

# Identity

## What is identity

Identity is seen as a recognizing of what you need, what your abilities are, what you think of yourself and it sometimes includes a social and political stance.

Identity can change over time. For students, it is often a time for change from others' expectations of how you think and behave to using your own perspective. The process is more threatening for some than for others.

Identity issues students have to consider include race, sexuality, gender, religious and cultural beliefs, language etc. The most common identity issue to deal with is negotiating intimacy.

Sometimes people struggle with parts of their identity which is not part of the dominant culture for example language...English being dominant at UCT. Sometimes when we struggle with dominant culture we can initially feel alienated.

## What if you choose a path different from friends and family?

Choosing to be different does not happen easily, for example commitment to sexual orientation, ideological stance and a vocational direction that is different from others expectation of one. However, decisions are not made once and for all but are made again and again. For example, vocational direction: ask older people what their undergraduate degrees were and what jobs or vocations they are now doing?

What if what is taught in curricula clashes with your home religious and cultural beliefs? Sometimes what is taught at varsity may make more sense, but it causes difficulties when you go home.

It is sometimes difficult to integrate home with varsity—having to respond to multiple and sometimes conflicting expectations of what constitutes appropriate identity.

## When do you know that you need help?

- When your problems interfere with your studies
- When you start isolating yourself,
- When you become anxious
- When you feel like you don't fit in
- When you cry more than usual
- When you experience a marked change in sleeping and eating behaviour
- When you regularly feel irritable

- When you experience physical discomfort for which doctors can find no reason
- When you regularly experience feelings of tension and pressure

## **How do I deal with identity issues?**

Identity issues resolve with time. However, sometimes what we are or choose to explore may not be the dominant culture and we have difficulties with these experiences.

As a way of coping, some students develop 'situational' identities, e.g. one identity for varsity and one for home.

Find someone you trust to talk about it, for example:

- A peer counsellor
- The Student Counselling Service
- A group of like-minded individuals in societies or groups
- Life line etc.

## **Find us @:**

**Student Wellness Services**  
**28 Rhodes Avenue**  
**Mowbray**

**Telephone Numbers:**

- **021 650 1017**
- **021 650 1020**

**Hours:**

**Mon – Fri 08H30 – 16H30**

- be informed**
  - know the dangers**
  - make an informed choice!!**