

Difficulties, rewards follow 'coming out'

By KAY BELLOR

"It was hard for me to say the word gay. It's weird how you can't say it," recalls Gary, a first-year student. "Now I'm very comfortable with it."

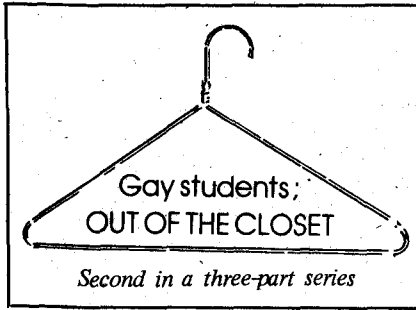
"I want people to accept me as I am. I just want an equal break just like anyone else."

For Gary, "coming out," declaring his homosexuality to himself and others, was a difficult but necessary step in his life.

"It's not the kind of thing I want to shout from the rooftop, but I'm through lying about it," he observes.

But many gays said that admitting their sexual orientation involved risks that outweighed the rewards. Instead, they choose to keep their homosexuality a secret, admitting it to themselves, but few if any others.

They adopt an outwardly heterosexual lifestyle. They may take a lover or perhaps confine their gay



activities to hurried meetings in secluded hideaways or bars.

The life of a "closeted" gay, one who keeps his sexuality secret, can be limiting both emotionally and socially, according to James Gallegher, a third-year College student.

"If people are very closeted they are going to have a very limited circle of friends," Gallegher said.

Coming out involves very real costs,

according to Robert "Elmo" Schwartz, a third-year law student and Student Council representative.

"There are certain things you lose when you come out. You lose heterosexual privileges. People may beat you up in the street or fire you from your job. You can't dine where you want to dine."

Also, "It's difficult for an 18-year-old male to say to his roommate, 'I'm one of those queers you've heard about,'" Schwartz said.

"Still, it's always better to come out," Schwartz said. Each of the 10 men and women interviewed agreed, although most admit that they are still "in the closet" to some extent.

"You think it's easy enough to go along. To get along, you go along. But sooner or later you realize you're paying more than you're getting. You don't build a happy life on a false

foundation," said Schwartz.

Gays who do admit their homosexuality may find that living as a gay in a heterosexual world takes too great a toll on their personal and emotional lives. They may choose to live in the "gay 'ghettos'" of larger cities where they can go to gay bars, restaurants and other places where hostile confrontations are unlikely.

Living in gay ghettos, "is a natural response to a world that is threatening," said Schwartz.

"It's sad that others have to resort to living in a gay world. I say that; for others it might not be sad," he added.

Gallegher said some homosexuals are frightened at the prospect of losing friends after they "come out." But several questioned the strength of friendships that cannot survive the discovery that one friend is gay.

Some, like Schwartz, found they could admit their sexual orientation to

friends and still find support rather than snubs.

If gays agree that "coming out" is better than staying in the closet, they do not claim that life outside the closet will be easy.

"When I came out, it was not a step into gay pride, it was a step into gay resignation," recalls Schwartz. "It was a step into disappointment."

Schwartz found "positive literature" on homosexuality as well as the support of his friends, which lessened his original ambivalence.

"I've been surrounded by tons of good gay and non-gay people," he said. "When I came out, none of my straight acquaintances turned their backs on me."

Some gays interviewed pointed to the benefits of coming out, saying

Gays

Continued from page 1.

gays are less confused about "role playing," something they say heterosexuals do to a much greater degree than gays.

"I don't see how a person can be happy unless she's true to herself. Coming to terms with one's sexuality seems to be a big part of being true to oneself," said Mary, a graduate student.

Max, a first-year woman, agreed.

"Being able to deal with gayness . . . does away with a lot of garbage. Once you get rid of it, you find a human being underneath."

Telling one's parents is at once the most difficult and the most liberating step in gay life.

"They're the people you depend on," Gallegher observed. "Once they know, it doesn't matter who else knows."

Other gays said they hadn't told

their parents but their parents already knew.

Few gays are completely open about their sexual orientation. They pay the price of living two lives.

"If I wanted to pass, if I'm not branded as a faggot, I could," said John Curtin. "And yet there are the psychological fears of trying to live a lie, living with the constant fear that someone is going to find out and then what the hell is going to happen?"