey Respondents

3.2. Gender-Based Comparative Analysis

The financial dynamics in heterosexual relationships are complex and influenced by various factors including societal norms, personal beliefs, and economic conditions. Our survey explored these dynamics, particularly focusing on the gender wage gap, non-reproductive labor, and spending on personal care.

3.2.1. Existence of the Gender Wage Gap and Pink Tax

The gender wage gap can be clearly reflected in our survey. As shown in Figure 4, the mode of income for women respondents falls in the ¥100,000 to ¥300,000 bracket, while for men, it is the ¥300,000 to ¥500,000 bracket. It is obvious that the lower and middle-income ranges (Less than ¥50,000, ¥50,000 to ¥100,000, ¥100,000 to ¥300,000) have a higher percentage of women than men, and for more upper-income ranges such as ¥300,000 to ¥500,000 and ¥500,000 to ¥1,000,000, the percent of men are substantially higher than women. It is worth noting that 12.5% of women respondents fall in the category of income level less than ¥50,000 and, astonishingly, 0% of men fall in this category. All these data show the gender wage gap, indicating men are more likely to be promoted and have higher income levels.

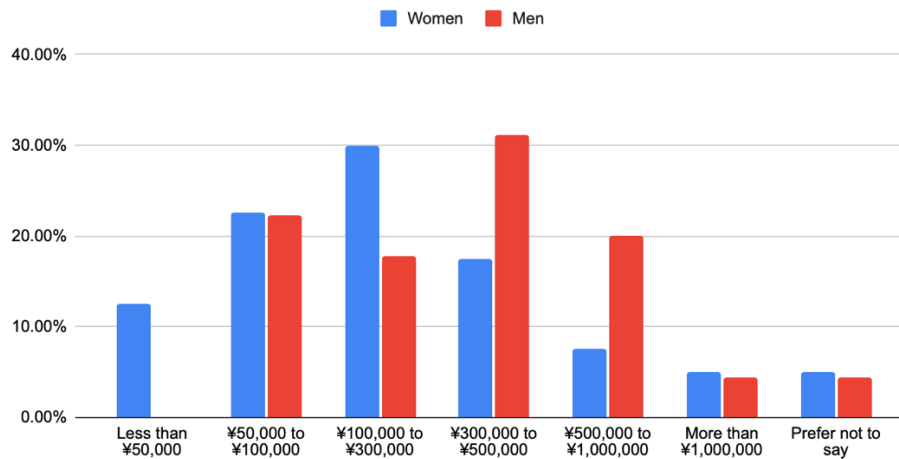


Figure 4: Gender-Based Income Distribution

The gender wage gap can also be reflected in another question “Between you and your partner, who typically earns a higher income?” The gender-based distribution of the answers is shown in Figure 5. More than 75% of men respondents reported earning more than their partners while only 20% percent of women respondents reported earning more than their partners.

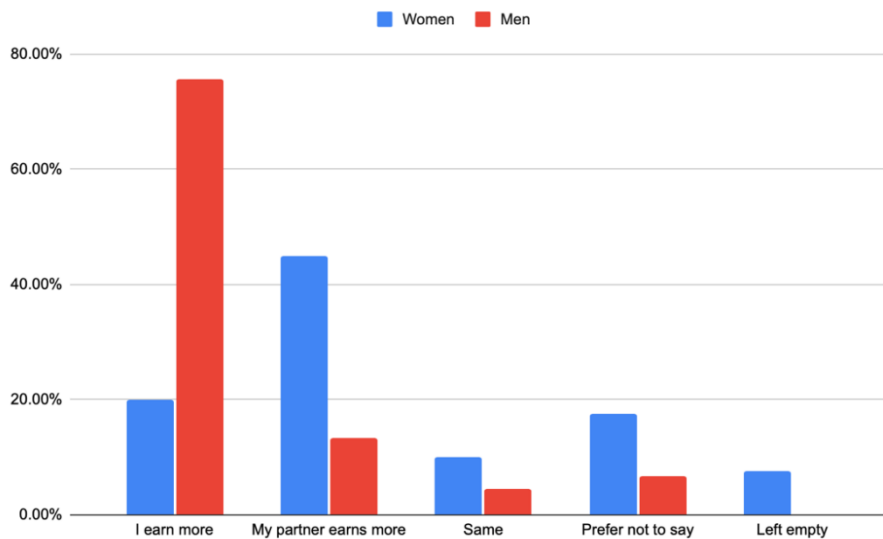


Figure 5: Perceived Income Levels Between Partners Distribution

We also asked our respondents “Are you aware of the concept of the ‘gender wage gap’?” and “Are you familiar with the term ‘pink tax’?” The gender-based distributions of the answers are shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7. About 63% of women respondents reported they are aware of the gender wage gap while about 43% of men reported they are aware of the gender wage gap. The gap between genders becomes larger when it comes to the concept of the pink tax: about 60% of women respondents reported they are familiar with the concept of the pink tax and about 9% of men respondents are familiar with the concept.

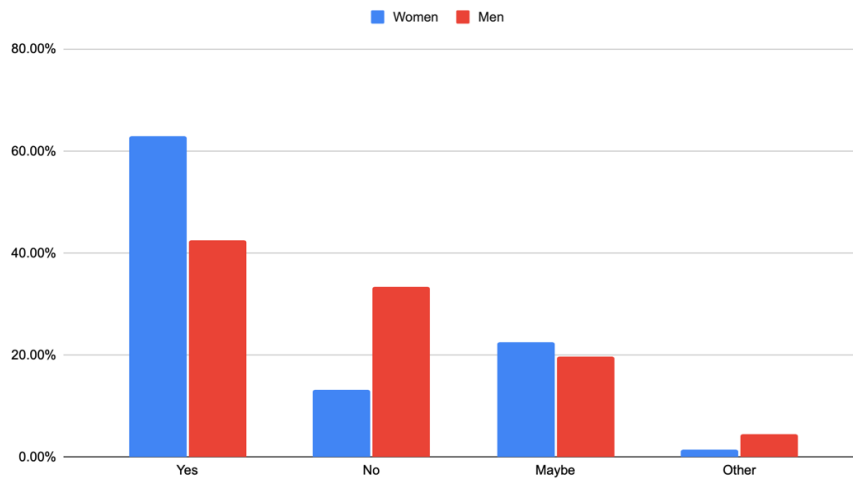


Figure 6: Gender Wage Gap Awareness Distribution

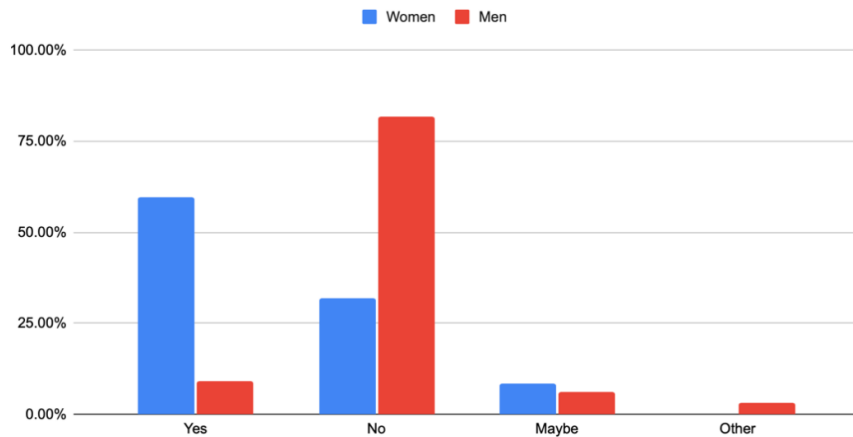


Figure 7: The Pink Tax Awareness Distribution

In the pink tax part, we further asked our respondents “Have you experienced or noticed a price difference in products marketed to women compared to those marketed to men?” The gender-based distribution of the answers is shown in Figure 8. Noticeably, more respondents answered “Yes” in this question than in the previous question – “Are you familiar with the term ‘pink tax’?” About 84% of women respondents and 47% of men respondents answered “Yes.”

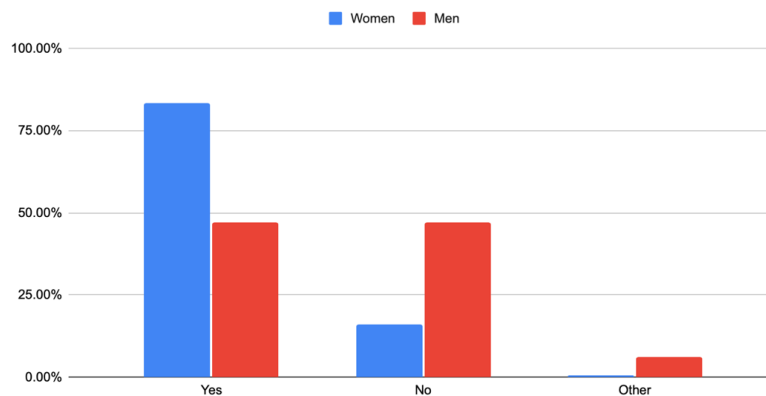


Figure 8: Awareness of Gender-Based Price Disparities in Marketed Products

3.2.2. Possible Reasons for the Gender Wage Gap

To further understand the gender wage gap, we want to find the factors, such as gender stereotypes women may meet at the workplace, resulting in a smaller chance of getting jobs than men; women's extra responsibility (compared to men) of bearing children and thus the odds of difficulty adjusting to maternity leave; the traditional norm of men being the breadwinners and women being housewives, reflecting in women taken more non-reproductive labor (chores) than their partners in heterosexual relationships and hinder their careers.

Figure 9 illustrates the distribution of the responses to the question "How are household chores divided in your relationship?" (The choice "Equally" is phrased as "About the same" in the survey). The data indicate that women are more likely to report an even distribution or handle chores exclusively by themselves, while men often report their partners as primarily responsible. From the graph, we can see notably more men respondents (27.27%) than women respondents (6.62%) reported that household chores are mostly done by their partners, and also 6.06% men respondents reported household chores are done exclusively by their partner. The data, again, reflects the traditional gender roles, but in the meantime, highlights the diversity of household arrangements.

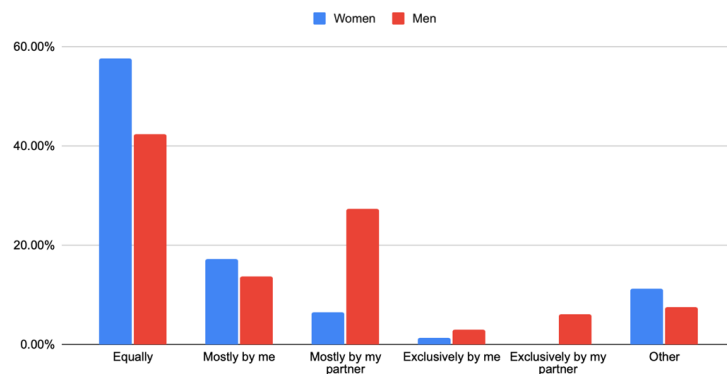


Figure 9: Distribution of Household Chore Responsibility

Another important aspect that enlarges the economic inequities between men and women is the difference in spending on personal care items and services, including nails, hair care, waxing, cosmetics, skincare, cosmetic surgery, etc.

Figure 10 reflects the distribution of responses to the question "What percentage of your monthly income do you typically spend on personal care items and services such as nails, hair care, waxing, etc.?" Figure 10 illustrates the large disparities in financial commitments to personal care, highlighting that more women allocate a significantly higher portion of their income to personal care items and services compared to men.

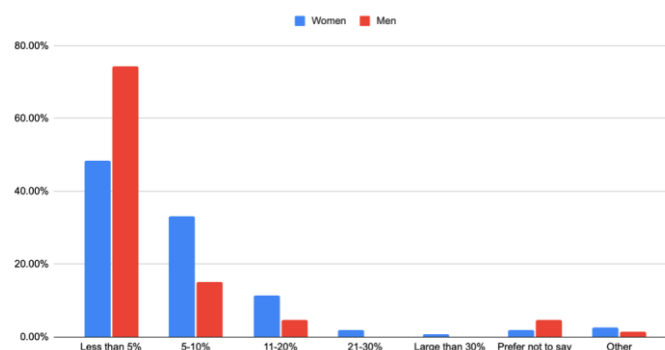


Figure 10: Percentage Spent on Personal Care Items and Services

We further asked our respondents “How often do you spend money on personal care items and services such as nails, hair, waxing, etc.?” The data is depicted in Figure 11. The data show that the frequency of women spending money on personal care is higher than men, indicating a continuous financial drain that can potentially affect long-term financial stability. Moreover, this indicates women spend not only money but also more time on personal care.

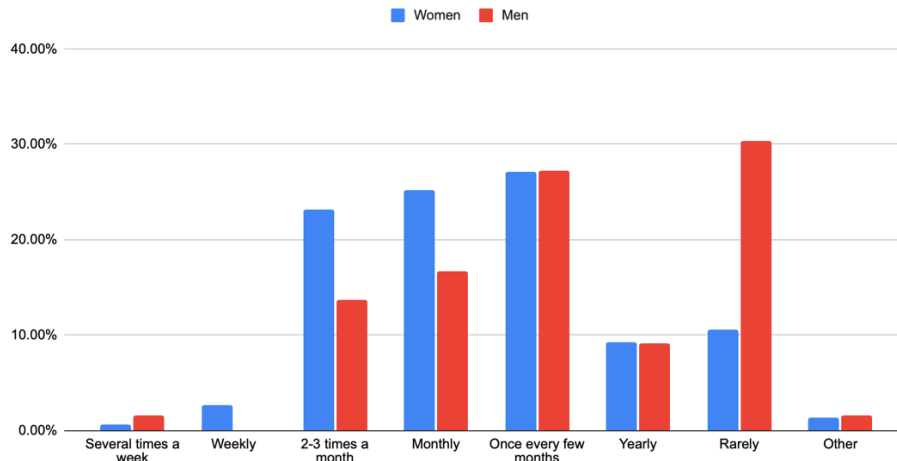


Figure 11: Frequency of Personal Care Expenditures

These patterns reflect deep-rooted societal expectations about gender presentation. The societal norm that women should maintain a particular aesthetic contributes to the economic discrepancies, as these expenditures are a substantial financial burden.

We asked our respondents “To what extent do you agree that social pressure and perceived judgments influence your spending on personal care items and services such as nails, hair care, waxing, etc.? Please rate on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates complete disagreement and 10 indicates complete agreement.” The data is shown in Figure 12. The figure shows the impact of social pressure on spending behaviors is profound (6-9), indicating that the majority of women are feeling compelled to spend more on personal care due to societal expectations. This social dynamic not only places an extra financial burden on women but also reinforces the gender wage gap by ensuring that women’s earnings are partially redirected towards maintaining socially constructed appearances rather than advancing economic independence.

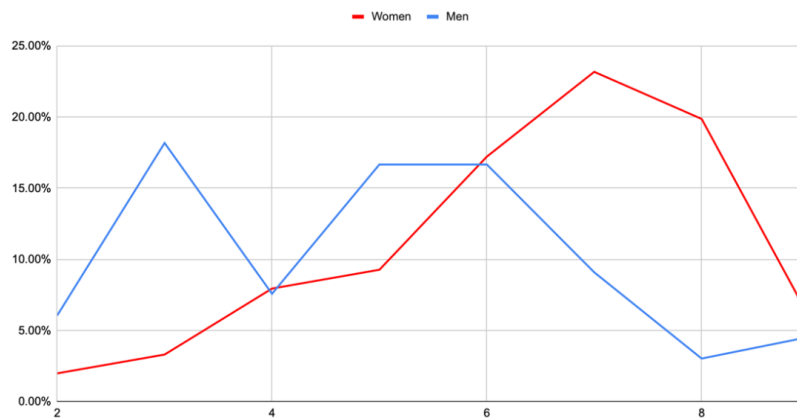


Figure 12: Impact of Social Pressure on Spending for Personal Care

In conclusion, the gendered patriarchal expectations surrounding the division of household chores and appearance contribute to the economic inequalities faced by women. These pressures not only impact social interactions but also deepen the gender wage gap.

3.3. Comparative Insights from a Global Perspective

Our study predominantly analyzed data from Chinese respondents. However, an exploration of the non-Chinese responses — 11 participants from various backgrounds including the United States, United Kingdom, and Ireland — provides a more global lens.

The non-Chinese responses offer insights that both agree and disagree with the primary dataset. For instance, similar to their Chinese part, non-Chinese respondents acknowledged the impact of societal expectations on financial dynamics within relationships. While the gender wage gap was a common concern across all demographics, the level of awareness and the perceived impact of the pink tax varied. Participants from the United States displayed a higher awareness of the pink tax, which may correlate with the broader discussions on gendered pricing in Western media.

4. Limitations and Future Directions

This study is subject to several limitations. First, the demographic composition of our respondents, predominantly young and from China, may not provide a full representation. Additionally, the survey's reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of response biases, where participants might provide answers they perceive as socially acceptable rather than their true beliefs or behaviors.

Future research should aim to include a more diverse and extensive sample. Moreover, qualitative studies could be conducted more to gain deeper insights into the perceptions behind financial practices in relationships, providing a richer contextual understanding.

5. Conclusion

This investigation into the gender dynamics within heterosexual relationships reveals a complicated landscape of economic inequities driven by deeply rooted societal norms. The findings from our survey reinforce the pervasive impact of the gender wage gap, compounded by the additional financial burdens placed on women due to gendered expectations. Our analysis illustrates that the norms of “men should pay bills” can be seen as compensation within the framework of a patriarchal society. This norm serves not only as a reflection of traditional gender roles but also as a form of economic exchange, where financial contributions are weighed against non-reproductive labor and societal expectations. However, while it appears to balance the scales, it reinforces the economic disparity and hegemonic masculinity and femininity since financial and domestic contributions are unevenly valued and recognized. Our study prompts a broader consideration of how societal structures and individual practices can evolve to foster a more equitable distribution of both economic and domestic responsibilities. Also, this research contributes to a growing dialogue that aims to dismantle the patriarchal backbone of our societal constructs.

So, should men pay the bills? As this norm acts as a form of compensation within the patriarchal framework, it seems justified as long as there remains a disparity to be compensated for. However, this practice should not be viewed as a permanent solution but rather as a temporary measure. Ideally, efforts should focus on the causes of economic and social inequities, paving the way for a future where such compensatory practices are no longer necessary.

References

- [1] Emmers-Sommer, T. M., Farrell, J., Gentry, A., Stevens, S., Eckstein, J., Battocletti, J., & Gardener, C. (2010). *First Date Sexual Expectations: The Effects of Who Asked, Who Paid, Date Location, and Gender*. *Communication Studies*, 61(3), 339–355. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510971003752676>
- [2] Joint Economic Committee. *The Pink Tax - How Gender-Based Pricing Hurts Women's Buying Power*. Accessed: 2023-12-31. 2015. url: https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/8a42df04-8b6d-4949-b20b-6f40a326db9e/the-pink-tax---how-gender-based-pricing-hurts-women-s-buying-power.pdf.
- [3] Claudia Goldin et al. "The Expanding Gender Earnings Gap: Evidence from the LEHD-2000 Census". In: *American Economic Review* 107.5 (May 2017), pp. 110–14. doi:10.1257/aer.p20171065. url: <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.p20171065>.
- [4] Breanne Fahs. "Dreaded "Otherness": Heteronormative Patrolling in Women's Body Hair Rebellions". In: *Gender & Society* 25.4 (2011), pp. 451–472. doi: 10.1177/0891243211414877.
- [5] P. Gagn'e and D. McGaughey. "Designing Women: Cultural Hegemony and the Exercise of Power among Women Who Have Undergone Elective Mammoplasty". In: *Gender & Society* 16.6 (2002), pp. 814–838. doi: 10.1177/089124302237890. url: <https://doi.org/10.1177/089124302237890>.

Appendix

The complete dataset of the survey responses, Chinese version and English version re can be accessed online at:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1nuckETlea3VVE7kxJf17XhqckxCsZVwa/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109390490146096914046&rtpof=true&sd=true>

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16OvM8genEshP_APnMVcmMcDZT8WmWefece9bKsC21IE/edit?usp=sharing