

The Black Male Privileges Checklist
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What does "privilege" have to do with Black men? We understand some kinds of privilege. The privilege to call a black man "Boy", even if that black man happens to be 60 years old or older. The privilege to drive a car and never have to worry that the police will racially profile you. Privileges that have nothing to do with what a person has earned, but rather are based entirely on who a person is, or what color they are.

As African Americans, we have the ability to critique and condemn these types of "unearned assets" because we recognize that these privileges come largely at our expense. We have also learned from social and political movements that have sought to redress these privileges, and academic disciplines that have provided us with the tools to critically examine and explore them.

However, there is another type of privilege that has caused untold harm to both black men and women but has not had the benefit of being challenged by a social and political movement within our community, nor given adequate attention within our own academic community. The privilege that I am referring to is male privilege.

Male privilege is more than just a "double standard", because it is based on attitudes or actions that come at the expense of women. Just as white privilege comes at the expense of African Americans and other people of color, gender double standards come at the expense of women.

Given the devastating history of racism in this country, it is understandable that getting black men to identify with the concept of male privilege isn't easy! For many black men, the phrase "black male privilege" seems like an oxymoron -- three words that simply do not go together.

While it is understandable that black men are hesitant or reluctant to examine the concept of male privilege, the African American community will never be able to overcome the serious issues that we face if we as black men do not confront our role in promoting and sustaining male supremacist attitudes and actions.

Inviting black men and boys into a conversation about male privilege does not deny centuries of discrimination or the burden of racism that we continue to suffer from today. As long as a black man can be tasered 9 times in 14 minutes, shot at 50 times on the morning of his wedding night, or receive less call-backs for a job than a white man with a felony record, we know that racist sexism that targets black men is alive and kicking.

Examining black male privileges offers black men and boys an opportunity to go beyond old arguments of "personal responsibility" or "blaming the man" to gain a deeper level of insight into how issues of class and race are influenced by gender. Gender is one of the most important tools in the production and reproduction of power because it relies on consent and not just coercion.

The items represented on the Black Male Privileges Checklist reflect aspects of Black men's lives that we take for granted, which appear to be "double standards," but in fact are male privileges that come at the expense of women in general and African American women in particular.

I offer this checklist based on years of experience working with men, and with the faith that we as men have far more to gain than we have to lose by challenging the privileges that we take for granted.

I believe that there are more similarities between men than there are differences. Therefore, many items on the Black Male Privilege Checklist apply to men generally. However, because of the specific privileges that black men have in relationship to black women; there are specific items that apply only to black men. I will leave it up to you to determine which items apply only to black men, and which items apply to men in general.

Background:

The Black Male Privileges Checklist was born out of years of organizing men's groups and the numerous -- often heated -- conversations I have had with men while utilizing Barry Deutsch's The Male Privilege Checklist. In my experiences, most men would object to at least some items on the Male Privilege Checklist. However, "men of color", and especially African American men, often had the sharpest criticisms of the Male Privilege Checklist and the most problems relating to the idea of male privilege.

There are many reasons why black men would be reluctant to identify with the concept of male privilege. One of the most important reasons is that our experience with privilege is based on a history of political, economic, and military power that whites have historically exercised over black life. This conceptualization of privilege has not allowed us to see ourselves with privilege because the focus has been placed largely on whites. Privilege is not restricted to economic, political, or military areas of life. Privilege is also social, cultural, sexual, institutional, and interpersonal in nature. Our inability to have a more expansive understanding of privilege and power has foreclosed important insights into virtually every aspect of black men's lives and other "men of color".

As black men, we have also been skeptical of pro-feminist males, most of whom were white and middle class. Black men who fought for freedom during the Civil Rights Movement and the Black Power Movements were suspicious-to say the least- of the motives of white men who were requesting that black men give up the privilege they never felt they had. Given the timing of the pro-feminist male movement and the demographics of these men, it has not been easy to separate the message from the messenger. Black men had a similar reaction to the voices of black feminists, who we saw as being influenced by white middle class feminists. Alongside this, there has long been a belief among many black men that racism provides privileges to black women that are denied to black men.

In addition, many of the items on The Male Privilege Checklist simply did not apply to black men and other men of color. As a result, many black men argued that the list should have been called The White Male Privilege Checklist. In light of these considerations, the Black Male Privileges Checklist differs from the Male Privilege Checklist in several respects.

First, It departs from an "either/or" view of privilege that suggests that an individual or a group can only be placed into one category. Therefore, the focus is on privileges and not privilege. It also highlights belief systems that often serve as the basis for justifications and rationalizations of exploitation and discrimination. Second, The Black Male Privilege Checklist takes a Life Course perspective, acknowledging the fact that privilege takes on different forms at various points in men's lives. Third, it takes a Global perspective to highlight the privilege that black males have as Americans, and the privileges black men share with other men of color. African American men rarely acknowledge the privilege we have in relationship to people in developing countries -- especially women. Too often, our conception of privilege is limited to white men and does not lead us to reflect on the power that men of color in Africa, Asia, and Latin America exercise over women. Finally, it calls for action and not just awareness. We need "men of color" to be actively involved in social welfare and social justice movements.

Invariably, the Black Male Privileges Checklist will inspire some men to create their own list describing the list of privileges they believe black women benefit from. What men need to understand is that paying attention to male privilege does not mean that women are without faults. Rather, it means that black men cannot be blind to the facts that black men earn more than black women do, black men continue to dominate most of the political, religious, and cultural institutions within the black community, and that black men continue to dominate black women in areas of physical and sexual abuse.

As "men of color", we have a responsibility to acknowledge that we participate in this system even though it offers us little rewards. Most African Americans, for example, take for granted the system of capitalism that we all participate in, even though we know that it does not offer us the same rewards that it does for whites. The sex-gender system, which privileges men over women, operates in similar way for all men. Black men and other "men of color" can participate in this system even though it does not offer similar rewards.

Finally, the Black Male Privileges Checklist is a tool that can be used by any individual, group, organization, family, or community that is interested in black males having greater insight into their individual lives and the collective lives of black women and girls. It is also a living tool that will grow and be amended as more discussion and dialogue occurs. This is the first edition of the Black Male Privileges Checklist and will be updated regularly. This checklist was created with black men in mind, and does not necessarily capture the experiences and cultural references of other ethnic males. I would welcome dialogue with others who are concerned about these constituencies as well.

The Black Male Privileges Checklist

Leadership & Politics

1. I don't have to choose my race over my sex in political matters.
2. When I read African American History textbooks, I will learn mainly about black men.
3. When I learn about the Civil Rights Movement & the Black Power Movements, most of the leaders that I will learn about will be black men.
4. I can rely on the fact that in the near 100-year history of national civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and the Urban League, virtually all of the executive directors have been male.
5. I will be taken more seriously as a political leader than black women.
6. Despite the substantial role that black women played in the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power Movement, currently there is no black female that is considered a "race leader".
7. I can live my life without ever having read black feminist authors, or knowing about black women's history, or black women's issues.
8. I can be a part of a black liberation organization like the Black Panther Party where an "out" rapist Eldridge Cleaver can assume leadership position.
9. I will make more money than black women at equal levels of education and occupation.
10. Most of the national "opinion framers" in Black America including talk show hosts and politicians are men.

Beauty

11. I have the ability to define black women's beauty by European standards in terms of skin tone, hair, and body size. In comparison, black women rarely define me by European standards of beauty in terms of skin tone, hair, or body size.
12. I do not have to worry about the daily hassles of having my hair conforming to any standard image of beauty the way black women do.
13. I do not have to worry about the daily hassles of being terrorized by the fear of gaining weight. In fact, in many instances bigger is better for my sex.
14. My looks will not be the central standard by which my worth is valued by members of the opposite sex.

Sex & Sexuality

15. I can purchase pornography that typically shows men defile women by the common practice of the "money shot."
16. I can believe that causing pain during sex is connected with a woman's pleasure without ever asking her.
17. I have the privilege of not wanting to be a virgin, but preferring that my wife or significant other be a virgin.
18. When it comes to sex if I say "No", chances are that it will not be mistaken for "Yes".
19. If I am raped, no one will assume that "I should have known better" or suggest that my being raped had something to do with how I was dressed.
20. I can use sexist language like bonin', laying the pipe, hittin-it, and banging that convey images of sexual acts based on dominance and performance.
21. I can live in a world where polygamy is still an option for men in the United States as well as around the world.
22. In general, I prefer being involved with younger women socially and sexually
23. In general, the more sexual partners that I have the more stature I receive among my peers.
24. I have easy access to pornography that involves virtually any category of sex where men degrade women, often young women.
25. I have the privilege of being a part of a sex where "purity balls" apply to girls but not to boys.
26. When I consume pornography, I can gain pleasure from images and sounds of men causing women pain.

Popular Culture

27. I come from a tradition of humor that is based largely on insulting and disrespecting women; especially mothers.
28. I have the privilege of not having black women, dress up and play funny characters- often overweight- that are supposed to look like me for the entire nation to laugh.
29. When I go to the movies, I know that most of the leads in black films are men. I also know that all of the action heroes in black film are men.
30. I can easily imagine that most of the artists in Hip Hop are members of my sex.
31. I can easily imagine that most of the women that appear in Hip Hop videos are there solely to please men
32. Most of lyrics I listen to in hip-hop perpetuate the ideas of males dominating women, sexually and socially.
33. I have the privilege of consuming and popularizing the word pimp, which is based on the exploitation of women with virtually no opposition from other men.
34. I can hear and use language bitches and hoes that demean women, with virtually no opposition from men.
35. I can wear a shirt that others and I commonly refer to as a "wife beater" and never have the language challenged.
36. Many of my favorite movies include images of strength that do not include members of the opposite sex and often are based on violence.
37. Many of my favorite genres of films, such as martial arts, are based on violence.
38. I have the privilege of popularizing or consuming the idea of a thug, which is based on the violence and victimization of others with virtually no opposition from other men.

Attitudes/Ideology

39. I have the privilege to define black women as having "an attitude" without referencing the range of attitudes that black women have.
40. I have the privilege of defining black women's attitudes without defining my attitudes as a black man.
41. I can believe that the success of the black family is dependent on returning men to their historical place within the family, rather than in promoting policies that strengthen black women's independence, or that provide social benefits to black children.
42. I have the privilege of believing that a woman cannot raise a son to be a man.
43. I have the privilege of believing that a woman must submit to her man.
44. I have the privilege of believing that before slavery gender relationships between black men and women were perfect.
45. I have the privilege of believing that feminism is anti-black.
46. I have the privilege of believing that the failure of the black family is due to the black matriarchy.
47. I have the privilege of believing that household responsibilities are women's roles.
48. I have the privilege of believing that black women are different sexually than other women and judging them negatively based on this belief.

Sports

49. I will make significantly more money as a professional athlete than members of the opposite sex will.
50. In school, girls are cheerleaders for male athletes, but there is no such role for males to cheerlead for women athletes.
51. My financial success or popularity as a professional athlete will not be associated with my looks.
52. I can talk about sports or spend large portions of the day playing video games while women are most likely involved with household or childcare duties.
53. I can spend endless hours watching sports TV and have it considered natural.
54. I can touch, hug, or be emotionally expressive with other men while watching sports without observers perceiving this behavior as sexual.
55. I know that most sports analysts are male.
56. If I am a coach, I can motivate, punish, or embarrass a player by saying that the player plays like a girl.
57. Most sports talk show hosts that are members of my race are men.
58. I can rest assured that most of the coaches -even in predominately-female sports within my race are male.
59. I am able to play sports outside without my shirt on and it not be considered a problem.
60. I am essentially able to do anything inside or outside without my shirt on, whereas women are always required to cover up.

Diaspora/Global

61. I have the privilege of being a part of a sex where the mutilation and disfigurement of a girl's genitalia is used to deny her sexual sensations or to protect her virginity for males.
62. I have the privilege of not having rape be used as a primary tactic or tool to terrorize my sex during war and times of conflict.
63. I have the privilege of not being able to name one female leader in Africa or Asia, past or present, that I pay homage to the way I do male leaders in Africa and/or Asia.
64. I have the ability to travel around the world and have access to women in developing countries both sexually and socially.
65. I have the privilege of being a part of the sex that starts wars and that wields control of almost all the existing weapons of war and mass destruction.

College

66. In college, I will have the opportunity to date outside of the race at a much higher rate than black women will.
67. I have the privilege of having the phrase "sewing my wild oats" apply to my sex as if it were natural.
68. I know that the further I go in education the more success I will have with women.
69. In college, black male professors will be involved in interracial marriages at much higher rates than members of the opposite sex will.
70. By the time I enter college, and even through college, I have the privilege of not having to worry whether I will be able to marry a black woman.
71. In college, I will experience a level of status and prestige that is not offered to black women even though black women may outnumber me and out perform me academically.
72. If I go to an HBCU, I will have incredible opportunities to exploit black women

Communication/Language

73. What is defined as "News" in Black America is defined by men.
74. I can choose to be emotionally withdrawn and not communicate in a relationships and it be considered unfortunate but normal.
75. I can dismissively refer to another persons grievances as ^*ing.
76. I have the privilege of not knowing what words and concepts like patriarchy, phallocentric, complicity, colluding, and obfuscation mean.

Relationships

77. I have the privilege of marrying outside of the race at a much higher rate than black women marry.
78. My "strength" as a man is never connected with the failure of the black family, whereas the strength of black women is routinely associated with the failure of the black family.
79. If I am considering a divorce, I know that I have substantially more marriage, and cohabitation options than my spouse.
80. Chances are I will be defined as a "good man" by things I do not do as much as what I do. If I don't beat, cheat, or lie, then I am a considered a "good man". In comparison, women are rarely defined as "good women" based on what they do not do.
81. I have the privilege of not having to assume most of the household or child-care responsibilities.
82. I have the privilege of having not been raised with domestic responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and washing that takes up disproportionately more time as adults.

Church & Religious Traditions

83. In the Black Church, the majority of the pastoral leadership is male.
84. In the Black Church Tradition, most of the theology has a male point of view. For example, most will assume that the man is the head of household.

Physical Safety

85. I do not have to worry about being considered a traitor to my race if I call the police on a member of the opposite sex.
86. I have the privilege of knowing men who are physically or sexually abusive to women and yet I still call them friends.
87. I can video tape women in public- often without their consent - with male complicity.

88. I can be courteous to a person of the opposite sex that I do not know and say "Hello" or "Hi" and not fear that it will be taken as a come-on or fear being stalked because of it.
89. I can use physical violence or the threat of physical violence to get what I want when other tactics fail in a relationship.
90. If I get into a physical altercation with a person of the opposite sex, I will most likely be able to impose my will physically on that person
91. I can go to parades or other public events and not worry about being physically and sexually molested by persons of the opposite sex.
92. I can touch and physically grope women's bodies in public- often without their consent- with male complicity.
93. In general, I have the freedom to travel in the night without fear.
94. I am able to be out in public without fear of being sexually harassed by individuals or groups of the opposite sex.