

# Embrace & Reform: Ending Hazing's Prohibition Era

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The effort to suppress hazing in fraternities and sororities has failed. Informed by hazing experiments, fieldwork, and a cross-cultural perspective, this article interrogates the underlying assumptions of the anti-hazing movement and the arguments commonly deployed against hazing. A detailed outline is offered for ending hazing's prohibition era by embracing and reforming the practice. Discussion focuses on issues of implementation, acceptance, and the importance of understanding rites of passage.

Many members of fraternities and sororities want to haze incoming members. That is, they want to create ordeals that lack obvious relevance to organizational activities, such as rigorous calisthenics or servile labor. (For more on the definition of hazing, see Cimino, 2017.) The desire to haze among some members is sufficient to risk expulsion, civil or criminal consequences, chapter dissolution, and (in some instances) the death of an inductee. The persistence of hazing in the face of obvious risks and societal resistance should be interpreted as a clear message that many chapters desperately want to maintain severe inductions. Rather than working with chapters to codify safer hazing ordeals, a broad coalition has worked for decades to undercut the legitimacy of severe inductions and deny members the ability to conduct them. The result is that we are now in hazing's prohibition era. Just like America's historical prohibition of alcohol, we have not stopped the production of hazing. Instead, we have ensured that it can

be produced in a way that is wholly unregulated and reckless. In this article, I hope to convince you that the assumptions underlying modern hazing prevention efforts are flawed and that it is time to investigate alternatives. I will lay out one such alternative, with a focus on reforming hazing practices and ensuring informed consent. While some of my arguments may be logically applicable to organizations other than Greek letter societies, my recommendations are for fraternities and sororities only. Further, because hazing is more severe among men, my focus will be on reforming fraternity hazing (e.g., Allan, Kerschner, & Payne, 2019; Hoover & Pollard, 2000; Nuwer, 2019). Most importantly, I will be advocating for the formal evaluation of specific hazing practices, not for their as-is acceptance. If you are an active member of a fraternity or sorority, understand that this article will not serve as a justification for hazing, nor will it indemnify you from any consequences.

## Hazing and Humanity

As an anthropologist, all of my work is focused on understanding hazing. This includes experimental studies of hazing motivation and newcomer-directed attitudes (Cimino, 2011, 2013; Cimino & Delton, 2010; Cimino, Toyokawa, Komatsu, Thomson, & Gaulin, 2019; Delton & Cimino, 2010), observational fieldwork with a real-world hazing fraternity (Cimino, 2016), efforts to refine policy and public understanding (e.g., Cimino, 2017; Cimino & McCreary, 2016; Dakin, 2018), and countless hours reading accounts of hazing from around the world. One takeaway from this work is that fraternity hazing has much in common with the ethnographic record of such rites. Indeed, in one of my classes, I show students a slide

that describes parts of a male initiation. It reads approximately as follows:

### A Severe Male Initiation

- Dressed up as unattractive women with penises drawn on their stomachs.
- Deprived of food and water for days.
- Made to do a seventeen-mile hike.
- Made to sing naked.

When I ask my students to guess what group performed these practices, they typically say that they came from a college fraternity. But these activities were all taken from a traditional Hopi initiation ceremony observed in 1891

(Fewkes & Stephens, 1892).<sup>1</sup> The Hopi are far from unique in this regard: In the ethnographic record, hazing can be found in a diverse array of small-scale societies, documented on different continents and in differing socio-ecological environments, many of them pre-industrial (see review in Cimino, 2011). The hazing practices of modern Greek letter societies are little more than a recent instance of a phenomenon that far predates us and will yet outlive us. This prompts many questions: Why did so many cultures independently invent hazing practices? Why does hazing have so many similar characteristics across cultures? Why do people keep reinventing and reestablishing hazing, even where it is actively prohibited and shamed? These questions are still being probed from a scientific perspective, and experimental, hypothesis-driven approaches to understanding hazing are uncommon (e.g., Cimino, 2011; Thomas & Meglich, 2019). My own work has suggested that hazing motivation may be—in part—a component of human nature: an anti-free rider strategy originally designed to prevent exploitation around group entry (for details, see Cimino, 2011, 2013; Cimino et al., 2019). That is, there is something about hazing that may have historically discouraged uncommitted prospects from staying, as well as temporarily changed the behavior of newcomers in a way that advantaged veteran members (e.g., by making newcomers work harder and adhere to group norms). This theory

may help to explain the prevalence, time depth, and commonalities of hazing across cultures. Because the scientific study of hazing is in its early stages, this initial theory is not settled, and there is much to be learned (e.g., McCreary & Schutts, 2019). Regardless, I believe that theories like my own are important for future hazing policy because they focus on the testable specifics of human coalitional psychology, rather than the moralization of hazers.

Alongside the nascent scientific study of hazing are anti-hazing advocates<sup>2</sup> that have collectively worked for decades to eradicate hazing, with a focus on Greek letter societies and athletic teams (e.g., Allan, 2004; Allan & Madden, 2012; Clery Center, 2017; Conn, Tompkins, & Hunter, 1993; Cornell University, 2019; Crandall, 2003; Hakkola, Allan, & Kerschner, 2019; HazingPrevention.Org, 2019; Hoover, 1999; Hoover & Pollard, 2000; Lipkins, 2006; Nuwer, 1999, 2000, 2018, 2004; StopHazing, 2019a). These advocates have been justifiably motivated by the egregious abuses, injuries, and deaths that have occurred due to hazing. However, the efforts of advocates and scientists do not always comfortably intermix (e.g., Dreger, 2015). Science, as a process, can raise questions that darken the clarity that drives an advocacy movement. My years of research into hazing have convinced me that, for Greek letter societies, the anti-hazing movement is pointed in the wrong direction.

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<sup>1</sup> People sometimes contest comparisons between hazing in small-scale societies and college fraternities because they believe small-scale societies had better justifications for hazing. There are, however, *always* in-culture justifications for hazing. Dismissing the hazing justifications given by Greek letter organizations while uncritically embracing those from small-scale societies suggests a belief in the Noble Savage myth. Many hazing practices among small-scale societies were obligatory, cruel, and performed on adolescents younger than those participating in modern fraternities and sororities (e.g., Allen, 1967; Herdt, 1998). For additional details on the Hopi practices, see the Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> I consider anti-hazing advocates to be those individuals self-consciously engaged in activism (e.g., by being a member of an anti-hazing organization) and—to a lesser degree—researchers or other stakeholders whose work suggests a strong and categorical anti-hazing stance.

## The Dominant Paradigm: Moralize & Suppress

To understand the problems with anti-hazing advocacy, one must understand its key assumptions. These assumptions form a kind of paradigm that has motivated or structured nearly all advocacy to date.<sup>3</sup> I call this paradigm “Moralize & Suppress.” The Moralize & Suppress paradigm has inspired prevention strategies that emphasize the immorality of hazing and the persuasive or punitive means to eradicate it (e.g., Allan, Payne, Boyer, & Kerschner, 2018; Apgar, 2018). Its key assumptions are as follows:

- **Hazing is immoral and dangerous:** There is no possible manifestation of hazing that could render it simultaneously moral and safe for its participants, regardless of the circumstances.<sup>4</sup>
- **Hazing prohibition is possible and probable:** There are moralization tactics that will successfully convince relevant populations that hazing is immoral and dangerous. If these tactics are paired with commensurate punitive measures from legal and extralegal authorities, hazing will be eradicated or substantially reduced in a lasting manner.

My reading of the scholarly and non-scholarly literature on hazing suggests that the Moralize & Suppress paradigm has no popular challenger (though varying degrees of skepticism and rejection have been expressed, see Butler & Glennen, 1991; Govan, 2011; Houseman, 2001; Kershner, 2011; Roosevelt, 2018). The implicit or explicit call to moralize and suppress hazing dominates non-fiction media on the phenomenon, including most hazing-related

research articles (e.g., Iverson & Allan, 2004; Nuwer, 2000; Sharma, 2004; Taylor, 2010). However, the total set of hazing prevention efforts to date appears largely ineffectual: Hazing remains highly prevalent among Greek letter societies and other organizations, and yearly hazing deaths and abuses continue to mount (Allan & Madden, 2012; Nuwer, 2019). Hank Nuwer (2017), a prominent anti-hazing advocate, summarized his frustration:

I’ve met dozens of the hazed and hazers alike, the families of the dead, the dedicated Greek professionals, a lot of jaded alums, and activists from HazingPrevention.org, Stophazing.org, the AHA Movement and so on. Many parents who gave years of service to the cause have quit, so disillusioned by the continuing string of deaths that they no longer can even utter the word “hazing.” Everything possible has been tried. Bystander training. Help Weeks instead of Hell Weeks. Associate memberships instead of pledges. Delayed rush. Yanking charters. But still the deaths continue.

Individuals working under the Moralize & Suppress paradigm have had decades to create lasting and generalizable results. They have garnered the support of university administrators, law makers, and every major Greek letter organization. They have formed anti-hazing organizations, toured as anti-hazing speakers, and acted as anti-hazing consultants. Entire books and documentaries

<sup>3</sup> As with many underlying assumptions, these are rarely stated explicitly and must be inferred from the relevant arguments and actions of anti-hazing advocates.

<sup>4</sup> “Dangerous” is here meant to encompass a broad spectrum of harm, including causing mental illness or physical trauma. Anti-hazing advocates sometimes maintain that even when hazing ordeals are not obviously harmful, they might escalate to become harmful (e.g., Lipkins, 2006; Roosevelt, 2018; StopHazing, 2019b), or might cause non-obvious, “hidden” psychological harm (e.g., Apgar, 2013; Maxwell, 2011).

have been devoted to the effort to moralize and suppress hazing, not to mention all manner of news articles and radio segments (e.g., Clery Center, 2017; Dakin, 2018; Nuwer, 1990, 1999; Sharma, 2004). Even if this work has had a non-zero effect on the prevalence or harm of hazing, it

has clearly failed at representing the kind of change that would satisfy most stakeholders. Why has all this effort resulted in so little ostensible success? One possible contributor is that the underlying assumptions of the paradigm are flawed and are long overdue for public questioning.

## Problems with the Prohibition Assumption

The ease with which we can suppress hazing depends on the nature of hazing itself. If motivations to haze are partially a component of human nature and are primarily activated by common environmental cues over which we have little control, our ability to prohibit hazing may be similarly constrained. My own studies suggest that certain group properties such as cooperative intensity, commonly held benefits, and longevity may play a role in hazing motivation (Cimino, 2011, 2013; Cimino et al., 2019). Note that these variables are not easy to manipulate in the real world. We cannot reach into groups and deprive them of intangible benefits like prestige. We cannot forbid group members from cooperating amongst themselves. Nor can we reasonably expect to prevent groups from enduring over time. If these and other common, hard-to-change environmental cues are among the fundamental drivers of hazing motivation, we should find hazing in many diverse cultures of the past and present. As noted in the introduction, this is precisely what we find. We should also find that it is relatively easy to engender pro-hazing

sentiments in experimental environments. This prediction is supported by vignette studies, wherein participants imagine themselves as members of groups with differing characteristics and then construct induction processes (Cimino, 2011, 2013; Cimino et al., 2019). Finally, we should find that hazing is very difficult to prohibit and is constantly being reinvented by a wide variety of groups (some more than others). Again, this is exactly what we find (e.g., Allan & Madden, 2012; Butt-Thompson, 1908; Loeb, 1929; McCarl, 1976).

To be clear, I am not suggesting that hazing is difficult to suppress because the expression of human nature is uniform and obligate. On the contrary, human nature is designed by evolution to flexibly respond to countless environmental cues (e.g., Richerson & Boyd, 2005; Tooby & Cosmides, 1992). Instead, I am suggesting that many of the environmental cues able to substantially and efficiently reduce hazing motivation (and thus hazing behavior) may be out of our reach. Note that “substantially” and “efficiently” are the operative terms.<sup>5</sup> Given enough investment in constant monitoring,

<sup>5</sup> What would count as a “substantial” reduction in hazing for Greek letter societies? One threshold might be a large effect size (à la Cohen, 1992) in the reduced frequency of reported hazing, as measured in survey data (e.g., Allan & Madden, 2012). The problem with such an approach, however, is that hazing is so common in Greek letter societies that even a large reduction might leave a significant proportion of members experiencing hazing. Alternatives include setting the “substantial” threshold at whatever frequency would downgrade hazing into a minor concern for Greek letter organizations. Minor concerns are those that do not need dedicated Web pages, training programs, invited speakers, consultants, etc.

extreme punishment, and propaganda, almost any behavior can be reduced in frequency. My concern is that, for fraternities in particular, hazing may require a very high level of monitoring and punishment to generate a substantial reduction. Even if such measures were implemented, their ultimate monetary and cultural costs could be profound. Imagine the impact, for example, of cameras in every room of a fraternity house, an in-house monitoring staff to follow and record initiation activities if

they go off-site, lengthy jail time for even the most minor of hazing infractions, relentless exposure to anti-hazing propaganda, etc. At a certain point, in addition to causing significant dissatisfaction among members, such measures would risk turning Greek letter societies into interest groups whose primary mission is simply *not hazing*. Thankfully, this draconian vision does not have popular support. But absent such a dystopia, we are left with the extant set of ineffectual hazing prevention efforts.

## Problems with the Morality and Danger Assumption

Assume for a moment that I am correct regarding the difficulty of suppressing hazing in Greek letter societies. It does not logically follow that we should allow any hazing practices. By analogy, any number of behaviors may be difficult to suppress at the societal level that should still be shamed and punished (e.g., murder, sexual assault). Severe inductions, however, are varied phenomena that can be performed in ways that will meet most people's intuitive ethical standards. The simplest demonstration of this fact is the uncontroversial existence of military basic training in the United States (e.g., Jacobs & Fisher, 2012; Leahy, 2002; Stowell, 2009).<sup>6</sup> Military basic training shares many characteristics in common with fraternity hazing ordeals: rigorous calisthenics, line-ups, yelling, menial labor, an emphasis on obedience,

etc.<sup>7</sup> Despite these facts (and some instances of abuse<sup>8</sup>) there is no moral panic over military "boot camp." No anti-hazing organization dedicates itself to making military basic training more "positive" or argues that it causes "hidden harm" to the thousands who participate annually. Thus, the anti-hazing movement seems to implicitly take the stance that 18-year-olds can be safely subjected to harsh military inductions, but face unacceptable, dangerous bullying in doing calisthenics and housework for a fraternity. This appears contradictory, to say the least.

Perhaps the only persuasive objection to the military/fraternity comparison is a combined appeal to differing purposes and comparative safety: The military has a practical reason to perform severe inductions and such inductions

<sup>6</sup> For a complete ethical defense of hazing from philosophical first principles, see Kershner (2011) (but see also Cholbi, 2009). My own argument for the ethics of hazing is comparatively simplified and Socratic, as I am focusing on unexamined assumptions indicating that people already believe in ethical hazing. My intuition is that any attempt to embrace and reform hazing must use an argument that is straightforward and immediately compelling to a non-academic audience.

<sup>7</sup> While all branches of the United States military prohibit what they consider "hazing" (Gilberd, 2017), none of the basic training practices listed would automatically qualify as such. Thus, the point of comparison here is the activities themselves, not the judgements we attach to them (i.e., hazing vs. non-hazing).

<sup>8</sup> See discussions of abuse by drill instructors in Schogol (2017) and Christenson (2013).

are conducted by trained individuals. Note, however, that this argument concedes any intrinsic concerns over the immorality and danger of some hazing ordeals. That is, it suggests that practices such as shaving the heads of inductees or punishing them with calisthenics

are not *intrinsically* harmful or immoral. Thus, by the same logic, if fraternity and sorority hazing had a convincing purpose and relative safety, it would also be acceptable. This is the opening to a possible future and an alternative paradigm.

## An Alternative Paradigm: Embrace & Reform

We are faced with a world where Greek letter societies are highly motivated to haze, and this motivation has proved incredibly difficult to suppress. This same world, however, has clearly demonstrated that severe inductions can be conducted safely on college-age participants. As such, it behooves us to seriously consider the possibility of embracing and reforming hazing. If we allow some hazing ordeals, realistic safety guidelines can be constructed along with appropriate training methods. The net impact of reformed hazing practices may be fewer hazing-related injuries, deaths, and scandals. Thus, the aforementioned “convincing purpose” for reformed hazing is to minimize the excesses that drove the creation of the anti-hazing movement in the first place. This alternative paradigm has three key assumptions:<sup>9</sup>

- **Hazing is not categorically immoral or dangerous:** While some manifestations of hazing are fundamentally dangerous and immoral (e.g., sexual assault), there is a subset of hazing ordeals that—in the right circumstances—are neither immoral nor particularly dangerous.
- **Hazing prohibition is possible but improbable:** For some groups, there is a set of causal forces that reduces the impact of efforts to moralize hazing and motivates hazing behaviors in a way that will frustrate most suppression efforts.<sup>10</sup>
- **Hazing motivation can be channeled into safer hazing practices:** Hazers will be more willing to accept safety modifications than the outright prohibition of hazing.

Using the above assumptions, I will describe what reformed hazing might look like in Greek letter societies.

<sup>9</sup> Both paradigms (Moralize & Suppress, Embrace & Reform) have many assumptions that I have not listed. I am highlighting only differentiators that are important for future policy.

<sup>10</sup> Note that this assumption does not require that my own theory of hazing is correct. I have emphasized that the science of hazing is nascent, and thus it is unwise to embed the specifics of my work into the foundational assumptions of a paradigm. The set of causal forces interfering with efforts to suppress hazing may be different than I (or others) suspect.

## Provisional Whitelist of Acceptable Hazing Practices

The following is a provisional list of hazing practices that can be performed ethically and with relative safety. I have chosen the practices below because they appear in many accounts of fraternity hazing, typically generate only temporary discomfort, and usually have a history of safe use in other contexts (e.g., military organizations, athletic teams, everyday existence). The ethical and safe performance of these practices requires the informed consent of inductees and, for calisthenics, chapter training in basic first aid (e.g., via the Red Cross).<sup>11</sup> This list is a *whitelist*, meaning that unlisted hazing ordeals are prohibited:

- **Calisthenics:** Inductees may be required to perform all manner of calisthenics, including pushups, sit-ups, pull-ups, sprints, and so on. Calisthenics may also be deployed as punishments for violating the rules of the induction program.
- **Line-ups:** Inductees may be required to line up in front of active members and stand at attention. Line-ups may be occasions for active members to assess inductee progress and performance, assign odd jobs, direct calisthenics, etc.
- **Yelling:** Inductees may be yelled at for violating the rules of the induction program or in order to encourage performance during calisthenics.
- **Head shaving:** Inductees may be required to wholly or partially shave their heads.
- **Uncomfortable or unflattering attire:** Inductees may be required to wear uncomfortable or unflattering attire during induction activities, such as sweatpants.
- **Odd jobs:** Inductees may be required to perform unskilled labor on behalf of a chapter. This includes chapter house cleaning tasks and minor personal errands for active members (as long as inductees bear no associated monetary costs). Odd jobs need not have an obvious utilitarian outcome. For example, inductees may be sent on scavenger hunts to collect items of dubious value, carry a burdensome item around school (e.g., a rock), or any other similar task that does not violate state or federal law.
- **Deference:** Inductees may be required to use explicitly humble or formal means of address towards active members. Deference may also involve the restricted use of communal resources such as house recreation areas and preferred entrances.

## Implementing Ethical Hazing Inductions

Implementing ethical hazing inductions requires establishing procedures for informed consent (e.g., providing information in a handout to prospective members). The specifics of such procedures would be determined by legal

professionals, but informed consent should ideally provide a broad sense of the challenges inductees will face while leaving out any ritual descriptions or proprietary knowledge (e.g., McMinn, 1980). Chapters using calisthenics should

<sup>11</sup> Basic first aid training should include not only injury treatment but also instructions for identifying symptoms of heat stroke, hypoglycemia, and other exercise-relevant conditions.

also request inductee health information that could impact participation, such as pre-existing injuries or chronic conditions (e.g., diabetes).

The provisional whitelist of hazing practices purposefully excludes most information about how and when the ordeals are to be used or explained to inductees. These details should be determined at the level of the individual chapter or their national organization. If hazing were embraced and reformed by fraternities and sororities, I would expect considerable variation in the intensity, formality, timing, and repetition of ordeals, in addition to the justifications (if any) provided to inductees. It is also worth emphasizing that these hazing practices are assumed to be integrated into a larger induction process that may include any number of non-hazing activities.

With the understanding that most injuries will result from calisthenics, expectations of danger in reformed hazing should be calibrated to collegiate athletic teams. Collegiate athletic teams are also a good safety target because students and parents regularly accept the risks entailed and because there is ample information on associated dangers. For example, averaging across all championship collegiate sports, Kerr et al. (2015) estimate that an individual athlete can expect 6 injuries per 1,000 “exposures” (i.e., practices or competitions). Using Kerr et al. as a guideline, fraternities and sororities could aim for no more than 6 injuries per 1,000 induction events. Injury expectations include sprains, fractures, strains, and contusions.

## Testing Ethical Hazing Inductions

None of my recommendations should be adopted prior to their formal evaluation. While all the details of such an evaluation are beyond the scope of this article, the following is a basic overview of what an initial study might entail:

- **Study recruitment:** A fraternity chapter already engaged in hazing practices is recruited to take part in a study of reformed hazing. The chapter is selected with attention to state anti-hazing laws and with the approval of its national organization and legal advisors. (This process necessarily requires pre-approval by an Institutional Review Board.)
- **Pre-induction review:** One or more researchers meet with the chapter and discuss their current induction process, from start
- to end, at a high level of detail.<sup>12</sup> Any hazing ordeals are compared to the provisional whitelist, with modifications or removals negotiated to the chapter’s satisfaction.
- **Chapter training:** The chapter receives training in basic first aid and informed consent procedures. Informed consent procedures are expanded to cover not only participation in the induction, but participation in a study thereof.
- **Induction evaluation:** One or more researchers accompany and observe the chapter as it inducts a new class of members. At multiple time points during the induction, inductees and active members are anonymously surveyed on their perceptions of the process with a variety of standardized

<sup>12</sup> This may require a joint meeting with the chapter’s alumni, as they may have considerable influence on the chapter’s induction behavior.

evaluations (e.g., measures of mental health, measures of group cohesiveness).

- **Post-induction evaluation:** At one or more time points post-induction, inductees and active members are again anonymously surveyed. Semi-structured interviews are performed to capture reflections on the process after its completion.
- **Analysis:** Using the gathered data, researchers analyze the results with the aim to answer a number of questions, including the following:

How safe was the process (e.g., number of injuries)? How did the process impact group perceptions and functioning (e.g., perceptions of group solidarity)? To what extent was the process seen as successful by the chapter (e.g., relative satisfaction with the induction)?

Assuming that the study produces useful and positive results, similar studies can be performed with other chapters until the overall plan to embrace and reform hazing is either accepted or rejected.

## Objections to Embracing and Reforming Hazing

Given my years of exposure to anti-hazing advocacy, I anticipate a raft of objections to my proposal. Below, I respond to the most likely objections.

***“No amount of hazing should ever be allowed. It has killed innocent people.”***

We all agree that hazing deaths are tragic and unacceptable. Our shared anger at hazing deaths, however, is not an indication that wholesale suppression is a viable strategy. As an analogy, I am angry at the deaths caused by inebriated drivers, but I do not believe that the solution is to outlaw alcohol itself.

***“If your reforms were implemented, they would amount to legitimating ‘interpersonal violence.’”***

There are many ways to define or categorize hazing that inadvertently poison the well for alternative positions such as my own. Calling hazing “interpersonal violence” is one such framing (e.g., Hakkola et al., 2019; StopHazing, 2019b). Such characterizations are sometimes

appropriate, but they should not be used to set the moral terms of this debate by definitional fiat. For example: Is hazing still “interpersonal violence” if hazing is given informed consent and reasonable safety precautions? If the answer is “yes,” then the categorization illegitimately borrows the moral weight of physical violence and applies it to situations that would not otherwise summon the same objections.

***“Hazing is fundamentally unfair. No one should have to endure any amount of hazing. Would you tolerate these practices in the workplace?”***

Greek letter organizations are private clubs. People do not need to join a fraternity or sorority to earn a paycheck or derive some logical necessity for functioning in society. My suggestion is that the details of private club induction practices do not have to meet stringent definitions of fairness. Such clubs do, however, owe their inductees reasonable safety precautions and informed consent, which is exactly what my reforms seek to accomplish.

***“The moralization and suppression of hazing has worked in some cases.”***

Given the prevalence and time depth of hazing, as well as variation in people and environments, I have no doubt that there are instances where hazing might have been reduced by prevention efforts (e.g., Apgar, 2018; Johnson & Chin, 2016). Again, with decades of varied attempts in varied circumstances, it seems inevitable that at least a few were successful. But the question is not whether traditional hazing prevention has ever worked, it is whether it can be made to work in a way that is generalizable, lasting, and meaningful in effect size for Greek letter societies. At this point, considerable skepticism is appropriate.

***“It is against the values of X fraternity/ sorority to allow hazing.”***

Most fraternity and sorority values are abstractions that are broadly compatible with innumerable behaviors (e.g., Tull & Shaw, 2017), including reformed hazing practices. For example, if an organization values brotherhood, it can be shown by inductees assisting one another in a difficult induction process. If an organization values commitment, it can be demonstrated by the willingness to undergo said induction process. It is easy to understand reformed hazing under the umbrella of these kinds of values, and a version of this understanding may already be present in the minds of members who haze (e.g., Baier & Williams, 1983; Cimino, 2016; Feuer, 2019; McCreary & Schutts, 2019).

***“Some of your reforms amount to militaristic practices. Greek letter societies are not military organizations and should not behave like them.”***

I am not calling for Greek letter societies to become militaristic organizations, only to have

the option of selectively adapting a few militaristic induction practices. These practices are already present in some chapters, making my reforms more about coming to terms with this reality than imposing it (e.g., Cimino, 2016; Leemon, 1970; Roosevelt, 2018). Moreover, abstract objections to an inappropriate incorporation of militarism need to be weighed against the larger goal of hazing harm reduction.

***“If you allow some hazing, it could spiral out of control.”***

And if you allow no hazing, it can occur in unregulated manifestations and spiral even further out of control. To put this more broadly, no one in this debate is morally unburdened from the possibility of negative outcomes arising indirectly from their proposals. For example, individuals who have sought the moralization and suppression of hazing may have helped push the phenomenon even further underground, where its brutality can grow unchecked (e.g., Bryshun, 1998). They may have contributed to members being reticent to call an ambulance when a prospective member is seriously endangered by hazing. They may have inadvertently taught members to disregard legitimate concerns by distributing patronizing anti-hazing propaganda, and so on (e.g., Cimino, 2017). I suspect that most people believe anti-hazing efforts are harmless, but this has never been formally tested. Even well-meaning programs for social change can backfire and generate harmful results (e.g., Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Legault, Gutsell, & Inzlicht, 2011).

***“People should not haze because hazing is detrimental to group solidarity.”***

From a scientific perspective, the extent to which hazing affects group solidarity is not a settled matter and should not be portrayed otherwise

(see discussions in Cimino, 2011, 2013, 2017). Attempts to measure hazing's impact on group solidarity have led to a variety of different results, and nearly all of them are difficult to interpret or generalize. For example, experimental studies of hazing tend to use very mild and brief stressors attached to ephemeral groups (e.g., Aronson & Mills, 1959). But common beliefs about hazing and group solidarity are focused on undeniably intense, lengthy inductions in long-lasting groups. There are also a number of legitimate ways to conceptualize and measure group solidarity, most of which have not been explored for hazing. Thus, any strong claim regarding hazing's on-average impact is premature.

***“Hazing is fundamentally negative and should be replaced with positive, supportive induction practices.”***

Many groups that haze already have “positive” induction practices in addition to hazing ordeals (e.g., Campo, Poulos, & Sipple, 2005; Cimino, 2016). If positive induction practices can substitute for hazing, why have they not already done so? Recall that fraternity and sorority hazing inductions are often effortful, time consuming, and risky. The idea that members have simply failed to realize that hazing ordeals can be replaced with movie nights or other trivial

activities is absurd on its face (e.g., Allan et al., 2018; Cornell University, 2019). Imagine, for example, recommending that the Hopi of 1891 just do *fun things together* instead of their hazing ordeals. These kinds of recommendations imply a narrow, Pollyannaish conception of human coalitional psychology. As interventions, they have as much hope as replacing drugs with hugs.

***“The plan to ‘embrace and reform’ hazing has not been tested. There is no direct evidence that it will work.”***

As a scientist, I am always ready to acknowledge that I could be wrong. There is no doubt that my reforms need to be carefully tested prior to any large-scale implementation. However, there is only one hazing prevention paradigm that has a long record of ostensible failure, and it is not my own. Thus, while it is right to be skeptical of my suggestions, any skepticism of my proposal should be equally applied to proposals to moralize and suppress hazing. Thus far, there seems little in the way of recognition that anti-hazing programs are essentially bereft of rigorous evidence for reducing real-world hazing. Without such evidence, the recommendations given and sold by anti-hazing organizations are questionable at best and potentially harmful at worst.

## General Discussion

I have reviewed some of the problems with anti-hazing efforts and proposed a solution for Greek letter societies: The formal evaluation of some hazing ordeals and (for those chapters determined to haze) the adoption of reformed hazing practices. This idea will be treated by some as a radical and immoral proposal on a

non-negotiable issue. Thus, I anticipate not only the objections reviewed in the previous section, but also a variety of emotional appeals and slogans, such as “A real brotherhood doesn’t haze.” When faced with such appeals, it is worth recalling the cross-cultural and historical breadth of hazing. It would be bizarre to claim,

for example, that sodalities among the Hopi (Stephen & Parsons, 1969) or Maidu (Loeb, 1933) were not “real brotherhoods,” that many small-scale societies of Africa and Melanesia did not have “real brotherhoods,” and so on (e.g., Butt-Thompson, 1908; Herdt, 1998; Loeb, 1929). The breadth of hazing suggests that the means by which “real brotherhoods” are maintained can be extreme and counterintuitive (Tiger, 1984).

Embracing and reforming hazing in fraternities and sororities would require significantly more than is described in this article. Among other things, it would necessitate a massive change in the messaging around inductions into Greek letter societies. Overbroad anti-hazing materials would need to be rewritten to focus on the reasoning behind some exclusions (e.g., alcohol). Unsupported claims would need to be discarded (e.g., quotidian activities can replace hazing). Anti-hazing organizations would need to publicly acknowledge that not all hazing is immoral or dangerous. This kind of sea change would not

happen overnight and would face considerable resistance.

In making the case for reformed hazing, I have focused on harm reduction. None of my arguments have rested on the idea that hazing will necessarily improve incoming members or their associated chapters along any measurable continua. Instead, I have argued that because hazing has certain properties and its prohibition has failed (and will likely continue to fail), we should attempt to regulate its use. But in the process of testing reformed hazing, we may identify any number of induction practices that actually do generate further improvements for fraternities and sororities. (Some of these practices may indeed be hazing ordeals.) Thus, efforts to reform hazing present more than just opportunities to reduce harm, they offer the possibility of broad enhancements, a deeper understanding of Greek letter societies, and a window into human coalitional psychology.

## Appendix: Hopi Initiation

The following are additional details on the Hopi initiation components referenced in the Introduction (Fewkes & Stephens, 1892). The complete initiation is a complex process and involves more ordeals and activities than are listed below.

- **Dressed up as unattractive women with penises drawn on their stomachs:** The initiates were made to wear costumes of “squalid married women” with phallic symbols painted on their gowns, around their stomach and hips. Fewkes and Stephens commented that “they presented a most grotesque appearance” (p. 200).
- **Deprived of food and water for days:** The duration of deprivation is implied to be about four days (p. 198, 208), an onerous time to go without food and a likely lethal time to go without water (especially considering the activities therein). Given their ostensible survival, I suspect that the initiates were not entirely deprived of water. Indeed, there can be deviations between the stated expectations of an initiation process and the on-the-ground reality. For example, in the fraternity I studied, inductees were not allowed to drink water during hazing ordeals (Cimino, 2016). But inductees could occasionally convince an active member to give them water

and, in some instances, might have acquired water through surreptitious means (they were sometimes made to wait outside the view of active members).

- **Made to do a seventeen-mile hike:** A distance of seventeen miles is based on Fewkes and Stephens' estimate of fifteen to twenty miles (p. 205). After the hike, the initiates were required to dig up roots and clay and then endure a return trip. Keep in mind that, all the while, they were being deprived of food and water (but see the above paragraph).

- **Made to sing naked:** Singing naked (p. 198) would not necessarily have been uncomfortable for violating the modesty of the initiates (Stephens, 1972), but instead for taking place within an intense and stressful initiation over which they had little control. However, the event may not have been singularly unpleasant, and this is not without precedent elsewhere. Severe initiations can have components that generate mixed feelings of anxiety and enjoyment (e.g., Houseman, 2001), and this is no different in college fraternities (e.g., Keating et al., 2005).

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