

Workplace Hazing: Toward an Organizational Science of a Cryptic Group Practice

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to establish a foundation for studying and managing new employee hazing in workgroups. Available empirical evidence indicates 25–75% of American employees encounter workplace hazing, but very little empirical research exists on this phenomenon. Workers are changing jobs more frequently than ever, which increases the cumulative impact and importance of new employee experiences, including hazing, a complex group-based phenomenon. Because hazing is a relatively universal social practice without a strongly established literature in the organizational sciences, we draw from multiple disciplines in reviewing and modeling the practice. The current research offers three major contributions: (a) a relatively exhaustive review of relevant empirical and theoretical work on hazing, (b) an initial, testable model for understanding workplace hazing as a multi-level phenomenon, including individual and group-level antecedents and outcomes, and (c) an outline of the need and support for considering both the dysfunctional and functional consequences of hazing, given the variety of forms it takes and reactions it evokes. Finally, we present actionable guidance for researchers seeking to study

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workplace hazing and discuss the organizational implications of our work for practitioners.

Keywords

hazing, job stressor, workplace hazing, socialization, initiation

Introduction

Hazing is a long-standing, widespread, and persistent group phenomenon. Accounts of hazing span back to ancient Greek and Roman academies (Nuwer, 1999) and across cultures (e.g., Butt-Thompson, 1918). Much of the current consideration of hazing focuses on academic settings (Allan & Madden, 2012; Hoover & Pollard, 2000). However, hazing in the workplace context remains largely underexplored. Thirty years ago, Josefowitz and Gadon (1989) published a study on workplace hazing, calling it a best-kept secret of the workplace. In interviews with more than 1000 employees, they discovered that 75% of employees were hazed at work and 10% of these employees quit because of it. Hazing may evoke connotations of college Greek rituals (Drout & Corsoro, 2003) or egregious, systematic instances of new employee harassment (Dickerson, 2018). These anecdotes do not necessarily represent common workplace hazing experiences. Hazing takes a wide variety of forms, often as unique as the specific groups enacting it, ranging from minute-long, spontaneous demands of newcomers to repeated, prolonged ordeals (Cimino, 2011). Such demands can vary in their humorous (Heiss & Carmack, 2012) and aggressive characteristics. Critically, no unifying theory or models exist for understanding the entirety of workplace hazing.

Workplace hazing may appear to be deleterious abuse or unremarkable practical jokes but its complexity and prevalence suggests the need for careful theoretical and empirical investigation. Because empirical evidence of its consequences is so limited, no certainty exists that all hazing is counterproductive or harmful. The prevalence of hazing across groups, cultures, and generations indicates that groups may derive some utility from hazing new members (Cimino, 2011, 2013, Cimino, Toyokawa, Komatsu, Thomson, & Gaulin, 2019; Norenzayan & Heine, 2005), which highlights the importance of research that systematically considers hazing from the perspective of hazers. Further, if a substantial proportion of workers (25–75%) encounter hazing, but research on newcomer experiences primarily neglects it, then hazing is effectively operating invisibly in current models of newcomer socialization (e.g., Bauer, Bodner, Erdogan, Truxillo, & Tucker, 2007). Workers are changing jobs at an increasingly growing rate (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, 2019), thus their newcomer

experiences—including hazing—are growing in frequency and cumulative impact. Together, we believe workplace hazing needs to no longer remain a secret. Scholars and practitioners alike would benefit from a foundational discussion of workplace hazing which (a) offers a meso-level model of hazing—its antecedents and outcomes—for all stakeholders involved, (b) rests on and extends the limited existing evidence on hazing, and (c) considers what functional (and dysfunctional) outcomes hazing may have for stakeholders and hazers/hazees.

What is Workplace Hazing?

Because hazing involves newcomers crossing a boundary of inclusion from outsider to insider, workplace hazing feasibly fits within the stream of research on newcomer socialization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Onboarding, a more recently discussed construct, sometimes treated interchangeably with socialization (Klein, Polin, & Leigh Sutton, 2015), captures the strategically enacted HR and organizational efforts to welcome, inform, and guide new employees into their new work environment (Chao, O’Leary-Kelly, Wolf, Klein, & Gardner, 1994; Klein & Polin, 2012; Klein et al., 2015). Socialization, comparatively, is a group process that may not be strategically enacted. It occurs among all types of enduring groups, not just at work, and many theories and models of socialization present a greater depth and complexity of mechanisms and variables not typically included in the onboarding literature (Feldman, 1981; Levine & Moreland, 1994; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Like socialization, hazing occurs in a wide variety of groups with their own social dynamics (Cimino, 2011, 2013) and involves individuals and their groups enacting, encountering, and (subjectively) experiencing the process (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Hazing may contribute to similar learning or bonding outcomes as a component of socialization, although it may also cause great stress for newcomers and may pose a variety of hidden downstream effects on organizational outcomes.

When scholars undertake the study of a distinct phenomenon, they must differentiate the proposed construct from nomologically relevant constructs (Hershcovis, 2011; Neall & Tuckey, 2014; Tepper & Henle, 2011). Workplace hazing, where it has received attention, appears to have fallen into a muddy construct space with numerous related phenomena inconsistently or incompletely sharing some of its features. This leads to challenges in pursuing research as the literature offers no agreed upon conceptual definition or widely tested measurement instruments (but see Mawritz, Capitano, Greenbaum, Bonner, & Kim, 2020) reflecting the full spectrum of the construct. In the service of science, emergent constructs must be given full consideration to allow empirical study and construct explication. To that end, we define workplace hazing nomologically by

first discussing its features and characteristics. Then, we explain its divergence and convergence with overlapping, inaccurately equivalized interpersonal constructs with which workplace hazing has been confounded (e.g., [Tepper, 2007](#)). Because of the paucity of workplace hazing research and because hazing is a widespread phenomenon (i.e., not just in workplaces), this discussion draws from multiple disciplinary perspectives where hazing research has occurred, including sociology, anthropology, and evolutionary psychology.

Defining and Characterizing Hazing

Because hazing is practiced in a wide range of settings, and we aim to further a broad-based, multidisciplinary study of hazing, we endorse using [Cimino's \(2007, 2017\)](#) hazing definition. Cimino's "strict" definition of hazing is stated as follows:

Hazing is non-accidental, costly aspects of group induction activities that: a) do not appear to be group-relevant assessments/preparations, or b) appear excessive in their application. Group induction activities are those tasks formally or informally required to obtain membership or participatory legitimacy for new or prospective members ([Cimino, 2017](#), p. 144).

The definition is "strict" in that it is more careful in its exclusion of separable phenomena than popular, competing definitions (see review in [Cimino, 2017](#)). Importantly, the strict definition of hazing exists to circumscribe a domain of inquiry rather than to presuppose the nature of hazing. That is, we are not claiming that hazing is *necessarily* irrelevant as an assessment or preparation, only that it gives at least the initial appearance of being so. Indeed, some theories suggest or imply that hazing may be relevant to a group's operation (e.g., [Keating et al., 2005](#); [Precourt, 1975](#)).

Space constraints limit our discussion of alternative hazing definitions, but a recently published, conceptual definition of workplace hazing from [Mawritz et al. \(2020\)](#) deserves direct consideration:

[T]he unofficial, temporary socialization practice of initiating newcomers into their workgroups by engaging in degrading behaviors toward the newcomers (p. 2).

Although this definition suited their research purposes, it focuses on a narrower area of the fuller construct space we address. First, the strict definition we use logically subsumes the definition offered by [Mawritz et al. \(2020\)](#). That is, [Cimino's \(2017\)](#) definition captures degrading workplace hazing *and* workplace

hazing that has no such effect or intent, although the Mawritz framework cannot be used to study all occurrences of workplace hazing. We detail below richer examples of workplace hazing, but, succinctly, not all hazing activities degrade newcomers. Thus, a definition rooted in a specific, proximate detrimental effect of hazing (degradation) will necessarily inhibit the study and management of workplace hazing that does *not* pose such an effect. Second, the considerable prevalence and variability of hazing methods merits focusing on a construct and definition functionally applicable across cultures, organizations, and disciplinary perspectives (Cimino, 2011). Doing so allows for maximal consilience and better comparability with hazing research in non-workplace settings, which have been a primary focus of hazing research thus far (see Allan & Madden, 2008, 2012; Allan et al., 2019; Cimino, 2011, 2013, 2017; Cimino et al., 2019). Mawritz et al. (2020) acknowledge the limitations of their perspective on hazing, stating their research “provides an incomplete, unbalanced view of hazing” (pg. 30). Our definition and approach offer a fuller consideration of hazing at work, including the types of hazing studied by Mawritz et al. (2020), in order to offer a broader foundation to advance multidisciplinary, scientific work and subsequent management of group hazing.

Workplace hazing examples. Workplace hazing takes a broad variety of forms. Before providing some examples, we emphasize that hazingees’ self-reported reactions to hazing can include distress, apathy, relief, entertainment, embarrassment, and affiliation (e.g., Houseman, 2001). Hazing, for the stakeholders involved, can also provide clarity in the confusing, liminal stage of group entry by providing a demarked line of social acceptance (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016). Thus, hazing manifests in a variety of ways and generates a variety of psychological outcomes, not all of which are negative.

One 50-member organization held a monthly company-wide meeting where any newcomer was required to stand up and tell the entire group a personally embarrassing story from their past.¹ Some employees reported being assigned and called nicknames, including race-based nicknames (e.g., Mr Miyagi), until they gained acceptance in the group. Other employees discussed being made to do work below their pay grade or skills, the “grunt work” of the group, to earn their keep over their first weeks (see Schein, 1968; also Mawritz et al., 2020 “task-related hazing”). In another setting, after passing a required practical employment test, new employees would be physically thrown into a dirty pond as a “baptism” representing their entry into the group.² Most serious are reports of aggressive newcomer hazing, where coworkers publicly humiliated new employees for mistakes, compelled newcomers to work needlessly without breaks for 12+ hour shifts, or asked them to unnecessarily perform dangerous work in order to allegedly test their

mettle. All of these demands placed on newcomers meet the requirements of the strict definition of hazing, although ambiguity exists on whether newcomers and group members consciously viewed these events as workplace hazing.

Hazing's regularities. A startling variety of hazing ordeals have been documented across cultures, including scarification, beatings, privation, servile labor, intensive calisthenics, and the ingestion of noxious substances. Undergirding this variety, however, are a number of common, recurring characteristics and contexts that should ground the study of hazing in the workplace and elsewhere. Cimino (2013) outlined four such regularities:

Temporary: Hazing has an end point. Hazing ordeals are usually part of a time-limited process and often have a jointly acknowledged point of cessation. Logically, hazing ordeals could repeat at some temporal interval, fixed or intermittent. Instead, hazing demands and content are not typically enacted for any reason outside the induction process.

Unidirectional: Hazing is directed at newcomers. Like hazing's temporality, it may seem tautological to observe that hazing ordeals are solely directed at newcomers, but this is not necessarily so. Hazing ordeals could, in principle, be performed such that veterans and newcomers take turns subjecting one another to the same practices during the induction period. Instead, hazing ordeals almost never have this type of mutual component (see Cimino, 2011).

Coercive: Hazers apply pressure. Hazees are often pressured into completing hazing ordeals. This may involve tactics like yelling, cajoling, trickery, intimidation, or the use of intoxication (Cimino, 2016; Herdt, 1998; Houseman, 2001; Whitehouse, 2005). This might also involve more subtle tactics that make use of social conformity pressures and obedience to authority. In some small-scale societies, undergoing hazing ordeals is (or was) simply an inescapable social obligation (e.g., the Hopi).

Coalitional: Hazing is concentrated in enduring alliances. Logically, nearly all human social groupings could engage in at least some form of hazing. Random aggregations of strangers at bus stops could haze those who arrive after they do. Temporary project teams formed to cooperate on a single task (e.g., preparing a presentation) could commonly haze new arrivals. Instead, real-world hazing appears to be concentrated in groups that are expected to endure across many collective actions and have engaged in some such actions in the past.

Distinguishing characteristics of workplace hazing. Our foundational discussion of the workplace hazing construct ends with an examination of how it differs from constructs often treated equivalently. Such an approach has been

successfully employed by authors describing constructs similarly grouped into messy construct spaces (e.g., Baillien, Escartín, Gross, & Zapf, 2017; Tofler, 2016). As an incoming employee experience, we consider workplace hazing in relation to bullying and new employee onboarding according to four relevant features. Table 1 provides a non-exhaustive comparison of the respective attributes of workplace hazing, workplace bullying, and new employee onboarding.

In much the same way that workplace bullying has been defined by its unique attributes (Baillien et al., 2017), we set out to identify specific attributes that denote hazing. The features we address are as follows: focal individual, duration, sources, function (real or perceived), and outcomes. These features complement Cimino's regularities by contextualizing hazing specifically within the workplace (cf. broadly).

Focal individual. Hazing focuses exclusively on aspiring group members seeking entry into group social structures. In the case of workplace hazing, the focal individual is a workgroup newcomer who has not yet gained group acceptance, irrespective of their formal job status. Hazing serves as a rite of passage, a boundary delineating insider and outsider status (Allan & Madden, 2012). While hazing occurs for newcomers who are "earning their place," workplace bullying happens for workers at all lengths of tenure (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). Therefore, although some similarities can be drawn between hazing and bullying, a key difference lays in the group tenure of their targets. Onboarding, comparatively, targets newcomers during their earliest formal time (i.e., dependent on formal job status) in the company, although some onboarding may include internal hires (Kammeyer-Mueller, Wanberg, Rubenstein, & Zhaoli, 2013).

Duration. Hazing is a comparatively short-term process vis-à-vis workplace bullying. Hazing is enacted during newcomers' group induction. Once newcomers overcome the hurdles of hazing laid out by group members, they earn membership or legitimacy in the group. Thus, hazing is enacted with an end in view, even if it is not strictly temporally defined. Conversely, bullying involves the systematic targeting of a victim over a period of at least 6 months, often without end (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003; Leymann, 1996). Targets of bullying frequently engage in withdrawal behaviors, often quitting their jobs to end their harassment (Lutgen-Sandvik, Hood, & Jacobson, 2016). Although onboarding also lasts only through the early stage of an employee's tenure, these periods are formally, purposefully defined, often based on time lengths (e.g., first week and first 30/60/90 days; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Compared to workplace hazing, onboarding is more consistent in offering a formally prescribed, clearly understood process with finite time windows that newcomers must complete before gaining acceptance (Saks &

Table 1. Comparison of Features of Workplace Hazing, Workplace Bullying, and Newcomer Onboarding/Socialization.

Employee Experience	Feature				Outcomes
	Focal individual	Duration	Sources	Function (real or perceived)	
Workplace hazing	Exclusively group newcomers	Limited to in-group-defined induction period	Work unit “in-group”) members; typically enacted by a group	Testing newcomer for acceptability to the work group; to build group cohesion	Varied; may be positive or negative—possibly different outcomes to the individual and the group
Workplace bullying	Employees of all tenure levels	Throughout the employment life cycle	Various actors working alone or in groups, peers, and subordinates	Enacted to cause distress, harm, and maintain power imbalance	Consistently negative to targets; leads to psychosomatic and career problems
Onboarding	Exclusively organizational newcomers	Limited to organizationally defined induction period (days and weeks)	Organization leaders, HR staff, and work group (“in-group”) members	Easing newcomers’ path to fit in to the organization; make outsiders into insiders; welcoming process	Generally positive with newcomers improving job performance and organizational commitment

Gruman, 2011). Hazing demands, in contrast, do not necessarily operate based on time in hours or days. Instead, newcomers experience the fuzzy time (Ashforth, 2012) of proving oneself to group members' testing criteria, however arbitrary or punitive it may be.

Sources. Workplace hazing ostensibly originates and perpetuates at the local level, among groups, not organizational leadership. Tenured members within the group (i.e., in-group members) enact hazing upon newcomers, often in concert with each other, as a culturally normative and legitimate practice (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001) as part of the boundary between inclusion and outsider status. Importantly, hazing involves a critical mass of in-group members' awareness, acquiescence, and participation. Workplace bullying may be enacted by various organizational members (Einarsen et al., 2003), including superiors, peers, and subordinates, acting alone or in coordination (Glambek, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2020). In contrast, onboarding processes originate and perpetuate with formal leadership strategy, enacted with a prescribed purpose, often in a programmed fashion (Klein et al., 2015). Multiple organizational members, including immediate supervisors, HR staff, and work unit peers can deliver onboarding, often with different actors giving more focus to their respective priorities (e.g., a supervisor advising on ideal performance vs. a coworker explaining how to "fit in").

*Function*³. Functionally, hazing may allow groups to select newcomers, temporarily regulate their behavior (Cimino et al., 2019), and may contribute to group cohesion. Bullying aims to harm or create distress for a target in a way that establishes an enduring, abusive dominance or exclusion, without the implied possibility of acceptance created by hazing (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). Onboarding, in contrast to both hazing and bullying, denotes an explicit, welcoming purpose: to ease entry into the organization and show newcomers the way things are done in a supportive manner (Ellis et al., 2015; Klein et al., 2015).

Outcomes. Limited evidence exists on workplace hazing's outcomes (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989), and research on hazing in other domains has produced a complex body of inconsistent findings, including negative outcomes (e.g., depression; Castaldelli-Maia et al., 2012; Kim, Kim, & Park, 2019), and beneficial consequences, like newcomer bonding (Winslow, 1999) and a sense of individual accomplishment (Allan et al., 2019). Workplace bullying research has consistently and repeatedly found only negative outcomes to the targeted individuals who report suffering PTSD (Nielsen, Birkeland, Hansen, Knardahl, & Heir, 2017), burnout, intentions to quit, and lowered job satisfaction (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). A recent study of workplace hazing has demonstrated the empirical divergence of hazing from bullying and forms of workplace socialization, in terms of these variables'

relationship with each other and each variable's pattern of relationships with relevant outcomes (Mawritz et al., 2020). Finally, existing evidence shows onboarding generally leads to beneficial outcomes such as improved employee performance, retention, and satisfaction (Bauer et al., 2007; Fang, Duffy, & Shaw, 2011; Feldman, 1994).

Before presenting our model of workplace hazing, we note two important possibilities: (a) some manifestations of hazing may be morally acceptable (see arguments in Cimino, 2020; Kershner, 2011) and, as we have stated, (b) some manifestations of hazing may generate functional outcomes (see review in Cimino, 2011). We emphasize that these possibilities are logically orthogonal (e.g., in principle, all hazing may be immoral while also generating functional outcomes; see also the Appendix A). Unfortunately, hazing research is currently dominated by a moralized anti-hazing paradigm that presents dangers for generating accurate models of the phenomenon (Cimino, 2017, 2020). D'Andrade (1995) warns us against combining moralized models with objective models, in part due to a "powerful tendency to believe that good things produce good results and bad things produce bad results..." (p. 406). As an analog, consider that the first 25 years of research on organizational citizenship behaviors generally assumed that they were categorically good for the employee and company. However, more recent studies have challenged this assumption and demonstrated a "darker side" to citizenship (Bolino et al., 2004; Bolino, Klotz, Turnley, & Harvey, 2013; Spector, 2013). We now understand citizenship to be more complex, not necessarily beneficial (Bolino et al., 2018), and sometimes harmful (Deery, Rayton, Walsh, & Kinnie, 2017). To prevent the same problem from occurring in the study of workplace hazing, we should welcome multiple perspectives, minimize assumptions, and cleanly separate moral and functional claims.

Model of Workplace Hazing

Given these foundations and delineations of the construct of workplace hazing, we introduce a model that succinctly lays out key variables we believe are relevant to understanding this phenomenon. We make no claim that the model (Figure 1) is exhaustive; rather, we have included antecedents and consequences most likely to surround this construct and be immediately amendable to investigation, based on an exhaustive review of germane evidence. The existing body of research on workplace hazing presents a very limited pool from which to draw strong predictions or conclusions. In positing our model of workplace hazing, then, we draw from many disciplinary backgrounds in considering how groups and newcomers interact in the context of hazing.

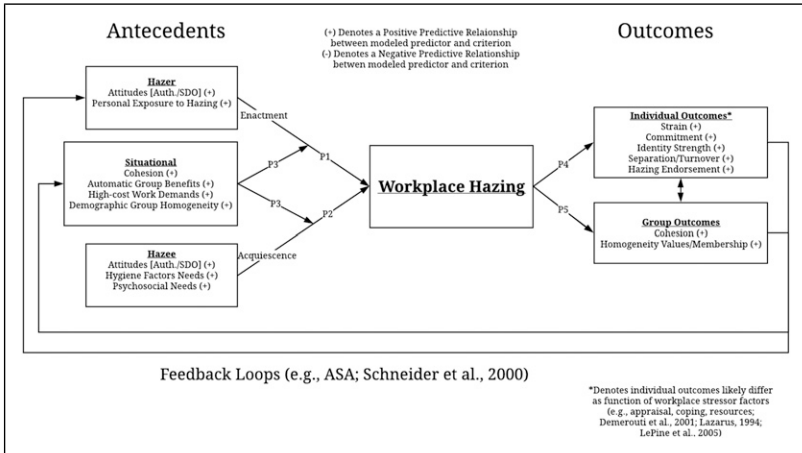


Figure 1. Proposed model of workplace hazing.

What We ‘Know’ About Hazing: Existing Evidence on Workplace Hazing

Because so little is empirically understood about workplace hazing, we take a cautious, inductive approach. Almost all modern hazing research focuses on university groups (e.g., sports teams; Gershel, Katz-Sidlow, Small, & Zandieh, 2003), especially fraternities and sororities (McCreary & Schutts, 2019), or career military settings (Keller, Matthews, Hall, & Mauro, 2015). Such research can inform the study of workplace hazing, but these settings are not common workplaces and may include critical differences that impact hazing outcomes (Zahra, 2007). For instance, a new employee can often easily quit a normal job upon encountering hazing, but the same is not true of military inductees.

When studied as a focal operating variable of interest within a (para)-professional group setting, workplace hazing appears in fewer than a dozen empirical studies beyond Josefowitz and Gadon’s (1989) research previously discussed. Chang (2011) used a bullying scale to measure hazing among medical academy students and reported a positive relationship between bullying forms of hazing and perceptions of injustice. Among military academy members, hazing researchers have observed relationships between experienced hazing and outcomes like strain and intentions to quit (Groah, 2005). Research on similar groups indicates that hazers and hazees agree on the content and prevalence of hazing in their midst (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001), an important finding which indicates some

level of agreement or shared perceptions among the targets and enactors of hazing (cf. bullying; Rosander & Blomberg, 2019). Thomas and Meglich's (2019a) study explored onlookers' responses to workplace hazing. Twenty-five percent of their broad employee sample reported experiencing workplace hazing at least once.

Recently, Mawritz et al. (2020) completed a multi-study development and validation of a workplace hazing scale. Their work focused on developing a viable scale of workplace hazing from the perspective of hazees (i.e., self-reported frequency of hazing encounters) and exploring the scale's predictive relationships with employee outcomes rather than providing a thorough theoretical examination of hazing or offering a multilevel model of its existence (i.e., groups and individuals, antecedents, and outcomes). In a figurative research desert, Mawritz et al.'s scale development is important for providing an initial examination of a subset of workplace hazing actions (e.g., verbal abuse and physical abuse). We note, however, that tackling the criterion problem around a cryptic, highly varied practice like workplace hazing is a monumental task. Analogous to the difficulties faced in measuring counterproductive workplace behaviors (Wiernik & Ones, 2018), no silver bullet likely exists for measuring workplace hazing, and (as we have discussed) a definition resting on hazing as degrading excludes many observed instances of hazing. Additionally, evidence indicates people may not always recognize or remember hazing (Allan et al., 2019), which poses another threat to reliable measurement. Creating a standardized measure of hazing, then, poses a great methodological challenge. We offer a section below on methodological guidance for future hazing research within the Implications section.

In sum, 30 years since Josefowitz and Gadon (1989) called hazing the best-kept secret of the workplace, research on the phenomenon remains nascent, but scholars can now develop information to equip important stakeholders—management, workgroups, and employees—on workplace hazing.

Model Foundations

We approach hazing as a meso-level social phenomenon where behaviors are a function of the complex interaction between situational forces and personal factors (Lewin, 2013). We describe hazing's antecedents and outcomes from the perspectives of hazees and hazers, along with the group as a contextual entity. Moreover, we treat hazing as a recursive phenomenon, where mechanisms provide feedback loops from the outcomes of hazing to its antecedents. For example, we suggest that the attraction–selection–attrition framework (ASA; Schneider, Smith, & Goldstein, 2000) can apply to workgroups using hazing because group and situational characteristics that foster workplace hazing also

serve to attract members most likely to survive, sustain, and endorse the practice. Similarly, group hazing has been linked to group cohesion, and this cohesion in a standing group may foster future hazer enactment or hazee acquiescence through mechanisms we detail below. Like other group processes, hazing drives and results from group dynamics (Lewin, 2013). In many circumstances, hazing itself likely serves to select out poor-fitting members, leaving a more homogenous group with values that support continued hazing. Research on more conventional new employee socialization methods, for example, has supported how these newcomer experiences similarly fit within the ASA framework (De Cooman et al., 2009).

Antecedents

Hazer antecedents. Hazers enact hazing on newcomers, actively and passively. A tenured employee may demand that a newcomer engage in some type of hazing activity. Workgroup members may enact hazing by complying with group norms on how hazing proceeds (e.g., neglecting newcomers until they earn inclusion status), by reporting on a newcomer's hazing-relevant behavior to other hazers, or bystanding and responding to hazing activities as they occur (e.g., laughing at a newcomer's actions during hazing). Although some group members may sincerely know nothing about the hazing occurring in their midst, hazing is a group-enacted phenomenon with group-level antecedents and consequences relying not only on more active catalysts and agents of hazing but on the group members who conform, implicitly or overtly, with hazing patterns and norms.

Proposition 1: Authoritarian and social dominance orientation ideologies and previous personal exposure to hazing are personal antecedents of individuals most likely to enact hazing.

Because hazing hinges on the distinction between group insiders and outsiders, hazers' attitudes may predict hazing, especially ideologies like authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (SDO). Authoritarianism is an ideology wherein priority is placed on group members' unquestioning compliance and collective social order over the rights and interests of the individual (Feldman, 2003). Social dominance orientation is the belief set wherein one prefers a clear hierarchy between groups and desires that their in-group dominate and maintain superiority over other groups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994). Given that hazing involves the relatively powerful in-group members exploiting and relying upon the disparity of status with

newcomers, it follows that these attitude sets predict a propensity to engage in hazing. Indeed, initial work suggests that higher scores in either ideology positively relate to endorsing employee hazing practices (Thomas & Meglich, 2019a).

Hazing's prevalence in work settings may be partially explained by its pervasiveness across many social groups, such that it is normalized by its frequency. Forty-eight percent of high school students reported experiencing hazing to join student groups (Hoover & Pollard, 2000), and 55% of surveyed college students reported encountering hazing (Allan & Madden, 2008). By the time they enter the workforce, then, many people have likely previously been hazed and may view it as normal. Further, because hazing is often a group tradition, being a hazzee may function as a good predictor of later being a hazer in the same group.

Hazee antecedents. When faced with external influence demands, people can exhibit a variety of responses, including compliance, resistance, and internalization. Compliance involves externally performing the desired behavior while internally disagreeing with its legitimacy or psychologically resisting. Internalization includes internal and external alignment with the intended influence, where actions and acceptance both fit with the influencer's intentions (Pinder & Harlos, 2001; Yukl, 2012). Not all employees comply with or internalize workplace hazing demands. Some may exhibit resistance by neglecting hazers' directions, by avoiding or confronting hazers, by reporting hazing to authorities, or by quitting their job (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989).

Proposition 2: Authoritarian and social dominance orientation ideologies, hygiene factor needs, and psychosocial needs are personal antecedents of those individuals most likely to acquiesce to hazing.

Just as authoritarianism and SDO likely positively relate to hazing enactment, these attitudes merit attention as antecedents of hazzees' acquiescence. Newcomers high in SDO, for example, believe in and value the inherent dominance of the group they seek to join (Pratto et al., 1994) and are more likely to accept the group's demands, especially when they perceive the group as prestigious or high status (Ellemers, Van Knippenberg, De Vries, & Wilke, 1988). Similarly, more authoritarian attitudes among newcomers lead to compliance, broadly, with group demands. Interestingly, these attitudinal components likely serve a self-perpetuating role in attracting hazing-prone newcomers to the groups more likely to haze them (Nicol, Rounding, & MacIntyre, 2011). That is, people high in SDO and authoritarianism are

likely attracted to groups whose values match their own (Vogel & Feldman, 2009). Further, the hazing process may contribute to such homogeneity by selecting out those whose values do not align with hazing (Schneider et al., 2000). This may help explain why groups commonly associated with hazing (e.g., fraternities) tend to include members more likely to endorse these idea sets (Drout & Corsoro, 2003).

People seek and remain in employment situations to fulfill multiple needs including the need for tangible resources and security (Herzberg, 2002) as well as the psychosocial benefits of work (e.g., belongingness, Baumeister & Leary, 1995; self-determination, Ryan & Deci, 2000). New employees especially prone to hazing acquiescence may possess either greater unmet needs or a set of constraints that limit their relevant choices. For example, individuals that have minimal alternative job options or who believe their current job offers the best overall rewards may be more likely to acquiesce to a stressor like hazing (Glazer & Kruse, 2008; Taing, Granger, Groff, Jackson, & Johnson, 2011; Vandenberghe, Panaccio, & Ben Ayed, 2011). Psychosocial needs including belongingness and identification (Schaubroeck, Peng, & Hannah, 2013), or a sense of accomplishment (Allan & Madden, 2008), may present a more complex effect. Groups using hazing are more likely to offer group-based benefits to members, which may partially explain their use of hazing to test, and draw lines of inclusion for, newcomers (Cimino, 2011, 2013, 2019). Newcomers in turn may perceive the demands of hazing⁴ as indicative of the prestige associated with membership and consider these costs to reflect the exclusivity of insider status. Thus, hazing itself may make newcomers with a higher need for belongingness or achievement more likely to acquiesce to hazing in order to fulfill these needs.

Situational antecedents. The power of situations, especially strong ones, to meaningfully cause social behaviors like aggression, dominance, compliance, and normalizing has been well established (e.g., Milgram, 1974). Much of the empirical research on group hazing is situationally bound, focusing almost exclusively on very strong situations like military settings (Keller et al., 2015), Panhellenic groups (McCreary & Schutts, 2019), or professional academies (Chang, 2011; Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). The common focus on and setting of hazing in very strong settings indicates the importance of situational antecedents in the prevalence of workgroup hazing. Recently, organizational scholars have increasingly included situational strength as a critical conditioning variable (Meyer, Dalal, & Hermida, 2010). To that end, we present a number of situational forces likely to enact, or foster, a setting where hazing occurs.

Proposition 3: Group cohesion, automatic group benefits, high-cost work demands, and demographic group homogeneity are situational variables likely to result in hazing.

First, consistent with the coalitional regularity discussed earlier, hazing appears more often in more cohesive groups (e.g., [Allan & Madden, 2008](#); [Butt-Thompson, 1918](#); [Cimino, 2011](#); [Herd, 1998](#); [Tiger, 1984](#)). These groups tend to be intimacy/task groups exhibiting high entitativity, that is, they are perceived as a single, entity-like unit with high viability. In these high-cohesion groups, members frequently interact, depend on one another in at least some activities, and see themselves as a socially demarcated, often named alliance. Many such groups also operate in severe or dangerous task environments, and the high level of trust needed in such environments has been theorized to motivate more extreme hazing practices (e.g., [Cimino, 2011, 2013](#); [McCarl, 1976](#); [Moreland & Levine, 2002](#); [Sosis, Kress, & Boster, 2007](#); but see [Cimino et al., 2019](#)). Specifically, amidst high-risk work (i.e., presenting an elevated risk of injury to workers; [Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015](#)) or high-reliability groups (e.g., firefighting), members may use hazing to determine trustworthiness and a capacity to perform in critical moments ([Myers & McPhee, 2006](#); [Schöbel, 2009](#)).

Groups perceiving themselves as offering high automatic membership benefits may be additionally motivated to haze (e.g., [Cimino, 2011, 2013](#); [Cimino et al., 2019](#); [Honeycutt, 2005](#); [Walker, 1968](#)). Automatic benefits are those benefits immediately available upon group entry, such as group status or prestige, access to group-owned property or privileges, and obligatory assistance or protection. For tenured members, these benefits may prompt a kind of preemptive anti-free riding response, motivating a set of behaviors designed to reduce near-term free riding and select out otherwise exploitative newcomers (see details in [Cimino et al., 2019](#)).

Research on hazing and workgroups suggests that gender composition and shared, group-held attitudes likely impact hazing behavior. First, hazing seems prevalent in workgroups conventionally dominated by either sex (e.g., law enforcement and nursing; [Brown & Middaugh, 2009](#); [De Albuquerque & Paes-Machado, 2004](#)) and in non-workplace organizations that are sex-specific (e.g., fraternity and sorority chapters). In collegiate instances of hazing, for example, men and women both report exposure to hazing, but men are significantly more likely to have experienced hazing and a broader variety of hazing demands and less likely to agree with statements critical of hazing practices ([Allan, Kerschner, & Payne, 2019](#)). This is important, as evidence suggests that a group's gender composition can affect members' behavior ([Myaskovsky, Unikel, & Dew, 2005](#)) and group states ([Lee & Farh, 2004](#)). Similarly, research indicates worker gender, individually and collectively

(e.g., gendered norms), can affect the risky behaviors of employees (Stergiou-Kita et al., 2015). Further, shared masculine norms in fraternities positively predict certain hazing justifications (McCready, 2019), and it is possible that men are more receptive to the putative bonding effects of hazing (Lodewijckx, van Zomeren, & Syroit, 2005).

Outcomes

Individual outcomes

Proposition 4: Workplace hazing operates as a stressor, resulting in potential outcomes such as strain, commitment, group identity strength, member separation/turnover, and endorsement of hazing.

Because hazing is a demand placed on newcomers, it merits consideration as a workplace stressor. Newcomers experience high stress levels during their transition into a workgroup (Nelson, 1987), and effective newcomer transitions involve the appropriate management of this stress (Wanous & Reichers, 2000). As an initial guide, we use the challenge–hindrance stressor framework (LePine, Podsakoff, & LePine, 2005), which posits that external demands placed on employees can be perceived as challenges or hindrance stressors, to consider the effects of workplace hazing. Key to this model is the appraisal processes of each person when faced with an external demand, such that not all demands are perceived the same by all people or at all times. Recent evidence indicates people can appraise demands as *both* challenge and hindrance (Gerich & Weber, 2020; Webster, Beehr, & Love, 2011), such that all demands are not categorically viewed as challenge or hindrance. The transactional model of stress (Lazarus, 1991) holds important insights into how this complex appraisal process operates, and research suggests the causal mechanisms preceding the appraisal process span a wide range, including beliefs about stressors' impacts (Daniels, Hartley, & Travers, 2006), trait affectivity (Debus, König, Kleinmann, & Werner, 2015), and social support (Gerich & Weber, 2020). Broadly, appraised challenge stressors, especially in low–moderate levels, yield predictive relationships with desirable outcomes, whereas appraised hindrance stressors tend to bear undesirable predictive outcomes. However, evidence also clearly indicates both types of stressors, regardless of their appraised type, often produce undesirable outcomes, like strain (LePine et al., 2005).

We consider hazing within this stressor framework and anticipate that individual differences will elicit different stress responses to hazing. That is, hazing will not operate equivalently for everyone, although, like all stressors,

it appears to bear consistently positive relationships with strain (Groah, 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007; Thomas & Meglich, 2019b). In their four studies on degrading workplace hazing, Mawritz et al. (2020) discuss five different categories of workplace hazing (see Mawritz et al., 2020 for full descriptions and results) and report each category's predictive relationship with relevant employee outcomes. Their results provide a dense, indefinite picture of workplace hazing's outcomes for the individuals experiencing it. Across multiple studies, hazing involving irrelevant work or purposefully withholding helpful information bore undesirable relationships with employee outcomes like exhaustion, commitment, and satisfaction. However, other categories posed complex patterns. For example, in one study, hazing involving newcomer segregation yielded undesirable relationships with employees' neglecting tasks and feelings of social acceptance, whereas in another study, this same hazing category yielded effectively zero-magnitude correlations with outcomes like employee exhaustion, commitment, and satisfaction. In another hazing category, hazing involving physical abuse yielded desirable, albeit weak, predictive relationships with exhaustion and satisfaction and a strong, positive relationship with commitment ($B = .48$). Thomas and Meglich (2019b) observed a similarly uncertain pattern of relationships between these categories of hazing and individual employee outcomes, including weak magnitude or ostensibly confusing relationships (e.g., a positive relationship between physical abuse and engagement). The predictive relationships observed using this scale, then, support the complex consequences of hazing. These results cannot speak to all forms of hazing that employees may encounter, although they suggest that hazing is not categorically harmful and highlight the need to consider variation in hazing's appraisals of hazing. In encounters of hazing, what one person finds noxious or degrading may be viewed quite differently by another person.

We posit that the challenge-hindrance stressor framework and transactional theory of stress, then, offer relevant mechanisms for researchers to explore hazing. They provide an elegant framework for such study because they do not assume a categorical consequence of any encountered demand and prioritize the complex appraisal process individuals experience. Research could test to what extent the different varieties of workplace hazing are appraised as challenges or hindrances, and the personal and situational variables that affect this primary appraisal process. Research could also consider the secondary appraisal processes associated with hazing as a stressor, including coping methods (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984) and the resulting outcomes (e.g., strain, performance, and commitment).

Considering hazing as stressor also suggests the possibility that hazing may build, strategically or not, resilience. Exposure to stressors, especially

challenging stressors, can subsequently result in personal resilience (Crane & Searle, 2016; Crane, Searle, Kangas, & Nwiran, 2019). Individual-level resilience from hazing may contribute to group longevity through increased member commitment (e.g., tenure length; Çetin, 2011), which reinforces the stability and entitativity of the group (McGarty, Haslam, Hutchinson, & Grace, 1995), and potentially its normative continuity, making hazing more likely for future new members. In support of this notion, challenge stressors in the workplace relate positively to organizational commitment levels (Podsakoff, LePine, & LePine, 2007). Thus, when perceived as a challenge stressor, workplace hazing may yield similar outcomes. Early studies suggested that harsh group initiation rites, including some hazing practices, can yield attraction (Aronson & Mills, 1959) and commitment (Brehm, 1960). In more recent studies of real-world groups, however, scholars have demonstrated that more severe initiation rites can yield worse evaluations (Lodewijkx & Syroit, 1997; Lodewijkx & Syroit, 2001). Moreover, moderately demanding initiation practices may form as much group identity as extreme practices (Kamau, 2013). To that end, we predict that workplace hazing can yield desirable outcomes like group commitment and identification for employees who encounter it as a challenge stressor, where completion of hazing is seen as an affirming accomplishment (Allan et al., 2019) or a means to a desirable end, especially for those with appropriate coping abilities (Demerouti, Bakker, Nachreiner, & Schaufeli, 2001). Importantly, severity may moderate this effect, such that more severe hazing diminishes the positive outcomes of hazing as a challenge stressor (Kamau, 2013).

Most interesting, and minimally explored, is the shifting psychology of newcomers who encounter hazing as they transition from outsider to insider. As we earlier discussed, hazing is temporary, and this poses an intriguing consequence for researchers in understanding the anticipatory, *in situ*, and hindsight processes involved in how newcomers experience hazing as a means to group entry. For example, university students who had been hazed spoke about their hazing, saying “‘It made me and my brothers better people. It was a positive experience!’” and “‘Feelings afterward outweighed the pain or stress felt during it.’” (Allan & Madden, 2008, p. 29) The latency between hazing’s occurrence and the measured reactions of hazingees may moderate the observed effects of hazing (Mawritz et al., 2020). Similarly, the anticipatory processes of completing hazing may pose consequences for hazingees, such that a clearly (cf., ambiguously) defined hazing period or requirement could affect individual appraisals of the experience.

Finally, many hazing groups include people who encountered hazing as newcomers and who now enact it on others. Therefore, hazing, for some, is followed by the endorsement of hazing. Possible contributing mechanisms

include dissonance reduction (Harmon Jones, Amodio, & Harmon-Jones, 2009), system justification (Thomas & Meglich, 2019a), or equity restoration (e.g., “I went through it, they should too”).

Comparatively, workplace hazing perceived only as a hindrance stressor likely leads employees to actively withdraw from the group or organization (Podsakoff et al., 2007), experiencing the dysfunctional outcomes of hazing (e.g., low commitment and strain). Hazing groups may actually justify hazing as a means of separating out the figurative chaff, especially in settings where the stakes of job performance are high (e.g., emergency rooms; Brown & Middaugh, 2009). As noted earlier, among a sample of more than 1000 employees, 10% of those who encountered workplace hazing quit because of it (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989). Clearly, consistently abusive or hostile forms of hazing are likely to repel newcomers encountering it (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012).

Group outcomes

Proposition 5: Workplace hazing results in greater group cohesion and homogeneity of members/values.

Research on new employee experiences has typically neglected the impact on tenured members, while focusing almost exclusively on the experience of the individual newcomer (Bauer et al., 2007) or their organization more broadly (Ashforth, Sluss, & Harrison, 2007). However, since its earliest introduction, socialization scholars have discussed this as a two-way dynamic where newcomer and workgroup affect each other (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Generally, the limited research exploring the effects of newcomer experiences on tenured members focuses mostly on individual employees (i.e., insiders) who encounter newcomers (Feldman, 1994, 2012). However, little research has explored socialization experiences from a meso-level perspective (e.g., Gómez, 2009), including the group-level outcomes of new employee experiences, despite calls for more emphasis thereon (Saks & Ashforth, 1997).

Certainly, newcomers can affect their groups upon entry (Levine & Moreland, 1994), but we consider the effects of workplace hazing on the group qua group, not newcomers' impacts on workgroup members directly. Because empirical evidence on socialization practices' effects on workgroups is scant, we cautiously discuss workplace hazing's group outcomes, drawing on relevant research where possible. First, hazing groups may experience greater cohesion, a multidimensional team-level state of attraction to group members and task (Carless & De Paola, 2000). A substantial body of evidence links cohesion to greater team performance (Chiochio & Essiembre, 2009), although the direction of this relationship is reciprocal, complex, and not easily predicted (Braun, Kozlowski,

Brown, & DeShon, 2020). Similarly, the relationship between workgroups' hazing and their cohesion is likely dynamically complex. Most interesting are the routes by which hazing can reciprocate with cohesion. For example, hazing can create shared discomfort, which may be a source of group cohesion (Stoverink, Umphress, Gardner, & Miner, 2014). On an individual level, stressors like hazing may build individual resilience, or the capacity to adapt effectively to adversity (Crane et al., 2019), and such capacity can produce commitment to cause and task (Çetin, 2011). Such commitment has sometimes been grouped under the concept of *esprit de corps*, a bonding force in groups whose members share motivations and values to achieve a common purpose (Boyt, Lusch, & Mejza, 2005). Together, hazing's potential relationship to group cohesion and related performance levels merits further investigation.

Hazing practices may also increase group homogeneity. By weeding out newcomers lacking hazing-consistent attitudes and values or pushing newcomers to adjust their values to best match their social settings (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), groups increase their internal similarities. Group member similarity may operate in ways that attract individuals who are, or perceive themselves to be, similar to those in that group. The group is subsequently regarded as a collective entity that is treated as an aggregate rather than individual members, which further fosters homogeneity within the group (Alter & Darley, 2009). The process of assimilating members into the in-group, which might be achieved through hazing rituals, further enhances perceptions of group homogeneity (Pickett & Brewer, 2001). The resulting similarity and subculture of group members may then positively contribute to group-level outcomes like cohesion (Saks & Ashforth, 1997). Thus, hazing's outcomes include its consequences on the situations and people likely to enact hazing for future group newcomers as well, through mechanisms similar to the ASA model (Schneider et al., 2000).

We discuss only two potential group outcomes here, for the sake of space and due to a lack of further evidence. But we do not preclude other possible outcomes or directions of relationships, including group-level outcomes like micro-level power distance (Daniels & Greguras, 2014) or undesirable outcomes (e.g., unethical climates). Importantly, cohesion and homogeneity will not always be desirable outcomes. In some circumstances, cohesion may breed groupthink (e.g., Bernthal & Insko, 1993). Further, in an increasingly diverse world, hazing's propensity to drive sameness in a group could have detrimental performance consequences (Boehm et al., 2014). Cohesion and homogeneity may also contribute to an iterative process of selecting out those who do not endorse or acquiesce to egregious hazing practices and thus create a progressively more unethical social climate (i.e., a bad barrel; Cialdini, Li, Samper, & Wellman, 2019). Evidence also indicates that people are more

likely to justify and react favorably to harsh workgroup hazing when it is enacted by a cohesive workgroup (Thomas & Meglich, 2019a).

Summary

Briefly, we end with a clear summary of the major contributions of this article. Hazing is happening at a high rate—25-75% of new employees encounter it (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989; Thomas & Meglich, 2019a)—with currently invisible effects because more questions than answers exist about its prevalence, content, duration, and consequences. Much research has focused on hazing as a categorically harmful encounter. The current research raises strong caution about this assumption, given the lack of evidence to support that approach and the myopic closure of research avenues it produces. Firsthand reports from employees who were hazed refutes the assumption that all hazing harms, with reported effects also including inattention, minor inconveniencing, amusement, affiliation, and inclusion, which match published reactions to hazing in other settings (Allan & Madden, 2008). Our research addresses the needs of practitioners and researchers left unfulfilled by current evidence by (a) presenting workplace hazing as a complex construct, taking a large variety of forms, and posing a range of consequences; (b) providing a relatively exhaustive overview of all the literature available on hazing at work and in relevant settings; (c) offering a simple, inclusive multilevel model of proposed antecedents and outcomes of workplace hazing for the relevant participants and groups; and, below, (d) giving specific, applicable methodological guidance to future researchers looking to test and improve this model. This guidance draws on considerable firsthand experiences researching hazing using multiple methodologies and foci.

Implications

For Researchers

Research priorities. Presently, we see two priorities for building a scientific understanding of workplace hazing. First, we need to understand how workplace groups initially go from a state of non-hazing to hazing. To do so, we should focus on experimentally identifying situational variables (e.g., the perception of automatic benefits) or personal variables (e.g., ideologies) prompting pro-hazing sentiments and actions in circumstances where hazing is absent. Variables reliably prompting such sentiments have causal priority over any that might simply maintain or exacerbate hazing once established. Understanding hazing's genesis in groups may help to clarify the causal order of the recursive relationships between hazing's antecedents and outcomes

(e.g., cohesion). For example, although we, based on existing evidence, posit hazing produces group-level cohesion, if cohesion gives rise to hazing where it did not exist, then the higher group cohesion levels currently observed among hazing groups is likely less a consequence and more an antecedent of hazing. Comparatively, if cohesion is not a necessary condition for hazing to take hold in a group, then its higher levels in hazing groups supports cohesion as an outcome of hazing.

Second, research should determine how hazing impacts groups, their states, and processes. Hazing's typical impact on individual and group-level measures of group-level variables (e.g., feelings of cohesion and potency) is entirely unclear. Given the age and persistence of the solidarity question (see [Cimino, 2011](#)), further systematic investigation is sorely needed. This is especially important for getting a sense of how hazing may be silently altering more conventional workplace socialization processes (e.g., onboarding). To this end, we have only discussed the effects of hazing on the individual employee and the group, without discussing the moderating mechanisms relevant to socialization processes. For example, future researchers could investigate how hazing a single newcomer, compared to multiple newcomers together (i.e., collective socialization; [Van Maanen & Schein, 1979](#)), affects individual responses and subsequent group sentiments, given evidence that being alone in severe initiations yields different outcomes than collectively experiencing such hardships ([Mann, Feddes, Doosje, & Fischer, 2016](#)).

Directions and guidance for future research. Approaching hazing from a stressor perspective likely holds great promise in understanding how the characteristics of the hazing and the attributes of the hazzee (e.g., dispositions and resource availability) may interact to yield different outcomes for those who encounter hazing. We recommend that scholars begin with the workplace stressor literature (e.g., [Demerouti et al., 2001](#); [Lazarus, 1991](#); [LePine et al., 2005](#)) when exploring workplace hazing's outcomes because this literature already incorporates many of the threads we have identified as relevant to the study of workplace hazing (e.g., socialization, workplace demands, and strain). It also incorporates a critical factor in understanding hazing's outcomes: the individual differences in appraisal ([Lazarus, 1991](#)) which can produce such interpersonally different evaluations and responses to stressors like hazing. Such an approach offers researchers established models and mechanisms (e.g., moderators and mediators) which could be applied to the relationship between workplace hazing and its outcomes. For guidance on methods, see below.

Vignette methods for assessing individual and situational antecedents. Vignette methods are a promising approach for assessing individual and situational

antecedents of hazing enactment (e.g., Cimino et al., 2019; Thomas & Meglich, 2019a). Studies using these methods instruct participants to imagine themselves in a real or realistic group and to then make decisions about newcomer treatment. Experimenters can measure associations with individual characteristics (e.g., social dominance orientation) as well as systematically manipulate situational variables (e.g., group prestige) and observe any resulting effects on hazing decisions. Minimizing social desirability when designing outcome measures is critical (see Allan & Madden, 2008; Cimino et al., 2019). Measures of desired newcomer treatment should either be general enough to capture a gut feeling or specific enough to implicitly exclude extreme hazing ordeals that would be automatically rejected. Further, attention should be given to the definition of hazing: Some groups have necessarily stressful and unpleasant inductions that are not considered hazing (e.g., calisthenics in preparation to be a firefighter). In these cases, vignettes should be designed to clearly indicate that any measures of desired newcomer treatment are separable from the preparation or assessment of basic, group-relevant skills or attributes (see Cimino, 2017). Aguinis and Bradley (2014) provide excellent guidance for using vignette methodologies to study organizational phenomena.

Interview methods for assessing individual antecedents and outcomes. Interviews may be at least partially instructive for assessing some predicted antecedents (e.g., the need to belong) and some predicted outcomes (e.g., feelings of commitment). Interviews may also provide an accurate and detailed picture of how hazing is manifesting in a given group. That said, hazing presents many difficulties for a prospective interviewer (e.g., Cimino, 2016; Leemon, 1970; Scott, 2007). A major issue with interviews is that humans are typically motivated to explain their behavior in a way that makes sense to others, presents themselves in a positive light, and provides implicit or explicit justification for their actions. This may be especially so when the behavior has moral or legal implications and is being investigated by an outsider. Moreover, many hazing groups have boilerplate answers to common questions about why they haze or what hazing accomplishes, turning inquiries thereof into relatively rote recitations (e.g., Cimino, 2016). Thus, we recommend that researchers focus on using direct and indirect measurements that correspond to predicted antecedents and outcomes rather than attempting to prompt relevant utterances in interviews.

Survey methods for assessing antecedents and outcomes in real-world businesses. We see two primary approaches for using survey methods: a retrospective approach to gather data on past hazing experiences (Thomas & Meglich, 2019b) and a longitudinal approach focusing on measuring the ostensible impact of a specific hazing induction as it occurs over time. The latter approach may be critical for understanding the real-world impact of

hazing on outcome variables, as some of the putative effects of hazing may fade over time and thus be difficult to capture in retrospective surveys. However, longitudinal studies of real-world hazing present many challenges and may require an insider status within the hazing group or an equivalent level of trust. Although some researchers have gained access to hazing groups, it is typically nontrivial to do so. We encourage prospective researchers to read available accounts of such efforts (e.g., [Cimino, 2016](#); [Leemon, 1970](#); [Walker, 1968](#)) as well as the qualitative observations therein.

Diary studies to record the experience in situ. The qualitative tradition of diary studies holds great promise to fully understand the “lived experience” of hazing as it unfolds for the newcomer and for hazers, exploring the actual events and the respondents’ feelings ([Wickham & Knee, 2013](#)). Rather than relying on memories of past experiences or envisioning hypothetical situations, a diary can record the actual events experienced by a diary keeper. Because the individual’s perspective may change over time, the diary is an elegant method to capture that transformation as it occurs. Diary studies are not without challenges, among which are respondent persistence and compliance. However, [Ohly, Sonnetag, Niessen, and Zapf \(2010\)](#) offer some useful approaches to capitalize on this promising method of inquiry.

For Practitioners

The current discussion has primarily focused on the scholarly study of workplace hazing, but we must also begin conversations on workplace hazing with practitioners and employees in mind ([Hodgkinson & Rousseau, 2009](#)). A high likelihood exists that employees will continue to change jobs frequently ([U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017, 2019](#)) and organizations will face a persistent talent shortage and competition for workers that will demand innovative, welcoming approaches to attract prospects ([Earl, Taylor, Roberts, Huynh, & Davis, 2017](#)). In particular, individuals who feel a sense of similarity to the organization will be more likely to apply for employment ([Devendorf & Highhouse, 2008](#)), consistent with the ASA framework ([Schneider et al., 2000](#)). Therefore, developing a compelling employer brand that will attract high-quality talent will be a business imperative. Hazing’s prevalence in groups, at work and beyond, and its resistance to extinguishing efforts should caution practitioners about categorically condemning the practice ([Cimino, 2020](#)). Indeed, initial research suggests it happens more than managers may anticipate ([Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989](#)), although we hope our model and perspective allows future research to better inform leadership teams and help manage hazing activities.

Talent acquisition. Because the newcomer experience is salient and impactful, human resource (HR) professionals are advised to ensure that their employer's brand conveys an inviting sense of openness to encourage individuals to consider employment opportunities (Cascio & Graham, 2016; Miles & McCamey, 2018). Considering hazing through the established lens of the challenge–hindrance stressor framework and transactional theory of stress will offer more clarity on how hazing, as a demand faced by newcomers, may be appraised during their earliest encounters and the outcomes of these appraisals. This appraisal process may begin *prior* to the job (e.g., realistic job portrayals (Klotz, da Motta Veiga, Buckley, & Gavin, 2013) and HR professionals need to evaluate the effectiveness of their acquisition strategies, armed with awareness of workplace hazing's role in that time frame. Similarly, candidates may respond not to hazing itself, but to its resulting group-level outcomes (e.g., homogeneity), which could attract or deter interest based on the similarity of the applicant to the group. As such, hazing's proximal outcomes on talent acquisition may evade quick recognition.

Employee retention and turnover. Turnover is a costly, often distracting, aspect of managing employees. When new employees encounter undesirable socialization conditions, they may elect to withdraw (Rubenstein, Eberly, Lee, & Mitchell, 2018). HR professionals are but one source of managing turnover, so it is important that all organization members, particularly workgroup supervisors and coworkers, understand their role in facilitating new employee retention (Schaubroeck et al., 2013). Unexpected hazing may represent a “shock” to newcomers, particularly when it contradicts their interpretation of the organizational culture (Holtom, Goldberg, Allen, & Clark, 2017). Indeed, employees who quit because of hazing reported they would likely have not quit if they had known in advance what to expect (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989). Thus, if recruiting and selection processes convey a friendly and supportive culture (advertised employment brand), newcomers who are abruptly subjected to hazing may reconsider their employment because the intake is incongruent with expectations. Because immediate group members serve as the primary socialization agent in organizations (Korte, 2009), hazing by these groups can pose unmanaged consequences for organizations trying to welcome and retain newcomers

Employees who are provided the necessary support (social and task) from their group members may find the transition from outsider to insider a smoother process, thus reducing their desire to leave the organization early in their tenure. The importance of supportive supervisory practices cannot be overstated (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Jokisaari & Nurmi, 2009; Rathi & Lee, 2017). Interestingly, group members who are complicit or active in the hazing

process can also offer support in the midst of hazing (e.g., “You are almost done, it will be worth it, you can do it”). HR professionals do their organizations and newcomers a great service by ensuring that frontline supervisors cultivate positive relationships with newcomers to promote their acceptance into the work unit.

Job attitudes. Organizational commitment, especially affective commitment (AC) and job satisfaction are sought-after outcomes for many organizations and HR professionals because AC is positively linked to job performance (Meyer, Paunonen, Gellatly, Goffin, & Jackson, 1989; Sungu et al., 2020). Effective socialization of new employees has been linked to higher organizational commitment (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Takeuchi & Takeuchi, 2009). Providing an appropriate, organizationally sanctioned onboarding process may be one mechanism to enhance the level of AC among newcomers (Ashforth, Saks, & Lee, 1997; Jones, 1986; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The mixed existing evidence on hazing’s impacts on commitment (Mawritz et al., 2020) provides unclear guidance on managing newcomer attitudes in a context of hazing, although managers should certainly not interpret this to mean that egregiously abusive hazing is merited. Instead, HR management can continue to outline and enact clear policies for civil workplaces, including providing newcomers the onboarding experiences that help their early transitions to mastery and social inclusion.

Conclusion

Workplace hazing, like hazing in other settings, is common and raises more questions than current research possesses answers. The complexity of studying hazing and its cryptic details for outsiders present obstacles to understanding this phenomenon. However, its observed prevalence, varying consequences, and potential utilities demand we attend to it. The current research serves as a foundation for scholars and practitioners in their efforts to better understand this workplace phenomenon. We approached hazing from a multidisciplinary perspective and provided a succinct model based on relevant conceptual and empirical work. Finally, we provided clear guidance, based on considerable firsthand expertise and existing methods, for future research and managerial purposes in approaching workplace hazing.

We sought to outline a compelling argument to organizational scholars who seek to understand the full spectrum of new employee experiences and for practitioners who endeavor to create conditions for successful newcomer integration. Individuals who have undergone hazing ordeals will appreciate the scholarly investment in clarifying the landscape in which it occurs and the

impact on their personal and professional lives. Groups who, strategically or not, haze their new members similarly deserve more attention to their practices and cultural rites. Understanding such processes is a necessary part of unpacking the largely invisible—and possibly functional—components of new employee hazing. We owe it to both groups to explore workplace hazing and to determine if it serves relevant stakeholders.

Appendix A

The Potential Evolutionary Origin of Hazing

Academia is awash in all manner of suggestions about what might contribute to hazing in one context or another, including groupthink (Nuwer, 2004), masculine norms (McCready, 2019), alcohol consumption (Arnold, 1998), moral disengagement (McCreary, 2012), and poor leadership (Zacharda, 2009). But regardless of their truth value, these and many similar suggestions do not directly predict the existence of hazing *ex nihilo*. That is, if hazing did not exist, it would not require us to reconsider the concept of groupthink or the influence of masculine norms. Thus, although some of these theories or perspectives may help explain variation in hazing behaviors, that is different than suggesting that they can also serve as primary explanations for the existence of the phenomenon itself.

In contrast, Cimino's automatic accrual theory (Cimino et al., 2019) does directly predict the existence of hazing and provides a potential ultimate explanation thereof. Briefly, Cimino suggests that because enduring coalitions were a fitness-relevant component of human ancestral environments, humans may have evolved cognitive adaptations for participating within such coalitions. In particular, because such coalitions built up benefits over time that would have been immediately available regardless of tenure (e.g., status and commonly held resources), they may have encountered increased free riding and other exploitative strategies by newcomers. In response, humans may have evolved a set of preemptive anti-exploitation strategies, including the imposition of arbitrary costs (see details in Cimino et al., 2019). Cimino's vignette studies suggest that automatic benefits positively predict overall desired hazing severity, the desired imposition of additional labor, and the desire to control newcomer behavior. Supportive evidence has been gathered from US and Japanese college students, a representative sample of the US, and a college fraternity and sorority. (For a discussion of theory-consistent real-world evidence, see Cimino, 2013). Automatic accrual theory may help explain why so many different cultures have independently invented hazing practices, why pro-hazing sentiments appear easy to elicit in vignette

experiments, and why hazing has been difficult to suppress in so many organizations, among other things (Cimino, 2020). Regardless, it is important to understand that automatic accrual theory is a theory about how hazing may have advantaged hazers over evolutionary time rather than a claim that hazing will necessarily be functional in modern contexts. What hazing accomplishes in workplace environments—if anything—remains an open empirical question. Further, even if some hazing behaviors are determined to be evolved strategies, it will not morally license their use. As practitioners and researchers, our decisions about how to respond to workplace hazing need to be based on an in-depth understanding of hazing's multivariate causes and consequences, as well as a careful consideration of the context in which it operates.

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Notes

1. The first author naturistically witnessed one of these instances. The employee's story was met with laughter and applause by group members. Immediately after the meeting, the employee reported enjoying this demand, reporting not seeing any harm in it, and relishing the chance to be one of the group, especially when other employees individually shared their own embarrassing stories they had told when it was their turn as a newcomer.
2. Notably, inductees did not uniformly feel this baptism was degrading. Many saw it as a minor hassle, some light heartedly tried to make the process more onerous for the hazers; others invited as many coworkers as possible to witness the event and relished the attention by humorously donning costumes for the event.
3. We use the term "function" with qualification: we do not assert that all groups or individuals make deliberative, strategic choices to haze new employees. Further, it is possible that some of hazing's putative functions were operative across evolutionary time. See the [Appendix A](#) for more information.
4. Importantly, we do not assert that hazing needs to be egregious to enact these consequences (Kamau, 2013), only that it exceeds perceived normal or necessary newcomer demands (e.g., onboarding; Klein & Polin, 2012).

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