

CLASS PRIVILEGE SIDE EFFECTS

From Chapter 8 of the Resource Generation publication *Classified: How To Stop Hiding Your Privilege and Use It For Social Change*, a compilation of the Side Effects of class privilege.

Some notes about the Side Effects:

There is no one right way to use or think about these side effects. Some ways we've found it useful are to look at them with a small group of people, such as a Resource Generation Praxis Group, or another intention group space. Each person takes a turn selecting a side effect that they feel like they act out, or they've seen privileged people around them act out.

Or, look at them in a large group, such as a workshop. One by one, go through the effects and ask people to call out examples of each one.

An important note about talking about the side effects is that they can often make people feel bad about themselves. This is absolutely not their intention. However, they can bring up some tricky stuff, as people begin to unpack the ways they've unknowingly acted harmful or unaccountable. A few good remedies for that are:

- Remind people over and over again that they are good people! Remind them that even if we play out these Side Effects, that is exactly what they are: effects of our privileges and socialization, not a representation of who we are as human beings. Thus, we have the power to change!
- After going over the effects themselves, spend time thinking about gentle ways to "interrupt" the effects as they're being played out. Show people that its not bleak! We can un-learn these effects, and help others un-learn them as well.
- Come up with new Side Effects that show all the wonderful and inspiring things one can do with their privilege and wealth. Giving Gary (who has made a plan to give away the bulk of his money), Raise-My-Taxes-Rita (who uses her wealth as a platform to gain attention for why wealthy folks should pay more taxes), or Fundraising Frieda (who does fundraising for grassroots organizations by tapping her wealthy networks) are a few examples.

The idea that being wealthy equals being the smartest, hardest-working and most deserving can have some pretty strange effects on our lives. Especially since it means that, as people with wealth, we're constantly being told we're the smartest, hardest-working and most deserving. This happens so often that no matter how cool and down-to-earth we are, it can end up seeping into our brains and influencing the way we act.

At RG we like to call this the Side Effects of class privilege. Except instead of making us woozy and unable to operate heavy machinery, these class privilege side effects can cause us to act like our needs are more important than anyone else's. Or to feel like we should always be in charge and that we always know the best solution for any problem. Unfortunately the Side Effects also don't take very long to emerge—they can kick in quickly even for those of us who have only recently become wealthy.

The Side Effects go deep. They are more than just an opportunity we have that others might not. They actually change the way we act and relate to people. They can even seep into our closest relationships. That's why looking at the Side Effects can be one of the hardest parts of understanding our class privilege.

Luckily we have the power to counteract their effects and change the way we act. Before we can do that, though, we need to be able to recognize what they look like. (Learning to laugh at them doesn't hurt either.) So here are a few of the most common Side Effects, brought to us today by the multitalented, all-animal cast of the Class Privilege Players...

the boss effect

The Boss Effect occurs when we automatically take charge or take a leadership role, no matter what the situation. Or we just act like we're the boss even if we're not. Sure, we may have amazing leadership skills. But we can't possibly be the right person for the job *all* the time.



the ivory tower effect

The Ivory Tower Effect happens when we assume that a privileged education means we know more than anyone who doesn't have one. It leads to valuing academic experience over life experience to the point that we refuse to consider the opinion of anyone who doesn't have a fancy degree. This effect can also cause us to see academic reports, theories and statistics as the only valid ways to understand something—to the total exclusion of people's lived experience and emotion.



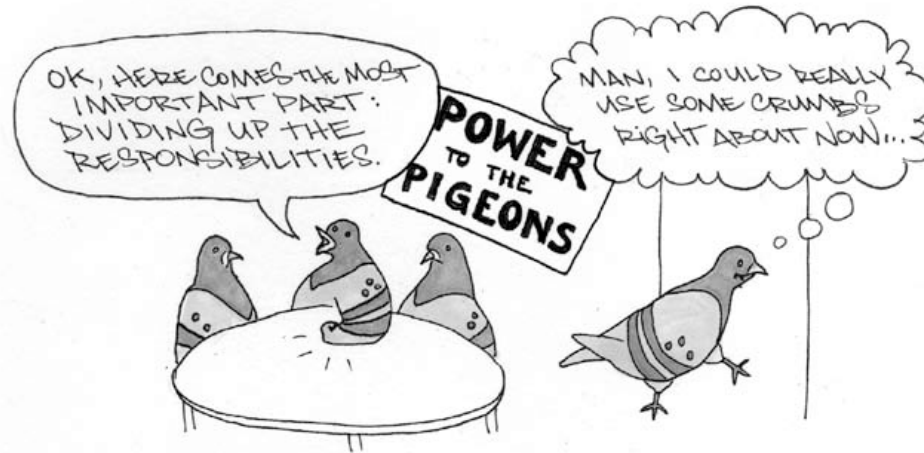
the waffle effect

Having privilege often also means having a lot of options open to us. This effect happens when we get so overwhelmed by all those options that we end up being unreliable or unable to commit to just one thing. We forget to take into account that changing our mind or making a sudden shift in plans might be a real problem for others who are counting on us.



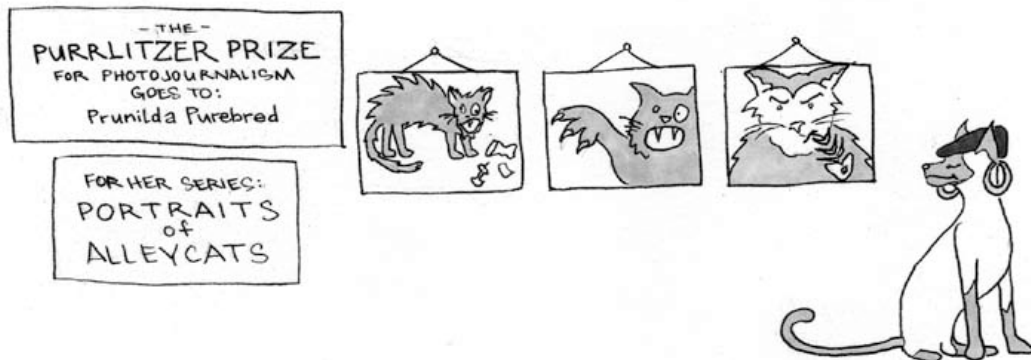
the space cadet effect

This effect happens when we don't take into consideration the impact we have on others, especially with our physical presence. This can include walking in and out of meetings at will, leaving in the middle of things or coming late, canceling at the last second and, in general, making decisions based solely on what is convenient for us. Taking good care of ourselves is absolutely essential, but we can still do that while being conscious of the effect we have on everyone else.



the stage hog effect

The Stage Hog Effect often pops up if we're collaborating with a group or gathering together other people's experiences for a project. It especially comes into play if we have a higher academic degree or more resources than the other people involved. We can end up feeling like having privilege is the same thing as being the smartest and most important, and therefore we're entitled to *all* the credit. Instead of just being proud of our hard work, we wind up hogging the spotlight.



the daddy warbucks effect

This effect happens when we “share” privilege without checking in with what the other person actually wants. Giving money or paying for things can be a generous, caring act. It can also make people feel disrespected or undermined when they aren’t consulted about it first. This effect can cause us to assume we know best what everyone needs, and blocks us from opening up a dialogue and working out a plan that feels right to everyone involved.



the all-knowing activist effect

This one occurs when we assume that our political view is the only way to see things and everyone else is ignorant. We forget that our political view is also shaped in part by the privilege we have. What feels most important and most urgent to us may be very different from what feels most important and urgent to someone with less privilege. This effect can end up isolating us from the very people we need to be working together with for social change.



the “ice ice baby” effect

This one comes into play when we look down at anyone who shows emotion, particularly in “serious” places, like at work. We end up assuming intelligence and leadership can only exist alongside feelingless-cool, and that emotional knowledge is useless. We may even freeze *ourselves* out in an attempt to conform to this icy ideal.



the big idea effect

This happens when we assume that we’re the biggest brains to ever have tackled a particular social change issue. Therefore our solution will obviously be the best! So we completely skip the step of talking to others who are working on the same issue and who could help us gain a deeper understanding of what’s actually going on. We just jump right into using our own resources and connections to make our plan happen. The Big Idea Effect means we end up putting our ideas—and our ideas alone—into action without ever having to consult or collaborate with anyone else.



the always comfy effect

This effect occurs when we get outraged or upset that someone has made us feel uncomfortable about having privilege. We end up assuming that our need to feel comfortable is more important than anything else. This effect often pops up if someone asks us for money or calls attention to our privilege when we are trying to keep it quiet. Even though feeling uncomfortable is totally miserable, if we freak out and close off whenever someone brings up the fact that we have privilege, we can end up completely isolating ourselves.



the side effects' strange adaptability

Many of these class privilege Side Effects are similar to the ways that other kinds of privilege, especially white privilege, get acted out. In fact, the more kinds of privilege we have, the more kinds of Side Effects we can end up with—and the harder it can be to catch when we're playing them out.

Another strange thing about the class privilege Side Effects is that almost everyone with wealth in the United States comes down with them, no matter who they are. People of all genders, races, ethnicities, cultures, religions, sexualities and abilities can, with enough class privilege, end up acting out these same behaviors. Of course our background and identity shape both the way we do it and how others respond to us. Still, the general gist is almost uncannily the same.

Experiencing class privilege Side Effects is probably not the kind of thing we can all get excited about having in common. It does say something though about the power of class privilege to sneak its way into how we act no matter who we are or where we come from. This means it won't always be easy to stop ourselves from doing this stuff. But as long as we're willing to learn from our mistakes—and help each other out—we have a pretty good shot.

thinking about Side Effects

- Has someone ever pointed out to you that you were acting in a way you didn't even realize? How did it feel?
- Can you think of a time when you acted out a class privilege Side Effect?
- Did you notice how it impacted other people? Describe what it was like.
- How does your identity shape the way you experience the class privilege Side Effects? Are there ways that your gender, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, sexuality, ability or other identities shape the way you might act them out?
- Have you ever felt like the Side Effects were undermining a close relationship? Were you able to talk about this with the other person? What was this like?
- Have you seen other people with class privilege act out Side Effects in the communities you are a part of? In what ways?

“We get stuck in our patterns and I think it's a big deal for individuals to break out of their family traditions and community traditions. I'm interested in having role models of people who do that. What does it take for them to do that? How can we really support each other? Because in our hearts we want to be a part of changing the status quo. It hurts us to be isolated and to know that we are holding resources that could make a big difference to other people.”—Laurel