

The Male Privilege Checklist

An Unabashed Imitation of an article by Peggy McIntosh

In 1990, Wellesley College professor Peggy McIntosh wrote an essay called “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack”. McIntosh observes that whites in the U.S. are “taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness, not in invisible systems conferring dominance on my group.” To illustrate these invisible systems, McIntosh wrote a list of 26 invisible privileges whites benefit from.

As McIntosh points out, men also tend to be unaware of their own privileges as men. In the spirit of McIntosh’s essay, I thought I’d compile a list similar to McIntosh’s, focusing on the invisible privileges benefiting men.

Due to my own limitations, this list is unavoidably U.S. centric. I hope that writers from other cultures will create new lists, or modify this one, to reflect their own experiences.

Since I first compiled it, the list has been posted many times on internet discussion groups. Very helpfully, many people have suggested additions to the checklist. More commonly, of course, critics (usually, but not exclusively, male) have pointed out men have disadvantages too – being drafted into the army, being expected to suppress emotions, and so on. These are indeed bad things – but I never claimed that life for men is all ice cream sundaes.

Obviously, there are individual exceptions to most problems discussed on the list. The existence of individual exceptions does not mean that general problems are not a concern.

Pointing out that men are privileged *in no way denies that bad things happen to men*. Being privileged does not mean men are given everything in life for free; being privileged does not mean that men do not work hard, do not suffer. In many cases – from a boy being bullied in school, to soldiers selecting male civilians to be executed, to male workers dying of exposure to unsafe chemicals – the sexist society that maintains male privilege also immeasurably harms boys and men.

However, although I don’t deny that men suffer, *this* post is focused on advantages men experience. Several critics have also argued that the list somehow victimizes women. I disagree; pointing out problems is not the same as perpetuating them. It is not a “victimizing” position to acknowledge that injustice exists; on the contrary, without that acknowledgment it isn’t possible to fight injustice.

An internet acquaintance of mine once wrote, “The first big privilege which whites, males, people in upper economic classes, the able bodied, the straight (I think one or two of those will cover most of us) can work to alleviate is the privilege to be oblivious to privilege.” This checklist is, I hope, a step towards helping men to give up the “first big privilege.”

The Male Privilege Checklist

1. My odds of being hired for a job, when competing against female applicants, are probably skewed in my favor. The more prestigious the job, the larger the odds are skewed.
2. I can be confident that my co-workers won’t think I got my job because of my sex – even though that might be true.
3. If I am never promoted, it’s not because of my sex.

4. If I fail in my job or career, I can feel sure this won't be seen as a black mark against my entire sex's capabilities.
5. I am far less likely to face sexual harassment at work than my female co-workers are.
6. If I do the same task as a woman, and if the measurement is at all subjective, chances are people will think I did a better job.
7. If I'm a teen or adult, and if I can stay out of prison, my odds of being raped are relatively low.
8. On average, I am taught to fear walking alone after dark in average public spaces much less than my female counterparts are.
9. If I choose not to have children, my masculinity will not be called into question.
10. If I have children but do not provide primary care for them, my masculinity will not be called into question.
11. If I have children and provide primary care for them, I'll be praised for extraordinary parenting if I'm even marginally competent.
12. If I have children and a career, no one will think I'm selfish for not staying at home.
13. If I seek political office, my relationship with my children, or who I hire to take care of them, will probably not be scrutinized by the press.
14. My elected representatives are mostly people of my own sex. The more prestigious and powerful the elected position, the more this is true.
15. When I ask to see "the person in charge," odds are I will face a person of my own sex. The higher-up in the organization the person is, the surer I can be.
16. As a child, chances are I was encouraged to be more active and outgoing than my sisters.
17. As a child, I could choose from an almost infinite variety of children's media featuring positive, active, non-stereotyped heroes of my own sex. I never had to look for it; male protagonists were (and are) the default.
18. As a child, chances are I got more teacher attention than girls who raised their hands just as often.
19. If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether or not it has sexist overtones.

20. I can turn on the television or glance at the front page of the newspaper and see people of my own sex widely represented.

21. If I'm careless with my financial affairs it won't be attributed to my sex.

22. If I'm careless with my driving it won't be attributed to my sex.

23. I can speak in public to a large group without putting my sex on trial.

24. Even if I sleep with a lot of women, there is no chance that I will be seriously labeled a "slut," nor is there any male counterpart to "slut-bashing."

25. I do not have to worry about the message my wardrobe sends about my sexual availability.

26. My clothing is typically less expensive and better-constructed than women's clothing for the same social status. While I have fewer options, my clothes will probably fit better than a woman's without tailoring.

27. The grooming regimen expected of me is relatively cheap and consumes little time.

28. If I buy a new car, chances are I'll be offered a better price than a woman buying the same car.

29. If I'm not conventionally attractive, the disadvantages are relatively small and easy to ignore.

30. I can be loud with no fear of being called a shrew. I can be aggressive with no fear of being called a bitch.

31. I can ask for legal protection from violence that happens mostly to men without being seen as a selfish special interest, since that kind of violence is called "crime" and is a general social concern. (Violence that happens mostly to women is usually called "domestic violence" or "acquaintance rape," and is seen as a special interest issue.)

32. I can be confident that the ordinary language of day-to-day existence will always include my sex. "All men are created equal," mailman, chairman, freshman, he.

33. My ability to make important decisions and my capability in general will never be questioned depending on what time of the month it is.

34. I will never be expected to change my name upon marriage or questioned if I don't change my name.

35. The decision to hire me will not be based on assumptions about whether or not I might choose to have a family sometime soon.

36. Every major religion in the world is led primarily by people of my own sex. Even God, in most major religions, is pictured as male.

37. Most major religions argue that I should be the head of my household, while my wife and children should be subservient to me.

38. If I have a wife or live-in girlfriend, chances are we'll divide up household chores so that she does most of the labor, and in particular the most repetitive and unrewarding tasks.

39. If I have children with my girlfriend or wife, I can expect her to do most of the basic childcare such as changing diapers and feeding.

40. If I have children with my wife or girlfriend, and it turns out that one of us needs to make career sacrifices to raise the kids, chances are we'll both assume the career sacrificed should be hers.

41. Assuming I am heterosexual, magazines, billboards, television, movies, pornography, and virtually all of media is filled with images of scantily-clad women intended to appeal to me sexually. Such images of men exist, but are rarer.

42. In general, I am under much less pressure to be thin than my female counterparts are. If I am fat, I probably suffer fewer social and economic consequences for being fat than fat women do.

43. If I am heterosexual, it's incredibly unlikely that I'll ever be beaten up by a spouse or lover.

44. Complete strangers generally do not walk up to me on the street and tell me to "smile."

45. Sexual harassment on the street virtually never happens to me. I do not need to plot my movements through public space in order to avoid being sexually harassed, or to mitigate sexual harassment.

45. On average, I am not interrupted by women as often as women are interrupted by men.

46. I have the privilege of being unaware of my male privilege.