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Teen Opinion

By Alexandra Gold

As the first semester of junior year comes to an end, competitive spirit runs wild through our veins, sparking 2 a.m. cram sessions and strenuous breaks spent refreshing School Loop for the updated grade report.

Despite popular belief, this overwhelming competition is not essential to pushing hard work; what was once a lighthearted journey to societal standards of success has turned into a crippling battle to reach the top of the class, or at minimum the highest of the colleges one is aiming for.

Competition has become the fuel that spurs envy, self-loathing, and a defeated sense of self. Rather than an excerpt from a charming '80s movie filled with laughter and preoccupied teenagers, high school has become a warzone, with our peers as the enemy and college as the prize.

It feels like we're always telling adults that learning simply is not how it used to be, or tallying the reasons why the pressure of a competitive school district eliminates the effort for genuine progress, (frequently misinterpreted as childish complaining of sleepless nights and pointless exams) but all to no avail. The pressure to be accepted into a name-brand college and head off to a successful, money-generating career overpowers the search for a life suited to the individual, in a location designed for one's own tastes, and a job path that will ensure not only security but joy.

Don't get me wrong, the prospect of a financial safety net and college degree are goals in my own life, and I work just as hard in school as the next suburban teenager, but it often feels as though even someone else's failures are more impressive than my own successes.

How will I get into college if I'm not nearly as intelligent as them? This is our root issue: if we define ourselves by others triumphs, we will never find pride in our own, because comparison is eternally the thief of joy.

Thus, upon further reflection, we must learn to weed out the envious glares shot at the ideal student, the copious amounts of self hatred, and the desperate glances at one another's exam scores, and do this wearying work for ourselves, because in the end, that's all we have: ourselves.

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