

Hazing Defined

"Hazing" refers to any activity expected of someone joining a group (or to maintain full status in a group) that humiliates, degrades or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. In years past, hazing practices were typically considered harmless pranks or comical antics associated with young men in college fraternities.

Today we know that hazing extends far beyond college fraternities and is experienced by boys/men and girls/women in school groups, university organizations, athletic teams, the military, and other social and professional organizations. Hazing is a complex social problem that is shaped by power dynamics operating in a group and/or organization and within a particular cultural context.

Hazing activities are generally considered to be: physically abusive, hazardous, and/or sexually violating. The specific behaviors or activities within these categories vary widely among participants, groups and settings. While alcohol use is common in many types of hazing, other examples of typical hazing practices include: personal servitude; sleep deprivation and restrictions on personal hygiene; yelling, swearing and insulting new members/rookies; being forced to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire in public; consumption of vile substances or smearing of such on one's skin; brandings; physical beatings; binge drinking and drinking games; sexual simulation and sexual assault.

Some common definitions and examples of hazing are below:

In the Alfred/NCAA survey of college athletes, hazing was defined as:

"any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. This does not include activities such as rookies carrying the balls, team parties with community games, or going out with your teammates, unless an atmosphere of humiliation, degradation, abuse or danger arises."

"Hazing is an activity that a high-status member orders other members to engage in or suggests that they engage in that in some way humbles a newcomer who lacks the power to resist, because he or she want to gain admission to a group. Hazing can be noncriminal, but it is nearly always against the rules of an institution, team, or Greek group. It can be criminal, which means that a state statute has been violated. This usually occurs when a pledging-related activity results in gross physical injury or death" (from Hank Nuwer's book *Wrongs of Passage*, 1999, p. xxv).

Hazing is defined by the FIPG (Fraternal Information Programming Group) as:

"Any action taken or situation created, intentionally, whether on or off fraternity premises, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule. Such activities may include but are not limited to the following: use of alcohol; paddling in any form; creation of excessive fatigue; physical and psychological shocks; quests, treasure hunts, scavenger hunts, road trips or any other such activities carried on outside or inside of the confines of the chapter house; wearing of public apparel which is conspicuous and not normally in good taste; engaging in public stunts and buffoonery; morally degrading or humiliating games and activities; and any other activities which are not consistent with fraternal law, ritual or policy or the regulations and policies of the educational institution."

"1. If you have to ask if it's hazing, it is.

2. If in doubt, call your advisor/coach/national office. If you won't pick up the phone, you have your answer. Don't B.S. yourself.

3. If you haze, you have low self-esteem.

4. If you allow hazing to occur, you are a 'hazing enabler.'

5. Failure to stop hazing will result in death..."

Will Keim, Ph.D., "The Power of Caring"

The following are some examples of hazing divided into three categories: subtle, harassment, and violent. It is impossible to list all possible hazing behaviors because many are context-specific. While this is not an all-inclusive list, it provides some common examples of hazing traditions.

[More Examples.](#)

A. SUBTLE HAZING:

Behaviors that emphasize a power imbalance between new members/rookies and other members of the group or team. Termed “subtle hazing” because these types of hazing are often taken-for-granted or accepted as “harmless” or meaningless. Subtle hazing typically involves activities or attitudes that breach reasonable standards of mutual respect and place new members/rookies on the receiving end of ridicule, embarrassment, and/or humiliation tactics. New members/rookies often feel the need to endure subtle hazing to feel like part of the group or team. (Some types of subtle hazing may also be considered harassment hazing).

Some Examples:

- Deception
- Assigning demerits
- Silence periods with implied threats for violation
- Deprivation of privileges granted to other members
- Requiring new members/rookies to perform duties not assigned to other members
- Socially isolating new members/rookies
- Line-ups and Drills/Tests on meaningless information
- Name calling
- Requiring new members/rookies to refer to other members with titles (e.g. “Mr.,” “Miss”) while they are identified with demeaning terms
- Expecting certain items to always be in one's possession

B. HARASSMENT HAZING: Behaviors that cause emotional anguish or physical discomfort in order to feel like part of the group. Harassment hazing confuses, frustrates, and causes undue stress for new members/rookies. (Some types of harassment hazing can also be considered violent hazing).

Some Examples:

- Verbal abuse
- Threats or implied threats
- Asking new members to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire
- Stunt or skit nights with degrading, crude, or humiliating acts
- Expecting new members/rookies to perform personal service to other members such as carrying books, errands, cooking, cleaning etc
- Sleep deprivation
- Sexual simulations
- Expecting new members/rookies to be deprived of maintaining a normal schedule of bodily cleanliness.
- Be expected to harass others

C. VIOLENT HAZING : Behaviors that have the potential to cause physical and/or emotional, or psychological harm.

Some Examples:

- Forced or coerced alcohol or other drug consumption
- Beating, paddling, or other forms of assault
- Branding
- Forced or coerced ingestion of vile substances or concoctions
- Burning
- Water intoxication
- Expecting abuse or mistreatment of animals
- Public nudity
- Expecting illegal activity
- Bondage
- Abductions/kidnaps
- Exposure to cold weather or extreme heat without appropriate protection

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT HAZING

Myth #1: Hazing is a problem for fraternities and sororities primarily.

Fact: *Hazing is a societal problem. Hazing incidents have been frequently documented in the military, athletic teams, marching bands, religious cults, professional schools and other types of clubs and/or, organizations. Reports of hazing activities in high schools are on the rise.*

Myth #2: Hazing is no more than foolish pranks that sometimes go awry.

Fact: *Hazing is an act of power and control over others --- it is victimization. Hazing is pre-meditated and NOT accidental. Hazing is abusive, degrading and often life-threatening.*

Myth #3: As long as there's no malicious intent, a little hazing should be O.K.

Fact: *Even if there's no malicious "intent" safety may still be a factor in traditional hazing activities that are considered to be "all in good fun." For example, serious accidents have occurred during scavenger hunts and kidnapping trips. Besides, what purpose do such activities serve in promoting the growth and development of group team members?*

Myth #4: Hazing is an effective way to teach respect and develop discipline.

Fact: *First of all, respect must be EARNED--not taught. Victims of hazing rarely report having respect for those who have hazed them. Just like other forms of victimization, hazing breeds mistrust, apathy and alienation.*

Myth #5: If someone agrees to participate in an activity, it can't be considered hazing.

Fact: *In states that have laws against hazing consent of the victim can't be used as a defense in a civil suit. This is because even if someone agrees to participate in a potentially hazardous action it may not be true consent when considering the peer pressure and desire to belong to the group.*

Myth #6: It's difficult to determine whether or not a certain activity is hazing--it's such a gray area sometimes.

Fact: *It's not difficult to decide if an activity is hazing if you use common sense and ask yourself the following questions:*

Make the following inquiries of each activity to determine whether or not it is hazing.

- 1) Is alcohol involved?*
- 2) Will active/current members of the group refuse to participate with the new members and do exactly what they're being asked to do?*
- 3) Does the activity risk emotional or physical abuse?*
- 4) Is there risk of injury or a question of safety?*
- 5) Do you have any reservation describing the activity to your parents, to a professor or University official?*
- 6) Would you object to the activity being photographed for the school newspaper or filmed by the local TV news crew?*

If the answer to any of these questions is "yes," the activity is probably hazing.

Adapted from Death By Hazing Sigma Alpha Epsilon. 1988.

Will Keim has a similar approach to making decisions about hazing:

"1. If you have to ask if it's hazing, it is. 2. If in doubt, call your advisor/coach/national office. If you won't pick up the phone, you have your answer. Don't B.S. yourself.' 3. If you haze, you have low self-esteem. 4. If you allow hazing to occur, you are a 'hazing enabler.' 5. Failure to stop hazing will result in death..."

Will Keim, Ph.D., "The Power of Caring"

© Copyright StopHazing.org 1998-2005.

info@stophazing.org

www.stophazing.org

Making Change—You Can Make a Difference!

Elizabeth J. Allan

Eradicating hazing can seem like an overwhelming undertaking, but it's important to remember that every individual can play an important role in making positive change. Consider the following (adapted from Berkowitz, 1994) steps as a guide for thinking about how you can help make change:

Help others to:

1. Notice hazing.
2. Interpret hazing as a problem.
3. Recognize a responsibility to change it.
4. Acquire the skills needed to take action.
5. Take action!

According to this model, the most effective way to educate about hazing is to begin by drawing attention to hazing and helping others interpret hazing as a problem. Campus and school officials, and student leaders, can do this by publicizing hazing policies (or establishing policies when they don't exist); providing information to students parents, staff, faculty and community members about how to identify hazing and where to report it; providing assurances of support for those who do report being hazed, establishing consequences for those who participate in hazing; and most importantly, developing incentives for the implementation of non-hazing group initiations and activities.

Remember the adage: "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem." It's not difficult to become part of the solution. Begin by educating yourself and others about hazing. You might consider [reading a book](#) about hazing. Next, help to build awareness about hazing by talking with your friends, family and others about the issue. Help others to [re-define hazing](#) as a serious social problem—not simply harmless jokes, pranks and antics. Become a positive role model by talking with youth about hazing and making them aware of the [potential problems](#). Inform yourself of the [laws](#) and policies related to hazing in your community and school/college/university. Identify others in your school or community who are also concerned about hazing—have a meeting—talk about what you can do as a team to prevent harmful hazing.

Common Barriers to Changing a Hazing Culture

In order to make meaningful change, it is important to identify the key barriers to change and work on dismantling these. Common barriers to eliminating hazing include:

- Denial of the problem
- Dismissing hazing as harmless
- Silence
- Fear
- Insufficient support for victims of hazing
- [Cultural norms that promote acceptance of hazing as "normal"](#)

Hazing is a complex social problem with no "easy answers." Those of us who have worked with groups to transform a hazing culture know there are many challenges to making meaningful change. However, we must not forget that every individual has an important role to play in helping to solve the problem of hazing. Each individual action can make a difference. Together, we can continue to build awareness and develop effective intervention and prevention strategies to eliminate harmful hazing!

Do you have a success story to share? We'd like to hear it. Please send your hazing change-making story to info@stophazing.org

Source: Berkowitz, A. D. (Ed.). (1994). Men and rape: Theory, research and prevention programs in higher education. San Francisco : Jossey-Bass.

Contact Dr. Mari Ann Callais
www.marianncallais.com
mac@marianncallais.com
www.facebook.com/dr.marianncallais