

Examining Personal Power and Privilege

Peggy McIntosh describes privilege as “an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in on each day, but about which I was “meant” to remain oblivious. In fact, privilege is an invisible weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, codebooks, pass ports, visas, clothes, emergency gear and blank checks” (Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack).

Take a moment to think about where you have power and privilege. Check each statement that applies to your experience.

- The leader of my country is also a person of my racial group
- When learning about our national heritage or “civilization” in school, I am shown that people of my gender made it what it is.
- When going shopping, I can easily find clothes that fit my size and shape.
- Most everywhere I go, I can kiss or hold hands with the person I am dating without fear of name – calling or violence.
- When I grew up, I always knew I would have a home/apartment to live in.
- I can go into stores/shopping malls and be fairly certain I will not be followed or harassed by sales or security people.
- I can use a public restroom without much thought and feel safe.
- Most of the religious and/or cultural holidays celebrated by my family and me are recognized with days off from work/school.
- When expressing my opinion, I am not automatically assumed to be a representative or spokesperson of my race.
- When I am angry or emotional, people do not dismiss my opinions/concerns as symptoms of “that time of the month”.
- I can easily buy posters, greeting cards, or magazines that represent my relationship with my significant other.
- I can easily find hair products and/or people who know how to cut my hair.
- In my family, obtaining a college degree is seen as normal or expected.

- If I am going out to dinner with friends, I do not worry whether the building is accessible to me.
- I can be open about who I am and be around people's kids and not have them be suspicious of me.
- I'm fairly certain I can attend any event and know there will be people of my race present.
- People do not make assumptions about my intelligence or work ethic based on the size and shape of my body
- When I strongly state my opinion, it is usually seen as assertive not as aggressive.
- When I am with others of my race, people do not think we are segregating ourselves or causing trouble.
- I can usually afford, without much hardship, to do the things my friends want to do for entertainment.
- When filling out forms for school or work, I am represented in the boxes I am asked to check for identification.
- I can choose the style of dress I am most comfortable in and feel it reflects my personality and identity, and know I will not be perceived by people as a threat to them.
- If pulled over in traffic by a police officer, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I do not worry about walking alone at night.
- When I speak, people do not make assumptions about my intelligence based upon my style of speech.
- When attending classes or other events, I do not have to worry about having an interpreter present to understand or participate.
- I can book an airline flight, go to a movie or ride in a car and not worry about whether there will be a seat that will accommodate me.
- People assume I was hired or was admitted to school because of my credentials rather than because of race or gender.
- As a child, I could use the "flesh" colored crayons to color my family and myself and it more or less match our skin color.