

# Coming Out

Today is National Coming Out Day, a chance for people to take that first important step and tell their family, friends, co-workers or even themselves that they are gay.

Let me get the ball rolling: I'm the editor of *The Alligator*, an English major and gay. That won't be a surprise to any of my friends, family or co-workers. I've been completely open for about two years now.

This isn't even the first time I've mentioned it in print. In a column about the 1988 presidential elections, I joked that I was the only conservative homosexual on the eastern seaboard.

That's not true, of course. Despite the stereotypes, gay people aren't all taking fine arts classes. We take business courses and science labs. We live in dorms, join frats or sororities and study in the library. We even participate in intra-mural sports.

Let's put it this way: You cannot say, "I've never known anyone who was gay." You *can* say, "I've never known anyone who was openly gay." But it's impossible for you to have gone through life without having a friend or acquaintance who's sexual orientation was different from yours.

If that idea bothers you or makes you feel uncomfortable, think about this. An even more important question than "Am I gay, straight or bisexual?" is "Does it matter?" If it does matter, you have a problem.

Whether because of your upbringing, your religious convictions or the simple fact that you've never met anyone who told you they were gay, you are prejudiced. Distrust or hatred of a segment of society because of who they are is unintelligent and un-American.

If your answer to "Does it matter whether I'm gay, straight or bisexual?" is "No" then you already have the right attitude. Maybe one of your friends will choose today to pull you aside and talk to you. Be understanding. They don't need wisdom or explanations, just someone to talk with.

If you think you might be gay (that is homosexual, lesbian or bisexual), then try talking to someone you trust — a friend, hall adviser, teacher or anyone else.

If you're not ready for that or want more information, talk to any of the numerous support and counseling groups on campus or call the Gay Switchboard at 332-0700 to find out about off-campus social groups, books you can read, etc.

Coming out shouldn't be a traumatic experience. I told one very close friend by calling him on the phone long-distance, telling him to play The Replacements album "Let It Be" and waiting for the excellent, but unrelated, song "We're Coming Out" to begin before I told him the news.

Don't worry so much. That first step is a difficult one, but most people experience great relief and happiness after telling just one person how they feel.

Come out to someone and you can start to be gay *and* happy. Still uncertain? Think of the Nike ads: Just do it. Life doesn't get any easier, but you'll feel better about yourself and about being open and honest with your friends and acquaintances.

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