

Truth vs. Loyalty

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It is 11:30pm on a quiet Thursday night. You have finished your homework, and you are rewarding yourself by watching the latest “The Walking Dead” episode on Netflix. To your shock, one of your close friends barges into your room with a troubled look on his face. He breaks down in front of you. It’s a classic boarding school horror story: he has an English essay due at 11:59 PM and hasn’t even started it. He goes on a rant, moaning about how this essay has a significant impact on the outcome of his semester grade. Between sobs, he mumbles about how the only way he could do well at this point would be to copy content from the internet. Not paying attention to what he is saying, as you are thirty minutes into “The Walking Dead”, you don’t bother to convince him otherwise.

What would you do in this situation? Would you turn him in, or would you let it slide?

In this situation, most teenagers would choose the latter. Throughout adolescent communities across the nation, there is a stigma associated with being a “snitch”. What is a snitch? In this school-related context, “snitch” is a demeaning and a rather blunt label for students who report their peers to school administrations or authorities, for violating rules or laws. This can result in harsh social consequences, from breaking friendships to being known as “that kid” for the rest of high school. Why do the majority of students, whether they attend a New England prep school or a football-focused public school in Texas, decide not to snitch on their peers? Think about it: what high school student would want to risk losing their social connections and their general reputation in exchange for being honest?

Now, let’s look at this from a moral standpoint. Being honest is obviously the morally correct choice. By being honest and informing administrators of those breaking school rules, students can protect the values and reputation of their school. In primary education, we are regularly taught that “honesty is the best policy.” Honesty preserves the backbone of education and is a core value that all who seek to learn should believe in and embody. Unfortunately, our instincts to avoid the social fallout of being identified as a “snitch” prevent us from doing this.

The act of telling on others can be viewed negatively not only in high school, but in almost every social situation. By betraying their friendships, the virtuous people who tell on others can become rejected by their peers and friends. The extent of the punishment is often taken into account when students are confronted with the decision of whether or not to report another fellow student. For most adolescents, disciplinary actions have the potential to alter their course of life by leaving permanent marks on their records. Because of this, many of us would rather protect our friends from disciplinary punishment than put them in harm’s way. It could even be

argued that, at many schools, the structure of the disciplinary system leads students to cover for their rule-breaking friends.

While it is morally correct to be honest, students are often not courageous enough to follow their moral values because of the social consequences that can follow. This anti-snitching culture is present in boarding schools as well as schools all across the country. It is a machine that powers and subdues even the most principled, ethical students. When put in such situations, most students will choose loyalty over truth.