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THE STORY OF A SUICIDE

Two college roommates, a webcam, and a tragedy.

BY IAN PARKER

Tyler Clementi, a gay Rutgers student, was electronically spied on by his roommate, Dharun Ravi, and Ravi's friend Molly Wei.

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN RITTER; PHOTOGRAPHS: RAVI AND WEI: AP; BRIDGE: GETTY

Dharun Ravi grew up in Plainsboro, New Jersey, in a large, modern house with wide expanses of wood flooring and a swimming pool out back. Assertive and athletic, he used “DHARUNISAWESOME” as a computer password and played on an Ultimate Frisbee team. At the time of his high-school graduation, in 2010, his parents bought space in the West Windsor and Plainsboro High School North yearbook. “Dear Dharun, It has been a pleasure watching you grow into a caring and responsible person,” the announcement said. “You are a wonderful son and brother. . . . Keep up your good work. Hold on to your dreams and always strive to achieve your goals. We know that you will succeed.”

One day this fall, Ravi was in a courthouse in New Brunswick, fifteen miles to the north, awaiting a pre-trial hearing. In a windowless room, he sat between two lawyers, wearing a black suit and a gray striped tie. His eyes were red. Although he is only nineteen, he has a peculiarly large-featured, fully adult face, and vaguely resembles Sacha Baron Cohen. When Ravi is seen in high-school photographs with a five-o'clock shadow, he looks like an impostor.

His father, Ravi Pazhani, a slight man with metal-frame glasses, sat behind him. Some way to the right of Pazhani were Joseph and Jane Clementi. Jane Clementi, who has very straight bangs, wore a gold crucifix. She and her husband form a tall, pale, and formidable-looking couple. Their youngest son, Tyler, had died a year earlier, and the family's tragedy was the silent focus of everyone in the room. That September, Tyler Clementi and Ravi were freshman roommates at Rutgers University, in a dormitory three miles from the courtroom. A few weeks into the semester, Ravi and another new student,



Molly Wei, used a webcam to secretly watch Clementi in an embrace with a young man. Ravi gossiped about him on Twitter: “I saw him making out with a dude. Yay.” Two days later, Ravi tried to set up another viewing. The day after that, Clementi committed suicide by jumping from the George Washington Bridge.

Clementi’s death became an international news story, fusing parental anxieties about the hidden worlds of teen-age computing, teen-age sex, and teen-age unkindness. ABC News and others reported that a sex tape had been posted on the Internet. CNN claimed that Clementi’s room had “become a prison” to him in the days before his death. Next Media Animation, the Taiwanese company that turns tabloid stories into cartoons, depicted Ravi and Wei reeling from the sight of Clementi having sex under a blanket. Ellen DeGeneres declared that Clementi had been “outed as being gay on the Internet and he killed himself. Something must be done.”

Enraged online commentary called for life imprisonment for Ravi and Wei, and Ravi’s home address and phone number were published on Twitter. Ravi was called a tormenter and a murderer. Garden State Equality, a New Jersey gay-rights group, released a statement that read, in part, “We are sickened that anyone in our society, such as the students allegedly responsible for making the surreptitious video, might consider destroying others’ lives as a sport.” Governor Chris Christie, of New Jersey, said, “I don’t know how those two folks are going to sleep at night, knowing that they contributed to driving that young man to that alternative.” Senator Frank Lautenberg and Representative Rush Holt, both from New Jersey, introduced the Tyler Clementi Higher Education Anti-Harassment Act. Clementi’s story also became linked to the It Gets Better project—an online collection of video monologues expressing solidarity with unhappy or harassed gay teens. The site was launched the day before Clementi’s death, in response to the suicide, two weeks earlier, of Billy Lucas, a fifteen-year-old from Indiana who, for years, had been called a “fag” and told vicious things, including “You don’t deserve to live.” That October, President Barack Obama taped an It Gets Better message, referring to “several young people who were bullied and taunted for being gay, and who ultimately took their own lives.”

It became widely understood that a closeted student at Rutgers had committed suicide after video of him having sex with a man was secretly shot and posted online. In fact, there was no posting, no observed sex, and no closet. But last spring, shortly before Molly Wei made a deal with prosecutors, Ravi was indicted on charges of invasion of privacy (sex crimes), bias intimidation (hate crimes), witness tampering, and evidence tampering. Bias intimidation is a sentence-booster that attaches itself to an underlying crime—usually, a violent one. Here the allegation, linked to snooping, is either that Ravi intended to harass Clementi because he was gay or that Clementi felt he’d been harassed for being gay. Ravi is not charged in connection with Clementi’s death, but he faces a possible sentence of ten years in jail. As he sat in the courtroom, his chin propped awkwardly on his fist, his predicament could be seen either as a state’s admirably muscular response to

the abusive treatment of a vulnerable young man or as an attempt to criminalize teen-age odiousness by using statutes aimed at people more easily recognizable as hate-mongers and perverts.

Ravi had made four court appearances since his indictment. That morning's hearing was intended to set a trial date, and to consider motions previously submitted by Steven Altman, Ravi's lawyer.

Judge Glenn Berman announced that he was denying the defense's request to see various documents in the possession of the state, including a handwritten document—conceivably, a suicide note—found among Clementi's things at Rutgers. Then, over the objections of Julia McClure, an attorney in the Middlesex County prosecutor's office, Berman confirmed an earlier ruling: the defense should privately be given the full name of Clementi's romantic partner on the night of the alleged offenses. The man, known in the public record as M.B., was a likely prosecution witness.

Ravi was visibly anxious when the judge addressed him. Last May, Berman reminded him, he had rejected a plea offer made by McClure. "You are presumed innocent," he said. "But if you are found guilty, the exposure"—the sentencing potential—"is significant." For the charge of bias intimidation alone, the judge would be expected to sentence Ravi to between five and ten years. If Ravi accepted the plea offer, he would serve no more than five years. Berman asked Ravi if he understood. Ravi said yes, in an unexpectedly high voice, and gave a reflexive smile.

He was not taking this deal. Berman set a trial date of February 21st. The Clementis waited for Ravi and his father to leave, then walked out, hand in hand.

On a Saturday night in August, 2010, a week before starting college, Dharun Ravi decided to look online for his future Rutgers roommate. He was living with his parents in Plainsboro. Ravi, who was planning to major in math and economics, had learned that he had been assigned to Davidson Hall—a collection of single-story, barracks-like dorms on Busch campus, which is considered the dullest of the four Rutgers campuses in New Brunswick and neighboring Piscataway. He would be in Davidson Hall C, a coed dorm for about eighty students. He knew Clementi's first name and that his last name started with C; he also knew his e-mail address, keybowvio@yahoo.com—apparently, a distillation of musical terms—and had e-mailed him but received no reply.

Late that night, according to instant-message communications released by attorneys into the public record, Ravi Googled "keybowvio." This set in motion a remote, electronic dynamic between the two students that was never quite overtaken by real-world engagement—even after they moved into a tiny room together.

"I feel like you're limiting me to correct answers."



A little before midnight, Ravi began an I.M. exchange with Jason Tam, a high-school friend. Ravi had found some of Keybowvio's posts on a Yahoo forum: something about fish tanks, Ravi told Tam, and something else "pertaining to violins." If, with "pertaining," Ravi was aiming for sly disdain, Tam struck a different note: "I'm calling it now. This guy is retarded." Ravi showed Tam a link to a page on a health forum where, three years earlier, Keybowvio had asked why his asthma symptoms had suddenly worsened, noting that he had prescriptions for Advair and Singulair. Nobody had replied. There was just Keybowvio's follow-up: "Anyone?" ("What a pussy," Tam wrote.) Ravi and Tam also found questions about anti-virus software and contributions to a Web site of counter-revolutionary peevishness called Anythingbutipod. In these old posts, at least, Keybowvio—who was indeed Tyler Clementi—seemed worried or defensive about computing. Ravi mocked his roommate for "asking if he should boot linux everytime he surfs internet."

Just before midnight, Ravi wrote to Tam: "FUCK MY LIFE / He's gay." He had found Keybowvio's name on Justusboys, a gay-pornography site that also has discussion areas. Ravi sent Tam a link to a page that contained sex-tinged ads but was otherwise mundane. It was a conversation, from 2006, prompted by Keybowvio's question about a problem with his computer's hard drive. Keybowvio noted that his electronic folders were fastidiously organized; perhaps jokingly, he added, "i have ocd."

In the next few minutes, Ravi wrote "wtf"—"what the fuck"—seven times. He posted a link to the Justusboys page on his Twitter account: "Found out my roommate is gay."

But when Tam asked "why do gaypornsites even have forums," Ravi laughed—"hahaha"—and wrote, "it's just a gay forum." That sounds like at least a stab at worldliness, and Ravi seems to have found it easy to drop the subject of Keybowvio's apparent homosexuality. Two minutes after the Justusboys discovery, Ravi was making a new observation, perhaps based on Keybowvio's worry about fixing his computer. "He's poor," Ravi wrote, adding a frowning emoticon. He then found Zazzle, a print-on-

demand site where Keybowvio, probably years earlier, had created a T-shirt that read, “If Opposites Attract Why Isn’t Anyone Attracted to Me?” Another said, “I Love My Mommy . . .” and, on the back, “Do You?” Ravi wrote, “I feel bad for him.”

At six minutes past midnight, Tam offered Ravi a summary. The roommate was “a gay person who asks a lot of questions, is mostly techno illiterate, and makes tshirt ideas.” Ravi replied, “I’m literally the opposite of that / FUCK.” Tam said that if he were in Ravi’s situation he would “just die.” Ravi said that he didn’t feel anything: “I’m just like LOL / Maybe I’m still a little buzzed.”

Tyler Clementi was not active on Facebook, and Ravi instead found the page of Tyler C. Picone, who was about to start at Rutgers, and who described himself as gay. He was good-looking, with long wavy hair sometimes held in place with a headband; video clips indicated that he was a talented singer. Tam wrote, “wow this guy is REALLY fruity.” Ravi said, “I’m such a thug compared to him.” The school friends seemed slightly awed by Picone’s confidence and popularity, as well as by the attractiveness of his female friends. But they were also confused: Picone didn’t look like an anxious asthmatic who wrote self-lacerating T-shirt slogans.

Tam remembered that Ravi had met a gay student named Carter during orientation at Rutgers, and had since spoken of him admiringly. Tam wrote, “If gay people were like carter, there wouldnt b a problem with gay hatred / Its the fags like this guy that just cause all sorts of trouble.” Ravi replied, “I know.” And then: “He would be born in January / what a gay month.” At about 2 A.M., Ravi and Tam changed the subject to video games.

When Ravi picked up the conversation with Tam the next afternoon, he said, “I still don’t really care, except what my parents are going to say. My dad is going to throw him out the window.” That day, Ravi also messaged with Bigeaglefan75—a friend, unidentified in court documents, who observed that Picone “looks like a freaking woman” and was likely to “blow you in your sleep.” Ravi’s language was more restrained, and he replied to the oral-sex comment by saying, “I’m pretty sure he’s majoring in theater.”

At one point, Bigeaglefan75 said of the roommate, “What if he wants you / wont that get awk.” Ravi replied, “He probs would. / Why would it be awk. / He’d want me / I wouldn’t want him.” Bigeaglefan75 reinforced a thought from the previous night: “He’ll bring back mad hot girls to your room and then you can be like / ladies / im not gay.” Ravi laughed and said, “I’m not really angry or sad,” adding “idc”—“I don’t care.” But even as he struck this note of equanimity he mentioned that he had forwarded a video clip of Picone to everyone he knew.

Ravi seems to have kept two ideas of Picone separate: Picone was someone he might come to like, but he was also material for a “gay roommate” news scoop. Ravi certainly appears to have cared a lot more about the reputational value of gossip than about Picone’s sexuality. (In witness statements taken for the Clementi case, nobody has recalled Ravi being contemptuous of gay people.) If this helps protect him from the charge of extreme prejudice, he might still be accused of lacking empathy: there’s no sign that he was inhibited by the fear that he might cause his roommate embarrassment, or annoyance, by discussing him on Facebook and Twitter. His Twitter account—@Dharun—was public and easy to find. Tyler Clementi read that first tweet about himself before he started at Rutgers.

Ravi sent Tyler Picone a message, via Facebook. Picone wrote back, explaining that he was the wrong Tyler. The same day, Ravi finally heard from Clementi, by e-mail. Clementi’s delay in contacting Ravi may have been connected to the emotional complications of his last few days at home, when he tearfully came out to his family. After receiving the message, Ravi characterized Clementi to a friend as “gay but regular gay.”

I recently met Tyler Picone in a crowded Au Bon Pain, on the Rutgers campus. Picone, who grew up in nearby South River, was charming and assured. “I *ran* my high school,” he said, smiling. “President of the class, editor of the paper—if you wanted to do anything, you had to go through me.” He recalled his brief interaction with Ravi, and I showed him the I.M.s by Ravi, Tam, and Bigeaglefan75. Much of the exchange—including the bit about January’s gayness—made him laugh. When the language turned more abusive, he said, “Yikes, calm down,” and, “This is so high school.”

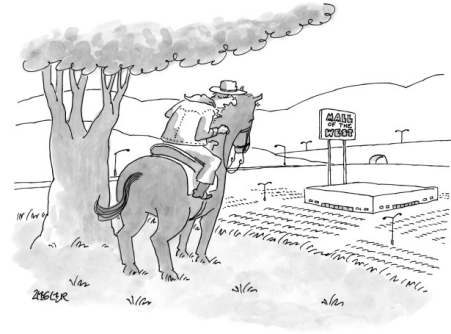
When he finished reading, he said, “I’ve seen so much worse.” And he discerned a tonal difference between Ravi and his friends. “The stuff that Dharun says is understandable, in a sense. If you find you’re sharing a room with somebody gay, and you haven’t been raised in an open home, you’re going to say, ‘Oh my God, what am I going to do? He’s probably going to *want* me.’ But his friends are assholes.”

Picone imagined that, had he and Ravi become roommates, they might have become friends. But he acknowledged that to speak so generously of Ravi—to unsettle the portrait of him as the perpetrator of hate crimes—was unwelcome at Rutgers. “I wish the gay community wasn’t so angry—*so* angry. I’m all about forgive but don’t forget.” He added, “Dharun didn’t want Tyler to die.” Rather, he said, Ravi had probably wanted people to be amused by his actions—to “think of him as this *bro*.”

Once Ravi understood that he would be living with Clementi, not Picone, he felt that he knew these essential facts: his roommate was gay, profoundly uncool, and not well off. If the first attribute presented both a complication and a happy chance to gossip, the second and third were perceived as failings. “I was fucking hoping for someone with a gmail but

no,” Ravi wrote to Tam. Clementi’s Yahoo e-mail address symbolized a grim, dorky world, half seen, of fish tanks and violins. Ravi’s I.M.s about Tyler’s presumed poverty were far more blunt than those about sexual orientation. At one point during his exchanges with Tam that weekend, Ravi wrote, “Dude I hate poor people.”

“How are you fixed for oats?”



One evening not long ago, I visited Paul Mainardi, a lawyer with a professorial manner who lives in Philadelphia, in an apartment tower with a wide view of the Delaware River. Mainardi poured a whiskey. He is a business lawyer, not a criminal lawyer, but he is Jane Clementi’s cousin, and he has been helping her family since Tyler’s death. He has accompanied the Clementis to hearings, and issued occasional press statements.

When I mentioned Ravi’s comment about “poor people,” Mainardi was a little shocked. “He said that?” he asked. “The family is not well off, but they’re certainly not poor.” The Clementis live in Ridgewood, sixteen miles northwest of the George Washington Bridge. The town, which is wealthy and white, was recently ranked fifteenth on a list of the top-earning towns in the country, one place below Greenwich, Connecticut. Last year, Ridgewood High School, which Tyler attended, was placed twenty-seventh in a Washington *Post* evaluation of New Jersey schools. (Ravi’s school was eighteenth.) A former classmate of Clementi’s described to me a world of hyperambitious parents and a line of Lexuses in the school parking lot. She noted the economic difference between the east and west sides of town. The Clementis live in a four-bedroom house on a pretty street, but it’s on the less affluent east side, within earshot of Route 17. At school, “west siders are more popular—they know how to get connections,” the former classmate said. “The west side dresses differently.”

Ravi drove a BMW in high school; Clementi didn’t have a car. Jane Clementi is a nurse. Joseph Clementi runs the public-works department in the nearby town of Hawthorne. They have two older sons, both of whom returned home after finishing college. Jane Clementi is active in the local Grace Church, which is affiliated with Willow Creek, the evangelical megachurch near Chicago. Mainardi described a quiet family. “There’s no loudmouth, unlike some of my children,” he said. Tyler was the quietest of all. “I knew him, but I didn’t know him, if you know what I mean. Very shy.”

Joseph Clementi recently told me that his son was physically slight, and that if someone wanted to hurt him “he would have absolutely no idea of how to defend himself.” Five feet six, with rigid posture, Tyler had short reddish hair, a prominent nose, and an open, earnest expression. In his mid-teens, he had the tastes and manners of a teen-ager from an earlier era. He contributed to online discussions about musicals and opera, gardening, and the care of African dwarf frogs. His computer desktop was decorated with the *Playbill* covers for “Fiddler on the Roof” and “Journey’s End.” “How should I broil Lobster Tails?” he asked on one Web site. “Drizzling olive oil over them and rosemary?”

Tyler was close to his mother. Mainardi recalled, “I have a photograph of the two of them, where he’s standing in front of her—she’s got her arms around him, grasping his hands.” Tyler seemed to have more female than male friends, but none of them, he thought, were “close, powerful friends.”

An acquaintance who memorialized Clementi online wrote, “Tyler never said very much or interacted with the rest of the youth group at the church I attended with him.” This post is accompanied by a photograph of Clementi on a church outing in 2007. Sitting on a bus, he is staring at the camera; behind him, a girl is laughing and putting on lipstick. He seems out of step even with his own bright-orange T-shirt, which reads “Daytona Beach.”

Soon after starting at Rutgers, Clementi had a late-night I.M. conversation with someone who used the name Sam Cruz. The friendship seems to have been fairly new. “I would love to have like 3 close friends,” Clementi wrote to Cruz. He said that, because he valued solitude, people “view me as always wanting to be alone,” adding, “but thats not true . . . i need some people in my life . . . just not as much as most people do.” He went on, “I NEED conversation . . it’s just that i can’t DO it.” Cruz tried to give advice—how to start a conversation, how to ask people about themselves. Clementi replied, “I’ve googled it like a million times / I kno all the ‘rules.’”

Clementi was, in fact, a very good violin player: he played in both the Bergen Youth Orchestra and the Ridgewood Symphony, an adult orchestra. But he was uncertain if he had the talent or focus necessary for a career in music. At fifteen, he worried online about his commitment to practicing, and added that, although he had sometimes been encouraged by Juilliard alumni to apply there, he wondered if, “deeeeeeeep down,” he really wanted to go.

By his senior year, Clementi had stopped considering a music degree. Online, he asked how to choose between Rutgers, Hartwick, and the University of Connecticut. “I don’t really have a major pinned down at all, either bio, pharm, accounting, or something,” he said. “Also toying with the idea of Community college, but the thought of getting away is very tempting too. I feel very defeated by HS and hated the whole thing.”

Paul Mainardi shared with me a memory of Tyler at a family gathering at the Clementis', about a year before his death. "He could play the violin while riding a unicycle," he said. "And I actually did witness that. It was quite impressive." As Mainardi drove home that day, he turned to his wife and said, "Wow, who would have thought that that was *in* Tyler?"

If Clementi had a touch of middle-aged fastidiousness, Ravi was fully a teen-ager: rangy, physical, with a taste for public regard. By the fall of 2010, when he left Plainsboro for Rutgers, he had written more than two thousand messages on Twitter, twice as many as the most active of his friends. He had posted homemade videos and hundreds of comments at Bboy, a break-dancing site. ("When i was like 8 i was trying to learn the helicopter . . . and i accidentally learned it in reverse.") At other sites, he posted his high S.A.T. scores, his 2.88 G.P.A., his long-jump record, and a photo of his fake New York driver's license. He spoke on Twitter about being "stoned out of my mind." Across the Internet, Ravi's written contributions tended to be unusually careful about grammar, and a little combative—with an element of teasing or insult and, sometimes, self-mockery.

Ravi also used Formspring, a site that encourages its members to respond to questions posed by others, whose identities may be hidden. It's a place where teen-agers show themselves able, or not, to withstand online assaults. (Jamey Rodemeyer—a fourteen-year-old from upstate New York, who committed suicide in September, 2011, after contributing to the It Gets Better video archive—had read such Formspring comments as "I wouldn't care if you died. No one would. So just do it.") On Formspring, Ravi aimed for nonchalance in the face of provocation. The first, anonymous question was "Why are you a fag?" (His answer: "Because I'm insecure.") The next: "Why are you such a faggot?" ("Because it feels right!") Over the next few months, the questions included: "Why don't you look at me when we make love?" ("I like to look at myself.") "Do you love anyone besides yourself?" ("Nope.") "I used to think you were the hottest indian guy ever . . . then i met you." ("I'm hot regardless of the fact that I'm an asshole.") "Who did you go with to prom last year?" ("I went alone.")

At two court hearings last fall, the rows of public benches directly behind Dharun Ravi were only half filled. But at a third hearing, in December, the same space was packed. Two dozen men in suits, most of them South Asian, arrived and left in a group; family friends, after some private debate, had decided to show support.



One member of that group, Anil Kappa, a friend of Ravi's father, agreed to meet me at a café in Princeton. When he sat down, he said that his heart went out to the Clementi family. He also talked, in a soft and dismayed voice, about Ravi's arrest and vilification: "I'm reading about him being a jerk, being a bully, being a homophobe, but as a real person who I've seen growing up—I can't relate to any of these statements." He thought of Ravi's actions as a "kid's prank that went wrong," in a culture of celebrity tweeting and "American Pie" (a comedy in which a young man sets up a secret webcam broadcast). The judicial system had taken things too far, he said. Ravi's family had struggled to live a normal life since the arrest, and Ravi—who is again living with his parents—had barely been able to leave the house. "He's been incarcerated—he's an exile," Kappa said. "Our minds are frozen right now."

Like Dharun's father, Kappa is a software engineer. They met in the nineteen-nineties, when both still lived in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where they were born. Ravi Pazhani and his wife, Sabitha, a homemaker with a liberal-arts degree, were then in their twenties, and their son Dharun was a toddler. (Following Tamil convention, Dharun has his father's first name as his surname.) In 1995, Kappa moved to America; two years later, he helped persuade Pazhani to do the same. The family first settled in Woodbridge, just east of New Brunswick, and Pazhani commuted to New York as a software consultant. That work continues, and Pazhani also owns, with Kappa, an information-technology company in New Jersey. Kappa described Pazhani as conservative, but couldn't account for Dharun's idea that his father would want to throw his gay roommate out the window. (Ravi and his parents declined to be interviewed for this article.)

Dharun's brother, who goes by the name Jay, was born in 2002. He is the family's sole U.S. citizen. If Dharun is convicted, he could be deported, and this has influenced his thinking about a plea deal. A few years after Jay's birth, the family moved to Plainsboro, which has an unusually high percentage of Indian-Americans. At poolside gatherings of family friends, Ravi was often the oldest child, and Kappa recalled that he was gracious with the younger ones, "tossing them around, teaching them tricks . . . never pushing them away." Ravi, he added, had taught him how to rollerblade.

But, by the time Ravi was a teen-ager, he could apparently be difficult or aggressive company. When he was thirteen, he blogged about an incident in which “we gave this kid a football in the hall way and started yelling at him to go to the touchdown and score. we yelled at him for 5 minutes and he finally dropped the ball. we yelled FUMBLE.” A young woman, Lucy Chen, recently wrote online about spending time with Ravi in 2008, at a camp in Pennsylvania run by the Center for Talented Youth. “He wasn’t openly nice to everyone, but he was nice to me,” she wrote. “Dharun and I ended up being best friends at camp. Inseparable!” She went on, “On the last day, all we did was hug. Well actually, I hugged him and he didn’t hug back.” The message was written in support of Ravi, but Chen added, “I think he hacked my computer, although I have no evidence.”

Jason Tam has known Ravi since seventh grade. Now studying in New York, Tam is one of few people from high school who have kept in touch with Ravi since his arrest. Though Tam described their relationship as friendly, in a recent instant-message interview his tone was harsh. Ravi, he said, was boastful, untruthful, and obsessed with being perceived as wealthy. Though Ravi could be “kind of funny at times,” and good company, Tam said, “he’s a dick,” adding, “I’d trust a rock more than dharun.” Tam’s disparagement of Ravi, even as he awaits trial, raised the question of a falling out. Tam said no; like Ravi, he didn’t seem to understand the value of self-censorship. (“Dharun would be fine with anyone talking trash about him,” he said.) But Tam’s lack of caution gives a kind of authority to his denial that Ravi was homophobic. As Tam put it, “He’s so much of a jerk that it may seem like he’s a homophobe but he’s not.”

Molly Wei knew Ravi both from home and from Rutgers. She declined to be interviewed, but last April, in a statement to the police, she explained that, as middle-school students, she and Ravi were “not really” boyfriend and girlfriend but were “really close.” She said, “I trusted him with a lot of things.” By high school, however, she had come to see Ravi as slippery. She said that he claimed to have been the captain of an all-black basketball team that had won the state championship. And he told her that he was “on billboards all over India, and that he was famous in Canada for snowboarding.” She supposed that he was trying to impress her—and she “tried explaining to him that it would be better if he didn’t try to. But I think he was really adamant about it. He was, like, ‘No, this is who I am.’” Wei cut him off. During her senior year, Wei mentioned all this to Mark Lin, a mutual friend. Lin passed on what she had said, and, as Wei recalled to the police, Ravi “got really mad, because no one ever confronts him about this stuff.” She said that Ravi called her a “lying bitch” and a “whore.”

When Wei arrived at Rutgers, with the aim of becoming a pharmacist, she was “praying to god” that she wouldn’t see him there. On the day she moved into Davidson Hall, she saw the name “Dharun” taped to the door across the corridor, and asked herself, “Crap, how many Dharuns do I know?”

Tyler Clementi had also looked for his roommate online. That summer, he reported to a friend, “My roomates name is Dharun / I got an azn!” Clementi’s correspondent, identified in court papers as H.Y., is Hannah Yang, a younger friend from his high-school orchestra, who is Asian.

Clementi and Ravi moved into Room 30 of Davidson Hall on Saturday, August 28th. The room was sixteen feet by eleven feet. Clementi and his parents arrived within minutes of the official moving-in time, and after organizing Tyler’s things they left to eat. When they came back, Ravi and his family were there; Ravi was setting up his computer and, according to Joseph and Jane Clementi, he had to be nudged by his father to turn around and say hello.

Clementi’s I.M. records offer a peculiarly intimate view of his first few hours with Ravi, after both sets of parents had left. As Ravi unpacked, Clementi was chatting with Yang. “I’m reading his twitter page and umm he’s sitting right next to me,” he wrote. “I still don’t kno how to say his name.” Yang replied, “Fail!!!! that’s hilarious.” Clementi told Yang that Ravi’s parents had seemed “sooo Indian first gen americanish,” adding that they “defs owna dunkin”—a Dunkin’ Donuts. Clementi and Ravi seem to have responded in similarly exaggerated ways to perceived hints of modest roots in the other.

There were windows at the end of the room, and along each side wall there was a bed, a desk, a dresser, and a free-standing closet. Clementi told Yang that Ravi had moved his closet to form a semi-private changing space; Clementi called it a “cubby.” (He later called the sight of Ravi changing “the most awk thing you’ve ever seen.”) Thanks to Twitter, Clementi knew that Ravi had seen his Justusboys postings, and he regarded the “cubby” as Ravi’s silent response, although the two didn’t speak about Clementi’s sexuality.

Clementi set his desk at the foot of his bed, so that he faced the window. Ravi, to his right, pushed his desk against the side wall, so that his back was to Clementi and his computer screen faced the room. Clementi noticed that the webcam on top of Ravi’s monitor was “pointed right at me.” He said to Yang, “I feel like he’s watching me watching him.”

“You should just start a conversation,” Yang wrote. “Like . . . hey, how the heck do I pronounce your name?” Clementi said, “I actually got it down pat I think / dah rune.” The curtains on Ravi’s side of the room were closed, and Clementi felt unable to ask his roommate to open them. Yang offered guidance: “Try hey, by any chance, would you mind opening the shades on your window?”



“That’s too funny / your giving me scripted conversations,” Clementi said. He called her “the screenplay writer for my life.”

Ravi and Clementi lived together for three weeks, but seem to have barely had a conversation. In an I.M. exchange with Sam Cruz, Clementi said, “I don’t think I’ve actually ever talked to him heheh . . . we kinda just ignore ea[ch] other.” Ravi told police that, every time he spoke with Clementi, it was “short and brief. I figured, Oh, he was just a shy kid.” He added that Clementi “didn’t seem to have any friends.” Ravi does seem to have recognized Clementi’s good nature. Tam showed me messages that Ravi wrote on August 29th: “He’s mad nice and mad quiet,” and “I think my roommate likes his privacy so I’ve been out of my room.” And though Clementi was sometimes annoyed by Ravi’s mess—in one chat, he mentioned a yogurt container left out for days—he also detected thoughtfulness and intelligence beneath Ravi’s swagger. He was impressed with his roommate’s tech skills; Ravi had written a speaking computer program called Jarvis, after the computer valet in the “Iron Man” films. Jarvis kept track of Ravi’s class schedule, and announced when university buses were due. (In an August conversation about his roommate, Ravi had joked, “I’ll have Jarvis warn me if he tries to rape me at night.”)

Clementi was intending to major in biology, but he kept up with the violin. He auditioned for the university’s second-rung orchestra but was offered a place in the Rutgers Symphony, which is made up largely of doctoral students in music. Its first concert, in October, was to include Berlioz’s tempestuous “Symphonie Fantastique.” Kynan Johns, the university’s director of orchestras, was very impressed by Clementi’s playing, and also noted his social awkwardness, which he regarded as typical freshman reserve. “I was hoping he would eventually transfer over into a music major,” Johns told me. In Davidson C, Clementi practiced his violin, despite being self-conscious about filling the corridor with sound.

Ravi was often out carousing until five in the morning. Clementi was not, though he sometimes went to parties with a group of four teetotalling girls. “I would die if I was forced to always have people around me,” he told Cruz. “The first week here was so hard b/c of that and my roommie purposely left me alone.” Ravi, he noted, had been “very considerate and perceptive.”

In high school, Clementi had not been widely regarded as gay. He had been posting messages at Justusboys since he was fourteen, but they were rarely sexual; rather, he exchanged views about television and compact cars with other affable contributors, some of whom used names like Bigpimpboy14. In one post, Clementi wrote, “Call me a prude but I honestly don’t think people are mature enough to be having sex prior to collegeish years in today’s world. . . . Sex isn’t something a 16 y/o should really need to spend much time debating. Then again, I’m practically asexual, and considered myself such until about 17 (when I started puberty), so I guess I have a lot of bias.” This post may well reflect the truth, but he wrote it when he was sixteen.

After Clementi’s death, his parents learned that he had come out to a friend in the spring of 2010, and that in the summer he had apparently met romantic or sexual partners online. Three days before starting at Rutgers, he came out to his family.

When he described that experience to Cruz, Clementi reported that his father was “very accepting” of his news, but added, “Its a good thing dad is ok w/it or I would be in serious trouble / mom has basically completely rejected me.” He later added that she had been “very dismissive.”

Jane Clementi told me recently that Tyler announced his sexuality to her in a private, late-night conversation, which “snowballed” to cover his perceived shortage of friends and the uncertainty he had about his faith. At the end of their talk, she recalled, “he cried, I cried, we hugged.” They said that they loved each other. But, Jane Clementi said, “I must admit, other than being surprised, I felt betrayed.” He had not confided in her, though he had known he was gay since middle school. She told me that she and her husband had long assumed that Tyler’s brother James was gay, and had even discussed the matter with Tyler, asking him, “Why won’t he just talk about it?” (James is now out.)

The day after Tyler’s disclosure, she said, “I guess part of me was grieving a little bit. I expected Tyler to be married one day, and be a father.” She said, “I was sad, I was quiet,” and she wonders if this is what he was reacting to when he wrote “rejected”; the word hurt her. She recalled that she spent the rest of the week with him, delivered him to college, and, throughout September, spoke to him on the phone. And she was expecting to visit Tyler for Parent and Family Weekend: “We had tickets to the football game. We had plans for the day.”

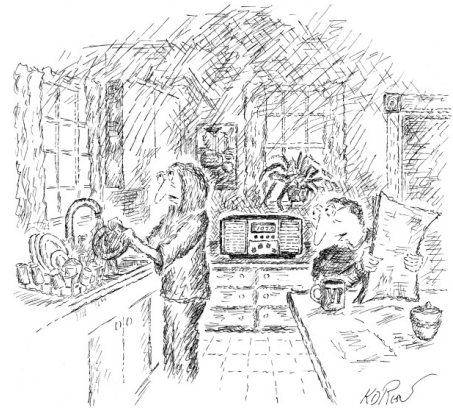
In September, Clementi attended at least one meeting of the Bisexual, Gay, and Lesbian Alliance, a Rutgers student organization. As he put it to Cruz, “I would consider myself out . . . if only there was someone for me to come out to.” Though he may have been slow to develop sexually, by the time he reached Rutgers he had found a streak of boldness. This perhaps left him exposed: once he overcame his shyness, he was not shy at all. His sexual self—born on the Internet, in the shadow of pornography—seems to have been largely divorced from his social self. After Clementi died, Gawker found what appeared

to be an account that he had opened at Cam4, a site where women and men put on sexual displays, by webcam. Clementi also used a hookup Web site called Adam4adam. On September 2nd, Cruz told him, “U need to get away from the computer . . . specially adam.”

Two weeks later, Clementi described to Cruz a recent liaison—“SOOO good”—with a man who visited him in Davidson Hall on September 16th, after the two of them had first considered renting a motel room. This was M.B., who will lose his anonymity if he gives evidence at Ravi’s trial. According to Clementi, M.B. was twenty-five, working two jobs, not out, and nervous about coming to the dorm. (Rooms could be reached only by walking through the student lounge.) Clementi, who said that he had texted Ravi to request use of the room, joked that it “would be so awk” if Ravi walked in “while I’m getting fucked,” adding, “At the same time i think I would just be like ‘screw it.’”

On September 19th, a Sunday, Clementi was expecting M.B. to visit again. As before, he asked Ravi for the room with a text message. That evening, Ravi played Ultimate Frisbee (a sport that, in one online discussion of the Clementi case, was predictably described as “gayer than having sex with a dude”). He returned to Davidson Hall at about nine. Ravi told the police he thought that Clementi “was just having a friend over to hang out.” Ravi started collecting things for a shower, down the hall, and Clementi asked, “Do you need anything else?” According to the statement made to the police by Wei, who spoke to Ravi a moment later, Ravi only then realized that he was being asked not to return; he recalled saying to Clementi, “Oh, you want me to leave?”

“Carol—you’re muttering about NPR again.”



At the start of the semester, Wei, overlooking Ravi’s past rudeness, had become friendly with him again. Upon leaving Room 30, Ravi apparently first made a quick visit to her room, across the hall. Wei said that he was agitated, asking, “Why does he want the room all to himself?” He then returned to his room, and was getting organized for his evening’s exile when Clementi retrieved M.B. at the dormitory entrance and brought him to the room. Ravi said of his brief encounter with M.B., “He didn’t acknowledge me at all. He just sat on the bed, on Tyler’s bed.”

Ravi returned to Wei's room. She recalled him saying, "It's a really old-looking guy, like, What the heck, what's going on?" Ravi thought that M.B. seemed "really shady." She went on, "He actually was kind of angry. He's, like, 'If he steals my iPad I'm going to make Tyler pay for it.' And he's, like, 'Oh, and my roommate's gay, like what if something else is going on?'" Speaking to the police, Ravi recalled M.B. as "slightly overweight," with facial hair of some sort. Ravi's reaction appears to have included some class prejudice: the man, apparently working-class, was a likely thief. He was "random," as one of Molly Wei's friends later put it—he was troublingly not of their world.

If Ravi was as disoriented as Wei claims, one can perhaps see why: Clementi was hesitant to talk about curtains, but in a busy dorm, after less than a month of cohabitation, he had kicked out his roommate so that he could have a sexual encounter with an older man who made no pretense of being his boyfriend. Ravi also noted, perhaps, the contrast between his constant flutter of self-promotion and Clementi's quiet, unswerving path to gratification. Jason Tam told me that he'd never known Ravi to have a girlfriend.

According to Tam, Ravi had already explored unorthodox uses of webcams. For a high-school physics project, Ravi had tried to link a webcam to a hobbyist coil gun. In the summer before college, he wrote a computer program that prompted webcams to snap photographs, at intervals, and upload them to a Web site. He disguised the program as something else, and tried to get friends to install it. Some did, Tam said, but they weren't tricked: they "noticed their webcam light turn on, so it was obvious." (Clementi, then, was apparently not the first subject of a webcam experiment.) Tam thinks that, by the evening of September 19th, Ravi had already told him that he intended to use a webcam to see why Clementi had begun asking for exclusive use of their room.

An online video chat, using an application like iChat or Skype, starts like a phone call: one person requests a conversation, and the recipient must accept the request. But Ravi had tweaked his iChat settings so that the program could automatically accept incoming calls. According to Ravi, he had made this his computer's usual setting. Whatever the case, that evening the program was set to auto-accept; he also turned off his monitor, or darkened it to black. At 9:13 P.M., he was beside Wei at her computer. He opened iChat, and clicked his name on her chat list. A few feet away, his computer accepted his request, and Ravi and Wei saw a live video image of Room 30.

According to Wei, she and Ravi "saw Tyler and his friend, or whoever that was—their upper body." She remembered that the two men were fully dressed, standing against the door. (Ravi later said that they had their shirts off.) "I couldn't see any faces, and they were just what seemed to be kissing, and then, after literally two seconds, we just turned it off. And we were kind of both kind of in shock, because for me, anyway, I've never seen anything like that." Ravi told police, "I just felt, like, really, like, really uncomfortable and, like, almost guilty that I saw it." Wei recalled, "At first, we were both, like, 'Oh, my gosh, we can't tell anybody about this, we're just going to pretend this never happened.'"

Ravi's resolve not to publicize the experience lasted for three or four minutes. At 9:17 P.M., he tweeted, "Roommate asked for the room till midnight. I went into molly's room and turned on my webcam. I saw him making out with a dude. Yay." Before Ravi locked down his Twitter account, a few days later, he had about a hundred and fifty followers, the bulk of them friends from high school. It's possible that he still thought of his Twitter audience as a group no larger than those followers. In truth, his audience could have included anyone who searched on Twitter for "Dharun." Perhaps Ravi expected Clementi to read his tweet; or perhaps he didn't bother to consider that he might. This issue may become important to a jury, given the seeming conflict between a charge of invasion of privacy and a charge of bias intimidation, both charges that Ravi faces. Spying is secret, and intimidation is not.

Soon after Ravi's tweet, Molly Wei began an I.M. conversation with Austin Chung, her boyfriend, then a college student in Hoboken. Wei began, "OMG AUSTIN" and then: "OH MY FKING GOD." She handed the keyboard over to Ravi, who told the story—guest, webcam, embrace—then let Wei resume typing. Chung asked "DID YOU TAKE A PIC," and she replied that they should have, but added, "Nah that would be TERRIBLE." Chung said that the news made him want to "throw up," even though Clementi was "mad nice." Wei replied, "He's NICE but he's kissing a guy right now / like THEY WERE GROPING EACH OTHER EWWW."

It seems possible that Wei's upper-case horror sprang not just from thoughts of homosexuality but from the night's many surprises: that Clementi, though nerdy, had sex; that he had turned Ravi out of his room; that his partner was not a student. Prosecutors, making the case for bias, and referring to Ravi's tweet, have asked, "If the word 'chick' were substituted for 'dude' in that same exact tweet, would it have generated the same interest?" But one can imagine female partners in Room 30 whose age, appearance, or sexual tastes might also have inspired Ravi to write a sarcastic tweet.

News spread beyond Wei's room—by electronic and traditional means. Just after ten, a friend of Ravi's from home posted "@Dharun you perv!" on Twitter. Ravi left the room, and later returned with a friend who lived in the dorm. Cassandra Cicco, Wei's roommate, appeared, as did three other female friends. Ravi and his friend said that they were going out for a "smoke." (Wei assumed that they were referring to pot.)

In Ravi's absence, the five young women in the room discussed taking another look. The consensus was no, according to Wei's police statement, but "one girl was really persistent so then I said okay." She turned it on. "I clicked the video button and it came on again for, like, a second or two before we turned it off. We saw Tyler again." Clementi and M.B. had moved, "and their tops were off and as soon as we saw that we turned it off." Wei said that they were wearing pants.

Ravi's computer monitor had remained dark all evening. But at one point Clementi noticed its webcam suddenly glowing green. When he moved toward Ravi's desk, intending to turn the camera away, the light went out. (This must have been one of the viewings from across the hall—that night, Ravi's computer made iChat connections only with Wei's computer.) M.B. left around ten. Ravi came back to Wei's room at about midnight, falling asleep in a chair. At two o'clock, Wei urged him to return to his room.

*"I need to leave you and the children and go to Tahiti if
I'm ever going to be a truly great accountant."*



Clementi read Ravi's "Yay" tweet the next day, and he made the connection to the flash of green light. That night, just before eleven-thirty, he and Hannah Yang began a long I.M. conversation. They talked largely about Ravi's intrusion. Though Clementi may have been a bit of a loner, in Yang he appears to have had a thoughtful friend. (As he apparently had in Sam Cruz, who had reminded him, not long before, in a conversation about loneliness: "u got my cell # and u could call me or txt if u need someone.") That night, Yang gently urged him to discuss the webcam spying with Ravi, even while she tried to protect him from alarm. "I guess," Clementi said. "But its not like he left the cam on or recorded or anything / he just like took a five sec peep lol."

A recent paper by two scholars of new media—Alice Marwick, of Harvard, and Danah Boyd, of N.Y.U.—describes the tendency of teen-age girls to categorize even quite aggressive behavior as mere "drama," in the same category as online gossip and jokes. Policy-makers and television anchors talk of "bullies" and the "bullied," but teen-agers tend not to, in part because "teens gain little by identifying as either," the scholars explain. "Social stigmas prevent teens from recognizing that they are weak, and few people are willing to admit that they purposefully hurt others. . . . 'Drama' also implies something not to be taken seriously, to be risen above, while the adult-defined 'bullying' connotes childishness or immaturity to teenagers."

The psychologist Dan Olweus has provided the standard definition of bullying: "A person is bullied when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons, and he or she has difficulty defending himself or herself." Because Ravi was a teen-ager behaving brutishly, and because he used a

computer, there's a temptation to draw this case into discussions about cyberbullying; but a brief, furtive intrusion, coupled with a few tweets, may not be easy to align with harassment that occurs "repeatedly and over time."

In any case, Clementi tried to shrug off his roommate's behavior. He seems to have distracted himself from the ugliness of Ravi's tweet by considering instead the brevity of the video viewing, and the fact that nothing had been taped. (He was right about that, but it's not clear how he knew.) Clementi told Yang that Ravi had been "just curious." Besides, he said, he didn't want Ravi to know that he was reading his Twitter feed. She pushed back:

YANG: I would feel seriously violated.

CLEMENTI: When I first read the tweet

I definitely felt violated

but then

when I remembered what actually happened . . .

idk

YANG: um

CLEMENTI: doesn't seem soooo bad lol

YANG: dude

CLEMENTI: hahaha

YANG: not only did he peep

he told the entire world about it

CLEMENTI: yah

YANG: you okay with that?

Two minutes later, Yang said, "I really don't like dharun." Clementi laughed and said, "Yah / he's a jerk."

By 1 A.M., Clementi's attitude seems to have hardened. He looked up the university's code of student conduct, which included a section prohibiting secret audio or video recording that was likely to capture nudity or sexual activity. He was wondering if he should make a complaint that might result in Ravi's expulsion:

YANG: i'm not encouraging this . . .
CLEMENTI: why not?
YANG: b/c you said you don't feel violated anymore
CLEMENTI: hahah
hmmm
idk
I feel like . . .
I've tried to be nice to him
and he hasn't
YANG: yah
it could be interpreted as a hate crime
or
the development of
CLEMENTI: hahaha a hate crime lol
YANG: yah!
CLEMENTI: that would be so fun
white people never get hated
heehee
YANG: heheh
you're gay. . .
CLEMENTI: yah

Clementi's conversation with Yang ended at 1:37 A.M. Forty-five minutes later, Clementi wrote a message to Justusboys. He was clearly pained, but there's little to support the idea that he was mortified by the thought that he'd been outed. There are only hints of Clementi's mood in the previous weeks and months. There was his claim that he hated high school, and there were three files on his computer, written in July and early September, whose contents are unknown but whose file names are Gah.docx, sorry.docx, and Why is everything so painful.docx. It may be significant that, on his initiative, he and his mother had taken excursions to bridges around New York; he kept photographs he had taken of the George Washington Bridge on his phone. Paul Mainardi, the lawyer, wondered if Tyler was "in the thinking-about-suicide world" sometime before college.

Now Clementi saw a risk in turning a creepy episode into a scandal that he was not equipped to handle. He had things to protect: a fresh start at school, a new lover, a new home. In person, he and Ravi had maintained a wary coexistence, and it was built on not discussing what they knew and said of each other online. Ravi was sneaky, but sneakiness is a form of discretion; he was nice enough face to face.

On Justusboys, Clementi asked what to do next:

I could just be more careful next time . . . make sure to turn the cam away . . .
buttt . . .

I'm kinda pissed at him (rightfully so I think, no?)

and idk . . . if I could . . . it would be nice to get him in trouble

but idk if I have enough to get him in trouble, i mean . . . he never saw
anything pornographic he never recorded anything . . .

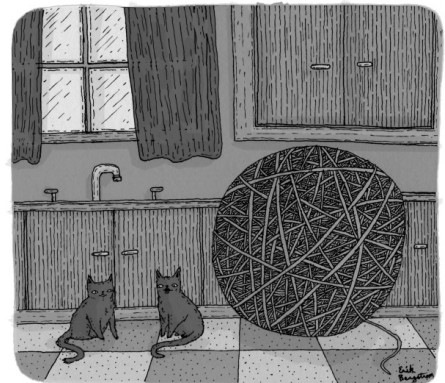
I feel like the only thing the school might do is find me another roommate,
probably with me moving out . . . and i'd probably just end up with somebody
worse than him. . . . I mean aside from being an asshole from time to time, he's
a pretty decent roommate.

He quickly received a few friendly replies. One urged him not to report Ravi, for fear
that he would "stir up more drama."

Just before four in the morning, with Ravi probably asleep a few feet away, Clementi
went online to the Rutgers housing site and requested a room change. (His reason:
"roommate used webcam to spy on me.") Soon afterward, he was back posting at
Justusboys. He had apparently read what Ravi's friends had written on Twitter or
Facebook, and he was dismayed that nobody in Ravi's circle seemed to challenge his
behavior. Clementi wrote, "other people have commented on his profile with things like
'how did you manage to go back in there?' 'are you ok.'" The friends were treating "my
making out with a guy as the scandal whereas i mean come on . . . he was SPYING ON
ME. . . . do they see nothing wrong with this?"

At quarter to five, he asked for advice on Yahoo Answers. Someone identified as Jennifer
replied, "Report him. What he is doing is completely inappropriate." She added, "I'm not
trying to be mean but if you don't have the guts to take control of the situation it is not
going to get better."

"I'm thinking of retiring."



Clementi weighed his dilemma. It was nearly dawn when he wrote, “I’m just not a great self advocate and am afraid that if I go to the wrong party, I won’t get the help I need.” He went on, “I’m just worried about things becoming a huge mess after this cuz i mean, someone reports you and then you might have to spend the rest of the semester living with them anyway because of stupid administration and then there’s the chance I could get a new roommate that’s even worse.”

On Tuesday, September 21st, Clementi invited M.B. back to his dorm room. In the late afternoon, he texted Ravi: “Could I have the room again like 9:30 till midnight?” Ravi replied, “Yeah no problem,” and then sent a text to Molly Wei: “He wants the room again.” She replied, “?!? WTF.”

Ravi now went into full impresario mode, in a way that may present the greatest challenge to his attorney. “Invasion of privacy” is a Peeping Tom statute. A fourth-degree invasion-of-privacy charge refers to the act of observing someone, without consent, “under circumstances in which a reasonable person would know that another may expose intimate parts or engage in sexual penetration or sexual contact.” A third-degree charge pertains to disclosing images without consent—“a photograph, film, videotape, recording, or other reproduction” of someone “whose intimate parts were exposed” or who was engaged in sexual contact. Ravi is charged with having done both these things on September 19th, and with having attempted to repeat them on September 21st. (On both dates, bias intimidation is attached, creating the risk of a long prison sentence.) In assessing Ravi’s actions on September 19th, one could perhaps mount the argument that sexual contact was not expected, that he did not tape anything, that the transmission was extremely limited in time and reach, and that nobody saw sex or intimate body parts. On the twenty-first, however, Ravi tried to set up a viewing.

At 5:20 P.M., Ravi tweeted, “6 foot wall of lobster crab and shrimp. I love rutgers.” (It was King Neptune Night in the dining hall.) At 6:39 P.M., he followed this up with “Anyone with iChat, I dare you to video chat me between the hours of 9:30 and 12. Yes, it’s happening again.” Alissa Agarwal, a student living in Davidson C, walked across campus with Ravi, and others, after supper that evening. She told police that although she had been “zoning him out,” she heard him “bragging” about his plan to broadcast Clementi’s date. The group went to Agarwal’s room. Prosecutors allege that, at 7:44 P.M., Ravi used Agarwal’s computer to check the iChat connection with his own computer.

That evening, Ravi also texted with Michelle Huang, a high-school friend who was at Cornell. “I have it pointed at his bed and the monitor is off so he can’t see you,” he wrote. And, “It’s set to automatically accept, I just tested it and it works.” He later added, “be careful it could get nasty,” and “people are having a viewing party.” (Huang did not take up the offer.)

At around eight-thirty, Ravi left Davidson C for Ultimate Frisbee practice. Clementi read Ravi's "happening again" tweet sometime before mid-evening—and this seems to have ended his doubts about taking action. Just before M.B. was due to arrive, Clementi went to see Raahi Grover, a resident adviser. Grover took him seriously, and asked him to repeat his story in an e-mail. He also offered him a spare bed in his own room for that night. Clementi declined, and returned to his room.

He unplugged Ravi's computer. In a text sent at 9:41 P.M., he told Yang, "I was afraid he might have hidden another webcam so I also shut down and turned off the power strip." Prosecutors, pursuing a bias charge, have claimed that "afraid," in this context, constitutes evidence of fear.

Ravi contends that, by this time, he had changed his mind about the broadcast, and had disabled his webcam. Yet he was still referring to a "viewing party" after leaving the dorm for Frisbee, and, when he texted Huang the next day, he said, "it got messed up and didn't work LOL."

M.B. arrived at 10:19 P.M. Clementi did not tell him about what had happened on Sunday. Ravi came back to the dorm, and waited in Agarwal's room. Just after eleven, he texted Clementi to ask if he was still using the room. At eleven-forty-eight, Clementi replied, "we're done."

About fifteen minutes later, Clementi sent a formal e-mail to Grover. He described the two incidents, quoted Ravi's Twitter messages, and wrote, "I feel that my privacy has been violated and I am extremely uncomfortable sharing a room with someone who would act in this wildly inappropriate manner."

That night, at Justusboys, he wrote, "I haven't even seen my roommate since sunday when i was asking for the room the first time . . . and him doing it again just set me off. . . . so talking to him just didn't seem like an option." He added, "Meanwhile I turned off and unplugged his computer, went crazy looking for other hidden cams. . . . and then had a great time." A few minutes later, he responded to the suggestion that he should take a screen shot of Ravi's Twitter feed: "Oh haha already there baby."

Late the next morning, Clementi spoke to his mother on the phone. He sounded normal, she says, although "there were some more thoughtful moments." He also received an e-mail from the Rutgers housing office, asking him to call.

That afternoon, he spent three hours rehearsing the "Symphonie Fantastique." Kynan Johns, who ran the rehearsal, saw nothing remarkable in Clementi's behavior, and even had some good news to share: he'd secured Clementi free violin lessons. Paul Mainardi told me that Clementi "sat next to this girl in the violin section that he always sat next to.

They were discussing the difficulties of a particular passage, making notes in their music, and even discussing some events that were upcoming. Everything was, on its face, so typically typical.”

Ravi had no classes that day, and spent much of it in his room. In the afternoon, Raahi Grover, the R.A., visited him there, and told him about Clementi’s complaint. According to Grover’s statement to police, Ravi tried to defend himself, but Grover cut him off. Ravi “seemed quite upset” and “confused,” Grover said.

Ravi was in the room when, sometime after five o’clock, Clementi returned to Davidson C. This may have been the first time they had interacted since Sunday. Ravi later recalled Clementi “doing something by his desk.” That’s where police found the handwritten note, inside Clementi’s backpack. (The note’s contents have not yet been disclosed to the Clementi family.) Ravi and Clementi were there together for less than an hour. It’s not known if they talked—there is no electronic record.

Ravi told police that he was called away from the room by a friend. When he came back, Clementi was gone, although his bag was still there. He figured, “Oh, maybe he just went to grab food, or whatever.” If Clementi and Ravi had argued, Ravi showed no sign of stress when he texted with Jason Tam, who was in New York, between 5:40 and 6:30 P.M. Ravi encouraged him to visit Rutgers: “Come to RU faggot.” Tam replied, “No, ru is gay.”

Mainardi told me what he knew of the next hours. Clementi went to the campus food court, bought a burger, and, at about six-thirty, took the university shuttle bus to the rail station, where he took a train to New York, then a subway uptown. He headed toward the George Washington Bridge.

He was carrying his phone, and he installed the Facebook app—this action was reportedly documented on his news feed. At eight-forty-two, he posted a status update: “Jumping off the gw bridge sorry.” Mainardi was told that there were no witnesses; people saw Clementi on the south path and then saw that he wasn’t there. The fall, from the center of the bridge, is about two hundred feet. His phone and wallet were found on the bridge.

“On the other hand, it’s not like I wake up every morning thinking, Omigod, I wish I had a giant wooden horse.”



Five minutes after Clementi posted to Facebook, Ravi sent him a long text. (Ravi later said that he saw the Facebook posting only on the following day.) He told Clementi that, on Sunday night, he was showing Wei his webcam setup when he'd caught an accidental glimpse of Clementi, adding, "Obviously I told people what occurred so they could give me advice." He said of Tuesday night, "I turned my camera away and put my computer to sleep so even if anyone tried it wouldn't work. I wanted to make amends for Sunday night. I'm sorry if you heard something distorted and disturbing but I assure you all my actions were good natured."

Ten minutes later, Ravi wrote again, in a less weaselly way. This message is something that one wishes had been written three weeks before: "I've known you were gay and I have no problem with it. In fact one of my closest friends is gay and he and I have a very open relationship. I just suspected you were shy about it which is why I never broached the topic. I don't want your freshman year to be ruined because of a petty misunderstanding, it's adding to my guilt. You have a right to move if you wish but I don't want you to feel pressured to without fully understanding the situation."

That evening, the Port Authority police, after finding Clementi's possessions on the bridge, alerted his parents, who, in turn, called Rutgers. Police officers drove to Davidson C, but there was no reply when they knocked at Room 30. Wei, noticing the commotion, phoned Ravi eight or nine times. When he finally picked up, he told her that he was in his room and she'd awakened him, adding, "I'm really tired, I want to go back to sleep." But he did then talk to the police. He gave them a description of M.B., saying of him, "I was worried that maybe he was involved with something."

That night, Ravi deleted the "yay" tweet and replaced Tuesday's "dare you to chat me" tweet with one that said, "Roommate asked for room again. Its happening again. People with ichat don't you dare video chat me from 930 to 12." And then he wrote, "Everyone ignore that last tweet. Stupid drafts." Ravi claimed that he had accidentally published a stored draft. If so, it's not clear why he didn't delete it. It seems more likely that he was being evasive. He knew that a less incriminating version of his tweet would have a Wednesday time stamp. The "draft" tweet would help to explain Wednesday's delivery of a Tuesday tweet. The deletion of the two earlier tweets, along with text-message conversations that Ravi had with Huang and Wei, form part of the indictment against him.

By ten-thirty that night, the Clementis had been told that, apparently, Tyler had jumped from the George Washington Bridge. Mainardi described "a few nerve-racking days, where you wondered whether maybe it was a fake by him." He remembered a conversation with an investigator in the office of the prosecutors, "when we were still waiting for his body to be discovered, exploring the various possibilities: what if he didn't

jump? What if he's living with some guy in New York City, and it's the only way he can find a way to do it? And I said, 'If he did that, *I'm* going to kill him.'" He gave a sad laugh.

On September 29th, Jim Swimm, who lives in northern Manhattan, was taking a lunchtime walk in Inwood Hill Park when he saw a body floating in the Hudson. A park ranger called the police, who dispatched a boat that picked up the body near a Columbia University athletic complex. Swimm, who is gay, said, "Not to sound all metaphysical about it, but I feel as if he was speaking to me that day—saying, people need to pay attention to what's happening."

Six days before Clementi's body was discovered, a delegation of Rutgers staff members visited Ravi in his room, and urged him to go home to Plainsboro. "I want to stay and defend my honor," he said, but he was persuaded to leave.

That afternoon, Wei was being interviewed by Rutgers police. During a break in questioning, she received a text from Ravi:

RAVI: Did you tell them we did it on purpose?

WEI: Yeah . . . well that we didn't know
what we were gonna see

Where is tyler . .

RAVI: Because I said we were just messing around with the camera. He told me he wanted to have a friend over and I didn't realize they wanted to be all private.

WEI: Omg dharun why didnt u talk to me first i told them everything

He asked, "Did you say anything about tuesday because I turned off my computer that day." Wei asked what had happened on Tuesday. "Nothing," Ravi replied. This exchange, too, is included in the indictment, as an alleged act of witness tampering. Despite being pressed by detectives, Wei has insisted that although she knew Clementi had asked for the room on Tuesday, she had missed all the talk of a "viewing party."

Ravi was asleep at home when the police came to Plainsboro. His father woke him, and Ravi agreed to be taken back to New Brunswick, where he spoke to the police after waiving his right to a lawyer. He again claimed that he had abandoned the Tuesday viewing, and tried to explain the business of the deleted tweets. The detective became impatient: "It's up to you which way you want this to go. You want to lie to us?"

If prosecutors had been able to charge Ravi with shiftiness and bad faith—if the criminal law exactly reflected common moral judgments about kindness and reliability—then to convict him would be easy. The long indictment against Ravi can be seen as a kind of regretful commentary about the absence of such statutes. Similarly, the enduring false

belief that Ravi was responsible for outing Tyler Clementi, and for putting a sex tape on the Internet, can be seen as a collective effort to balance a terrible event with a terrible cause.

On September 28th, the Middlesex County prosecutor's office charged Ravi and Wei with invasion of privacy for the momentary viewing on September 19th. Ravi alone was charged for an attempted viewing on September 21st. Even if one doubts that these charges would have been brought if Clementi had not died, or questions that men are revealing "sexual parts" by removing their shirts, the charges made some legal sense: Ravi and Wei had admitted seeing the video images. But to some an "invasion of privacy" charge seemed insufficient; Equality Forum, a national gay-rights organization, released a statement that called the actions of Ravi and Wei "shocking, malicious, and heinous," and urged "the prosecutor to file murder by reckless manslaughter charges." Paula Dow, then New Jersey's Attorney General, said, "Sometimes the laws don't always adequately address the situation. That may come to pass here." Bruce J. Kaplan, the Middlesex County prosecutor, announced, "We will be making every effort to assess whether bias played a role in the incident."

In April, 2011, a grand jury indicted Ravi on fifteen counts, including two charges of second-degree bias intimidation. Two weeks later, Wei made a deal with prosecutors: the charges against her would be dropped if she agreed to attend counselling, serve three hundred hours of community service, and testify against Ravi, if called. Before the end of May, Ravi was offered a plea bargain for a three-to-five-year sentence; he rejected it. A second offer was made in December: no jail time, an effort to protect him against deportation, and six hundred hours of community service. This, too, was rejected. "You want to know why?" Steven Altman, Ravi's lawyer, said to reporters, outside the courthouse, on December 9th. "Simple answer, simple principle of law, simple principle of life: he's innocent." Ravi's trial, starting a week before his twentieth birthday, is expected to last a month.

"Oh my gosh, it's three o'clock already."



He is waiting at home in Plainsboro. Altman said that he has been taking online courses. Ravi told Jason Tam that he has designed a door lock that employs fingerprint recognition. ("Be proud of me," he told Tam.) Anil Kappa, the family friend, cautions that, even with an acquittal, Ravi would still "face this for the rest of his life," adding, "He's going to keep paying the price."

Plugged In, an entertainment Web site published by Focus on the Family, the Christian conservative group, recently ran what it called "a rundown of pop culture's biggest shakers and breakers" of 2011. At No. 6, between Rebecca Black and Tim Tebow, was Tyler Clementi, whose death "was a critical reminder that, even when we disagree with someone's choices or lifestyle, we must always treat that person with respect, dignity and compassion." The entry was illustrated with Clementi's Facebook photograph: self-shot, in his sunny Ridgewood bedroom, it shows him with cropped hair, glasses, and a hesitant smile. As the story of Clementi has become a popular parable of teen-age good and evil, that yellow-toned photograph has become an icon of adolescent distress.

One afternoon last October, a year after Clementi's death, the image was projected onto two giant screens in a hall in a student center at Rutgers. CNN was taping a special, "Bullying: It Stops Here," hosted by Anderson Cooper. The audience consisted mostly of Rutgers students—Tyler Picone sat in the front row—and they listened courteously as a floor manager called out "Are you guys excited to be on TV?" and "You're a good-looking group," then coached them on how to express shock or grief while watching the panel.

The discussion, involving Dr. Phil McGraw, Kelly Ripa, and Robert Faris, a sociologist at U.C.-Davis, and others, began with Cooper declaring that Tyler Clementi's life had been "thrown onto the Internet." Then, in what may have been quiet recognition that the source of Clementi's despair was unknown, and may remain unknown, the show barely mentioned Clementi again. Its primary subject was the meanness of middle-school students. Clementi was a totem, but not part of the story. Outside, I spoke to Eric Thor, a junior, and the president of Delta Lambda Phi, a gay-oriented fraternity. " 'Bullying' is trying to be a label that covers all negative interrelations between students," he said. "If you say the word enough, it starts to lose meaning." He noted that Clementi had lacked a close ally at Rutgers. "Everyone needs a sidekick. I don't think he had that."

I returned to New Brunswick a few weeks ago. In a diner on Route 1, I had lunch with Joseph and Jane Clementi, who had just attended another pre-trial hearing. The Clementis are likable, thoughtful people. They were wearing gold-colored wristbands distributed by the Tyler Clementi Foundation, which they launched last year to raise awareness of teen-age suicide, cyberbullying, and the difficulties of gay youth. Joseph Clementi was wearing a pink tie. They didn't want to discuss the case, beyond saying that they were satisfied with the charges against Ravi. "What we want to see is justice," Joseph Clementi said. "That doesn't necessarily mean the punishment has to be harsh."

He talked about Tyler's senior year in high school. "I would characterize him as a child growing up," he said. "He was getting more into being fashion-conscious. Now, this kid, he had to dress for orchestra—since he was seven, he was wearing suits and ties. But he was getting more trendy, in the last year or so." Jane Clementi recalled that, not long before his death, Tyler had bought a spectacular new pair of glasses—bright green on the inside of the stems. His father said, "He was definitely trying to express himself."

They never saw any sign of depression, and can't even see it retrospectively. "As a parent, what it says to me is that what you think you know, you don't know," Joseph Clementi said. "And that's a hard thing, because we all think, I know what my kid's up to. You don't."

On the night Jane Clementi learned that Tyler was gay, she said, "I told him not to hurt himself." Not long before, a girl from his school had committed suicide. "We had talked about it briefly that summer, and for some reason that thought came to mind. And all I said was 'Don't hurt yourself,' and he looked me right in the eye and he laughed, and said, 'I would never do anything like that.'" ♦



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