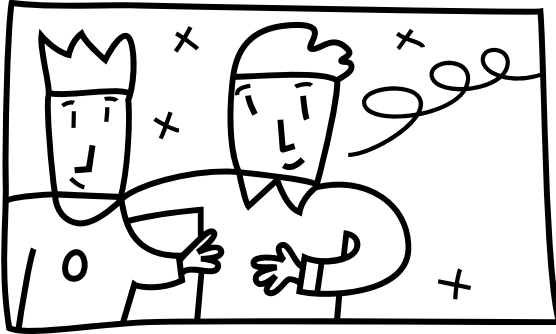


Sexual Orientation & Gender Issues

Recognizing your own sexual identity and working toward self-acceptance are the first steps in coming out. First, concerning sexual identity, it helps to think of a sexual orientation continuum that ranges from exclusive same sex attraction to exclusive opposite sex attraction. Exploring your sexual identity may include determining where you presently fit along that continuum.



If you determine you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning (LGBTQQ), and decide to come out, understand that the “coming out” process is very personal. This process happens in different ways and occurs at different ages for different people. Some people are aware of their

sexual identity at an early age; others arrive at this awareness only after many years. Coming out is a continuing, sometimes lifelong, process.

We live in a society that strongly enforces codes of behavior regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Many authorities give the message, particularly to young people that they must be heterosexual and act according to society's definition of their gender. One prescription simply doesn't fit for all people in our society.

Virtually everyone is exposed to hate terms and negative remarks about gender and sexually under represented groups. Too many LGBTQQ people, particularly youth, are verbally, physically, and/or sexually harassed. This can lead to feelings of isolation, fear, depression, anxiety, and even thoughts of suicide. These feelings left unaddressed can contribute to increased difficulty with self-acceptance, internalized homophobia, depression, anxiety, self-esteem, body image and eating disorders, addictions, and other psychological difficulties.

WAYS TO GET ACCURATE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT:

- Reading about lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender queer, questioning, and intersex people and pertinent issues is a way to come to understand yourself better and to replace society's prejudicial myths with facts. It also lets you learn about role models.
- Meet and talk with other people like you, including other people questioning their sexual orientation or gender identity. There are support groups, hotlines, and online organizations. This is one way to reduce your sense of isolation.
- Find an ally. This is a straight person whose attitudes and behaviors are anti-heterosexist and works toward combating homophobia and heterosexism on a personal and institutional level.

RESOURCES AT UW-LA CROSSE:

- Pride Center – Located at 42 Cartwright Center (lower level), Pride Center addresses the campus' need of providing resources for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Questioning, and Queer students, their Allies, and family member's concerns; empowers and provides resources and educational programs at UW-L and within the La Crosse Community that encourages the acceptance, respect and appreciation of human diversity in relation to race, gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical capabilities, socioeconomic status, and religious affiliation or spirituality. This includes panels, ally training, educational programs, “Safe Place” site, and support. Visit Pride Center in Cartwright, call at (608) 785-8870, or logon at www.uwlax.edu/pridecenter.
- The Counseling and Testing Center – At any point on your journey of self-discovery, it can be helpful to seek professional help and support from a counselor or therapist. Therapy offers individuals a safe and confidential place to talk about personal concerns in an accepting and nonjudgmental environment. Counseling offers assistance in:
 - Identifying and clarifying issues. Sometimes, people who seek counseling are not sure about what is wrong, but they know that they are not happy. Counselors are skilled at helping people understand themselves and their feelings. The process of recognizing ones sexual orientation often involves a confusing set of thoughts and feelings. Counselors can help an individual clarify and sort through some of the confusion.
 - Identifying, clarifying, and expressing feelings. Often people have difficulty understanding, labeling and/or expressing feelings. This is particularly true when people are under stress. Feelings can be confusing and may often seem to be out of control. Most counselors are particularly good at helping people handle and understand their feelings.
 - Deciding what to do. Feeling stuck and uncertain is common when people are having difficulty determining alternatives. Usually, there is more than one choice in how to behave. Counselors are adept at helping people uncover and discover options and alternatives.
 - Developing and enhancing relationship skills. Building a support system and developing close interpersonal relationships is especially important to most people. Yet there are some individuals who seem to have difficulty getting what they want from a relationship -- whether it is from family, friend, or partner. Dealing with relationships may be a primary focus of counseling and counselors. It is also an essential part of developing a healthy sense of self.



THE UWL COUNSELING
AND TESTING CENTER
STAFF ARE AVAILABLE

TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO
ARE DEALING WITH SEXUAL ORIENTATION,
GENDER, AND OTHER LIFE
ISSUES. CALL (608) 785-8073 TO
MAKE AN APPOINTMENT TO TALK
WITH A COUNSELOR.

Source: University of New Hampshire Counseling Center