

Coping with College Series

Coming Out In College: Confronting One's Sexual Identity

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College is a place and time in which most students begin to ask questions about their identity—questions such as "What do I really want?" and "Where do I belong?" One issue that many students struggle with is that of sexual identity. Because we live in a world in which the majority of people appear to be heterosexual, life can be difficult for students who know that their sexual orientation makes them "different" from most people they encounter.

Being homosexual or bisexual in a predominantly heterosexual world can sometimes be a scary, lonely experience. There continues to be a great deal of social prejudice against homosexuals that is rooted in myths and misconceptions about homosexuality. One such myth is the idea that people choose their sexual orientation. On the contrary, sexual orientation is an inborn nature that is unlikely to change, much like handedness. Most people are right-handed. Yet some are left-handed, and some feel comfortable using either hand. Sexual orientation is very similar.

Yet many people who know instinctively that they are not heterosexual, have difficulty accepting this. It can be scary to begin to accept that you are in a minority of people who unfortunately are often feared, disliked, and misunderstood. It can be scary to tell your family and friends that you are not who they thought you were. It can be scary to know that once you tell people about your sexual orientation, many people will fail to see you as a whole person, but instead will see only a gay man, lesbian woman, or a bisexual person.

Yet while "coming out" can be a scary experience at first, it can ultimately be very rewarding. People who have struggled with accepting their sexual identity often find that when they finally tell people "This is who I am," it can be a very freeing experience. It can be exciting to finally discover who you are and to stop keeping parts of yourself a secret.

Accepting and feeling comfortable with one's sexual identity may take time. You may wrestle with your own beliefs about sexuality and who you think you *should* be. It is likely that your family and friends will also need some time before they can fully understand and accept your sexual identity. You will need to be patient with yourself and those who care about you.

If you find yourself identifying with any of these feelings, know that you are not alone. Many people struggle with their sexual identities and whether or not to "come out" to the world. If you would like more information about this subject, or would like to talk to someone about your concerns, contact Student Counseling Services at 438-3655.