

Cheaters by john stockwell

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The paper "Cheaters by John Stockwell" is an exceptional example of a movie review on visual arts and film studies. In the academic world, it is a well-established policy that should be honest and maintain integrity when it comes to their achievements; however, this does not always happen. Within the movie entitled Cheaters, the ethics and morality of cheating are looked at in the context of the real life 1995 cheating scandal at the Chicago public school known as Steinmetz. The alleged cheating occurred during the academic decathlon of that year, and this film details the events that led up to the cheating, and the consequences which occurred afterward. At the beginning of the movie, Cheaters, the team members of the academic decathlon compete in regionals by studying hard and performing honestly. The end result of this is that the team has come in the last place, and the reigning champions—Whitney Young—come in first. The students at Steinmetz, who were excited and confident going into the regional competition, now feel depressed, and as if they should not even try to study for the national competition because they are going to fail no matter what, especially when they are going to have to go up against Whitney Young. Ultimately, it is this despair and apathy which leads one of the students to steal a copy of the test for nationals which ends up in the hands of the Dr. Plecki, the teacher who is in charge/running the decathlon team.

The team discusses whether or not they should cheat. The end result of this discussion being that they decide to go ahead and cheat. The intent of the students and Dr. Plecki in deciding to cheat lies in the fact that they want to beat Whitney Young and prove that an underfunded public school could win the competition which is the outcome that they are hoping to achieve in the

end. When Dr. Plecki states that they were “ performing an act of civil disobedience,” their earlier motive ties into this as, basically, the students wanted to go against the system which had made it much harder for poorer and underprivileged kids to get the kind of good education that is required or needed in order to win an academic decathlon(Cheaters).

In making the decision to cheat, a few of the students were more hesitant due to their belief in the idea that cheating is wrong. However, the other students and Dr. Plecki begin to persuade them with thoughts of beating Whitney Young, thoughts of proving their intelligence, and the potential for fame and success. The persuasion ends up pushing the hesitant students into agreeing to cheat because they have concluded that the possible benefits outweigh the potential risks.

After they win the decathlon and are accused of cheating, the students appear offended and angered which is surprising. They decide to blame the cheating accusations on the fact that they are from a poorer public school rather than their outrageous score differences that led officials in the academic decathlon to question them in the first place. They are asked to retake the test and refuse, thinking that the problem would likely fade away, but it does not. Ultimately, the student’s bizarre reaction to the cheating accusation indicates that they do not fully understand the severity of their actions. The students have made the cheating right or moral in their minds by saying that they basically deserved to win anyway and that they were being picked on for their economic and social status in society.

Charles Sykes once said that “ humans rationalize because it is convenient and suits our interests. If we choose, we can shape morality to meet our

inclinations and impulses." This type of rationalization is utilized by the students and Dr. Plecki throughout the movie. Dr. Plecki, in particular, does a lot of rationalizing due to the fact that part of him knows that he is doing the wrong thing as a teacher. Yet, Dr. Plecki rationalizes his actions by thinking about his own immigrant father who worked hard in a diesel factory and ended up being treated like dirt by his workplace and bosses, otherwise known as "the man." Dr. Plecki justifies what he is doing by telling himself that people who work hard and are honest, do not get anywhere and are not successful. By looking at what happened to his father, Dr. Plecki decides that, in the real world, cheaters do prosper, and why shouldn't he and his students take advantage of that fact? By the end of the movie, it appears that both the students and Dr. Plecki have realized that taking this immoral route does not always work out the way a person wants it to and that taking this unethical path can often cause more problems than it solves. Thus, the movie, *Cheaters*, is able to illustrate that the concept of cheating is much more complex than it might initially seem.