



LONG ISLAND INSTITUTE FOR GROUP WORK WITH CHILDREN & YOUTH **HUH?!?**

a newsletter about working with children and youth in groups

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From the Editor

Broomsticks and pine cones and golf balls... Almost anyone living in the New York metropolitan area (and across the country) knows by now that these are not the first few words of a nursery rhyme. They are words about kids, a group of big kids who were a part of a high school football team on Long Island, New York.

It seems like only yesterday that I wrote in this newsletter about another group of big kids who were part of a high school football team in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. In the winter, 1998 issue of HUH?!? I reviewed the book, *Our Guys: The Glen Ridge Rape and Secret Life of the Perfect Suburb*. I said, "This a book that takes us deep inside a community that is now notorious for a single horrific incident. There is an eerie familiarity about (the town). It has the look and feel of many contemporary suburban communities. We are brought face-to-face with a small group of predatory male athletes whose distorted sense of sexuality and degrading behavior are tacitly supported by an admiring community with

a twisted value system. We also meet a succession of professionals with a penchant for looking the other way. But we also meet the exceptions and the exceptional, the outraged few who fight for a misunderstood and abused

**When I was little
I was scared of**

**lions and tigers and bears
lions and tigers and bears
lions and tigers and bears**

but

broomsticks and pine cones and golf balls?

oh my!

young woman who just wants to make friends, to fit in, and escape the loneliness of being different...Our Guys is the true story of the breeding and coming of age of a destructive group culture gone wild in a protected environment."

As I read these words Yogi Berra's, "It's déjà vu all over again," comes to mind.

It gives me goose bumps to read these lines of the book review and, although the details vary, it is the same old story...not a children's story or nursery rhyme but a modern suburban horror story.

As a former high

school and college football player I know a little bit about "summer camp," the weeks before school that the team comes together for pre-season practice. I was always too exhausted and sore by day's end to

fraternity, there were teammates and brothers who used hazing as an opportunity to exercise power. Fortunately none of it even approached the same universe as the alleged behavior at the Mephram summer camp.

In this issue of HUH?!?, my colleague Toni Kolb has written two pieces on the subject. Toni brings a unique perspective to hazing as she is concurrently a group worker and a high school coach. One of her pieces is on the difference between male and female hazing, and the other is a plea to coaches, parents, and the rest of us who care about the young athletes in our town. Also included in this issue of HUH?!? are surveys that are part of an action-oriented research project instituted by the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth. Our third action research project, the focus is on youth sports. We invite you to participate in the survey as you see fit.

The Mephram story will live on for a long time. 25 years from now we will read

think about anything but sleeping, let alone how to torment underclassmen. No hazing was necessary, initiation rites occurred on the field of play.

I also pledged a college fraternity in the winter and spring of my freshman year. There was hazing. The worst I can remember having was standing on my head while pancake syrup was poured down my pants legs. Although gross, it was for the most part harmless tongue-and-cheek good fun, "boys will be boys" in the most innocent sense. Nevertheless in both situations, team and

A. Malekoff

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 features entitled, "Mephram - 25 Years Later" and the like. What lessons will be learned? Will adults entrusted with the care of students be more vigilant? Will team members separate themselves from the destructive pressure of a group gone bad and step up to do the right thing? Will athletes get a clear message that a place on a pedestal of honor requires good character as well as superior strength and speed? Will whole communities of people re-prioritize their values so that there will be no such thing, ever again, as blaming the victim?

These questions, and more, represent the challenge ahead and not just for the Mephram community but for the rest of us who have a stake in children and youth. As group workers we need to contribute to the dialogue with our special knowledge and understanding.

Make no mistake, the same dynamics and processes that can lead to the development of healthy and constructive group experiences can lead to destructive ones if not carefully monitored and undergirded with positive values.

Andy

"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."

Edmund Burke, attributed

Male and Female Hazing

❖ Introduction: An eighth-grader joins the varsity

It was a bitter cold, early spring day in 1990 when Kim was introduced to the idea of hazing. Kim was a younger than usual rookie on a high school varsity softball team, not yet a high school student, when she was given the ultimatum of "don't you dare take the starting position away from a senior." Not knowing how a statement like that would change her first 'real' competitive experience, she looked at the upperclassman and said, "I doubt that would happen, they are really good". Kim was bullied into underestimating her own ability, which obviously threatened them.

Succumbing to the ways of a naïve rookie, she practiced and showed up for every meeting and game still questioning her own capability. Kim's coach always asked if everything was okay and if the girls were giving her a rough time. She kept the rude comments and rolling of the eyes to herself. As an eighth-grader Kim's middle school coaches and physical education teachers encouraged her to "show your stuff".

A number of fans attended all of the varsity games, just to see this prodigy perform. With so many people watching her, how could she tell

someone she was unhappy? Fortunately for Kim, Coach knew better. Just a week or so after their conversation, while they were practicing a play that needed some extra attention, one of the upperclassman threw a ball by Kim's head. It was too close for comfort. Kim was stunned, but not as much as coach was. Obviously she didn't know who threw the ball, "nor did I ask"... "I cared; I just didn't think I would get a straight answer." Continuing with practice Kim fielded the ball and a base runner dropped her shoulder, directly aiming for Kim's abdomen. Coach stopped practice, took the two girls to the side, and asked them what was going on. Neither of them responded. The next day before practice, Kim went to see Coach and told him how she was feeling, yet she wouldn't give him the names of the upperclassmen that she felt had targeted her.

Kim later came to find that Coach met with the captains after their meeting and gave them an ultimatum of, "get along with the rookies and stop the harassing or you'll be asked to leave the team". Kim now credits Coach and told him, "Thanks, your little chat with the captains helped, which made practices and games a lot more fun."

♦ "Showered" with praise?

I was so interested in Kim's story of hazing, that it led us to another of her hazing experiences that coincidentally, was going on at the same exact time and with the same teammates. She told me, "As rookies, we carried the equipment to and from the field. Most of the other rookies told me to carry the heavy stuff since I was the 'baby' of the bunch, not yet 13". "When I arrived at the locker room I was picked up by four of the juniors, still in my uniform and cleats, and thrown into the shower." This water escapade went on each week for about one month. Finally, after the fourth 'shower', Kim stood up, looking at the four girls laughing but just as wet as she was, and said "If you want to teach me something this year, why don't you teach me how to win a starting position?" After the glazed looks disappeared, she stared at them waiting for an answer. "I was asked if I noticed if any of the other rookies were 'showered'. I knew that they weren't, which, as a matter of fact, was a major part of my frustration." Their reasoning was that Kim did deserve to be a starting player on the team and played like one therefore, they were initiating her into the starting nine. They each spoke of their showering

» » Continued Page 3.

» » Continued from Page 2. experiences with as much agony as Kim spoke with, as a form of "tradition". Two days later, Kim was put in the game for a senior who had made more errors than innings. There she was, an eighth grader, thirteen years old and starting every game since the fifth week of the season. The girls knew she was better than the senior and were honoring her with a 'shower'. "I understood, it was a long-lived tradition, but one I felt was unnecessary to continue to prove an upperclassman's approval of a rookie," Kim said with disgust. Though she was still considered a rookie the following year by some (the girls who were two or three years older than she was and now finally making the varsity team), Kim would not participate in any of the 'traditions' of the starters. By now they had a team mainly of seniors all of whom were bestowing upon her the position and responsibility to keep 'tradition' alive. Sorry seniors, that was the last shower to be had.

In order to understand the differences between male and female hazing, I invited a former high school and collegiate football athlete, now collegiate football coach, to share with us his experiences with hazing. He did so, for reasons you will soon see, on condition of anonymity.

♦ An insider's view of hazing on the gridiron

The term 'hazing'

has been a part of sports for as long as anyone can remember," begins Sam. "Athletes define hazing as an initiation to their team." According to Sam, seniors or upperclassmen usually administer the rituals by giving specific jobs to the freshmen. Examples of these jobs include freshmen sharing the duty of bringing the equipment bags to and from practice, being required to clean the locker room before leaving (any tape, towels or other equipment must be picked up). Another form of hazing is having freshmen put on a talent show for the team. Often the freshmen sing or dance, often mimicking the coaching staff.

"Athletes want to feel as if they are a part of the team: needed, accepted and respected," says Sam. "It's an unwritten rule that athletes have been following for generations." Hazing is supposed to be a harmless routine for players to earn the respect of upperclassmen. Sam believes that athletes accept hazing rituals because they feel it builds team unity, chemistry and a 'family' relationship. "It is an important tradition for freshmen, because freshmen are supposed to 'pay their dues' in order to be considered a part of the team. Freshmen often do what is asked of them because they know the honor of being a part of a team is at stake."

Unfortunately, there are the athletes

who give initiation rites a bad reputation. When the freshmen get on the bad or wrong side of upperclassmen, a dark side of hazing is seen. Sam recalls, "I've witnessed freshmen running naked across campus, freshmen blindfolded and beaten in a dark room, freshmen told to sit on a block of ice, naked, for 30 minutes straight. Some were hog tied and gagged while being dragged along the carpet (rug burn) before being thrown into the shower while others were forced to drink large amounts of alcohol so that the upperclassmen could dress them in women's clothing and urinate on them while passed out in the bathroom."

"Although I consider this to be the worst of hazing I have ever witnessed, I will also admit that I too stood and watched some of these terrible acts. I don't condone these rituals, but I also believe that some type of "paying dues" is a necessary component of team building. To have freshmen carry equipment to and from practice is a harmless ritual that most athletic teams participate in."

♦ Bullying and psychological aggression

When experts speak of bullying, they also mention psychological aggression. What is the difference between bullying and the psychological aggression among girls? When someone mentions bullying, the first thing

that comes to mind is some type of physical act. Some think that "boys will be boys" because they physically push each other or play fight. The male bully is the king of the playground or the villain of the lunch room. The bully is feared, and disliked by more people than just the victim. The male bully is physically harmful to his victims. Unfortunately, he is often unaware of the consequence of his actions.

Vindictive gossip and social exclusion, backstabbing, sneaky and manipulative behaviors are the attributes of the 'female bully'. Rachel Simmons wrote in her book, Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls, that there are three sub-types of covert, nonphysical aggression that are defined as behaviors intended to hurt or harm:

1. Relational aggression
2. Indirect aggression
3. Social aggression

Studies on male and female aggression routinely show that, while boys tend to specialize in physical or direct (hitting or verbal) aggression, girls are more likely to use relational aggression. Male athletes can also be psychologically aggressive when they use humiliation to belittle teammates. In an article published in February 2003 of Parent Guide, "Are Your Kids Safe? Bullying & Emotional Violence at School," Dr. Ellen deLara and Dr.

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James Garbarino wrote, "The effects of bullying, harassment and emotional violence go beyond the direct perpetrators and victims to include the bulk of kids who are bystanders." They continue, "National studies have shown that between 30 and 75 percent of students are involved in incidents of bullying and sexual harassment on a regular basis. Bullying, in all its variety of manifestations, is a part of everyday life at school. There is no escaping it.

❖ Conclusion

Through Kim and Sam's stories we see that there is the potential for the agony of ridicule and heart wrenching humiliation for both genders in all sports. Is there a difference between male and female hazing? My answer is no, although the degree to which hazing occurs and causes harm varies. Anything that endangers the physical and emotional well being of a person can have the same long lasting effect on their life, no matter the degree.

Toni Kolb, MSW, is a social worker at North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center and a softball coach at Long Beach High School.



What Are Our Young Athletes Learning?

❖ Introduction: Who is teaching the teachers?

After reading newspaper articles and speaking with colleagues, athletes and parents, I have become more upset about the alleged assaults on the three football players at Mepham High School. What, if anything, does today's coach or athlete know of child abuse? Is there anything redeeming about hazing? When do we know that we have crossed into the "dark side" of hazing? For all of the young athletes reading the newspapers or watching ESPN, I'm sorry if your questions aren't being answered. Who is teaching what should be happening in team athletics? Who is teaching what hazing means and how it affects our children? How do we know if coaches are prepared to work with our children?

♦ Physical and emotional abuse in youth sports

I've been coaching for ten years, preceded by eighteen years of competing. I've taken many coaching courses, but none taught me more about coaching than working with child victims of sexual abuse. Most spectators at athletic events know first hand about verbal abuse. Whether they themselves are tormenting the coaches and athletes or are witnesses to the verbal attacks directed at the athletes. Verbal abuse is a private or public "put

down". Spectators also know about emotional abuse, but more so by parents of the athletes. When a child comes home crying, full of anger or disappointment at coaches and peers, it's emotionally draining and hurtful.

Physical abuse has also been in the spotlight with athletics. Hitting, smacking or kicking athletes are examples of physical abuse at the hands of coaches. Athletes who try hard to please the coach can unwittingly become an outlet for frustration and anger, and physical abuse. Sad to say, but these are the same athletes that the bully thinks he/she can overpower. And let's not forget about irate parents hitting coaches, athletes or other parents.

As a coach, I am appalled at the ease which so many people have in dismissing the fact of abuse against athletes. Abuse is more prevalent in athletics today than most want to believe. Are team sports changing? I played team sports since the mid 80's when we had team hazing, but under no circumstance was the well-being of the athlete in jeopardy. So why the sudden rise in destructive hazing incidents?

♦ Team as family and coach as more than coach

Where did we begin to see a change in the way groups of athletic

adolescents treat each other? What ever happened to the sense of family and camaraderie among teammates? As a coach I sit with my athletes at least once a week to discuss life issues. We talk about things like drugs and alcohol, health and nutrition, responsibility and the team aspect. Most importantly, I talk with them about their real concerns of everyday life. I don't sit in the front of the bus to find some quiet time or write my line up. If I'm not in the middle of a conversation with some of the athletes I get asked if I feel ok or if anything is wrong. A team is a family. I feel as if I am coach, parent, and social worker all in one. It's the reason I began coaching in the first place. I have responsibility for sixteen athletes: understanding their moods, motivations, behaviors, and the specific qualities that make them each unique individuals.

♦ (Shhh...and don't tell anyone, but they actually want to compete for me too!)

As coaches we should take preventive measures before mishaps occur. Team as family is a good frame of reference. A young athlete needs to first prove him or herself loyal, trustworthy, hardworking, or a good person before he or she is considered part of the family, a true teammate.

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I was raised that way in my home by my parents.

♦ **Telltale signs and tips for preventing hazing on youth sports teams**

Does hazing have a "good" side? Not in my program. Period. I often catch some of the girls acting very "catty" and obviously avoiding some of their teammates. They talk about each other or about what they heard in the halls. They roll their eyes or giggle as a certain teammate walks by. Or they whisper during drills (a.k.a. "coffee klatching"). All of this is representative of psychological aggression between girls, the "female" version of bullying. To a young female athlete, psychological aggression is just as severe and tortuous as the physical bullying young male athletes experience.

The dark side of hazing can happen more quickly than you think. Here are some things to look for.

- ♦ Are there many cliques on the team?
- ♦ Do you have problems with the older athletes agreeing to work with the younger athletes or vice versa?
- ♦ Learn about your athletes as quickly as you can so that it will be easier for you to notice the nonverbal cues.
- ♦ Unexplained injuries?
- ♦ Doesn't show up to practice?
- ♦ Obviously ignored by the team, even after a great play?
- ♦ If the team captain takes control of team bonding, be inquisitive so you can learn what your

team is doing when you are not around.

Understand that giving your athletes a piece of paper to have signed by them and their parents doesn't mean that they or their parents understand the ramifications of hazing.

Scholastic athletic coaches are required to have a coaching license, training in CPR/AED and First Aid, as well as take certain courses such as the philosophy of coaching, health sciences related to coaching (nutrition) and coaching techniques. We should be required to take a course on child and adolescent development, so that we can gain some familiarity with the developmental, psychological, and emotional aspects of the child. Perhaps I have a bias toward this knowledge since it is my professional training as a social worker. However, it is imperative to understand the complete child because they are our focus as sport coaches. An accountant, car salesperson, chef, or other professional cannot be successful without complete knowledge. Unfortunately some coaches only pride themselves on their expertise of the sport, not that of understanding child behavior.

Coaching scholastic athletics is a huge responsibility, which cannot be taken lightly. Pick up a book on child behavior even if you've been coaching for 50 years (it's never too late). Contact the families

of each athlete on your roster. Let them meet you informally so they have an opportunity to learn your coaching philosophy, expectations of athletes and your coaching technique.

❖ **Conclusion: Good coaching begins at home**

If you have an athlete at home or perhaps you are a coach, talk to the child about team sports, the difference between right and wrong, and the value of self-respect. The first article written about the sexual assault of the three boys from Mephram High School, quoted parents of other children in the community saying that learning begins in the home. Our parents are asking why the teaching of right and wrong isn't a priority. If we talk to our children about these life skills maybe it will help the negative ways athletics is viewed. Don't wait for your athletes' coach to bring it up, do it now! Open the door for communication.

I leave you with a few quotes that I hope will spark something in each of you to learn and understand more about such a passion as coaching and competing alike.

article by *Toni Kolb*

♦ *"Coaches have to watch for what they don't want to see and listen to what they don't want to hear."*

John Madden

♦ *"The spirit of sports gives each of us who participate an opportunity to be creative. Sports know no sex, age, race or religion. Sports give us all the ability*

to test ourselves mentally, physically and emotionally in a way no aspect of life can. For many of us who struggle with 'fitting in' or with our identity—sports gives us our first face of confidence. That first bit of confidence can be a gateway to many other great things!"

Dan O'Brien

♦ *"Look for players with character and ability. But remember, character comes first."*

Joe Gibbs

♦ *"No written word nor spoken plea can teach our youths what they should be. Nor all the books on all the shelves. It's what the teachers are themselves."*

Unknown

Something Special Enclosed

The first athletic team experience for our children often begins with Little League. There is no time like the present to raise the consciousness of our coaches and help to create a more positive future in athletics for all involved. The PLAY (Positive Lessons in Athletics for Youth) committee will appreciate your support. Enclosed in this issue of HUH?!? you will find two research surveys (one for parents and one for kids). Please join the process and arrange to have the surveys completed in your town. Please return the completed surveys to:

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The Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth

★ MISSION STATEMENT ★

The Mission of the Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth is: To promote and enhance effective group work practice with children and youth through advocacy, education, and collegial support. **HUH?!?** is the Institute's newsletter dedicated to providing information, inspiration, and support for anyone working with young people in group settings.

Chairpersons: Joanne-Ditchik-Stutz; Cynthia Scott

Steering Committee: Jean L. Bacon, Stacey Burke, Roseline Felix, Toni Kolb, Stacey Levin, Maureen O'Connor, Andrew Peters, and Aimee Reifer.

Project Coordinator: Andrew Malekoff

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To Our Readers...

Due to growing printing and postage costs, beginning with this issue (Volume 9 Number 1) of **HUH?!?**, there will be two issues per year instead of four. When the newsletter started it was only two pages. Soon it grew to four pages. In recent years we have published a number of special issues, such as the 9/11 anniversary issue. Those special issues were often eight pages long.

Please be assured that the newsletter will continue to be of substantial quality despite the fewer number of issues per year.

If you have been subscribing, please continue - if you have received complimentary copies, please subscribe to help us defray costs and keep **HUH?!?** going. Your subscription is a way of giving voice to your support for quality group work for children and youth. Send us your name and address and please make your \$10 check payable and send to: Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children & Youth/NSC&FGC; 480 Old Westbury Rd.; Roslyn Heights, NY 11577-2215.

Andrew Malekoff, Editor

Hello! My name is Toni. I am asking you to answer some questions about your Little League coach. **I don't want your name or your coaches' name!** No matter what your answers are to these questions, your coaches' will never know what you said. Please be as truthful as possible. Thank you and good luck in your season!

HOW OLD ARE YOU? _____

WHAT GRADE ARE YOU IN? _____

Let's P.L.A.Y.

(Positive Lessons in Athletics for Youth)

CIRCLE YOUR ANSWER

- | | | |
|---|------|-------|
| 1. Your Little League coach teaches you about the game. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 2. You enjoy being with your team mates.. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 3. Your Little League coach gets upset and begins to yell and / or uses bad language. | TRUE | FALSE |
| 4. Your Little League coach gets along with the other coaches | TRUE | FALSE |
| 5. Your Little League coach gets along with your parents. | TRUE | FALSE |

Positive Lessons in Athletics for Youth

A program of North Shore Child & Family Guidance Center, The Long Island Institute for Group Work with Children and Youth is asking that you complete this survey in order to help them establish the true difficulties that communities are experiencing with Little League Coaches. **Under no circumstances will this survey affect your child playing Little League Sports. This is an anonymous survey, in order to obtain true information and ensure participants confidentiality.**

___ PARENT

___ COACH

___ PARENT- COACH

AGE AND GRADE OF YOUR ATHLETE (S) _____

	Very Satisfactory	Satisfactory	Not so Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
1. How satisfied are you with the level of parent – coach communication?	1	2	3	4
2. How satisfied are you with the level of skill being taught to your athlete (s)?	1	2	3	4
	Very Effective	Effective	Not so Effective	Non-effective
3. How effective does your coach (s) communicate his/her knowledge of the sport to your athlete (s)?	1	2	3	4
	Always	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
4. Our coach demonstrates and teaches respect for all involved with the sport including officials, opposing teams and parents.	1	2	3	4
5. My child's experience in Little League has been positive because being a member of the team...				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
...fostered good relations to work with teammates	1	2	3	4
...helped my child (ren) feel good about him/her self	1	2	3	4
...taught him/her more about having fun (help them)	1	2	3	4
...helped him/her to feel included and a part of his/her peers	1	2	3	4
6. Our coach displays anger and frustration through ...				

	Always	Some of the time	Rarely	Never
yelling/screaming toward the athlete, spectators or other coaches...	1	2	3	4
bad language/cursing toward the athlete, spectators or other coaches...	1	2	3	4
negative gestures... (i.e. kicking, hitting, flaring arms)	1	2	3	4
<i>doesn't</i> display anger and frustration in a negative way	1	2	3	4

7. Please give an example of a comment that has been said to you or your athlete (s) that had a positive effect on their Little League experience? _____

8. Please give an example of a comment that has been said to you or your athlete (s) that had a negative effect on their Little League experience? _____

We are interested in any suggestions you may have that can help to make your Little League experiences more positive. _____

Thank you for your time! We appreciate your honesty and support!

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