

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack II

Sexual Orientation

Daily effects of straight privilege

This article is based on Peggy McIntosh's article on white privilege and was written by a number of straight-identified students at Earlham College who got together to look at some examples of straight privilege. These dynamics are but a few examples of the privilege which straight people have. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer-identified folk have a range of different experiences, but cannot count on most of these conditions in their lives.

On a daily basis as a straight person...

- I can be pretty sure that my roommate, hallmates and classmates will be comfortable with 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 did not grow up with games that attack my sexual orientation (IE fag tag or smear the queer).
- I am not accused of being abused, warped or psychologically confused because of my sexual orientation.
- 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 am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.
- I can be sure that my classes will require curricular materials that testify to the existence of people with my sexual orientation.
- 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.
- I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It's assumed.
- My sexual orientation was never associated with a closet.
- People of my gender do not try to convince me to change my sexual orientation.
- I don't have to defend my heterosexuality.

- 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 me.
- I have no need to qualify my straight identity.
- My masculinity/femininity is not challenged because of my sexual orientation.
- I am not identified by my sexual orientation.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my sexual orientation will not work against me.
- 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.
- Whether I rent or I go to a theater, Blockbuster, an EFS or TOFS movie, I can be sure I will not have trouble finding my sexual orientation represented.
- I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented in the Earlham curriculum, faculty, and administration.
- I can walk 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 do not have to worry about telling my roommate about my sexuality. It is assumed I am a heterosexual.
- I can remain oblivious of the language and culture of LGBTQ folk without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- I can go for months without being called straight.
- I'm not grouped because of my sexual orientation.
- My individual behavior does not reflect on people who identify as heterosexual.
- In everyday conversation, the language my friends and I use generally assumes my sexual orientation. For example, sex inappropriately referring to only heterosexual sex or family meaning heterosexual relationships with kids.
- People do not assume I am experienced in sex (or that I even have it!) merely because of my sexual orientation.
- I can kiss a person of the opposite gender on the cheek or in the cafeteria without being watched and stared at.
- Nobody calls me straight with maliciousness.
- 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 am not asked to think about why I am straight.
- I can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.