

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack II

Daily effects of straight and cisgender privilege: This article is based on Peggy McIntosh's article on white privilege. These dynamics are but a few examples of the privilege which straight people have. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer-identified folk have a range of different experiences, but cannot count on most of these conditions in their lives.

Sexual Orientation

On a daily basis, as a straight person...

- I can go for months without being called straight.
- I am not asked to think about why I am straight.
- I am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.
- People don't ask why I made my choice of sexual orientation.
- People don't ask why I made my choice to be public about my sexual orientation.
- Nobody calls me straight as an insult.
- People do not assume I am experienced in sex (or that I even have it!) merely because of my sexual orientation.
- If I pick up a magazine, watch TV, or play music, I can be certain my sexual orientation will be represented.
- When I talk about my heterosexuality (such as in a joke or talking about my relationships), I will not be accused of pushing my sexual orientation onto others.
- I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical or psychological consequences.
- I can go home from most meetings, classes, and conversations without feeling excluded, fearful, attacked, isolated, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, stereotyped or feared because of my sexual orientation.
- I can be sure that my classes will require curricular materials that testify to the existence of people with my sexual orientation.
- I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for being heterosexual.
- I can count on finding a therapist or doctor willing and able to talk about my sexuality.
- I am guaranteed to find sex education literature for couples with my sexual orientation.
- Because of my sexual orientation, I do not need to worry that people will harass or assault me.
- My masculinity/femininity is not challenged because of my sexual orientation.
- I am not identified/defined by my sexual orientation.
- If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has sexual orientation overtones.
- I can hold hands or kiss in public with my significant other and not have people double-take or stare.
- I can choose to not think politically about my sexual orientation.
- I did not grow up with games that attack my sexual orientation (IE fag tag or smear the queer).
- People can use terms that describe my sexual orientation and mean positive things (IE "straight as an arrow", "standing up straight" or "straightened out") instead of demeaning terms (IE "ewww, that's gay" or being "queer").
- I can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.

Adapted from http://www.cs.earlham.edu/~hyrax/personal/files/student_res/straightprivilege.htm

Gender Identity

On a daily basis, as a cisgendered person...

- Strangers don't assume they can ask me what my genitals look like and how I have sex.
- My validity as a man/woman/human is not based upon how much surgery I've had or how well I "pass" as a non-transperson.
- When initiating sex with someone, I do not have to worry that they won't be able to deal with my parts or that having sex with me will cause my partner to question his or her own sexual orientation.
- I am not excluded from events which are either explicitly or de facto* men-born-men or women-born-women only. (*basically anything involving nudity)
- My politics are not questioned based on the choices I make with regard to my body.
- I don't have to hear "so have you had THE surgery?" or "oh, so you're REALLY a [incorrect sex or gender]?" each time I come out to someone.
- I am not expected to constantly defend my medical decisions.
- Strangers do not ask me what my "real name" [birth name] is and then assume that they have a right to call me by that name.
- People do not disrespect me by using incorrect pronouns even after they've been corrected.
- I do not have to worry that someone wants to be my friend or have sex with men order to prove his or her "hipness" or good politics.
- I do not have to worry about whether I will be able to find a bathroom to use or whether I will be safe changing in a locker room.
- When engaging in political action, I do not have to worry about the *gendered* repercussions of being arrested. (i.e. what will happen to me if the cops find out that my genitals do not match my gendered appearance? Will I end up in a cell with people of my own gender?)
- I do not have to defend my right to be a part of "Queer" and gays and lesbians will not try to exclude me from OUR movement in order to gain political legitimacy for themselves.
- My experience of gender (or gendered spaces) is not viewed as "baggage" by others of the gender in which I live.
- I do not have to choose between either invisibility ("passing") or being consistently "othered" and/or tokenized based on my gender.
- I am not told that my sexual orientation and gender identity are mutually exclusive.
- When I go to the gym or a public pool, I can use the showers.
- If I end up in the emergency room, I do not have to worry that my gender will keep me from receiving appropriate treatment nor will all of my medical issues be seen as a product of my gender. ("Your nose is running and your throat hurts? Must be due to the hormones!")
- My health insurance provider (or public health system) does not specifically exclude me from receiving benefits or treatments available to others because of my gender.
- When I express my internal identities in my daily life, I am not considered "mentally ill" by the medical establishment.
- I am not required to undergo extensive psychological evaluation in order to receive basic medical care.
- The medical establishment does not serve as a "gatekeeper" which disallows self-determination of what happens to my body.
- People do not use me as a scapegoat for their own unresolved gender issues.

Adapted from http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/gsc/downloads/resources/Gender_Privilege.pdf