

Privileges confirmed for straight white men working in STEM

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A new study that considered multiple aspects including sexual identity and disabilities confirms a long-held belief: White, heterosexual men without disabilities are privileged in STEM careers.

The University of Michigan study of 25,300 professionals in science, technology, engineering and math shows that this segment experiences better treatment and rewards than members of 31 other categories by gender, race, LGBTQ+ status and disability status.

Straight, nondisabled white men experience more social inclusion, professional respect and [career opportunities](#), and have [higher salaries](#) and persistence intentions, the research showed. Study author Erin Cech said these advantages act as premiums, meaning they cannot be attributed to things like [education level](#), job commitment, [family responsibilities](#) and human capital.

Prior work about the various groups connected to STEM did not have sufficient sample sizes or adequate demographic measures to illustrate this in full, she said.

"Often, the research only focused on a single axis at a time—gender or race or [sexual identity](#)," said Cech, U-M associate professor of sociology.

The current study uses data from a large national-level survey of STEM professionals employed full time in the United States. They were asked about social inclusion and harassment experiences; professional respect by colleagues; career rewards, including salary and advancement opportunities; and their intentions to stay in their STEM career long term.

White [heterosexual men](#) without disabilities are more likely, on average, to experience [social inclusion](#), respect and rewards. They also are more likely to intend to stay in their STEM professions, compared with members of other groups, the study found.

The findings show the importance of encouraging white men to

recognize the privileges they may have access to, and commit to serving as allies to fight for change at the organizational and structural level, Cech said.

"It is everyone's responsibility—advantaged and disadvantaged alike—to fight for more equitable climates and practices in STEM," she said.

Cech also pointed out that not every straight, nondisabled white man will experience advantages associated with intersectional privilege. Some of them may encounter prejudice and discrimination on the basis of other disadvantaged statuses, such as age, nationality and socioeconomic background. Others may be targets of negative workplace treatment disconnected from social status, such as generalized bullying or incivility.

The findings appear in *Science Advances*.

More information: Erin A. Cech, The intersectional privilege of white able-bodied heterosexual men in STEM, *Science Advances* (2022). [DOI: 10.1126/sciadv.abo1558](https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.abo1558)

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