Clearing the haze

Each year roughly one third of MIT's entering freshmen pledge themselves to the 28 campus fraternities with the hope of becoming a member. One of the best fraternity systems in the United States. Social life, quiz reviews, assistance from "big brothers," freshman orientation, and many other activities have contributed to the notion that our fraternity has a little something extra on the ball.

We find it contradictory, then, and indeed unfortunate, that in one particular area of fraternity life — an important one to freshmen — the process of sophistication and maturity exhibited by freshmen has been shown to seriously interfere with the academic performance of a freshman who either needs more time to study, or whose environment causes them to be distracted. This is a valuable skill for fraternity life. Several other arguments have been heard now and then, but they do not seem to be as widely agreed upon. For example, hazing offers a traditional test of worthiness which binds generations of brothers into a common heritage.

The fact remains that hazing, particularly in its accelerated form in the buildup to and during Hell Week, is more destructive than constructive. Class unity as well as safety and health may profit, can certainly be achieved in more straightforward ways. As remarked earlier, several fraternities have already set examples that the time has come for the remaining houses on campus which still hazing, at the risk of academic and social adjustment of the new men, to adopt modern methods of promoting fellowship at MIT. And it is the responsibility of the newly progressive fraternities to actively make it clear to those that hazing is definitely out of style and out of date.

Unfortunately, however, activities as described above, in the service of pledge training and freshman orientation, are present only in progressive fraternities. A large number continue to subject their pledges to hazing activities at various points during the term or following the climax generally known as Hell Week.

There are many ways of defining hazing, and it appears in many different forms. There are whole complete hazing programs generally include one or more time-consuming pledge projects throughout the pledge period which would be regarded by the non-fraternity world as ranging from useless to sadistic or cruel. Constructive endeavors in the name of hazing are incidental rather than planned and physical and absurdity are typical factors of a well-planned hazing activity. Most importantly, hazing occurs in physical and mental forms. While it is difficult, in view of the laws of secrecy, to determine exactly how many fraternities strain these lines, it is admitted that virtually all apply significant psychological pressure either before or during "pre-initiation activities" (Hell Week), or both. And psychologically hazing, although less tangible than physical labor, is no less real and no less significant.

Each year MIT admits a group of freshmen which is not only brighter than the previous batch, but also generally more mature and aware. These people are coming to MIT to study and to establish friendships. In many cases, hazing has been shown to seriously interfere with the academic performance of a freshman who either needs more time to study, or whose environment causes them to be distracted. This is a valuable skill for fraternity life. Several other arguments have been heard now and then, but they do not seem to be as widely agreed upon. For example, hazing offers a traditional test of worthiness which binds generations of brothers into a common heritage.

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