Sam

This document is the result of one of the resolutions of an Honor Council mediation that took place because of a violation of the social honor code. The document is not the result of Honor Council proceedings, but rather was agreed to by the confronting and confronted parties at a formal mediation. The document will have the following form: 1) an "abstract" of the events that occurred at the time of the violation, through the confrontation, and finally the mediation. 2) a personal statement from Sam, the confronted party. 3) statements from members of the class involved. 4) a statement from the administration about the incident and subsequent proceedings.

This is not the abstract of a trial.

Abstract

Near the end of this term a class was meeting outside on the green. The class was all women, with a female professor and class visitor. After a while they began to hear shouting from a window in a nearby dorm. They said that they heard someone yell things like, "get off the lawn, the bomb scare's over," "go home," and "catalog pictures aren't being taken until next week."

After the shouting ceased Sam appeared at the open window and then pulled down the shade to conceal his face. He pulled down his pants and exposed himself to the class. The class believed that he was masturbating at them.

Members of the class were very upset about the incident, many of them feeling threatened and harassed.

The class decided to confront Sam. They met with a dean immediately after class and after some discussion with the dean decided to proceed through Honor Council. They decided on representatives who would go and talk to Sam as the first step towards a resolution. When they did, he said that he had been urinating out the window and that it was an inside joke with his friends who were in the room. He said that his actions had not been directed at the class on the green, but did not deny that their presence made the joke more funny. At the confrontation Sam was told that he ought to approach the chairperson of Honor Council, as they intended to take the incident to the Council.

The confronting party met with the chairperson of Council and they decided together to try to resolve the situation in a mediation. The mediation took place approximately five days after the confrontation. Sam, his support person and the confronting party were present, as well as the chairperson and two members of Honor Council who served as mediators.

The confronting party initiated the discussion by presenting resolutions (that they and the rest of the class had agreed upon) to help repair the breach of trust with the community. After some discussion of the incident and the resolutions, Sam left the room with his support person to think about the resolutions and decide if he could accept them.

When he returned there was more discussion about the incident itself and the group came to consensus upon the following resolutions:

1. An "abstract" would be written and sent to all members of the community before the end of the semester. It would contain a summary of the incident and the events occurring since, a statement from Sam, statements from members of the class who wished to comment, and a letter from one of the deans. This document was to be sent to the community this semester.

2. Sam will write a letter of apology to the members of the class which will be distributed to them privately.

3. Sam will have an appointment with one of the deans to discuss his actions and their effects on the community.

A timetable for completion of these resolutions was agreed to by all parties before they left. The mediation took about 2 hours.
Sam's Statement

I was waiting for my afternoon class to begin, and was sitting with my friend in his room. It was a warm, sunny day and we noticed a class was in progress outside on the grass. It's an inside joke in that suite to go to the bathroom out the window. It sounds like something one does when drunk, but it actually started once when one of us really couldn't make it down the hall in time. Now we do it for laughs. I thought it would be funny for me and my friend, if I went to the bathroom out the window, as I had done so many times, but this time in front of the class that was sitting outside. He agreed. I went to the window and pulled down the shade over my face. It was one thing to go to the bathroom out the window, but I wasn't going to show my face while I was doing it. I stood at the window for about a minute, undid my pants, but did not urinate for very long. When I was done, I shook my penis, as guys do when they're done going to the bathroom. Then, I buttoned my jeans and sat down in the room.

A few minutes later, my friend yelled a few obnoxious comments out the window: "Hey you kids — get off the lawn, comprende?" and "the yearbook pictures aren't until next week, go home." None of these comments were an attempt to harm anyone. They were as harmless as they sound.

The next day I received a message — a note to call one of the women in the class. We set up an appointment for about seven women to meet with me and discuss what had happened.

After a couple of meetings with these women, I can see that I really threatened some of them. I'll never completely understand the anger and pain that some of them felt, but I see that what I did was wrong. Although I never really, at that time, thought of what I was doing in terms of male-female gender roles, ignorance is no defense. It's true that I often joke around and thought that me and my friend would get a laugh out of the incident, but I see now that I've hurt some people. I've communicated to them how sorry I am for disrupting their class and making them uncomfortable. I also realize after talking with them that they misconstrued my act of shaking my penis as an act of sexual aggression rather than one of necessity. I realize that they may not understand where a man is coming from if he says that he shakes his penis when he's done urinating. I was not playing with myself as it could have appeared to them. The fact that they could not distinguish between the two is not very important. I was wrong and have learned some things about acting on impulses and being more sensitive to those around whom you live. I've seen some new aspects about myself and the Code from this experience.

It has been painful for both sides and I appreciate the time they've given to explain it to me. I hope that this will not cause complete uneasiness between us in the future.

The Class's Statements

My reaction to this was one of disgust and anger. I was disgusted by his actions and angry that such a thing could happen at Haverford. Maybe I was naive, but I sincerely thought that Haverford was a place where things like this didn't happen and where people really did respect each other. He was showing us, even if only subconsciously, that he had no respect for us. The fact that he knew we were out there and the fact that he pulled down the shade to cover his face indicated to me that he was putting on a show for us which he knew was considered crude and disgusting, but which he thought he could get away with. I hope that our actions will show that such things are not acceptable at Haverford and will not be tolerated.

It was like he was giving us "the finger," but in an obscene way. All my semester's work of studying women and learning to believe in us and believe that we can have some power was shot to pieces by one male. I dreamt about it all night long after it happened, going over and over it, spinning around. I keep crying about it — I'm so hurt and angry and scared, too.
Sixteen women sitting in the sun discussing women, discussing change. "Go away!" "Go back inside!" Sixteen women's lives disrupted. This is a story of sixteen women, victims of a violent crime, who found support and strength together, internally, who struggled within a sit-down-and-discuss-it-respectfully ideology at the very time when the only force encouraging (demanding) action was our own passion, our own anger. Without these women with me, I would have been (re)victimized, immobilized, silent, afraid. If you hope the good in others will be your protection, if you hope to never have to deal with fear face to face, if you are a woman alone, I fear for you.

I am angry that "male bonding" is an excuse for destroying other people's confidence in themselves. I'd like to thank the class for being so unified and supportive through this, which kept it from being a completely negative experience.

I feel victimized, angry, and vulnerable. Mostly angry, at the lack of respect and loss of trust, and I have a difficult time feeling that I should try to understand and respect the feelings of someone who so blatantly disregarded ours. I can only hope that the community will recognize the violence and damage of this act, and will refuse to tolerate such action.

Last year a man pulled a knife on me in a Philadelphia train station. I see no difference between that act of violence and this incident which occurred on the Haverford campus. Both times, I was left feeling vulnerable, afraid, despised, and very angry. It took me months to enter that train station again -- I would go miles out of my way to pick up another connection. But when I finally entered that station again I felt triumphant. It will also be a victorious day when women on the Haverford campus can walk safely, speak up boldly in class, and live and work in an atmosphere that nurtures being a woman. To work toward that day, I encourage all women to speak up -- loudly. It hurts, but silences hurt more -- they only protect the doers of the violence.

You make me hate you... I hate you for giving me a reason to hate men... I hate you for making me feel powerless, violated, in danger, scared, angry... what gives you the right to make me feel this way? You know you are protected by this place and its system... you know that I can't tell people what a scam you are! ...You know I can't reveal your name to anyone... You exploit the system and force me to alienate other women... I want to tell each and every one of them... I can't... I can't protect them from you... Can I? ...You know it you use it you abuse it... you bastard!

When I witnessed this incident, it reminded me of two other instances in a city which I had been involved in, and brought back the fear I have as a woman alone. It made me wonder whether I should let this restrain my freedom or whether I should continue to risk my safety. This "inside joke" was a clear act of aggression against women's intellectual pursuits by intimidation. However, rather than belittling women's studies, it only served to illuminate for me the need for such discussions, in and out of class.

I didn't actually see what he did, because I was facing the other way, but I felt the tension of the group. First there was disbelief -- Is this what I think it is? At Haverford? Then confusion -- Should we ignore him? Shout back? Point and laugh? It was frustrating that in a class on women's issues, we didn't know how to deal with sexism when we were personally confronted with it. No one was sure exactly what to do: ourselves, our professor, or the deans. It made me feel very powerless as a woman.

I saw everything. My initial reaction was disgust. Then shock that someone in this community would stoop so low as to do something so disasteful. But when I realized that he was not pissing out the window, or at least not just pissing out the window, I became angry. I was indignant at the
brazenness with which he imposed his maleness upon us from above, with all the social and psychological associations that entails. I felt somehow violated as a woman. Then realizing that this act was being directed at a class of women, including a woman professor and another adult woman, I took this act to be a direct insult to women's academic and intellectual endeavors, especially given the accompanying shouts of "Go home!" He certainly disrupted our class discussion. My anger thus intensified was further compounded by our powerlessness to stop him. A class of sixteen women was dominated and repressed, temporarily but with force, by a single male and his penis.

This disruption of my class felt very aggressive and really disturbed me — why? Is it the underlying message of male power and its supposed inappropriateness at Haverford? Is it the inherent communication that something is seriously wrong when men, however idiosyncratic the act, need to express this kind of feeling toward women? Is it the real world impinging on an "ivory tower" class, one that I designed to include discussions of gender relations and female forms of power? I find all of these possibilities deeply upsetting, because I cannot dismiss this as a purely frivolous or individual act. For me, it tied into the broader cultural context here at Haverford, and beyond. We need to discuss and understand this event, our reactions, and their implications. Hopefully we will learn to recognize and deal better with the underlying causes.

Letter from the Deans

HAVERFORD
Dean of the College

May 10, 1989

Dear Members of the Haverford Community:

Haverford College holds as fundamental a commitment to the dignity of each and every one of us. Obscene and sexist acts not only aggress against the individuals toward whom they are directed but also violate the community as a whole. As such, they will not be tolerated. All of us—students, faculty, staff, and administration—share a collective responsibility to eradicate this kind of behavior in order that the reality of the Haverford experience comes closer to the ideal of mutual respect we all espouse.

Matthews Bamabata
Dean of the College
To the Haverford Community:

I know that my intolerable action has caused many of you to feel uncomfortable. I can see it on your faces and by your words on the comment board. I too am uncomfortable. I have wanted to respond to you before now, but have been intimidated to approach the comment board, preferring to do so when fewer people were around. When I walk through campus I assume that you all know what I've done. Being in the dining center is probably most difficult. My mind has certainly not been on my work. Before I was mostly embarrassed- now I'm scared. It's hard for me to believe that I've caused such an explosion. Yesterday I got an anonymous note that told me that I should be castrated in public. Although my initial reaction to the class' comments in the abstract was that they seemed exaggerated, now I don't know what to think. But I do know that I am certainly not doing too much laughing at my "joke".

It is obvious from the comment board and from my discussions with Tamara Lave (HC Chairperson) that there are some of you who are not satisfied with the current state of things. Some feel that I should have been thrown in jail. Some feel that the women who confronted me were too lenient in their demands. Some feel that my statement in the abstract was inadequate and insincere. And some feel that this is an example of something blown way out of proportion.

Although I stand by my statement of the facts (I was not masturbating or shaking my penis at the women. I was urinating as a joke to get a laugh from my friend. I did not urinate on the women or at the women. I did not mean anything malicious towards them. I did not know that it was a women's studies class. I didn't even notice that the group was all women. My friend in the room was not screaming things to degrade women) I did not write the second part of the letter well. In trying so hard to make sure that I made it clear that I was only urinating, I gave off the impression that what was at issue was whether or not the women correctly understood my actions. What is important is that I apologize to the class and the
community for my disrespectful and disgusting behavior. Although I honestly do not understand the extent to which the women and others have been hurt in terms of sexism, I realize that my actions were inappropriate regardless of their gender implications.

Some of you have read the comments of "Fletcher" on the board. He was the friend in the room with me at the time of the incident. We talked last night for a while, and he told me that he had changed some of his views after talking with his mother for three hours. He has since written another letter which I hope you will read. Regardless, please listen to me and my words. Don't get angry with me because of what people who know me say. I am now speaking to you.

I know that I have offended many people and many feel unsafe with me on campus. I wish that was not the case. I don't want people to fear me. I would never hurt anyone. But I realize that I have made myself untrustworthy. I am therefore withdrawing my name from the housing list and will live off-campus next semester (Although it looked like I was going to wind up in a Gummers bathroom anyway). Hopefully this act will show you that I respect your fear. But I really want to come back to campus.

I also know that I do not understand some of the remarks that have been made about sexism. But I respect those who feel that I in some way have violated women - people are obviously not making up their anger. So I will take the suggestion that has been made to me that I take a course next year in women's studies. Perhaps some feel that I should not be allowed to be in such a class. In light of this view, perhaps if I write a letter to the professor explaining my situation and asking permission to be in the class, he or she will let me.

These are some ways that I can take further steps to help people trust me. And I think I can do this also by continuing my commitment to community service. I really like Haverford and want to again be a full member of this community. I know that those who really know me, know that I can prove myself worthy of your trust. I did not mean to hurt you, and once again, I deeply apologize. I guess its called growing up.

Thank you,

"Samm"