

November 5, 2013

**Hazing's Perfect Storm - The American College Fraternity
*The Interplay of Social Status and Conformity***

This week's Tip discusses the interplay of social status and conformity that contributes to hazing's perfect storm.

Studies of bullying among adolescents (Bandura et al., 1999) and among prisoners (South & Wood, 2006) have found that bullying behaviors have a strong correlation with an individual's desire for social status. Another study of adolescent bullying found that conformity motives were the highest predictor of bullying among adolescent males (Kuntsche, Knibbe, Engels & Gmel, 2007). In examining these studies together, it would seem logical that both conformity (the need to fit in) and social status (the need to obtain a place of status in the social hierarchy of a given environment) are both contributing factors in fraternity hazing. Emerging research suggests that this is very much the case.

Research by McCreary and Schutts (2013) measured fraternal conformity, social status and hazing tolerance and found strong, significant correlations among all three variables. A diagram of these relationships would look like the following:



Any fraternity/sorority professional can readily recount a wide variety of anecdotes describing the ways that fraternity members jockey for social status (both individually and as groups), as well as the ways in which fraternity members conform to the "frat" stereotype (changing the way they dress, the music they listen to, the places they go, etc.). Research would suggest that the need to be accepted, taken in combination with the strong desire for social status, provide an environment in which hazing thrives. Hazing is often carried out in a way that promotes conformity and solidarity among new members. It is also done to achieve social status on campus (i.e. the prestige associated with a "hard pledge program"). Cimino (2011) would argue that the social

status of many groups on their campus would be an “automatic group benefit,” and that hazing in those groups is designed to prevent new members from exploiting those benefits. It is likely that these two factors are stronger among college fraternity members than among any other group, although further research is needed to be certain. The confluence of social status and conformity, unique to the college fraternity, is a significant risk factor in the perpetration of deadly hazing. The desire to achieve social status is so strong that new members are willing to do almost anything to belong - a situation ripe for disaster, and one unique to college fraternities.

In next week’s final Tip of this series, I’ll explore the problem of absolute power that colludes with the current nature of hazing in the American college fraternity.

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