

How Straight, White, Privileged, Male Academics  
Talk To Each Other In Private

A short play

by

William Missouri Downs

283 Mount Massive  
Glacier View, CO 80536  
970-302-9686  
Downs@me.com

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 White Men)

### **DR. BOB**

*A new adjunct professor, white, male, 30ish*

### **DR. PILLSBURY**

*Head of the English Department, tenured, white, male, older*

## SETTING & TIME

Head of the English Department's office at a nameless university.

The present.

## How Straight, White, Privileged, Male Academics Talk To Each Other In Private

*(The lights find DR PILLSBURY, the head of the English department. He's privileged, pompous and white. Enter, DR BOB - as an adjunct, he's less privileged but also white.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

Dr. Bob, come in. Door closed?

DR. BOB

Yes.

DR. PILLSBURY

You're sure?

DR. BOB

Positive. *(Frustrated)* I can't believe this happened in my first week of teaching. Am I going to lose my job?

DR. PILLSBURY

Not if you play your cards right.

DR. BOB

What's going to happen?

DR. PILLSBURY

There'll be a hearing, witnesses called, and then three to six months from now the Dean's Oversight Committee will issue an executive report that will be filed and forgot, just like the university's new five-year plan. You're safe.

DR. BOB

Still, I'm worried.

DR. MUMFORD

Bob, it's time we have the talk.

DR. BOB

What talk?

DR. PILLSBURY

The secret rules, the golden plates, the Holy Grail. What they don't cover in the University's five hour Diversity and Inclusion Training Webinar. How a straight, white, male, heterosexual can survive the messy realities of political correctness at a modern university.

DR. BOB

I've heard these rules existed and were handed down from one generation of white male professors to another but I thought it was just an urban legend.

DR. PILLSURY

No, they're for real. And now you will be a member of the club.

DR. BOB

I'm honored.

DR. PILLSURY

Rule one: Always remember, it isn't your fault. We white males didn't create this situation, the walls were put up by them not us. We are victims. Say it.

DR. BOB

I am a victim.

DR. PILLSBURY

No, say it like you mean it.

DR. BOB

I am a victim!

DR. PILLSBURY

Good. Rule Two: always assume that ninety-five percent of your students and fellow professors are one of them.

DR. BOB

Them?

DR. PILLSBURY

Vagina Monologue feminists or knee jerk liberals. And that they are constantly prepared to be offended or, in the case of feminists, utterly humorless.

DR. BOB

Should I be taking notes?

DR. PILLSBURY

Absolutely not. We cannot take a chance that this will fall into enemy hands. Rule three: vocabulary adjustment. The idea being that if you change the words people use, you'll tear down the walls between us - tear down the walls and you find yourself in an accepting open minded society - it doesn't work of course, but it's a nice thought.

*(DR. PILLSBURY reaches into his old satchel and takes out flashcards.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

Let's test your word skills.

DR. BOB

You want me to...

DR. PILLSBURY

Yes. Say the word in the correct form.

*(The flashcard reads, "Waitress.")*

DR. BOB

'Waitress.' A politically incorrect term that has been replaced by 'server' or 'waiter.'

*(DR. PILLSBURY isn't sure, he checks the back of the card for the answer.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

You are correct.

*(He flips to the next card, it reads, "Foreign food.")*

DR. BOB

'Foreign food' has been replaced with 'ethnic cuisine.'

*(Once again, DR. PILLSBURY must check the answer on the back of the card.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

You're batting a thousand.

*(He flips to the next card, it reads, "Bisexual Prostitute.")*

DR. BOB

Ah, Dr Pillsbury, I don't think 'bisexual prostitute' is something that'll come up in faculty meetings.

DR. PILLSBURY

You never know, give it a guess.

DR. BOB

*(Guessing)*

Ah... Equal opportunity sex worker?

*(DR. PILLSBURY checks the back of the card.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

You are on a roll. Let's try a full sentence. Instead of saying, "The deaf businessman had a sex change operation in a ghetto." You say...

DR. BOB

Ah... The hearing impaired businessperson had gender reassignment in an economically deprived area.

DR. PILLSBURY

*(Impressed)*

You are good.

*(DR. PILLSBURY hands over the flashcards. )*

DR. PILLSBURY

Take these, study them, and always remember appearance is more important than the real thing.

DR. BOB

Am I now a open minded person?

DR. PILLSBURY

Rule Four: Because you teach writing. New writing rules, part one - metaphors. I'll give you a sentence and you rewrite it using the correct metaphor. Ready? "Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a female driver." Go ahead.

DR. BOB

*(Guessing)*

Ah... Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a madman.

DR. PILLSBURY

No, that would be flagged by people with mental health issues.

DR. BOB

*(More guessing)*

Drunk with power he crashed into the room like a... a...  
bowling ball?

DR. PILLSBURY

No, bowlers have feelings too.

DR. BOB

*(Trying again)*

Drunk with power he crashed into the room. Period?

DR. PILLSBURY

That's right! Avoid metaphors! And if you write about a character who is drinking coffee, never, ever describe the shade of the coffee.

DR. BOB

*(Growing frustrated)*

But Dr. Pills//

DR. PILLSBURY

New writing rules, part two! How to avoid Twitter mobs - from now on you can only write within your S.C.I.U.

DR. BOB

S.C.I.U.?

DR. PILLSBURY

Seses Contained Identity Unit. White men are only allowed to write about white men. No exceptions. White women are allowed to write about white women and men. Black men are allowed to write about both black and white men and black women, latinos, and LGBTQ-ists can write about anybody they want.

DR. BOB

But//

DR. PILLSBURY

Rule Five: pedagogy, when you're in front of your class be sure to, once a week, throw in a little footnote on the contributions of them.

DR. BOB

Them?

DR. PILLSBURY

Gays, lesbians, and anyone else on the alphabetical list. For you this'll be easy.

DR. BOB

It will?

DR. PILLSBURY

You teach dramatic lit - lots of playwrights. Rule Six: Political correctness insurance. You take out insurance by doing little things that make you appear to be open-minded.

DR. BOB

But I *am* open-minded.

DR. PILLSBURY

Of course you are, all white male English professors are. But nowadays you gotta prove it. So let's say one of your students is selling cookies for some student group in the union - you be sure to stop by, chat'em up, buy something, you know, make an appearance. By the way, cookie?

*(DR. PILLSBURY offers him a cookie.)*

DR. BOB

Thanks.

*(They eat cookies.)*

DR. PILLSBURY

They're doing the cutest thing today. To protest the wage gap between men and women they're charging men a dollar and women only eighty-seven cents.

DR. BOB

Cool.

DR. PILLSBURY

Yes! That's the exact correct response. Rule Seven: Comedy.

DR. BOB

I like a good joke.

DR. PILLSBURY

No you don't. Comedy is dead.



DR. BOB

What about witticisms?

DR. PILLSBURY

And never ever be witty. Did you hear what happened to Dr. Adhock over in Criminal Justice?

DR. BOB

No.

DR. PILLSBURY

Full professor, top in his field, published twenty books. This freshman//

DR. BOB

*(Correcting him)*

First year student.

DR. PILLSBURY

Thank you. This first year female student kept sending him long, rambling, three-page, emails.

DR. BOB

Oh I hate that.

DR. PILLSBURY

He kindly requested that she edit. She sent more. He recommended that she get to the point. Even more long emails. Finally, trying to get through to her he wrote back a witticism, quote "An e-mail should be like a skirt, long enough to cover the essentials, but short enough to be interesting" Unquote. That's witty, right?

DR. BOB

I guess.

DR. PILLSBURY

That's Oscar Wilde witty. Not only was he fired, they disappeared him.

DR. BOB

Disappeared?

DR. PILLSBURY

They removed his entire academic record and expunged his books from every college library. His books are now harder to find than an episode of The Cosby Show.

DR. BOB

So never make a joke.

DR. PILLSBURY

Or a pun, or a wisecrack.

DR. BOB

What about irony?

DR. PILLSBURY

Irony is dead! Repeat after me, irony is dead!

DR. BOB

Irony is dead.

DR. PILLSBURY

No, say it like you mean it.

DR. BOB

Irony is dead!

DR. PILLSBURY

But! Always remember, no matter how unfunny you are, all white, straight males are going to screw up at some point. Am I right?

DR. BOB

You're right.

DR. PILLSBURY

And so you need Rule Eight: a safety statement - A declaration that you can haul out on a moment's notice. Example, you're at some faculty potluck when you slip - You make a minor Eurocentric, micro-aggression, cultural appropriation error, right?

DR. BOB

It happens.

DR. PILLSBURY

First, it's critical that you act out a proper dose of concern. Then you gotta nip it in the bud, so you got a safety statement memorized and ready to go. Here. Read.

*(DR. PILLSBURY hands a note card to DR. BOB.)*

DR. BOB

*(Reading the note card)*

"I think the dehumanizing stereotypes perpetuated by our culture are wrong. We have to stop the hostile, discriminatory environment that prevents positive identity roles."

DR. PILLSBURY

A bit mechanical, work on it, memorize it, be prepared to use it on a moment's notice.

DR. BOB

Dr Pillsbury, this all sounds rather dishonest. I mean, do we straight white males have to go to such lengths? Can't we just create a world where there are no walls?

*(DR. PILLSBURY laughs.)*

DR. PILLSURY

They've created a world where you can't afford to be wrong. Where once the mistake is made there is no forgiveness, no teachable moments, so it's best not to talk. Better yet, don't make eye contact. That's it. Lesson over.

DR. BOB

Gee thanks, this has been enlightening.

DR. PILLSURY

Remember there are no safe spaces for straight, privileged, white, male academics and that makes us...?

DR. BOB

Victims!

DR. PILLSURY

You are now ready to face the politically correct world!

DR. BOB

*(Looking at his watch)*

I should get to my next class.

DR. PILLSURY

Which is?

DR. BOB

Shakespeare.

DR. PILLSURY

And how are you going to teach it?

DR. BOB

*(Sure of himself)*

I'm going to, for no apparent reason, right in the middle of a lecture on Macbeth, mentioned that Shakespeare was most likely a bisexual.

DR. PILLSURY

And...

DR. BOB

And then I'm going to go on a long tangent about how Taming of the Shrew is a sexist play filled with female oppression.

DR. PILLSURY

And what else are you going to do?

DR. BOB

*(Proud)*

Keep my job!

DR. PILLSURY

You go girl!

DR. BOB

Thank you Dr. Pillsbury, it's been a privilege.

DR. PILLSURY

No, the *privilege* has been all mine.

*(They shake, black out.)*

THE END