

Who are your College Student Counsellors?

Bernie O'Farrell is the main college student counsellor at Hugh Baird College. You will find him in The POD in the Balliol building. He is available at the following times:

Wednesday	8.30am to 4.00pm
Thursday	8.30am to 12.00pm
Friday	8.30am to 4.00pm

We also have a counsellor called Sheila available on Tuesdays. Sheila is also based in The POD in the Balliol building.

Tuesday	8.30am to 4.00pm
---------	------------------

How do I arrange to see a counsellor?

The counselling room is based in The POD in the Balliol building. Drop by or call 0151 353 4410 or 07771 965792 (mobile) to arrange an appointment.

You can also arrange appointments by emailing anthony.o'farrell@hughbaird.ac.uk or by referral form from your tutor.



Helpful Websites

www.bgiok.org.uk

www.lgbt.foundation

Leaflets in this series include:

- A Guide to Student Counselling Services
- Bereavement
- Sexuality
- Helping Stress with Support
- Exam Anxiety
- Drugs, Alcohol and Tobacco
- Anger Management
- Eating Problems
- Bullying
- Anxiety
- Depression

Sexuality



Call 0151 353 4410

or email anthony.o'farrell@hughbaird.ac.uk
or visit The POD, Balliol Building

Introduction

In its broadest sense sexuality describes the whole way a person goes about expressing themselves as a sexual being. It describes how important sexual expression is in a person's life; how they choose to express that sexuality and any preference they may have towards the type of sexual partner they choose. Every survey of human sexual behaviour reveals that there is a huge variety of sexual expression - the way we choose to behave sexually is usually as individual and as complicated as the way we choose to dress or to earn a living.

Human sexuality rarely falls into neat categories or lends itself to simple labelling. It is a rich and complex area of human experience. Authors, artists, poets, philosophers and composers have worked to explore sexuality from earliest times without coming up with any enduring answers.

In recent times however, the word sexuality has come to also have a more limited meaning. Sexuality is now often defined by whether the gender of the sexual partners we choose is the same as our own or different. Some feel this more restrictive definition can create problems since it attempts to fit a complex, subtle experience into three or four simple categories.

However, it also offers solutions since it can give people who don't feel they share the major assumptions of the dominant heterosexual mainstream of the society, pride and sense of validation that comes from discovering an identity and a shared experience with others.



Why people's sexuality differs

A hot debate has endured over recent years about why people's sexuality differs. Many theories have been put forward - citing genetic pre-determination, childhood influences and peer pressure amongst other reasons. However, attempts to find a single cause for individual's choices of sexual orientation have not been successful. Nor have attempts to influence or change an individual's sexuality. Like many of our other characteristics, sexuality seems to be largely a chance product of our individual nature which is further developed by our early interactions. Like many other personality traits, our sexuality seems to be formed by the time we reach our

teen years, although it may be many years later before we understand and accept our sexuality. Our sexuality also seems resistant to attempts to radically change it.

In the rest of this leaflet, we look at sexuality predominantly in terms of the choices which face those who feel convinced they are gay, lesbian or bisexual.



Coming out to yourself

Before you can come out to anyone else you have to come out to yourself!

There is no hard and fast rule when this happens. Some people are certain of their sexuality from a very young age; for others it can happen much later in life. Accepting the conclusion that one is gay, lesbian or bisexual hopefully is easier nowadays than it has been in the past. Hugh Baird College seeks to offer a supportive environment to students of all sexual orientation. However, the decision to come out to yourself can still be a very scary one and can be a period of upheaval and uncertainty. If you want someone to talk to during this time, the Student Counsellor is available to speak to in confidence and will be happy to help you.



Coming out to others

Families often have detailed plans for their children and can be very upset when it becomes clear that not all their hopes are going to be realised. Similarly, friends and other groups may have their own very definite opinions or prejudices. It is important that you come out to people who will validate and celebrate your new found sexuality as well as to people who may question it. You may also want to talk over the situation in detail first:

- Look for sympathetic people to come out to first.
- Follow your own timetable - it's your life and your sexuality. Don't feel you have to tell people until you are ready.
- Don't assume people are homophobic just because they make anti-gay jokes. Often people haven't really thought the thing through, and don't do so until someone close to them comes out.

- Sadly, the opposite can also be true. Just because people claim to be politically correct, doesn't mean that they can't be quite fixed and judgemental in their views of gays and lesbians.
- Everyone doesn't have to know. Many people will consider your sexuality is your own business. You don't have to share it with them unless you particularly want to.
- Don't be too put off by an initial reaction. Many people react badly when they are faced with something that has shocked them. However, what is said can always be unsaid - even if it doesn't feel like it at the time.
- Choose your medium. If you are worried that someone will be very hostile, writing might give them time to assimilate the news better.
- Never feel guilty! Easier said than done, but once we start blaming ourselves for other's bad reactions to us, we are on the road to depression. None of us have control over how we are, so we don't need to apologise for it.

