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COMING OUT. being GAY in the haverford-bryn mawr college community....

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THE HC-BMC GAY PEOPLES ALLIANCE

The Barnard Center
For Research On Women

Introducing GPA

In September, 1975, a new campus organization, the Gay People's Alliance, emerged at Bryn Mawr-Haverford Colleges. Throughout this first year, membership has steadily grown until now, at the close of the semester, 1976 spring, we have approximately thirty active members.

The group has founded a peer counseling center; opened an office in Jones Hall, Haverford College; held weekly meetings in the College Inn, Bryn Mawr College; presented two lectures open to the entire campus community; and held a very successful dance, among other things. We hope that the school year of 1976-77 will find our ranks even larger and our functions even more extensive.

Coming out is a continuing process, done by individuals, and in the case of our group, done by organizations of people. It involves making the same-sex preference/orientation visible in a society that still largely ignores and admonishes such. It is done by individuals to individuals, as in coming out to schoolmates, friends, parents, employers, and other significant people.

Coming out is a gay person's statement about the viability of his or her sexual orientation/preference. Sometimes it is easy and other times it is very difficult to do. In this pamphlet are articles about the coming out experience, written by both gays

and nongays. The purpose of this pamphlet is to spread knowledge about this aspect of gayness with the premise that through knowledge comes understanding, and that from understanding comes acceptance. College is a time for learning. We of the Gay People's Alliance offer you this opportunity to learn about coming out.

The Girl Next Door

The following incident is an example of the kind of psychological harassment that gay people undergo all the time. It is a composite of several experiences I have had.

I was on a train with a group of Bryn Mawr students, none of whom I knew very well. As the train pulled out of the station, I got out some cookies, which I shared with the girl sitting next to me, and then I settled down to read Plato.

In the seat in front of me, two girls began to discuss homosexuality. They spoke loudly and clearly. One of them could not understand why "those people" needed Gay Alliance--"you'd think they would want to keep it private," she said. Her companion said that it really didn't matter to her--"although once you knew about someone, you really started to notice how different they are." Loudly and clearly they agreed that any normal

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person had an immediate reaction of repulsion towards the idea.

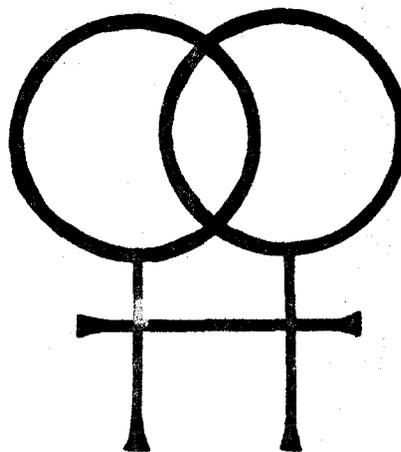
I could feel my body filling with tension. My mind raced over the alternatives: Confront them. Ignore them. Cry. This kind of shit will never end until people realize that anyone--yes, even the girl sitting in back of you reading Plato--might be gay. But to confront is to expose myself to a group of people whom I don't know, don't trust. I have friends--and a lover--to protect at Bryn Mawr. My willingness to come out is tempered by their feelings. But how will anything ever get better if someone doesn't take a stand?

The conversation ended. I was relieved, and went back to my reading, trying to concentrate. An acquaintance came over to say hi, and to tell me about her plans for the weekend. I felt myself relaxing, becoming cheerful and unhassled again.

In back of me four girls began to discuss homosexuality. I heard the word 'gay' and felt the tension flood back. I tried to tell myself not to listen. I questioned myself--am I oversensitive? Am I paranoid? I told myself that it's their problem if they are ignorant and intolerant. I could live my life without the outside world--my personal situation is secure and supportive enough. But I'm not going to do it. I'm not going to live in a closet. I care too much about my friends and myself to be able to endure being judged on the basis of ignorant and unreasonable prejudice. I felt as though I was choking.

The conversation in back of me was along the same lines as the first one, plus a few jokes about lesbians, which were so stupid that I could have laughed. They knew nothing at all about gay people. They began to talk about "Women's Lib." Suddenly the tone of the conversation changed; they were talking about "people" now. Anyone who calls the Feminist Movement "Women's Lib" (and any woman who talks about it as an abstract movement in which she has no place) needs some consciousness raising in my estimation--but their views on working mothers (still being discussed loudly enough to edify the whole train) made me drowsy and disgusted and I tried to sleep. And then, there it was, the inevitable last straw: a sniggering crack about homosexuals molesting children.

I turned around, so angry that I could hardly see them. "You obviously



know nothing at all about gay people to say a thing like that. Gay people live ordinary human lives, good and bad, just like anyone else. Gay relationships are no more strange or unnatural than heterosexual ones, and it seems to me that any kind of loving relationship is pretty healthy. And furthermore the statistics show that the majority of child molesting is done by white male heterosexuals over the age of forty."

The whole section of the train was silent. My hands were shaking and my last words sounded more like a sob than the angry scream I felt. The girl sitting next to me said, "Would you like an orange?" and when I said, "Yes, please," she peeled it for me.

Honestly Now

I was well aware that I was attracted to men for quite some time before I came to Haverford. I didn't know if there was a group of gays organized on campus before I arrived. I didn't have the nerve to ask about it during my interview (that seemed tantamount to asking for a rejection notice). But I got the feeling that the bi-college community was a liberal place, where people cared about each other, and were too mature to worry about such trivialities as one's sexual preferences.

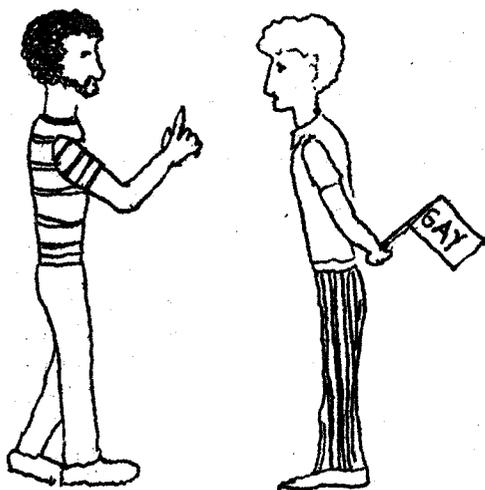
I had everything planned perfectly. I would make no pretenses about my sexuality to anyone. Of course I wasn't planning to announce myself as a screaming queen in the middle of Opening Collection, but I thought I would have the opportunity to make a fresh start in a new environment. I reasoned that I

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didn't have any friends or family here to alienate, so that I could be honest with everyone; there would be no problems. Things did not work out as planned.

When I arrived for Customs Week, I was very nervous. I met the other freshmen on my hall, and my customs-people. They all seemed to be pleasant, and I began to relax. I was getting along with these people as well as I had with my friends at home. Then I realized that I was just as afraid of coming out to my new friends as I had been of coming out to my old friends. I decided not to bring up the subject of homosexuality until I got to know everyone a little better. After all, it would have been foolish to prejudice them against me from the very beginning. I thought I would wait for a week or two until I could win their confidence.

But by the time a week went by, it was too late. They were already my friends. I already had something to lose. The expected remarks came up ("Gee, it's lucky that none of us got stuck in a suite with some faggot!"), and I smiled politely as my guts churned inside. I couldn't be honest without blowing my cover. Eight years of being trapped in the closet at least gave me skill in preserving that. I was so good at being dishonest with others, that I was even able to lie to myself . . . for a while.



I CAN SMELL A
FAG A MILE AWAY!

I told myself that I wasn't really being dishonest. I just hadn't gotten the chance to reveal the whole truth. I didn't mean to hide anything. The subject just never happened to come up at an opportune moment. And all this time, I was lying to my friends, I was lying to my family, I was lying to my "girlfriend" (who didn't even know that I was using her to cover for me), and I was lying to myself; I felt guiltier and guiltier with each passing day. I became very moody, and abandoned my schoolwork. My life seemed to be falling apart, and there was nothing I could do to save it.

Over the summer I decided that I couldn't go on that way. I knew that I would have to take the big step, sophomore year. I was fed up with myself, and with my whole attitude toward my sexuality. How could I expect others to accept me, when I couldn't even accept myself? I would tell my friends at school, and if they couldn't handle it, well . . . it would be their tough luck.

A funny thing happened, though. I came back, expecting to break the big news, and I just couldn't do it. The old cowardly streak surfaced again. I didn't want to alienate people. I was afraid that the news might reach my parents. The same old thoughts from freshman year began to plague me again. But this time, I wasn't going to let them to get the better of me.

One by one, I started to tell the people living on my hall that I was gay. The first one was tough. I picked someone who I thought would be sympathetic. He'd mentioned that he had gay friends at home, and seemed to be the sort of person who could accept me for what I was, and not as a misguided deviant. We were talking alone in my room one afternoon. I gritted my teeth, and told him. Then I waited for his reaction. But there didn't seem to be one. I waited for a very long thirty seconds. "So?" he asked. The sense of relief was overwhelming. I was so filled with happiness, I didn't know what to say. He knew I was gay, and he didn't really care!

Soon I told another person, and then

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a third. I told my old "girlfriend". It was getting easier each time. I only had one more major obstacle in the bi-college community: my suitemate. We had agreed to live together freshman year, and I didn't know how he would handle it. He made his share of faggot jokes, but I was able to overlook that. I knew that ideologically, he was in favor of civil rights for gays, but there is a big difference between reading about them in the newspaper, and having them make love in the next room.

Also, I worried about the ways my "coming out" would affect him. Would people assume that because I was gay, and we were living together, that he was gay also? This was definitely a stigma which I did not care to inflict on him. But I couldn't do this halfway. I knew that if I didn't tell him, someone else would. And since he had to hear it, I wanted it to be from me.

He was shaken at first, as I expected him to be. But I tried to handle it as comfortably as possible, and soon he got used to the idea. After I saw that he could deal with it, I lost all fears of coming out in the bi-college community.

I was very lucky. My friends were not only tolerant, but accepting of my gayness. I never dreamed that things would work out so well. Now, at least here at school, homosexuality is just another ordinary aspect of my life, although it is an important one. I am no longer afraid of dancing with other men at bi-college dances, or putting up posters for the Gay People's Alliance. And although I know that coming out is not right for everyone, it is probably one of the best things I have ever done.

The Better Alternative

Coming out in the bi-college community this fall was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. Thinking back, however, I wonder whether the loneliness I felt existed because of Haverford and Bryn Mawr, or whether it was inherent in my own personality, and might have been even more difficult to deal with elsewhere.

For me, coming out was not simply recognizing or even acknowledging my

homosexuality: I had realized for a long time that I had felt sexual attraction towards men, and that I was more likely to fall in love with a man than with a woman. What I had to deal with, then, was not myself but other people--particularly the separation I felt between myself and others. I didn't know anyone gay at Haverford; and the Gay People's Alliance seemed remote and threatening. Also, my male heterosexual friends seemed sympathetic to my problems, but were either unable or unwilling to give me the kind of support I needed: it seemed that they would accept homosexuality in me, but wouldn't even consider responding to my feelings towards them with a similar warmth. I was also afraid to consider my future: if I was a homosexual, I thought, sex would always be impersonal, I would always be frustrated in falling in love, and I would never meet anyone outside of bars. It was intensely depressing, and, seeing no alternative, I began to consider suicide.

Once I had reached that point, I realized that any sort of life was an improvement on none; and it eventually became clear that there was no reason why I couldn't be both a homosexual and happy--it wasn't necessary to conform to stereotypes. The first decisive thing I did was to attend a Gay Alliance meeting, and found there the consideration and concern that I've noticed in almost all Haverford-Bryn Mawr people. There was, however, also a positive attitude towards homosexuality that I'd never met before.

I have also learned a great deal from the relationships I've had with people--including the fact that homosexual relationships can be as fulfilling as heterosexual ones. Because of the lack of stereotyped roles, they may even have more of a possibility for making people happy. I've also begun to realize that happiness is more closely related to satisfaction with oneself than to the state of one's relationships with other people, though I have no desire to regain the isolation I used to feel. Being more at ease with myself, I think it's easier to like other people--or at

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least to be tolerant of them.

What I would like now is to reach a state in which it doesn't matter whether people call themselves "homosexual" or "heterosexual"--almost everybody is a mixture of the two. I would like to think that it's possible to love and feel attracted to a man or a woman--and that his or her sex and "sexual preference" are unimportant. Before this happens, however, it is necessary not only that I be free in this way, but also that everyone else learn that the value of people is more important than the distinctions that too easily get in our way.

It Still Isn't Easy...

The definition of coming out is vague. I had no desire to make grand pronouncements about my sexuality, but I did come out at Bryn Mawr and Haverford in that it was here that I began to acknowledge to myself what my sexual feelings meant -- to accept them as part of me. It was also here that I began to let other people in my world know about my feelings; I began to share them.

To accept homosexual feelings as part of yourself is no easy thing, when you are constantly told from infancy that these feelings are wrong -- that they are not good and wonderful, but sick and sinful. It is difficult to accept parts of yourself that society does not (unless you are a radical non-conformist). You are told your desires are horrible, but you know somewhere inside that they can bring you pleasure and beauty. The cognitive dissonance takes a while to resolve; the resolution is often the coming out process.

I am not sure that being a member of the bi-college community had any great effect on my coming out process, but it may have helped me that I had some good and sympathetic friends who didn't reject me (one of my worst fears) when I told them. They were willing to listen and understand as much as they could. Wouldn't I have had similar friends elsewhere? Yes -- and I did. Nevertheless, knowing that Haverford was a "liberal" place, and that almost no one, outwardly at least, would react negatively, made it easier. Bryn Mawr and Haverford hindered me,

though, by being such closety places. There were and are plenty of gay students and faculty members; yet for two years I only knew of two that I'd heard about in nasty rumors. I had no role models to identify with, no one who said to me what I needed to hear: "You can be yourself and be happy. It really is possible." Not having a gay group around disseminating information -- or just being there -- also made coming out more difficult. Furthermore, knowing that the reason there was no gay group lay in the unique difficulty that these schools have in dealing with the issue (because of their single-sex status) added to my difficulties. (Why do people assume that gay people don't like or don't want to be with people of the opposite sex? I found all-male Gummere to be a despicable and sexist place.) Finally, the audience response to the showing of the movie "Boys in the Band" in my sophomore year was a disaster; it reinforced every fear I ever had.

The situation for gays here is neither good nor bad now. To have a gay social life, it is still necessary to go off-campus sometimes. I am also not convinced that attitudes have really changed here. Because people have let a gay group exist does not mean that they have changed their innermost feelings or confronted their innermost fears. For me, to be gay at Haverford today ultimately means experiencing some alienation from myself, some alienation from the larger community, or both. How can a homosexual have a satisfactory sexual and social life when he can not easily walk across campus holding hands with his lover? I am not sure the situation can be changed until the larger society changes further, moving from the increasing tolerance shown to real acceptance. Certainly Haverford and Bryn Mawr cannot change until everyone who is gay is willing to come out. It won't change until we examine and acknowledge our feelings, and how they got that way. It is easy to say, "I think gays have a right to exist." It is not so easy to confront one's own feelings when one sees two men French-kissing in a park. It is not easy to question one's own sexuality by trying to understand the sexuality of others. We are dealing with gut emotional issues, and not a logical academic argument. Coming out isn't easy!

Finding Out About a Friend

1.

We met early in the year and quickly became close friends. It started as a purely platonic friendship, but after a while I began to feel attracted to him, just physically and then sexually. I dropped hints, which were not picked up. "Certain thoughts" (Is he . . .? No, of course not.) had crossed my mind, hints which he had let fall, which I in turn refused to acknowledge. Finally, after much puzzling, I decided that an upcoming party would provide the right atmosphere (i. e., free, and, if possible, the tiniest bit inebriated) to convey my feelings to him.

He told me what I'd known and steadfastly refused to admit, that he was gay. For something which was not, after all, news, it hit me incredibly hard--I don't know how long I cried, with him there in my room. We talked, I went through so many thoughts and emotions, which usually came back, that night, to reassuring myself that he was bisexual (well, he must be . . .), and so all was not lost. [That attitude played itself out quickly when I realized what an imposition it was of my own values.] I calmed down, he (very thoughtfully) kissed me goodnight and left; I woke up my closest girlfriend, across the hall, and she came back to my room and rocked me and stroked me while I cried even harder. I spent much of the weekend thinking about him, about being gay, and about my own sexuality.

And I came to realize how perfectly all right and good it is for me to feel as close as I do to some of my girlfriends (don't we all worry?), how right it was for my girlfriend to be so very close, physically, that night--she would have slept with me if I'd asked her to, just for the warmth of human contact. I'm not gay, I know that I'm not sexually attracted to other woman. But I feel much more comfortable about being physically attracted to them; I understand and appreciate the difference. I love my gay friend as much if not more than before,

I feel free to love him as a friend who knows me much better now, and whom I understand better--I hope he feels the same. There isn't the strain which existed when we each had something we were keeping from the other. The concept of homosexuality no longer seems so distant to me, nor is it threatening. I've come to terms with ways I've wanted to deal with people I like, male and female, and I feel more "whole" because of the examining.

2.

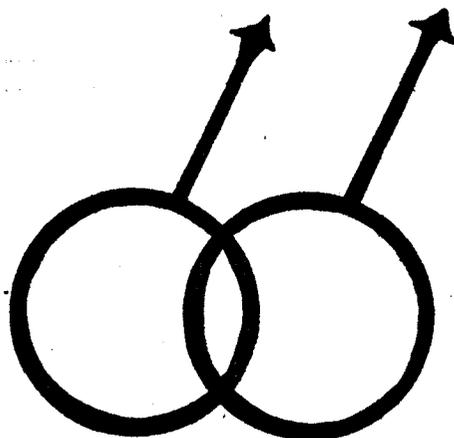
As a fairly intelligent and tolerant female heterosexual, I try hard to understand and accept the increasing emergence of homosexuality in our society. But a crushing experience some months ago makes it difficult for me to control my emotional reaction to homosexuality. Perhaps this brief story can help those at all points of the sexual continuum to adjust to their own feelings and to those of the people around them.

I had been dating a guy I met in high school for about a year and a half. During the summer between my freshman and sophomore years at Bryn Mawr we worked and boarded at a private country club, along with another guy whom I had known since kindergarten who had been my boyfriend's best friend for several years. One night as we sat around in the room the two boys shared, our friend announced to me that he was a homosexual and had been for years. I knew that there had been many nights those two had spent together or with a bunch of other guys during high school, and I immediately broke down completely, feeling more sexually inadequate than I'd ever felt in my life. "I'm not enough," I said to myself, "so he turns to this guy

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without telling me about it."

After that night the three of us had a series of long talks about ourselves, our sexualities, and our futures. Sometimes other close friends would join us. We all tried to be frank without being brutal. Sophomore year passed and we spent a second summer together at the country club. But toward the end of that summer our communications broke down. My boyfriend went back to his college and I returned to a rough Junior year here. From his family I heard rumblings of my boyfriend's involvement with homosexuals at school. Yet I heard nothing from him; no explanations, no sympathy for my academic woes, not even a "Look, bug out! Things have changed with me." Those months of silence were some of the worst



I've ever spent. We met briefly over vacation and broke up after unsuccessful attempts to talk things out. The fears and defenses which had built up were too strong to overcome.

I am making no judgement on my ex-boyfriend, our homosexual friend from high school, or homosexuals in general. I am only trying to show that with explanation and understanding it is possible to learn acceptance and patience with those who are of different

sexual attitudes. Failure to communicate can only result in painful misunderstanding and lead to unhealthy prejudice and censure.

RESPONSE TO 2.

We thank the writer of the above essay for sharing with us what was obviously a very painful experience, and we support her wholeheartedly in her plea for honesty in interpersonal relationships.

Unfortunately, many gay people feel they can't be honest and open about themselves, often because past attempts at honesty have met with disastrous results. Rejection by parents or friends who either can't or won't try to understand them leads gay people to believe that trying to explain their feelings honestly will at best be fruitless (no pun intended), and at worst destructive of a relationship they may value very highly.

Until attractions for members of the same sex are accepted as natural and healthy, those of us who experience them will be forced to choose between lives of total honesty, accompanied by an everpresent fear of rejection by those who regard us as sick or perverted, and lives of "pick-and-choose" honesty, where we are open only with those we trust will understand. Obviously, neither alternative is without its drawbacks; the decision as to what type of life one wishes to lead is often very difficult.

The second alternative, which is probably chosen more often than the first, places one in the uncomfortable position of constantly trying to evaluate friends and acquaintances to determine how receptive they would be to a "coming out" scene. Naturally, there are bound to be errors in judgment. Friends who are repulsed by the mere thought of homosexuality will be mistakenly confided in; others who actually are able to understand will be kept in the dark, and will be very hurt if they happen to find out that they were not trusted.

The Gay People's Alliance and other groups like it are working toward the day when homosexuality is no longer looked at askance, and gay people no longer feel a need for deceptiveness in personal relationships.

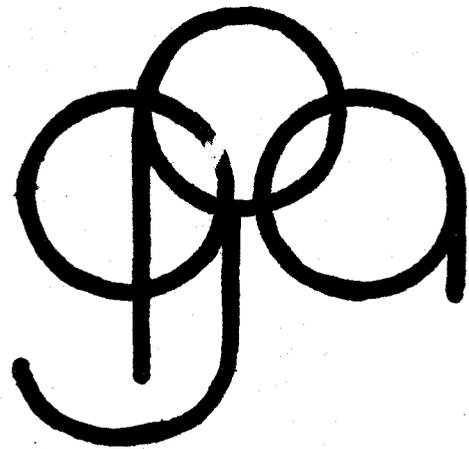
Friendly Reactions To a Freshman

As a freshman at Haverford, I covered up my sexual preference and attendance at Gay People's Alliance meetings with a barrage of lies. I made up stories about girlfriends and completely avoided talking about homosexuality with my friends. I thought if I were honest I might lose my present friends and not make any new ones. Things turned out differently--

One of my friends, my Customsman, saw through my cover-up. It was he who finally brought up the subject. I couldn't keep on lying to him and decided to tell the truth and face the consequences. His reactions were primarily good, but he admitted to feeling somewhat threatened. I tried to explain that I liked him as a person and a friend, and I felt no sexual attraction towards him. A homosexual does not look at every person sexually. Just as a heterosexual has close female friends he doesn't think of sleeping with, a homosexual can have close male friends without having sexual feelings for them.

One of the most positive reactions to my sexual orientation came during second semester. I learned that three of my friends, one Haverfordian and two Bryn Mawrers, had found out about my sexual preference almost a month before I knew they had. In that month I hadn't noticed any change in their behavior towards me. When I finally got the courage to talk to one of them he asked why I was afraid it would change. He was my friend and liked me for what I was--being gay didn't make a difference.

Since then I've become more at ease with myself and my gayness. By being honest and not acting as if homosexuality is a disease, I hope to help more people to become aware that gay people are a healthy part of society. Homosexuality, either in yourself or in your friends, is not something to be feared.



A Different Debutante

I suspect that all gay people who have living parents have the desire to tell these significant others about their lives. It just plain hurts a lot to be experiencing friendship, intimacy, love... sharing meaningfulness about your life in any and many ways, and yet not sharing that with the people with whom you first learned the importance of those things. Most parents do not receive the news that they have a gay son/daughter very gracefully. Reactions vary from, "phase," and "you'll get over it," to "sick," and "we won't ever get over this". Many parents feel terribly alone and ashamed, and spend a good deal of time blaming themselves. They worry that family and friends of theirs will find out and mourn the loss of future grandchildren. Their feelings of loneliness, shame, and blame, are often all too familiar to the gay son/daughter, for overcoming centuries of misunderstanding and oppression is, even for the strong self-liberated gay, a difficult task.

Over and over during the time I have spent with gay people I have heard them tell me they want to come out to their parents. I know what they are feeling. I wanted my folks to know years before I told them. I, like most other gays, waited years to share this information with my parents. At first, I made up social events to tell them about, filled letters with fictitious boyfriends, and spoke vaguely about feminism. Later,

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I talked about my activities with women's groups, stopped mentioning dates with men, and tenuously discussed a gay male friend with them. Still later, I began to mention my lover, couched in explanations of going here or there with my "special friend." Finally, my mother asked me if I ever went out with anyone except her.... did I ever see any men? I replied that yes, I saw them, but that I wasn't really looking! In fact, I added, I wasn't particularly interested in men. Pushed to explain by a not-unperceptive mother who feared that her worst suspicions might be confirmed, I told her that indeed, I was more fond of women than men, one particular woman especially, and that yes, if she were wondering if I was gay that the answer was also yes. Although my mother had, over the years, given me many indications that she suspected my orientation/preference, and that some part of her wanted to know for sure, she still took the announcement rather hard. She didn't die, as she proclaimed she surely would, and while I don't make her as happy as she says I would if I was in the sexually oriented majority; still, she has her joys in life, and I have mine. One of which, I hasten to say, is the fact that my parents now know about my lifestyle.

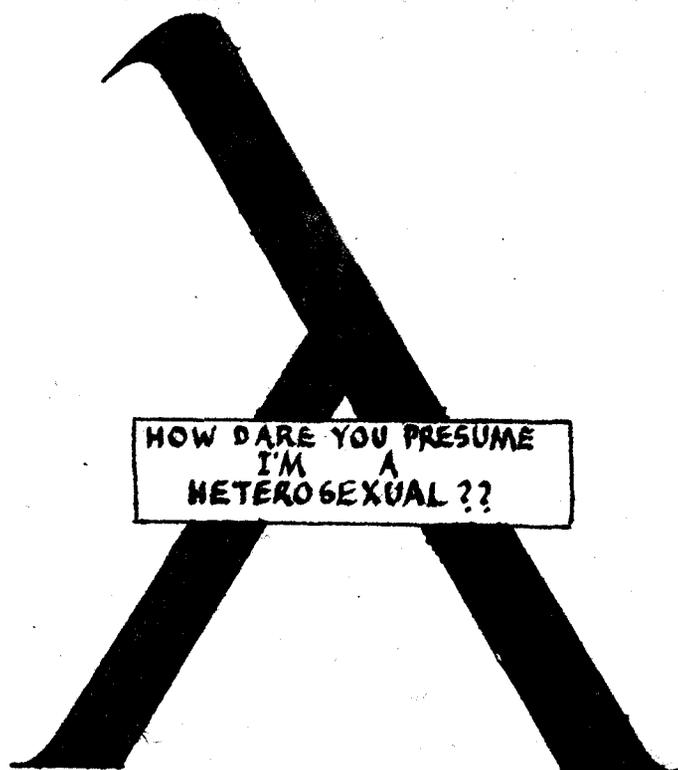
As soon as my parents found out, they did not want to know any more. They didn't want me to mention my gay life in letters, they didn't want to discuss it, and I strictly complied with their wishes for some time. After all, I took some time to deal with my orientation/preference and so I believed that they too were entitled to that consideration. Gradually, they have mellowed. Earlier this year they met my lover over dinner in a restaurant, and later she spent a weekend at their home with me. Though we are as much of a loving dyad as my brother and his wife are, we are not treated as such, nor, I suspect, will we ever be, at least by my folks. It hurts me, annoys me, oppresses and depresses me, but it also strengthens me and gives me hope. My folks have come a long ways towards accepting me and my lifestyle...if they did it, perhaps someday...

There isn't any formula for coming out to parents or to other significant people. The need to tell exists in gay people everywhere. Acceptance can come only through understanding, and understanding only through knowledge. And many gays recognize that parents and close associates are vital links in the

education process that is necessary in order for the greater culture to end repressive treatment of homosexuals.

Coming out to parents can be a rewarding experience if the difference between your desire to tell and your parents' desire to know is not too great. When is the difference too great? Only you can decide. Usually parents give some signals, some indication to you of what they are wanting to know about you and your life. Those signals can serve as valuable guides.

Whether coming out to parents or to others of importance, your own spiritual, physical, emotional, and financial strength are things to be in



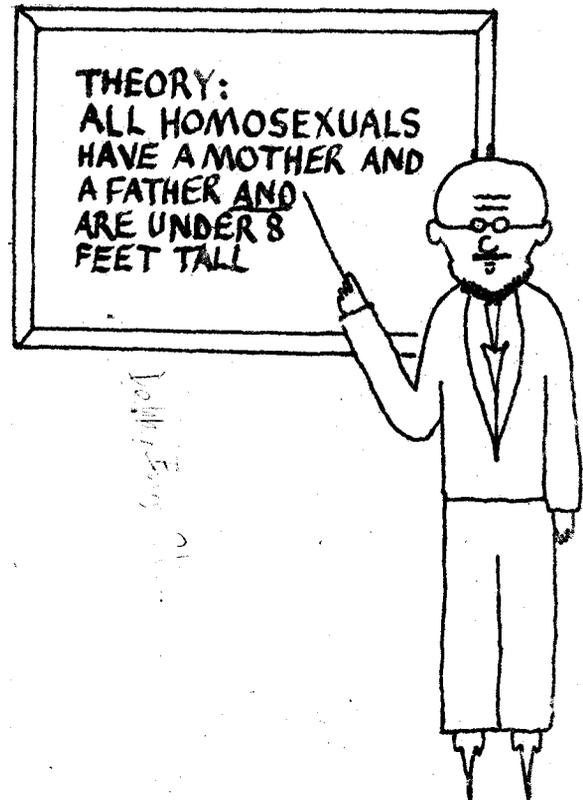
touch with. It would be unreasonable to urge every gay person to come out to her or his parents, friends, and employers, with little consideration for the price that individuals still pay. If you are contemplating coming out, especially to your folks, take a look at the potential losses and gains, check your storehouse of strengths, and peek at your bitterness thermometer. Are you getting even with your folks by giving them news you know they can't handle well at this point? Or are you telling them because they seem to want to know you and you want them to? Remember, regardless of how good coming out feels to you, the larger society restricts this term to debutantes, and, in most cases, your folks will not feel like having a party.

Mom and Dad, I'm Gay

I have a nice story to tell! Ever since I've been in Gay Alliance--since it first started--I've heard a lot of different people tell many stories about their feelings toward their parents. Every week we have a consciousness raising session after our business meeting; during that time many personal feelings and doubts, stories of experiences, etc., are discussed. The conversation often drifts to coming out to our parents or dealing with them. Most of the people in the Alliance have expressed a lot of concern about how their parents have reacted or would react if they knew about their son or daughter being gay. Unfortunately, most people believed that their parents would be negative if they knew. They felt that they would be sent to counseling services, psychiatrists, or that their parents might even do something drastic--like disown them. These CR sessions made me think about telling my parents that I was gay. I've been gay since I had any sexual preference at all, but had always been careful not to let my parents know about it. It would have been impossible for me to tell them about it while I was still at home since I was too unsure of my own feelings anyway.

It took my whole freshman year at Haverford and then active membership in Gay Alliance during my sophomore year for me to become genuinely comfortable about discussing my gay preference with people, gay and straight. The good, supportive feelings that I got from the people in GPA finally made me realize that I owed it to my parents, without whom I'd be nothing, and even more to myself, to tell them something that was so important to me.

So, during our Thanksgiving break of 1975 I went home with the intention of telling my parents that I was gay. Let me tell you, it was one of the toughest things I ever had to do, which says something for the oppression that gay people feel. I love both my parents dearly and they love me just as much. They've always been very liberal and have never



censured the gay movement or gay people they knew. Yet when I sat them down to tell them my stomach felt like a yawning pit and my head was a fuzzy mess. I got my brother (who had known for a long time) to stand next to me while I blurted out my sexual preference. After their first surprise they both kind of said, "Now what?" and so we talked into the wee hours of the morning. I explained myself and my happiness with my preference to them, and they reacted to those feelings in a way so positive, so genuine, that I felt good for a long time.

The important thing is that I had known that they would be good about it, so what made me the nervous wreck that I was when I told them? It was something in me--something in me because of a societal attitude. Never once when I was growing up did I hear positive things about homosexuality! Well, now I feel good about telling people about my sexual preference and I feel and hope that organizations like GPA, and parents like mine, will make it easier for other gay people to feel good about themselves.