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**Subject:** Feeling entitled  
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Greetings -

I listened to [an episode of \*Against the Rules with Michael Lewis\*](#) that got me thinking. About 30 minutes in, Cal Berkeley psychologist Dacher Keltner asks an interesting question: “Does the sense of being privileged make you disobey the rules of the road or the laws of the land?” He set out to answer that question by devising an experiment. [He and his colleague](#) planted a couple of students at a pedestrian zone (giving the pedestrian the right of way—cars are required by law to stop) near the Berkeley campus. One student attempting to cross the street, while the other hid and recorded the details. One of the details was the make of the vehicle. [It turned out](#) that drivers of the least expensive vehicles always gave the pedestrian the right of way, whereas 46% of the drivers of the most expensive cars cut off the pedestrian.

This study led to a bunch of others that more or less replicated the pattern of behavior. The studies suggest a sense of entitlement in one group (on average) compared to the other. I think it’s human nature to have negative feelings toward someone who feels (or you think feels) more entitled. But the question I was pondering was a little different: are entitled people less happy? (Why is that hippie trying to walk across the hood of my car when I’m already five minutes late to my appointment?)

I know that I’m almost invariably at my worst when I’m feeling most entitled. If something isn’t going my way, I often get frustrated and lash out, and the reality is the thing that isn’t going my way is often outside of my control.

While I don’t know if we can have a black and white answer to the question, [this 2016 article](#) is admittedly a nice fit for my confirmation bias. They define entitlement as “a personality trait characterized by pervasive feelings of deservingness, specialness, and exaggerated expectations.” They go on to describe how entitlement may be a problem for the entitled person, proposing a vicious cycle: “entitlement presents the individual with the possibility of experiencing distress, predisposes further risk factors for distress..., and increases the risk of interpersonal conflict, again leading to distress.”

When I think about healthspan—the how “well” you live part of longevity—I think of three components: cognitive, physical, and emotional. It’s this last one that is disproportionately getting my attention. Perhaps it’s because I have spent so much time trying to optimize the first two. Perhaps it’s because I have what I perceive to be as such gaping holes in latter. Regardless, I would say at least half of my energy these days is going into better understanding emotional well-being. And one of the techniques that helps ease my misery is reminding myself of the entitled drivers in the Berkeley study.

- Peter

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