
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 benefitting 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 a soldier dying in war - the sexist society that maintains male privilege also does great harm to individual boys and men.

In the end, however, it is men and not women who make the most money; men and not women who dominate the government and the corporate boards; men and not women who dominate virtually all of the most powerful positions of society. And it is women and not men who suffer the most from intimate violence and rape; who are the most likely to be poor; who are, on the whole, given the short end of patriarchy's stick.

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 so low as to be negligible.
8. I am not taught to fear walking alone after dark in average public spaces.
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 pursue 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. Chances are my elected representatives are mostly people of my own sex. The more prestigious and powerful the elected position, the more likely this is to be true.
15. I can be somewhat sure that if I ask to see "the person in charge," 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, every day, without exception.
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. If I have sex with a lot of people, it won't make me an object of contempt or derision.
25. There are value-neutral clothing choices available to me; it is possible for me to choose clothing that doesn't send any particular message to the world.
26. My wardrobe and grooming are relatively cheap and consume little time.
27. If I buy a new car, chances are I'll be offered a better price than a woman buying the same car.
28. If I'm not conventionally attractive, the disadvantages are relatively small and easy to ignore.
29. I can be loud with no fear of being called a shrew. I can be aggressive with no fear of being called a bitch.
30. 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.)
31. 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.
32. My ability to make important decisions and my capability in general will never be questioned depending on what time of the month it is.
33. I will never be expected to change my name upon marriage or questioned if I don't change my name.
34. The decision to hire me will never be based on assumptions about whether or not I might choose to have a family sometime soon.
35. Every major religion in the world is led primarily by people of my own sex. Even God, in most major religions, is usually pictured as being male.
36. Most major religions argue that I should be the head of my household, while my wife and children should be subservient to me.
37. 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.
38. If I have children with a wife or girlfriend, chances are she'll do most of the childrearing, and in particular the most dirty, repetitive and unrewarding parts of childrearing.
39. If I have children with a 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.
40. 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 much rarer.
41. On average, I am under 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.
42. If I am heterosexual, it's incredibly unlikely that I'll ever be beaten up by a spouse or lover.
43. Complete strangers generally do not walk up to me on the street and tell me to "smile."
44. On average, I am not interrupted by women as often as women are interrupted by men.
45. I have the privilege of being unaware of my male privilege.

Compiled by Barry Deutsch, aka "Ampersand." Permission is granted to reproduce this list in any way, for any purpose, so long as the acknowledgment of Peggy McIntosh's work is not removed. Please tell me about how you used it – email: barry@amptoons.com.