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Emily Feuer, University at Albany, SUNY

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HAZING DEFINITIONS OF STUDENTS AND ADMINISTRATORS AT TWO INSTITUTIONS USING A FOUR FRAME APPROACH

EMILY FEUER, PH.D., UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK (SUNY)

This study looks at how students affiliated with fraternities/sororities and administrators who work with these students define hazing at two institutions of higher education. These personal definitions are compared to institutional definitions and are examined using Bolman and Deal's (2017) four-frame model: the Human Resource Frame, the Political Frame, the Structural Frame, and the Symbolic Frame. This examination allows for an understanding of what frames are naturally used to define hazing and where areas for improvement may lie in terms of making changes to existing institutional policies and incorporating additional frames to better understand hazing and create effective hazing definitions (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Hazing is a significant area of concern on college campuses across the United States, with a focus especially on fraternities and sororities. Allan and Madden (2008) found that approximately 55% of college students who are involved on campus with any student organization, club, or team, and 73% of students involved with fraternities or sororities, have experience with hazing. In more recent years, there have been multiple fraternity/sorority hazing-related deaths with at least five deaths in 2017, five deaths in 2018, and three deaths thus far in 2019 (Nuwer, 2019).

To better understand the way fraternity/sorority members and administrators who work with these students think about hazing may allow administrators to create more informed and effective hazing prevention strategies. One way of going about this is focusing on how students and administrators define hazing compared to their institutional hazing definitions. To analyze these personal definitions of hazing, the researcher applied a framework on how individuals frame incidents and processes. Bolman and Deal (2017) posit that individuals use one or multiple frames (e.g., Human Resource, Political, Structural, and Symbolic) to understand complex organizations and organizational issues. By applying this framework to hazing definitions, we can begin to understand what frames students and

administrators naturally use to define hazing, where gaps (and potentially interventions) may lie in these definitions, and where differences between the two sub-populations and institutions may present themselves. Knowing this may allow administrators to create stronger hazing prevention policies and strategies that allow us to prevent hazing and allow the fraternity/sorority community to positively impact their members and broader communities.

Review of Literature

Defining Hazing

While there is some literature on hazing perceptions of administrators and students, there is limited knowledge that incorporates university specific contexts, an important factor that may influence an individual's understanding of hazing. Ellsworth (2004) looked at student definitions of hazing through the examination of specific activities. In his study, statistically significant differences related to hazing definitions were found based on student organization affiliation, especially between students affiliated with Reserve Officer Training Corp and sororities where sorority members were more likely to find physical activities hazing (Ellsworth, 2004). This study also found significant differences between men and women (Ellsworth, 2004).

In terms of general student perceptions about the purposes of hazing, the literature found purposes including increasing the relationships between new members, upholding tradition, and displaying commitment to the organization (Baier & Williams, 1983; Cokley et al., 2001; Alexander, 2018). While these general themes exist, the literature also highlights differences based on race, institution type, and gender (Goodner, 1992; Cokley & Wright, 1995; Drout & Corsoro, 2003; Meriwether, 2016).

In addition to focusing on student perceptions of hazing, there have also been studies on administrator perceptions of hazing. In one study of administrators who work at historically black institutions of higher education, it was found that there were no statistically significant differences in mean attitudes of hazing based on organizational affiliation, gender, nor institution type (Arnold, 2005). In another study, it was found that attitudes and beliefs of administrators about hazing law effectiveness is grounded in personal experiences, especially experiences related to times as an undergraduate student (Richardson, 2014).

Currently, hazing definitions vary by state, inter/national organization, and campus. For a student or administrator, these differences in definition may cause confusion. For example differences between campus and inter/national organization may conflict while an individual or organization may be responsible for adhering to both of these definitions. At present, there are two proposed federal legislation items, The REACH Act and The END ALL Hazing Act, that would provide a federal definition of hazing that may help clarify the term in the future, but no federal definition currently exists (Hinds, 2019). While there are no universal definitions of hazing at this point, there are some widely accepted definitions. According to HazingPrevention.Org, a non-profit organization focused on hazing prevention, hazing is defined as “any action taken or any situation created intentionally that causes embarrassment, harassment or ridicule and risks emotional and/or physical harm to members of

a group or team, whether new or not, regardless of the person’s willingness to participate” (n.d., para.1). According to this organization, hazing definitions have the common factors of including a difference in power, involving tradition, and a lack or presence of consent needed (HazingPrevention.Org, n.d.). A hazing definition from the Fraternity Executives Association that has been widely adapted by inter/national organizations and institutions of higher education stated, “any action taken or situation created intentionally, whether on or off fraternity premises, to produce mental or physical discomfort, embarrassment, harassment, or ridicule” (Nuwer, 2018, p. 26). Another definition created by Cimino (2018), a researcher focused on an anthropological lens to research hazing declared, “the generation of costly induction experiences (i.e. some part of the sundry activities required to be recognized as a “legitimate” group member) that do not appear to be group-relevant assessments or preparations” (p. 214).

There is no universal definition of hazing. Students and administrators may have different perceptions of hazing based on a variety of factors, but since there is no federal definition of hazing, where someone lives may especially impact their personal hazing definition. Because of the great variation that may exist in defining hazing at state, institutional, and personal levels, it may be useful to examine personal definitions of hazing based on a theory rooted in organizational leadership and process.

Four Frames

Bolman and Deal (2017) theorized how individuals understand organizations and organizational processes using four frames: Structural, Human Resource, Political, and Symbolic.

The Human Resource Frame is based on the worker and theorized that workers are most successful when their needs are aligned with those of the organization and those needs are not only being met, but also nurtured by the

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organization. The Political Frame found that there will always be struggles over power within an organization and individuals will naturally form coalitions in an attempt to gain or retain power and scarce resources through the use of conflict and bargaining. The Structural Frame looked at organizational charts and individual roles as the basis for effective organizational productivity. Lastly, the Symbolic Frame examined the meaning behind organizational activities and elements rather than the activities and elements themselves to understand the true meaning and values of these organizations (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

In terms of hazing, individuals may use one or multiple frames when understanding and defining the concept. Bolman and Deal (2017) argued that for most situations, strategies and foundations are most effective when multiple frames are used to capture various aspects of the situation, but in some cases, some frames may be better suited than others.

Methods

This research focuses on what frames students and administrators utilize to define hazing and how these definitions are impacted by university definitions and position (student versus administrator). This qualitative study is based on 17 phone interviews conducted at two institutions. To meet the participation requirements, the institutions had to have an active fraternity/sorority community, have at least three full-time administrators who work with fraternity/sorority members in some capacity, and have an annual enrollment over 10,000 students. In addition, to account for state legislation differences in terms of hazing and how that may impact institution-level policies and procedures in regard to hazing, the two institutions had to be located in the same state. Further, one institution was selected as a “common case” with no recorded or presumed hazing deaths within the past ten years impacting the campus and the other site was selected as

an ‘extreme case’ with a recorded or presumed hazing deaths within the past 10 years to understand how a major hazing incident impacts institutional hazing definitions and to better account for a more full spectrum of cases (King, Keohane, & Verba, 1994).

Each interview lasted between 30-60 minutes and was conducted using an interview protocol adapted from Carlock (2013) and Perez (2009) who both developed interview guides using Bolman and Deal’s (2017) four frames. Additional questions were added about hazing definitions to help qualify statements. In addition to the interviews, the researcher worked with the institutions to gain access to both public and private institutional documents pertaining to hazing. The researcher also conducted general internet searches to find news stories and pertinent information to related to hazing policies and incidents at the selected institutions.

Results

Institution One

Institution One is considered the ‘extreme case’ for the study as a hazing related death occurred at the institution within 10 years of the study being completed (King et al., 1994). At Institution One, the student code of conduct provides a definition of hazing that includes activities that are affiliated with joining or maintaining membership within an organization, endangers physical or mental health, destroys or removes public property, involves alcohol, drug, or other substances in excess, or violates other university policies. In addition, the policy states that hazing can occur with or without consent of participants.

The researcher conducted nine interviews, three with administrators and six with students affiliated with a fraternity/sorority at Institution One. All but one participant seemed relatively familiar with the institution’s hazing definition. When asked about personal definitions of hazing, the top frame utilized was the Political Frame with all participants mentioning some aspect

Journal of Sorority and Fraternity Life Research and Practice, Vol. 14 [2019], Iss. 2, Art. 5 of a power dynamic being involved in hazing. Students and administrators used phrases such as “subjugation,” “coercion,” and “tearing people down” in their definitions. Many participants discussed physical aspects of hazing either through examples or use of the word “physical.” Two out of the three administrators, but only one student, referred to mental aspects of hazing.

In terms of utilizing aspects of Bolman and Deal’s (2017) other four frames, five participants, including all three administrators, described hazing as a process or “barrier to entry”, an element that could be related to the Structural Frame. Three students (no administrators) utilized the Human Resource Frame through

their use of talking about the intention of hazing to “build unity,” experience “bonding events,” and “create some sense of community.” When discussing their personal hazing definitions, no participants at Institution One discussed elements related to the Symbolic Frame.

Personal definitions included some, but not all elements of institutional definitions of hazing as shown in Table 1. Most participants discussed hazing as part of an organization, and as discussed above, all administrators and half of students discussed physical aspects of hazing while two administrators and only one student specifically mention mental aspects. One administrator and two students discussed substance abuse, all three

Table 1
Elements of Institutional Hazing Definition Within Personal Definitions at Institution One

| Elements of Institutional Definition | Number of Administrator Participants | Number of Student Participants Who |
|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| | Who Reference Element (n = 3) | Reference Element (n = 6) |
| Affiliation with Organization | 3 | 4 |
| Destroying/Removing Public Property | 0 | 0 |
| Endangering Physical Health | 3 | 3 |
| Endangering Mental Health | 2 | 1 |
| Substance Abuse (Alcohol, Drug, Other) | 1 | 2 |
| Violation of Other Policies | 0 | 0 |
| With or Without Consent | 1 | 1 |

specifically mentioning alcohol. One student and one administrator discussed consent, but only the administrator’s comment aligns with the institutional definition. The student discussed the ability for anyone to say “no” at any time during a new member activity even though activities may be considered hazing even if all participants consent according to the institutional definition. No students or administrators mentioned the institutional definition elements of destroying/removing public property or violation of other policies. In general, administrators were more likely to mention elements of their institutional hazing policy in their personal definitions,

except for the categories of physical health and substance abuse where a higher percentage of students than administrators addressed these elements.

In addition to being asked about their familiarity with their institutional policy and their personal definition of hazing, student participants were also asked about their familiarity with their inter/national organization’s hazing policy. Student participants had general familiarity with their inter/national organization’s policy and three believed their institutional and inter/national organization’s policy were similar. Two participants believed

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that their institution's policy was stricter than their inter/national organization's policy. One of these students discussed how the university's policy is "more stringent and less flexible" than his inter/national organization's policy where there is less "consistency."

Institution Two

Institution Two is considered the common case, where a hazing incident had not occur within ten years of the study being completed (King et al., 1994). The institutional definition of hazing varied between the Code of Conduct and a webpage dedicated to fraternity/sorority life, but the researcher focused on the Code of Conduct hazing definition. The institution's hazing definition provided in the Code of Conduct includes the elements of endangering physical or mental health, affiliation with an organization, and/or destroying/removing public property.

The researcher conducted interviews with three administrators and five students at Institution Two, for a total of eight interviews. All administrators were familiar with their institutional policy, and three out of the five students stated they were familiar with the policy.

When asked about their personal definitions of hazing, all eight participants used statements related to the Political Frame with many including "forcing" or "making" a new member do something. Three participants, two students and one administrator, mentioned an element

of the Structural Frame as they discuss hazing as a process for "initiation" or "admission" into an organization. Another student also mentioned an element of the Structural Frame related to the role of hazing. In her definition, hazing is something that only one group has to do. As she stated, "I would just define it [hazing] as anything where there's anything aimed toward only one group." One participant, a student, discussed tradition, an element related to the Symbolic Frame, but talked about processes that are traditional that might be considered hazing to others isn't considered hazing to her because of the traditional nature of the activities. As she stated, "There are things that are classified as hazing that I don't think are hazing. I think they are part of the process of becoming a brother or sister, which is a traditional thing. I have different views than my own sisters. My own sisters don't even agree with me sometimes." No participants at Institution Two discussed elements related to the Human Resource Frame in their personal definitions of hazing.

When comparing personal definitions with the institutional definition of hazing as shown in Table 2, the category with the most overlap was affiliation with an organization as one administrator and five students mentioned this. One administrator and three students mentioned physical health while the same administrator and two out of the same three students mentioned mental health. Neither administrators nor students mentioned the institutional hazing definition element of destroying or removing

Table 2

Elements of Institutional Hazing Definition Within Personal Definitions at Institution Two

| <u>Elements of Institutional Definition</u> | <u>Number of Administrator Participants</u> | <u>Number of Student Participants Who</u> |
|---|---|---|
| | <u>Who Reference Element</u> | <u>Reference Element</u> |
| | (n = 3) | (n = 5) |
| Affiliation with Organization | 1 | 5 |
| Destroying/Removing Public Property | 0 | 0 |
| Endangering Physical Health | 1 | 3 |
| Endangering Mental Health | 1 | 2 |

Students at Institution Two were also asked about their familiarity with their inter/national organization's hazing policy and how that policy compares to their institutional hazing policy. Three out of the five students believed that their national organization was stricter in terms of hazing than their institution. As discussed by one participant, "I think my organization is more strict on what they count as hazing as opposed to my school's policy [which is] a whole lot more broad. I think the school's [policy] allows for more loopholes within it."

Discussion and Recommendations

Institutional Definitions

Overall, the institutional definitions of hazing have similar components at Institution One and Institution Two, whereas Institution's One definition having a few additional components. Both institutions include affiliation with an organization, endangering physical and mental health, and destroying/removing public property in their definitions. Institution One also adds components related to substance abuse, violation of other institutional policies, and lack or presence of consent necessary for an activity to be considered hazing. Neither definition includes the common factor of a power differential discussed in HazingPrevention.Org's (n.d.) common factors of hazing definitions.

At both institutions, the most frequently referenced element in personal definitions found within both institutional hazing definitions is affiliation with an organization, with a total of 13 participants referencing this element. The second most referenced element found within both institutional definitions is endangering physical health with ten participants referencing or providing an example of this element. Six participants reference mental health. Although at both institutions there is a reference to destroying or removing public property, this is not mentioned in any of the participant's personal definitions of hazing. At Institution One,

where there are additional components within the institutional definition, three participants mention substance abuse, two participants mention consent, and no participants mention violation of other policies.

It is worth mentioning that both institutions have elements related to the damage/removal of property in their hazing definitions, but no participant at either institution have incorporated this element in their personal definitions of hazing. Because this focus on property removal/damage is not resonating with personal definitions nor widely accepted definitions in the field, institutions may want to consider removing this aspect of the policy as it is detracting from the core of what hazing is and may just be one of many examples of a hazing activity.

It is also interesting to compare student's thoughts about differences between their institutional policy and inter/national organization's policy. Out of the students who found differences between the two policies, two students at Institution One found their institutional policy stricter and three students at Institution Two find their inter/national organization's policy stricter. Noticing these differences may suggest that how hazing policies are explained and interpreted by students may matter and may impact how students navigate digesting their institutional and inter/national organization's hazing definitions and policies. Because these differences exist, administrators and institutions should address these differences and work with inter/national organization policies to provide clear expectations and ways of addressing discrepancies to their students.

In general, at both institutions, most participants were familiar with their institutional definition of hazing. With this said, three students did not feel they were familiar with their institutional hazing definition. While it can be assumed that many students are not familiar with all of their respective institution's policies, all three of the students who were unfamiliar with their institutional hazing definition stated they were in leadership roles at some point within

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their fraternity/sorority. Since many campuses focus training initiatives on organizational leaders, one may assume that if all leaders are not aware of what their institution considers hazing, there are many more non-leaders who would be unfamiliar. As discussed by Hollmann (2002), hazing policies and procedures should be clear. To prevent hazing, an important first step is ensuring all stakeholders have a common understanding of what their campus defines as hazing. Because of this, institutions of higher education may want to ensure hazing policies and definitions are more widely and effectively available.

Frame Utilization

At both institutions, the most utilized frame was the Political Frame with all 17 participants using power to distinguish hazing activities. It is interesting to note that the Political Frame is the most utilized by participants when describing hazing as these participants utilized the Human Resource Frame most frequently when thinking about why organizations may choose to include hazing as part of their new member activities (Feuer, 2019). It seems participants use power dynamics to identify what hazing is but think about relationship and skill building when thinking about the purpose of hazing.

As discussed by Bolman and Deal (2017), power conflicts and struggles are natural parts of organizations and should be expected rather than avoided. It is important for those working toward hazing prevention to acknowledge the natural power differences that may exist between current members and new members of fraternities and sororities, but work with current members to mitigate risk and manage this responsibility associated with their inherent power rather than avoiding acknowledging this increased power status. Further, as discussed above, neither institutional definition includes an element related to power, even though this is found to be a common factor in hazing definitions by HazingPrevention.Org (n.d.). Institutions may way to consider adding a power component

to their institutional hazing definitions to not only address this important aspect of hazing, but to also better resonate with their students and administrators who may naturally think about this factor. One way of addressing power may be by thinking about power in terms of the other three frames. Within the Human Resource Frame, power can be thought of in terms of relationships with other members and within the Structural Frame, power in terms of the way fraternities/sororities are organized to accomplish group goals could be considered. Finally, using the Symbolic Frame, stakeholders could examine symbolism and culture associated with themselves and their organization both internally and externally (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

After the Political Frame, the second most utilized frames in personal hazing definitions by all participants is the Structural Frame with nine participants mentioning an element of this frame. Eight of the nine participants discuss the Structural Frame in terms of hazing as a barrier to entry within an organization, but one student at Participant Two talks about the roles that are involved with hazing activities. It is interesting to note that when participants are thinking about why organizations haze, the Structural Frame is the least utilized frame.

No administrators discuss the Human Resource Frame or the Symbolic Frame at either institution in their personal definitions of hazing. Three students at Institution One (no students at Institution Two) discuss the Human Resource Frame by discussing hazing in terms of relationship building. One student participant at Institution Two (and none at Institution One) discuss the Symbolic Frame in terms of certain activities that may be considered hazing being traditional activities. It is interesting to note that no participants mention aspects of the Symbolic Frame even though symbolism may be a major aspect of hazing according to other definitions. As discussed by Cimino (2018), hazing involves experiences that symbolize being a legitimate member that are not directly relevant to group goals or focus. Further, according to

HazingPrevention.Org (n.d.), a factor involved in hazing definitions include tradition or initiation rites.

Overall, at both institutions and within both participant type (administrator and student), the element of power within the Political Frame is the most utilized in personal definitions of hazing followed by the Structural Frame. No administrator used either the Symbolic Frame or Human Resource Frame. Implications for fraternity and sorority professionals and related staff roles based on the findings of this study include revising institutional and organizational hazing definitions to make them available, concise and digestible, working with partners to understand and help students understand the other hazing definitions they are expected to abide by, and thinking about how hazing definitions can include elements of Bolman and Deal's (2017) four frames, especially the element of power within the Political Frame.

Limitations

Based primarily on the initial design of the study and demographic characteristics of the participants of the study, there are limitations of the study that are considered. Only two institutions were studied and to protect the anonymity of these institutions, a full analysis of the context and policies of the institutions cannot be included. Based on the design of the study, perspectives of new members and students who may be involved with institutionally unrecognized fraternities/sororities were excluded. Further, the researcher intentionally left out questions about previous hazing experiences, but because of this, correlations between current thoughts and past experiences with hazing cannot be examined.

In addition to design limitations, there are also limitations related to demographics. At Institution Two, there was a lack of diversity in terms of gender, with most participants being female. When thinking about hazing perceptions,

gender has been found to be a significant variable (Cokley & Wright, 1995; Drout & Corsoro, 2003; Ellsworth, 2004; Meriwether, 2016). Further, there was a lack of variation with inter/national organization affiliation and gender since all male participants are affiliated with the fraternity at Institution One and all females are associated with the same sorority at Institution Two. There was also a lack of representation in terms of race/ethnicity as most administrators identify as White. Race/ethnicity has also been found to be a significant variable when thinking about hazing perceptions (Cokley & Wright, 1995; Goodner, 1992; Meriwether, 2016). Finally, there was a lack of representation in terms of experiences for students as all student participants have held an executive board position within their organizations. Nonetheless, this study still contributes to the literature on how students and administrators define hazing and how institutional definitions may impact these definitions.

Conclusion

This study found that students affiliated with fraternities/sororities and administrators who work with these students frame their personal hazing definitions primarily by using the Political and Structural Frames and consistently reference, and also exclude, some elements of their institutional hazing definition. Opportunities exist at the institutional level to update hazing policies to make them more relevant and consistent with personal definitions and to incorporate the Political and Structural Frames. Opportunities also exist to continue to explore the use of the Human Resource and Symbolic Frames in terms of hazing definitions and applications, especially since there seems to be incongruence in how students and administrators frame hazing definitions and why hazing exists based on Bolman and Deal's four frames (2017).

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Author Biography

Dr. Emily Feuer is the assistant director for student affairs assessment and planning at the University at Albany, State University of New York (SUNY). She is also a part of RISE Partnerships consulting team. Emily is a member of Theta Alpha Lambda, a local sorority at SUNY Plattsburgh.