I'm Ari Worthman. I'm a sophomore here at Haverford. I guess when I came here last year, I didn't really think that people really changed that much in college, or that their perspectives were really shaped to a large degree by their college experiences. That's probably a very typical freshman assumption—I mean, it's hard to imagine when you first get here that you may be a very different person when you leave. Yes, I definitely was and am naïve. I always have been. In fact, let me give you a sort of light-hearted example as to how naïve I can be.

Last year I made one or two trips into the city to Woodys. For those of you who don't know, it's a gay club. When I told my mom that I go to a club named Woodys, she responded with a degree of ambivalence: she thought it was great that I was enjoying some type of gay scene, but she was very sketched out by the name, Woodys. She told me that she was sort of sketched out, I probably gave her a puzzled look, and then shrugged it off of one of those really weird things that parents concern themselves with. But this past summer, I was visiting my friend Alex Mertens, who lived here in HCA. I was telling her about this chat with my mom and how perplexed I was that she was weirded out by the name, Woodys. I mean, I thought the club was named after a person. You know, like the character, Woody, on the TV show Cheers. I could picture him owning his own bar and naming it Woodys after himself. But Alex was just like, "Ari, the club is named after the penis—Woodys, erections, get it?????" Woooo, the fact that I enjoyed going to a club named after penises really freaked me out. I later learned that everyone I knew understood what was implied in the name, Woodys. So, yes, naïve I am and very proud of it.

But anyway, so I live in my little Haverbubble, rowing on the crew team, working in admissions, tap dancing, and hanging out with all of the cool folks here. I have always found Haverford to be a very queer-friendly place—a home where I felt comfortable talking about the guys whom I think are cute and the movie stars whom I wish would come out of the closet. Yes, it can be very heterosexist, but unintentionally, I think. I find that if I nicely suggest to someone that he/she made a heterosexist comment, they take it in good stride. And even before I came to Haverford, when I had been out for only a couple of months, I spent all my time with a bunch of eighteen year-olds who were about to head off to college and who happened to have been raised to be very tolerant, loving and acceptable people. So, being the naïve person that I am, I concluded that the world was filled with *some* homophobic and heterosexist people, but it wasn't rampant. I mean, horrible atrocities such as the murder of Matthew Sheppard occur, but they must be anomalies. I made what I think is the very typical mistake of projecting my own experiences onto world perspective. Oh boy, big mistake.

So, anyway. this is my first year hosting and giving tours in admissions. A couple of weeks ago, I was explaining to one woman how wonderful it is that Bryn Mawr is right down the road from us—how it broadens our academic and social horizons. She sort of chuckled, leaned over to my ear, placed her hand on my shoulder, and softly giggled: "Oh young man, I'm sure I know exactly why you like that Bryn Mawr is down the road…"

The implication being that I loved the fact that over one thousand beautiful women live down the road from me. Now, let me be blunt. I hate breasts!!! I mean, I appreciate their aesthetic value in paintings and in the overall framework of the female anatomy, but nothing else seems more undesirable to me than to kiss them, or fondle them, or caress them...eewwwww.... Anyway, I didn't know what to say. I couldn't believe that she had just said that. I mean, didn't she know that there are men in the world who are not sexually attracted to women? But you know, it's not even that. It's not unreasonable, since ninety percent of the men in the world are straight, to assume that someone is straight. Chances are that they are straight. But why did I feel uncomfortable to tell her that I happened to be gay? Perhaps she would have been perfectly OK with it. I had come out to some of my tours without any apparent problems, but it occurred to me that most likely, this was not a person who was thinking "chances are he is straight, so I'll just assume he is until he says otherwise." Most likely this was a woman who never even considered the possibility that I am gay. And then a few days later, on another tour, when I was explaining that I thought Haverford was a comfortable place for people of all races, ethnicity's, nationalities, sexualities, one woman instantly stiffened and in a very alarmed tone exclaimed: "Well, it's not like Haverford is trying to recruit gays or anything, right?" As if that would be horrible if Haverford was. Hmmm. These incidents really got me thinking. My Haverbubble was apparently nothing like the rest of the world.

I have changed so much from the end of second semester last year up through today, in many ways. One significant way is that I have come to realize that in many ways, Haverford is nothing like the rest of the world. Perhaps I can hide here, shielded by the 1100 supportive people and a set of ideals that protects me from being disrespected, but in three years from now I'll be fending for myself—going out there and being ready to deal with all the people who have never met another gay person before in their lives, all the people who think that homosexuality is all about ass-fucking, all the people who think that I woke up one morning and said, "gee, should I spend the rest of my life attracted to women or men?"

Yet, let me just say that I'm not pessimistic. In fact, what I want you all to get out of what I'm saying should not at all be that I have negative and foreboding views of the world. What I really want you to think about is this: if the people here at Haverford have the potential to be tolerant and accepting, so does everyone. So while I am intimidated by a world that is frequently homophobic and exclusive, I am reassured of its potential to change by my Haverford experience—by the people whom I see everyday, by the Honor Code that we ratify every spring, and by forums such as this. No, Haverford is far from a perfect place, but it's better than most. So, what I plan to do, and what I hope some of you who see things from my perspective plan to do is this: enjoy your Haverbubble, appreciate the comfort and safety that you experience within it. But when you leave it, or when it's finally time for you to pop your bubble on graduation day, remember what it felt like and whatever you do in the world, always try to encourage others to foster our values of respect and tolerance. And then maybe someday, though probably long after I'm gone, there will really be no fault in projecting my Haverbubble onto my more worldly experiences.