

Editorial: Make The Right Choice

By Tanya Khan

Imagine getting up at the crack of dawn, and then sitting in a room with nothing to do all day long, except for staring at the white, dismal walls surrounding you. You must never leave this room without an escort, even when you go to the bathroom. You look forward to the 15-minute showers and lunch breaks, for they are now privileges that allow you to escape from the daily monotony. On a few occasions, you may get to see your family and other visitors, and perhaps have the opportunity to even speak with them for a short time. Throughout the day, nearby neighbors shout and yell across the hall. A uniformed man fires back at the tenants, telling them to behave themselves.

In the midst of all this chaos, you ask yourself, "Why am I here?"

But you know the answer.

Somewhere along the way, you made a wrong decision, and now you're doing time for 25 years.

A former gang member, identified only as "Jose," knows this scenario all too well. During the *Safe Schools and Communities* press conference on November 16, the Trenton prison inmate spoke of his past gang years. At 31 years old, he has spent approximately half of his life in prison, ever since he joined a gang fifteen years ago. Although "Jose" admits that he initially "felt like somebody" in the gang, he now realizes that it only taught him, as he said "...to destroy, to hate, and not to think for myself."

Thousands of individuals like "Jose" waste away in jail for similar gang involvement. Because of a few hasty decisions, they suffer for the rest of their lives in jail cells, where privacy is negligible and freedom is nonexistent.

What, if anything, does all of this have to do with us?

As students, our responsibilities extend far beyond academics and extracurricular activities. If we are aware of potential

violence or hazing, it is our moral obligation to notify someone. We have the choice to speak out and to make all attempts to avoid any mishaps. One of the greatest mistakes we all make is choosing to keep information to ourselves. This, however, makes us just as guilty as the perpetrators. Perhaps gang recruiters don't visit Holmdel High School frequently, searching for vulnerable prey. But this does not necessarily imply that our school is violence-free. Even the most minor bullying can be damaging. Hateful comments not only hurt the victims, but encourage hateful relationships. Theft of individual property and vandalism produce similar effects. Simply by making a choice to rid our schools of violence, we will be, in turn, creating a safer, healthier environment in which we are able to learn and to make friendships.

From deciding what clothes to wear to choosing a career, life is all about making choices. Every day, we have to make intelligent decisions based on our own personal morals and values. Whereas some decisions are relatively easy to make, others are more difficult. In any circumstance, we have to ask ourselves, "What are the long-term effects if I choose one option over another?"

And perhaps more importantly, "Will I ever regret making this choice because it stands in the way of my goals or values?"

So the next time you are faced with a dilemma, keep in mind your goals in life and these questions. If the answers conflict with your goals, you may want to reconsider. You can make the right choice now – or do time later.

Editors' Note: This editorial was authored by Tanya Khan and represents the opinion of The Sting editorial board.