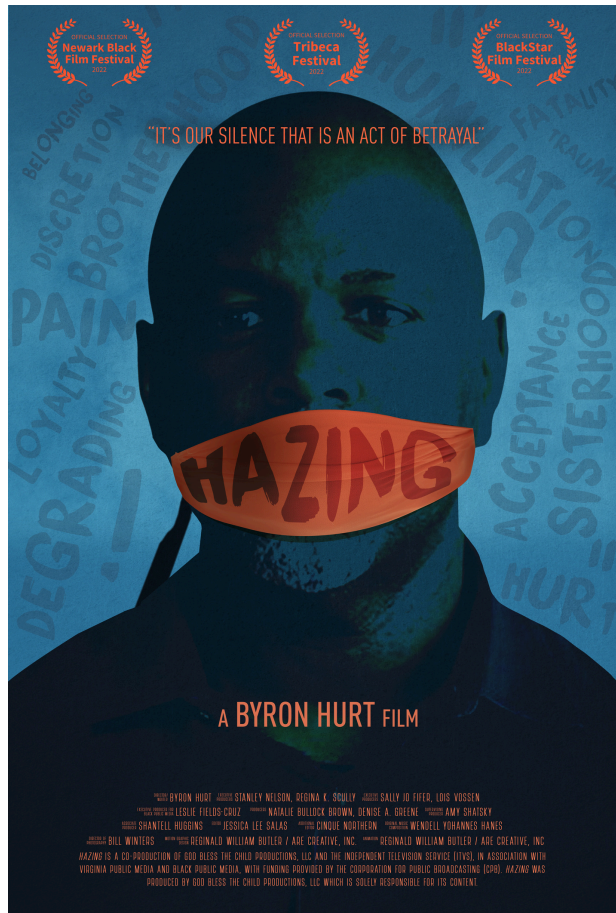# POWER DYNAMICS & HAZING

HAZING FILM ADDENDUM

POWER DYNAMICS & HAZING

HAZING FILM ADDENDUM

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Framing Hazing as an Issue of Power

What is Power?

Power can take many forms, including, for example, physical size and strength, economic power, and positional power such as the power difference between a professor and a student or a supervisor and a staff member. Power can manifest as authority, influence, or control and often shapes visible actions, decisions, and how people think, feel, or perceive their interests.

- **Power over:** When one individual or group has authority or dominance over others, this power dynamic is commonly associated with coercion and control.
- **Groupthink:** A phenomenon where the desire for group harmony and conformity leads to poor or irrational decision-making, often stifling dissent and critical thinking (Shaukat, 2024).

Power dynamics refer to how power is distributed and exercised within relationships or groups.

What is Hazing?

Hazing is 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 (Allan & Madden, 2008 adapted from Hoover, 1999). This definition of hazing is understood to have three components (Allan & Madden, 2008 adapted from Hoover, 1999):

Three Components of Hazing

1. Occurs within a group context

2. Physical, emotional, psychological harm

3. Regardless of willingness to participate

(Allan, 2014)

STOP HAZING

1. Group context:

Hazing is inherently tied to the dynamics of group membership, as someone joins or participates in a group context. Hazing is often compared/likened to bullying, a form of interpersonal violence focused on excluding individuals from groups or communities. Unlike bullying, hazing is deeply rooted in the collective identity of the group and is often justified as a way to foster belonging or solidarity, despite its harmful effects.

2. Humiliating, degrading, or endangering behavior:

Hazing behaviors are intended to challenge or subjugate individuals in ways that undermine their dignity or personal safety. These behaviors often serve to reinforce power imbalances within the group.

3. It happens regardless of an individual's willingness to participate:

The actual "choice" to participate may be offset or diminished by the peer pressure and coercive power dynamics that often exist in the context of gaining membership in a group. In a coercive environment, individuals may feel that if they do not agree to a certain behavior, their desire to belong will go unfulfilled, leaving them with little genuine choice. Even when someone appears to consent to participate in hazing activities, these power dynamics and social pressures create an environment where individuals comply not out of free will, but rather to secure acceptance, membership, or avoid exclusion. This makes the perceived "willingness" to participate invalid, as it is shaped by coercion, social conditioning, and fear of consequences for noncompliance rather than an autonomous decision.
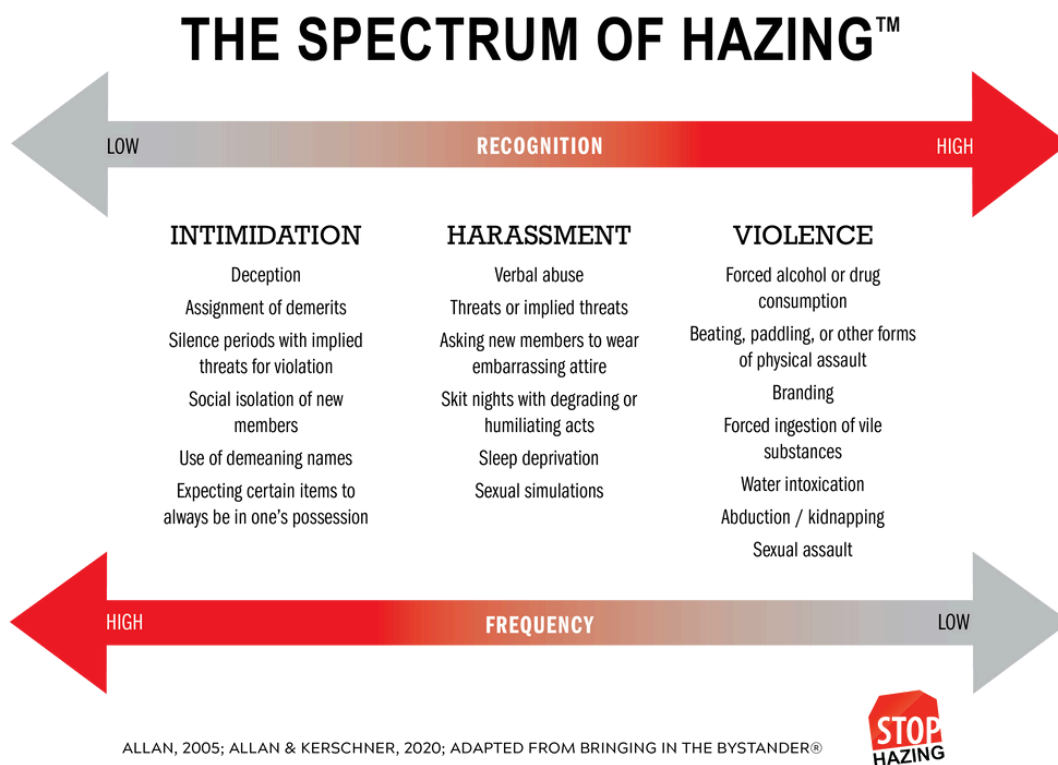
Hazing & Power

The definition of hazing shared earlier highlights the role of power in hazing—how power is distributed and exercised within relationships or groups, often profoundly shaping behaviors and decision-making.

The final component of the definition of hazing, "regardless of a person's willingness to participate," serves as a vehicle for understanding how the power in hazing may undermine and/or impede true consent. Individuals may feel coerced by explicit threats or implicit pressures, fear of exclusion, retaliation, or loss of status. Hierarchical structures further amplify this dynamic by leaving those with less authority feeling powerless to challenge group expectations.

- Hazing often relies on an imbalance of power, where established members (those with power) impose harmful activities on prospective, new, and current members (those with less or no power).
- Power imbalances create environments where individuals feel pressure to engage in hazing activities to gain acceptance, avoid retaliation, or "prove" their worth.
- Groupthink reinforces hazing, as members may prioritize conformity over questioning harmful traditions and may also rationalize or justify the behavior to maintain group cohesion and avoid conflict.

Hazing occurs along a spectrum, but all forms of hazing are rooted in an imbalance of power. Power dynamics are deeply intertwined with The Spectrum of Hazing, as the abuse of power underscores behaviors ranging from intimidation to outright violence (Allan, 2005; Allan & Kerschner, 2020; Adapted from Bringing in the Bystander). These dynamics foster environments where individuals may feel compelled to conform to harmful traditions, perpetuating hazing practices across all levels of severity.

THE SPECTRUM OF HAZING™

LOW ———— RECOGNITION ———— HIGH

INTIMIDATION

Deception

Assignment of demerits

Silence periods with implied threats for violation

Social isolation of new members

Use of demeaning names

Expecting certain items to always be in one's possession

HARASSMENT

Verbal abuse

Threats or implied threats

Asking new members to wear embarrassing attire

Skit nights with degrading or humiliating acts

Sleep deprivation

Sexual simulations

VIOLENCE

Forced alcohol or drug consumption

Beating, paddling, or other forms of physical assault

Branding

Forced ingestion of vile substances

Water intoxication

Abduction / kidnapping

Sexual assault

HIGH ———— FREQUENCY ———— LOW

STOP HAZING

ALLAN, 2005; ALLAN & KERSCHNER, 2020; ADAPTED FROM BRINGING IN THE BYSTANDER®

Broader Systems of Power and Hazing

How Race and Gender Intersect with Hazing

Intersectionality, a term introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991), highlights how multiple aspects of a person's identity, such as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, interact to shape their experiences of privilege and oppression. This framework shows how systems of privilege and oppression are not experienced in isolation but rather amplified or compounded based on the convergence of marginalized identities.

For example, students who identify as both racial minorities and members of the LGBTQ+ community may face heightened vulnerability to hazing and power imbalances, as their intersecting identities can exacerbate the dynamics of exclusion, exploitation, or targeting. Understanding intersectionality is crucial to recognizing the nuanced ways in which students with marginalized identities experience hazing and power structures differently

STOP HAZING

Examining How Race and Gender Impact Hazing
1. ***Race:***
    a. <u>Insights from Linder (2019):</u> Linder emphasizes the need for a power-conscious framework to unpack systems of domination and privilege, particularly how marginalized identities (race, gender, socioeconomic status) experience power imbalances more acutely. These dynamics are compounded in institutional settings like group, team, and organizational settings, where power structures often go unquestioned.
    b. <u>Insights from Allan et al. (2024):</u> Race is deeply intertwined with hazing practices, often rooted in whiteness and white supremacy within historically white institutions (Allan et al., 2024). Framed as tradition, hazing reinforces exclusionary systems and perpetuates inequities, forcing Students of Color to navigate environments dominated by whiteness to achieve social belonging.
2. ***Gender:***
    a. <u>Insights from Allan & Kinney (2018):</u> Gendered power dynamics contribute to the perpetuation of hazing, as individuals feel pressured to perform their gender roles to gain acceptance within the group.
        i. Hazing in male-dominated organizations often reinforces traditional dominance, toughness, and endurance ideals.
        ii. Women's experiences with hazing, as noted in Allan and Kinney's work, often involve behaviors that emphasize conformity to societal standards of femininity and subservience.

While current research provides important insight into how race and gender intersect with hazing, there remains a significant gap in research about how other aspects of identity, such as social class, sexual orientation, and disability, interact with hazing culture. A more expansive application of intersectionality is needed to explore how these dimensions shape students' vulnerability to hazing, their access to support systems, and how power operates within and across different organizational contexts. How might a student's race, gender, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic background influence their experience with hazing and their ability to seek help or challenge harmful group norms?

To better understand how power dynamics function within hazing, it is essential to explore not only the intersections but also how broader social systems and power imbalances manifest in hazing practices. Hazing activities are often structured to assert dominance, establish control, and create a sense of belonging through submission.

Talking Points & Prompts for Critical Dialogue

Examining various key film examples helps to illustrate how these dynamics unfold. As a facilitator, you can guide the discussion by focusing on how these moments reveal how power is exercised, maintained, and perpetuated, ultimately shedding light on the harmful impacts of these practices.

Key Film Examples for Consideration of Power

- **4:41- Summary: Questions designed to assert dominance over newcomers:** Line of questioning: "Why are you trying to be my friend? What makes you think you are good enough to be in this frat? What do you know about my frat? What do you know about my friend? Tell me some history. What can you do for Omega?"
    - These questions create a psychological barrier, making newcomers feel unworthy and dependent on approval from existing members. They demonstrate an imbalance of power and control.
    - **Discussion Questions:** How do the questions asked of newcomers/prospective members reflect power imbalances? How might these types of questions create an environment of coercion and control?
    - **Potential Answers:**
        - They establish a hierarchy where existing members have authority over newcomers.
        - They force newcomers to justify their worth, reinforcing exclusivity.
        - They create dependency by making approval from current members seem essential.
        - They pressure newcomers to conform to group expectations.
        - They set the stage for hazing by making obedience a condition for acceptance.
- **9:02- Summary: Validation and belonging contingent on undergoing hazing.** "He's already in the band. He's a drum major. It's this whole thing; you've got to be validated. You're not part of this group unless you go through this process."
    - **Discussion Questions:** What does the need for validation through hazing reveal about group culture? How can organizations foster belonging without harmful practices?
    - **Potential Answers:**
        - Commitment is measured by how much someone is willing to suffer rather than their contributions to the group.
        - Ensure leaders demonstrate respect, inclusion, and support rather than dominance.
        - What strategies can organizations use to shift from "power over" to shared or distributed power models?
        - Potential Answers:
        - Give all members a voice in shaping policies, events, and group culture.
        - Train members in leadership styles that emphasize teamwork, inclusion, and empowerment.

STOP HAZING

- **14:02- Summary: The cyclical nature of hazing; senior members perpetuating practices done to them.** Cyclical nature of hazing: Robert Champion's bandmates had been trying to haze him since he came on campus and finally got their way; since it was done to them, it "had" to be done to him, displaying "power over."
    - **Discussion Questions:** Why do senior members feel compelled to perpetuate hazing practices done to them? How can organizations break this cycle?
    - **Potential Answers:**
        - Breaking tradition might feel like weakening the group's identity or diminishing their own experience.
        - They may believe that "shared adversity" strengthens relationships and commitment to the group.
        - Replace harmful activities with meaningful bonding experiences that build trust without coercion.
        - Enforce anti-hazing policies and hold members accountable for perpetuating harm.
- **55:14- Summary: Social pain and the psychological drive for acceptance:** Dr. Mitch Prinstein- The drive to fit in is real. Psychological research shows that the minute that we feel that we might be excluded, our brain sends us pretty powerful signals telling us to change our behavior immediately. Activates the same areas of pain in our brain as physical pain. Social pain = physical pain. People might engage in extreme behaviors to avoid social pain or rejection because fitting in makes us uniquely human.
    - Social exclusion activates the same areas of the brain as physical pain, driving individuals to extreme behaviors to fit in.
    - **Discussion Questions:** Psychological research equates social pain with physical pain. How does this insight explain individuals' willingness to endure hazing? What strategies can address this drive for acceptance while preventing harm?
    - **Potential Answers:**
        - When pain is normalized within a group, individuals may accept it as a rite of passage rather than questioning its impact.
        - Shift the focus from proving one's worth through suffering to demonstrating commitment through engagement and support.

Take Action

Examining various key film examples helps to illustrate how these dynamics unfold. As a facilitator, you can guide the discussion by focusing on how these moments reveal how power is exercised, maintained, and perpetuated, ultimately shedding light on the harmful impacts of these practices.

Foster a Culture of Accountability
- Speak up against harmful behaviors or traditions within your group. If you witness hazing, report it to appropriate authorities or utilize anonymous reporting tools.
- Practice self-reflection to understand how your own actions or silence may contribute to perpetuating hazing.

Embrace Bystander Intervention
- Participate in bystander intervention training to learn safe intervention techniques. Reference resources like the Bystander Intervention Guide and Hazing Film Bystander Intervention Addendum to strengthen intervention skills, recognize hazing behaviors early, and implement actionable strategies.
  - Definition: Any situation in which a person observes or hears about potential harm and takes steps to support and/or prevent that harm to those involved or to themselves is considered bystander intervention (StopHazing, 2024).
- Build a network of allies willing to challenge hazing behaviors and support vulnerable peers.

Challenge Groupthink
- Encourage open discussions about traditions or rituals. Ask, "Does this activity align with our organization's values?"
- Support and amplify the voices of members who express discomfort with harmful practices.
- Check out the 10 Signs of Healthy & Unhealthy Groups™ – Toolkit & Training, a resource from StopHazing and One Love that explores how group behaviors impact safety, belonging, and well-being. This toolkit provides examples, discussion guides, and insights on risk factors, helping educators and leaders foster healthier group dynamics.

Prioritize Inclusive and Ethical Leadership
- Advocate for sharing leadership roles among members and promote collaboration over hierarchy.
- Seek to create decision-making processes where all members, including new ones, feel valued and heard.
- Check out Practicing Values-Based Leadership & Decision-Making, a workshop and training from StopHazing that empowers student leaders to align their choices with personal and organizational values. This resource offers real-life scenarios, guided reflections, and practical tools to support ethical decision-making, foster accountability, and prevent harmful behaviors within group settings. Perfect for educators and facilitators looking to strengthen leadership development and promote a culture of integrity.

Educate Yourself and Others
- Learn about power dynamics and hazing through workshops, webinars, or reading resources.
- Share what you learn with your peers to promote awareness about how power imbalances contribute to hazing.

Using the Film as a Discussion Tool

Reflection and Discussion Questions
1. How do power dynamics contribute to the normalization of hazing?
2. Reflecting on Byron Hurt's statement about his fear of losing respect from his fraternity brothers, how can coercive environments create barriers to effective bystander intervention? How can organizations create a culture that supports individuals who speak up against these behaviors?
3. How could members of an organization use their individual and collective power to disrupt the cycle of hazing? Reflect on examples from the film where leadership was used to perpetuate or challenge hazing practices.
4. How does groupthink prevent individuals from challenging harmful traditions like hazing?
5. In what ways do societal factors, such as race or gender, intersect with power dynamics in hazing scenarios? Provide an example from the film.
6. Reflecting on the film, what role(s) does personal accountability play in addressing power imbalances and preventing hazing?

Time Stamps from Hazing Documentary

- **16:42 - Summary: This ritual symbolizes the enforcement of hierarchy and "power over" dynamics, perpetuating a cycle of control by senior members.**
  - The display of "power over" new members by veterans, "bigs," or prophytes through unofficial initiation rituals, such as the act known as "Crossing bus C.
  - Potential discussion questions: How do unofficial rituals reinforce harmful power structures? What can organizations do to create meaningful and safe initiation processes?

- **19:52 - Summary: This illustrates the conflict between maintaining tradition and advocating for organizational change.**
  - Rasheed Ali Cromwell said: "What's interesting to think is the younger members really want to do something different without letting their older brothers down, without letting their older sisters down - and they're trying to struggle with "Well, what does that mean?" and "I still want the respect of older members, but I still want to do the right thing. "
  - Potential discussion questions: How can organizations support younger members who want to challenge harmful practices while respecting older members?

- **20:12 - Summary: Hazing exploits individuals' desire for validation and belonging, leveraging these needs to justify harmful behaviors.**
  - Rasheed Ali Cromwell on the perception of self-worth tied to pledging and sense of belonging/value/power/status: "People feel that in order to have some type of worth or self-value, you've got to pledge to get it."
  - Potential discussion question: How can organizations promote a sense of worth and belonging without requiring harmful initiation practices?

- **20:39 - Summary: The process reinforces the idea that acceptance and respect are contingent on enduring harm, embedding toxic power dynamics into group culture.**
  - Examples of this: a rite of passage, gaining "privileges" you did not have before, were accepted into the larger community, acceptance contingent on completing the process, or proving yourself.
  - Potential discussion question: How can groups redefine rites of passage or joining processes to align with their values while eliminating harm?

- **21:02 - Summary: Peer pressure creates a coercive environment where individuals feel they must comply to gain acceptance, even at personal cost.**
  - Lasana Hotep on peer pressure as coercion: "[Hazing is] Peer pressure in its broadest form."
  - Potential discussion question: What strategies can help individuals resist peer pressure in group settings?

- **22:24 - Summary: Marginalized identities may experience hazing differently due to systemic inequities, amplifying feelings of exclusion and powerlessness.**
    - Discuss minority groups, isolation, etc., and how they play into power dynamics.
    - Potential discussion question: How can organizations address and mitigate the unique challenges minority groups face in hazing scenarios?

- **24:44 - Summary: Such actions are framed as necessary to build strength or conformity, but often result in lasting harm.**
    - Violent displays of "power over," including acts described as "torturous, barbaric things to do" and paddling, are used in an effort to break individuals down to force conformity and create a perceived sense of unity and strength.
    - Potential discussion question: What are the long-term consequences of violent hazing rituals on individuals and group culture?

- **34:14 - Summary: These tasks underscore the unequal distribution of power and the exploitation of newcomers.**
    - There was an established expectation that pledges would perform personal tasks for members of the organization, such as cleaning their rooms, doing their laundry, or writing their essays, with the belief that having a pledge meant access to this kind of service for the next four years.
    - Potential discussion question: How can organizations eliminate exploitative practices while fostering camaraderie/brotherhood/sisterhood?

- **36:11 - Summary: These rituals perpetuate toxic masculinity, reinforcing harmful stereotypes about gender roles.**
    - Dr. Jackson Katz on gender dynamics: "It's all about manhood. A lot of hazing rituals are exaggerations of some of the qualities of so-called manhood that boys and men often feel pressured to conform to."
    - Potential discussion question: How can groups challenge and dismantle gendered expectations with their traditions?

- **36:50 - Summary: Groupthink blinds individuals to their ethics, aligning them with harmful practices to maintain group cohesion.**
    - Hank Nuwer on groupthink: "That's like a cult to have psychological influence over the newcomer. Blinding you to your ethics, your values, your principles out of allegiance to the greater organization and the leader of that group."
    - Potential discussion question: What steps can organizations take to encourage critical thinking and ethical decision-making among members?

- **37:09 - Summary: Walking away is rarely simple or easy due to the intense social and psychological pressures involved.**
    - Dr. Jackson Katz said: "And anybody who would say it's easy to just walk away. It's foolish behavior. It's obvious. They haven't been in that situation."
    - Potential discussion question: How can individuals and organizations create pathways for members to exit harmful situations without fear of ostracism?

- **7:23 - Summary: Gender and race can shape hazing experiences in unique ways, such as Black women in culturally based organizations being pressured to "prove" their toughness or protect the organization's reputation.**
    - There can be differences in gender and race in hazing incidents. Example: Black women in culturally based organizations having to prove they are as tough as the men and will protect the chapter/organization.
    - Potential discussion question: How do gender and race influence the way hazing is experienced, and why might Black women in culturally based organizations feel pressure to prove themselves or protect the group?

- **55:46 - Summary: While growing up, changes in the brain increase our desire for social rewards like attention, feedback, and status, leading to a stronger craving for peer approval and recognition.**
    - Potential discussion question: How might the brain's increased craving for social rewards during adolescence make students more vulnerable to hazing or risky group behaviors?

- **57:05 - Summary: Objects or rituals used in hazing, such as a paddle, can serve as both tools of abuse and symbols of power or status within the group.**
    - The same tools used for abuse, such as a paddle, are often regarded as symbols of power or badges of honor within the organization.
    - Potential discussion question: Why might items or actions used to harm others in hazing also be seen as symbols of pride or achievement, and what does that say about group culture.

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Acknowledgments & Suggested Citation:

If you have any questions about this resource, reach out to StopHazing at info@stophazing.org.

Contributing Authors

The conceptual design, interpretation, and drafting of this project were led by Lauren Griffin, M.Ed., Program and Prevention Coordinator at StopHazing, Meredith Stewart, M.Ed., Operations Manager at StopHazing, and Elizabeth J. Allan, Ph.D., Professor of Higher Education at the University of Maine and Principal of StopHazing.

Acknowledgments

Thank you to Jenny Desmond, M.A., David Kerschner, Ph.D., and Devin Franklin, M.Ed., for contributing content expertise and feedback. Thank you to Elisabeth Rebmann, M.A. for resource design and creation. We also acknowledge the University of Maine, home to the Hazing Prevention Research Lab, for its longstanding support of research related to hazing and its prevention.

Recommended Citation:

StopHazing & God Bless the Child Productions, LLC (2025). Power Dynamics and Hazing, *HAZING* Film Addendum.