

Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack II - Sexual Orientation*:

Daily effects of straight privilege

This is an opportunity to consider the automatic and often invisible tools, resources, conditions, experiences, and preference you enjoy based on identifying as straight or heterosexual. While reading, consider what it might be like if your journey did *not* include this invisible knapsack of necessities.

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 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, stereotyped or feared because of my sexual orientation.
- I am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.
- My sexual orientation is not considered a choice and I do not 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.
- Because of my sexual orientation, I do not need to worry that people will harass me.
- 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 I watch a movie or television, I can be sure I will find my sexual orientation represented.
- I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented at my job, church, school and home.
- I can walk in public with my significant other and not have people double-take or stare.
- My sexual orientation and political agenda are not lumped together.
- I do not have to worry about telling my roommate about my sexuality. It is assumed I am a heterosexual.
- 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 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 can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.

*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.