Heterosexual Privilege

Much more subtle than outright hostility toward gays and lesbians but damaging nonetheless are heterosexist attitudes. Because our society is predominately heterosexual, many people take being in the majority, and the rewards and privileges it affords, for granted. Homosexuals, who as members of the minority do not wield much social and political power, do not have this luxury. Many of the most basic privileges denied to homosexuals are taken for granted by heterosexuals: being able to talk openly about one's partner without fear of recrimination or abuse, being able to publicly display affection toward one's partner, obtaining employment benefits from a partner's job, serving openly in the military or corporate settings, being able to legally document a relationship commitment or to adopt children, and even being able to engage in private sexual behavior without fear of criminal penalties. For most homosexuals, simply taking one's relationship partner to a party or having that person's picture on one's desk is a social privilege that is denied. Heterosexism is a somewhat controversial but intriguing topic to explore. The questionnaire on the next page contains a humorous and widely-circulated scale developed by Martin Rochlin. This scale turns the tables on the usual question of "What causes *homosexuality*?" and in doing so illustrates how hypocritical and one-sided attitudes toward gays, lesbians, and bisexuals often are. Rochlin has been using this popular questionnaire in lectures and in conferences as a consciousness-raising tool since 1972.

*Heterosexual Questionnaire*

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| 1. | What do you think caused your heterosexuality? |
| 2. | When and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual? |
| 3. | Is it possible your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of? |
| 4. | Is it possible your heterosexuality stems from a neurotic fear of others of the same sex? |
| 5. | If you’ve never slept with a person of the same sex, is it possible that all you need is a good gay lover? |
| 6. | To whom have you disclosed your heterosexual tendencies? How did they react? |
| 7. | Why do you heterosexuals feel compelled to seduce others into your lifestyle? |
| 8. | Why do you insist on flaunting your heterosexuality? Can’t you just be what you are and keep it quiet? |
| 9. | Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing the problems they’d face? |
| 10. | A disproportionate majority of child molesters are heterosexuals. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers? |
| 11. | With all the societal support marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiraling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexuals? |
| 12. | Why do heterosexuals place so much emphasis on sex? |
| 13. | Considering the menace of overpopulation, how could the human race survive if everyone were heterosexual like you? |
| 14. | Could you trust a heterosexual therapist to be objective? Don’t you fear she or he might be inclined to influence you in the direction of her or his own leanings? |
| 15. | How can you become a whole person if you limit yourself to compulsive, exclusive heterosexuality, and fail to develop your natural, healthy homosexual potential? |
| 16. | There seem to be very few happy heterosexuals. Techniques have been developed which might enable you to change if you really want to. Have you considered trying aversion therapy? |

Rochlin, M. (1972). Heterosexual Questionnaire. Originally published in the *AGP Newsletter*, October, 1980.