

Article

# When Hazing is Not Hazing: Media Portrayal of Hazing: Developing A Typology. Introducing the TAIR Model

Scott Alden Mathers <sup>1</sup> and Jackie Chavez <sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sociology and Justice Studies Department, Eastern Washington University, Cheney, WA 99004, USA; smathers@ewu.edu

<sup>2</sup> Department of Criminal Justice, Troy University, Troy, AL 36081, USA

\* Correspondence: jchavez@troy.edu; Tel.: +1-334-670-3755

Received: 22 July 2018; Accepted: 12 September 2018; Published: 14 September 2018



**Abstract:** The present article is a preliminary study using textual analysis of 35 news articles regarding media portrayals of hazing. In an effort to better understand how the media defines and portrays hazing explanations and the types of injuries victims sustain, we introduce the TAIR Model. Results indicate that the TAIR model provides hazing motivations as being the result of tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual and that victims of hazing often sustain physical, psychological, and sexual harm. Furthermore, many “hazing acts” are really crimes that happen to be perpetrated by members of sports teams rather than a sports hazing event. The impact of this analysis suggests that due to media portrayals of hazing, the ways in which we think and speak about hazing, as well as the subsequent “solutions”, are counterproductive and distort our understandings of the causes of “hazing”.

**Keywords:** hazing; media; criminal justice; criminology

## 1. Introduction

The problem of hazing persists in various organizations including sports, school groups, fraternities, sororities, and the military (Chin and Johnson 2011) and acts involving serious injury and death have continued to attract intense media scrutiny. The present study uses a textual analysis of 35 news articles in an effort to better understand how the media defines and portrays hazing explanations and the types of injuries victims sustain. Specifically, this study seeks to understand how the media explains hazing to the public, defines hazing events, and how the public perceives hazing. The authors question whether the hazing acts are really sports-related events or crimes that happen to be perpetrated by members of sports teams. This disconnect between the public perception of hazing events and the media portrayal is sorely lacking in hazing literature. Due to the serious nature of “hazing events,” this critical perspective is long overdue in the research literature. It is vitally important to explore these issues since hazing events can lead to sports-ending careers, permanent disabilities, and death.

Hazing can be defined as “any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers regardless of a person’s willingness to participate” (Hoover and Pollard 1999, p. 8). However, confusion around the definition of hazing persists since there are a variety of definitions found in the literature. Moreover, definitions frequently used by researchers do not always correspond to public perceptions of hazing. The present research examines the intersection of this disconnect between how the public understands hazing and how academics and the media understand hazing. For these reasons, it is important for researchers to narrow down a clear and concise singular definition of hazing to educate both academia and the public sector.

The problem of hazing is not confined to the United States nor to any one demographic. In India, for example, hazing is referred to as “ragging” and has led to physical, mental, and sexual abuse and 31 student deaths since 2000 (Carroll et al. 2009). Hazing encompasses a variety of acts and behaviors from mild pranks to serious life-threatening injuries or even death. DeHass (2006) found that, even though both genders are involved in hazing, men were more likely than women to be both the victims and perpetrators of hazing in college. Hazing activities are meant to humiliate and degrade and can involve physical abuse, verbal abuse, psychological torture, and dangerous or illegal behaviors. Examples of physical abuse can include a variety of acts such as hitting, slapping, or kicking while verbal abuse can include name-calling, screaming and cursing, or humiliating someone (Allan and Madden 2008). Acts such as sleep, hygiene and food deprivations, kidnapping, and abandonment are all used to psychologically torture victims during acts of hazing (Carroll et al. 2009; McMullen 2014). Often, both offenders and victims participate in dangerous, deviant, or illegal behaviors. These behaviors may include rape, beatings, drinking to the point of getting sick or passing out, enduring harsh weather conditions without appropriate clothing, engaging in group sex, or performing other deviant and sexual acts (Chin and Johnson 2011; Allan and Madden 2008; Nuwer 2004). In addition to the psychological, physical, and/or physiological harm that victims endure, hazing can also have negative effects on bystanders (i.e., those who witness hazing) or on the individuals that initiate the hazing (McMullen 2014). As McMullen (2014, p. 189) notes, “young people who witness hazing are more likely to be depressed or anxious, use alcohol or drugs, and miss school.”

Consequently, offenders and bystanders may find themselves in trouble with their team, organization, school, or law enforcement. Although punishments for hazing vary, typical penalties include fines, suspension or expulsion from the team or school, having diplomas withheld, being fired from their place of employment, civil lawsuits, or prosecution and conviction (Crow and Macintosh 2009; Chin and Johnson 2011; McMullen 2014; Van Raalte et al. 2007). Schools and colleges can be sued or held liable in cases where personnel knew hazing was occurring or failed to prevent it (Chin and Johnson 2011). Despite the potential consequences of hazing, many perpetrators, victims, and members of the public do not view hazing as a serious issue. Instead, individuals often consider it as athletes just having fun.

Definitional issues and underreporting are two problems associated with examining hazing behaviors (Finkel 2002). For example, Hoover and Pollard (1999) found that only 12% of the 61,258 athletes surveyed reported being hazed. However, that number jumped to 80% when researchers discussed typical activities associated with hazing. Furthermore, many offenders dissuade victims from reporting hazing (Van Raalte et al. 2007). Similarly, Allan and Madden (2008) found that many student athletes only identified activities as hazing if the acts or behaviors involved physical force. In the present research, we examine the disconnect between how the media frames hazing and how participants and students perceive those events. Interestingly, we find a similar gap in how different groups view hazing events where severity and whether the event was relevant to the sports program or sporting activity are major “fault lines.”

Education is key in preventing hazing and should start early on and continue throughout student athletic careers (McMullen 2014). Sports organizations such as the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and various state high school activity associations have created a variety of resources for players, coaches, advisors, and administrators in order to help prevent hazing (Kowalski and Waldron 2010).

Coaches and administrators are important actors in helping to prevent hazing from occurring. Accordingly, they must communicate expectations of team behavior and provide suitable punishments for hazing events as well as continually convey the importance of reporting hazing (McMullen 2014). Unfortunately, there have been incidents where coaches encouraged hazing or looked the other way (Kowalski and Waldron 2010). Johnson and Donnelly (2004) found that coaches were often skeptical of the effectiveness of educational meetings, sanctions, or efforts to change the culture of hazing.

It is important for athletic teams to have vigorous enforcement of anti-hazing policies. To improve the social cohesiveness among team members, it is important that teams incorporate team-building activities such as pre-season activities or endurance tests (McMullen 2014). With respect to punishment,

there are a variety of goals including deterrence, retribution, and rehabilitation. Proponents of zero tolerance policies maintain that punishments must be implemented so athletes understand that inappropriate behaviors will not be tolerated, which will hopefully decrease hazing.

Conversely, it has also been argued that zero tolerance policies do not deter athletes in cases involving peer pressure or in those athletes with low impulse control. In addition, arguments against zero tolerance policies state that severe punishments are not only ineffective but may result in unanticipated consequences (McMullen 2014). For example, some punishments may be associated with negative outcomes such as lower grades, lower standardized test scores, and higher dropout rates (Boccanfuso and Kuhfeld 2011). Opponents suggest addressing the culture of hazing through education and reserving punishment as a last resort or in extreme cases (McMullen 2014). Regardless, it is crucial to investigate the nature and extent of hazing in order to properly respond to, punish, and prevent hazing from occurring in the future.

Many consider hazing to be a normal and acceptable part of the initiation process in athletics. However, given the potential seriousness of hazing, it is crucial to focus on why individuals engage in this type of behavior in hopes of preventing future incidents. Athletes of all levels may engage in and/or be subjected to hazing for a variety of reasons (Crow and Macintosh 2009). Campo et al. (2005) and Robinson (1998) found that group cohesion, the desire to belong, and wanting to be part of something bigger were all contributing factors of hazing.

Baumeister and Leary (1995) state that an individual's need to belong to a group and maintain positive, lasting, and meaningful relationships makes them susceptible to the pressures placed on them by senior teammates. This may also validate the idea that veteran teammates are superior to other teammates (Kowalski and Waldron 2010). Holman (2004) asserts that there is a difference between joining a team and being accepted by the team. Therefore, many athletes believe that "experiencing initiation is the only way to be accepted" (p. 53). Caperchione and Holman (2004) found that coaches' agreed that most athletes participated in hazing as a way to gain acceptance from teammates. Likewise, initiation rites can be "pro-social behaviors that build social relationships, understanding, empathy, civility, altruism, and moral decision making" (Hoover and Pollard 1999, p. 3). Furthermore, group cohesion promotes group skills and attitudes, stimulates social dependency on the group, and reinforces hierarchy (Bryshun and Young 1999; Campo et al. 2005; Keating et al. 2005). These factors appear to be especially salient in athletics.

However, research found that initiations that involve degrading hazing practices do not effectively build cohesion and some athletes admit hazing could even act as a deterrent to team cohesion (Van Raalte et al. 2007; McMullen 2014; Kowalski and Waldron 2010). Instead, the focus should be on team building alternatives that include shared goals and equal partnership opportunities that require teammates to work together to ensure lasting bonds (Chin and Johnson 2011). Nonetheless, many current and former athletes are not only willing to engage in hazing but would not speak out against hazing for fear of receiving harsher hazing or being ostracized from the team (Waldron and Kowalski 2009).

The current research evaluates how the media explains hazing to readers using the TAIR Model. This model includes explanations for hazing that categorizes the events as the result of tradition, acceptance, imitation, or ritual (TAIR Model). The current research uses media accounts that include one of the four explanations for hazing and, therefore, is an important influence in how the public understands hazing. The following section describes the methods and definitions used in the present research to classify each article into one of the four categories. Furthermore, this research uses textual analysis to critique the public perception of hazing events that are often at odds with media portrayals. Lastly, this research focuses on the severity of harm to victims and the role of perpetrators.

### 1.1. Methods

The data were gathered from 2016 to 2017 among United States newspapers and media reports of hazing events with an  $N = 35$ . It is common for qualitative data to be based on 1 to 30 units

(Bengtsson 2016). Wang and Riffe (2010) found that, in examining news coverage, “a sample size of six days was effective and efficient to represent one year of content of the New York Times Online” (p. 1). The various explanations offered from the selected texts were from a variety of sources such as witnesses, journalists, friends, parents, and school staff (i.e., not always the offenders themselves). The sample represents a purposive design to analyze articles that explain hazing to the public and, subsequently, shape public perspectives on hazing events. Most media accounts of hazing use what the authors call the TAIR Model, which references tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual as the explanation for why hazing occurs. Newspaper articles on incidents of hazing were screened to evaluate if the article provided an explanation for the hazing event in one of four categories: tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual (TAIR Model) and the description of injury type (sexual, physical, humiliation, and psychological). Articles that did not discuss the explanation and injury for hazing events were excluded from the analysis. Searches were conducted online between the dates of September 2016 and January 2017. The gender of perpetrators and victims were determined by names and personal pronouns provided by the articles.

Each article was validated by an independent content and textual analysis by both researchers and discrepancies of categorization into the TAIR model, which were resolved. The resolution was determined by whether or not an article explicitly stated the explanation as tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual or implied one of the four as the reason for the event. Typically, the explanation for hazing was explicitly stated in the article. Occasionally, the explanation was implied by a quote usually from a community member that clearly relates to one of the four categories. For example, a concerned parent who states “*this has been going on for years and, this time, they took it too far . . . it’s time for this to stop*” would be classified as the explanation ‘tradition.’ Occasionally, an article would state that the reason was one category such as tradition, but spent time also discussing rituals, initiation, and/or acceptance “explanations.” For example, an article might explicitly state that the reason for the hazing was tradition, but the text implies other reason(s). In these cases, the article was classified as the explanation ‘tradition.’ This is because the researchers determined that explicitly defining the explanation is more influential as to how readers might understand the narratives compared to an implied explanation.

### 1.2. Impact

The goal of the present research is to analyze articles that have the most possibility to influence the public’s perspective on hazing. The authors focus on reports that are published in widely circulated news outlets as an indicator of impact on public perception. Primary sources include major media and news outlet such as Newsweek, Fox, New York Times, ABC, CBS, NBC, New York Post, and USA Today in addition to circulation in local media markets. The authors also look for duplication of news articles and media reports as an indicator of impact on public perception. The articles used for analysis have been written about in multiple news outlets and media reports and cross-reference each other in a way that provides the reader with more detail and context. For example, the “Woodmore Case” dealt with in detail can be found in a variety of media accounts that provide updates on the health of players and information relating to ongoing criminal investigations.

The following section provides conceptualizations of the TAIR Model. These conceptualizations are used as the basis for categorizing hazing in the analysis section. These conceptualizations contribute to the literature by creating clear definitions for the explanations of hazing since these clear definitions are lacking in current literature. Additionally, these conceptualizations are used to evaluate how the explanations for hazing in each article shape how the public understands hazing in light of injury to the victim.

### 1.3. Tradition

An article where a hazing event is categorized as ‘tradition’ explicitly states and/or mainly discusses how tradition is the main reason for the hazing event. This type of source focuses on

the history of a sports program, sports in general, and the history of how the community relates to the sports program. 'Tradition' can appear similar to the explanation 'acceptance' since an article about tradition will focus on how generations of people in the community were both the subjects and perpetrators of hazing events, which implies acceptance. The difference is that an article that focuses on tradition will not say that the community accepts hazing as "basically okay or desirable" but has merely tolerated it because it has always been a part of the program. Typically, the discourse in these articles will revolve around the need to "finally end the tradition" and typically imply that the community knew it was questionable or wrong but has failed to act.

#### 1.4. *Acceptance*

An article where a hazing event is categorized as 'acceptance' explicitly states and/or mainly discusses a culture of accepting hazing acts. This type of source focuses on the community and culture of the student body, administration, and/or coaching staff. In particular, a hazing event that is explained by acceptance discusses the rationalizations and ideas that support hazing as okay or desirable. For example, the source might focus on how the community believes football players need to be "tough" and "men." Therefore, hazing events reinforce and train members as to these qualities. This form of acceptance cast hazing is desirable by the community and subsequently encouraged. Another aspect of the explanation 'acceptance' focuses on all the ways the community might minimize hazing as not harmful and, therefore, prior hazing events have never been challenged.

#### 1.5. *Initiation*

An article where a hazing event is categorized as 'initiation' explicitly states and/or mainly discusses situations in which a team or program uses a specific event as a form of formal or informal membership. These sources discuss the idea that hazing is how "people really join the team" or "become part of the program". Initiation can appear to very similar to a 'ritual.' However, the former focuses on a general event in which membership is established (initiation) while the latter focuses on the specific requirements of the event as well as the context that trigger the hazing (ritual). With initiation, the hazing event is a one-time event for new members and can vary widely by practice. For example, the initiation might be some form of public humiliation or physical pain that fluctuates widely depending on who is joining and which specific members are conducting the hazing. The important criteria for the explanation 'initiation' is that, after the conclusion of the event, there are no regularized future hazing events for the victim and that person is now viewed as a member due to the result of participation.

#### 1.6. *Ritual*

An article where a hazing event is categorized as a 'ritual' explicitly states and/or mainly discusses situations in which a team or program has regular hazing events as part of its basic functions. This differs from tradition because an event such as "not practicing hard enough" triggers the hazing ritual. These hazing rituals reinforce certain things deemed important by the team. For example, the article might describe how football players endure a specific amount of pain administered by teammates or the coach for mistakes they make during the game or in practice as a form of ritual hazing punishment.

## 2. Results

The purpose of this study is to investigate media portrayals of hazing. We specifically focus on three areas of analysis in the medial portrayals of hazing that are demographics, explanations, and injury. Demographics, hazing explanations, and injury type were determined by what was reported in each news article including those that were stated and implied. All articles were evaluated by both authors for mutual consultation to determine validity and reach consensus. The following table examines the demographic characteristics of victims and offenders in terms of sex and age. In our

sample of 30 news articles, the majority of hazing perpetrators and victims were male (25 perpetrators and 21 victims). A small number of articles did not specifically indicate the sex of either perpetrator or victim (3 perpetrators and 9 victims, respectively). Table 1 provides the demographic variables.

**Table 1.** Demographic Variables.

Demographics	Total Number	Percent (%) of Total
Perpetrator Sex		
<i>Male</i>	25	71.4
<i>Female</i>	7	20
<i>N/A</i>	3	8.6
Victim Sex		
<i>Male</i>	21	60
<i>Female</i>	5	14.2
<i>N/A</i>	9	25.8
Perpetrator Age		
<i>High School</i>	20	57.2
<i>Professional</i>	2	5.7
<i>N/A</i>	13	37.1

Depictions from the TAIR model emerged based on quotes obtained from the news articles on hazing. However, not all news articles portrayed hazing in a negative light. In fact, many articles featured quotes portraying offenders as “good kids.” For example, one article portrayed hazing as a matter of typical play that boys engage in by stating:

*“For many middle-aged patrons, mostly men, according to Chaffee, the dominant opinion held that too much was being made of an incident that, when they were younger, would have been overlooked, or treated as boys just being boys”.* (Ithaca Journal 2014)

Similarly, articles also portrayed incidents as pranks rather than hazing, which was depicted in the following selected texts:

*“All the students stated they were not forced and most everyone laughed about the incident before dispersing” and “A good guy, but like all of us, you want to have your fair share of pranks and stuff like that . . . I would just say he’s a jokester kind of guy” and “some Prosser players on Monday told WLS-TV that the incident was merely horseplay between the players, adding that the 14-year-old wasn’t hurt or bruised in the incident”.*

(Lee 2011)

Unfortunately, such portrayals may serve to reinforce misconceptions that hazing is not a serious issue and ignore the fact that minor incidents can escalate quickly to more serious criminal behavior. In fact, on more than one occasion, media accounts included excuse-oriented quotes from parents such as:

*“I just disagree with hazing entirely. I think that’s maybe something for college and not some high school kids,” and “trying to add to the wussification of our students”.* (Ithaca Journal 2014)

Table 2 displays the primary explanations for hazing illustrated in the news articles. We identified the specific type of explanation for hazing that was discussed in each article. The quotes provided in the study were given by a variety of individuals such as the authors, offenders, victims, school officials, or law enforcement. The hazing explanation typology included four categories that are frequently cited in the literature: tradition, acceptance, initiation, and ritual.

**Table 2.** Hazing Explanations.

Hazing Explanations	Total Number	Percent (%) of Total
Initiation	15	42.9
Acceptance	12	34.3
Ritual	6	17.1
Tradition	2	5.7

Fifteen (42.9%) hazing explanations were attributed to initiation, 12 (34.3%) explanations were attributed to acceptance, 6 (17.1%) reasons were attributed to ritual, and 2 (5.7%) were attributed to tradition. As these numbers suggest, initiation and acceptance are the greatest used explanation for hazing in the media. The following selected texts offer examples of a typical narrative used to classify each article as tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual categories.

#### *Tradition*

*“Swimmers were forced to participate in a tradition called the “freshman fight club” and beat each other while upperclassmen watched” and “it was happening because hazing is a sports tradition that has endured for generations and coaches and administrators often let it happen”. (Lee 2011)*

#### *Acceptance*

*“But he denied feeling as if he had been bullied, ‘hazed,’ or attacked and suggested he instead felt as though he was being welcomed to the team”. (ZwemZa 2016)*

#### *Initiation*

*“After every incident they said that it was initiation, your freshman initiation,” said TerHar. In addition, “according to a criminal complaint,” Pille “intentionally engaged in an act involving forced activity which endangered the physical health or safety of a student for the purpose of initiation into a school organization”. (Rohrbach 2016)*

*“The hockey season was canceled after 12 players were charged with violating various hazing and drinking laws during an off-campus initiation party that resulted in the shaving of heads and bodies of the students involved”. (Peng 2015)*

#### *Ritual*

*“The first case included named plaintiffs and named alleged perpetrators that said a team culture of “mutual horseplay and banter” included a ritual that involved poking teammates in the rectum” (ESPN 2002 and “The parent of one victim later described what occurred as a violent ritual involving anal sexual attacks by seniors who routinely preyed on freshmen”. (Gokavi 2017)*

Table 3 displays the primary injuries sustained in hazing events. We identified the specific type of injury discussed in each article. The quotes provided in the study were given by a variety of individuals such as the authors, offenders, victims, school officials, or law enforcement. Many victims suffered a multitude of different types of injuries ranging from physical to psychological/humiliation and sexual.

**Table 3.** Hazing Injuries.

Hazing Injuries	Total Number
Physical	21
Psychological/Humiliation	23
Sexual	20

A total of 21 of the 30 articles included more than one type of injury (e.g., physical, sexual, humiliation, and psychological). The following selected texts offer examples of a typical narrative used to describe each article's reported injury as sexual, humiliation, psychological, and physical:

#### Sexual

*"Then, the victim would be lifted to his feet while a finger was forced into his rectum".* (Stanmyre 2014)

*"In the school's wrestling room, a 15-year-old boy was allegedly sodomized with a mop handle while teammates held him down and dozens of other wrestlers watched".* (Nuwer 2007)

#### Humiliation/Psychological

*"Anthony Erekat, a member of the football squad, was duct-taped by the arms and legs at a football camp run by the team's coaches. He had his hair hacked off and had players spread feces and peanut butter over his body".* (Nuwer 2007)

*"Initiation for girls has included such things as wearing bathing suits and being covered with food, cat food, or other sticky substances and then rolled in the sand, which ends in the ocean or ends with getting hosed off".* (ESPN 2002)

#### Physical

*"Five seniors were removed from the team for punching and hanging two sophomore teammates by their waists".* (Nuwer 2007)

*"Players on Prosser Career Academy's varsity team beat the boy with belts at the school".* (Bronner 2017)

*"Players who made it back to the field within eight minutes were told to form a line, as 'New Woodmore.' All players who took longer than eight minutes to return to the field after dressing were told to line up across from the others, eight to ten yards away, as 'Old Woodmore.' In full pads, and in excessive heat, Coach Bringman is alleged to have told 'New Woodmore' to hit 'Old Woodmore' as hard as possible and for 'Old Woodmore' to make no effort to defend themselves".* (Lee 2011)

One surprising finding is that many media accounts of hazing appear to be crimes committed by students on sports teams more than sports related hazing events. Many of the incidents were only tangentially related to sports such as a coach directing the team to beat a player accused of stealing shoes. Furthermore, many of the articles discussed a conflict between victims and perpetrators that occurred just before the "hazing event," which implies the violence was more about the conflict as opposed to sports-related phenomena.

The analysis reveals that many of the hazing events in the articles detailed violent crimes, sexual assaults, and false imprisonments. Additionally, in many of these cases, the victim(s) suffered physical, psychological, and sexual assault resulting in traumas that ended their careers in sports. On a few occasions, students needed to be hospitalized. In one case (Woodmore), a student suffered traumatic brain injury. Extreme cases as defined by victims needing medical or psychological treatment were

more common than not. Additionally, the comment sections of “extreme case” articles included many commenters pointing out that “*this is not hazing; this is criminal behavior*” and “*someone should have called the police not the principal*”. In these extreme cases, it was common for the public to reject the media’s explanation for hazing as the result of tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual as well as outright rejecting the idea that the event was hazing. One commenter stated “*this is not sports hazing; it is kids on sports teams who are committing crimes.*” These results suggest the public is at least partially aware of the disconnect between *hazing events* and *media narratives* rooted in the TAIR Model. The impact of this analysis suggests the ways in which we think and speak about hazing as well as the subsequent “solutions,” which are counterproductive and distort our understanding of the causes of “hazing.” Lastly, in some cases, the students did not want to participate in the hazing events but were forced by coaches. These cases typically involved excessive physical punishments or being directed to commit crimes. In these cases, both parents and students rejected the notion that these were hazing events. For example, many of the students on the Woodmore Team refused to hit their teammates or “held-up” just before impact. Parents and students alike were perplexed that the media would frame the incident as a hazing event and, in extreme cases such as these, parents were often suing schools and coaches. Articles of this type blur the line between hazing, which is a sports-related event, and criminality of people who happen to be on sports teams. The difference between the two, in the judgment of the authors, has to do with whether or not the participants viewed the events as hazing or something beyond hazing that is more criminal. In some articles, quotes and accounts from school officials, police, parents, and students accepted the “media framing” that the activities in question were hazing events. However, in more extreme cases, the school officials, police, parents, and students rejected the events as hazing and spoke about the events as criminal. Therefore, the primary issue of importance that impacts analysis is the difference between media accounts and the perspectives of those involved.

### 3. Limitations

There are limitations of the study that should be taken into consideration. First, certain types of injuries may be reported less often such as psychological and sexual harms. Most news articles did not interview the victims or offenders directly and relied on other sources to establish harms. These sources include parents, school officials, police, and court documents. It is possible that other harms that were not reported in the media accounts were part of the hazing event. Second, only information provided from the media-selected news article accounts as well as from people who experienced the events is analyzed. These include victims, parents, community members, police, and school officials, but rarely offenders. As such, it is possible that the explanations portrayed in the articles do not match the offender’s actual motivations. In this respect, we cannot determine if the explanations provided in this study are truly the offenders’ motivations. However, it is important to recognize that the purpose of the study is to examine media portrayals rather than offender explanations. At times, it appeared the media portrayal was rooted in the “offender’s perspectives” and, at other times, it appeared to be the opinions of others who were unrelated to the hazing event.

### 4. Conclusions

The purpose of the present research is to explore the common themes used in media narratives regarding hazing. This research introduces the TAIR model as a useful tool to understand how the media explains hazing as well as how the media frames solutions to hazing events. The results enhance how we understand media typologies as well as how those typologies influence public opinion. Analysis reveals that public opinion is shaped to understand hazing as the result of tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual as evidence by the finding that every article cited is one of the four explanations. Additionally, analysis reveals that sometimes the participants (school officials, parents, students, police) rejected the media frame of the event as hazing and instead framed the event as criminal activity. This discourse is useful because we gain insights into the degree of influence the media has framing hazing events. The findings indicate that the public does not passively accept

media narratives. This is especially true when the “hazing” results in serious harm. It appears that the public generally thinks of hazing as acts that involve minor injury and are acts linked to the sports program. Cases in which acts do not appear to be linked to the sports program and cases in which the acts are extremely violent are cases where the public is the most likely to reject the frame of hazing.

Specifically, some of the most extreme “hazing” events appear to be violent crimes committed by people who happened to be on sports teams as opposed to a sports hazing event. For this reason, it would be useful to analyze whether the public is receiving a skewed version of why sports hazing happens. This is particularly important as the extreme hazing cases are more likely to be discussed in online forums and more prevalently reprinted in multiple news outlets. The typical media narrative model explains hazing as the result of tradition, acceptance, initiation, or ritual. This categorical media narrative removes much of the content from these hazing events. The textual analysis presented in this research reveals that the public partially rejects those narratives and, at times, the media undercuts their own narrative. In particular, part of an “unrecognized media narrative” includes the nature and context of relationships between the perpetrator and the victim(s).

The textual analysis indicates that many of the most extreme hazing events are embedded in strained contexts or relationships. Findings suggest that these hazing events are more accurately understood as violent crimes as opposed to the TAIR Model media narratives presented to the public. Results suggest that the public is at least partially aware of the disconnect between hazing events and media narratives. The impact of this analysis suggests the ways in which we think and speak about hazing as well as the subsequent “solutions” are counterproductive and distort our understanding of the causes of “hazing.” We argue that explanations for hazing are better understood through a relational framework that moves beyond the categorical model. Future research on hazing events should take into account the context of the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

**Author Contributions:** S.A.M. contributed to data analysis and collection and J.C. contributed to the literature review and data analysis. Both authors contributed to the writing and editing of the paper and conceptualizing the TAIR Model.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

- Allan, Elizabeth, and Mary Madden. 2008. *Hazing in View: Initial Findings from the National Study of Student Hazing*. Collingdale: Diane Publishing.
- Baumeister, Roy F., and Mark R. Leary. 1995. The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin* 117(3): 497–529. [CrossRef]
- Bengtsson, Mariette. 2016. How to plan and perform a qualitative study using content analysis. *Nursing Plus* 2: 8–14. [CrossRef]
- Boccanfuso, Christopher, and Megan Kuhfeld. 2011. Multiple Responses, Promising Results: Evidence Based, Nonpunitive Alternatives to Zero Tolerance. *Research-to-Results Briefs*, 11. Available online: [http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Child\\_Trends-2011\\_03\\_01\\_RB\\_AltToZeroTolerance.pdf](http://www.childtrends.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Child_Trends-2011_03_01_RB_AltToZeroTolerance.pdf) (accessed on 5 May 2016).
- Bronner, Sasha. 2017. Malibu High School Hazing Letter To Parents Evokes Scenes From Cult Classic ‘Dazed And Confused’ (UPDATE). *Huffpost*. Available online: [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/04/malibu-high-school-hazing\\_n\\_1569401.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/04/malibu-high-school-hazing_n_1569401.html) (accessed on 1 January 2017).
- Bryshun, Jamie, and Kevin Young. 1999. Sport-related hazing: An inquiry into male and female involvement. In *Sport and Gender in Canada*. Edited by Philip White and Kevin Young. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 269–92.
- Stanmyre, Matthew. 2014. Sayreville Football Players Charged with Locker Room Sexual Assaults. Available online: [https://www.nj.com/middlesex/index.ssf/2014/10/sayreville\\_high\\_school\\_football\\_hazing\\_parent\\_reveals\\_sexual\\_nature\\_of\\_locker\\_room\\_ritual\\_exclusive.html](https://www.nj.com/middlesex/index.ssf/2014/10/sayreville_high_school_football_hazing_parent_reveals_sexual_nature_of_locker_room_ritual_exclusive.html) (accessed on 5 January 2017).

- Campo, Shelly, Gretchen Poulos, and John W. Sipple. 2005. Prevalence and profiling: Hazing among college students and points of intervention. *American Journal of Health Behavior* 29: 137–49. [CrossRef]
- Caperchione, Cristina, and Margery Holman. 2004. Gender differences in coaches' perceptions of hazing in intercollegiate athletics. In *Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing*. Edited by Johnson Jay and Margery Jean Holman. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., pp. 97–117.
- Carroll, Michael S., Daniel P. Connaughton, John O. Spengler, and James J. Zhang. 2009. Case law analysis regarding high school and collegiate liability for hazing. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 94: 389–410. [CrossRef]
- Chin, Jessica W., and Jay Johnson. 2011. Making the team: Threats to health and wellness within sport hazing cultures. *The International Journal of Health, Wellness, and Society* 12: 29–38. [CrossRef]
- Crow, R. Brian, and Eric W. Macintosh. 2009. Conceptualizing a meaningful definition of hazing in sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 94: 433–51. [CrossRef]
- DeHass, Denise M. 2006. *NCAA Study of Substance Use among College Student Athletes*. Indianapolis: National Collegiate Athletic Association.
- ESPN. 2002. Sports Hazing Incidents. Available online: <https://www.espn.com/otl/hazing/list.html> (accessed on 8 January 2017).
- Finkel, Michelle A. 2002. Traumatic injuries caused by hazing practices. *American Journal of Emergency Medicine* 20: 228–33. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Gokavi, Mark. 2017. WSU Opposes 'John Doe' Status in Hazing Lawsuit, Alleges Slurs. *Dayton Daily News*. Available online: <https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/crime-law/wsu-opposes-john-doe-status-hazing-lawsuit-alleges-slurs/QcjuWGwAqOCfHTuIQwzgxI/> (accessed on 16 January 2017).
- Holman, Margery. 2004. A search for a theoretical understanding of hazing practices in sport. In *Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing*. Edited by Johnson Jay and Margery Jean. Holman: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., pp. 55–60.
- Hoover, Nadine, and Norman J. Pollard. 1999. *Initiation Rites and Athletics: A National Survey of NCAA Sports Teams*. Alfred: Alfred University, Rochester: Reidman Insurance Co., Inc.
- Ithaca Journal. 2014. Unnecessary Roughness: Groton Divided after Hazing. Available online: <https://www.ithacajournal.com/story/news/local/2014/11/07/groton-hazing-aftermath/18647435/> (accessed on 12 January 2017).
- Johnson, Jay, and Hugh P. Donnelly. 2004. In their own words: Athletic administrators, coaches, and athletes at two universities discuss hazing policies. In *Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing*. Edited by Jay Johnson and Margery Holman. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., pp. 155–75.
- Keating, Caroline F., Jason Pomerantz, Stacy D. Pommer, Samantha J. H. Ritt, Lauren M. Miller, and Julie McCormick. 2005. Going to college and unpacking hazing: A functional approach to decrypting initiation practices among undergraduates. *Group Dynamics: Theory, Research, and Practice* 9: 104–26. [CrossRef]
- Kowalski, Christopher, and Jennifer Waldron. 2010. Looking the other way: Athletes' perceptions of coaches' responses to hazing. *International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching* 51: 87–100.
- Lee, William. 2011. 2 CPS Coaches, 4 Players Charged in Alleged Hazing. *Chicagotribune*. Available online: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/local/breaking/chi-2-cps-coaches-4-students-charged-following-alleged-hazing-episode-20111025-story.html#> (accessed on 8 January 2017).
- McMullen, Judith G. 2014. Addressing abusive conduct in youth sports. *Sports Law Review* 251: 427–48.
- Nuwer, Hank. 2004. How sportswriters contribute to a hazing culture in athletics. In *Making the Team: Inside the World of Sport Initiations and Hazing*. Edited by Johnson Jay and Margery Jean Holman. Toronto: Canadian Scholar's Press, pp. 118–31.
- Nuwer, Hank. 2007. Hazing Awareness: There Is No Fun in These Games. 25 Bad Incidents That Do Not Involve Greeks. Available online: <http://www.hanknuwer.com/hazing-awareness-there-is-no-fun-in-these-games-25-bad-incidents-that-do-not-involve-greeks/> (accessed on 19 January 2017).
- Peng, Vanessa. 2015. Teens face even more charges in high school hazing. *KCCI*. Available online: <https://www.kcci.com/article/teens-face-even-more-charges-in-high-school-hazing/6913842> (accessed on 10 January 2017).
- Robinson, Laura. 1998. *Crossing the Line: Violence and Sexual Assault in Canada's National Sport*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart.

- Rohrbach, Ben. 2016. Oklahoma baseball coach, players suspended in 'tickling' hazing incident. *USA Today High School Sports*. Available online: <https://usatodayhss.com/2016/oklahoma-baseball-coach-players-suspended-in-tickling-hazing-incident> (accessed on 5 January 2017).
- Van Raalte, Judy L., Allen E. Cornelius, Darwyn E. Linder, and Britton W. Brewer. 2007. The relationship between hazing and team cohesion. *Journal of Sport Behavior* 304: 491–507.
- Waldron, Jennifer, and Christopher Kowalski. 2009. Crossing the line: Rites of passage, team aspects, and ambiguity of hazing. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport* 802: 291–302. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Wang, Xiaopeng, and Daniel Riffe. 2010. An Exploration of Sample Sizes for Content Analysis of the New York Times Web Site. *Journal of Mass Communication Research* 20: 1–22.
- ZwemZa. 2016. Ex-Swimmer Sues Germantown Academy over Alleged Abuse. Available online: <http://www.zwemza.com/?p=27406> (accessed on 16 January 2017).



© 2018 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).