

Examples of Heterosexual Privilege

Heterosexual Privilege: Unearned, often unconscious or taken for granted benefits afforded to heterosexuals in a heterosexist society based on their sexual orientation.

Notice that the items on the list represent personal, social, psychological, economic, and legal privileges that accrue to heterosexuals. The goal of reading and thinking about the list is to raise awareness about heterosexual privilege. All heterosexuals have these privileges most of the time. For heterosexuals, as you read this list, assess which of them you are aware that you have and which of them you never thought about before. This is not a complete list. The privileges are written from the perspective of heterosexuals.

1. I am not identified or labeled — politically, socially, economically, or otherwise — by my sexual orientation.
2. No one questions the “normality” of my sexuality or believes my sexuality was “caused” by psychological trauma, sin, or abuse.
3. I do not have to fear that my family, friends, or co-workers will find out about my sexual orientation, and that their knowing will have negative consequences for me.
4. I get paid leave from work and condolences from colleagues if my partner dies.
5. My sexual orientation (if known to others) is not used to exclude me from any profession or organization (teaching, coaching, the military, Boy Scouts).
6. In the event of my partner's death, I can inherit automatically* under probate laws.
7. I am not accused of being deviant, warped, perverted, or psychologically confused, or dysfunctional because of my sexual orientation.
8. I get reduced rates* with my partner on health, auto, and homeowner's insurance.
9. I can go home from most meetings, classes, and conversations without feeling excluded, attacked, ostracized, outnumbered, intimidated, invisible, stereotyped, dehumanized, or feared because of my sexual orientation.
10. I can have immediate access* to my loved ones in the hospital in the event of accident or illness.
11. People don't assume that I know all the other heterosexuals just because they're heterosexual.
12. I have support and inclusion from my family of origin for my relationship with my partner.
13. People don't ask me why I chose my sexual orientation, and why I choose to be so open about it.
14. I can walk in public, holding my partner's hand, hug my partner, and even kiss my partner in front of others without disapproval, comments, laughter, harassment, or the threat of violence.
15. I can easily find a religious community that will welcome me and my partner.
16. I can talk openly about my relationship, my family projects, my vacations, my partner's activities, our family plans in personal and professional settings.
17. I am guaranteed to find sexuality education materials for couples of my sexual orientation.
18. I can disclose my pain if my relationship ends and expect that friends, family and co-workers will notice and express their support for me.
19. My gender identity is not challenged as a result of my sexual orientation.
20. I can work with young children and not fear being accused of molesting, corrupting, or recruiting them to my sexual orientation.
21. I can talk about my sexual orientation in casual conversation and not be accused of flaunting it, or pushing it on others.
22. I can volunteer or give money to organizations that discriminate based on sexual orientation, and not be held accountable for the organization's stance.
23. When I rent a movie, watch TV, listen to music, or go to the theater, I can be sure that my sexual orientation will be represented often and accurately.
24. I can date the person I am attracted to beginning in my teens and throughout my life.
25. I am guaranteed to find people of my sexual orientation represented in the school curriculum.
26. I can live openly with my partner without the scrutiny, curiosity, or condemnation of others.
27. People of my sexual orientation are well-represented in the positions of power in my workplace.
28. My relationship receives validation and blessing by my religious community.
29. My individual behavior does not reflect on all people of my sexual orientation.
30. I can expect social acceptance from my neighbors, colleagues, and new friends.
31. In everyday conversation, the language used assumes my sexual orientation (sex = heterosexual sex; family = a man, a woman, and their children; spouse = husband or wife of another gender).
32. I don't have to hide or lie about the social events I attend when talking to coworkers or classmates.

33. People do not assume that I am promiscuous or sex-focused because of my sexual orientation.
34. I am identified by my profession or interests rather than my sexual orientation (I am a teacher, not a gay teacher; I am a musician, not a lesbian musician).
35. I have a life rather than a lifestyle.
36. I did not grow up with games and pejorative terms that ridicule my sexual orientation ("fag tag," "smear the queer," "Thursday is queer day. Don't wear green").
37. My sexual orientation is not used as a synonym for "bad," "stupid," or "disgusting." ("That's so gay." "What a fag." "She's a lezzy").
38. I can raise children without threats of state intervention and without my children having to be worried about which friends might reject them because of their parents' sexual orientation. I don't have to prepare my children for the people who may treat them badly because of their parents' sexual orientation.
39. People do not assume that I can magically identify all other heterosexuals.
40. I feel secure that few hate crimes are targeted at people like me because of our sexual orientation.
41. I don't ever have to justify my identity, my life, or my sexual orientation to people who think I shouldn't exist.
42. I benefit from public recognition and celebration of my relationship. I get cards congratulating me on my union, and there is a social expectation that my relationship will be committed, long, and stable (marriage).
43. I don't have to choose between spending significant family time (religious holidays, family events) with my family of origin or my family of choice. I can assume that my family of origin will welcome or at least accept my partner.
44. I can live every day without ever having to face, confront, engage, or cope with anything on these pages. I can choose whether to pay attention to these privileges. I am not forced or compelled to address heterosexism.

*On June 26th, the US Supreme Court ruled in favor of the freedom to marry in Obergefell v. Hodges, striking down marriage bans in the remaining 13 states that continued to discriminate and opening the freedom to marry to same-sex couples nationwide. While the LGBTQ+ community now has the same rights as heterosexual couples, we continue to be denied access to numerous rights and/or under go additional scrutiny that heterosexual couples do not experience.

How Homophobia Hurts Everyone

Warren J. Blumenfeld

Within the numerous forms of oppression, members of the target group (sometimes called “minority”) are oppressed, while on some level members of the dominant group are hurt. Although the effects of the oppression differ qualitatively for specific target and dominant groups, in the end everyone loses.

1. Homophobia locks all people into rigid gender-based roles that inhibit creativity and self-expression.
2. Homophobic conditioning compromises the integrity of heterosexual people by pressuring them to treat others badly, actions contrary to their basic humanity.
3. Homophobia inhibits one’s ability to form close, intimate relationships with members of one’s own sex.
4. Homophobia generally restricts communication with a significant portion of the population and, more specifically, limits family relationships.
5. Societal homophobia prevents some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people from developing an authentic self-identity and adds to the pressure to marry, which in turn places undue stress and often times trauma on themselves as well as their heterosexual spouses and their children.
6. Young people, of all sexual identities, are often pressured to become heterosexually active to prove to themselves and others that they are “normal.” Homophobia is one cause of premature sexual involvement, which increases the chances of teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
7. Homophobia combined with sexphobia (fear and repulsion of sex and/or talking about sexuality) results in the elimination of any discussion of sexual minorities as part of school-based sex education, keeping vital information from all students. Such a lack of information can kill people in the age of AIDS.
8. Homophobia can be used to stigmatize, silence and, on occasion, target people who are perceived or defined by others as gay, lesbian, or bisexual but who are in actuality heterosexual.
9. Homophobia prevents heterosexuals from accepting the benefits and gifts offered by sexual minorities: theoretical insights, social and spiritual visions and options, contributions to the arts and culture, to religion, to family life, indeed to all facets of society.
10. Homophobia (along with racism, sexism, classism, sexphobia, etc.) inhibits a unified and effective governmental and societal response to AIDS.
11. Homophobia diverts energy from more constructive endeavors.
12. Homophobia inhibits appreciation of other types of diversity, making it unsafe for everyone because each person has unique traits not considered mainstream or dominant. Therefore, we are all diminished when any one of us is demeaned.

Benefits of being an Ally

- You can help make a difference in someone's life.
- You can develop healthy relationships with people from the gay community.
- With the addition of those new friends you learn more about the world around you.
- You create an inclusive community where everyone can live, learn and play feeling safe and valued.
- You make visible an invisible population.
- You are able to support someone when her/his life seems difficult and isolating.
- You will be making a personal contribution to improving the campus climate and the lives of students, faculty, and staff.
- Staff, faculty, and students may be more at ease when sharing issues pertaining to your job.

Adapted from University of Southern Maine's "Safe Zone Project" by Gregory M. Weight, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Community Office, University of Delaware, March 2000

Some Risks of Being an Ally

- Others may speculate about your own sexual orientation. You may be labeled as LGBTQ+ ("by association"). This may be uncomfortable for you.
- You may become the subject of gossip or rumors.
- You may be criticized or ridiculed by others who do not agree with you or who view the issue as unimportant or unpopular.
- You may experience alienation from friends or colleagues who are not comfortable with the topic of sexual orientation. These people may distance themselves from you in order to avoid conflict or labels.
- Your values, your morality, and your personal character may be questioned by people who believe homosexuality is wrong, sinful, against family values, etc.
- You may become the target of overt or subtle discrimination, such as not being appointed to a committee, being excluded from certain activities, or a negative reflection on an evaluation. People who are LGBT may not accept you as an ally. Some may believe that you are really LGBT but are not ready to acknowledge it.
- Due to some past negative experiences with heterosexuals, people who are LGBT may not trust you and may question your motivation.

*** Information from the Duke University SAFE on Campus Resource Manual*

Adapted from Beyond Tolerance: Gays, Lesbians, and Bisexuals on Campus. (1991). N.J. Evans & V.A. Walls.

How We Experience Heteronormativity, Privilege & Phobias Homework

Reflect on the readings above as they will help with answering the below questions. Write a response to the below questions. Each question should be answered in 100 words or less. Please bring these statements to the training as we will go over them.

1. Describe how you learned from others that heterosexuality was normal, called heteronormativity (for example: family, friends, role models, here at UC Merced etc.). How did heteronormativity impacted your attitudes, beliefs, and interactions with the LGBTQ+ communities?
2. After reading Examples of Heterosexual Privilege, identify some privileges listed that you relate to and describe how the knowledge of heterosexual privilege impacts others?
3. Describe an instance or situation where you were:
 - a. a perpetrator or participant in an instance of homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia, or
 - b. a time you were a target of such phobias.

