

Heterosexual Privilege¹

The following are but a few examples of the privilege which heterosexual 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 heterosexual person:

- If I pick up a magazine, watch movies or TV shows, go to the theatre or play music, I can be certain my sexual orientation will be represented.
- I have positive role models of my sexual orientation.
- I grew up thinking my romantic feelings towards others were perfectly normal and healthy.
- In everyday conversation, the language my friends and I use generally assumes my sexual orientation. For example, “sex” referring to only heterosexual sex or “family” meaning heterosexual relationships with kids.
- I was able to put pictures of my “crush” up in my locker when I was in high school, and talk to my friends about him / her.
- I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It’s assumed, and it has never been associated with a closet.
- I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical and psychological consequences.
- 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.
- I am not accused of being abused, warped or psychologically confused because of my sexual orientation, or of wanting to recruit others (particularly children) into my lifestyle.
- I am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.
- I am not asked why I chose my sexual orientation, or why I made my choice to be public about it. I don’t have to defend it, and nobody tries to convince me to change it.
- I do not need to worry that people will harass me or assault me because of my sexual orientation.
- I can go for months without being called heterosexual, nobody calls me heterosexual with maliciousness, and people can use terms that describe my sexual orientation as a positive (i.e. “straight as an arrow”, “standing up straight” or “straightened out”) instead of a negative (i.e. “ewww, that’s gay” or being “queer”).
- I’m not grouped because of my sexual orientation.
- People do not assume I am experienced in sex or am sexually promiscuous (or that I even have sex!) merely because of my sexual orientation.
- I can choose to not think politically about 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 to talk about my sexuality.
- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help my sexual orientation will not work against me.

¹ Heterosexual Privilege is based on “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack” by Peggy McIntosh, in 1989. “[White Privilege](#),” dealt with the unacknowledged privileges of being white. Among Caucasians, there were many special and unearned assets that accrued because of their skin color, but about which white people remained largely oblivious. It is no different for the LGBTQ community. The adapted version was written by students at Earlham College, and modified January 2006 by Karla Stewart, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit.

- I can walk hand-in-hand in public with my partner, or kiss him/her goodbye at the airport and not have people stare at us, talk about us, insult or assault us.
- I can talk freely to others about my relationship with my partner, our vacation or our plans for the future.
- I can marry my partner without public controversy, and enjoy all the social, legal and financial benefits that go along with being married.
- My partner and I can find appropriate anniversary cards for each other in any store.
- My partner and I can attend family functions together, and my partner is included in family photographs.
- My partner and I can easily find appropriate housing, and we can expect that our neighbours will be friendly or at least neutral toward us.
- My partner and I can comfortably purchase a “couples membership” at a gym or fitness centre.
- I am easily able to find sex education literature for couples with my sexual orientation.
- My partner and I can adopt children, or have children by in vitro fertilization or artificial insemination, without being criticized and without our motives being questioned.
- My partner and I can parent our children without threat of intervention by child protection agencies based on our sexual orientation.
- I do not have to worry about telling my co-workers about my sexuality. It is assumed I am a heterosexual.
- I can be pretty sure that my co-workers will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.
- I can go home from work 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 reference materials used in my work setting reflect the existence of people with my sexual orientation.
- I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented in my workplace.
- I can be open about my sexual orientation without worrying about my job.
- I am not identified by my sexuality in my workplace (e.g., “that heterosexual nurse”).
- If my partner was to die, I would have paid bereavement leave from my job. My name would automatically be included in the obituary as his/her survivor.