

# **CPYU Trend Alert:**

## **Hazing: Not just for college anymore** by Chris Wagner

Hazing isn't a new trend, but rather one that needs to be addressed on a regular basis. A 2008 report titled "Hazing in View: College Students at Risk" describes the initial findings from the National Study of Student Hazing. It reports that 47 percent of students experience some form of hazing before graduating high school. The problem is just as bad on the college campus. According to the study, "55 percent of college students involved in clubs, teams and organizations experience hazing." Hazing may not be new, but it is indeed widespread.

Before we take a closer look at the issue, let's first take a moment to define it. "Hazing in View" calls the practice "any activity expected of someone joining or participating in a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses or endangers them regardless of a person's willingness to participate." Dr. Susan Lipkin, author and expert in hazing, believes it's important to note that hazing is not the same as bullying. A main difference is that bullying takes place when a victim is trying to be excluded, while the ultimate goal of hazing is inclusion.

Hazing is an extreme form of initiation into some sort of group. Many are familiar with the fact that hazing often takes place within sports teams, as well as in Greek life on college campuses. In fact, 74 percent of college students on a varsity athletic team report going through hazing, as well as 73 percent of social fraternity or sorority members. Though these are perhaps the most well-known groups with a reputation of hazing new prospective members, hazing is certainly not limited to these institutions. Students report being hazed as initiation into all sorts of groups, including 64 percent of those in club sports, 56 percent who participate in performing arts organizations and even 20 percent of those in honor societies. E-mails received from students at the Web site [www.stophazing.org](http://www.stophazing.org) indicate that hazing also takes place among military groups, marching bands and religious organizations.

Just as fraternities/sororities and athletic teams tend to grab the hazing spotlight in terms of "who," so do forced alcohol consumption and violence in regards to "what." Cases involving alcohol and violence are most likely to receive attention because they often lead to medical emergencies, and even possible death. But other forms of hazing exist as well. Dr. Mary Madden and Dr. Elizabeth Allen, authors of the "Hazing in View" study released a summary of findings related to hazing at the high school level. According to their findings, the following are the most frequently reported hazing behaviors among high school students:

- 28 percent associate with specific people and not others
- 21 percent sing or chant by self or selected group members/not related to a game or event
- 19 percent are yelled, screamed or cursed at by other members of the group
- 12 percent participate in a drinking game
- 12 percent deprive self of sleep
- 12 percent get a tattoo or body piercing
- 11 percent drink large amounts of a non-alcoholic beverage
- 11 percent endure harsh weather conditions without proper clothing
- 9 percent be awakened by other members during the night
- 8 percent make prank telephone calls or harass others
- 8 percent drink alcoholic beverages until the point of getting sick or passing out

(Source: [http://www.hazingstudy.org/publications/hazing\\_in\\_view\\_web.pdf](http://www.hazingstudy.org/publications/hazing_in_view_web.pdf))

Many of the experienced behaviors reported among college students were similar. However, alcohol-related hazing increases significantly. "Hazing in View" reports that the most frequently reported behavior among hazed college students is to "participate in a drinking game" at a rate of 26 percent.

Documentaries about hazing such as *The Pledge* and *Haze* demonstrate many other extreme forms of hazing. These included hours of forced calisthenics, being confined to small spaces for hours or even days, and violent acts such as spanking. Another popular ritual includes blindfolding prospective group members and dropping them off at undisclosed locations. Sexually related acts also are part of the college hazing experience, with 6 percent reporting they were forced to perform sex acts with the opposite gender. Though not reflected in the survey, forced same-sex acts and other forms of sexual humiliation, including being sodomized with foreign objects, have also been reported.

Why do students choose to subject themselves to this type of behavior? Teens and adults alike all desire to be a part of a group. Unfortunately, sometimes we will go to extreme lengths to be accepted. Students will endure hazing because of the promise of acceptance once the humiliation is over. In Greek campus life, this is commonly known as brotherhood or sisterhood. The bonds created among those that have gone through the hazing together can be extremely strong. Many students even look back fondly on their time of hazing because the shared experience helped build relationships.

There also are cultural forces in place that do nothing to discourage hazing, and in some cases even promote it as healthy character building. As Dr. Lipkin states on her Web site ([www.insidehazing.com](http://www.insidehazing.com)), hazing is ritualistic and based on tradition.

Members of the group simply believe it is okay to haze new members because that's the way it has always been done. They feel entitled to make others go through the same things they endured. This attitude toward hazing often carries into adulthood, so at no point in the cycle does anyone see any need for change. Hazing continues year-after-year reinforcing the idea that it promotes positive and healthy group cohesion.

As a result of these traditional views of hazing, many in society believe it is nothing more than harmless fun. This was certainly demonstrated during a recent ABC "Primetime" news episode as part of their "What Would You Do?" hidden camera series. Actors, posing as college students, were asked to stage common hazing practices out on a public street. Sadly, rather than intervene, most of the people walking by simply did nothing. Some even stopped to watch as students were wrapped to a pole using cellophane, treated like dogs, forced to wear nothing but a diaper and verbally ridiculed as if it were entertainment. Others actually joined in the hazing, even calling some of the females "fat" and a "slut." To their credit, a handful of people did come to the defense of the hazed students, but the show ultimately demonstrated that our culture has come to see hazing as an accepted form of behavior.

Furthermore, "Hazing in View" reports that "professional staff and administrators who are aware of dangers inherent in hazing often report feeling discouraged and perplexed by entrenched attitudes and beliefs that support a culture where hazing is normalized as part of college life." Many schools and organizations turn a blind eye to this behavior because they see nothing wrong with it. Insidehazing.com reports that 92 percent of high school students say they wouldn't even bother reporting a hazing incident. Students who may be inclined to report hazing incidents are often left with no one to turn to. Others don't speak up because of fear. They are afraid of possible retaliation and ridicule from the group.

The consequences of hazing can be long and devastating. Students from across the country have died because of hazing-related alcohol poisoning. The verbal and psychological abuse endured can also lead to deep emotional scars. The destruction of self-esteem, self-confidence, feelings of self-worth and respect are just a few of the effects of hazing, according to Mothers Against School Hazing. Embarrassment and humiliation now often extends beyond the actual hazing experience itself, as many leaders of the group post images or video of the experiences online for others to see. According to "Hazing in View," "53 percent say a member of their team or organization posted photos of the hazing activity on a public Web space like Facebook or MySpace." Interestingly, this practice has actually aided police and administrators with their investigations into hazing incidents. Group leaders also can face grave consequences in the form of legal charges.

In order to be stopped, hazing must be addressed at multiple levels. First we need to make our teens aware of hazing so they can identify it when it happens. Educate them about the many possible dangers of hazing and reinforce which behaviors are acceptable and which are not. Encourage them to report incidents of hazing, and create a safe or perhaps anonymous environment for them to do so. Demonstrate what it means to be a part of a group or team where members show kindness and respect to one another. Teach them to highly regard the value of others and to treat them as they would wish to be treated.

Be especially aware of hazing if you know your teen is about to enter into some form of new group dynamic, whether that be a sports team, club, school grade or fraternity/sorority. Find out who the leaders of this group are and discuss expectations. Talk to coaches, leaders and school administrators about what kinds of anti-hazing policies they have in place and what they are actively doing to enforce them. Sadly, Allen and Madden report that "in 25 percent of hazing experiences, students believed coaches and/or advisors were aware of the activities." Let those in charge know that hazing is unacceptable. Raise awareness by speaking out and asking questions. Most states have anti-hazing laws, look into what policies are in place where you live.

Those of us who are in leadership positions may have to make hard decisions. We must choose to not accept hazing and effectively discipline those who are caught doing so. Even if you've turned a blind eye to hazing in the past, you must let teens and students know that it will no longer be tolerated. Just because something is tradition, doesn't make it right. This may not be a popular position to put oneself in, but it's a stand that must be taken. Instead of hazing, try suggesting and promoting alternative activities that promote group bonding and trust. Many colleges—Cornell and Harvard are two examples—have Web sites dedicated to stopping hazing and offering alternative ideas. These include community service, camping trips, ropes courses and many other beneficial social activities that those who work with youth are very familiar with.

Don't wait until hazing has gone too far to do something about it. The physical, emotional and psychological health of our teens is at stake. Let's work together to bring change to the existing cultural attitudes that consider hazing to be an acceptable and normal part of teen and young adult life.

**Visit the website of the Center for Parent/Youth Understanding at [www.cpyu.org](http://www.cpyu.org) for more information on today's youth culture.**