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## The Hidden Cost of Tradition: Understanding and Combating Hazing

### Introduction

Hazing, is often disguised as tradition or a team-building activity, has been a plague to places such as educational institutions, sports teams, and clubs. Despite multiple attempts to combat hazing. Hazing persists, leaving behind a trail of physical, emotional, and psychological scars on its victims both temporary and permanent. This devastating, widespread phenomenon has had deep negative effects in the personal and career lives of students all over the world.

### Historical Roots of Hazing

Historically, hazing has been utilized as a rite of passage, most often associated with military organizations and sororities/fraternities. These rituals served to instill discipline, loyalty, and camaraderie among group members, reinforcing hierarchies and social structures. Hazing was supposed to be a light-hearted way to show loyalty to a group. Over time, however, hazing practices have become increasingly more intense and have shown extremely detrimental effects on individuals and communities. According to authors Srivastava and Srivastava 'Many practices associated with being initiated by other students are cruel and inhumane. Hazing has, in some cases, led to homicide, rape, sodomy, infliction of physical injuries, mental torture and forced binge drinking of alcohol'. What once was a way for tight-knit communities to show loyalty has been flipped on its head and caused horrific effects.

### Psychological Dynamics of Hazing

Psychological theories offer insights into the mechanisms of hazing behaviors, more specifically the role of social identity, power dynamics, and conformity within a community. Individuals engage in hazing rituals as a means of seeking acceptance and validation within their respective groups, often causing students to succumb to peer pressure because of the desire to belong. The allure of belonging and the fear of exclusion makes individuals endure hazing despite its potential risks and consequences. A great example of this would be the power-dynamic of an upper-classmen student and a lower-classman. A study done in 2022 explores these dynamics, the author states, 'It was evident that generating fear and intimidating newcomers was the way the seniors-maintained secrecy' (Wickramasinghe et al.).

### Societal Norms and Institutional Pressures

Societal norms and peer pressures further worsens hazing by normalizing and even encouraging such behaviors. Since hazing is considered a tradition many colleges and workforces consider it normal under its original intention, however with hazing rituals becoming darker and more secretive, hazing should be discouraged if not banned. Many institutions like these often have hierarchical systems and power dynamics that also play a significant role in the

normalization of hazing. Leaders and figures in control may exploit their positions to force compliance in order to maintain control of anyone beneath them in the hierarchy.

### Consequences of Hazing

The consequences of hazing can be devastating, they can range anywhere from physical injuries to psychological trauma and, in the worst of cases, death. Victims of hazing often suffer from anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other long-term psychological effects. Moreover, hazing undermines trust, cohesion, and morale within groups, eroding organizational culture and fostering environments of fear and intimidation, completely weakening the intended purpose of the hazing tradition.

### Legal and Ethical Implications

Legally, hazing is subject to varying degrees of regulation and enforcement, with some jurisdictions implementing strict anti-hazing laws while others lag behind dealing no consequences to the culprits. Ethically, hazing raises many questions about consent, coercion, and accountability, societal norms, and peer pressures. Institutions and organizations bear a moral responsibility to uphold the safety and well-being of their members, therefore confronting hazing head-on and implementing proactive measures to prevent its occurrence. Many colleges have attempted to end hazing. Washington Post states that The University of Maryland has ordered fraternities and sororities to stop holding social activities where alcohol is served after allegations of harmful misconduct, a move taken amid renewed concerns about hazing during pledge events and other parties (Olivo).

### Preventive Strategies

Preventing hazing requires a comprehensive approach that addresses its root causes and underlying dynamics. Educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the dangers of hazing and promoting positive group norms can help shift attitudes and behaviors. Clear policies and consequences for hazing behaviors serve as deterrents, while fostering inclusive and supportive environments cultivates a culture of respect and accountability. However, many hazing incidents often end up getting swept under the rug with a light slap on the wrist, this is more evident with colleges considered high-class and prestigious. Colleges with prestige want to avoid any tainted images associated with their college, often times paying expensive lawyers in order to help reduce the publicity.

### Bystander Intervention

Bystander intervention training empowers individuals to speak up and intervene when witnessing hazing incidents, thereby disrupting the cycle of abuse, and shifting social norms. By fostering a community of active bystanders who refuse to tolerate hazing, institutions and organizations can create safer and more inclusive environments for all members. Hazing is supposed to be kept under wraps in order to 'foster loyalty' when in reality its fostering 'bystander syndrome,' continuing the vicious abuse cycle.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, hazing represents a plagued and deeply entrenched problem with severe consequences for individuals and communities. By examining its historical roots, psychological dynamics, societal norms, and ethical questions, a deeper sense of understanding of hazing can be found as well as developing more effective strategies for prevention intervention, and consequence. It is imperative that institutions, organizations, and individuals collectively confront hazing, dismantling the toxic traditions that perpetuate abuse and begin fostering cultures of respect, inclusion, and accountability.

## Works Cited

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