

Resistant Privilege and (or?) Privileged Resistance: Navigating the Boxes of Embodied Identity

Jason Zingsheim

Through the use of performative writing, my goal is to investigate with you, to theorize with you, the possibility, potential and problems of employing critical performance pedagogy in a privileged body. Can the embodied privilege of a white boy be critically deployed for resistant ends? If so, how is this resistance also (or is it only) privileged? To explore the nuances of these questions, I reflect upon my performance of identity and pedagogical practice, specifically the ways they are constrained and enabled by whiteness, masculinity and queerness. The confluence of these social discourses offers a rich context to explore how the performative nature of our embodied pedagogical practices works to perpetuate and challenge oppression.

Keywords: Embodied identity, performative writing, critical pedagogy, masculinity, whiteness, queer.

We begin with a box. In a box, actually. A rather large box, but a box nonetheless. We begin in a black box theatre. Bright lights flood the center of the space, the center of this box. In the middle of this pool of light are a number of black wooden boxes stacked irregularly. You know these boxes; we all know these boxes. This unkempt arrangement will not do at all. Boxes are nothing if not organized. Just look at them, perfectly squared (well, almost). They are just begging to be organized. We cannot go any further; we must first organize these boxes. Let us demarcate a large square space by placing four of the boxes around the corners of the space. There yet remains a single box. Let us place this final box downstage center in line with the two front corner boxes. A row of three evenly spaced black boxes. Yes, this will do quite nicely, I think, my space, our space, is arranged. We may now proceed.

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2 *Resistant Privilege*

As we move, the space before us will come to represent diverse locations. It shall begin as a representation of the boxes we find ourselves in when called upon to claim an identity. It will transition into a symbol of the boxing ring. Finally, at points throughout the essay, it will illustrate the space of the classroom. The shift between and among these spaces is subtle. Each of these spaces is characterized and dominated by traditional masculinity making it easy to slide between them. Like Gingrich-Philbrook, my objectives are to implicate and resist the violence and hegemonic masculinity of traditional scholarship (“Disciplinary”). Masculinist ideology seeks to whitewash scholarship, to bleach anything that seems remotely personal, anything that could be put into italics (Blair, Brown, and Baxter). Still, I am hesitant to use italics myself. Gingrich-Philbrook’s voice rings in my head. I understand his distaste for italics, especially those used as empty, overly simplistic and often unnecessary signifiers of difference (“Autoethnography’s” 307-08). They are often used to denote the personal and it seems pointless to italicize the entire essay, don’t you think? Besides, when italics are used, the text seems to slant to the right and that makes me a bit uncomfortable. Text standing up looks, well, normative and privileged. Maybe even objective, without any overt agenda. It isn’t unless you read closely that you see the very same text, the very same words are also speaking resistance. But you have to pay very close attention to the word choice, the sentence structure, the transitions, the point of view, the voice(s), and the moments. You have to pay attention; otherwise you could miss it (Alexander and Warren 329-330). Perhaps I shouldn’t be telling you what you have to do. You might not like that.

Then again, maybe that’s just the way you like it.

Yet, I’d like to reserve the right to occasionally, *sparingly*, use italics to mark that which seems particularly deserving. It may indeed be personal. It may indeed be theoretical. Don’t be fooled though, the line between the personal and theoretical is not so distinct. In this piece I work to theorize in and through the body. I endeavor to take to heart Hamera’s reminder that “we don’t just teach or study bodies. We teach and study *as* bodies and our bodies are, in turn, literally reshaped by the ‘hows’ and ‘wheres,’ the material practices, of our pedagogy” (“Exposing” 63). My intent here is to explore some of the knowledges our bodies are subjected to, (re)constructed with, and constrained by within the space of the classroom (Hamera, “Performance Studies” 129-130). Specifically, I seek to reveal my (our) complicity in these disciplining systems, to uncover how our performative pedagogical practices are “implicated in the effects of our labor” (Alexander 43). So I follow Gingrich-Philbrook’s injunction and turn to examine my (our) own scholarly talk and pedagogical practices (“Disciplining” 210). I accept Alexander’s “invitation to see *ourselves* in the moment of our teaching engagements” (60) and to “engage [in] the double-lensed act” of looking at myself look at myself (43). In other words, in order to explore how the performative nature of our embodied pedagogical

practices works to propagate oppression, I reflexively interrogate my own performing body within the classroom.

In this attempt to theorize in and through the body, text describing the body, my body, your body, our bodies and their movements slides from the personal to the theoretical. The distinction gets blurry and I just don't have a font that works well for that. Instead, I employ performative writing, a strategy that "attempts to keep the complexities of human experience intact, to place the ache back in scholars' abstractions" (Pelias, "Performative" 418). Performative writing allows room for the body, for our bodies. Through this form we, you and I, are able to theorize about the body through the body, through our bodies. It is a process that enables us to encounter "a productive and formative construction of the self in a particular situation" (Alexander and Warren 329). Yet this compositional strategy compels the reader (that would be you) "to respond to the cultural texts in a visceral as well as cognitive mode" (Nakayama and Corey 332) and "to participate kinesthetically as well as intellectually" (Pineau, "Critical" 49). It asks, invites, sometimes demands, that you be engaged. Performative writing is consequential, "operat[ing] from within the circuitries of reader response" (Pollock 95). Similar to the autopoietic narratives of Alexander and Warren, this work asks that you "reflect upon [your] own experiences within the educational context and how issues of race, culture, ethnicity, sex and gender rubbed against the always already fragile construction of [your] own identities" (Alexander and Warren 330). This reflection, this interaction with the text, may be for transformation (Nakayama and Corey 332); it may be "for a truly good laugh, for the boundary, banal pleasures that twine bodies in action" (Pollock 98); but it will not be for finding sterile conclusions. The evocative, metonymic, and citational characteristics of this style of scholarship avoid easy oversimplification and tidy endings (Pollock), much like the way our embodied identities resist neat and clean closure. Neither takes very well to being boxed in.

Join me (please read as either an invitation or a demand, whichever you prefer) as we delve into a space where text and bodies, scholarship and identity, privileged and marginalized come together and fall apart.

"Jumping"

We claim that identity is intersectional (Crenshaw). We may know this as a truth, even as our truth. We may understand the complexity that this entails. But to look at much of the scholarship on identity, you'd never know it. The traditional conventions of writing scholarship mandate that we clearly address one topic, one axis of identity at a time, visibly marked by a subheading. Any other pertinent facets of identity must be addressed in a separate section, with a separate subheading. Previews, signposting and

reviews are required to guide the reader as they jump from box to box to box. Before we know it, intersectionality becomes merely sequentiality.

I make each jump. White. Male. The boxes each support my weight. Gay. Middle-class. Sometimes, I feel I must jump faster: White-gay-middle-class-male. Or in a different order: Gay-male-white-and-middle-class. Other times, I jump to different boxes: Educated-Gay-Christian. Yet as I go through these motions, I feel nervous. What if I miss a box? I can picture myself coming up short, my toes just missing the edge, shins banging against the corner, torso falling forward, hands slapping the wood, expletives flying out of my mouth. What if I jump too far? Heels slide off the far edge, tailbone crashes against the box and then slams into the floor as I howl in agony. What if the box breaks – or tips – or slides – or slips? What if Butler (*Gender Trouble*) is right, what if the box is only there because we keep talking about it like it's there? Plenty of people, like Holstein and Gubrium, as well as Tracy and Trethewey, have said that these boxes aren't fixed entities; that they are constantly being made and remade in certain ways by discourses of power that are beyond my individual control. And I believe them. Despite appearances, boxes are slippery creatures. So the jumping, the jumping makes me nervous.

“Boxing”

The ground feels more solid, somehow safer, and not as risky. Except now, standing on the ground, I am surrounded by boxes. I've got more boxes than I know what to do with. What vexes me at this point is how to navigate this space, these intersections, these trajectories, this increasingly kinetic “dense particularity” (Alexander). Which box(es) should I stand near? Should I carefully sit upon one of them, like a throne, with my feet still firmly planted on the ground? Which one? How many can I touch at the same time? What happens in the spaces between these boxes? How do we make sense of multiple facets of identity in the spaces where they are no longer multiple? How is this complicated when the various aspects of one's identity challenge each other? It's like in this corner, I'm wearing the blue robe hearing the announcer yell “Masculinity!” The crowd roars. And in this corner, I'm wearing rainbow colored trunks as “Queer!” reverberates through the air. Again the crowd roars. This in and of itself might be an interesting bout. But there are always more than two boxers in the ring. I'm also over in this third corner wearing the invisible gloves. “Whiteness!” The crowd still roars. We can watch as these three fighters circle each other. Each one sizing up the others. In this type of championship match - Who teams up on whom? Who will be the heavyweight champion? For how long? On what terms?

But if we are going to take intersectionality seriously, then we have to acknowledge that we are all both privileged and marginalized in various, contextual, and connected ways (Collins 245-249). So this fight, or some

version of it, some copy of this copy, happens in the same ring, in every ring, in every body, at the same time – and then over again, and again and again. How many boxers are you right now? How do you resist dominant narratives when your very body reinscribes them? Can those of us who are marked as privileged ever really engage in critical work, or does the privileged flesh undermine the resistant discourse? What happens when we mark how an intersectional identity is stretched across the matrix from marginalized to privileged? Perhaps the dominant blue robe hides the oppressed rainbow trunks. Perhaps the bright rainbow trunks demand attention making the gloves and robe suspect and impotent. Yet this thinking relies on a masculinist ideology whereby one must win and the others must lose (Blair, Brown, and Baxter). Adopting a both/and perspective allows us to embrace the ways power and resistance perpetually exist in a tensive relationship (Foucault 95-96). It's a complicated dance full of bobbing, weaving, bouncing, ducking and hopping. But there's never a champion – there are too many boxers. There isn't even a knockout blow. A right hook may stun, a left jab may shake, but the bout continues, bobbing and weaving, weaving and bobbing.

“Reading”

I know that I too am named by Pelias (*Writing* 11-20). I too am a “fool of [my] own making,” concerned with measuring and with measuring up (19-20). But must we also be frozen (146)? I want to move, to move carefully, cautiously, ethically, and to learn as I stumble on (19). Yet in attempting to move at all, I am concerned with Warren that this analysis might just support and stabilize the oppressive forces I am working to disrupt (“Bodily Excess” 85-86). Still, I agree with Pineau when she writes that “a genuine critique of privilege, *of my privilege at any rate*, begins by engaging the forms through which I wield it” (“Engraving” 68). So I begin with the forms I use. Pineau claims this is a difficult and distasteful task. She is right. Not that I had any doubt, but it's one thing to read about how bitter the tea is. It's another to taste it, to feel your mouth pucker, your tongue revolt, your neck stiffen, and your stomach convulse as the sour warmth slides down your throat when you sip from the silver spoon. But tea has healing properties. So I take another sip and resist the urge to vomit.

In the space of the classroom, I wield privilege. Not through a body bitterly contorted, but through internalizing whiteness and masculinity, through adopting a confident and assertive presence, comfortable in my educated and institutional(ized) status. I consciously improve my posture, standing up a bit taller and straighter, my chest full and out. I lift my head to look out over the students and, sitting on the edge of a table or box, I literally put myself up above them. I am in charge and my body easily slips into this role. My voice follows suit, increasing in volume and deepening a notch. I smile. While I want there to be no doubt in the minds of my

students/readers that I am in charge, I also want to look friendly and not like a power hungry asshole. As the performer on stage, the author on page, the teacher in the classroom, I assume and demand not only authority, but that you like me too.

Alright class, today we're going to continue our discussion of gender and nonverbal communication. Remember last week we talked about Butler's notion of performativity and we started to go over the idea of passing and its historical use in terms of racial and gendered identities. Today, the concept is often used in terms of sexual identities and to clarify what this means and how it works, we'll be discussing and analyzing how performativity and passing function in our own classroom. Basically, we'll be using me as a case study. Today we're going to explore how people might read me as gay and how they might read me as straight.

Now, first, if you know who I'm dating [*insert coy smirk here*], because s/he does teach in this department too, please don't say anything, [*insert playfully worried expression here*] it will ruin our fun. Now you've all had a few weeks to get to know me and observe my behavior. Based on these interactions, you know a lot about me and my identity. For instance you know that I'm biologically male and that I identify as masculine and as white. If you don't know these things, you need to come to class more often. You know that I am dating someone. But few, if any of you, know what my sexual orientation is. But how many of you have made assumptions about it? When I talk about the person I'm dating, do you picture anyone? Is that person sexed or gendered? What led you to make those assumptions? That's what we want to explore today—how you've been reading me.

Now, I know you may not be completely comfortable raising your hand to tell your instructor, "you're gay and here are all the reasons for how I know you're gay." Others may not be comfortable calling me straight and delineating how you know I'm attracted to women. Or maybe you don't think sexual orientation should be brought into the classroom, except that it's already here. When you pictured the person I'm dating, it was here. When your instructors wear wedding rings or talk of spouses and kids, it's there. Sex and sexuality are already in the classroom, they are everywhere (Berlant and Warner). I recognize that there are power issues here between my position as instructor and your position as student. I assure you I will not get offended by assertions that I am either straight or gay. I've had this conversation a number of times, with many classes, and have been referred to as both gay and straight by plenty of students. I promise you I won't hold it against you. Of course, you may not believe that promise, so feel free to not say anything, which is of course an option.

Now, should we start with gay or straight?

Sure, we can start with that one. On one of the sheets of paper you were given, go ahead and write down any reasons you can think of for why someone in this class may think that I am _____. And turn the paper horizontally, or landscape, so that everyone writes on it the same way. Now

remember, it can be nonverbal—things that you’ve seen me do or how I’ve said certain things. It can also be verbal—things that I’ve said. It might be activities or experiences that I’ve shared with you. Whatever reasons you can think of. Take a minute or two write them down—and remember, don’t put your name on it.

As a reader, if you’d like, feel free to think of responses yourself. Yes, I know, you’ve already seen the answer key. Put it aside for a moment and play along. Come on, it’ll be fun. For those of you who’ve never met me, I’m afraid you have little to draw upon, so let me explain that I actually have this conversation with my students when teaching gender and communication. I schedule it for about a third of the way through the semester. We don’t actually use paper, but rather I facilitate a class discussion/debate and I write the students’ ideas on the whiteboard in front of the class. In both situations, I retain physical control as ideas are funneled through me and gain legitimacy in the classroom through my writing/collecting of them (Trujillo). The embodied conversation prevents anonymity for students but remains consistent with the open and discussion-based classroom climate. Students are afforded their right to abstain from vocally participating, though most choose to join the conversation at some point as classmates debate the merit of suggestions. In this discussion, I work to bring the body, specifically my body, consciously and explicitly, into the classroom (Hamera). I know that one of the reasons I can do this is because the white body, the male body, my white male body, will be read as universal (Shome) and concentric with the dominant values of the educational system (Mumby 166-67; Warren, “Bodily Excess”). And by questioning the normative body, my normative body, the status quo as its legitimizing apparatus is also questioned and implicated. Or, it can be, but that partly depends on what it is you came up with.

Go ahead and wrap up your thoughts on me being _____ and pass up your paper. Now we’ll flip and on the other sheet of paper, write down any reasons that someone in the class might read me as _____. Again, this is why *someone*, not necessarily you, might read me this way. You aren’t claiming to read me this way yourself. Remember, anything that you’ve seen or heard in class is fair game.

Again, feel free to develop your own responses as you read. Take about a minute or two. I’ll wait.

Okay, now I’m bored. So, while you work on your second responses, I’ll tape together the first set of ideas, top to bottom, into a vertical banner, folding the sheets together like an accordion. But first I need a work surface.

Ah, yes, the boxes! They are so versatile aren't they? I must admit, I do appreciate versatility.

I kneel behind the box downstage center. I am positioned inside the ring, kneeling and working on top of this box, this throne, this site of power. I find the choice intriguing. To kneel, often a sign of weakness or vulnerability. Just ask my knees. It is a gesture of supplication. I kneel within a space marked as contested. I kneel as I am contested. Are you reading me as gay or straight right now? I eagerly kneel before/as a versatile object/subject. Am I performing queerness? I kneel to carefully work on a box. Am I performing straightness? I kneel in a space also marked as hypermasculine. I kneel before a source of my power. I kneel before my own throne. Yet, as I kneel, I also manipulate your ideas and contributions. Tape rips. Paper shuffles and folds. Scepters, swords and markers deem those who are worthy. Do I kneel in submission to the contest or in power to determine the results? On my knees, do I submit to you? Or do you submit to me?

Perhaps it really isn't about the kneeling at all. Perhaps, it's about hiding behind the box. What will you come up with? What ideas will you give voice to? I can't control what you're writing down. What if you say something I hadn't thought of before? Why do you think I'm straight? Why do you think I'm gay? What if you're wrong?

What if you're right?

What if you don't come up with any reasons? What if you are just sitting there, bored yourself, waiting for me to get up off my knees? Kneeling/hiding/manipulating/fearing. In and out of control. Unsure of what or how I'm feeling. Frightened by the potential yet confident in my ability to handle any outcome.

It looks like most of you are close to being done, so go ahead and start passing your second responses forward. I'll quickly repeat the process of taping them together. I really can work quite efficiently when needed. Even/Especially when I'm on my knees. Ripping, taping, and folding. Ripping, taping, and folding. Ripping, taping, and folding. Rip, tape, fold. Rip, tape, fold. Rip, tape, fold. Rip. Rip. Rip. Rip. Rip. RIP. RRRRIIIIPPPP.

t a p e.

f o l d.

I stand up. (Are you relieved?)

Shall we discuss your responses? "Your shoes," you say. So, based on my shoes someone could conclude that I'm attracted to other guys. I purchased them from a small boutique shoe store in Seattle while on vacation. My romantic partner helped me pick them out. I do like to think they are fairly stylish, which made it easier to justify spending the money on them. They cost more than any other pair of shoes I own. But I'm not getting any younger and at some point, I believe I should be able to spend money

on a good pair of shoes. Apparently “good” means expensive and boutique. I have heard that shoes say a lot about a man. And as the rumor goes, all gay men have great style, right? Though I’ve also heard that shoes are often one of the first things women look at on a guy. So maybe that’s why I’m wearing them? Interestingly, “Appearance” was on the straight list too, but that was because my shirts are usually wrinkled. I admit they are. Isn’t that stylish today? Apparently, my wrinkles don’t have that much to do with being an overworked teacher with barely enough time to do laundry, much less iron it, but are really about whom I’d prefer to sleep with.

Absent from my body is the hyper style associated with stereotypical gay men or straight metrosexuals. What style I do possess is encapsulated by my glasses and shoes, both of which my partner helped me pick out. The un-tucked button down shirt paired with the jeans and the shoes do more than present my body as masculine. What is glaringly present, yet constantly overlooked, is the way all of these articles and my appearance as a whole, code me as reliable, competent, knowledgeable, hard working, trustworthy, and dedicated. Or, for short: middle-class and normative.

“You don’t flirt with me in class.” I’d like to think I don’t flirt with anyone in class, so please don’t take it personally. I don’t know, call it being professional, or wanting to keep my job, whatever. And, yes, we will be covering sexual harassment in a few weeks.

Was this response written by a male or a female? Does it rely on Trujillo’s claim that to be masculine is to be hetero (and hyper) sexual? My lack of hyper/hetero/sexuality via flirting marks my incorrect performance of masculinity. I can’t help but wonder what this implies about being educated or professional. On the other hand, perhaps this response relies on Anita Bryant’s claim that all gay men are trying to recruit your children? I haven’t tried to “turn you gay,” so I must not be gay, one of those over-sexed dangerous predators. Perhaps the sex of the writer is less salient than our races. Perhaps you feel I should flirt with you because we are both white. Perhaps you feel I should flirt with you because as a white male I am supposed to desire the eroticized exoticized Other.

Or maybe the truth is that I’m just not good at flirting.

Humor deflects and protects the ego at all costs. Perhaps I am better at performing traditional white masculinity than you thought. It is easier than I thought. A quick one-liner is all it takes. In that deft move, I foreclose connection, deny relational identity, resist accountability, and ignore the longings to belong (Carrillo Rowe). Protecting myself through sarcasm and humor, I enact the hyper-masculine queer (Goltz, “Laughing” 99). I gloss over the colonial, white supremacist legacy my body testifies. I weakly gesture to my homophobic and ageist fear of becoming the youth-obsessed, bitter, old queen (Goltz, “Investigating”). And after having earlier claimed that sex is everywhere, I now conveniently assert that it shouldn’t be here.

“Your hair.” I must be straight because of my hair? I’ll have you know there are plenty of men, straight and gay, with thinning hair. You can’t do

anything about it. Except for that Rogaine stuff, but that shit's expensive and I can't afford it. Don't you flip back or scroll up to that section about the shoes. Just because I can justify a one time purchase for the illusion of middle-class stability doesn't mean I can justify the monthly purchase of a product that may or may not provide the illusion of youth and beauty. We're at the top of my head now, stay with the rest of us. Thinning hair, receding hairline, and the early, yet unmistakable, fact of male-pattern baldness.

"You go to the gym." I don't know, I'm pretty sure both gay and straight men go to the gym. Maybe it's connected to wanting to look good for the person I'm dating. Maybe it's connected to the obsession in gay culture with body image. Maybe it's connected to the desire for power and strength that supports hegemonic masculinity (Trujillo). Or maybe it's simply connected to a family history full of high cholesterol and fatal heart attacks.

But let's face it, when I go to the gym, I perform squats and bench presses because these exercises work a variety of muscles with a single movement. The act of going to the gym iterates a variety of discourses in that single act. I do want to look healthy and attractive for my partner. I do compare myself to the tanned, muscular models in the gay glossies and bars. I want a body type I have been taught to desire, one that works to (re)construct my dominant location. As Dyer explains, a "tanned built body affirms whiteness as a particular yet not a restricted identity" (162). I want a body that is statistically rare, yet one that I am told is within reach of all consumers who are willing to spend their resources to remake their body. I do want power and strength, or more importantly, to be perceived as powerful and strong. I know that such a perception bolsters and affirms my performance of masculinity. I hope that such a perception reduces the risk of being a victim in a hate crime. I hope that performing these exercises strengthens my heart and clears my arteries. I know that this white male body is not complete and whole, despite how it is represented (Shome).

"Passing"

"The fact that you're doing this activity." Yeah, that was on the other list too. It's always on both lists. So for some, I would only do this activity if I were straight and had nothing to risk. For others, I would only do this activity if I were gay and had something to gain from the risk.

I think this is interesting, the risk factor. Or maybe it would be more accurate to say the ambiguity of risk. It comes up every time, and it comes up on both lists. The odd thing is that it doesn't seem risky to me. In fact, it's kind of like the blue robe—warm, snuggly, secure, downright cozy. I mean sure, given the right set of circumstances, I could end up accidentally flashing someone. And that might be a little unsettling; but overall, not much is actually at stake. I've spent our time together cultivating a climate

where I know I can do this. We've been vulnerable with each other. And remember—you like me. I told you that you did. I've done it many times before. It would take a lot more than some rainbow trunks for my white, male, masculine, middle-class body to get knocked out on my teaching evaluations.

Drawing this attention to my body, to my identity, doesn't really make sense to me as 'risk.' As a white male, my world is constructed in such a way to protect me from feeling at risk based on my identity. The only threat I am encouraged to fear is color coded, mass mediated and can easily be thwarted if only I shopped more often. Daily risk, the kind of perceived and actual danger that many people face on a daily basis, the risk that forces one to face their own vulnerability, that risk is often foreign to me. I walk alone through parking garages without fear of harm. Walking into a store I don't risk my status as an individualized subject, I don't risk being reduced to a homogenous otherized object. I am accustomed to my universal, absent, and normative body. I expect the ability to take this body into any situation I want to without risking my sense of safety and security. This sense of entitlement is not accompanied by a sense of risk. My white, middle-class, male body reads as the epitome of privilege. I have been "conditioned into oblivion" to take comfort in that unearned privilege, and above all, not to question it (McIntosh 78).

My body questions this logic, it resists this complacency, and it distrusts this trust in whiteness and masculinity. It is often at the hands of these same social discourses that the queer body finds itself beaten and bruised. It senses the collusion of these boxers, it feels itself being backed into a corner, up against the ropes, it tenses and prepares to resist, to bob, and to weave.

Even wrapped in the robe, my stomach takes flight, my mouth dries up, and the hairs on the back of my neck stand at attention. Maybe it's just the robe rubbing up against it. Or maybe, despite the ways my whiteness and masculinity rely on rationality and intellectualism to make sense of the world and to control the world (Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles), my body, my queer (white, male) body, in the moments before it is revealed as such, knows that it can't fully control this. It has been hailed as excess, excessive, and beyond control. It has been disciplined. It knows what risk *feels* like. Even if the rest of me doesn't.

Would it be better to just pass? Would it be easier? Is that what I've been doing thus far in the semester, hiding behind the box of heteronormativity? It seems as though I begin the semester using gender-neutral language as a tactic to resist the dominance of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality. When I first refer to a "romantic partner" and what "they" did, normative oppressive assumptions are troubled. At some point, or rather at multiple points, and I'm not exactly sure when or where, this tactic slides into a strategy supporting the oppression of hegemonic masculinity and homophobia. It becomes a game. As long as I don't say "he,"

you don't know. But I do. And so I can play with you, I can dangle it in front of you, and when I get bored watching you jump and paw at this toy, I can put it away without having to explicitly, publicly face my homosexuality.

What other boxes do I hide behind? When I pick out my clothes in the morning, when I grab the old wrinkled shirt and jeans, when I pass over the new bright green shirt hanging in my closet, I find myself hiding behind the box of masculinity. In those moments, which are more common than I like to admit, when I pass over the emotion, the passion, the intuitive and retreat into hyper-rationalization, I kneel behind the box of whiteness. I kneel behind my nationality when I remark that we are focusing on the context of the U.S., effectively mapping the boundaries of our discussion on top of national borders and ignoring the permeability of both. I pull up the box of education to further protect my colonialism when I give the (often false) impression that as an educator I do have wealth of knowledge about other cultural contexts related to the subject, but we just don't have the time to delve into that today.

Where do you hide? How do you "find ways to teach critically while also actively searching for ways to call privileged perspectives—including [your] own teacherly perspectives—into question with students" (Nainby, Warren and Bollinger 199)?

Before I reveal the full results of the survey, before I present you with your reasons, your readings, my queer body knows what it feels like to want more security, more safety, more power. If I can no longer hide behind the box, I'll stand on top of it, on top of the throne, hoping I'll find more power standing up here, looking down at you. Holding the papers, carefully taped together and folded upon each other, I extend my arms to the sides.

What do you see right now? Before I let the paper accordions unfurl down to the floor, as I stand above you with my arms extended, in this moment, what do you see in this fleeting gesture?

An offering.

An embrace.

An equivocation.

A man about to get crucified.

A brainless scarecrow offering useless directions.

The moment passes.

Do you?

"Resistant Privilege"

And here are the results. Paper accordions unfold from my outstretched hands down to the floor. Don't strain, you can't read them. But that's okay because they don't really matter. It doesn't matter what gets written down on these pieces of paper, it doesn't matter what gets put up on the

whiteboard in front of the class. No matter what great and convincing ideas students come up with, the class always . . . always . . . concludes that I'm straight. We take a vote—secret ballot, of course. The margin may shift a little but in the end, the majority always assumes that I'm straight. I think that part of it might be their concern over calling an instructor gay. But I don't think that can account for all of it, not given the dynamics of the discussion, the classroom climate, and my own strategic performances. I think more than anything else, the vote is determined by this body and its privilege, my privilege, my blinding privilege. This privileged body moving down off the box, into the center of the ring. The one that is present in its absence, by virtue of the text, by virtue of whiteness. The heteronormative vote is enabled by my body. This body rocking from side to side. Wrapped as it is, as I am, in my masculinity. My fists protected and cushioned by the normativity and oppression of whiteness. My students have watched my performances of confidence and sarcasm. I rock side to side from one to the other. I act assertive and authoritative and they know that I can be fucking vulgar and little bit crass. The rocking subtly shifts into bouncing from toe to toe. They've seen these performances, they know this dance, and since the robe isn't silky and pink, they think I must be heterosexual.

The high energy music ramps up. The strobe light flashes. Camera angles shift rapidly. Billy Blanks yells "Double time!" followed by the cheers of cotton and spandex clad studio athletes. My well trained body knows the routine. I/it/we shift from side to side, bouncing from toe to toe, fists up blocking my body. Stay in rhythm now.

One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six. Seven. Eight.

Give me one more. One more set. Come on now, push it! I remember to keep my abs tight. Billy would be proud. I rely on him to encourage me. To push me. To train me. I often go to racially marginalized scholars to inform my position. I listen to their words. I sit with them. I study their tools. Is using their work still appropriation if it's intended for the same goals of bodily health and social justice? Does my privilege preclude me from using these critical tools ethically or does it mandate that I use them differently? "But I cannot refuse to speak because I am privileged to do so" (Pelias, *Writing* 136). Does the dense particularity of my white, middle-class, gay, male body positioned as the class instructor in a conservative public university afford the possibility to manipulate my privileged and marginalized positionality in order to affect a critical intervention among my students? Do the intended ends ever justify the actual means? If I point out that I was hiding behind the box of heteronormativity before disrupting it, does that make it okay? Does asking the question redeem the colonial, patriarchal violence?

And at this point, as I'm bouncing back and forth from toe to toe, draped in masculinity, protected by whiteness, the students get so mesmerized by the movement, so lulled by the familiar rhythm, many of them never see it coming.

"I'm queer." My body lunges ahead, my right arm thrusting forward in an arc from the folds of the robe in a right hook, stopping abruptly before overextending my elbow. Flawless form.

I hate to interrupt at this point, but you know, that last section isn't exactly accurate. I mean it does happen like that, sort of. But it's not that neat and smooth. This conversation is scripted. I know the lines. I dance back and forth as part of a rhythmic routine that I've performed before. I perform my interrogation of my performance of identity. But in the classroom . . . in the classroom, I don't always have that kind of rhythm. I know it's stereotypical, but I am a white boy. I don't have rhythm and I can't dance. Not well. I usually end up hemming and hawing, trying to find the right words, trying to balance critical pedagogy with internalized homophobia and systemic heterosexism. The boxes are slippery creatures. Eventually, the words make their way out, but rarely that succinctly, rarely does the blow land that squarely.

Yet this announcement, this right hook, tends to throw my students a little. It may have thrown you. They begin to ask questions in order to regain their balance. Boxes slip beneath them. You begin to skim faster. I maintain my stance, my confidence, my illusory rhythm. Bouncing from toe to toe, side to side.

"Yes, he's my boyfriend." My body lunges forward, my left arm thrusting straight ahead in a quick jab before returning to the ready position.

"Yes, we've been together for three years." My body lunges forward, my left arm thrusting straight ahead in a quick jab before returning to the ready position.

"Yes, we're both pretty masculine." My body lunges forward, but this time my right arm thrusts straight ahead with two quick punches before returning to the ready position.

"Yes, I did work for a church." My body lunges forward, right arm thrusting straight ahead in a quick jab before returning to the ready position.

"Yes, I did go to a Christian college." My body lunges forward, right arm thrusting straight ahead in a quick jab before returning to the ready position.

"Yes, I do still identify as Christian." My body lunges forward, again with two quick punches before my left arm returns to the ready position.

At this point, they begin to realize that while I am just like they thought I was, I am nothing like they thought I was. I take a step back on my left leg, lifting my right leg, bending it at the knee, and driving my foot forward.

They stumble backwards, up against the ropes, eyes cross, and sight blurs as I dissolve and multiply before their eyes.

"Privileged Resistance"

The bell rings and the bout momentarily pauses. Students, often with heads swimming, stumble out of class. For a while, I hope, their vision stays blurry. The identities of those they come across are not as distinct and clear as they once perceived them.

I move to carefully sit down. See, I'm still in control. A little winded, but still in control. I move a box into the middle of the ring, to that space where the multiple is no longer multiple. I still sit upon the throne, a source of my power. I won't give that up until I leave this space. I can't. It's not that I don't want to, or, well, that I don't want to try. Garvey, Ignatiev, and Roediger have all advocated for white folks to abolish whiteness by becoming traitors to the race. Their work urges me to rip off the gloves, but I don't know how. I don't even think it's possible. The laces, and my hands, are tied. Tightly. The box does give me a lot of tools and authority, just like McIntosh promised; it just doesn't give me the power to quit. There is no gum or patch for this. I could pretend to give up the power and the privilege, others have tried, but as Warren ("Performing") and Moon and Flores have pointed out in their work on whiteness, when you try to give up the box, you end up standing on it, jumping on it, dancing on it. You can only claim to abolish the privilege by using the privilege. And as you do, the privilege and the box grow. So instead, I sit on it.

Still.

With my hands at my sides, slowly, carefully tracing the edge of it with my gloved fists. I try to draw attention to the box, to the knots in the wood, the chips in the paint, and to its boundaries. This becomes especially complicated when we realize the number of boxes we are dealing with. Within the space of the classroom, this conversation with students focuses on the sexuality and the insidious nature of heteronormativity. To a certain extent, we also explore the box of traditional, hegemonic masculinity. We mark how it privileges my body, and my performance of identity, in conjunction with heteronormativity. It is my hope that for some students, the box of heteronormativity starts to fall apart through this experience. At the same time, I fear that hegemonic masculinity is strengthened as it becomes the authorizing logic within the conversation further marginalizing alternative masculinities. Meanwhile, the whiteness and middle-class boxes remain largely unscathed. My location atop boxes of Christianity, education, nationality, cosmopolitanism, and ability also offer stability and security. Together, these work to silently frame me as an "acceptable" and privileged queer (Perez).

Even as I sit here with you, I realize I am still relying on my privilege. Throughout my time here with you I've relied on my privilege. My persona, confidence and assumed authority. I haven't invited you to participate so much as expected and demanded it. Coyly, perhaps, but demanding nonetheless. As if I was entitled to it. My sense of humor and sarcasm—and boxing? Boxing? I chose boxing and its violence as a metaphor for how I

interact with my students. You can't get more fucking masculine than that. Yeah, I was doing Tae Bo. So it was a little queer; but it was still really masculine. These characteristics are all constitutive of and performances of my gender and race. My gendered race and my racialized gender. My whiteness and masculinity cover my body, inscribe it, infuse it, construct it, scar it, infect it. They are how my body understands; they are how I understand my body. And for as much authority and power they grant me and my body, I don't have enough power to ever fully get out of them. They won't let me. My body won't let me. I don't have that much authority. I am bound to them. And they to me. Bobbing and weaving.

But maybe I am not bound by them. Maybe there is a way to use them, to fuck with them, to manipulate the privilege in order to resist it. Use the power and the expectations that come with this body for progressive ends. I mean, maybe if I play into the expectations long enough, knowingly enough, then perhaps when they are broken, rather than being read as simply unintelligible (Butler, *Bodies*), I can be read as paradoxical. So I consciously use gender-neutral language and wait until the semester is established before outing myself. I don't pretend to be straight, but neither do I explicitly mark my position as other than straight. I understand that in our heteronormative world this performance of identity will be incorrectly read as normative. I wait before I intervene in this reading. Maybe then the complexity of identity remains intact, the dense particularity retains its density. Maybe it's precisely because of my body that I can get close enough, especially to people whose bodies look like mine, and then, after I get close and they don't suspect anything because clearly I'm in the club, then I can use my body, my membership, and my identity to create a rupture, to effect a critical intervention, give them that left hook, the one that stuns momentarily, that gives pause. We all need a good critical uppercut every now and then. Don't we? Maybe? Perhaps you feel I need one now. One reminding me that such an exertion of privilege, even in the name of resistance, is another performative iteration that reifies the privilege in the first place.

Maybe I'm just sitting here, covered in perspiration, with sweat in my eye and vision not worth shit. See that's the thing about the perspective of privileged resistance—it's not all about me, it can't be all about me. What I see isn't the point. What do you see?

I pause.

Let the question sink in. Sitting in the middle of the ring, the space of the challenge, I look out at you, at your bodies with their dense particularities, at you upon and behind your own boxes. I look out and offer you a challenge.

And then I think to myself, "what happens if someone actually starts to answer the question?"

Before having to face this, I slowly rise to my feet and exit stage left. At some point the bright lights will begin to fade as you put the paper down or

close the window on your computer screen. Before you move on, pause, please, just for a moment. Where is your body? How is your privilege resistant? How is your resistance privileged?

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