Sample Speech: Hazing: When Rites Become Wrongs
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Note: This speech is provided as an EXAMPLE. Remember, in this class you must speech from an OUTLINE and NOT a manuscript!

In Connecticut, a 15-year-old boy was sexually assaulted by his wrestling team. They savagely forced the handle of a plastic knife into his rectum. In Texas, a student was urinated on and repeatedly thrown against the wall. He was sent to the hospital with multiple head injuries and fluid in his lungs. In Minnesota, a female high school sophomore was ordered to put her face on the ground while 100 drunken seniors taunted her and the other sophomores. The seniors poured vinegar into the girl’s eyes, smeared dog food all over them, and broke bottles over their heads.

Each year, according to Christian Science Monitor, September 21, 2000, "1.5 million American high school students undergo some form of humiliating abuse when they join a group." These escalating patterns of abuse are not called assault or harassment. Instead we cover-up the truth with the euphemism: hazing. Now, I know what you are probably thinking. "Hazing? That is nothing new." You're right. That is why it must be stopped. It has been around for years, and yet we consistently ignore it. According to CNN, August 28, 2000, "48% of all students reported being subjected to violent hazing." Think about it: half of the people in this room have been victimized. No one is immune. U.S. News & World Report, September 11, 2000, pointed out that hazing occurs in music, art, theater organizations, and even church groups. Joining a group should be a good experience. We all have a responsibility to make sure hazing is seen as a dangerous, unbearable ritual; not just an unfortunate side effect of the need to belong. In an effort to abolish violent hazing for good, I will first define the severity of the problem, then discuss the causes of the problem, so that I can finally offer practical solutions that will stop these incidents and create safer organizations for all of us.

Part of the problem of hazing is the definition and its dimensions. According to a 1999 study at Alfred University reported in Christian Science Monitor, September 7, 2000, hazing is defined as "any humiliating or dangerous activity expected of you to join a group, regardless of your willingness to participate." The victims' consent is irrelevant. Consent given under pressure is not consent. The term hazing is not merely verbal abuse or bullying. At its worst, hazing is lethal. According to The Post Gazette, August 28, 2000, hazing activities include: eating excrement, receiving physical beatings, coerced consumption of alcohol, using illegal drugs, vandalizing property, stealing and even sexual attacks like rape.

For some 15% the problem started in middle school. For most of us, hazing started in high school and escalated in college. According to the Naples Daily News, just two weeks ago, April 13, 2001, fraternity members, at the University of Tampa, ordered pledges to swim blindfolded across an alligator infested river or risk getting shocked by a stun gun. When the pledges refused, they were zapped with the gun. We have come to expect hazing out of fraternities, but not church groups, choir, or sports. According to ABC News, August 28, 2000, approximately 237,000 high school students are hazed in church groups each year. And churches are supposed to be safe. Even choir and band are not safe. Four years ago Nick Hostutler was beaten with a two-by-four, and covered in human waste when he joined the high school choir. Hazing is more frequent and more dangerous in sports. Dan Reda, according to The Pittsburgh Tribune August 1, 2000, suffered a concussion in football camp as a result of not sticking to the hazing ritual that was supposed to build team spirit. Seniors responded to his negative response by ordering sophomores to jump him. He was hit with a clock radio and other objects that were stuffed into socks and used as weapons. Hazing activities prevail in every part of the country, across activities, across classes, across school size, and across gender. Even when hazing does not result in death or physical injury, it has enduring consequences. Many students reported feeling angry, embarrassed, or guilty.

This was how I felt. I felt guilty; I felt embarrassed. I may look like the least likely victim of hazing, but I too was hazed. In my freshmen year of high school I went out for football. I wasn't familiar with the hazing rituals that I was expected to endure. I was assaulted in my high school locker room. I was thrown into the locker room while
three upper class men jumped me. I was relentlessly beaten while teammates laughed and cheered them on. Not only was I assaulted, but they forced me to keep silent. I told no one. There was no one to tell. Like many of you, hazing kept me out of an activity I wanted to be a part of. This is unacceptable. To stop hazing we must now explore the causes.

First, hazing is caused in part by overextending the acceptable boundaries of ordinary initiation rituals. Initiation rituals are important to group unity as long as no one is harassed or placed at risk. As long as adults support hazing as a tradition people will get hurt. According to CNN, August 28, 2000, students are more likely to torture their peers if they know an adult who did it too. It is this attitude, which leads assailants to think others condone their behavior, when in fact we don't. If a person knows hazing is occurring, they are also to blame. In Winslow, Arizona, a coach was indicted when he knew about the abuse of one of his students and failed to stop it. Initiation rites have changed from exercise of endurance to execution of punishment. The second cause is hazing's secretive nature. It's private, often ceremonial, that makes it a hard tradition to break. Take Corey who was asked in a deposition, according to Long Island Business News, March 10, 2000, if he considered turning down the invitation to a initiation party where the hazing took place. Corey replied: "I didn't feel I had a choice to." Why? "Because this is what you have to do." Secrecy encourages students and teachers not to report the brutality. Rarely do such incidents become public. It is only reported when it involves the police or hospitalization. U.S. News & World Report, September 11, 2000, stated The University of Washington placed its men's soccer team on probation only after campus police found three players bound together in sexual positions and taped to a luggage cart. Had the police not been involved we would never have heard about it. The final reason that hazing continues is because victims who decide to prosecute often find the assailants banned together and formed alliances. The Christian Science Monitor, March 8, 2000, reported that at the University of Vermont group members lied to cover up the hazing when one freshman formally complained and later sued. The final reason many acts go unreported is according to Macleans, March 6, 2000, victims think adults don't know what to do about it. Or as one woman said, "There is no one I could tell who cared."

Let us change our apathy into action. Action must begin with us. First, we must be better educated about state anti-hazing laws and local school policies. Anti-hazing laws should be implemented in all states. Hank Nuwer heads an anti-hazing group. With your help, he can lobby your state. He can be reached at: 1-800-621-1115. Second, educators must realize that hazing can arise in any group. This means that campus supervision should increase everywhere. Campus safety must mean more than blockheads on bicycles with walkie-talkies. It means educators speaking up and stopping the violence. Am I asking for a campus climate change? Yes. According to MSNBC, August 29, 2000, universities underreport and cover up campus hazing to protect their image. This type of behavior is unscrupulous and wrong. We can change it. Third, we need to talk with students about the distinction between initiation and hazing. We need to create constructive, positive, and safe groups. Hazing only breeds destruction, negativity, and dangerous groups. If it makes you feel at-risk, it likely makes of other people feel at-risk, too. The experts suggest finding a friend, a parent, a trusted teacher, or a counselor to talk to. If any of you have ever been hazed tell others. It must not be a secret. Right near here, Assistant Principal Joanne Laird, at Monta Vista High School, in Cupertino, California, created an anti-hazing program called Link Crew. In a telephone interview, this past Monday, she told me: "If you're being hazed, you're not feeling trust." She explained how the program makes a difference in the school's climate as well as the student's lives. It has even seen success at Cal Poly. Institute. You too can establish Link Crew in your college. Just contact program director Phil Boyd at askphil@aol.com. You see, only together can we end this horrid ritual.

In the end, we can turn our heads and ignore what happened to these students. We can ignore what happened to that victim in Minnesota covered in vinegar and dog food. Or we can ignore what happened to me and say that we should fend for ourselves. But if someone like me can't avoid it, then it shows that we need all of us to ban together, before another life is ruined. Today we have investigated the problems of hazing and its effects, by first defining its dimensions, then the causes of the problem, and finally I offered feasible solutions that are vital to end hazing. Many legal experts suggest that what happened to that 15-year-old boy in Connecticut, is comparable to parents who snuff out cigarettes on their children's arms. Forcing the newest rookie to carry the team equipment...
is not the same as hog-tying him and sexually brutalizing him. And until we do something, we are all condoning this behavior.