

Abstract Discussions: Thursday, February 23rd at 7:30 PM in Lunt Cafe.

Sex and the City¹

An Honor Council Student Facilitation Panel

Released Spring 2006

Introduction:

Aidan, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda became good friends while living together in a suite. Over the semester, the dynamic between the four became very open, physical, and sexual. One day, Aidan led Samantha to believe that he had created an embarrassing video of her. Although no such video actually existed, Aidan told Samantha that he had shown the embarrassing footage to others and intended to continue doing so. Believing Aidan was telling the truth, Samantha became increasingly distressed.

Later that night while Aidan was out, Samantha and Charlotte entered his room to borrow an article of clothing (which they had Aidan's permission to take). While searching, Samantha found Aidan's digital camera, and began looking for the embarrassing video he claimed to have made. To her relief, Samantha found no such video. Unable to locate the clothing, Samantha and Charlotte left Aidan's room. Miranda, however, decided to enter Aidan's room and continue the search for the clothing. While alone in the room, Miranda found Aidan's camera and scrolled through it to look for unflattering pictures of herself which Aidan had said he took at a party. While scrolling, Miranda found a sexually explicit image, and took the camera into the hallway to show Charlotte and Samantha. Realizing that the image was the beginning of a video, Samantha pressed play. Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda proceeded to watch the video clip, which contained sexually explicit images of Aidan.

As a result of the sexual openness in the suite, Samantha assumed Aidan would not be particularly upset that she, Miranda, and Charlotte had watched his video. Several days later, after a party at which Samantha and Aidan had been drinking, Samantha, in passing, told Aidan that she had seen his personal video. Aidan immediately became extremely angry. In the aftermath of the incident when Aidan confronted the women, several of them felt physically threatened by him. Not satisfied with the nature of the confrontations which had taken place, Aidan contacted Honor Council.

After reading statements from all four parties, Honor Council came to consensus on a suspicion of violation, with two people standing outside. With no one standing outside consensus, Honor Council sent the case to a Student Facilitation Panel (SFP).

Orientation and Preparatory Meeting:

During the orientation meeting, an Honor Council member who was not serving on the panel met with the parties to explain the SFP process. Each party was also given the opportunity to read the statements of the other involved parties.

At the preparatory meeting which followed, the members of the panel, consisting of three Honor Council members who had been trained in mediation and three randomly selected community members, met to read and discuss the parties' written statements. The panel members also discussed the SFP procedure and some basic principles of mediation. Everyone was reminded that "the Panel's primary goals are

¹ This naming scheme was chosen by the parties themselves before the end of the Panel. Unlike some other abstracts, the genders of the participants have not been changed here due to the sexual nature of the incident.

facilitating respectful communication with the intent of reaching some common understanding, and encouraging individuals to take responsibility and accountability for past actions” (Students’ Constitution).

Facilitated Dialogue 1²:

After introductions, the panel members, confronted parties, and confronting party agreed to some ground rules meant to promote respectful and productive dialogue. Finally, everyone agreed to ultimately work toward creating resolutions.

Aidan’s statement:

In his written statement, Aidan described his relationships with Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda as very open. He said that they were all very close friends, and as a result, had few if any explicit boundaries. Aidan became extremely angry when Samantha told him that she, Charlotte, and Miranda had gone through his digital camera and watched his sexually explicit video. Because the suite boundaries were so broad, Aidan did not mind that the women had entered his room or even gone through his camera. He felt, however, that the women violated his privacy and the Honor Code when they pressed “play” and decided to watch the video. Aidan was also angry that the women had continued to violate his privacy by discussing the incident and its aftermath with their Deans and several other students. He told the Panel that he felt victimized and violated by the women’s actions, and he contacted Honor Council in order to gain control of the situation.

In his statement Aidan expressed that he brought the case to Honor Council because after the incident he felt overwhelmed and wanted a space to work out the issues which had arisen. Despite his anger, Aidan did not think the women watched his video with malicious intent.

Having now read the women’s statements to the Panel, which raised concerns that Aidan had been physically threatening in the aftermath of the incident, Aidan thought the women had portrayed him as a monster. Aidan was deeply disturbed that the women never confronted him about their concerns, stressing that he never intended to be threatening or physically intimidating.

Aidan said that he was no longer angry at the women, and that he accepted their apologies (which they had made earlier). Despite having forgiven the women for watching his video, Aidan still felt hurt by their actions. Specifically he felt vulnerable because he sensed Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda had ganged up on him. Aidan explained that although he hoped to discuss the actual incident, he felt there were several other more important issues that had arisen in the aftermath of the conflict. He said that he still respected the women very much and that he hoped that after the panel they could feel comfortable with one another again.

Samantha’s statement:

Samantha began her uninterrupted spoken statement by emphasizing that she believed a horrendous communication breakdown had occurred, and she hoped that the lines of communication could be rebuilt.

² Because the four parties and all the panel members had read the written statements of fact before the first Facilitated Dialogue, the presentation of fact in this portion of the abstract combines the contents of their written and spoken statements. Please note that the written statements were composed by the parties one month before the panel began and tended to have a more emotional and angry tone than the spoken statements.

In her written statement, Samantha said that her relationship with Aidan was characterized by nebulous boundaries, especially regarding physical and sexual matters. They had engaged in casual sexual relations before, and often had very candid conversation. In general, the atmosphere in the suite was one of openness: Suitemates often left their doors unlocked and changed their clothing in front of one another. Despite this dynamic, Samantha explained that even before the incident Aidan's immature humor was beginning to bother her, and that she did not feel she could trust him completely.

At the time of the video incident, Samantha reiterated that she had believed that Aidan had used his camera to create an embarrassing video of her. Samantha was particularly upset because Aidan claimed to have shown the video to other people and said that he intended to continue sharing the video with others. Samantha said she first looked through Aidan's camera with the intention of finding and deleting the embarrassing footage. Samantha emphasized that when Miranda showed her the explicit image on the camera, she did not press the play button to be vindictive. In fact, at first she did not even realize that video contained footage of Aidan. Although she could immediately tell this particular video did not contain footage of her, Aidan's previous teasing about embarrassing videos disinclined her to believe he would be upset about her watching his.

Two days later, Aidan revealed to Samantha that the embarrassing video he claimed to have made did not actually exist. Laughing, Samantha said that she already knew he was lying about the video's existence because she had looked through his camera and found no incriminating images of herself. At this point she casually mentioned that she had watched his sexual video. Samantha explained that she had mentioned viewing the video in passing only because it had never occurred to her that Aidan would be angry given the sexually open dynamic between the four suite members. Aidan, however, was furious. Although Samantha had not wanted to hurt Aidan, she felt that he often ignored her privacy and her sense of boundaries. How, she wondered, could he be angry about her actions when he so often violated her privacy?

Samantha said that throughout their initial confrontation, Aidan's anger escalated. Although she apologized and said that she felt terrible for hurting him, Aidan maintained that her actions were an egregious violation of his privacy. Ending the confrontation, he loudly threatened to take her to Honor Council and left the suite. Samantha noted that though it was unclear how intoxicated Aidan had been that night, he was holding a container of alcohol and had clearly been drinking.

Around 4 a.m. that same night, Aidan returned to the suite, and rather forcefully insisted on engaging Samantha in a second dialogue. At this point in the night, Samantha was tired and somewhat intoxicated. Fearing for Samantha's safety, one of her friends attempted to dissuade Samantha from speaking with Aidan. Samantha, however, thought it might be productive to allow the dialogue to occur. Samantha and Aidan stepped outside to speak. During the discussion, Aidan used profanity, raised his voice, and got very physically close to her. Samantha felt extremely upset and angry but moreover, she felt physically threatened by Aidan. Samantha said that not only did Aidan give her little opportunity to speak but she felt too overwhelmed and threatened to truly assert herself. During the talk, Aidan said that their friendship was over. Still shocked by his level of anger, Samantha felt that Aidan was attempting to manipulate her into feeling remorse.

In response to Aidan's statement, Samantha said that she no longer felt physically threatened but she did feel that he had manipulated her. She said that their boundaries were constantly changing and these shifting boundaries largely contributed to the intensity of emotion surrounding the incident. She reminded the panel that she had not watched the video as way to "get Aidan back." She hoped to use the SFP process as a means of reestablishing trust and opening the lines of communication with Aidan.

Charlotte's statement:

Charlotte began her spoken statement by agreeing that there had been a huge communication breakdown, and that no one involved had been malicious. In her written statement, Charlotte said that since they started living together, she and Aidan had become close friends. She also described the open sexual atmosphere in the suite, and added that Aidan had been physically inappropriate with her despite repeated and explicit requests to refrain from such behavior.

Charlotte placed a particular emphasis on Aidan's confrontation with the women. She had witnessed the initial confrontation between Aidan and Samantha, and felt that Aidan could be dangerous. As a result, Charlotte refused to discuss the issue with Aidan on the night of the incident and later insisted on the presence of an unbiased mediator during any confrontations. Like Samantha, Charlotte wrote that she was surprised that Aidan had reacted so strongly. She also explained that she never meant to hurt Aidan and felt badly that he was so upset.

Charlotte said that she had felt very uncomfortable with the living situation throughout the semester. Only after the video incident, however, did she realize how truly uncomfortable the situation had become. She and Aidan had discussed her concerns in the past, and Charlotte explained that she would have made more of an effort to talk to Aidan had she realized the extent of the situation.

Charlotte said that the communication breakdown had occurred because she had felt, and to a small degree still felt, intimidated by Aidan. She said that she stood by the information conveyed by her written statement but explained that a lot of the anger expressed in that statement had since subsided.

Miranda's statement:

In her written statement, Miranda also emphasized the loose sexual boundaries which characterized the relationship between the four suite members. While she acknowledged that all the suite members had created this dynamic together, Miranda felt that Aidan's treatment of women particularly contributed to the sexual atmosphere. Although Miranda said that Aidan had never been physically inappropriate with her, she felt his actions toward the other women suggested that he had no real concept of boundaries. Aidan, for example, had engaged in what Miranda considered to be inappropriate sexual touching which Aidan had simply characterized as playful.

Miranda agreed with the details of the incident described by both Samantha and Charlotte, confirming that she had been the one to turn on Aidan's camera and find his video. Although Samantha had earlier looked for the embarrassing video Aidan claimed to have made of her, Miranda did not scroll through Aidan's camera looking for that video - she was simply looking through his pictures for unflattering images of herself. Like the other two women, Miranda did not expect Aidan to be so upset that they had watched his video.

Miranda said that her discussion with Aidan had been comparatively calm and productive. Because they had largely worked out their issues, Aidan had even suggested the possibility of excluding Miranda from the trial. Eventually, however, they decided together that because Miranda been a part of the incident, she should be confronted.

Miranda also explained that after Aidan confronted the women, she and Charlotte confidentially discussed the situation with some community members including their Deans in order to explore their options. When Aidan found out the two women confided in their Deans, Aidan was extremely angry. While Miranda felt bad that her actions upset Aidan, she considered his attempts to completely control her actions disturbing. Miranda expressed concern that Aidan would use physical intimidation to gain even more control over the situation.

In her spoken statement, Miranda emphasized that her issues with Aidan were somewhat different from his issues with Samantha and Charlotte. Unlike the other two women, Miranda's relationship with Aidan was not characterized by as much sexual tension, and she never felt directly threatened or violated by him. Miranda, however, had witnessed Aidan's angry conversations with the other women, and in the aftermath of the incident had worried about her own safety. During the trial, she apologized to Aidan for unnecessarily fearing him.

*Dialogue*³:

After all four statements, the Panel began a moderated dialogue.

- **Aidan** began by stating that he was pleased with how the SFP had gone thus far, and that he now better understood the women's statements.
- **Samantha** said that she had felt sexually intimidated by Aidan. Nevertheless, she didn't think that Aidan had intended to make her feel this way. Referring to the atmosphere in the suite, Samantha said that uncomfortable sexual situations were often laughed off.
- **Aidan** said that the aftermath of the incident elucidated the severe issues surrounding their living situation. He admitted to having contributed to the suite dynamic.
- **Charlotte** said that it was clear that the loose sexual boundaries within the suite were a recipe for disaster. She also said that miscommunication between suite members was a chronic problem. Charlotte explained that she did feel physically intimidated by Aidan but that this was mostly due to the lack of boundaries. Although Aidan pushed boundaries, she never saw him as a sexual monster.
- **Aidan** wanted to explain to the women why he felt so violated by their behavior: Although there were few sexual boundaries within the suite, Aidan felt the women had violated his privacy by watching the video because the incident occurred when he was not around. Aidan reiterated that he felt the real violation occurred when the women pressed "play" on the camera. Had he been in their situation, and seen an explicit image, he would not have watched the video; he considered watching the video a very deliberate act. Aidan, however, said that he could understand how anyone one of them could make such a mistake.
- **Charlotte** responded to Aidan's claim that the act was deliberate by suggesting that though Samantha made the "decision" to press play, the incident did not seem calculated or deliberate at the time. Because there were few boundaries between the women and Aidan, it did not register that Aidan would consider their actions an invasion of his privacy.
- **Aidan** said that everyone's motivations were becoming clearer now that they all had had a chance to look back on the incident. He said that he was beginning to realize how unhealthy their relationships had been. Despite their problems, he emphasized that their relationships had a lot of good qualities, and he hoped that they could rebuild their friendships.
- **A panel member** said that she wanted to be sure that Aidan understood how his actions toward the women could have been inappropriate.

Before taking a break, all of the parties acknowledged that there had been a breakdown in communication in the aftermath of the incident. They decided to take a few minutes to reflect on how to re-open communication lines.

³ While the dialogue presented here is meant to give the reader an idea of what occurred during the trial, it is obviously incomplete.

- **Samantha** said that she was upset that Aidan had previously referred to her statement as partially inaccurate. She stressed that, while her feelings toward Aidan had changed since writing her statement, her statement represented how she initially felt.
- **Charlotte** suggested that the perceived inaccuracies were actually misinterpretations of each other's emotional states—further proof that the group needed to improve their communication skills.
- **Samantha** agreed with Aidan that the discussion was going well but felt he was dominating the conversation and even speaking for the group. She asked that Aidan only speak for himself when expressing his feelings.
- **Aidan** said that he was upset by the angry and accusatory nature of the women's statements.
- **Charlotte** said that if she were writing her statement now, the facts would be the same, but the tone would be different. Samantha apologized that Aidan had only become aware of many of the women's concerns by reading the statements.

The panel members and parties decided to break for the night.

At their next meeting, the panel members wanted to touch base with the confronted and confronting parties separately.

Meeting with Aidan: Aidan said that he thought that the previous facilitation had gone very well. He told the panel that he wanted to ensure that the aftermath of the incident and the incident itself be discussed separately. A panel member asked Aidan how the women could prove that they understood how he felt. Aidan said that he wanted them to acknowledge their mistake, suggesting that they still did not completely understand why he had been so hurt in the first place.

Meeting with Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda:

- **Charlotte** said that she felt that the previous facilitation had been very productive. She wasn't looking for an apology but hoped that Aidan would acknowledge how their dynamic had ultimately hurt her. She said that she owed Aidan a similar acknowledgement.
- **Miranda** said that she and Aidan had engaged in a productive confrontation prior to the facilitation and that she now felt comfortable being around him.
- **Samantha** also said that she felt more comfortable around Aidan. Nevertheless, she was afraid that Aidan didn't really understand how upsetting their initial confrontation had been.
- **Several panel members** expressed concern that Aidan had dominated the discussion. The women said that they felt comfortable speaking up.

Meeting with only Panel Members: The panel agreed to first discuss the video incident and then the aftermath and confrontations.

The dialogue: After the parties returned, everyone agreed to begin by discussing the video incident before exploring the subsequent confrontations. After reiterating several key issues including boundaries, communications, and the women's lack of malicious intent, everyone agreed that while there were many issues to be addressed, the video incident was particularly significant, and that Aidan was justified in feeling his privacy has been violated. Aidan said that he accepted the women's apologies, and the women said that they understood why Aidan had felt so violated by their actions.

Facilitated Dialogue 2:

A panel member asked the parties to suggest ways in which their previous confrontations could have been improved especially given the sexual and emotional nature of the conflict.

- **Aidan** said that he and Miranda had engaged in a very productive confrontation.
- **Charlotte** said that after witnessing Aidan’s volatile confrontation with Samantha, she had been unwilling to discuss the incident with him. She did feel that the SFP had provided an excellent opportunity to express her feeling to Aidan.
- **Samantha** said that her confrontation with Aidan probably would have been more effective if they had taken time to calm down before talking to each other.
 - **Aidan** apologized for upsetting Samantha but said that he was too distressed to delay the confrontation. He found it particularly difficult to refrain from confronting her because they lived in such close proximity.
 - **Samantha** emphasized how intense their confrontation had been and said that she hoped Aidan could understand that his actions were ultimately counterproductive.
 - **Aidan** said that he did understand.
 - **Samantha and Aidan** agreed that their confrontation could have gone better but both suggested that the confrontation had proved somewhat effective in the long-run—they both had an opportunity to blow off steam before engaging in a more calm and productive dialogue later on.
- **Charlotte** said that she may have been wrong to assume that Aidan would have confronted her in the same way he had confronted Samantha.
- **A panel member** asked if the parties thought they would be able to recognize when certain confrontational tactics would be inappropriate, and the parties said that they had definitely learned a lot from examining their mistakes.

Possible Resolutions:

- **Boundaries:** Miranda suggested that the four suite members sit down and discuss boundaries. Everyone agreed that this was an excellent suggestion. Samantha expressed a desire to rebuild her friendship with Aidan, and suggested that establishing boundaries would facilitate this process.
- **Communication:** A panel member asked the parties how they could keep the lines of communication open. Charlotte suggested they should all explicitly discuss and list acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Samantha said that she would be more comfortable discussing issues as they came up. Aidan said that he was comfortable with that system and intended to respect any boundaries the women set.
- **Co-Ed Living Guidelines:** Another panel member suggested that each party write a statement summarizing what he or she learned from this experience. Such a document could be distributed to the community in order to help other students avoid similar boundary issues. Aidan suggested writing something collaboratively. The four parties agreed to write a statement about co-ed living, and Samantha suggested that she and Aidan produce an additional document about effective confrontation. A panel member recommended that the parties create a pamphlet targeting freshmen living in a co-ed environment for the first time. The panel members and the parties agreed that the abstract itself could serve as a good way for customs groups to initiate a dialogue about co-ed living.

Everyone came to consensus on the following tentative resolutions, with one panel member standing outside due to absence.

Tentative Resolutions:

- 1) **The members of the living group will collaborate on establishing sexual and general privacy boundaries.**
- 2) **The confronted and confronting parties will collaborate on writing a statement to the**

community concerning successful co-ed cohabitation, to be attached to the abstract.

- 3) Samantha and Aidan will collaborate on writing a statement to the community addressing successful confrontation in emotionally charged situations, to be attached to the abstract.**
- 4) The panel and the parties strongly suggest that this abstract be discussed with incoming freshmen during Customs Week.**

Final Meeting:

The panel members and the parties were satisfied with how the SFP had proceeded, and felt the resolutions were appropriate. The four parties had even written their statement to the community during the 24 hour break between the second dialogue and the final meeting—the panel was very impressed. The panel members and the parties came to final consensus on the above resolutions.

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What constitutes invading another person's privacy? Do personal boundaries relate to community standards?
- 2) What are some techniques which might facilitate a constructive confrontation in a highly emotional situation?
- 3) Is disaster inevitable when suite members in a co-ed living situation set few sexual boundaries?
- 4) What made this SFP so successful?
- 5) Could the parties have resolved their issues without involving Honor Council? Is Honor Council the appropriate forum in which to deal with roommate/suitemate problems or highly personal disagreements?

Resolution 2

As Haverford students, we are granted the privilege of living in co-educational dorms. This affords us an opportunity to live in a unique and exciting environment that brings with it responsibility. We have experienced first-hand the positive and negative aspects of this kind of living situation, and we hope that the Haverford community can benefit from this experience. To that end, we respectfully submit to the community a list of suggestions for successful co-educational cohabitation.

At the beginning of the year, we strongly suggest sitting down as group (Customs Group, suite, and/or roommates) and discussing potential issues that may arise, such as personal privacy, physical and sexual boundaries, and confidentiality. It is very important that a hall be a safe space and that everyone feel comfortable living there. While it may be difficult to know what may or may not make you feel uncomfortable at the beginning of the year, if you know that a certain kind of situation will cause unease, that should be brought up at this point. Don't be afraid to include mundane, everyday things in this discussion. Talk about music volume, sleeping schedules, smoking, and alcohol. Little things can accumulate, so they should be addressed as early as possible.

Be assertive and speak up when something makes you feel upset or uncomfortable. A healthy group dynamic is absolutely essential to a positive living experience. Realize that if you confront someone about an issue, you are simply insuring that your relationship with that person continues to be healthy. It's not simply a personal issue: it affects everyone around you, and you should confront someone out of your respect for them and the other people with whom you live. Relationships need maintenance, and boundaries evolve, so don't be afraid to speak up even if the issue is something that was not initially addressed.

Similarly, be respectful when someone asserts his or her boundaries to you. You would want someone to respect you, so you need to respect them. Also, if someone confronts you, don't feel embarrassed or ashamed. It's not personal; the confronting person is simply doing what he or she needs to do in order to continue maintaining a healthy relationship with you. Boundaries exist out of mutual respect and trust, not ill will or a personal grudge.

Establish a forum for the discussion of issues as they come up. This can be a fluid and adaptable institution ranging from a mock confrontation written out as a group to a private conversation between roommates. Regardless, having something planned out ahead of time with which a group of people is comfortable is essential to the facilitation of effective dialogue. It can also take the intimidation factor out of approaching someone and/or being approached. Also know that there are easily accessible mediation resources available on campus ranging from Honor Council members to Customs people that may be accessed and used in the proper forum if BOTH parties are amenable.

Don't let things fester! It's better to address issues as they arise. If you feel uncomfortable, you're uncomfortable. There is never any reason to feel that your feelings are invalid or silly. Even if you cannot exactly articulate what makes you feel uncomfortable, gut reactions matter, too. It's better to try to work something out as a team with the other party than to let it go. This insures healthy personal relationships. BUT there is a proper time and place for things to be discussed. Take into account time of day and the mental states of both parties. Alcohol and stress are particularly not conducive to effective dialogue.

These suggestions are not intended to scare you or imply that your living situation need be a sterile environment. They are merely guidelines, like suggestions for responsible drinking, to insure that your fun doesn't go awry.

Respectfully submitted,

The SATC Gang (Aidan, Samantha, Charlotte, and Miranda)