

L.A. Private School and Privilege

Description



Gossip Girl

The other day I took one of those ridiculously popular BuzzFeed quizzes. This one was called, [How Privileged Are You?](#) I scored a 58 out of 100 points. Here's what the quiz said about me:

“You’re quite privileged. You’ve had a few struggles, but overall your life has been far easier than most. This is not a bad thing, nor is it something to be ashamed of. But you should be aware of your advantages and work to help others who don’t have them. Thank you for checking

your privilege.â€•

According to the quiz, Iâ€™m considered privileged, although less so than white men, because of my race and gender. No surprise there. Iâ€™m also less privileged than other people because I lost my mom to breast cancer as a teenager. Iâ€™d argue that Iâ€™ve been severely disadvantaged by this fact alone.

One of the BuzzFeed questions asked if I attended private school.

I did not attend private school, which deducted from my privileged status. Still, I scored more or less about where I thought I would, based on my level of education and other factors. The private school question jumped out at me. Attending private school gives you points on the privilege scale.

This silly quiz reminded me why my kids are in private school, even though I attended public school all the way through graduate school. My elementary and middle school experiences were so negative I wanted something better, something different, for my kids. For me, that didnâ€™t mean the biggest house in the â€œrightâ€• neighborhood or the newest car. It only meant private school.

Itâ€™s an understatement to say that there is a tremendous amount of privilege among many families at L.A. private schools. Iâ€™ve seen it and so have my kids. Sure, thereâ€™s some imaginary wealth, but much of it is real. Theyâ€™ve gone to school with kids who only fly on private jets, whose homes are the size of a city block and who have personal chefs, foundations bearing their family names, multiple nannies and mannys and house managers for their numerous houses around the globe. We have more than enough, thankfully, but we donâ€™t have any of those things.

At private school, there will almost always be somebody richer than you. My kids, to their credit, donâ€™t seem to care. They want to go to their friendâ€™s houses to have fun and hang out. Theyâ€™ve never asked why we donâ€™t have our own airplane or a movie theater in the house. Theyâ€™ve also had friends who are on financial aid, who have divorced parents whose lifestyles have been shattered by legal fees and kids with parents who work hard to pay tuition. There are the â€œrich hippiesâ€• who hide the fact that they have money, with long, messy hair, Birkenstocks, Volvos and multi-million dollar homes. I sort of like them because theyâ€™re so obvious. There are the social climbers whose mission has nothing to do with the parents, but only the kids. I avoid them like crazy. The most egregious social climbers Iâ€™ve met at private school arenâ€™t the low-income families. Not even close.

When you have kids in private school, extreme wealth is an inherent part of the culture. The school roster tells you where your kid's classmates live. The Annual Report tells you how much families give to the school. You may recognize some of the last names. You see the expensive cars in the carpool line. This is by no means limited to private school. There are L.A. public schools, especially at the elementary school level, that rival this stuff; it just depends on geography.

I'm pretty sure that even if we lived in an affluent suburb with excellent public schools, I'd still want my kids to attend private school. I'm biased because I had so many awful years as a student in L.A. public schools. I doubt anyone who had a similar experience to mine (being the constant target of bullies, being forced to change schools) would willingly entrust their own kids to the same school system.

For me, like you, all of this is highly personal and hard to sort out as a parent. We all want better for our kids than we had. Nobody wants an entitled brat. I know parents who talked non-stop about their belief in public schools until their kids got there, then changed their mind and enrolled them in private school. Families who started at private school are now in public school for various reasons, not only financial. After seeing the viral video of the kid and teacher fighting over drugs in the classroom at Santa Monica High, I wrote on my personal Facebook Page, "Nothing's changed." I went to that high school. It conjures up bad memories. Well, as sometimes happens on Facebook, somebody I know was offended. I wrote a response, then deleted it, replacing it with a funny meme about relationships. I have no interest in an online debate about that school, so far in my past, yet still obviously impacting my beliefs about my kids' education.

Talking to one of my private school mom friends recently, she joked that she thinks our kids live in a "bubble." I only half-jokingly laughed, saying that's exactly where I want them. Yet, my expectations for my kids are big when it comes to their understanding of how fortunate they are to attend private school. They are reminded of the educational opportunities they have and how they need to give back in meaningful ways to those who need their help. This isn't a topic that is ignored in our family. I want my kids to know that, according to BuzzFeed, going to private school counts as a privilege.

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