

Hazing issue in fraternities

[Sociology](#), [Bullying](#)



Fraternities began establishing themselves at American colleges and universities in the early 19th century (Clay). Although unique, the principles upon which each Greek organization was founded are similar, including the pursuit of academic excellence, good citizenship, the development of leadership abilities among its members, and fellowship. These shared principles provide the foundation of the Greek system. Hazing attacks this foundation, challenging the very principles upon which the Greek system was founded. Hazing is an illegal activity and is defined as any action taken or situations created, whether on or off fraternity premises, which recklessly or intentionally produces mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule (Clay; Hennesy & Huson, 66). The issue of hazing, in fact, most frequently occurs in Fraternities than in any other organization. The major causes of hazing are the students' wanting a sense of belonging in a big college campus, the college's infrequent knowledge of what occurs in fraternities, and the unwillingness of fraternities to change tradition. Since hazing has been around for more than a century, one cannot expect the practice of hazing to stop all together. Possible solutions that may decrease, and eventually put a stop to hazing, include better education about fraternity hazing, stricter laws to prevent hazing from occurring, and more intervention from college administrators. Through this can Fraternities be restored to their intended purpose: providing moral and social support for college students. The lack of a common definition of hazing often deters an institution from moving toward an enforceable policy prohibiting such conduct as hazing. An institutional policy should be developed defining and prohibiting hazing that is sufficiently broad to prohibit behaviors and

activities. Such a definition is stated by Hennesy and Huson in the article "New Challenges For Greek Letter Organizations: Actions that recklessly or intentionally endanger students' safety or their physical or mental health; forced or required consumption of any food, liquor, drug, or other substance; forced participation in physical activities...exposure to the elements; excessive fatigue resulting from sleep deprivation, physical activities, or exercise; physical brutality, including paddling, branding, and striking with fists, open hands or objects; verbal abuse...forced or required conduct that could embarrass or negatively affect the individual's dignity...denial of sufficient time to study; assignment of activities that are illegal or unlawful or that might be morally offensive to individual pledges; forced trips that involve kidnapping or stranding individuals. (67) Institutions and senior students affairs officers should develop an institutional policy defining and prohibiting hazing that is sufficiently broad enough to prohibit the various behaviors and activities associated with hazing. However, there are several reasons why stricter regulations are not applied to the initiations of fraternities, these being the strong sense tradition hazing has instilled in fraternities and the belief that this process creates a sense of bonding. Fraternity members do not want to change the tradition of hazing. Hazing has been a part of fraternity initiations ever since fraternities were founded. Hazing is used to test the pledges that wanted to join the fraternity, to make sure that the pledge is "fraternity material," or in other words, able to handle the ludicrous requirements that current members of the fraternity may invoke upon its new members. According to one pledge, fraternity members have a feeling that if "I went through it, you should too", as long

as there are people in the fraternity who were beaten, they feel they have a right to treat new members in the same manner by beating them as well (Morgan, 1). Many fraternity members do not consider new members to be true members unless they have been properly inducted. And to many, "induction" includes hazing. The sense of belonging, or "fitting in" is one of the major reasons for the students' desire to subject themselves to ridicule and torture by joining a fraternity. The desire to be in a brotherhood and involved with something that is perceived to be positive is so strong in young people that they are willing to submit to hazing in order to become members. Not only are college men being hospitalized but many are putting their lives on the line, and even dying, just so they can be considered a "brother" in a fraternity. The humiliations of hazing are said to build bonds between pledges and fraternity brothers. According to fraternity beliefs, the theory goes, if you and a couple of friends go through fraternity initiations, drinking excessive amounts of beer and being beaten by fraternity members etc., and only you and your friends go through it, then this gives you all something in common. Men are experiencing injuries including those caused by "blunt force" (beatings, paddling, motor vehicle crashes, pedestrian accidents, and falls from height), cold exposure, heat exhaustion, and gunshot, just to name a few. These supposedly bring the fraternity together in a "brotherhood." However, hazing doesn't build brotherhood. As stated by Hank Nuwer of Indiana University of Journalism, hazing "builds dissension, undercutting, and eventual retribution." It eventually strips a pledge's self-esteem and sense of an individual self separated from the surrounding group. Often times, these pledges go beyond their physical and mental

limits, which, in turn, provides no benefit. The result is an unquestioning obedience of any command authority. It demands respect, rather than earning it. Yet, within the fraternity system, respect is not what the system should be built around, rather it should be built around trust, support, and fellowship. Another issue created by hazing is that of selective self-stereotyping (Biernat, Vescio, & Green). As defined in the article, self-stereotyping " involves perceiving oneself as a member of a group and consequently behaving in line with this social identity" (1). Often times, the process of self-categorization provides the basis for self-stereotyping, which then leads to depersonalization and " adherence to and expression of in-group normative behavior" (1). In other words, one loses a sense of one's own personal identity, allowing it to be manipulated into a person that the fraternity, in a sense, controls. The individual is no longer an individual person but an obedient person who directs personal choice into the hands of those willing to take it a abuse it, therefore losing the ability to choose which inherently affects the moral and social development of the person (Mathiasen, 1). Reports of incidents involving hazing, in fact, have often overshadowed the Greek organizations' positive efforts in campus involvement, community service, and charitable funding. In many instances, the values supported and the activity of hazing in these organizations may be counter to the institution's mission and this discrepancy, can produce an unhealthy learning environment. To prevent hazing, more sufficient education and information on hazing for both fraternities and the societies in which they are organized, should be presented. If college men are educated enough and discover what occurs during fraternity initiation ceremonies and

what is done to them, if they join the fraternity, then they will probably think twice about joining or demand some types of changes to occur, on the fraternity's part. Already initiated fraternity members should to consider that they did not enjoy what was done to them during pledging, therefore it is likely that future members would also not like the particular treatment that would be administered to them in the initiation process. Another solution that would be to apply stricter regulations on the initiation ceremonies, and restrict hazing altogether. Due to the small involvement of the institutions in the fraternities activities, crime is more easily committed; crime such as verbal abuse, physical abuse, sexual assault, and even murder. College administrators must take full responsibility in informing fraternities of the regulations that are to be set forth, any warnings must be issued to protect the welfare of the students, as well as set the confirmed consequences of participating in hazing in an inappropriate way. Responsibility should be directed toward the actual perpetrator and any others who were involved, and they should accept the consequence for any mishap (whether intentional or not) that should happen. Another possible solution that could restrict hazing, and eventually put a stop to it, is to create stricter laws that prevent hazing from occurring. Forty states have enacted statutes making hazing illegal (Hennesy and Huson). Hazing participants can now be charged with simple or aggravated assault or battery, kidnapping, false imprisonment, manslaughter, or even murder. This legislation was prompted by the numerous injuries and deaths resulting from hazing activities. Still, this does not mean that they are preventing hazing altogether. While anti-hazing laws were passed in some states, it is hard to discern that college administrators,

for liability reasons, were the ones who fought to get these laws passed. More likely it was the parents of children who died in hazing incidents that are the ones responsible for getting the laws passed. As a result of these people's interests, fraternity members are discovering that they are extremely vulnerable to legal action stemming hazing activities. Fraternities are liable to pay large sums of money in hazing related deaths. All fifty states should be required to pass anti-hazing laws so that hazing can be put to an end, without having more pledges being made vulnerable and more susceptible to injury, ridicule, or even death. Hazing has been a part of the initiation process for pledges, or potential members of fraternities, since they were established. It has often been associated with the right of passage into fraternities, connecting it with a sense of tradition. This labels hazing a necessity in the minds of fraternity members, since it has been in existence for over a century, therefore it could not be eliminated in a short period of time. Stricter regulations must be set forth that apply directly to the initiation process and inhibits the use of hazing as a traditional ritual of membership confirmation. This enables the fraternities to advance in