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Moral Paragons, but Crummy Friends: The Case of Snitching

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Keywords: morality, loyalty, punishment, whistleblowing, social cognition

Abstract

Loyalty to friends is an important moral value, but does that mean snitching on friends is immoral? Across four pre-registered studies, we examine how loyalty obligations impact people's moral evaluations of snitching (i.e., turning in others who commit transgressions to relevant authorities). In vignette and incentivized partner choice studies, we find that witnesses who snitch (vs. do not snitch) are seen as more moral and as better leaders (Studies 1–4), regardless of whether they snitch on a friend or an acquaintance (Studies 1–2). Our experiments also demonstrate that snitches receive less moral credit when snitching on non-moral (vs. moral) transgressions (Study 2), and when snitching aligns with a self-interested motive (Study 3). We demonstrate that although snitching is often seen as morally right, turning in transgressors entails important reputational tradeoffs: Snitching makes one appear disloyal and a bad potential friend, but boosts perceptions of morality and leadership potential.

Keywords: morality, loyalty, punishment, whistleblowing, social cognition

Moral Paragons, but Crummy Friends: The Case of Snitching

When one witnesses a moral transgression at work, blowing the whistle to ensure the transgressor is identified and punished may seem like the right thing to do. However, in many cases of wrongdoing, relationships between wrongdoers and witnesses complicate the situation. For example, in organizational settings, people form close relationships with colleagues and coworkers (Dutton & Ragins, 2007; Ferris et al., 2009), which both increases the chances of learning about others' workplace transgressions and decreases the likelihood of raising them to authorities (Khan & Howe, 2020). In short, turning in friends can mean betraying the obligations of loyalty inherent to close relationships: One person's moral whistleblower is another's traitorous snitch. Do loyalty obligations release witnesses¹ from the moral imperative to turn in bad actors? When friends transgress, is blowing the whistle seen as the right thing to do, or, as the adage goes, do snitches get stitches?

To the extent that prior work has investigated snitching among coworkers, or whistleblowing more broadly, it has largely focused on how witnesses decide whether to turn in transgressors (e.g., Forbes & Stellar, 2021; Lee & Holyoak, 2021; Near & Miceli, 1985; Weidman et al., 2020), as well as the behavioral implications for doing so (Björkelo, 2013; Kenny et al., 2019; Paul & Townsend, 1996). The present research investigates how people evaluate snitching, with a particular focus on whether close relationships, and the loyalty obligations they entail, change third-party perceptions about the morality of snitching. We define snitching as reporting bad behavior to relevant authorities who can levy consequences and punish transgressors². Our studies focus on third-party perceptions because we are interested in

¹ We define the term "witness" broadly, as any individual who learns about an unethical act that someone has committed, regardless of whether they actually see it.

² This definition is consistent with the definition of whistleblowing behavior in organizational research (e.g., Near & Miceli, 1985). We use the term "snitching" here because it closely captures the behavior we are most interested in

probing the broader reputational consequences associated with snitching. Rather than focusing on the snitch's decisions, the current studies instead explore how uninvolved third parties evaluate those who snitch or decide not to snitch.

Understanding how people evaluate snitching behavior and how such evaluations vary as a function of social relationships has important implications. First, snitching cases entail conflicting moral values, and so illuminate how people tradeoff moral dimensions in forming impressions and navigating relationships. Although many scholars have emphasized the centrality of loyalty in definitions of what it means to be a moral person (e.g., Cohen et al., 2014; Graham et al., 2011), little is known about how people respond when being loyal means abetting a bad deed, nor how judgments of snitching might vary as a function of specific social relationships endemic to many real-world cases (Schein, 2020). Second, people frequently make decisions (e.g., Kumar & Epley, 2021; Leary & Kowalski, 1990), and snitching decisions in particular (Butler et al., 2020), based on expectations of how others will judge them. Thus, understanding how potential snitches are viewed by others can reveal the reputational incentives witnesses face when deciding whether to speak up.

The Upstanding Snitch: Why might snitching seem like the *right* thing to do?

There are multiple reasons to expect that people may see snitching as moral, especially in the absence of relationship-specific loyalty obligations. Research in economics and psychology suggests that people think it is morally right to condemn and punish wrongdoers (Carlsmith et al., 2002; DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009, 2013; Graham et al., 2009; Graham et al., 2011; Hofmann et al., 2018; Monin & O'Connor, 2011; Rai & Fiske, 2011). Some even argue that seeking justice for wrongdoings—through condemnation and punishment—is at the heart of what it means to be

(turning in a friend specifically), but we see these cases as falling under the broader umbrella of whistleblowing (informing authorities of bad behavior in general; Clampet-Lundquist et al., 2015; Near & Miceli, 1985).

a moral person (e.g., DeScioli & Kurzban, 2009; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Carlsmith et al., 2002). Indeed, people across many cultures feel that wrongdoers deserve punishment (Carlsmith & Darley, 2008) and see punishment as a way to enforce norms and deter harm (Bregant et al., 2020; Carlsmith et al., 2002; Martin & Cushman, 2016). Consequently, snitching may be evaluated as moral in part because it helps bring wrongdoers to justice. Accordingly, snitches themselves often report feeling motivated, in part, by a desire to prevent harm and do what is right (Avakian & Roberts, 2012; Dungan et al., 2019; Watts & Buckley, 2017; Waytz et al., 2013).

Snitching might also seem like the moral thing to do because withholding information—particularly information pertinent to preventing harm—often seems untrustworthy (Baum & Critcher, 2020; Cushman et al., 2006; Jamison et al., 2020; Silver & Shaw, 2022; Spranca et al., 1991). For example, John and colleagues (2016) find that a job applicant who tries to conceal past unethical behavior seems less trustworthy and hireable than a job applicant who reveals it. More broadly, people regard failing to prevent harm as immoral (Baron & Ritov, 1994; DeScioli et al., 2011). Similarly, witnesses who choose not to speak up may seem dishonest and immoral.

Although the above research suggests that snitching is seen as moral in general, it is relationship-agnostic—it tells us little about the impact of relationship obligations on how people evaluate snitching. Recent discussions in moral psychology call for investigations that integrate relevant social relationships (Earp et al., 2021; Schein, 2020), as these more closely reflect situations people actually face. As noted, one's co-workers are often one's friends (Ferris et al., 2009; Pillemer & Rothbard, 2018), and this poses a challenge for understanding the moral status of snitching because now snitching, which may seem moral in the abstract, requires sacrificing another fundamental moral value: loyalty.

The Immoral Snitch: Why might snitching seem like the *wrong* thing to do?

Because loyalty obligates people to protect close others, there is reason to believe that snitching *on a friend* may seem less moral than snitching in the abstract. Close relations require loyalty: Loyal people are considered better friends (Shaw et al., 2017), citizens (Hildreth et al., 2016), and employees (Hirschman, 1970; Kondratuk et al., 2004). In fact, groups of all scales and sizes function better when there is loyalty in the ranks (Farrell, 1983; Hirschman 1970). But what is loyalty, and why might it make people think that snitching is wrong?

Beyond helping relationships to function, *loyalty is often considered an important moral value* (Berry et al., 2021; Graham et al., 2009; Haidt & Graham, 2007; Hildreth et al., 2016; Rai & Fiske, 2011; Shweder et al., 1997). Loyalty has been defined as a form of “moral partiality,” where people are expected to favor close others, and doing so is considered morally right (Hildreth et al., 2016). In its strongest form, loyalty is a promise of self-sacrifice: Being loyal means prioritizing loyal ties above other competing interests, including self-interest in some cases (Scott, 1965). In many settings, *failing* to act loyally is considered a moral transgression in and of itself (Kundro & Nurmohamed, 2021; Kunst et al., 2019; Travaglino et al., 2014). For example, people report disliking those who fail to keep a friend’s secret (Hart et al., preprint).

Because loyalty places moral demands on social relationships, people sometimes think it is more moral to help a friend than to fulfill other moral obligations. For example, individuals who help family members over strangers are considered more moral than individuals who help strangers over family (McManus et al., 2020). Similarly, when people endorse an ethical system that requires strict impartiality, they are seen as less trustworthy than people who endorse an ethical system that prioritizes loyalty (Everett et al., 2018). Moreover, being dishonest but loyal is sometimes seen as more moral than the opposite (Hildreth & Anderson, 2018).

In the abstract, snitching to prevent harm and punish wrongdoing seems like the right thing to do, but when doing so requires disloyalty, things get more complicated. In some cases, snitching on a friend may seem like the *wrong* thing to do because it entails violating the moral value of loyalty (e.g., Graham et al., 2009; Rai & Fiske, 2011).

Current research

We investigate the tension between combatting wrongdoing and remaining loyal by probing people's evaluations of snitching in the presence or absence of relationship-based loyalty obligations. Across four pre-registered studies, participants learned about witnesses who chose to snitch (vs. not) on friends (vs. acquaintances) and then made judgments about the witness's loyalty and morality. Based on literatures reviewed above, one clear prediction is that, when the wrongdoer is an acquaintance, snitching should be regarded as more moral than not snitching—here, snitching confers the moral benefits of exposing wrongdoing, with none of the costs associated with sacrificing the obligations of friendship. Another clear prediction is that snitching on friends (vs. acquaintances) should be seen as more disloyal because friendships entail stronger loyalty obligations (e.g., Ferris et al., 2009; Forbes & Stellar, 2021). Our experiments find evidence for these two predictions, but they are not our focus.

Our focus is this: How do people evaluate the morality of those who snitch on their friends, and do people evaluate others differently for snitching on a friend vs. an acquaintance? Answering these questions affords a clearer picture of whether people see loyalty obligations as a morally legitimate excuse to protect wrongdoers from punishment.

One account, the “Immoral Snitch” hypothesis would suggest that snitches will be regarded as *less* moral when they snitch on a close friend rather than an acquaintance, because the former requires sacrificing loyalty whereas the latter does not. This account would predict

that snitching on a friend (vs. not snitching) should be seen as immoral, and, further, that snitching on a friend should be seen as less moral than snitching on an acquaintance. We favor an alternative account, the “Upstanding Snitch” hypothesis, which suggests that snitches will be regarded as moral regardless of preexisting relationships between witnesses and wrongdoers because although people recognize loyalty obligations, they do not think that fulfilling them is morally right when it requires protecting an immoral actor. This account does not deny that snitching will be seen as disloyal or that loyalty *can* figure into moral judgments, but it suggests a boundary to the relationship between loyalty and morality: When being loyal means protecting wrongdoers from consequences, it is no longer associated with moral rightness.

The key theoretical difference between these accounts lies in how loyalty is expected to impact moral evaluations. The Immoral Snitch hypothesis posits that, in the eyes of observers, being loyal might give witnesses a ‘moral pass’ not to turn in their friends, since being loyal is typically morally good (see Figure 1, right panel). The Upstanding Snitch hypothesis posits that observers do not recognize loyalty as morally good when it entails abetting others’ moral transgressions, and so will see turning in friends vs. acquaintances as similarly moral and preferable to not doing so (see Figure 1, left panel). To operationalize these predictions, in a 2 (turning in vs. not turning in) x 2 (friends vs. acquaintances) design where people judge morality, the former predicts an interaction, whereas the latter predicts a main effect of witness behavior only. To preview, we will find stronger evidence for the Upstanding Snitch hypothesis, that loyalty obligations do not figure into moral evaluations of snitching, and that turning in others, at least for moral transgressions and absent ulterior motives, is viewed as the right thing to do. See Table 1 for specific predictions associated with each account.

Figure 1*Stylized Depiction of Competing Hypotheses*

Note. How will the morality of turning in a transgressor be viewed under conditions of high (friend) vs. low (acquaintance) loyalty-obligations? This graph depicts the predicted patterns from two competing accounts (Left = Upstanding Snitch; Right = Immoral Snitch). Graphs approximate hypothetical results that would be consistent with each hypothesis, and are not generated from actual data.

Table 1

Prediction	Immoral Snitch Hypothesis	Upstanding Snitch Hypothesis
Snitching on acquaintance seen as more moral (vs. not snitching)?	Yes	Yes
Snitching on friend seen as less loyal than snitching on acquaintance?	Yes	Yes
Snitching on friend seen as more moral (vs. not snitching)?	No	Yes
How much more immoral should it be to snitch on a friend than an acquaintance?	Substantially	Little if at all

Note. Details of what each hypothesis predicts.

Overview of Studies

Four pre-registered experiments explore how people evaluate the loyalty and morality of witnesses who snitch (vs. not snitch) on friends (vs. acquaintances). Study 1 tests whether the Upright Snitch or Immoral Snitch hypothesis explains how people view snitches. Studies 2–3 examine potential moderations (whether the relevant transgression is unethical or merely a function of incompetence; whether the snitch feels personal animus towards the transgressor). Finally, Study 4 tests competing hypotheses about the morality of snitching in an incentivized cooperation game. In all studies, sample size was determined before any data analysis, and we report all measures, manipulations, data exclusions, and sample size rationales. All studies were pre-registered on AsPredicted.org, and we report all analyses in the manuscript unless noted (https://osf.io/e29h5/?view_only=5ff5279d3da9429c9d3a6b5b8581f7d7).

Study 1

Study 1 explored how people evaluate a witness who informs (or does not) on a friend or acquaintance at work, to examine how loyalty obligations impact the morality of informing on friends. We expected that informing on a friend would be regarded as disloyal. The key question was how people would evaluate the morality of such disloyal snitching, and further how it compares to snitching when no loyalty-based obligation is present.

Method

Participants. We recruited 203 MTurkers ($M_{\text{age}} = 37.50$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.08$; 50% female). For each study we conducted a sensitivity analysis in G*Power 3.1 (Faul et al., 2009; two-tailed, $\alpha = .05$) for our morality measure. For this study, it indicated that this sample size would provide 80% power to detect an effect of $\eta^2 = .04^3$. In all MTurk studies, participation was restricted to

³G*Power 3.1 provided an effect size f for the sensitivity analysis, which we hand-calculated into eta-squared to easily compare the effect size for the sensitivity analysis to the effect size for the primary analyses, for all studies in

the United States. No participants were excluded from any MTurk study. All participants completed a captcha to prevent bots from taking the surveys.

Procedure. Participants read a brief scenario involving someone informing or not informing on a transgression and answered questions about it. Participants were randomly assigned in a 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) x 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Acquaintance) between-subjects design. In the scenario, the witness is told by a friend (or an acquaintance) that they had been selling company secrets for money, and then the witness decides either to inform or not to inform (see Appendix A for full vignettes). After reading, participants evaluated the witness, answered demographic questions, and received payment.

Measures

All measures assessed participants' agreement with the questions and were measured on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *Strongly disagree*, 7 = *Strongly agree*). Participants evaluated the witness's morality by rating their agreement with two statements: "What Jake did was the morally right thing to do," and "Jake is a moral person." These two items were strongly correlated across all studies, so morality was assessed by averaging them ($r_{\text{across studies}} = .75$).⁴ Next, participants evaluated whether they thought that the witness was loyal, and whether they thought the witness would be a good leader and a good friend. These two measures further probe the perceived morality and loyalty of the witness, since people tend to prefer moral leaders (Treviño et al., 2003; Treviño et al., 2000) and loyal friends (Everett et al., 2016). In this study and all remaining studies, we summarize the results of the leadership and friendship measures in

which a sensitivity analysis was conducted for an ANOVA. The calculation was conducted following recommendations from Cohen (1988): $\eta^2 = f^2 / (1 + f^2)$.

⁴Our initial pre-registered plan was to analyze these items separately, but for ease of interpretation and given the high correlation between the two items, we average them in the manuscript. Results remain the same when analyzing each item separately.

the SOM to streamline reporting. We also asked participants an exploratory question regarding what they would have done in the situation (see SOM).

Results

Morality. A 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) x 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Acquaintance) ANOVA on the morality measure revealed a main effect of Witness Behavior, $F(1,199) = 205.43, p < .001, d = 2.02, CI95\%[1.68, 2.36]$. This result indicates that participants evaluated informing ($M = 5.81, SD = 1.24$) as more moral than not informing ($M = 3.15, SD = 1.39$). There was no main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' moral evaluations did not significantly differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.47, SD = 1.86$) rather than just an acquaintance ($M = 4.49, SD = 1.89$), $F(1, 199) = 0.015, p = .903, d = -.005, CI95\%[-.28, .27]$. Finally, we found no Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction, $F(1, 199) = .193, p = .661, \eta^2 = .001$. Indeed, there was no significant difference between the evaluation of informers in the friend ($M = 5.76, SD = 1.33$) and acquaintance ($M = 5.86, SD = 1.14$) conditions, $t(199) = .40, p = .693, d = -.08, CI95\%[-.47, .31]$.

Figure 2

Note. Means and standard errors of morality and loyalty by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship and Witness Behavior for Study 1.

Loyalty. A 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) x 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Acquaintance) ANOVA on the loyalty measure revealed a marginally significant main effect of Witness Behavior, suggesting that participants evaluated the actor as more loyal when not informing ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.72$) rather than informing ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 1.82$), $F(1,199) = 3.60$, $p = 0.059$, $d = -.26$, $CI95\%[-.54, .02]$. We found no main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' evaluations of the loyalty of the witness did not significantly differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.84$) rather than just an acquaintance ($M = 4.89$, $SD = 1.74$), $F(1, 199) = .001$, $p = .979$, $d = -.005$, $CI95\%[-.28, .27]$. Importantly, there was a Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction, $F(1, 199) = 13.00$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .061$.

We followed-up on this interaction with planned contrasts and found that, as predicted, participants evaluated the witness as less loyal when informing on a friend ($M = 4.23$, $SD = 1.91$) rather than not informing ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(199) = 3.89$, $p < .001$, $d = -.77$, $CI95\%[-1.18, -.37]$. Participants evaluated the witness as similarly loyal when informing on an acquaintance ($M = 5.10$, $SD = 1.63$) rather than not informing ($M = 4.68$, $SD = 1.83$), $t(199) = 1.22$, $p = .225$, $d = .24$, $CI95\%[-.16, .64]$. Indeed, if anything, witnesses were seen as directionally more loyal when informing on acquaintances than not informing.

Robustness Test

In Supplemental Studies 1–3, we replicated and extended Study 1 by using slightly modified vignettes to test for the robustness of our effect across different kinds of transgressions (stealing code, stealing cash) as well as the severity of the transgressions (stealing \$50k vs. \$1k of furniture from work), with different consequences (no immediate consequences, immediate firing), finding results consistent with Study 1 (see SOM for details). Additionally, in Supplemental Study 4 we provide further evidence that people do see informing as broadly more moral than not informing. We asked 111 undergraduates to rate a witness who informed (or did not inform) on their close friend for stealing code by evaluating to what extent the witness endorsed each of the categories of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (Graham et al., 2011). Students evaluated the witness who informed as more moral in general, and as more committed to all other moral foundations (besides loyalty): being fair, respecting of authority, protecting purity, and reducing harm (see Supplemental Study 4 for details).

Discussion

The results provide evidence for the Upstanding Snitch hypothesis: people thought that the individual was much more moral, but far less loyal, when snitching on a friend (vs. not snitching). Moreover, as expected, people thought it was less loyal to inform on a friend than an

acquaintance. Interestingly, despite the fact that those who inform on friends were seen as less loyal, informing on a friend was judged to be *no less moral* than informing on an acquaintance. This result suggests that people think that the right thing to do is to inform on wrongdoing, regardless of the witness-wrongdoer relationship. In other words, the bonds of loyalty inherent to friendship did not appear to diminish people's perception that snitching is the right thing to do.

Note that even if we had detected a small difference between the morality of informing on a friend or an acquaintance, this would not be strong evidence for the Immoral Snitch hypothesis. Given the large hit to perceived loyalty when snitching on friends vs. acquaintances, one would want to show large commensurate changes in moral evaluations of the two types of informing in order to provide support for the Immoral Snitch hypothesis. We return to this in the General Discussion.

Finally, the witness's decision to snitch (vs. not snitch) impacted perceptions of the witness' fitness as a friend and leader. Because people value moral leaders, snitching boosted perceived leadership potential. Because people value loyal friends, snitching undermined perceived friendship potential (see SOM for details).

Study 2

In Study 1, participants thought informing on a friend was broadly moral, despite being strongly disloyal, and no less moral than informing on an acquaintance. We have argued that this is because people believe that others have an obligation to inform on moral violations that supersede loyalty obligations. However, there are alternative possibilities. Perhaps people regard surfacing problems as the right thing to do in general, or maybe they see withholding pertinent information of any kind as an immoral omission. The goal of Study 2 was to test whether the violation type, as a moral (dishonesty) or a non-moral (incompetence) violation, impacted the

perceived morality of turning in a friend. Is it that people see raising problems to authorities as the right thing to do in all cases? Or are loyalty obligations superseded only when doing so helps to bring to light *moral* violations specifically? Our account favors the latter possibility.

Method

Participants. 373 MTurkers participated ($M_{\text{age}} = 36.36$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.98$; 51% female). Our sensitive measure indicated that a sample of this size would provide 80% power to detect an effect of $\eta^2 = .02$.

Procedure. The design of the study was similar to Study 1. Participants read a scenario about someone who decided to inform or not to inform on an employee who was either a friend or an acquaintance. However, here half of participants were told that the witness knew about someone else's *immoral* behavior (the employee stole computer code), while the other half were told that the witness knew about someone else's *incompetent* behavior (that the employee was a bad coder; see Appendix A). Thus, this study employed a 2 x 2 x 2 between-subjects design, which varied whether the witness learned of someone else's immoral or incompetent behavior, whether the person in question was the witness's friend or an acquaintance, and whether or not the witness brought the problem to the attention of authorities.

Measures

After reading, participants evaluated the witness on the same dimensions as in Study 1. We report the results of the loyalty measure in the SOM to streamline reporting of the focal variable.

Results

To investigate three-way relationships between Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, Witness Behavior, and Transgression Type, we first report results of informing or not informing

on immoral behavior (like in the previous studies), followed by the results of informing or not informing on incompetent behavior. Pre-registered analyses also included ANOVA models with 3-way interaction terms to account for all three independent variables simultaneously, which we report in the SOM.

Morality. Starting with people's judgments in the immoral behavior conditions, a 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) x 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Acquaintance) ANOVA on the morality measure revealed a main effect of Witness Behavior, $F(1,180) = 49.20, p < .001, d = 1.04, CI95\% [.73, 1.35]$. Participants evaluated informing on a moral transgression ($M = 5.42, SD = 1.25$) as more moral than not informing ($M = 3.96, SD = 1.54$). There was again no main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' moral evaluations did not significantly differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.55, SD = 1.62$) rather than an acquaintance ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.53$), $F(1, 180) = 1.33, p = .250, d = -.16, CI95\% [-.45, .13]$. Finally, again, there was no Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction, $F(1, 180) = .121, p = .728, \eta^2 = .0007$.

Would the same patterns arise for witnessing *incompetent* behavior? We next conducted 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) x 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Acquaintance) ANOVA for the morality measure in our incompetence conditions. Here, as predicted, there was no main effect of Witness Behavior, suggesting that participants' moral evaluations of the witness did not differ when informing on the wrongdoer ($M = 4.74, SD = 1.54$) rather than not informing ($M = 4.77, SD = 1.33$), $F(1,185) = .019, p = .889, d = -.02, CI95\% [-.31, .27]$. Neither was there a main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' moral evaluations did not differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.91, SD = 1.37$) rather than acquaintances ($M = 4.59, SD = 1.48$), $F(1,185) = 2.27, p =$

.133, $d = .22$, $CI95\%[-.07, .51]$. Finally, there was no Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction $F(1, 185) = .574$, $p = .598$, $\eta^2 = .002$.

Figure 3

Note. Means and standard error of morality by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, Witness Behavior, and type of behavior to inform on for Study 2.

Discussion

In the context of moral violations, participants again evaluated informing on a friend as more moral than not informing. Further, in a replication of the key result from Study 2, participants again evaluated informing on friends and acquaintances to be similarly moral, although they again saw the former as much less loyal (see SOM). Importantly, we observed a different pattern of results when people informed on non-moral violations (i.e., an employee's incompetence). When the witness had information about a friend or an acquaintance's

incompetent behavior in the workplace, those who informed on friends were not regarded as more moral. At the same time, participants evaluated the witness as less loyal when informing on others, regardless of the type of information that they were informing on (i.e., morally relevant or not morally relevant; see SOM). In line with our account, these results suggest that people think it is immoral to conceal immoral misdeeds specifically, not merely to conceal any relevant information.

Study 3

In Studies 1–2, we found that people who turn in friends for moral violations are judged to be more moral than those who do not. Is this because snitching on others is an unimpeachably noble action? We do not think this is likely. There are a variety of reasons why someone may inform on another person. A witness who informs might be motivated by moral concern, but they might also be motivated by other factors like personal animus or self-interest (Butler et al., 2020). Do these different motives factor into moral judgments of informing?

In Study 3, we manipulated the relationship between the witness and wrongdoer to test how being motivated by personal animus (a motive for snitching behavior, Devine & Aplin, 1986) shapes third-party judgments of the witness's morality and loyalty. Specifically, we compare people who inform on friends vs. co-workers that they specifically dislike. In the disliked co-worker condition, informing can be attributed to a desire to hurt one's adversary rather than by genuine moral concern, which we expected should attenuate the link between informing and being seen as moral.

Method

Participants. 199 MTurkers participated ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.09$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 12.65$; 54% female). Our sensitivity measure indicated that this sample size would provide 80% power to detect an effect of $\eta^2 = .04$.

Procedure. Participants followed the same procedure as past studies, and we used the scenarios from Study 3. Participants read about a witness who was either friends with the wrongdoer or who specifically did not like the wrongdoer. Participants then read that the witness either informed or did not inform (see Appendix A for full text vignettes).

Measures

After reading the scenario, participants answered the same questions as in Studies 1–2.

Results

Morality. A 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Disliked Co-worker) x 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) ANOVA on the morality measure revealed a main effect of Witness Behavior, $F(1, 195) = 12.73$, $p < .001$, $d = .50$, $CI95\% [.22, .78]$. This result indicates that participants evaluated informing ($M = 4.91$, $SD = 1.55$) as more moral than not informing ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.44$). We did not find a main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' moral evaluations did not differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.53$) rather than a disliked co-worker ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 1.56$), $F(1, 195) = .002$, $p = .966$, $d = .002$, $CI95\% [-.28, .28]$. However, we found a Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction, $F(1, 195) = 7.37$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .036$.

Planned contrasts revealed that, in line with past studies, participants evaluated the witness as more moral when informing on a friend ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.43$) rather than not informing ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.34$), $t(195) = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $d = .94$, $CI95\% [.53, 1.35]$. However, participants' judgments of the morality of the witness did not significantly differ when informing

on a co-worker they did not like ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.63$) rather than not informing ($M = 4.46$, $SD = 1.50$), $t(195) = .55$, $p = .585$, $d = .10$, $CI95\%[-.30, .51]$.

Loyalty. A 2 (Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship: Friend or Disliked Co-worker) x 2 (Witness Behavior: Inform or Not Inform) ANOVA on the loyalty of the actor measure revealed a main effect of Witness Behavior, suggesting that participants evaluated the actor as more loyal when not informing ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.39$) rather than informing ($M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.67$), $F(1,195) = 62.65$, $p < .001$, $d = -1.10$, $CI95\%[-1.40, -.80]$. We did not find a main effect of Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship, suggesting that participants' evaluations of the loyalty of the witness did not differ when the witness was friends with the wrongdoer ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.95$) rather than a disliked co-worker ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 1.53$), $F(1, 195) = .644$, $p = .423$, $d = .09$, $CI95\%[-.19, .37]$. Indeed, in both Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship conditions, participants evaluated the witness as far less loyal for informing compared to not informing ($p < .001$). Finally, there was a Witness Behavior by Witness-Wrongdoer Relationship interaction, $F(1, 195) = 8.91$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2 = .043$.

We followed-up on this interaction and found that participants evaluated the witness as similarly loyal when informing on a friend ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.73$) compared to a disliked co-worker they did not like very much ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.59$), $t(195) = 1.52$, $p = .129$, $d = .62$, $CI95\%[.20, 1.03]$. However, participants evaluated the witness as more loyal when not informing on a friend ($M = 5.80$, $SD = 1.39$) compared to not informing on a co-worker they did not like very much ($M = 4.97$, $SD = 1.28$), $t(195) = 2.69$, $p = .008$, $d = -.28$, $CI95\%[-.67, .12]$.

Figure 4

Note. Means and standard error of morality and loyalty for Study 3.

Robustness Test

In Supplemental Study 5, we replicated the results of Study 3 using a different type of witness motive: the witness would personally benefit from informing on the target (see SOM for details).

Discussion

Study 3 reveals an important boundary condition on the morality of snitching: the presence of ulterior motives. Informing was not seen as more morally preferable than not informing when informing could be attributed to interpersonal animus. We also replicated our previous results, finding that, in the absence of such motives, people think that informing on a friend for a moral violation is more moral than not informing. Taken together, these results

suggest that although informing is not sensitive to loyalty-based obligations (e.g., close friendships), it is sensitive to information that implies an ulterior motive.

Study 4

We have identified an important tradeoff associated with behaving loyally in snitching contexts: Not informing on a friend's moral violations can lead one to seem less moral. The goal of Study 4 was to examine how this apparent tradeoff (between acting loyally and acting morally) impacts observers' preference of partners in an incentivized cooperation game. Our previous studies have demonstrated that, in some contexts, people prefer those who inform (e.g., for leadership positions) and in other contexts they prefer those who do not inform (e.g., for friends). Here, we tested whether people's preference for a loyal or moral cooperative partner would impact whether they want a partner who would or would not inform on a friend's moral infraction. We opted for the Prisoner's Dilemma (PD) because it is a game where people might select a partner based on overall morality or loyalty, which should provide some heterogeneity in participants' responses. This design allowed us to extend our findings in two ways. First, we hypothesized that partner choice would be linked to their intuition about who was more likely to cooperate: someone who was moral or someone who was loyal. That is, if people think that morality drives cooperative behavior in the prisoner's dilemma, then they should be more likely to choose a partner that would inform on a close friend rather than a partner who would not. Relatedly, if people think that loyalty drives cooperative behavior, then they should be more likely to select a partner that would not inform on a close friend. A secondary goal was to examine if the upstanding snitch pattern held even in cases where someone selected their partner. For example, if someone selected a partner who would not inform, did they see that person as loyal, but immoral (as in our previous studies), or did they see that person as both loyal and

moral? If the former ended up being true, this would be a strong demonstration of the putative tradeoff we have explored thus far: even for people who prefer the person who does not inform, they might still recognize that not informing is immoral.

Method

Participants. We recruited 100 MTurkers ($M_{\text{age}} = 38.83$; $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.46$; 41% female), based on a recruiting heuristic of 100 participants per within-subjects condition.

Procedure. Participants were told that they would be playing a game with another participant with the opportunity to earn real bonus money. Participants then learned the rules of a standard PD game, and were told that both their decision and their partner's decision in the game would matter for their final payout (see Appendix A for the instructions and payoff visualization we provided).

After learning the rules of the game, participants were then told that they had been matched with two potential partners, Partner A and Partner B, and that they would select with whom to play. Participants then read a scenario involving a witness who learned about a friend stealing money from work. They were instructed that two other participants had seen the same scenario and had indicated how they would behave in it (either informing or not informing; see Appendix A for the specific scenario). Partner A had indicated that they would not inform on their close friend in this situation, and that Participant B had indicated that they would inform on their close friend. Participants then chose either A or B to be their partner for the PD game, decided whether or not to cooperative with them, and answered a few more questions.⁵

⁵ This study used a non-deceptive design. The potential partners that we told participants they could choose to play with were real people who had participated in a pre-survey where we presented them with the snitching scenario (see Appendix A), and asked how they would navigate it. Then, in the pre-survey, we described the rules of the Prisoner's Dilemma game to them, and told participants that they would be randomly matched with a partner in a few days, who will indicate their response, and then we will pay them based on their choice and their partner's choice. The participants in this study were all matched with a participant from the pre-survey, and were paid based on their response and the response of their selected partner.

Measures

Our DV was participants' partner choice between A and B. Our central variable of interest asked participants to evaluate whether morality or loyalty is a more important value in a partner when thinking about the "ideal partner" for the PD game (i.e., someone who would produce the highest payout; 1 = *loyalty is more important*, 7 = *morality is more important*). We were particularly interested in exploring if participant values predicted their partner choice.

For exploratory purposes, we asked participants to evaluate how moral and loyal they thought their selected partner was, both of which were assessed on 7-point Likert scales (1 = *not at all*, 7 = *extremely*). We then asked participants whether they themselves would inform or not inform on their close friend in the scenario.

Results

Overall, partner selection between the potential partner who informed compared to not informed was exactly 50%. Rates of cooperation between partner choices were nearly identical: 84% of participants who selected the partner who informed on a close friend cooperated with the partner, and 82% of participants who selected the partner who did not inform on a close friend cooperated with the partner. As noted in our pre-registration, we anticipated that rates of cooperation may be highly similar given one's partner choice, because presumably people are selecting partners with the greatest cooperation potential.

Our primary focus was to determine if participants' desired values in a cooperative partner predicted their partner selection decision. We regressed participants' partner choices onto the measure of preferred partner values, and found that this measure was related to the partner choice variable: the more people emphasized morality as a more important value than loyalty in an ideal partner, the more likely they were to select the partner who chose to inform on their

close friend at work, $b = .40$, 95%CI s [.173, .641], $SE = .12$, Wald = 11.17, $p = .001$, Odds Ratio = 1.49.

Finally, we set out to test how moral and loyal people viewed their partner, predicting that these judgments would correspond to the findings reported in the previous studies. Specifically, we found that even participants who selected the partner who did not inform on a close friend evaluated their partner as not particularly moral ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.23$) and much less moral than participants who selected a partner who did inform ($M = 6.44$, $SD = .76$), $t(82) = 10.94$, $p < .001$, $d = -2.19$, $CI95\%[-2.69, -1.69]$. Further, we found that participants who selected the partner who did inform on their close friend evaluated their partner as not particularly loyal ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.80$) and, much less loyal than participants who selected the partner who did not inform on their close friend ($M = 5.94$, $SD = 1.10$), $t(81) = 5.85$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.17$, $CI95\%[.74, 1.60]$. Indeed, regardless of who they chose as their cooperative partner, people generally thought those who informed were moral, but disloyal and that those who did not inform were immoral, but loyal.

Discussion

The results provide further evidence of the tradeoff that potential whistleblowers face between being moral and being loyal. In an incentivized cooperation game, participants had to choose a cooperation partner, selecting between one who they believed would inform on a close friend's immoral act, or one who they believed would not inform. Interestingly, participants were quite divided, with half selecting the informer and half selecting the non-informer. In line with our hypotheses, participants' partner selection mapped onto their preferences of values in a partner: participants who valued morality more in a cooperative partner selected a partner who said that they would inform on a friend, rather than a partner who said that they would not

inform on a friend. Furthermore, we found that regardless of who they selected, participants recognized this tradeoff between morality and loyalty: believing that those who inform are moral, but not very loyal and vice versa for those who do not inform.

General Discussion

Across four pre-registered studies, we found support for the Upstanding Snitch hypothesis: People thought that it was broadly moral for a witness to turn in a friend who committed a moral transgression, despite the fact that doing so was seen as substantially less loyal than keeping one's mouth shut. Indeed, people viewed those who snitched on friends to be as moral as those who snitch on acquaintances. Moreover, although they recognized that snitches might make crummy friends, participants thought snitches would make better leaders (Studies 1–3, Supplemental Studies 1–5). These results reveal an important tradeoff faced by witnesses who discover wrongdoing by their friends: they can be moral or loyal, but not both. This tradeoff arises because, although being loyal is typically consistent with being moral, the link between loyalty and morality is broken when being loyal means abetting others' moral transgressions.

This tradeoff potential whistleblowers face mapped onto incentivized partner selection decisions that people made for a cooperative game (Study 4). Interestingly, there was heterogeneity in people's preference for a partner who was more moral or loyal and we found that this predicted partner choice: people who wanted a moral partner picked the snitch and vice versa.

We also identified boundary conditions clarifying the scope of our findings. First, the type of information being snitched on mattered for judgments of morality and loyalty. When a witness knew that a friend was incompetent at their job, people did not regard it as more moral to inform (vs. not inform) relevant authorities (Study 2). Second, we demonstrated that witness'

preexisting motives matter when evaluating their behavior. When the witness had a potential ulterior motive for snitching (i.e., the wrongdoer was a co-worker that they did not like), they were no longer seen as more moral for snitching than not snitching (Study 3). Importantly, these results demonstrate that snitching is not an undeniably moral action. Contextual and interpersonal factors *can* make snitching seem morally wrong; but, loyalty obligations to the transgressor do not appear to be among them.

Implications

These data have implications for research on morality, specifically the role of loyalty in judgments of moral character. Loyalty is often regarded as a central component of morality (Rai & Fiske, 2011; Shweder et al., 1997), and is included in major theories of morality (Curry et al., 2019; Graham et al., 2011). Prior research has documented that fulfilling loyalty-based obligations can signal good moral character, consistently finding that prioritizing the needs of close others is judged positively (e.g., Forbes & Stellar, 2021; Hughes, 2017; Weidman et al., 2020), even when doing so means pursuing ostensibly less moral behavior (Everett et al., 2018; Hughes, 2017; McManus et al., 2020). Moreover, when people behave immorally, they often do so to benefit close others (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Hildreth & Anderson, 2018; Liu et al., 2020). Such results suggest that loyalty plays a strong role in broader perceptions of morality.

Our results add an important qualification: Being loyal does not appear to boost perceptions of moral character when it requires enabling morally bad behavior from friends. Most prior work demonstrates that people evaluate others as moral for being loyal to an *innocent friend*. However, our results suggest that in cases where being loyal means helping a *guilty* friend, people think that the moral thing to do is to forgo the obligations of loyalty and snitch. In line with this idea, we found that the moral benefits of snitching are far-ranging: people thought

the snitch valued every moral foundation but loyalty more than the non-snitch (Supplemental Study 4). This advances previous work finding that snitches are seen as valuing fairness over loyalty by demonstrating that snitches are seen as valuing a variety of moral values, including general morality, over loyalty.

Second, our work has implications for research on whistleblowing. Past work has explored what kinds of concerns push people to blow (or not to blow) the whistle (Butler et al., 2020; Dungan et al., 2019; Forbes & Stellar, 2021; Latan et al., 2021; Lee & Holyoak, 2021; Near & Niceli, 1985; Spoelma et al., 2021; Weidman et al., 2020). We build on this work by exploring how *third-parties* evaluate those who blow the whistle (i.e., snitch). Adding this observer perspective helps to illuminate the broader social incentives (or disincentives) for bringing transgressions to light. If blowing the whistle on one's friends at work makes one appear an immoral traitor, then one will naturally be less willing to do so. However, we find that in most cases people think whistleblowers are highly moral, even when blowing the whistle on a close friend, suggesting that snitches may have little to fear on this dimension.

Finally, our results reveal the complexities inherent to balancing different, and sometimes competing, reputational goals. Many models emphasize the importance of partner choice and suggest that people are often cooperative and moral to signal their desirability as social partners (for review see, Baumard et al., 2013). However, managing moral impressions is complex. People don't face a choice between having a good or a bad reputation, but rather a series of tradeoffs between different kinds of reputation or different traits that help one achieve specific goals (Shaw et al., 2019; Silver et al., 2021; Steinmetz et al., 2017). Being honest may entail seeming unkind (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015); being fair may entail seeming wasteful (Choshen-Hillel et al., 2015); and being impartial may make one seem untrustworthy (Everett et al., 2018).

Our results highlight another such tension inherent to close relationships. When a friend does something wrong, a witness must decide whether they would rather be seen as someone who is loyal at all costs, or someone who will set personal relationships aside to do the right thing.

Limitations & Future Directions

We also note a few important limitations and opportunities for future scholarship. First, our studies focused on WEIRD participants (Henrich et al., 2010), which are thought to place a high premium on fairness and less emphasis on binding foundations like loyalty. Because many of the findings we reviewed also come from Western samples, our findings can nevertheless speak to relevant ongoing debates. Although loyalty is considered a foundational value across cultures (Rai & Fiske, 2011), the degree to which a given culture values loyalty or accepts favoritism can vary substantially (Fiske & Rai, 2015; Graham et al., 2011; Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1994). Future work should consider how group differences in emphasis on loyalty shape perceptions of whistleblowing across cultures.

Second, our work has focused on third-party judgments of others who snitch. It was not designed to test decisions about whether to snitch directly, nor how transgressors view snitches who turn them in. As noted above, there is already a wealth of research that has explored how snitches themselves navigate these tradeoffs (e.g., Dungan et al., 2019; Forbes & Stellar, 2021; Weidman et al., 2020; Waytz et al., 2013), but this work does not give us direct information about how third parties evaluate such behavior. Our core interest was in understanding how uninvolved third-parties judge snitching because of what it reveals theoretically about the nature of the relationship between loyalty and morality, and what it reveals about the broader social incentives and disincentives for whistleblowers in society. In many real-world cases of whistleblowing at work, as in our vignettes, the majority of people may be acquaintances of the

parties involved, but are not directly connected to either party socially—i.e., they do not hold interpersonal motivations to view the action more or less leniently. And it is important to understand how such individuals feel about those who opt to snitch or not, in order to better understand the reputational consequences for snitching. Of course, we acknowledge that the transgressors being snitched on will likely feel less positively about the snitch than third parties, but that was not the focus of the current manuscript.⁶

Third, it is worth noting that our work is not suggesting that people will always do the moral thing and turn in their friends. If anything, people may feel strong pressure not to turn in their friends (Lee & Holyoak 2020), whose transgressions they may view more leniently and less deserving of punishment (e.g., Forbes & Stellar 2021; Weideman et al., 2020). An interesting question for future work concerns whether witnesses have accurate expectations about how they will be viewed in these contexts. Snitches probably understand that snitching will seem disloyal, but do they also worry about seeming broadly immoral (beyond to those they are implicating)? If they do, correcting this misperception may encourage whistleblowing. By contrast, emphasizing the importance of loyalty (e.g., the bonds of family and friendship within an organization) may inadvertently reduce it.

Finally, we speculate that people may sometimes evaluate snitching on a friend as *more moral* than snitching on an acquaintance if people recognize the inherent difficulty in turning in one's friends. That is, snitching on a friend (rather than an acquaintance) could have been seen as especially moral given the higher social costs to snitching when the transgressor is a friend.

⁶ A related line of work from Monin and colleagues (2008) sheds some light on this point. These authors found that “moral rebels,” people who go against the status quo (e.g., by speaking out on moral issues) in the name of their principles, are viewed favorably by neutral others, but unfavorably by people who are implicated by their behavior (Monin et al., 2008; Monin & O'Connor, 2011). In a sense, the witnesses we studied here represent a special case of moral rebellion: Forgoing the ties of loyalty to close others to expose their wrongdoing. Thus, work on moral rebels offers an interesting extension for future inquiry: Although unbiased observers may reward snitches with higher evaluations of moral character, transgressors and their allies might have harsher views of snitching.

Although we did not observe such an effect here, we do find that contextual factors can impact the morality of snitching in general. If the strong social risks that snitching on friends entails were highlighted, witnesses may seem *more* moral for turning in friends as compared to acquaintances.

Conclusion

It often seems morally right to loyally protect and favor close others (e.g., Forbes & Stellar, 2021; Weidman et al., 2020). However, we found that in one important context, the connection between loyalty and morality is severed. Across four pre-registered studies, we find that when close others transgress, people think it is quite moral to forsake loyalty and turn them in. Of course, this behavior comes at a cost: Snitching harms perceived loyalty and diminishes friendship potential. These findings suggest a qualification to the classic adage: Snitches may get stitches in terms of their reputation as a good friend, but at the same time they benefit by improving their moral reputation.

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Appendix A

Vignette Text for all Studies

Study 1

Friend Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake and Lucas are both employees at a major technology company, and they have been close friends for many years. Recently they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he has been selling company secrets to their company's competitors. Jake is surprised by this behavior and realizes that no one has found out yet.

A few days after the conference, Jake is in a meeting at the company. During the meeting one of the managers speaks up and asks, "we have been informed that someone within the company has been selling some of our confidential ideas for a profit. Does anyone know anything about this theft? We have the police on site so that we can issue an arrest as soon as we have more details that point to the culprit."

Jake realizes that this person is asking about his close friend's unethical behavior. He remembers that Lucas told him that he has been selling the company's confidential ideas for a profit. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, "I know Lucas personally. He told me that he has been stealing our confidential ideas and selling them to our competitors for a profit"]**.

Acquaintance Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake and Lucas are both employees at a major technology company, but they are not particularly close and do not know each other well. Recently they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he has been selling company secrets to their company's competitors. Jake is surprised by this behavior and realizes that no one has found out yet.

A few days after the conference, Jake is in a meeting at the company. During the meeting one of the managers speaks up and asks, "we have been informed that someone within the company has been selling some of our confidential ideas for a profit. Does anyone know anything about this theft? We have the police on site so that we can issue an arrest as soon as we have more details that point to the culprit."

Jake realizes that this person is asking about Lucas, the person who he recently got drinks with. He remembers that Lucas told him that he has been selling the company's confidential ideas for a profit. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas / Jake decides**

to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, “I recently met Lucas and had drinks with him. He told me that he has been stealing our confidential ideas and selling them to our competitors for a profit”].

Study 2

Scenario for snitching on immoral behavior

Friend Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are close friends, and they see each other’s work featured in tech write-ups. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud. He is a terrible coder and actually often steals code from others. Jake thinks about this and realizes that he has never seen Lucas produce any original code because Lucas must steal it all, but no one has found out yet.

A few months later, Jake is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas’s company asks, “does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?”

Jake realizes that the man is asking about his close friend Lucas. He remembers that Lucas told him that he steals his code and claims it as his own. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, “I know Lucas personally. He tends to steal code and claim that it is his own.”]**

Acquaintance Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are not particularly close and do not know each other well, but they see each other’s work featured in tech write-ups. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud. He is a terrible coder and actually often steals code from others. Jake thinks about this and realizes that he has never seen Lucas produce any original code because Lucas must steal it all, but no one has found out yet.

A few months later, Jake is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas’s company asks, “does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others

if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?”

Jake realizes that the man is asking about Lucas, the person he had drinks with at the conference. He remembers that Lucas told him that he steals his code and claims it as his own. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, “I recently met Lucas and had drinks with him. He told me that he tends to steal code and claim that it is his own.”]**

Scenario for snitching on incompetence

Friend Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are close friends. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud who cannot competently code. He is a terrible coder and does not really know what he is doing. Jake thinks about this and is surprised that Lucas has been able to survive in the industry as an incompetent coder.

A few months later, Jake is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas’s company asks, “does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?”

Jake realizes that the man is asking about his close friend Lucas. He remembers that Lucas told him that he cannot competently code. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, “I know Lucas personally. He currently lacks the ability to code well.”]**

Acquaintance Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are not particularly close and do not know each other well. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud who cannot competently code. He is a terrible coder and does not really know what he is doing. Jake thinks about this and is surprised that Lucas has been able to survive in the industry as an incompetent coder.

A few months later, Jake is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas's company asks, "does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?"

Jake realizes that the man is asking about Lucas, the person he had drinks with at the conference. He remembers that Lucas told him that he cannot competently code. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, "I recently met Lucas and had drinks with him. He told me that he currently lacks the ability to code well."]**

Study 3

Friend Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are close friends, and they see each other's work featured in tech write-ups. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud. He is a terrible coder and actually often steals code from others. Jake thinks about this and realizes that he has never seen Lucas produce any original code because Lucas must steal it all, but no one has found out yet.

A few months later, Jake Is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas's company asks, "does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?"

Jake realizes that the man is asking about his close friend Lucas. He remembers that Lucas told him that he steals his code and claims it as his own. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, "I know Lucas personally. He tends to steal code and claim that it is his own."]**

Disliked Co-Worker Scenarios [what appears first in brackets is not inform condition / inform condition]:

Jake is a developer at a major company in the health industry, and Lucas is a developer at a major company in the social media industry. Jake and Lucas are not friends and do not like each other very much, but they see each other's work featured in tech write-ups. Recently, they were both together at a conference and over a few drinks Lucas told Jake that he is a fraud. He is a terrible coder and actually often steals code from others. Jake thinks about this and realizes that

he has never seen Lucas produce any original code because Lucas must steal it all, but no one has found out yet.

A few months later, Jake is in a seminar at another tech conference when someone from Lucas's company asks, "does anyone know Lucas Sullivan, a developer at my company? I am considering promoting him to Senior Developer in our company, and I want to know from others if he is really as good of a coder as he seems. It is a high stake position that only our best can succeed in. Does anyone know him personally and can speak to his coding skills?"

Jake realizes that the man is asking about Lucas, the guy he does not really like. He remembers that Lucas told him that he steals his code and claims it as his own. **[Jake decides to stay quiet and keep the secret between him and Lucas. / Jake decides to speak-up. He raises his hand and says, "I know Lucas and recently had drinks with him. He told me that he tends to steal code and claim that it is his own."]**

Study 4

Below are the instructions for the prisoner's dilemma game that participants read, as well as the payoff matrix with which we supplemented the instructions. After the payoff matrix, you will find the snitching scenario that participants were told their potential partners responded to.

Instructions:

In the RELIABILITY GAME, the rules are simple.

You and **one** other player will make simultaneous decisions.

- You will choose whether to RELY ON or AVOID your partner.
- Your partner will choose whether to RELY ON or AVOID you.

Your bonus will depend both on what you decide and also on what your partner decides.

Click next to learn how your decisions impact one another.

Visual Payoff Matrix:

THE RELIABILITY GAME

YOU
YOUR PARTNER

And YOUR PARTNER chooses...

RELY AVOID

If YOU choose...

RELY AVOID

RELY	<p>22 CENTS</p> <p>22 CENTS</p>	<p>30 CENTS</p> <p>0 CENTS</p>
AVOID	<p>0 CENTS</p> <p>30 CENTS</p>	<p>5 CENTS</p> <p>5 CENTS</p>

Snitching scenario that participants were told their potential partners responded to (in the survey, we highlighted the first option for Partner A, and the second option for Partner B):

Scenario

Imagine that you work at a company alongside a close friend of yours. While at work, you witness this colleague and close friend steal money off of your manager's desk. Your manager knows that someone stole the money, but he has no idea who stole it. In fact, you are the only person in the office who saw your friend steal the money.

You have two options. You can either keep silent and not tell your manager who took the money, or you can speak up and inform your manager about what happened. What would you do in this situation?

I would remain silent and NOT INFORM on my friend for stealing

I would speak up and inform on my friend for stealing