

Hazing - The More You Know

By Lorin Phillips



As a high school student, I knew the risks of drinking and driving, that smoking or drinking was prohibited during my soccer season, and that if I was caught in a boys' room during a band trip I'd get sent home.

I didn't hear anyone talk about hazing until college, and I didn't fully understand how to define hazing until I attended an anti-hazing seminar two years after I graduated from college. It was then that I finally realized that some of my high school band, soccer, and youth group experiences had been hazing. I'd always thought of those experiences as traditions, pranks, or just what I needed to do to be like everyone else in those groups. On some occasions, adults were present. My assumption is that by their inaction they, too, did not define those events as hazing. Perhaps it was because it was simply "the way it had always been done."

I participated in events that compromised my values, negatively impacted my confidence, and more than likely made others feel the same way when I continued those traditions as a junior and senior. I wish I'd known more. If I had known then what I know now, I would have said...

Hey students, listen to your gut!

Let me share a few moments from my high school experiences when I wish I'd taken this advice. I remember feeling so guilty when the younger kids would go through "initiation" at church camp and be shaking out of fear. Instead of speaking up, I tried to comfort and coach them individually through it. I convinced myself that by doing so, I wasn't the one causing this fear. Then at band camp, I remember feeling so angry and disrespected when the section leader would be in my face and purposely trying to intimidate me. This time I allowed others to convince me that it was just this way for a little while and this helps us become a well-disciplined outstanding band. I remember feeling guilty when I broke the rules of my soccer team to participate in traditions done by the popular girls on the team. When my coach asked me about it, I finally listened to my gut, was honest, and shared how those events made me feel. I also shared that I was scared that by telling her I'd not be a true part of the team. Instead of allowing that to happen, she helped me and the team change. As a result, we had a better season and a stronger team because we learned to genuinely work together and communicate instead of using intimidation and fear as a way to motivate everyone.

Hey parents, ask questions!

Hazing seems scary, and I told myself on multiple occasions in college that what was happening to me wasn't hazing. I was a strong, independent, well-liked, cool, leader. I would never allow someone to haze me or bully me. The reality is I was hazed, and I did allow it to occur. My soccer coach asked the right questions that helped me open up and be honest. She asked me about the impacts of hazing not if I was hazed. Using these other entry points to start the conversation made it feel like a friendly supportive check-in. Dropping the "H-bomb" is like being called into the principal's office where the code of silence is in full effect. She asked me questions to make sure I was feeling included, respected, supported, and confident. She also asked me if I'd been frustrated, over-whelmed, or uncertain at any time. Somehow it was easier to talk about those topics than something so extreme like hazing or bullying. The advice isn't to downplay the situation...simply don't enter it like a bull in a china shop and realize there are other words you can use to get to what you really want to know - "are you being harmed in any way?"

Hey teachers and administrators, learn from your peers in higher education!

First, create a single anti-hazing policy that is used across the board - athletics, band, clubs, and honor societies. Yes, honor societies. In my experiences, the ones more often abusing their power were the well-respected, smart students loved by teachers. Tradition and inclusion are more powerful forces than logic and values for students. Second, hazing escalates. Traditions evolve as we are in a "bigger and better" society. Third, hazing and the harms caused by hazing won't always be the same for boys and girls. Boys hazing can often be more physically tough and built around proving themselves as a man. For girls, it can more often be mental and emotional abuse built around proving yourself as trustworthy. Don't limit yourself to one view of hazing. It is emotional, mental, and physical.

I remember feeling so guilty when the younger kids would go through "initiation"

Finally, I encourage students, parents, and teachers to create a culture which does not allow events to be downplayed as pranks or brushed off with phrases such as "boys will be boys". I am still baffled by how media coverage on high school and college hazing sparks outrage and concern while media coverage of rookie hazing days in professional sports sparks laughter and draws a crowd to watch "all in good fun." We are sending mixed messages. Phrases which downplay hazing communicate there isn't a true problem. Hazing IS a problem in high schools, and it isn't a new thing. The stories I've shared happened 1994-1997. Since that time, more and more harmful hazing incidents have been reported and continue to make national news.

These are crucial conversations. If I'd known then what I know now, I would have been a better president of my youth group, section leader in the band, and captain of my soccer team. I also think I would have been better equipped to stand up against hazing in college and the bullying many face in the workplace. So now we both know. Keep learning, and let's get to work!

Lorin received her Bachelor of Science in Integrated Science and Technology from James Madison University in 2002. Lorin traveled for her sorority, Sigma Sigma Sigma, as a Leadership Consultant from 2002 to 2003 before becoming the Director of Chapter Services in May 2003. She has worked for Tri Sigma as the Director of Chapter Services for 10 years and is now currently the Assistant Executive Director. Director Lorin obtained a Master of Education in Adult Learning and Human Resource Development from James Madison University in 2007. In addition to her staff responsibilities, Lorin began speaking with CAMPUSPEAK in 2013 on topics of Women's Hazing, Confrontation, and Alcohol. During her time with Tri Sigma she has conducted over 100 risk management investigation, facilitated numerous chapter leadership programs on a variety of topics, served as lead facilitator for National leadership programs, and developed a risk reduction curriculum for students and advisors.