

# OPINION

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## Passing as straight not the same as being straight

We live in a world where what you appear to be matters more than what you are.

There's no better example of this than straight-passing. This phrase defines someone who identifies as queer but doesn't fit the stereotypical queer image or who is in a relationship that appears to be heterosexual.



BY OLIVIA NEAL  
OPINION EDITOR

Many see straight-passing as a privilege because it can mean less discrimination. While this might be true, queer people of all types still have to face bigotry, if in different ways.

When we first look at daily interactions with other people, there is a difference in how people who pass are treated.

"If we appear straight and cisgender, and for some reason are not in a safe place to come out, we have the ability to pretend," said Early College senior Kinsey Danzis. "People whose appearance doesn't quite fit into the heterosexual and cisgender norm don't have that luxury because people tend to assume right off the bat that they're queer, whether they're actually queer or not."

While people who don't conform to the straight, cisgender image are faced with more immediate discrimination, people who do are still wrongfully treated, if a little later.

"Although a queer person may pass as straight if they're in a heterosexual relationship, straight privilege by definition doesn't exist for them because (first), they're queer and (second), they still have to deal with prejudiced a—s on all sides," said Erin Tatum in an article for Everyday Feminism. "I'm pretty sure that cancels out any ephemeral benefits of temporarily passing."

Straight-passing queer people also experience the same fear of coming out and are often met with shock.

"There's an embarrassment that crosses their face, a shuffle of papers, a reach for a pen — a social clumsiness in that they assume I'm not," said Koa Beck in an article for Salon.

Facing this scary experience is difficult for anyone who identifies as queer, regardless of how they appear.

"In a society so eager to assume straightness that 'don't ask, don't tell' becomes public policy, it takes courage and resolve to challenge the presumption of heterosexuality," says the GLBTQ online encyclopedia in its definition of "passing."

Additionally, once they have come out, people who appear straight and cisgender are more often met with disbelief. This is especially true for people who identify as bisexual or pansexual.

"I think that sexual diversity when one is homosexual is somehow (treated like it's) branded into their personality, and when someone is bisexual or pansexual their sexuality is brushed off as a slight variation of heterosexuality," said Early College sophomore Erin Goeke.

This kind of questioning is always harmful.

"After all, who would be happy (to not be) recognized for what they really are?" said Aviva Dove-Viebahn in an article for The Root.

People who pass are also often not given the same level of respect and acceptance in the queer community.

"I'm neither butch nor a tomboy," said Dove-Viebahn. "Does that make me less gay or, more importantly, less politically viable as a gay woman?"

This question is shared by many straight passing people, and it could isolate them from the community.

"Maybe passing keeps me safe," said Gaby Dunn in an article for Thought Catalog. "But sometimes I just want to feel proud of who I am or accepted by the people who should be my people."

Regardless of outward appearance, everyone in the queer community should be welcomed and heard.

No one should ever assume sexuality based on appearance and all queer people — straight-passing or not — should uphold this value.

"When people irresponsibly jump to conclusions about someone's gender or sexuality based solely on their appearance, that invariably leads to more discrimination regardless of whether or not the assumption is correct," said Danzis.

While it's true that different parts of the queer community face different issues, all face bigotry. All have struggles. The difficulties of some should not be valued more or less than the difficulties of others.

The message should always be acceptance. That's the whole point.

## Film industry is to blame for lack of representation



This year's Oscar nominations lacked diversity in many of its categories. This can be seen above in nominees made for Best Actress.

As the most prominent film award show and a cultural event, second only to the Superbowl, no one is questioning the impact of the Oscars. But, the nation is questioning why all the nominees this year were suspiciously lacking in one quality: diversity.



BY ANNIE FULLWOOD  
STAFF WRITER

This year, no minorities were nominated for any of the acting categories, something that hasn't occurred since 1998. Additionally, all of the Best Picture nominees, most of which were directed by men, focused on male characters.

Many would claim that the Academy's demographics are what led to this year's catastrophe, which may be partially true. As of 2012, the Academy consists of a 94 percent white and a 77 percent male population. Black voters made up only 3 percent of the group.

"Most of the nominated were white males," said Early College junior Janie Cary. "It may not necessarily be an intentional bias of the Academy, but the voting committee is made up of mostly white males."

These circumstances inspired a collective outrage on social media. Protesters boycotted the broadcast of this year's Oscars to show their discontent and flooded Twitter with the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag. Many attribute the 16 percent drop in viewership to their efforts.

"There were many performances, both in front of and behind the camera, by people from marginalized communities that I believe should have been recognized," said April Reign, the creator of the #OscarsSoWhite hashtag, to Forbes magazine. "The point of the hashtag I created is not that the other nominees are not deserving. They all turned in excellent performances, and that should be recognized. But Ava (DuVernay) and David (Oyelowo, of "Selma" fame) also should be recognized for their outstanding contributions, among others."

The blame, however, lies not with the Academy of Arts and Sciences, who votes on Oscar wins and nominations, but with the entire Hollywood industry.

"I think the lack of diversity is reflective of the film industry as a whole, which is dominated by white males," said Chad Phillips, visiting assistant professor of theatre studies and head of film studies, in an email interview.

According to Time magazine, the number of nonwhite people on the big screen is three times less than the number of nonwhite people in America. Even more concerning, the top three acting agencies in the industry have fallen behind in their attempts to build a racially diverse roster.

"There are certain major projects that you just don't get to be a part of unless you have a connection with one of these top agencies," said Ana-Christina Ramon, the co-author of a UCLA study on diversity in film agencies. "Or maybe you get to be a part of it, but you're not going to be the lead. So the tendency of top agencies to pack their talent rosters with whites really restricts access to opportunities for underrepresented groups."

According to the UCLA study, the top three agencies together represent 72 percent of all film actors, and only 7 percent of their represented actors are minorities. Out of the 28 percent represented by smaller agencies, 19 percent are minorities.

This lack of support is reflected in the gross underrepresentation of minorities, including women, Hispanics, Asian- and African-Americans in film and TV. According to the UCLA Diversity Report in 2011, minorities claimed only 10.5 percent of the lead roles in 172 examined films. That same year, minorities made up 36.3 percent of the U.S. population.

However, the Oscars have done as well as could be expected in previous years, awarding various minorities for their impressive cinematic feats.

"A lot of attention has been given to the lack of African-American nominees (this year)," said Williams. "But, it is worth noting the past two Best Directors have been Mexican, as was the winner of both the 2013 and 2014 Best Cinematography awards, (Emmanuel Lubezki)."

The Oscars' problem isn't that the Academy voters vote for white males, it's that the industry isn't producing films with representation for minorities.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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BY NOELLE LANE '15

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