

"YOU BEGIN TO WONDER..."

I'm a lesbian. Or at least I think I'm one. I'm in a closet and sometimes I'm not so sure that I'm a lesbian. After all day of saying you're heterosexual, dealing with men, coming on pretending you have a boyfriend or renting out a male friend for the occasion, you really begin to wonder what you are. It's not that I like being in the closet- I hate it.

One day when some women I went to school with were trying to figure out who all the lesbians in the class were (you know you can count on 10% of the population being gay), I wanted to stand up and scream at them " I'm a lesbian and so are a lot of my friends and we're all women too!". Instead I sat there quietly, hoping they wouldn't notice my silent and drawn face. Sometimes I think I'm just overly paranoid and it would be okay to tell them the truth about my sexuality. But then I remember all the jokes and the put-downs of queers and perverts and I just couldn't stand it...to know that they would talk about me behind my back and that I would be isolated from all of them.

I can't afford to 'come out' at work. It's not that they have an explicit policy of firing lesbians-it's just that they don't have a policy saying they hire homosexuals. I can't afford to lose my job because who can I turn to when I'm out of money? I don't know how many lesbian women there are at work who keep their mouths shut as the price they pay for some job security and social contact with the other women at work.

In some ways I'm not all that much in a closet. Most of my friends know and some of my family, and I have several lesbian friends so I'm not as isolated and alone as many other women have to be. But part of my hassle is keeping straight what story I've told to whom and then there's the big question--can you trust the people you told to keep your identity quiet. Then there's the fear of running into someone you know from work at a lesbian or gay bar. I'd always presumed that they'd want their identity secret as much as I do until I met a lesbian woman who had another woman squeal on her. Now whenever I go to a lesbian bar I automatically do a quick scan to see if I know anyone.

But I really get tired of this hassle. Sure there has been a lot in the paper about homosexuality, that it's cool to be gay (especially if you are a man), that attitudes are changing and so on. The gay movement and women's movement tells you that you should come out--because if we all came out, there'd be no closets and you are making it hard on all the gays who are out. But it's not a question of will power, it's a question of power. As long as I'm dependent on my job for money of my own, I can't be open about being lesbian. I know there are a lot of other women in a similar situation, particularly lesbian mothers, who would risk losing their children if they're open about themselves.

It really makes me angry that I have to live this schizophrenic existence, that I can't be upfront about my sexuality. I want the space to be out of the closet, to say I'm lesbian but it's a choice for me between having some money of my own and living in a closet, or 'coming out' and risking losing my job, my friends and the possibility of having children. I don't want this schizophrenia any longer. I want the space to be lesbian and I want the money! If I got paid for my first job of being a woman, then I'd be able to come out without having to worry about losing my second job. And if all women were paid, we would all have that freedom-

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