

The Cornell Daily Sun

[News](#) | [Sports](#) | [Opinion](#) | [Daze](#) | [Forums](#) | [Daybook](#) | [Contact](#)

Search

Search

[News](#)
[Sports](#)
[Opinion](#)
[Daze](#)
[Interact](#)
[About the Sun](#)
[Advertising](#)
[Links](#)

User login

Username: *

Password: *

Log in

- [Create new account](#)
- [Request new password](#)

Home

Gray Areas of 'Hazing'

By [Archives](#)
 Oct 14 2004

"If it doesn't kill you, it only makes you stronger," my wrestling coach used to say -- usually right before the last mile sprint of morning practice. Half the team came in six minutes later, cotton mouthed and gasping for air. But we made it, and it made us better.

So it goes with most hardships: those things which test a person's mental and physical fortitude, those which pressure a person to test his ability, inevitably reveal the limits of his character. When imposed with a clear purpose in mind and safeguards in place, such rites of passage and tests of mettle reward perseverance with pride at the end of the journey. Problems arise when those leading the exercise go too far and someone gets hurt. Misguided by stupidity and charged by the moment, some people do make poor decisions which end in disaster and, in the process, cross the fine line between hardship and hazing.

As my colleague put it last week, hazing is "immoral, illegal, humiliating, and antiethical." He's right: the unnecessary abuse of others by elders, superiors, or even peers can spin out of control and do far more damage than good. The pledge, taunted by brothers, takes 20 shots and slips into an irreversible coma. High school girls, desperate to be part of the in-crowd, subject themselves to ritual disgrace at the whim of outgoing seniors. The JV high school football player, helpless at the hands of the varsity, gets molested at a preseason football camp. The gangbanger wannabe, seeking initiation, receives kicks and blows until he passes out.

These incidents -- those on the extreme fringe of the blanket of hazing -- capture our attention and compel our disgust every few months. Who could do such a thing? Why would anyone want to? most people ask. But the fact of the matter is that most people have or have been "hazed" in one form or another at some time without any dire consequences -- it's a process that has existed forever and will continue to be a facet of social stratification. The question is not how to eliminate hazing from sports or social life, but how to make it safe and meaningful while simultaneously trying to prevent it.

The United States military provides a perfect template for hardship in action. Once they arrive for summer duty at the United States Naval Academy, plebes (incoming freshmen) undergo a series of challenges, which have helped these initiates bond since the school's inception. In one test, upperclassmen grease a tall obelisk with lard and charge the class with reaching the top, no matter how long it takes. Some groups get it done within a few hours; others take the better part of the day. Throughout, the plebes must strategize as a team and, quite literally, support their mates shoulder-to-shoulder in order to accomplish the goal.

Before becoming marines, boot campers must conquer the Crucible -- a sleepless, multi-day, marathon of obstacles which forces individuals to not only face their fears, but conquer them. Marine candidates get gassed, they run until their legs practically fall off, they starve, they make it. No wonder they're called the few and the proud.

But what about an example closer to home, a scenario more germane to our civilian lives. In high school, I remember standing on the football field with another sophomore teammate, imitating a golf pin with our hands triangulated our ears, while two seniors chipped golf balls at us. That was one of a few things we had to do during football camp which could qualify as hazing. But did we care? No. Did we make it through unscathed? Yes. Do those times make for fun memories and good stories? Absolutely.

Think of the last job you had. Were you on the lower end of the totem pole as a summer intern? Did your boss ever just tell you to make the coffee or copy the portfolio ... 500 times? Did she thank you, or just give you something else to do? Think of the last time you went to a big party. Did you have to wait in line while the person at the door picked and pecked through the lot, decided who could come in and who would have to wait? Think of the last time you wanted anything badly and had to work hard to get it. Was it worth it? Did it stink to go through but feel good once you made it? I imagine so.

Were Cornell's IFC board, athletic department, or student affairs office to catch wind of anything remotely similar to military "hazing" (or high school hazing, for that matter) taking place within the context of a fraternity, sorority, team, or social group, heads would roll -- and they have.

In most cases, I imagine political correctness has more to do with those judicial decisions than common sense. While many of Cornell's varsity teams, Greek houses, and secret societies probably have some sort of unspoken initiation processes, few participants (if any) ever suffer as a result. And, miracle of miracles, those people -- athletes or otherwise -- look back on the experience with feelings of accomplishment. Nonetheless, administrators continue to admonish the practice and hammer those unfortunate enough to get caught. That's wrong. Forced drinking is never acceptable. Anything activity that puts a person in clear danger is unacceptable. And any activities which have no beneficial outcomes and serve merely to humiliate or scare another are unacceptable, because those are just the things which put people in the hospital and give sports teams and the Greek system bad reputations. On the contrary, those things which may be hard but have a purpose and conclude with success have their rightful place among us.

So, instead of focusing on a few fringe incidents of hazing gone awry, instead of harping on the dire consequences of stupid actions, we should instead concentrate on the positive aspects of trying times which, if used wisely, may break a person down only to build him up.

Everett Hullverson is a Sun Assistant Sports Editor. He can be contacted at ejh27@cornell.edu. Chew on This will appear every other Friday this semester.

Archived article by Everett Hullverson

By [Archives](#) at Oct 14 2004 - 7:00

[Post new comment](#)

Your name: *

E-mail: *

The content of this field is kept private and will not be shown publicly.

Homepage:

Subject:

Comment: *

- Allowed HTML tags: <a> <cite> <code> <dl> <dt> <d
- Lines and paragraphs break automatically.
- Images can be added to this post.

[More information about formatting options](#)

[Preview comment](#)

[Post comment](#)

Paid Advertisement

Posts and Comments are the exclusive property of their owners.
Wiki Pages licensed under the [GNU Free Documentation License](#).

All other content © 2006 The Cornell Daily Sun

All Rights Reserved.

[Contact The Sun](#)