

**Need for Belonging and Attachment Style in Relation  
To College Students' Participation in Negative Group Initiation Practices**

**By**

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PREVIEW

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## ABSTRACT

Numerous stories have emerged in the media related to the participation of adolescents and young adults in hazing activities as a requirement for initiation into groups. Although group dynamics have been identified as playing a role in engagement of these activities, minimal quantitative and research based information has been completed investigating individual factors that relate to participation.

This study examined the relationship between specific individual factors of belongingness, attachment, and discomfort in participation in both acceptable and unacceptable group initiation practices. Possible predictors of engaging in unacceptable behaviors were also investigated. Furthermore, unacceptable practices were delineated into categories of humiliating activities, dangerous/illegal activities, and activities involving substance use based on previous research findings. The final sample consisted of 268 college students from a Mid-Atlantic urban university. Participants completed a packet of 4 surveys and scales, which included a modified hazing survey, the Selfobject Needs Inventory (SONI), the Social Connectedness and Assurance Scales, and the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale (ECRS).

Results were mixed in regards to the relationships for belongingness and attachment needs on participation in group initiation activities. The Need for Mirroring was positively associated with participation activities. Higher levels of social connectedness were related to higher levels of participation in acceptable practices and lower participation in dangerous hazing, while lower levels of social assurance were significantly related to higher levels of participation in all negative activities. Higher levels of anxious attachment were associated with higher levels of participation in humiliating and dangerous hazing practices. Age and gender were found to be associated with certain types of group initiation practices. Social assurance was the only variable found to be a significant predictor of engaging in 4 out of the 5 types of participation (overall participation, acceptable, humiliating, and dangerous). Social connectedness was also found to be

a significant unique predictor of participation in acceptable practices, only. Higher levels of discomfort were associated with all types of group initiation activities. Lastly, belongingness factors did not moderate the relationship between discomfort and participation in group initiation practices, although significant associations were found between factors. Limitations and implications of findings on the field of school-clinical child psychology were also explored.

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

The practice of hazing is a long-standing group initiation ritual that has been recognized in society across cultures for many years. Hazing refers to “any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person’s willingness to participate” (Allan, 2003). Pellicciotti (2000) further substantiates that hazing refers to activities that “produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule”. In the past, hazing was often considered to be harmless pranks practiced predominantly by young men in college or fraternities (Allan, 2003; Nuwer, 1990,1999). Yet, in recent years, society has become much more aware of the increasingly aggressive and negative aspect of hazing, as well as, the differential in gender practices. Research has begun to look more in earnest at the practices of hazing and the demographic make-up of those who adhere to these types of behaviors although it mainly is descriptive in nature.

However, there is limited material on the relationship between the internal characteristics of individuals and the negative behaviors they are exhibiting during hazing rituals. Prior research and theoretical frameworks have examined the nature of need for belonging, and relationship attachment style, in the older adolescent population, separately (Allen & Ladd, 1999; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Lee & Lee, 2001; Lee & Robbins, 1995, 1998, Scharf, Mayseless, and Kivenson-Baron, 2004). Yet, there have been no research studies, to date, that examines these internal variables simultaneously, and their relationship to older adolescents’ attitudes towards and practices of hazing. Therefore, the aim of this study would be to investigate these internal variables in relation to hazing attitudes and practice in a population of college students.

## CHAPTER II

### Literature Review

The escalation of hazing practices among the adolescent population has taken society by surprise. The practice of hazing was originally thought to be one of harmless jokes but has evolved into a practice that can be humiliating, degrading, and dangerous. Various articles have been written about the deleterious affects of the initiation process, virtually ending in physical harm and/or fatalities of new group members (Arnold, 2000, Nuwer, 1990, 1999, Yachnin, 2000). Alcohol is often incorporated into this initiation process, adding to the level of intensity (Arnold, 2000). The practice of hazing has been documented with a wide variety of ethnicities, gender, nationalities, and various organizations including military personnel (Allan, 2003, Jones, 2000, Ostvik, 2001, Ruffins & Evelyn, 1998). More recent reports are indicating that younger and younger adolescents are engaging in hazardous hazing practices (Hoover, 2001, and Oliff, 2002). For instance, the events at Mepham High School in Long Island, NY, Woodridge High School in Peninsula, Ohio, and Glenbrook North High in suburban Chicago (Wahl & Wertheim, 2003, and Weir, 2003) are just three of many documented incidences of extreme hazing within a high school population.

#### Definition of Hazing

As previously stated, hazing is defined as “any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, or risks emotional and/or physical harm, regardless of the person’s willingness to participate” (Allan, 2003). Hazing occurs when an individual attempts to join a group and is expected to complete an initiation process. Nuwer (1990, 1999) reports that hazing is when veteran members of a group require that new members endure demeaning or dangerous rituals, or temporarily give up social status, in order to gain membership and acceptance into the organization. Within the Greek fraternal community, this process is more commonly known as pledging. The pledging or initiation process serves the purpose of instilling

value to the membership in the group and forming a cohesive bond/union between new members to perpetuate the organization. In essence, developing a group unification from many individuals (Nuwer, 1999, Pelliciotti 2000). Jones (2000) reflects that the pledge process is a symbolic journey of the theme of death and rebirth. The completion of the pledge process “symbolically represents the replacing of a life of hopelessness, selfishness, and solitude with one full of hope, light, and fraternal love” (p.116). The author also sheds light on the historical and ritualistic nature of the initiation process, particularly with African Americans. The usual intention behind the initiation process is a positive one. However, the resulting tactics are often negative in nature and can cause psychological and/or physical harm. Elizabeth Allan (2003) posits that hazing practices are shaped by a power dynamic in a group and/or organization. For instance, some examples of hazing include members being required to act as personal servants for current members of the group, depriving oneself of food, sleep, or hygiene, destroying or stealing property, and being tied up, taped or confined in small spaces. Therefore, some individuals hold greater power than other less seasoned initiates.

### **Research on Hazing**

Empirical research on hazing is scarce and most information in the literature regarding hazing is qualitative in nature. However, in 1998 the most comprehensive study on hazing to date was conducted by Alfred University in order to accumulate data on prevalence and risk factors. The first study (Hoover, 1999), conducted in conjunction with the NCAA organization, focused on hazing practices among college men and women who participated in organized athletic teams. The researchers sent out an anonymous survey directly to 10,000 student athletes' homes. The participants were chosen randomly from a list of 61,258 names compiled from 224 collegiate institutions. There was a response rate of over 20% for the students with more women responding than men. The survey assessed types of hazing activities; the percentage of those who had been hazed who were most at risk, gender differences, and ways to combat hazing. For their purposes, the authors defined hazing as “any activity expected of someone joining a group that

humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers, regardless of the person's willingness to participate. This does not include activities such as rookies carrying the balls, team parties with community games, or going out with teammates, unless an atmosphere of humiliation, degradation, abuse or danger arises (Hoover, 1999, p.8)."

The investigators separated initiation activities into 4 categories based on factor analysis, acceptable, questionable/minimal danger risk, alcohol-related, and unacceptable/ dangerous or illegal. Acceptable activities included those that were deemed innocuous or positive in nature such as maintaining a certain GPA, completing volunteer or community service, completing a ropes course or team trip, dressing up for team functions, and taking an oath or signing a contract of standards. Questionable activities were those that were humiliating or degrading in nature but were not deemed to be dangerous or potentially illegal, such as being yelled at, being forced to wear embarrassing clothing, and associating with specific people, among others. Alcohol-related activities included drinking contests. Unacceptable and/or potentially illegal behaviors related to those activities that carried a high probability of danger or injury, or could result in a crime. This included, being tied up, destroying or stealing property, being paddled, or harassing others.

Mixed results were found regarding the participation in positive and negative initiation practices. For instance, almost all respondents indicated participation in at least one acceptable activity; however, only 20% of the respondents reported being involved in only acceptable initiation activities. On the other hand, the researchers found that one in five students was subjected to unacceptable and potentially illegal hazing. Half were required to participate in drinking activities while two in five had consumed alcohol on recruitment visits even before enrolling. Two thirds of the participants were subjected to humiliating hazing (defined as being yelled at, forced to wear embarrassing clothing, or being deprived of sleep). Women were more likely to engage in alcohol-related hazing than in other types. Student athletes attending school in the east and west were more likely to engage in alcohol-related hazing, while those on southern and midwestern campuses had greater incidences of dangerous and potentially illegal activities.



Interestingly, those athletes who were most at risk were male, attended rural, residential campuses, did not belong to a Greek organization but whose campus maintained a Greek system, and were soccer or lacrosse players or swimmers/divers.

Alfred University then conducted their second comprehensive study (2000) focusing on hazing practices by students in high school. A similar procedure was used to gather data. Twenty thousand surveys were randomly sent to high school students across the nation based on a composite of over 8 million student names and addresses. Of the original 20 thousand, 1,541 surveys were completed and mailed back. For the purpose of the study, hazing was defined as “any humiliating or dangerous activity expected to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate (Hoover, 2000).” Four categories were still utilized, closely relating to the categories used in the NCAA study but with different titles (i.e., Community Building, Humiliation, Substance Use, and Dangerous). The results showed that hazing was a practice experienced by 48% of the informants. Of the students who had reported being hazed, 43% were subjected to humiliating activities and 30% reported performing potentially illegal acts as part of their initiation. This indicates that hazing is a problem in the high school setting, as well. Furthermore, both males and females reported high levels of hazing, the lower a student’s GPA the greater the risk of being hazed, and students joining “safe” groups such as church groups responded that they were hazed (24%). Twenty five percent of those who reported being hazed said that they first experienced hazing before they were 13 years old. The students’ attitudes (i.e., considering hazing to be socially acceptable) were found to reflect the likelihood of being hazed. Dangerous hazing and substance use in hazing were both found to be similar in high school students as in students in college. Seventy one percent of the students subjected to hazing reported negative consequences including feeling angry, confused, embarrassed, or guilty. Lastly, most of the students reported that they participated in hazing activities because they were “fun and exciting”. The results of the Alfred University studies continue to be supported with recent prevalence studies continuing to indicate that negative hazing and team-building initiation

activities remain a part of the fabric of undergraduate experience (Campo, Poulos, and Sipple, 2005).

Hazing activities are not exclusive to collegiate activities, alone (Ostvik and Rudmin, 2001; Winslow, 1999). Ostvik and Rudmin (2001) completed a study investigating both bullying and hazing behaviors among Norwegian army soldiers. They distinguish hazing from bullying in several ways. First, “hazing is harassment by a cohort of senior members of a group against a cohort of newcomers to the group, whereas bullying is harassment by one or a few individuals against isolated individuals” (p.19). Additionally, the relationships are not reciprocal so newcomers cannot haze senior members, hazing tends to be a public activity, hazing is characterized by ritualistic behaviors that are followed year after year, hazing has a finite ending, it is used as a means of socializing new members and eventually brings victims into group solidarity with tormentors. The authors found hazing was engaged in more frequently than bullying in this population with 22% reporting they had been hazed at some time and 19% reporting they had hazed others. Forty-six percent believed that most seniors in the military service hazed new recruits. Interestingly, only 1% of the soldiers were 18 years old but they were found to be the most vulnerable for victimization with 40% reporting being hazed and 0% of them hazing others. In comparison, 26% of 19 year-olds reported being hazed and 21% reported hazing others. Findings also indicated that it tends to be the younger soldiers, but not the youngest, which do the hazing.

Whereas some research has begun to explore attitudes towards hazing (Cokley, 2001 and Drout and Corsoro, 2003), research investigating causal factors related to negative group initiation practices has been slow to be established. Although not the only determinant of behavior, attitudes do play an important role in the likelihood of a said behavior subsequently being engaged in. This is reflected by Ajzen’s work (1991) in which he proposed the Theory of Planned Behavior. This theory posits that behavior can best be predicted by a person’s intentions. An individual’s intentions is composed of three underlying factors, attitudes towards the

behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Attitudes are favorable or unfavorable evaluations or appraisals of the behavior in question. Subjective norms include perceived social pressure to perform or not perform. Perceived behavioral control refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behavior.

Keating, Pomerantz, Pommer, Ritt, Miller, and McCormick (2005) studied the group dynamics of hazing and touched upon the importance of the attitude of the individual toward the group and the hazing experience itself, as well as, promoting social dependency. They found that the more likely the tasks were perceived as “fun” the greater likelihood the individual would be to engage in dangerous tasks. Additionally, harsh initiations were associated with elevated perceptions of the importance of the group (e.g., belonging to the group) to the individual. The authors postulated that gaining social approval is the first step in gaining group identity and attachments and that the feeling of belonging to the group was an important source of identity to individuals participating in the group.

Recently, some literature has begun to question the relationship between hazing and belongingness. Hoover (1998) postulates that the desire to be accepted into the valued group induces the initiates to endure everything required of them to become an inside member of the group. Ruffins and Evelyn (1998) also suggest that possibly “the most important psychological trait of frat members may be their strong desire to be part of something larger than themselves” (p.18).

### **Need for Belonging**

The need for belonging was a key component of Abraham Maslow’s theory of self-actualization. Maslow proposed that before an individual could be considered self-actualized they required the attainment of certain needs that were placed upon each other in a pyramidal shape. At the base of the pyramid are biological needs, followed by safety needs. Above safety needs is the need for belonging which, when attained, leads to the needs of the ego and then to self-actualization (Maslow, 1968).

Other theorists have also identified one's need to belong or belongingness and how it relates to the functioning of an individual. Heinz Kohut (1971) postulated the theory of self-psychology in which he regarded the infant's basic self as fragile, vulnerable, amorphous, and without a stable structure with continuity. Thus, the infant requires the support of others to help develop a more stable, cohesive structure (self), namely the mother and father. These individuals are termed selfobjects because the infant perceives them to be aspects of his or her self rather than separate objects with their own identities. The self was considered to be the center of experience and was organized according to two needs, grandiosity (mirroring) and idealization. Later, Kohut proposed a third need, that of an alter ego or belongingness (twinship) need. Particularly, Kohut implied that people look to confirm a sense of belongingness as a way to avoid feelings of loneliness and alienation. The accurate attainment of these needs leads to a sense of cohesive self. In this way, Kohut's theory focuses on the early experience of the child and maintains parallels with Bowlby and Ainsworth's theories of attachment.

Based on Kohut's theories, Lee and Robbins (1995) propose that belongingness is composed of three aspects, companionship, affiliation, and connectedness. Companionship begins in early infancy and refers to the young child attempting to form a bond with a nurturing parent. This aspect continues through adulthood. Affiliation refers to the need for twinship that Kohut originally inferred in 1984. Children look to form bonds with others in an attempt to increase self-esteem and extend beyond the parent-child relationship. This piece plays an important role during later childhood and early adolescence. The final step is that of connectedness which begins to emerge during adolescence and extends throughout the adult life. The authors developed a measure of belongingness that evaluates an individual's level of social connectedness and social assurance.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) hypothesized the Need to Belong as a fundamental human motivation. Based upon a comprehensive literature review, the authors posited that the "belongingness hypothesis is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at