

Hank Nuwer

Hazing Abuses in U.S. Prisons

Znęcanie się nad nowo przybyłymi skazanymi w amerykańskich zakładach karnych

A major obstacle to adult socialization of the prison population in the United States is the toxic practice of hazing. These so-called initiations take multiple common forms. First, there is the practice of the present prison population greeting the new prisoners with verbal and physical abuse to intimidate them and serve as a sort-of cheap entertainment for the veterans. The practice becomes nearly impossible to root out since the newcomers soon become the veterans and repeat the hazing process when new prisoners, referred to pejoratively as “fresh meat”, are processed. The most problematic hazing in prison is perhaps the vicious and calculated initiations perpetrated by members of gangs. They require newcomers aspiring to become gang members to withstand beatings and other forms of physical abuse to show their willingness to pass an initiation as a “test of the heart”. This means the prospective gang member is willing to endure the worst forms of pain in order to show willingness to join. Those judged unworthy or who whine can become sexual slaves. Perhaps even more disturbing are increasing numbers of reports from prisons in Maine and other states that demonstrate how initiations have become a sadistic practice among corrections officers in prison. Women guards, in particular, are targeted by male guards with misanthropic intentions. The practice often puts guards in harm’s way and leads to a disturbing number of new guards quitting the occupation. Only recently has scholarship turned its attention to prison hazing in an attempt to reform the culture.

Key words: Hazing, Initiation, Adult Socialization, Prisoner Bonding, Gang Violence, Occupational Hazing.

Główną przeszkodą w socjalizowaniu osób dorosłych w populacji więziennej w Stanach Zjednoczonych jest toksyczna praktyka znęcania się nad nowo przybyłymi skazanymi. Ta tak zwana inicjacja przybiera różnorodne formy. Przede wszystkim objawia się to praktyką powitania nowo przybyłych skazanych poprzez werbalne i fizyczne znęcanie się przez obecnych więźniów w celu onieśmielenia ich. Jest to także swego rodzaju tania rozrywka dla starszych stażem. Wykorzenienie tej praktyki staje się praktycznie niemożliwe, ponieważ nowo przybyli wkrótce stają się weteranami i powtarzają proces znęcania nad nowymi skazanymi, których negatywnie określa się jako „świeże mięso”. Najbardziej problematyczne praktyki znęcania się nad nowo przybyłymi więźniami to prawdopodobnie brutalne i wyrachowane inicjacje, których dopuszczają się członkowie gangów. Wymagają oni od nowo przybyłych przyłączenia się do ich struktur w celu uniknięcia pobić oraz innych form fizycznego znęcania się, po to by wykazali chęć zaliczenia procesu inicjacji jako „testu odwagi”. To oznacza, że potencjalny przyszły członek gangu jest w stanie znieść najgorszy rodzaj bólu w celu wstąpienia w struktury organizacji. Inni, którzy się opierają lub zostaną ocenieni jako niezasługujący, mogą stać się seksualnymi niewolnikami. Być może jeszcze bardziej niepokojącym faktem jest wzrost liczby zgłoszeń z zakładów karnych w Maine i innych stanach, ukazujących, że inicjacje stały się przyczynkiem do sadystycznych praktyk stosowanych przez funkcjonariuszy Służby Więziennej. W szczególności funkcjonariuszki więzienne są celem ponurych praktyk stosowanych przez mężczyzn-funkcjonariuszy. Praktyki te często narażają nowych funkcjonariuszy na niebezpieczeństwo i prowadzą do niepokojącej liczby ich rezygnacji z pracy. Dopiero od niedawna środowisko naukowe zwraca uwagę na omawiany problem znęcania się w zakładach karnych i usiłuje zmienić te praktyki.

Słowa kluczowe: Znęcanie się, inicjacja, socjalizacja osób dorosłych, tworzenie więzi wśród osadzonych, wojny gangów, znęcanie się nad współpracownikami.

Introduction

Hazing is rampant in the United States in every facet of society, including schools, the military, jobs, professions and social groups, and so it

is not surprising the practice flourishes in street gangs and prison gangs. In the United States, despite sanctions and threats of retaliation from supervisors, occupations such as chefs often practice it, as do branches of the U.S. military, police and prison corrections officers. Newcomers typically get hazed during their probationary period designed to exclude the unfit applicants, although hazing is outside the boundaries of normal job expectations. Perversely, hazing can involve such demands as nudity, the performance of foolish tasks, homoerotic encounters with other newcomers (or with the hazers), and the guzzling of copious quantities of alcohol.

While authorities in all groups and organizations attempt to stamp hazing abuses out, and 44 of 50 U.S. states forbid the practice, individuals and some groups defiantly keep the age-old practice alive. In U.S. schools and high schools, hazing rages as a continuing menace.

Hazing behavior in Penal Institutions

Hazing satisfies a human need for power and status. Prisoners that haze often stop at nothing to demonstrate that they control the prison yard. Interestingly, members of both genders haze in prison, but males as a rule haze far more brutally. Initiation attacks run the range from crippling sodomies to pile-on beatings. Prisoners serving life sentences pose a particular danger to other prisoners. With no possibility for parole, and nothing left to lose, men like Roger A. Jaske, a convicted murderer, demonstrate their virility by beating new prisoners during a so-called initiation. During one such initiation in 1983 at an Indiana state reformatory, the lifer Jaske inflicted such horrendous punishment on 20-year-old prisoner Clinton Page that the latter died¹.

Gang hazing is also problematic in U.S. prisons. A case in point is an attack endured by a 19-year-old new inmate at Lancaster (Florida) Correctional Institution exposed in the Miami Herald by reporter Julie K. Brown, the journalist whose investigation resulted in the arrest of billionaire pederast Jeffrey Epstein. Nine inmates, aged 18 to 20, initially battered fellow inmate Gennerson Louisius with a bar of soap hidden in a sock, escalating the abuse when he refused to give them extortion

¹ Perlman L. (1986), *Mercenary group is formally charged*. Muncie, Indiana Star Press, 7 March, 1986.

money. That's when Robert A. Walker, 20, a convicted rapist, and fellow inmate Hakiem Blount decided to administer the stick end of a broom taken from a prison closet that was perhaps intentionally left unlocked by a guard or prisoner on cleanup duty. They penetrated Louisius and left him close to death with acute rectal tearing. A guard, supposedly on watch, failed to come to the victim's aid because before the activity he had left his post. Louisius was taken to the hospital and endured a colostomy, the first of five or six such surgeries carried out at taxpayer expense². Testimony given in a subsequent federal civil rights lawsuit revealed that this was not the first similar attack on a prisoner that day at this institution, and that similar initiations occur quite frequently on a regular basis – with many going unreported if a victim has the means to pay off his attackers.

The phrase “A Test of Heart” is a street euphemism for terrible hazing practices performed by prisoners connected to gang membership in U.S. penal institutions. Vicious rapes and killings occur regularly in and out of prison among such well-known gangs as the Aryan Brotherhood, Bloods, Gangster Disciples, Texas Syndicate, and Mexican Mafia (also known as the M.A). Invitations into a gang are followed by initiations; these are employed as a testament to a newcomer's loyalty and supposedly prove a potential newcomer really wants to belong to the tribe. Those accepted become members for life. They have no way to abandon membership except death administered by a rival gang or to suffer death at the hands of one's own gang should members be judged as betraying the organization such as “ratting out” a fellow gang member to a guard.

The topic of hazing in prison encompasses many areas of scientific study, including socialization of prisoners, race relations, adjustment to overcrowded conditions and inmate deprivation of previously unalienable rights and freedom. Criminal hazing in any group involves behavior taken to extremes, but prison brutality makes initiations in secret societies, for example, pale by comparison. At their worse, initiations range from brutal sodomy by prisoners wielding broomsticks to savage beatings with fists, kicks and blunt objects required to test a “rookie” prisoner's courage in an antisocial rite of passage. None of this is a kept secret from prison staffers. Gang members often operate in full view of

² Brown J.K. (2015), *Young inmates beaten and raped in prison broomstick ritual*, Miami Herald, 12 September.

prison authorities. For example, the distinctive tattoos adorning prisoner faces and bodies tell prison professionals much information about the gang member's criminal past and present since gang criminal activities frequently continue in prison, usually in the form of selling and bartering illegal drugs.

At this point we need to define and explain the term hazing. It is not the same as mentoring in which a greybeard prisoner takes a newcomer under his wing to help that inmate adjust to the psychological stresses inherent in prison while away from the world outside prison walls. Previously we considered the issues associated with gang hazing, but even non-gang members can haze in an effort to create for themselves what they consider comfortable levels of solidarity and homogeneity with other inmates. The hazing can be against rules of the prison but non-criminal, merely something silly or slightly demeaning such as requiring a new member to perform an errand on demand or light a veteran prisoner's cigarette. Criminal hazing is an activity, often brutal, dangerous, demeaning and deadly, required of a newcomer by accepted group members in order to gain admission into the group. It also occurs when veteran members put a newcomer through similar activities to administer humiliation, but the members intend to exclude victims from joining the group, organization or team, as opposed to welcoming them. Such initiations inside and outside prison are perpetrated by men desperate for gang acceptance. These predators connected to gangs inside and outside prison walls often kill innocent people on the order of gang leaders to show their loyalty. They typically target someone who is of another race, perceived as physically weak, or convicted of sex crimes involving children. They also form packs like wolves to attack bigger, stronger members of a rival gang or non-gang members. In the latter instance a victim is never invited to join the gang, because its sole purpose is to exclude the prisoner. Other occasions the hazing that is administered by hardened prisoners can be to extort money from the victim or simply done out of sadistic maliciousness.

Solutions

“Prison gangs disrupt correctional programming, threaten the safety of inmates and staff, and erode institutional quality of life...

A suppression strategy (segregation, lockdowns, transfers) has been the most common response to prison gangs,” note experts Mark S. Fleisher and Scott M. Decker³. The two argue, however, that given the complexities of prison gangs, effective prison gang intervention must include improved strategies for community re-entry and more collaboration between correctional agencies and university gang researchers on prison gang management policies and practices.

Before examining solutions that may work to stop gang activities and the initiation wrongs of passage associated with them, it may be useful to examine a measure that either do not work well or does not work as well as more scientific solutions.

First, the segregation of inmates. Briefly, putting gang leaders out of sight rarely puts them out of mind. “Segregation is expensive and does not solve the problem of developing better prison management to control gangs”, note experts Fleisher and Decker. Moreover, given that males by nature hold grudges for a long time, it is but a matter of time before revenge is exacted or a heinous initiation act is performed even if the gang chief is segregated from other inmates.

The Prison Rape Elimination Act of 2009 enforced methods and procedures intended to reduce or eliminate sexual assaults in prison. Since accurate information is of paramount enforcement, PREA mandates data collection pertaining to assaults. Prior to the law’s passage, state of California corrections experts admitted to the New York Times in 2005 that they were clueless as to the number and nature of sexual assaults in prisons and other correctional facilities. It also led to the founding of a national board of commissioners charged with overseeing accountability and transparency by institutions, groups and individuals. Many heralded the passage of PREA, including Roderick Hickman, secretary of the California Department of Corrections. “I’ve made a commitment to a strategic planning process for complying with PREA”, Hickman stated in a CDC news release. “Not just because it’s the law, but because we have made a commitment to safe prisons and treating inmates humanely”.

All state and federal prisons do keep detailed records on known gang members under the category of Security Threat Groups, abbreviated as

³ Fleisher M., Decker S.M. (2001), *An Overview of the Challenge of Prison Gangs*, Correction Management Quarterly, 5(1), 1-9.

STGs. Florida's prisons include trained strike forces that provide intelligence and assistance. Data on the nearly 11,000 inmates affiliated with gangs is kept in a Security Threat Operations Review Monitoring System (STORMS). Data for 2017 found that the number of gang members increased six percent from the previous year. Moreover, 16.6 percent of these identified gang members had been sentenced for murder or manslaughter⁴.

Murder as Initiation

It should be noted that the term “hazing” and the term “initiation” are often used interchangeably in prisons and elsewhere. The difference is that an initiation can often be malevolent exactly like hazing or can be something innocent and harmless such as the oath in a formal ceremony administered by a school honor society. Hazing appears to satisfy a basic human need for acceptance, a need of certain persons to dominate, and an outlet for aggression. Criminal hazing gives sociopaths and similar others a form of psychopathology to engage in cruel and despicable acts upon the powerless – specifically those individuals newly sentenced to prison. Hazing perversely makes perpetrators who are regarded by society as the biggest losers into feeling like winners in their own heads. Put another way, hazers become the biggest bottom-feeding fish in a small, stagnant prison pond.

As with initiations, a gang's criminal behavior in prisons can be predicted. Gang members typically plague penal institutions with their selling and using of drugs. A 2016-2017 Florida Department of Corrections Annual Report from the Florida lists the most common drugs as synthetic cannabinoids, bath salts, and opiates such as K2, Spice and Fenatyl⁵. According to the Florida report, “synthetic drugs have been difficult to control because they can be derived from common household products”, making them virtually undetectable to drug searches. Nonetheless, use of drug-sniffing dogs in Florida prisons has had demonstrated success. Florida canine units in 2016-2017 successfully uncovered 1,431 cell phones, 1800 grams of illegal drugs, and 1038 weapons⁶.

⁴ Florida Department of Corrections Annual Report 2016-2017...

⁵ Florida Department of Corrections Annual Report 2016-2017...

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Unfortunately, the punishments doled out by too many U.S. prison staff are created merely to punish and not to transform a criminal into someone suitable to rejoin society after a sentence is served. All too often, elected officials support and bolster wrong-thinking methods of reforming U.S. prisons. Many experts find that today's problems associated with overcrowding in prisons can be attributed to well-intentioned but politically motivated and unscientific "tough on crime" mandates promoted by now-disgraced President Richard M. Nixon in the 1970s, and especially by President Bill Clinton who championed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. Experts also point to socioeconomic explanations and police selective targeting of blacks, Hispanics and Asian minorities for the decades-long boom in gang membership numbers.

Overcrowding leads to overwhelming challenges in prison such as hazing. At present some 2.3 million men and women are incarcerated, which translates to 700 persons out of every 100,000 persons in the USA. In particular danger from gangs are those unable to fight back and therefore often victimized. According to 2019 Federal Bureau of Prisons data, those incarcerated include more than 2,000 individuals aged 21 and under, as well as an ever-skyrocketing population of more than 35,000 prisoners listed as elderly – including nearly 5,000 prisoners 65 and older. Finally, in recent years, the imprisonment of a growing number of transgender persons has led to a plethora of vicious attacks by veteran prisoners that look down upon them as deviants.

Clinton himself after leaving the presidency acknowledged the deficiencies of his crime bill and passed some of the blame on recommendations by his Vice President Joe Biden who chaired the crime-bill's committee. The bill turned out to be unscientific and flawed for many reasons. The "three-strike" rule that defined career criminals flooded the jails with prisoners that had no chance for release. A Clinton-era mandate that ordered prisoners to serve 85 percent of their sentence further bottlenecked American prisons. Mandatory life imprisonment sentences for juveniles in Tennessee, for example, meant that females convicted of killing males that had been abusing them had no chance for release. Only recently have there been some prison reform measures to free model prisoners ahead of their original long prison release dates.

Corrections experts Mark S. Fleisher and Scott H. Decker put the problem succinctly this way: "In recent years, elected officials have called

for tougher punishments in prisons, stripping color televisions, removing weightlifting equipment, and weakening educational programs as if doing these trivial things will punish inmates further and force them to straighten out their lives and will scare others away from crime. If criminals choose to commit crime, ‘let them suffer’ seems to be the prevailing battle cry of elected officials and citizens alike, who have little formal knowledge of criminogenesis [the origin of crime], punishment, and imprisonment”⁷. The two experts advise that prison reformers should bear in mind truisms of human behavior, namely that all persons seek to establish an identity, are social beings, and wish to interact with those “of their own kind” who offer protection and a sense that others “have their backs”. Gang members see their gangs as a place where they find belonging or at least fit in after their initiation buys them entry.

Theories Regarding Hazing Behavior

Here are some important theories to consider for the reasons that hazing continues and why it is so difficult to eradicate:

- Anthropologist Aldo Cimino of the University of Santa Barbara proposes an evolutionary theory for the act of hazing. He explains that veteran members of a group often wish to ensure that initiates don’t enter the organization with a free pass; the hazing rituals are a demonstration of worthiness through a series of challenges.
- A second popular theory comes from sociologist Stephen Sweet of Ithaca College, who explains the symbolic significance of hazing. Briefly summarized, his theory regarding adult socialization applied to the criminal justice system is that hazing links prisoners in their social interaction with other prisoners.
- One theory of my own first proposed outlined in my book “Wrongs of Passage” is that hazing was and is a form of “Groupthink”. The term by definition means that hazers operate quite differently from how they normally behave when not in a group. “Hazers exhibit negligent and dangerous behaviors, act as if members and [rookies] were invincible, value group practices above individual human rights

⁷ Fleisher M., Decker S.M. (2001).

and deny [involvement or responsibility] when abuse occurs”⁸. The theory of Groupthink was first proposed by Yale Professor Irving Janis to explain how a desire for camaraderie under then-President John F. Kennedy led to the faulty thinking and execution of plans resulting in the Cuban fiasco known as the Bay of Pigs. My second theory regarding hazing also published in “Wrongs of Passage” and republished in the seminal “Chronicle of Higher Education” is that hazing groups such as prisoners display cult-like behavior. Although there is no one cult leader present such as a David Koresh of the Branch Davidian sect, there are group leaders who restrict movements of rookies in prison, isolating them from the prison community until the rookies gain acceptance after initiation⁹.

Women in Prison

Male hazing inside prison and outside prison is more violent and deadly than female hazing (although, unfortunately, as society changes, some females mimic the baser impulses and practices of males). While males confronted with a “fight or flight” option often fight, women typically choose flight, particularly if frightened or reminded of violence perpetrated against them in the past. Males often retain resentment and the Sicilian saying that “revenge is a dish best served cold” is true for them. Females, after an initial confrontation, tend to “get over” such slights. In my work I have long noted that the hazed, particularly males, soon after initiation want to return all they endured on the newcomers in like kind.

Hazing of female corrections officers often is linked to harassment, job discrimination, and sexual misconduct. The number of cases reported is but the tip of the iceberg because the threat that a female will be drummed out of the profession – blackballed – should she file a report is a valid concern on her part.

The New York Times in 2018 exposed a particularly nefarious case of hazing and harassment in the Federal Bureau of Prisons. The article

⁸ Nuwer H. (2017), Wrongs of Passage in Fraternity Hazing, The, “The Conversation”, August 28, Available at <http://theconversation.com>.

⁹ Nuwer H. (1999), *Greek Letters Don't Justify Cult-like Hazing of Pledges*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 26 November.

titled “Hazing, Humiliation, Terror: Working while Female in Federal Prison” documented numerous cases where female officers were put into situations with prisoners in which they were groped, threatened, subjected to erect prisoner penises, and verbally abused by prisoners with the complicity of male corrections personnel that regarded such treatment as a type of deserved hazing for women that dare enter what traditionally was considered an occupation for males. Such acts were not only degrading but put the female officers potentially into harm’s way.

The Dehumanization Process

As with the persecution of Jews in Poland by German occupiers in 1939, the hazing perpetrators in prison may or may not be aware exactly how they try to seize power and control over newcomers through dehumanization for many perform with malice as if instinctively. Perpetrators see themselves as the superior beings and the winners in what the author Jack London called the “survival of the fittest”. Their actions may seem trivial at first to other prisoners newly arrived or previously judged as weak or inferior by these stronger inmates. But as time goes by, the hazing rituals become more sinister and hurtful.

When new prisoners don orange prison garb and walk alongside a guard to the cell that is home for the remainder of sentencing, the old timers and lifers call out the perverse greeting of “Fresh meat!”. The weaker and more unfit the newcomers, the more certain the chance they will be metaphorical lunch for those perceived to be the strongest and fittest. The catcalls of “fresh meat” serve to dehumanize the rookie prisoners with denigrating language that tells them they are less than nothing in their new surroundings and therefore can be treated as deserved spoils by veteran inmates. The newcomers – in prisons, in the pledging process of fraternities, on sports teams – are referred to as rookies (or pledges in fraternities), and they are assured they are green, wormlike, unworthy. Group members that see themselves as masculine escalate to calling the newcomers sexualized terms such as human body parts – including female genitalia – and other dehumanizing examples of language.

The reaction on the part of newcomers is invariably anxiety, and they exhibit typically a fight or flight response. Almost immediately, as with thunder and lightning, the newcomers realize that they do not “belong”

and so they try to “fit in” as best they can with self-preservation in mind, even if those ultimately offering protection are sadists showing signs of unstable mental and behavioral conditions such as blind rage. The mindset of the perpetrators is that because similar dehumanizing words and actions by veterans were done to them as newcomers, rookies or pledges, they try to regain lost self-respect by doing unto these recent arrivals in a reciprocal manner what had been done to them. It is exactly at such a time that the best protection the rookies should have is from supervisors such as correctional officers in prison, coaches in athletics, or alumni and fraternity house supervisors in social groups, but the perpetrators squelch the newcomers’ dependence on authority figures by warning them that in effect they would be regarded as snitches. They typically are told that “snitches get stitches” – that is, beatings and sexual assaults if they cooperate with authorities. No wonder the new rookies, even the ones that will later seek power and status themselves, are anxious, unsure and prone to feelings of depression and vulnerability.

Other times they may even be stripped of their clothing by group members, leaving them with feelings of shame and anxiety, which produces a desire to seek out and find any veterans at all that might throw them crumbs of kindness and offerings of protection. The weakest and the least able to retaliate in prison, of course, do get sucked up in the prison game and capitulate, finding themselves humiliated and employed as virtual sexual slaves, and therefore always to be regarded as members of the prison’s underclass. Their first prison sexual experience of some may be with a cunning veteran prisoner and gang member who gets them alone and convinces them that any sexual activity will just be the two of them. Then, of course, when the sodomized, weaker prisoners are further dehumanized, they get passed around to other gang members as “fresh meat” and get abused and used accordingly. In no time even prisoners that on the outside had been cheerful adopt a hangdog countenance and display signs of dependence and often do self-harm when all dignity has been taken from them.

In the United States, the academic perhaps best known for his observations of life in the penitentiaries of Poland is Professor Marek M. Kaminski, Ph.D., a University of California at Irvine School of Sciences faculty member, and author of *Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prisons* for Princeton University Press. As a sociology undergraduate at the University of Warsaw in the 1985 Soviet era, Kaminski was

a student activist in the Solidarity movement when police stopped his car and found banned books and propaganda. To keep his mind active during a sentence at various penal institutions, he began observing and taking notes on prison subculture, particularly the high-status prisoners who rationally figure out and adapt to the system, as well as the lower-status prisoners who suffer rape, beatings, and ignominious treatment. He himself once took a prison beating, and the significance of his work, similar to my own studies of school social groups, is that the behavior of prisoners is predictable as they process and apply the rules of the “game”.

Kaminski discovered that prison rookies are expected to exhibit toughness toward prison personnel as a demonstration of loyalty to others assumed to be his own kind in the yard. He has this to say about prison initiations: “In Polish prisons the main objective of the initiation rituals, according to the inmates’ common knowledge, is to select detailed information about the rookie’s *character* or *type*. *Toughness* and *cleverness* are two of the primary characteristics of an inmate”¹⁰. He himself found that by taking a beating without whining, he gained acceptance and even admiration from the beaters. So too is it characteristic of hazing outside of prison in U.S. fraternities and sports teams. Once the persons hazed show their mettle, desire to belong, and respect and uphold the group’s status quo, all abuse stops. On the other hand, if any initiated members in a gang or social group later are perceived to have turned on the group, they are regarded as pariahs and traitors. Subsequent beatings can become even more intense and occasionally even deadly.

Another pernicious type of hazing occurs when prisoners have served their sentences and are due for immediate release. One such 1995 case occurred in Utah at the Lone Peak Minimum Security Facility in Bluffdale, Utah, and demonstrated that corrections officers aided and abetted the hazing of a soon-to-be former prisoner by supplying other prisoners with handcuffs and duct tape to hogtie him. The case produced photographs that had been taken of this hazing and others in a model prison program designed to train prisoners to fight forest fighters. Moreover, when corrections officer Clifford Hall reported the hazing, he experienced retaliation from peers and superiors for snitching. As a result, the Utah State Supreme Court struck down a previous Governmental

¹⁰ Kaminski M. (2004), *The Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prisons*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2004, p. 41.

Immunity Act that had failed to protect whistleblowers that reported hazing offenses and other prison abuses. Corrections spokesman Jack Ford called the prison hazing “unfortunate” and claimed the practice had been ended following Hall’s complaint. [Maja: Insert Footnote: Elizabeth Neff, “Whistle-Blowers Get More Protection: Justices rule state employees can sue for acts of retaliation”, The Salt Lake Tribune, April 18, 2001].

Only rarely do hazing cases in federal prisons result in charges placed against corrections officers or prison administrators. When lawsuits do come forward, no compensation can be awarded by the courts unless the abuse leads to corrective measures that change the culture under the terms of the Prison Litigation Reform Act of 1996. Exceptions can occur under protections guaranteed by the Eighth Amendment if the plaintiff can prove the defendant was “deliberately indifferent” to a threat against the welfare of an inmate or if the inmate had been subjected to “cruel and unusual punishment”. A case in point was a civil suit dismissed in 2006 in Somerset County, Pennsylvania against the county and a county warden after several inmates complained that they had been assaulted and hazed. [Maja: Insert footnote. Judy D. J. Ellich, “County faces paying compensatory damages”, The Daily American, Sept 9, 2006]. It happened that four former inmates claimed prison officials knew of the attacks by gang members for up to four years and failed to take preventive measures to reform “an environment of pervasive and endemic intimidation, hazing and assaults”. [Insert footnote: Paula Reed Ward, “Somerset inmates’ suit claims hazing abuse”, Pittsburgh Post Gazette, June 3, 2006]

Home Boys and Queen Bees

I once worked as a volunteer teaching English and video-making skills at an Indiana vocational training school with young offenders – all gang members with serious arrest records. Many were considered attractive recruits by existing gangs because they were of a certain race or ethnic group. In addition, they were often already “home-boy” friends or associates of known gang members or had family – a brother or cousin – that attested to their worthiness. The males universally told me they were “beaten in” to the gang to show courage and that they would stand tough

in the adversity so the gang knew it could count on them. An alternative was to get “crimed in” by committing a crime such as an assault on an innocent victim. The females, known as “queen bees” told me they rolled dice and had a choice of being beaten or “sexed in”, that is subjected to sexual acts with male acquaintances of the gang. Those that rolled two on the dice fared better than the unlucky that rolled two sixes on the dice. Ironically, the gang members joined such groups for security and protection for life. The research studies by Elliot Aronson and Judson Mills found that the harder the initiation, the more do those who successfully navigate its challenge find their new group to be of value. The downside was that if they who took a “blood oath” from a self-inflicted cut ever elected to leave the gang, the consequences were horrendous for them. This is especially true with prison gangs where those who disassociate find that revenge awaits traitors even in a prison library, mess hall or workshop.

The Role of Corrections Officers

A search of news clippings and lawsuits clearly demonstrates that inmates and correctional officers alike complain of abuses within a patriarchal U.S. prison system in which violent aggression is common and even expected, but “whistleblowing” or reporting incidents of abuse is discouraged or, when done, punished by peers and prison authorities alike. Critics condemn the prison administration for tolerating and even fostering an abusive system where hazers and abusers commit transgressions over and over with impunity. After a career prison guard named Charles A. Graner faced serious charges following photographed incidents in which he allegedly was abusing of Iraqi prisoners at notorious Abu Ghraib, an investigation showed several allegations of similar abuse during a stint as corrections officer at a Pennsylvania State Corrections Institute levied during lawsuits subsequently dismissed. Nicholas Yarris, an activist and a former Death Row inmate freed after new DNA evidence helped exonerate him, condemned not only Graner but the penal system for malfeasances. “It isn’t Charles, it’s the people producing Charles”, he said, alleging that Graner and other correction officers repeatedly had singled him out for unnecessary body cavity searches. “When they’re put in charge, they make up their own rules because they think abuse is

acceptable”. [Footnote: Lin, Judy, “Graner’s troubles not only in Iraq”. *Indiana Gazette*, May 12, 2004].

Not surprisingly, incidents of hazing involving veteran correctional officers hazing new officers and correctional officers hazing prisoners or turning their heads when prisoners haze other prisoners are found in public records as part of more common harassment and assault criminal charges and lawsuits. After new prisoner Greg Kaminski of Walton Hills, Ohio sued on grounds that a Cuyahoga County corrections officer had pummeled him upon entry into prison and shattered his nose and facial bones, his attorney Kevin Rogers, Jr., alleged that fellow correctional officers made no move to intercede. “To them it was just another day at the office”, Rogers wrote in the complaint. [Footnote: Adam Ferrise, “Inmate sues county, says officer attacked him for no reason”. *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, August 10, 2019]. Subsequently, the governor of Ohio ordered inspections of the county jail every 30 days after supporting video surfaced showing a restrained prisoner being pummeled and eight county prisoners dying of various causes in 2018.

Corrections Officer Hazing

Numerous complaints and subsequent investigations hearings also have been filed in recent years in America regarding hazing of new corrections officers by veteran guards. The practice is not only humiliating for the hazed but costly in terms of employee turnover and the cost of job searches for replacements. Perhaps the most despicable but also quite common type of hazing among corrections officers is so-called “training exercises” with little purpose but to intimidate, degrade and supposedly put the new guy in his place.

One of the more egregious cases involved a new Pennsylvania corrections guard named Charles Chisler who was manhandled and incurred debilitating bodily injuries on October 7, 2007, when superiors and peers performed acts of horseplay under the guise of training him. Chisler had good reason to worry and to be wary when several colleagues ordered him into the “bubble” used for ordinary training. Previously these same colleagues had rendered him unconscious in a so-called exercise. This time they verbally abused him and roughed him up when he refused to wear handcuffs out of fear for what they might do to him while immobile. His

obstinacy infuriated them, and they jumped him, employing tactics best described as potentially deadly force. As a result, Chisler was seriously injured, sued his superiors, and eventually left the corrections profession to work as a T-Mobile territory supervisor. During the lawsuit, Chisler alleged that another employee subjected to similar hazing treatment actually committed suicide, a claim that the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections investigated but did not make public. His departure from a job he might have loved due to hazing was anything but a bonding experience in the workforce.

Maine Senator Stan Gerzofsky, a Democrat and co-chair of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, said that in his home state eight of ten new guards quit their jobs soon after employment. The job quite obviously is difficult enough due to often hostile prisoners, but many guards depart due to the hazing from superiors and veteran peers, which can and do often escalate from childish pranks to abusive behaviors, homophobic slurs directed at guards, and putting the new guards in harm's way. For example, former guard Cory Peaslee told the Maine Criminal Justice and Safety Committee that his hazing began with his boss taking his lunchbox and hiding it to escalating to real harassment where he was locked out of a safe area and forced into a dangerous zone called "No Man's Land" where he could have been fired upon by a sentry. His superior forced him to make a phony emergency drill call that went out to all guards. He was jumped, handcuffed, roughed up, nearly pepper sprayed, and coerced into "admitting" he "dreamed" of being a homosexual.

Lauren E. Bedard, chief of Corrections for the Seminole County Sheriff's Office in Sanford, Florida, acts as one of a handful of prison reformers dedicated to stamping out hazing among corrections officers. "These sadistic behaviors most likely transfer to the inmate population. If staff are willing to treat their own like that, I shudder to imagine how they are treating inmates", she wrote. The Maine Department of Corrections might want to look beyond the hazing incidents and reopen cases where inmates say they have complained about similar behaviors". [Footnote: Lara E. Bedard, "Preventing Hazing in the Workplace: Hazing may not be anything new, but it also shouldn't be happening inside of prisons". Article may be accessed at [Http://CorrectionsOne.com](http://CorrectionsOne.com)].

"Hazing in corrections must stop. It is sadistic, degrading and defies the professionalism we have worked so hard [to achieve] over decades. Those of us active in the field know how high turnover is and how difficult

attracting new recruits can be – there is no sense in hazing those who want to give it a try. Our challenge should be to make them feel welcome and to mentor them throughout their journey so they can succeed in this field”.

The author of this article agrees with Dr. Bedard. It is my fervent hope that one day prison hazing on both sides of the bars will be eradicated.

Bibliography

- Brown J.K. (2015), *Young inmates beaten and raped in prison broomstick ritual*, Miami Herald, 12 September.
- Fleisher M., Decker S.M. (2001), *An Overview of the Challenge of Prison Gangs*, Correction Management Quarterly, 5(1), 1-9.
- Kaminski M. (2004), *The Games Prisoners Play: The Tragicomic Worlds of Polish Prisons*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Nuwer H. (1999), *Greek Letters Don't Justify Cult-like Hazing of Pledges*, Chronicle of Higher Education, 26 November.
- Perlman L., (1986), *Mercenary group is formally charged. Muncie*, Indiana Star Press, 7 March, 1986.

Netography:

- Florida Department of Corrections Annual Report 2016-2017, Florida Department Of Corrections (FDC) Bureau of Research and Data Analysis, p. 431. Available online at http://www.dc.state.fl.us/pub/annual/1617/FDC_AR2016-17.pdf.
- Nuwer H. (2017), *Wrongs of Passage in Fraternity Hazing, The, "The Conversation"*, August 28, Available at <http://theconversation.com>.

