Heterosexual Privilege for Sale

This activity is an incredible tool to reveal heterosexism, heterosexual privilege and how those systems operate socially, politically, and legally in our everyday lives.

Necessary supplies
- Participant handout sheet
- Writing utensils
- One piece of scrap paper

Goals & objectives
- To acknowledge and investigate heterosexual privilege
- To expose that there are many “rights” not extended to the queer community and that many of these privileges are not limited to political or legal ones but include social and interpersonal privilege as well
- To give participants an opportunity to see what privileges they hold most valuable
- Highlight the many ways that heterosexism and homophobia is institutionalized throughout our culture and systems
- To get people interacting with each other and sharing a little more personally about themselves

Step-by-step walk through
1. Break the group up into smaller groups, no more than 4 people, ideally 3.
2. Explain to the groups how the activity will work.
3. Example: “I will be passing out a sheet with a list of privileges on it. For the purposes of this activity we all are going to exist exist in a world without these privileges. You and your group are going to have to buy specific privileges from me. You will each receive money to buy the privileges and each one costs $100. As a group you must decide which privileges to buy. Then we will come back together as a big group and share and discuss!”
4. Pass out the sheets.
5. Write down dollar amounts for the different groups on scrap paper. Vary the amounts given to each group from $100 - $800 dollars. Pass out the piece of paper to each group indicating the amount of money they have.
6. Allow each group 5 minutes to discuss and decide which privileges they would like to buy.
7. Discuss each group’s choices together as a large group.
8. Discuss the activity as a whole with the group.

Guiding questions

Was it difficult to pick out the privileges?

This question will generally be met by a few different people talking all at once. If someone says something definitive you can speak directly to that person and ask them to expand on that.
- There are a lot of different types of privileges to choose from - and our group really didn’t know exactly what to prioritize. We had to choose between choosing privileges about family, legal, ones regarding money, and social privileges.
- Within the group there can be people who feel very strongly in different directions.
- There are a lot of privileges and only a few that your group got to choose.

What on this list surprised you?

- Surprised by the number of different types of privileges.
- I had never thought of THIS privilege before, I had never thought of it as a privilege.
- I didn’t realize how many different privileges they were, a lot of times we only discuss privileges that are legal - like marriage - and we forget about all of the day-to-day privileges that come along with being straight.

Are there any items that you would like to discuss more as a group or found particularly interesting?

If no one responds here - you as a facilitator - can remark on a privilege that you found surprising when reading the list of you would like to talk about more.

Example: “So when I read this list for the first time I had never really thought about why it is a privilege to be able to talk about your relationship openly with others. But I realized that if I wasn’t able to discuss my relationship with others, I would experience being in my relationship differently... and I found that really interesting to think about.”

Did anyone else have items they were struck by?

Are there any items you don’t quite understand?

- So in the past I’ve had others ask me “What would it mean not having your doctor understand your sexuality?” Well I’ve had the experience where doctor’s don’t understand why I’m not on birth control, without ever asking who my partner is and who I am sexually active with.
• Additionally, there are sometimes different health risks or concerns that people who are active with same-sex partners need to be made aware of and if the doctor doesn’t feel comfortable eliciting that information, or understand what the specific concerns are, it can be a real problem.

How did this activity make you feel?
• For some people this is a really new experience because they’ve never thought of privilege in this way, or in a list form like this. It can be quite shocking to see it listed in such a way.
• Something to keep in mind is that if you identify with a stigmatized/marginalized sexuality you may experience this activity really differently. It can feel quite different to be a gay individual who is looking at this list than a straight person.

What have you learned from this activity?
• Learned that privilege comes in many different forms - social, political, legal, and cultural.
• That money can in many ways “buy” privilege. And that money could mean capital like actual dollar bills that mean you don’t have to worry about particular privileges, or it could mean cultural capital in the sense that you come from a particular location or background that begets a certain amount of cultural or social privileges.

Is there anything you would like to add we haven’t talked about?
I usually just use this as a time to allow people to add any thoughts they haven’t yet, or you can add your own anecdotes that haven’t really fit in anywhere else in the conversation - or you can just use it as a segue into a closing.

Wrap-up

Use this wrap up to hit any points above that you don’t think were made or didn’t hit home with your participants.

“There are a wide variety of privileges that those in heterosexual or what we would consider opposite sex relationships are endowed with in this society. Some are personal, social, political or even legal. And while we often focus on the fights for the legal or political privileges, there are also day-to-day experiences of those in the LGBTQ community to keep in mind. Remember that privilege - money in this case - can at times beget more privilege - and gain access to more privilege. In moving forward from this activity I think it would be positive to keep this in mind when we talk about how does stigma and marginalization effect those in the LGBTQ community or in same-sex relationships - that all of these things affect someone’s daily life and experiences.
Notes

This activity can be quite heavy depending on the group and particularly for groups with a large number of queer students. It may not be bad to point out (to any group) how different this activity feels when you are a queer-identified individual.

This activity will really hit home for some people. Give people time to debrief. It is also a really great activity to refer back to later in the workshop because a lot of people really connect with this activity and can use it to understand other impacts of bias or prejudice or how additional levels and layers of privilege would interact.