

UNPACKING THE INVISIBLE KNAPSACK  
by Peggy McIntosh

Remixed by Dan Scott

(On white male privilege  
in the sound arts version)



*In Peggy McIntosh's original text she wrote how she "decided to try to work on myself at least by identifying some of the daily effects of white privilege in my life". I have taken McIntosh's text and remixed it to explore my own experience of privilege within the sound arts community. I have chosen to explore the intersection of race and gender as whiteness alone (as explored by McIntosh) may obscure the additional privileges that my maleness also confers. To paraphrase McIntosh: as far as I can tell, my non-white, and non-male, friends, and acquaintances with whom I come into daily or frequent contact in this particular time, place and time of work cannot count on most of these conditions.*

Within the sound arts I can easily, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race and gender.

I can field record anywhere in the world, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

I can go to a sound art exhibition or concert and see people of my race and gender widely represented.

When I am told about the sound arts canon I am shown that people of my colour and gender made it what it is.

I can be sure that university courses and libraries contain curricular materials that testify to the existence of my race and gender and their centrality to the sound arts.

If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a forum for this piece on white male privilege.

I can be pretty sure of having my sounds heard in front a group in which I am the only member of my race and gender.

I can be casual about whether or not to listen to another person's sounds in a group in which they are the only member of their race and gender.

I can go onto a contemporary music or sound arts website and count on finding the music or sounds of my race and gender represented.

Whether I rent or buy my gear, I can count on my skin color and gender not to work against the appearance of financial reliability or technical know-how.

I do not have to educate my white male students to be aware of systemic racism and sexism as factors in their own professional development.

I can offer an opinion, or even expertise, on the sounds of cultures different to my own, without being seen as eccentric or anomalous.

I can be pretty sure that curators, promoters or academics will tolerate me if I fit art institutional norms; my chief worries about their reactions do not concern others' attitudes toward my race and gender.

I can make noisy, repetitive or "poor quality" recordings and not have people put this down to my colour and gender.

I can swear, express my emotions, or not answer emails, without having people attribute these choices to the different morals, the poverty or emotional nature of my race and gender.

I can speak, play out or exhibit in public to a powerful male group without putting my race and gender on trial.

I can do a good performance, exhibition or presentation without being called a credit to, or exemplar of, my race and gender.

I am never normally asked to speak for all the people of my racial and gender group.

I can remain oblivious to the alternative sound scenes and cultures of persons of different cultures who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my sound scene or culture any penalty for such oblivion.

I can criticize our government within my work and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as an extremist.

I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to the promoter, label owner, curator or professor I will be facing a white person.

I can easily buy records and sound works, magazines and artworks, made by or featuring people of my race and gender.

I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in, rather than isolated, out-of-place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance or feared.

When not performing, exhibiting, recording or presenting, I can, because of my race and gender, easily hide or avoid expressions of ambiguity, difference or vulnerability.

I can be pretty sure that if I argue for a program centering on race and gender, this is not likely to cost me heavily within my present setting, even if my colleagues disagree with me.

If I declare there is a racial and gender issue at hand in sound art, or there isn't a racial and gender issue at hand in sound art, my race and gender will lend me more credibility for either position than a person of colour or a different gender will have.

I can choose to ignore developments in minority writing and minority activist programs, or disparage them, or learn from them, but in any case, I can find ways to be more or less protected from negative consequences of any of these choices.

My white male culture gives me little fear about ignoring the perspectives and sounds of people of other races and genders.

I am not made acutely aware that my shape, bearing or hair style will be taken as a reflection on my race and gender.

I can worry about racism and gender without being seen as self-interested or self-seeking.

I can get a gig or exhibition or receive a funding award without having my peers suspect that I got it because of my race and gender.

If my show or gig got bad reviews, or I didn't succeed in an application, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it had racial and sexist overtones.

My white male way of hearing the world can remain invisible, inaudible and unremarked upon within the sounds I make.

I can think over many options, social, political, imaginative or professional, without asking whether a person of my race and gender would be accepted or allowed to, or would normally do what I want to do.

I can be late to a meeting without having the lateness reflect on my race and gender.

I can arrange my artistic activities so that I will never have to experience feelings of rejection owing to my race and gender.

If I have low credibility as a band-leader, curator, artist organiser, or other, I can be sure that my race and gender is not the problem.

I can easily find courses in sound arts and technology which give attention only to people of my race and gender.

I can expect figurative language and imagery and sound in all of the arts to testify to experiences of my race and gender.

I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life within the sound arts, institutional and social.

Produced for White Noise  
Sound::Gender::Feminism::Activism  
11th and 12th November 2016

with thanks to

Angus Caryle  
Nicole Brittingham-Furlonge  
Iris Garrelfs  
Lisa Hall  
Magz Hall  
Holly Ingleton  
Cathy Lane  
Sophie Mallett  
Carey Robinson  
Trish Scott

With special thanks to Peggy McIntosh  
for her generosity and advice in developing this work.

This piece is an adaptation of White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack (1989), Peace and Freedom Magazine, July-August, 1989, pp. 10-12, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, Philadelphia, PA.

Please contact [dan@danscott.org.uk](mailto:dan@danscott.org.uk) for further information