

# Coming out: One student's journey

Let me first begin by saying that this past semester was just a little bit crazy for me. In addition to the regular course load, I took on the joyful task of coming out as a queer. With that being said, prepare yourself for an exciting opinion article from yours truly about things gay in nature.

So for a little bit of a chronology, it wasn't until this past summer that I decided I was going to come out. I told one or two close friends at home and I came out to most people on campus upon my return. I then took it upon myself to write a couple of articles about sexual minorities and GLTB rights to submit to The Collegian. I used a narrative that was carefully construed

to keep my own sexual orientation out of the content. To my absolute horror, a couple days after publication I found out from some friends at home that all of a sudden the word was out that I was gay and that literally everyone from my hometown had heard.

Thankfully my closest friends told me that they didn't know about the rumor and my parents were still in the dark.

Now, the second semester of my sophomore year, I am completely out to everyone (and if I wasn't already, I sure am now) — and it feels good. So good. I feel as if a massive weight has been lifted off of my back. But I've been thinking a lot about the whole coming out thing for a while now, and although I feel better, a couple of things that people have said to me during the whole process have really got me confused and a little irritated. Let's take a look:

"Why have you been lying to me this whole time?" This was the most common line I heard from people when I told them

I'm gay. I'm sure other people may have different reasons, but for me, I didn't even realize that I was gay until this past summer. I don't really understand how people can get upset at me for lying to them about my sexuality when I have believed the lie I was telling myself for years and years.



By Matt Rafalow  
Guest Columnist

"Why are you doing this to me? This is a choice; you're doing it just to fit in better with your friends!"

First of all, I'm sorry that deciding to come out makes you sad, but if you knew what it was like to think you're strong enough to be outed to everyone you know and then to find yourself hurling in the bathroom and crying like a little baby

because of how emotionally draining the whole thing is, I think you'd realize that this isn't all about you. Secondly, as a friend of mine put it, why would I willingly decide to identify as an oppressed minority unless there's validity to it? And yes, homosexuals are an oppressed minority, and if you don't believe me, then go Google the name "Matthew Shepherd."

"I don't understand why you'd be worried about telling people. I mean, everyone knew it in the back of their minds anyway." Yeah, you're probably right. A lot of people have told me that they already thought I was gay but that they had put the idea in the back of their minds until I decided to

tell them myself. My parents told me they had thought about it. But you know what? It's still stressful. It's completely possible that a friend or a parent could have already thought of the notion that I could be gay, but when you tell them directly that possibility becomes reality. There's no definite way you can be sure things will go smoothly, or if people will be crying and hugging, or if people will yell at you to get out of their house and never come back.

I personally am thankful for the way things worked out with my friends and family, and I am additionally thankful that everyone who thought I was gay still supported me when I was adamantly denying my homosexuality. I mean, it must have been pretty hard not to at least notice that little extra skip in my step or my excessive fondness for pink button-downs — the gay radar (gaydar) must

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have "dinged" a number of times whenever anyone aimed it in my direction. Part of me is actually a little bit happy that I fit a lot of the stereotypes and that people may have already thought that I was gay. A person who does not exhibit a lot of the "signs" might have it a whole lot harder coming out because their friends and family may be more shocked by the news ("But you don't act gay ...").

One of the greatest things about coming to college here was the opportunity to meet gay people and straight allies. There are some truly amazing, supportive and caring people on this

campus. I have been able to hear countless personal stories about coming out, stretching across a wide spectrum of family backgrounds and situations. And I hope I won't be the first to inform you that not every gay person is welcomed or even tolerated by his or her family. I have friends who told their parents they were gay, and then were surprised when their parent responded by saying, "Wow, me too!" I also know kids who are cut off from the family, forced to live on their own and receive no support at all.

Part of the reason that I'm writing about all the things that have been going on in my head this past semester is because I realize that when you decide to come out, it's not just about you. Sure, I'm doing this for me, but it affects other people as well. The relationships I have with my friends and family are going to be slightly different from now on.

My family is going to have to deal with some of the same homophobia that I've experienced my whole life, quite possibly even from within my own extended family. It's my hope that if I open myself up as I have been doing, either through conversation on the street or in class or through some thoughts I write down for The Collegian, that things will get a little easier for those people who might not be strong enough to come out but would like to. I personally don't think that most people are completely homophobic and hateful toward non-heterosexuals, but that it's more just a matter of exposure. Someone who's never met a homosexual before can read some story about a gay kid in Canada, but if it's a member of your community or family that's talking, it makes reality a little more tangible, and I hope a little less frightening in the long run.