

Silence, Gender, and Space

--A Piece of My Consciousness

By Christine Williams

Every day there are negotiations. I am so out, that most people know I'm a dyke with my face appearing in the Daily Tarheel more than once. Still there are negotiations. My hair is not very short; sometimes I wonder if my failure to cut it is related to style or fear. These questions seem complex--things I'm still trying to think about and explore.

As out as I am, there are still places and spaces that I don't want to come out at. I still wonder if people will be freaked out by my leg hair or if they know what the buttons on my bag mean. Econ 10 is not a safe space as a queer, socialist, or a feminist. Even the barriers I break down for myself aren't down for other people. I've felt the stares recently. Like when I forget that I'm not in queer space, anymore. As when we dressed-up for Crape Myrtle, I in my tie and she in her evening gown. We walked into the restaurant thinking ourselves fabulous and soon realized we were so queer. It is to walk into space you know is reserved for straight people. To feel the desire to take off the tie, just to avoid the stares. To move away from a lover as frat boys, or the police walk by. To simply and politely respond know to the woman on the train asking if I have a boyfriend. It is to spend countless nights digging into my soul/brain pounding to find the words to identify myself with. Do you look for those words?

I'm not supposed to hold her hand or look like a dyke. Sometimes I do out of spite. Sometimes I beg that some asshole will call me a dyke just so I know we are visible. The scene is different. You know "the scene--" the queer scene. The tie is taken a different way. It is more than that. She as a femme, sees me as a butch. I would buy her flowers, open the door, and she would grab my arm. She loves the smell of my cologne, the way I walk, and my

energy in dynamic relation to hers. I do look at myself differently and interact with butch women differently, but what is it that I act in relation to her, and what is it that is me--or has been since I was young? I've never liked dresses, shunned the Barbies my sister had, and was always encouraged to be a "little more feminine." My hair isn't very short, and sometimes I wonder if my failure to cut it is out of fear of conforming, performing, or of people thinking I'm trying to fit into a bitch dyke role. But so often I have no words for myself, and I wonder if I want any. But I also don't want to be acting; I need to be real--to somehow separate what is me and what is performance. It's so much more complicated than that. It's not exactly how people perceive it, and it's not masculine or feminine, necessarily. And what does this all mean, as a woman, as a feminist?

Trust me; Sometimes I would like not to care, but I'm forced to from ignorance, and fear, and my own consciousness because I really do care--for so many reasons and for my closeted brothers and sisters. Sometimes I'm angry that I should explain myself, and that I have to somehow be a teacher to you about what it's like to have no words.

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