

# **The Pink Tax on Transportation**

## **Women's Challenges in Mobility**

**Sarah M. Kaufman, Christopher F. Polack,  
and Gloria A. Campbell**

**November 2018**



**Supported By:**



# Introduction

Women report day-to-day experiences of harassment, catcalling and general discomfort, much of it on transportation systems, affecting their sense of safety and self-worth. This report, prepared by the NYU Rudin Center for Transportation, is based on an online survey of New Yorkers conducted in September-October, 2018.

The term “woman” is inclusive of all female forms, including cis, trans and female-presenting.

## The Pink Tax

The Pink Tax is a form of gender-based price discrimination<sup>1</sup>. It is the extra amount that women pay for certain products, such as deodorant, and services, including dry cleaning. A study conducted by the New York City Department of Consumer Affairs found that on average, women’s products cost 7% more than similar products for men<sup>2</sup>.

This report seeks to determine whether and how the Pink Tax applies to Transportation in New York City.

## Survey

To learn more about women’s experiences while traversing New York City, the NYU Rudin Center for Transportation deployed a survey, which was shared online at SurveyMonkey for approximately six weeks during September and early October, 2018.

The survey’s 33 questions asked users about travel habits, safety on transportation, costs of travel, caretaker trips, and demographic information. The survey did not request any personally identifiable information.

There were 547 complete survey responses. The

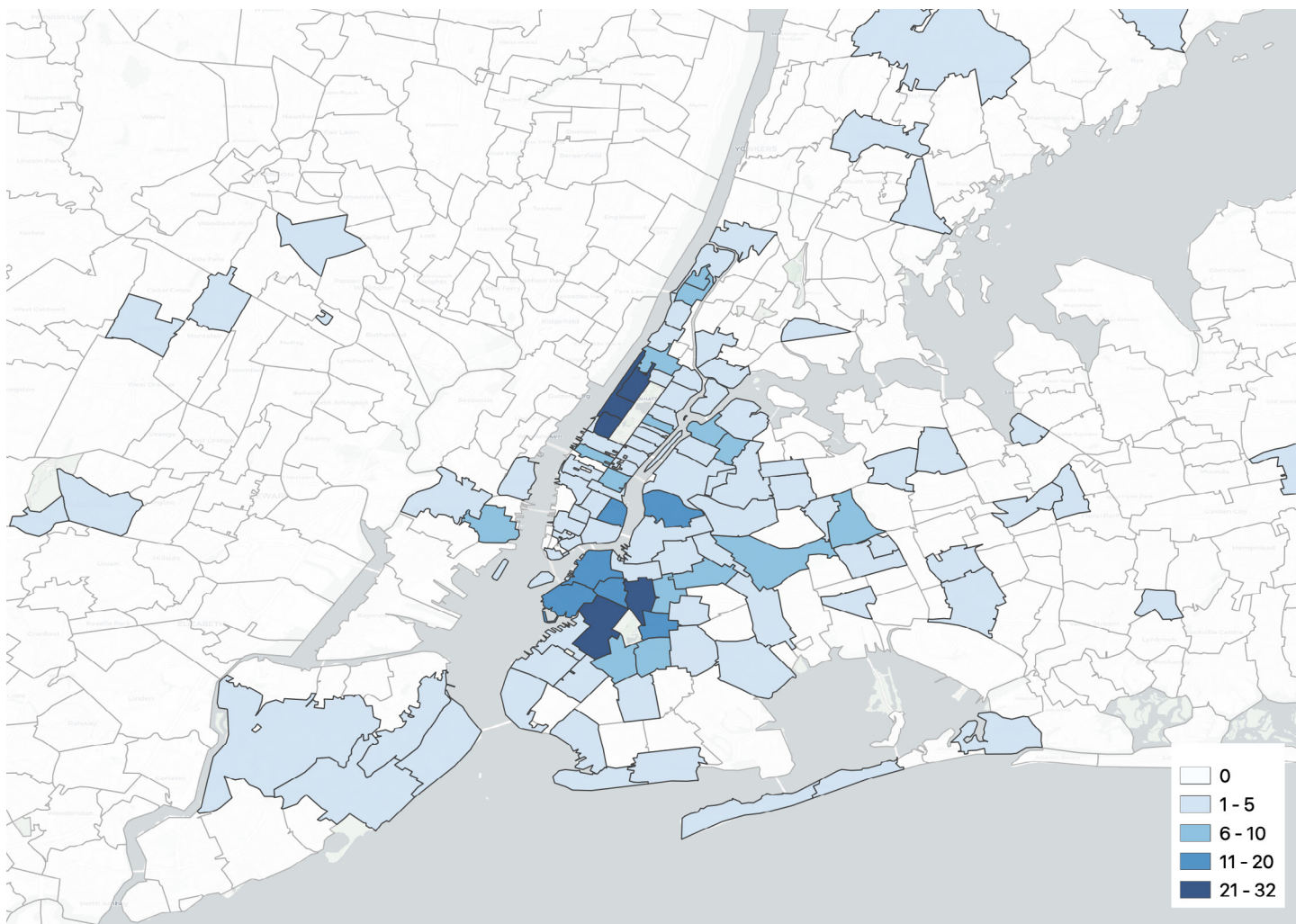
following map (Figure 1) shows the geographic distribution of survey responses, based on a question asking respondents for their home ZIP code. Note that there were several responses in outlying areas that are not shown on the map—the map provides detailed response information for the New York City area only. The following graphs (Figures 2, 3, & 4) provide a demographic profile of the survey respondents.

The survey respondents consist of a subset of the NYC population, one that is not entirely representative of the entire city’s residents. They include primarily college-educated individuals—93.4% have a college degree or higher—and are geographically concentrated in specific areas of the city, including the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This is reflected in the subway line ridership results, which show unusually high ridership along the 1 line. Detailed results of the survey are presented in the following sections.

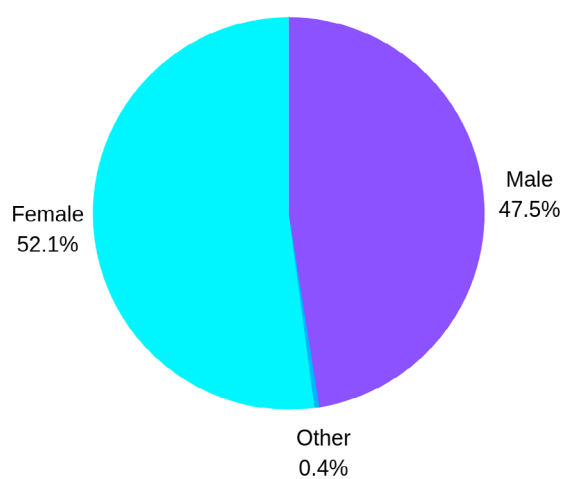
Question 4 asked respondents which subway line they take the most frequently. The results are shown in Figure 5 on page 4.

In order to understand the types of users participating in the survey, Question 2 of the survey asked, “What is your regular mode of transit during the day (6 a.m. - 8 p.m.), such as to your place of work or school? (Select all that apply).” The results are shown in Figure 6 on page 4. Upwards of 89% of survey respondents regularly use public transportation. Respondents who use walking, public transit, private car, and ferry as primary modes are evenly split by gender. However, 77% of taxi users are female, 73% of for-hire vehicle users are female, and 67% of bike users are male.

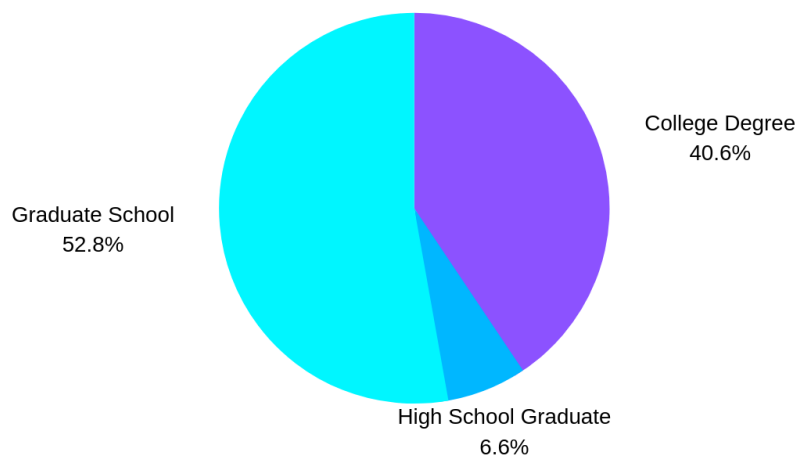
<sup>1, 2</sup> “From Cradle to Cane: The Cost of Being a Female Consumer”, NYC Department of Consumer Affairs, 2017



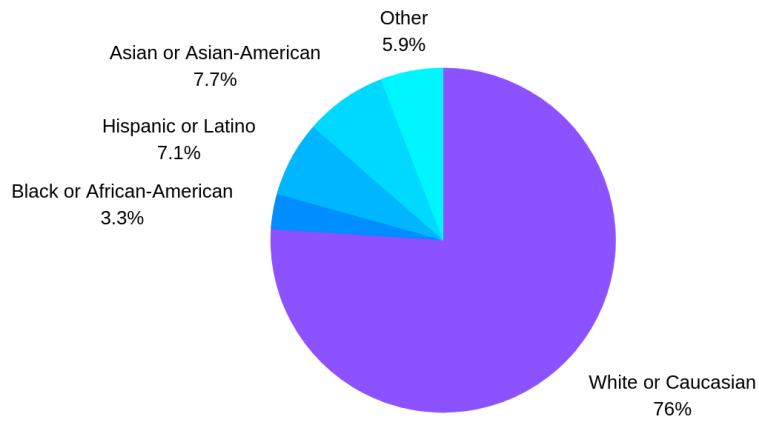
**Figure 1:** Distribution of Responses by ZIP Code in NYC Area



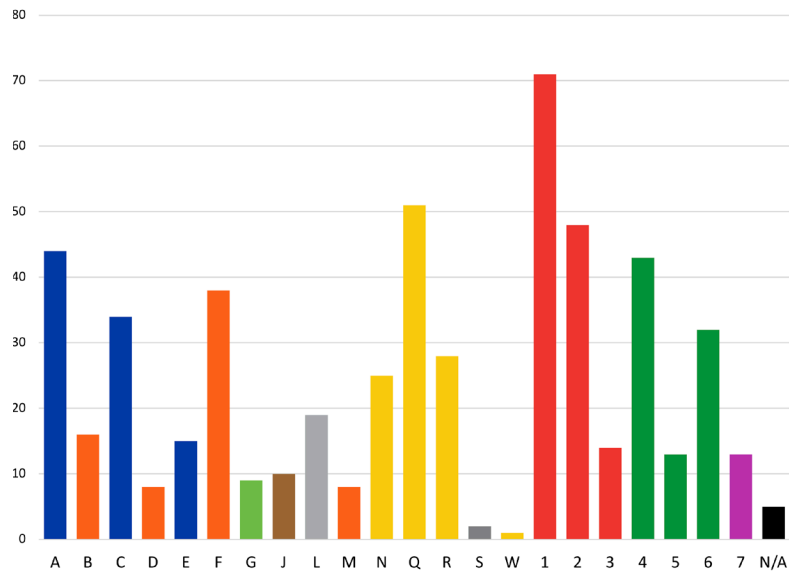
**Figure 2:** Responses to, "What is your gender?"



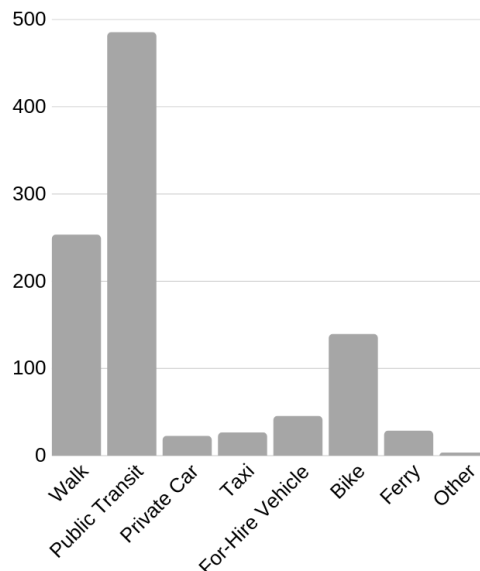
**Figure 3:** Responses to, "What is the highest level of education you have completed?"



**Figure 4:** Responses to, “Which race/ethnicity best describes you?”



**Figure 5:** Respondent Subway Usage by Service. The Z line is implicitly included with the J line.



**Figure 6:** Respondent regular daytime mode of transit

# Safety on Public Transportation

According to the survey results, 75% of female responses indicated some form of harassment or theft while using public transportation. By contrast, 47% of male responses indicated some form of harassment or theft while using public transportation. Approximately 86% of harassment incidents occur on the subway system, of which 76% occur on the trains (as opposed to on the platform or turnstile area). Most incidents occurred during rush hour (38%), when trains are crowded, as opposed to late night or off-peak hours.

Question 17 asked respondents how many times they had experienced harassment. Most respondents had trouble quantifying the exact number and provided answers like, “Too many to count,” “Not sure - it’s taken place over my entire life,” and “Countless.”

**88% of those who have experienced harassment did not report the incident to authorities.**

Several respondents shared the sentiment that reporting the incident would have no effect. One respondent explained, “I didn’t bother because I didn’t think they would do anything.” Another respondent answered, “The notion of reporting everyday harassment to the authorities is bizarre to me. What would they do?”

For those respondents who did report to authorities, a follow-up question asked respondents about the outcome. One respondent answered, “After waiting in line to speak with the person in the booth, a train passed through the station, so I was told the person who harassed me had probably already left and it wasn’t worth calling the police. I then took a cab

home.” Another summarized the outcome of many investigations: “they did nothing.”

## Perceptions of Safety

More than half (54%) of female respondents are concerned about being harassed while using public transportation, compared to only 20% of male respondents.

For late night travel, most respondents feel safest using for-hire vehicles (42%), followed by taxis (16%), and then public transportation (15%).

**Conclusion: These real and perceived threats have a notable impact on transit users’ opinions of safety on public transportation.**

However, more frequent subway users are more likely to feel safe on public transportation late at night. Of those who use the subway several times per week, 17% feel safest using public transportation, while no respondent who uses the subway less than once per month said they feel safest on public transportation during late nights.

Almost half (49%) of frequent (multiple trips per week) subway users have experienced harassment compared to 34% for less frequent, monthly subway users.

**Conclusion: More frequent users of public transportation are more likely to have experienced harassment or theft.**

Approximately 13% of female respondents said they dress differently, and 29% do not take public transportation late at night as a result of a perceived safety threat. In comparison, only 3% of male respondents dress differently and 8% do not take public transportation late at night for the same reason.

**Conclusion: Women are more likely than men to change their behavior in order to avoid harassment.**

The results of the survey conclude that using alternative modes of transportation at night for safety reasons adds to monthly travel expenses for women.

**The median extra cost per month for men, due to safety reasons, is \$0.**

**On the other hand, the median extra cost per month for women is \$26-\$50.**

# Women as Caretakers

Nationally, women make up 75% of caregivers<sup>3</sup>, though we do not have comparable data for New York City. Additional trips, including taking young children to school and elderly relatives to appointments, add up in cost. Most survey respondents who take frequent caregiver trips add more than \$75 to their monthly travel expenses (Figure 7).

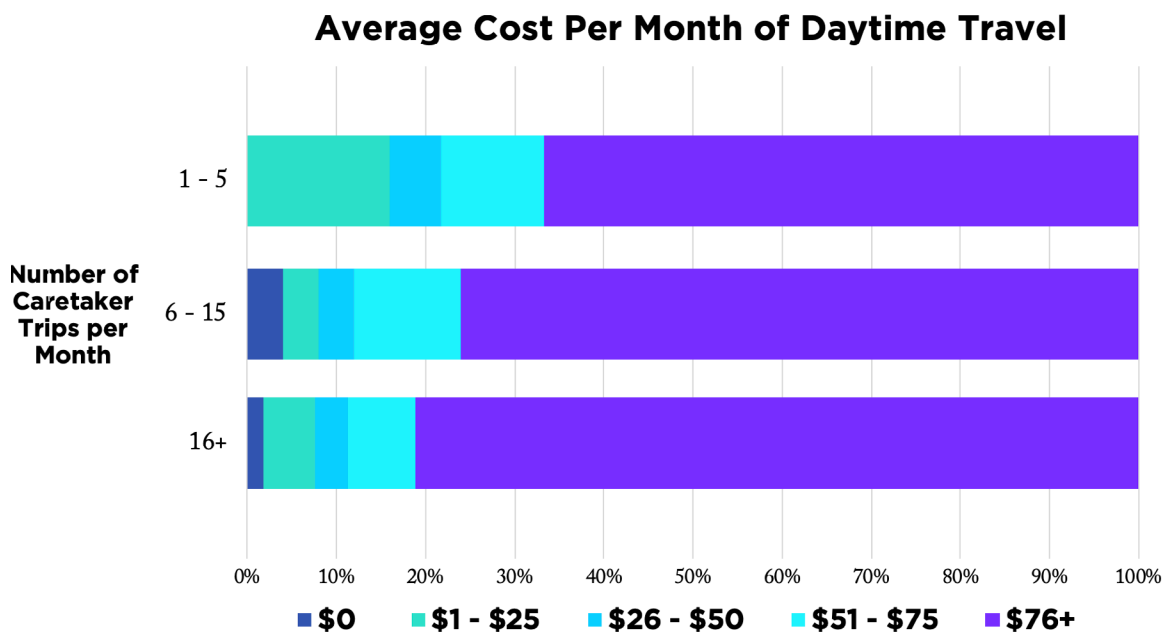
Furthermore, caregiver travel is a challenge with public transportation. One survey respondent commented: “It is REALLY hard to get around the city with children even as an able-bodied person, particularly with multiple children.”

It is both physically and economically costly to be responsible for caretaker trips.

## The Pink Tax on Caregiving

In sum, women spend an additional \$26-\$50 per month for safety reasons and caretakers spend an additional \$26-\$50 for caretaker trips.

**We estimate that the Pink Tax on women caregivers in New York City can reach up to \$100 per month in addition to regular travel expenses.**



**Figure 7:** Number of respondents paying more than \$75 per month increases as caretaker trips increase

<sup>3</sup> Caregiver Statistics: Demographics, Family Caregiver Alliance, 2016

# Discussion Panel

The NYU Rudin Center for Transportation hosted a panel discussion about the survey results and, in general, women's challenges in mobility, on October 30, 2018.

The panelists were:

- ▶ Helen Rosenthal, New York City Council-woman and Chair, City Council Committee on Women — who generously offered to host the panel
- ▶ Sally Librera, Senior Vice President, Subways, MTA New York City Transit
- ▶ Brittany Kendrick, Co-Founder, Safer-Together
- ▶ Christine Serdjenian Yearwood, Founder and CEO, UP-STAND
- ▶ Karla Gonzalez Carvajal, Leading Manager for Gender in Transport, World Bank

In the discussion, themes that emerged included:

- ▶ The need for women in leadership positions for transportation design and management
- ▶ Challenges of police-averse populations to assume assistance from authorities

- ▶ Sensitivity training for first responders
- ▶ The importance of safety for women to participate in the economy, as they cannot travel to jobs that may pose a risk to safety
- ▶ The lack of accessibility that led to pregnant women and parents with young children suffering health and economic costs for their inability to navigate mass transit

## Recommendations

Recommendations that emerged from the panel included:

- ▶ Technological: Improved safety, monitoring and reporting tools on public transportation
- ▶ Leadership: Women should lead transit station and safety systems to build in safety from the start
- ▶ Reporting: First responders should be better trained to help victims
- ▶ Equity: Victims with equity concerns, such as tense relationships with law enforcement



# Further Study

The NYU Rudin Center for Transportation plans to conduct a second iteration of the survey. This second survey will aim at a more diverse user base to provide a wider range of experiences.

Several opportunities for further study include ongoing and proposed work in these areas:

- ▶ Public transit safety improvements:
  - ▷ Security cameras in train cars and buses
  - ▷ On-board safety procedures, including texting the bus control center with a specific code (currently in Mexico City)
- ▶ For-hire vehicle safety improvements:
  - ▷ Subsidized work-related e-hail rides late at night, currently provided by Lyft in Michigan and Medford, NJ
  - ▷ Well-lit for-hire vehicle pickup points, provided by Uber in some locations

- ▶ Startup ecosystem:

- ▷ Building out startup services for safety assurance, including Safer-Together and e-Bodyguard, and developing collaboration between these organizations and public transportation providers

- ▶ Educational opportunities:

- ▷ Training law enforcement and allies to improve response
  - ▷ Developing family-friendly policies for public transportation, including clear messaging on priority seating

The Rudin Center for Transportation is committed to improving our understanding of the way in which women use and experience transportation in New York City.

We welcome comments and suggestions which can be sent to Sarah Kaufman, Associate Director, Rudin Center for Transportation, at [rudin.center@nyu.edu](mailto:rudin.center@nyu.edu).