Hazed and Confused: Transforming Hazing Cultures

by Elizabeth J. Allan, Ph.D.

Hazing is a social issue that is under-studied, under-discussed, and its power is all too often under-estimated. When I am asked to speak with groups about hazing in educational settings, I generally find there is widespread lack of awareness and common misunderstandings about what is meant by the term “hazing,” why hazing is a problem, and what can be done to change it. In order to begin a change-making process, we need to identify the problem and understand some of the complexities associated with it.

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.

Why is Hazing a Problem?

Hazing can involve seemingly harmless activities, but such activities often set the stage for more risky and potentially dangerous behaviors. The risk level of hazing can quickly escalate and take participants by surprise. Alcohol, uneven distribution of power among the group/peer pressure and groupthink are some of the factors that can impair judgment and contribute to increasing the danger level of hazing.

Hazing can be harmful on a number of levels and is often related to the following...
Hazing, cont’d from page 1

detrimental outcomes:
• Physical harm and death  
• Emotional harm  
• Student attrition  
• Breeding of mistrust among group members  
• Cultivation of a school/campus culture of abuse  
• Bad press for individuals, organization and school/campus or community  
• Lawsuits and liability  

In some cases, determining the risk level of hazing is fairly straightforward—as in the case of forced alcohol consumption. In other cases however, many point to the so called “grey areas” where it seems more complicated to predict whether or not a particular activity might be interpreted as hazing. While some activities may seem innocuous to one person, they may be considered humiliating, degrading and harmful to another. It is often difficult for students to judge when they are crossing the line from harmless to harmful. For instance, it is becoming increasingly common for women’s groups to involve sexual simulation in hazing rituals. While some suggest such an activity is just “a joke”; others consider it degrading, insulting and even threatening—especially for many young women who have experienced the threat of sexual harassment, stalking and/or assault. Students need guidance in helping them understand that hazing isn’t simply about the activity (though this is one factor), it’s also about the process—the ways in which power and control are exercised among group members and how new members or rookies are made to feel about their place in the group.

Making Change
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. I usually suggest the following steps (adapted from Berkowitz 1994) as a guide for thinking about change-making. I usually suggest the following sequential stages as a guide for thinking about change-making.

Help others to:
• Notice hazing.  
• Interpret hazing as a problem.  
• Recognize a responsibility to change it.  
• Acquire the skills needed to take action.  
• 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.

The Role of Research
Scholarly attention to hazing has also focused largely on the impact of hazing within athletics and Greek life. The most extensive empirical data regarding hazing practices were generated from the Alfred University/NCAA study on college athletes (1999), which found that over 76% of all athletes at more than 1,000 National Collegiate Athletic Association schools experienced some form of sports-related hazing during 1998-99. Other accounts of hazing have been provided by author/journalist Hank Nuwer (1990, 1999, 2000), and a number of thesis and dissertation studies have focused on hazing in the context of Greek life (Holmes, 1999; Lowery, 1998; Shaw, 1992) and athletics (Johnson, 2000).

The hazing problem in postsecondary education, however, is pervasive and moves well beyond athletic and fraternal environments, affecting students of diverse identities and experiences. While we know hazing incidents have been reported in marching bands, theatre groups, ski clubs, freshman camps, orientation groups, residence living units, and other social and academic clubs, no studies have yet collected data to document the nature and prevalence of hazing among all types of student groups on college campuses. Without this data, many are likely to view hazing as a problem for Greek-letter organizations and athletic teams only. Directing hazing education at these groups alone may jeopardize the health and safety of many who are subject to hazing in other types of student groups.

Research is also needed to help establish “best practices” in relation to hazing interventions. Scholars are now considering how hazing is shaped by many social and institutional forces rather than understanding it as solely a problem rooted in personality traits or other individual characteristics. Research is important because it will help us to clarify the causes of hazing, identify environmental and socio-economic factors, and create new strategies for eradicating harmful hazing activities.

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.

Help others to:

Notice hazing.
Interpret hazing as a problem.
Recognize a responsibility to change it.
Acquire the skills needed to take action.
Take action!
Research Summary and Progress to Date: Examining and Transforming Campus Hazing Cultures

by Elizabeth J. Allan, Ph.D., Principal Investigator

The NIF began a partnership with Elizabeth J. Allan, Ph.D. in 2002, providing funding for grant research for her research study “Examining and Transforming Campus Hazing Cultures.”

Overview of the Project

Once thought of as simply aberrant behavior perpetrated by a few isolated collegiate groups or teams and/or the military, it is increasingly evident that hazing behaviors are far more widespread involving students of diverse identities and experiences. Scholars are now considering how hazing is shaped by many social and institutional forces rather than understanding it as solely a problem rooted in personality traits or other individual characteristics. Viewing hazing as simply a problem of Greek-letter organizations or athletes is shortsighted and may jeopardize the health and safety of students involved with hazing in many other arenas. In the end, this will hinder the overall quality of learning environments in schools and postsecondary institutions.

This proposed research will investigate the nature and prevalence of hazing practices across a range of student groups within diverse types of postsecondary institutions in the U.S. By addressing the lack of empirical data, the study will provide foundational data from which to assess campus climates and to inform best practices for hazing prevention and intervention.

Research Goals

- This study aims to generate breadth of knowledge and promote more in-depth understanding about hazing in postsecondary educational institutions with possible applications to other populations as well. More specifically, the goals of this research are to:
  - Investigate the prevalence and nature of hazing behaviors among students in U.S. colleges and universities.
  - Offer research-based strategies for responding to and preventing the problem of hazing among college students with transferability to middle and secondary schools.

Outcomes

It is anticipated that empirical data generated from the study will inform best practices related to the intervention and prevention of hazing including: sharpened insights about the nature and prevalence of hazing; characteristics of students and institutions most at risk for hazing; factors that facilitate and/or impede the reporting of hazing; and qualities of effective policy and educational efforts.

Implications and Significance: Making a Difference

Numerous anecdotal and journalistic accounts of hazing practices have documented the problems of hazing (including death, physical injuries, emotional harm, and attrition) among college students (Nuwer, 1990, 1999, 2000; Robinson, 1998). Yet, little is known empirically about the prevalence and nature of hazing in this population. Many students and professional staff in colleges and universities are uninformed about the realities of hazing, and stereotypes shape perceptions of hazing as only a problem for Greeks and athletes and/or simply harmless antics and pranks. Data generated from this study will provide empirical data related to the prevalence and nature of hazing behaviors for students in U.S. higher education. As such, the data will serve as a platform for advancing further understanding of the problem in a larger context and inform more viable approaches to the intervention and prevention of hazing by promoting campus cultures that are more fully aware of the realities of hazing and are less tolerant of harmful hazing.
NIF announces

2003 Scholarship and Fellowship Recipients

Lloyd G. Balfour Fellowships
$1,000
Courtney Collins-Shapiro, Delta Delta Delta, Policy and Leadership
Michael Fontana, Zeta Beta Tau, Mass Communications
Stephanie Gause, Delta Gamma, Law
Amelia Purser, Delta Gamma, Medicine
Mario Mazz, Zeta Psi, Oenology
Shannon Sauter, Alpha Epsilon Phi, Student Affairs
Virginia Smith, Delta Gamma, Public Relations and Issues Management

Lloyd G. Balfour Fellowships $2,500
Edward Tulin, Delta Upsilon, Law
Elizabeth James, Kappa Epsilon, Pharmacy
Ryan Kraemer, Kappa Sigma, Medicine
Molly Morgan, Gamma Phi Beta, Science and Technology Policy

Mary Louise Roller Scholarship
$1,000
Stephanie Gause, Delta Gamma, Law

James H. McLaughlin Scholarship $700
Timothy Braude, Alpha Epsilon Pi

Jack Anson Fellowship $2,000
Meghan Johnson, Alpha Sigma Alpha, Student Personnel Services

George W. Cox

George W. Cox, Jr., Immediate Past Chairman of the NIF, began his Greek experience at Old Dominion University when he joined Pi Kappa Alpha. His membership there became a springboard to a life of exemplary professional and civic accomplishment.

George has practiced law for thirty years, the past twenty as principal of Cox & Associates, P.C. in Myrtle Beach, SC. In addition to serving on many other community projects and boards, he is a past national officer of the Phi Alpha Delta Law Fraternity and a past national president of the Professional Fraternity Association. His work with both of those organizations ultimately led to his involvement with NIF.

“My early goal was to focus on enhancing the profile of all professional fraternities within NIF, as some questioned NIF’s relevance to that group,” he recalled recently. “That has been accomplished and it has been exciting to see the growth of new programs and new partnerships with the College Fraternity Editors Association (CFEA) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) as well as the Campus Hazing Cultures project. In addition, the NIF has stayed the course with important scholarships for those graduate students who serve as the very best examples of Greek leadership and scholarship.”

A highlight of George’s lifetime of involvement in the Greek world came with his election as president of the NIF in 1999. “It was an honor and pleasure to interact with truly outstanding leaders in the Greek system. Many former presidents and executive directors, as well as outstanding leaders in higher education, often gravitate to the NIF Board. The wealth of experience and problem-solving talents they bring to the Board is formidable.”

While George has ‘retired’ from the Board, he continues to be a staunch ally of the NIF and the North American college fraternity system. We wish him the very best and thank him for his yeoman service.

2004 Scholarship Applications Available
Applications for NIF scholarships are now available online at www.NIF-inc.net.
Applicants may apply directly online or download an application to be mailed. All applications and supporting materials such as transcripts and letters of recommendation must be postmarked no later than May 15, 2004 to be eligible for consideration. Complete instructions are available on the website.
The NIF is proud to welcome 5 new members to the Board of Directors who bring much experience, talent and expertise.

Peg Crawford, Alpha Omicron Pi
David Persky, Kappa Sigma
Clifford Schechter, Phi Alpha Delta, Alpha Epsilon Pi, Rho Pi Phi
Barbara Snyder, Alpha Phi
Linda Wardhammar, Gamma Phi Beta

NIF Partners with CFEA on Awards Program

In keeping with NIF’s new-found momentum to serve as a catalyst for “good things Greek,” it has recently partnered with the College Fraternity Editor’s Association to support and enhance CFEA’s already prestigious awards program. NIF’s own publications award program has been “blended” into the CFEA application process in a win-win-win for the two organizations, Greek editors and their individual organizations.

NIF will be providing a $2000 sponsorship grant in support of this year’s program, with present intent to be a long-term partner with CFEA. As the oldest and largest interfraternal organization, CFEA is an excellent outlet for NIF funding in support of positive interfraternal activities. NIF representatives will be on hand May 8 in Chicago to present a check at the CFEA Award’s Banquet—and to recognize those editors who have gone “over and above” in their efforts. More extensive integration of NIF and CFEA award’s goals, objectives, and mutual promotion is planned for next year.

You can register for the CFEA annual conference at www.CFEA.org. The event is at the Renaissance Oak Brook Hotel, May 6-9 in the Chicago area.

2003 Balfour Fellowship Recipient—Ryan Kraemer

Ryan Kraemer is from a small town (Hammond, Louisiana) but that hasn’t stopped him from having big dreams. The NIF through the L.G. Balfour Fellowships, is proud to be a part of those dreams. In 2003, Ryan was awarded a $2,500 Balfour Fellowship in recognition of his outstanding academic achievements and his exceptional community and fraternal activities. His fellowship will help him achieve a medical degree from LSU.

Ryan, a member of Kappa Sigma at Centenary College, credits his fraternity membership with developing his leadership and his people skills, both of which have come in handy in medical school. He noticed that he seems much more at ease meeting people and knows that an important part of his profession is making his patients feel comfortable. He also values the deep bonds he shares with his Kappa Sig brothers that run far beyond ordinary friendships.

While an undergraduate, Ryan served his chapter as Rush Chair and Treasurer. He worked diligently for months to revive the defunct IFC on his campus, helped develop the constitution and felt a great sense of achievement when it was rechartered in 2000. Ryan was additionally very active on campus as an orientation leader, senator and honor court representative.

Ryan says he is incredibly honored to have received a Balfour fellowship and is inspired by what the NIF represents. The financial reward “has helped me tremendously and I’m deeply grateful to have been chosen. It is a very big honor.”

Ryan’s plans include starting a family practice where he looks forward to the opportunity to follow his patients throughout their lifetime. We’d say that Ryan’s future patients are very fortunate indeed and the NIF is proud to have played a small part in helping him reach his goals.
Founders’ Circle ($10,000+)
Sidney H. Guller, Alpha Epsilon Pi

Chairman’s Circle ($2,500+)
Foundation Chapter of Theta Chi

Leadership Circle ($1,000+)
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Phi Kappa Tau Foundation
Phi Sigma Sigma Foundation

Benefactors ($500+)
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George A. Beck, Pi Lambda Phi
Eugene D. Cote’, Phi Gamma Delta
Delta Sigma Pi
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Phi Sigma Sigma
Sigma Alpha Epsilon Foundation
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George W. Spasyk, Lambda Chi Alpha
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Delta Delta Delta Fraternity
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Delta Upsilon Educational Foundation
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Gale Wilkerson, Delta Tau Delta
Please note that the NIF has a new website address [www.nif-inc.net](http://www.nif-inc.net).

More than 90% of applicants in 2003 used the website to apply for scholarships. In addition to scholarship applications you will find the NIF grant application, a listing of NIF Board members, NIF history, issues of *NIF Notes* and more.
Notes

North American Interfraternal Foundation
10023 Cedar Point Drive
Carmel, IN 46032