

Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack

Adapted from Peggy McIntosh

Ask yourself the following questions regarding your life in Canada:

1. I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
2. If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area which I can afford and in which I would want to live.
3. I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
4. I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented.
5. When I am told about our national heritage or about “civilization,” I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
6. I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
7. I can be pretty sure of having my voice heard in a group in which I am the only member of my race.
8. I can go into a supermarket and find the staple foods which fit with my cultural traditions. Whether I use checks, credit cards or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.
9. I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
10. I can be pretty sure that my children’s teachers and employers will tolerate them if they fit school and workplace norms; my chief worries about them do not concern others’ attitudes toward their race.
11. I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
12. I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
13. I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
14. I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the “person in charge”, I will be facing a person of my race.
15. If a traffic cop pulls me over I can be sure I haven’t been singled out because of my race.
16. I can easily buy posters, post-cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys and children’s magazines featuring people of my race.
17. My culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and powers of people of other races.
18. I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race would be accepted or allowed to do what I want to do.
19. I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.
20. I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
21. I can easily find academic courses and institutions which give attention only to people of my race.
22. I will feel welcomed and “normal” in the usual walks of public life, institutional and social.

Now, think about how you will feel being in a country where your racial background will be the minority – how will that effect you?