

The Psychology of Hazing and Event Culture

Yale Student Leadership Training 2013

Initiations and Hazing

Initiations are powerful rituals. By stepping outside the routines of everyday existence, initiations create intense experiences of community, summoning and strengthening group spirit. At their most potent, initiation rituals affirm a group's core values, inducting new members into a collective sense of purpose.

And yet—the intensity of initiations can warp into destructive forms. The ritualized atmosphere and excitement can heighten power dynamics, making it exceptionally difficult to calibrate coercion and risk. People can find it very hard to protect themselves or each other, even despite their good intentions. All too easily, groups can find themselves engaged in hazing.

Strong leadership, creativity, and good planning will enable your group to create lasting bonds without resorting to hazing. Below, you will find tools to help you—useful questions, examples, and detailed regulations. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Office of Student Affairs. If you encounter or learn about hazing in any form, bring it to the attention of a dean, master, or the police—or text YaleTip to make an anonymous report.¹

Acts of hazing are, of course, strictly forbidden at Yale. They violate the Undergraduate Regulations and may be crimes in the State of Connecticut. Hazing is utterly incompatible with Yale's core values of integrity, civility, and respect.

We must all work collectively and diligently toward eradicating hazing practices on our campus. If these are the traditions of some groups, we must transform them. Traditions are always in flux—as leaders, we must ensure that change moves in a positive direction, eliciting the best of ourselves, our groups and our communities.

¹ Text 67283; type “yaletip” and a space, then your message. More info at <http://publicsafety.yale.edu/yaletip>.

Creating Positive Initiation Rituals

Not all groups conduct initiations. If yours does, you'll need to reflect carefully on the practices involved. Consider the following questions:

- 1) What is the mission of our student organization?
- 2) What do we want to accomplish in our initiation? How do those goals align our broader mission?
- 3) What are our traditional initiation practices? Do those practices accomplish our goals?
 - a. Do our rituals make members of the group feel valued and respected throughout the process? How?
 - b. Does the initiation contain any actions that could be seen as a misuse of power?
 - c. Are "choices" within the initiation real? Can people opt out? How?
 - d. Could our initiation in any way violate the hazing sections of the Undergraduate Regulations or Connecticut law? (See attached.) If so, how will we change those aspects of our initiation?
- 4) Does our group need to develop new practices to realize our goals? How can we make that happen? How will we handle resistance to change?
- 5) Who will plan and conduct the initiation? What support do these students need? Who will give it?
- 6) During the initiation itself:
How will we make sure we stick to the plans and avoid hazing? Will support and help be available to the students running the rituals? Who will intervene if things go wrong? How?
- 7) After the initiation:
How did it go? Were our goals accomplished? Are there improvements to be made?

As a group leader, you are responsible for ensuring that there is no hazing in your initiations.

BE CREATIVE. INNOVATE. ASPIRE.

**SELECT THE BEST OF PAST PRACTICES, JETTISON THE WORST,
AND CONSTRUCT TRADITIONS THAT WILL SERVE YOUR GROUP WELL.**

Examples of Hazing

- New members of a women's singing group are made to wear bikinis for the night of their initiation.
- New recruits of a musical organization are made to stand in a line for several hours until released by seasoned members of the organization.
- A person tapped for a senior society is 'paddled' by the previous members.
- New members of an athletic team are put in a room to finish a keg together. They are told they don't have to participate, but feel pressure to pull their weight.
- A fraternity recruit is put into the trunk of a car to be transported to another location.
- New members of a performance group are expected to get incredibly drunk, and are then dropped off at a club late at night.

Yale's Undergraduate Regulations on Hazing Excerpts

Because it violates our community values and standards, Yale College prohibits all acts of hazing. Hazing includes any action that violates Connecticut hazing law ([CT General Statute, Section 53-23a, Hazing](#)) as well as additional violations spelled out in these regulations.

In addition to Connecticut law, Yale College defines hazing to include initiation or affiliation activities that intentionally or recklessly endanger physical or mental health; that intimidate, denigrate, or humiliate persons pledging or seeking membership, or seeking to retain membership, in a registered or unregistered student organization or on an athletic team; or that intimidate, denigrate, or humiliate third parties who are witness to or subject to such activities. **Because hazing is an organizational activity, the organization, its officers, and responsible members will be held accountable for hazing violations.**

Hazing is an offense whether it occurs on or off campus. The Yale College Executive Committee will not consider the implied or express consent of the person being hazed as a defense; nor will it consider the use of alcohol or drugs as a mitigating factor. To the contrary, **in the context of hazing, the use of alcohol or drugs by any participants may be considered an express attempt to impair judgment, likely contributing to reckless behavior.**

With respect to possible disciplinary action against all such persons, the Executive Committee may consider as mitigating factors efforts made to prevent the harmful or potentially harmful situation, as well as their cooperation with the Executive Committee's investigation of the situation.

Hosting a Safe Event: Reducing the Risk of Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct can happen in a wide range of circumstances, but events—especially parties—carry with them some specific risks. With some proactive planning and attention during the event, you can increase the odds that your guests can enjoy a safe, successful event.

Strategies:

- 1) What kind of an event is it? What is your goal? It might be as simple as providing a space for your friends to hang out and have fun, but it's important to think about what you want before you think about how to achieve it. If the event is hosted by a group, everyone should understand the goals for the event and strategies for achieving them. That discussion should include a frank assessment of risk and a collective plan to minimize it.
- 2) Think about who to invite. How big is your space? Will there be dancing? Is it a dinner party? Will the people you invite bring guests? Thinking this through will help you know how to set up the space and how much food etc. to purchase.
- 3) Think about the physical space of the event and how that space might be used. Are there adequate spaces where conversations can happen? If there are more isolated spaces figure out who will remain aware of what's happening in those spaces during the event.
- 4) Choose music strategically. Any music playing will be a big factor in determining the atmosphere of the entire event, how your guests perceive it, and how people will act.
- 5) Many events need to be registered. If you are hosting an event in a residential space on campus and there will be more than 20 people, it needs to be registered with your master. If you are hosting an event off campus and there will be more than 50 people, it needs to be registered with the Yale College Dean's Office.
- 6) Talk to your neighbors ahead of time. Let them know something will be happening and give them your phone number so they can call you if there is a problem.
- 7) Remember, you as the host set the tone for your event. During the event do not tolerate patterns of pressure, derogatory language, or other offensive behavior. If you don't want a direct confrontation, intervene in a low key way (change the topic, make a joke, dance between people).

- 8) If you are serving alcohol remember that you can be held legally responsible for your guests' behavior. Make sure you read up on Connecticut's Social Host laws. A few important precautions:
 - a. Take steps to make sure guests are not pressured to drink or to drink beyond their limits.
 - b. Make it easy for people to manage their own consumption. Provide ways for people to measure the alcohol they put into a drink, or better yet, have a friend go through Yale's free bartender training and run a bar for the party.
 - c. Have interesting non-alcohol options available along with food. Alcohol metabolizes much more gradually if consumed with food.

- 9) Keep an eye on your guests.
 - a. Be alert to the possibility that someone needs help. Does anyone look uncomfortable or unwell? Make yourself visible as a host—and offer help when it might be useful.
 - b. Be alert to the possibility that someone is causing trouble. Are there signs of pressure, coercion, disrespect or general shadiness? Intervene. Don't wait for things to get out of control. The best interventions come early, and are often barely perceptible. Redirect situations well before they reach a danger point. Speak up. Distract. Disrupt.

- 10) If you can't fix a situation on your own: get help. If that doesn't work, call the Yale Police at 203-432-4400. Be willing to overreact to protect someone.

- 11) Remember that Yale has a medical amnesty policy. Any student, regardless of their age, who is intoxicated or high may seek help at Yale Health without fear of penalty for consumption. If one of your guests appears to need help, call Acute Care at 203-432-0123.

- 12) Think about how people will get home. Have the Yale Shuttle number ready to call for your guests: 203-432-6330.

- 13) If your event affects any communal space, make sure you clean it up as soon as possible. Be respectful of those around you.

Excerpts from Yale's Undergraduate Regulations on Sexual Misconduct:

Definition of Sexual Misconduct

Sexual misconduct incorporates a range of behaviors including rape, sexual assault (which includes any kind of nonconsensual sexual contact), sexual harassment, intimate partner violence, stalking, and any other conduct of a sexual nature that is nonconsensual, or has the purpose or effect of threatening, intimidating, or coercing a person or persons. When there is a lack of mutual consent about sexual activity, or there is ambiguity about whether consent has been given, a student can be charged with, and found guilty of, committing a sexual assault or another form of sexual misconduct.

Much sexual misconduct includes nonconsensual sexual contact, but this is not a necessary component. Threatening speech, which is sufficiently serious to constitute sexual harassment, for example, will constitute sexual misconduct. Photographs, video, or other visual or auditory records of sexual activity made without explicit consent constitute sexual misconduct, even if the activity documented was consensual. Similarly, sharing such recordings without explicit consent is a form of sexual misconduct. For example, forwarding a harassing electronic communication may also constitute an offense.

Definition of Sexual Consent

Sexual activity requires consent, which is defined as clear, unambiguous, and voluntary agreement between the participants to engage in specific sexual activity. Consent cannot be inferred from the absence of a "no"; a clear "yes," verbal or otherwise, is necessary.

Consent cannot be obtained from someone who is asleep or otherwise mentally or physically incapacitated, whether due to alcohol, drugs, or some other condition. Consent cannot be obtained by threat, coercion, or force. Agreement given under such conditions does not constitute consent.

Consent must be clear and unambiguous for each participant throughout any sexual encounter. Consent to some sexual acts does not imply consent to others, nor does past consent to a given act imply ongoing or future consent. Consent can be revoked at any time. For all of these reasons, sexual partners must evaluate consent in an ongoing fashion and should communicate clearly with each other throughout any sexual encounter.