Principal Smith is well versed in the topic of bullying and committed to providing students a safe place to learn. Throughout her career as a teacher and an administrator, she has worked to prevent bullying in her school environment and also developed several anti-bullying educational materials and campaigns for Fairweather Middle School. She had done quite a bit of research on what is considered to be a violation of free speech when the students’ actions may take place after school hours or off campus.

She was well aware that if the actions took place off campus or after hours and the school attempted to address it, they could potentially be sued for exceeding their authority or violating the students’ freedom of speech. That said, she formed the school committee that created the off-campus clause in the school’s acceptable use policy. This provision would enable school administrators to address possible acts of bullying among their students regardless of where and when the potential bullying took place. It should also be noted that Fairweather has a zero tolerance policy when it comes to bullying, with acts being punished with expulsion from the school.

Principal Smith felt confident in her knowledge on bullying so she was completely taken aback at the situation that the Assistant Vice Principal, Mr. Johnson brought to her attention. Earlier that day, Mr. Johnson had been approached by Tom, a 7th grade student. Tom was very good friends with Steve and Ryan who were characteristically good students, though they did seem to get in some trouble now and again. Apparently, a few weeks ago, Steve, Ryan and Tom were playing some online, chat-based video games against some of their other classmates. While they were online, they created a request, to Patrick, another of their classmates. Patrick accepted the request and the boys continued playing the game against each other.

During the course of the gameplay, it was apparent that Patrick was very good at the game. He was definitely in a “virtual” position of power — which is something he never experienced within the classroom. Patrick was typically one of the shy, quiet students who kept to himself. Steve & Ryan, who were not used to being displaced by Patrick, began saying things to Patrick like: “You may be good at this game, but you are a loser in school” and “You might as well just stay home tomorrow — even though you can beat us in this game, we will beat you up for real the next time we see you.”

While all of this was going on, Tom was actually using the recording device on his electronic tablet to record what the boys were saying to Patrick. He recorded about 5 minutes worth of dialogue between Steve and Ryan and the comments that they were making to Patrick. Steve and Ryan had no idea that they were being videoed during this time. Tom thought it might be funny to share the video later to get a rise out of Patrick. Eventually, Patrick beat Steve and Ryan in the virtual game and the session ended.

Patrick was absent from school for the next few days. Feeling guilty about the comments that were made by his friends and thinking that perhaps this is what was driving Patrick’s absence,
Tom brought the video to Mr. Johnson and showed him what happened. He felt that reporting the bullying was the right thing to do. Mr. Johnson now had proof that Patrick had been bullied by Steve and Ryan, but was hesitant to use the video since it was taken without the boys’ knowledge. He also wondered whether he should include Tom as one of the bullies since he was with Steve and Ryan during the occurrence. Finally, at this point, he had not heard from Patrick’s parents as to why he was absent and was deciding whether he should reach out to them and try to get information or just let things settle and see what happens. Perhaps his absence was simply a coincidence.

Mr. Johnson discussed the situation with Principal Smith, since she was so knowledgeable about the topics of bullying and the acceptable use policy of the school. Principal Smith is now faced with the dilemma of what to do with the students and the issues presented.

**Questions for Discussion**

1. What alternative actions might Principal Smith consider if she were coming from an ethic of justice? (Remember that justice also includes fairness.)
2. What elements of this dilemma lend themselves to a caring approach? An analysis using the ethic of critique?
3. What would the profession expect of Principal Smith?
4. What would you do if you were Mr. Johnson? Principal Smith? Why?