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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Welcome Aboard! Earning Your Place on the Crew

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Abstract

An important TM practice to improve retention of newcomers is the socialization process used to assimilate them. We conducted two studies; an exploratory qualitative study followed by a survey-based study. Our results indicate a substantial percentage of U.S. workers experience hazing as newcomers. Compared to newcomers who experience traditional onboarding, hazed workers report higher turnover intentions and strain and lower levels of engagement; important outcomes for firms seeking to reduce the costs and disruptions of early-tenure turnover. Leaders of SMEs may heed the call to provide a welcome mat rather than a gauntlet for new employees to run.

Keywords: New employee hazing, New employee onboarding, Employee engagement, Turnover, Employee well-being

JEL classification: M5, M54

Introduction

Organizations across the globe and across a spectrum of industries require high-quality talent to achieve success. Since organizational performance can be influenced by the talent management (TM) practices used to attract, acquire, deploy, and retain talent (Gallardo-Gallardo et al., 2020; Jiang & Messersmith, 2018), many organizations adopt TM practices aimed at improving the quality of talent as well as reducing the likelihood of costly, unwanted turnover (Allen et al., 2010; Kim et al., 2017). Because employees' earliest time on the job poses the greatest risk of turnover (Choi & Fernández, 2017; Hom et al., 2008; Weller et al., 2009), any methods that reduce unwanted newcomer turnover can save organizations valuable resources and time. Candidates' and newcomers' early interactions with their employers may especially impact their intentions to remain in the job or to leave. Consequently, exploring the very earliest tenure socialization experiences can inform actionable guidance for talent managers. The studies we present here focus on newcomer hazing, a potentially negative socialization practice that may influence newcomer decisions and behaviors.

Socialization's vital impact on employee's acclimation (Cooper-Thomas & Anderson, 2002), subsequent retention (Allen & Shanock, 2013) and engagement at work (Albrecht et al., 2015) and its increasing frequency in modern employees' lives (Campbell et al., 2012) makes this aspect of newcomer treatment an important avenue to explore and understand. The substantial body of research and policy on socialization has focused primarily on best practices, implicitly assuming all socialization is positive and beneficial (Bauer et al., 2007; Saks et al., 2007). Evidence exists, however, that a substantial percentage of employees (25–75%; Thomas & Meglich, 2019; Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989) across occupational domains and ranks experience a different quality of newcomer experience—workplace hazing. Hazing often brings to mind prominent, egregious instances (Dickerson, 2018) or heinous acts that earn prominent coverage in the popular press. Relatively little research has investigated hazing in the workplace (Thomas & Meglich, 2019), with far more study

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devoted to its occurrence in academic or sports contexts. Given a majority of workers experience hazing on the job, scholars and leaders need to better understand hazing than current research can inform. Because early employment experiences pose such important consequences to TM practices and organizational outcomes, we initiated an investigation of workplace hazing to better inform scholarship and management on this area.

Leaders of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) may adopt one of two contradictory TM philosophies (Harney & Dundon, 2006; Lewis et al., 2020; Wilkinson, 1999). Those subscribing to the 'small is beautiful' (Schumacher, 2011) paradigm emphasize the flexibility of the small firm environment to establish closer relationships between managers and workers. In the 'small is beautiful' perspective, managers would ostensibly be caring and interested in their employee's welfare and view TM as helpful in ensuring worker satisfaction and well-being and view the workplace more like a family than a disinterested corporation (Mallett & Wapshott, 2017). Conversely, the opposing paradigm, dubbed 'bleak house' (Rainnie, 1989; Sisson, 1993) approaches employees as a means of production to be exploited. Labor is a cost that managers perpetually seek ways to reduce. TM practices are therefore viewed through the lens of lowering costs, but not necessarily focused on improving the working conditions for employees. In either case, effective new employee socialization and inculturation may address underlying TM priorities as a means to improve management-employee relationships or to reduce costs of unwanted turnover. Only a small percentage of SMEs have implemented HR practices in a strategic manner (Cassell et al., 2002). While HRM has been studied extensively in larger organizations; there is far less research in the SME context, leaving many aspects of TM underexplored (Harney & Alkhalaf, 2021). Thus, we have little to draw on regarding existing onboarding and socialization of newcomers in SME firms.

This research is perhaps more critical to SMEs and their leaders, because the formal, structured TM methods for new employees (e.g., onboarding, relationship-forming) in these enterprises often are less-developed, exhaustive, and systematized than in large-scale entities (Cassell et al., 2002). TM, in larger-scale groups, receives much greater resources (e.g., staff, expertise, specialization, money, time) within the organizational structure and workflow, because the volume of employees in the organization amplify the costs/benefits of TM decisions. In SMEs, comparatively, deliberate and exhaustive TM practices, like the onboarding, training, and socialization provided newcomers, typically take a more minimal, casual, and as-needed form. As a result, the newcomer experiences which are *not* formally enacted as part of TM merit greater consideration in SMEs (Pauli & Pocztowski, 2019; Zakaria et al., 2012). Moreover, SMEs' workforces are smaller, which increases the stakes of retaining or losing any *specific* employee. Thus, SME TM must consider the individual, exceptional instance of workplace experiences, whereas larger scale companies may be able to focus on the more commonplace, high-frequency instances.

1 Conceptual and theoretical underpinnings

1.1 Workplace hazing

We adopt Cimino's (2017) functional definition of hazing as "non-accidental, costly aspects of group induction activities that: (a) do not appear to be group relevant assessments/preparations, or (b) appear excessive in their application" (p. 135). Workplace hazing, then, consists of the purposeful demands placed on employees new to job roles which are not essential for work performance *or* which are excessively applied. Importantly, hazing differs from strategic HRM practices like onboarding and welcoming in its source and administration since leaders are often not involved in these amorphous practices enacted by group members.

Perhaps due to the paucity of research, sources frequently treat hazing interchangeably with bullying (Tofler, 2016) or incivility (Herschovis, 2011; Tepper, 2007). However, important differences distinguish these phenomena. Workplace bullying is the systematic targeting of a victim over a time period time that is intended to exclude the target from the workgroup (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen et al., 2003). Bullying is often a relentless, ongoing series of abusive actions that persists with no end in sight that results in deleterious outcomes for targets (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). Incivility is "acting rudely or discourteously, without regard for others, in violation of norms for respect in social interactions." (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Incivility is often described as low-intensity mistreatment with ambiguous intent to harm the target (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Like bullying, incivility does not typically involve a fixed or anticipated conclusion; it can continue for a long duration without abatement. Conversely, workplace hazing can range in duration, intensity, and frequency but with an express purpose of including those who pass the gauntlet and separating out those who are

deemed unfit or unworthy to join the group (Cimino, 2011, 2017; Østvik & Rudmin, 2001).

1.2 Content and consequences of workplace hazing

In an early exploration of workplace hazing Josefowitz and Gadon (1989) labelled it one of the best-kept secrets of the workplace. Data from their interviews with over 1000 employees across job ranks and industries showed that 75% of new employees experienced hazing, leading 10% of those interviewed to quit their jobs. Inexplicably, little to no workplace research was published in the intervening three decades.

Our literature review yielded few studies wherein hazing was a *primary variable of interest* studied in a *professional setting*. We found research on hazing in educational/university settings (Gershel et al., 2003; McCreary & Schutts, 2019) and military, or para-military, settings (Keller et al., 2015), although these studies are not generalizable workplace settings. Hazing at the U.S. Naval Academy was positively related to outcomes like psychological distress and intentions to quit (Groah, 2005). Østvik and Rudmin's (2001) study of Norwegian military conscripts revealed hazing included physically aversive acts and derogatory nicknames. In a healthcare setting, Chang (2011) used a bullying scale to measure hazing and reported its positive relationship to perceptions of injustice among medical students. Thomas and Meglich's (2019) cross-sectional study examined onlookers' reactions to reports of workplace hazing, reporting 25% of sampled respondents had experienced hazing at work. Recent work by Mawritz et al. (2020) advances the study of workplace hazing and resulted in a workplace hazing scale to measure the frequency of specific behaviors they deemed to represent the hazing construct. While a laudable effort, the scale may overlook the full range of hazing experiences as they adopted a 'hazing is universally degrading' perspective.

1.3 Theoretical frameworks

Our working definition of workplace hazing involves irrelevant or excessive induction activities imposed on newcomers by existing group members. We considered this phenomenon from two major theoretical frameworks, which address the *induction* element and the *demands* presented by hazing.

Considering hazing as organizational socialization, we draw on Van Maanen and Schein's (1979) theory of organizational socialization (TOS). Based on the relatively consistent empirical links between hazing and stress variables (e.g., strain; Groah, 2005), we drew from workplace stress literature, namely the challenge-hindrance stressor model (LePine et al., 2005) to explore the consequences of hazing's demands. We use these existing theories of socialization and stress to ground our discussion of workplace hazing.

1.3.1 Theory of organizational socialization

Fundamentally, socialization transforms newcomers "from organization outsiders to participating and effective members" (Feldman, 1981, p. 309). Workplace hazing is a form of socialization enacted by workgroups, often outside the knowledge, sanction, and planning of organizational leadership that can serve three functions of organizational socialization: (a) communicating group culture and norms, (b) testing and selection of newcomers to earn inclusion, and (c) bonding group members through social identity mechanisms (Feldman, 1981; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Effective socialization communicates lessons of group culture to newcomers. Newcomers adjust to their social environment, perpetuating the group culture to avoid and reduce ostracism and tension (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Workplace hazing teaches group culture to newcomers, who must adapt to earn membership. Culture includes the unspoken rules of conduct in a workplace, which hazing communicates and enforces among newcomers, including the norms, power structures, and values of the group (Cimino, 2011; Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989).

The TOS holds socialization is most salient during times of transition across the boundaries within an organization (Schein, 1971). Inclusion boundaries describe the continuum of members' importance and centrality to the group, with leaders and respected members anchoring one end and outsiders, or newcomers, on the other end. Newcomers who pass the tests laid out by important members earn inclusion and deeper group privileges like influence and group secrets (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). While formal employment arrangements often include officially designated probationary periods and evaluations (e.g., first 90 days; De Corte, 1994) planned and administered by formal authorities, coworkers often test (i.e. haze) newcomers during socialization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Indeed, an employee's immediate workgroup often acts as the primary socializing agent (Anderson & Thomas, 1996; Korte, 2009).

For newcomers who understand the unspoken boundaries of group membership and who successfully complete hazing demands, hazing also serves to bond group members. Considerable research supports people's needs to belong (Baumeister & Leary,

1995), relate (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and experience connection to a greater social whole (Maslow, 1968). Social identity theorists (SIT) explain how people use categorizations of social groups to satisfy this drive, by identifying with a group (Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Ashforth and Mael (1989) note that socialization fosters employees' developing identification with their workgroups. For groups who use socialization to teach and test newcomers, members come to identify and resemble the group's central characteristics as they gain inclusion (Hogg, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Such identification, when successful, results in closer commitment and belongingness to the group, both to its members and as a long-standing entity extending beyond the composing members (Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). Thus, we suggest hazing can amplify the binding processes of social identification, whereby passing the crucible of hazing results in greater identification and embeddedness with the group, as well as greater preference for the group's culture and characteristics—even including subsequently endorsing or engaging in hazing newcomers.

1.3.2 Challenge-hindrance stressor model

Newcomers experience great stress early in their job roles (Nelson, 1987). Hazing, as a cost of group entry, adds to demands on newcomers. The challenge stressor-hindrance stressor framework (LePine et al., 2005) is therefore an appropriate lens through which to view hazing. Demands placed on employees (i.e., stressors) are seen as either challenge-stressors (C−S), necessary steps towards progress or achievements, or hindrance-stressors (H−S), unnecessary limitations or hurdles towards achievements (Cavanaugh et al., 2000). Prolonged or severe stress responses can result in experiences of strain—the negative consequences of stress. According to fundamental models of stress (Lazarus, 1991), not all external demands are perceived identically across people; some employees may view socialization demands as challenges where others see hindrances. Extant literature on socialization in the challenge-hindrance framework indicates these learning experiences can operate as C−S and H−S, and consequently result in positive and negative outcomes like engagement, retention, and strain (LePine et al., 2005; Podsakoff et al., 2007), with complex interactions between environmental stressors and individual variables affecting the appraisals of these stressors as challenges or hindrances (Edwards et al., 2014; Lazarus, 1991). Socialization, then, can present both types of stressors, although more beneficial socialization experiences have been categorized as C−S (Ellis et al., 2015). The costs of hazing appear unnecessary, irrelevant, or excessive (Cimino, 2017), which aligns better with H−S. However, hazing as a form of socialization, also communicates and serves as a proving ground for newcomers to demonstrate the necessary attributes for earning membership into the group (Cimino, 2011), which better matches the concept of C−S. Because hazing occurs in various forms, ranging from the clearly egregious (Dickerson, 2018) to relatively minor (Rumpff, 2019), and employees themselves present a similar variety of individual dispositions relevant to stress appraisal and responses, the relationship between hazing and stress is not easily predicted.

1.4 Research questions

Lacking substantial empirical evidence of the common experiences of workplace hazing and the outcomes linked to it, neither researchers nor practitioners can meaningfully identify, predict, or respond to instances of hazing in workplaces. Although some workplace hazing demands are certainly harmful (Dickerson, 2018), it is empirically unclear if all workplace hazing is harmful. Indeed, a functional or evolutionary perspective of behavior would indicate hazing's ubiquity does serve a group purpose (Cimino, 2011). The overall dearth of research leaves many open questions. We therefore undertook research to describe workplace hazing's content and consequences and were guided by the following research questions.

Research Question 1: What are common hazing demands placed on workers?

Research Question 2: In what occupational settings does hazing occur?

Research Question 3: How do workers recognize the end of hazing?

Research Question 4: How does hazing relate to employee stress?

2 Method

2.1 The two studies

To fill in the incomplete picture of workplace hazing attributes and outcomes, we proceeded first with a qualitative study to uncover normative data on the characteristics of hazed employees' experiences. This was followed by a survey study looking more deeply at outcomes of socialization processes. In both Studies 1 and 2 we used Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) to recruit participants. We specifically sought diverse respondent groups in both studies rather than a more limited group of

organizations or job roles (such as military or health-care settings). We acknowledge Amazon MTurk does not provide a sample which is perfectly representative of the American workforce, however, MTurk has received support as a recruitment source for organizational science research (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2015). Moreover, the ethical and practical challenges of recruiting hazed employees, which we detail below, justify the use of a tool to cast a broader recruiting net.

2.2 Study 1: descriptions of workplace hazing

2.2.1 Sample and measures

We recruited respondents (minimum of 19 years old, living in the United States, currently employed with minimum six months work experience) who had been hazed at work, which we defined as "being required to perform or complete embarrassing, unreasonable, or unsafe tasks by other employees in order to 'show you the ropes' or make you 'pay your dues' *because* you are new." Respondents then completed a Qualtrics survey. The initial sample of 60 respondents was reduced by five respondents' data for careless or invalid responses. The resulting sample ($N = 55$) was comprised of mostly full-time employees (73%), almost equally men (51%) and women, ranging in age from 19 to 56 years old ($M = 33.18$; $SD = 9.50$ years). The majority of respondents were white (58%) although other groups were represented (29% Asian, 6% Black, 4% American Indian or Alaskan Native).

Participants responded to a series of items for each of up to three different jobs where they had experienced hazing. For each job, participants provided text-based responses to open-ended questions asking for (a) the job title, (b) organization type, (c) their organizational rank in the job, (d) number of employees in the organization, (e) a description of the hazing they experienced, (f) duration of the hazing, and (g) signal that the hazing had ended. An additional item was used to report their estimated stress level resulting from hazing (i.e., How much stress did this workplace hazing experience place upon you? 1−5 Likert-type scale; 1 = None at all, 5 = A great deal).

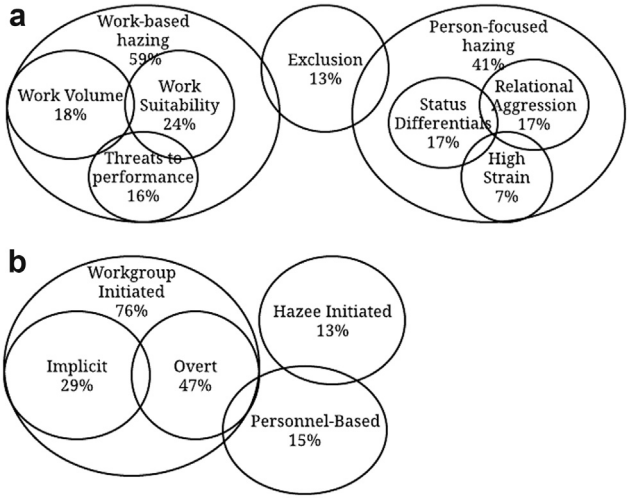

Fig. 1. a: Themes of workplace hazing demands[1]. b: Themes of signals hazing has ended[2].

2.2.2 Data analysis and results

We analyzed response data using qualitative and quantitative approaches. As prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006), we used thematic analysis of the text-based responses to understand: (a) the context and content of workplace hazing (Research questions 1 & 2) and (b) signals of hazing's end (Research question 3). We followed an inductive approach where only the semantically-derived data points were considered to code the hazing demands reported by respondents. We used basic descriptive methods to analyze quantitative data (Research question 4).

Hazing was reported in an assortment of occupations (e.g., engineers, IT executives, carpenters, teachers, and laborers), companies (e.g., large accounting firms, local restaurants, and large retailers), and groups, ranging from 3-person companies to international retailers. Although entry-level employees were a plurality of respondents (41%), middle manager (29%), upper manager (17%) and first-level supervisor (13%) roles were also represented.

We inductively identified three major themes among hazing experiences: (a) work-based hazing, directly targeting the newcomers' competent performance of work, (b) person-focused hazing, the

[1] The entire sample ($N = 55$) provided, in total, 61 unique descriptions of instances of workplace hazing which were considered the data set for this thematic analysis. Each description was approximately 20 words in length. We identified 111 data extracts from this data set, based on an inductively generated (i.e., based on content and commonalities) coding system featuring 23 unique codes. Codes were then grouped into sub-themes and larger themes, independently by researchers who then compared themes and sub-themes for overlap and inconsistencies. The resulting Figure displays the final theme and sub-themes structure into which codes were grouped, along with the representation of each theme among the 111 data extracts.

[2] The entire sample (N = 55) provided, in total, 63 unique descriptions of instances of workplace hazing which were considered the data set for this thematic analysis. Each description was approximately 13 words in length. We identified 68 data extracts from this data set, based on an inductively generated (i.e., based on content and commonalities) coding system featuring 21 unique codes. Codes were then grouped into sub-themes and larger themes, independently by researchers who then compared themes and sub-themes for overlap and inconsistencies.

interpersonal mechanisms and intrapersonal consequences of hazing, and (c) exclusion, neglecting, excluding, or leaving the newcomer out of activities or social interactions. Fig. 1a displays these themes, and their representative proportion across all responses.

Individual anecdotes of hazing spanned a variety of demands, in content, frequency, and duration. Workers reported relatively harmless demands (e.g., a professional dancer who had to complete a dance routine while holding a blow-up doll or a golf pro who had to roll like a log across a green) and more serious threats (e.g., employees waiting in sub-zero temperatures for a non-existent delivery, cook being purposefully misinformed on how to fry food, nearly resulting in a fire). Hazing experiences often included inclusion/exclusion, whether in the group (e.g., "I was just treated like an outsider until they trusted me") or as a function of one's class membership (e.g., "I was called the Indian guy know-it-all"). Demands of hazing often exemplified these inclusion boundary passages, where employees were not exposed to pranks or egregious strains, but simply required to do tasks below their status, skill-level, or work for which they were purposefully uninformed until they were deemed worthy of inclusion and status in the group.

We identified three major themes that signaled hazing's end: (a) workgroup-initiated ends, (b) hazee-initiated ends, and (c) personnel-based ends. Fig. 1b displays themes, and proportions of representation in responses. Empirically, workplace hazing ended, on average, about 10 weeks into the new job role ($M = 9.65$ weeks; $SD = 14.35$ weeks).

Finally, when asked to recall the stress created by the hazing, respondents reported an elevated level of stress overall. A one-sample t-test revealed the average level of reported stress ($M = 3.89$; $SD = 1.12$) associated with respondents' hazing experiences was significantly higher than the midpoint of the 5-point scale, $t\ (54) = 5.92$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 0.79$. This relatively large effect size indicates these respondents retrospectively associated a great deal of stress with the workplace hazing they experienced.

2.2.3 Discussion of study 1

This study provided preliminary data on common workplace hazing themes and experiences, and uncovered information on the settings and effects of hazing. Primarily, hazing was not a terrible, disgusting pattern of harassing and bullying newcomers, although some instances were more severe. These narratives demonstrate how unexpectedly varied hazing demands can be for employees. Although hazing ended about 10 weeks after employees' first days, newcomers experienced substantial variability in how long they had to earn their place through hazing. Finally, the high level of stress employees associated with their hazing experience raises concern about the consequences of this new employee experience during an already stressful time as a new employee (Nelson, 1987), reinforcing the need for a better understanding of this stress and its impacts on employees and TM practices.

These results are consistent with TOS. This study inductively revealed exclusion and status differences as themes common to hazing in line with the role of socialization transitioning newcomers along boundaries of inclusion in their workgroups (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In this same vein of group member centrality and SIT, our results also provided evidence of the importance of group member similarity, where outsiders were hazed until they were seen as 'one of us.' The greater the perceived difference (gender, race, background, age, education, religion), the more the newcomer's competence and personality fit are tested" (Josefowitz & Gadon, 1989, p. 24). In SMEs, where diversity may be less common or prioritized than in larger companies (Neuhaus & Schröer, 2017), this element of group member (dis)similarity as a correlate of hazing may raise even more concern.

2.3 Study 2: comparing newcomer experiences

Our second study explored workplace hazing as a newcomer socialization mechanism and stressor. Inconsistent evidence on the effects of hazing indicates it may lead to undesirable outcomes (Chin & Johnson, 2011), valued outcomes (Allan & Madden, 2009; Keating et al., 2005), or little to no consequences at all (Østvik & Rudmin, 2001). We drew on results of Study 1 to provide a first look at its predictive effects on workplace outcomes relevant to socialization and stressors.

Socialization experiences explain meaningful variance in a number of valued employee outcomes like retention (Allen & Shanock, 2013) and engagement (Saks & Gruman, 2011). Stressors can similarly relate to a broad spectrum of outcomes for employees which vary based on the appraisal of a stressor as a challenge (C−S) or hindrance (H−S) (Podsakoff et al., 2007). Generally, C−S yield positive relationships with commitment (Podsakoff et al., 2007) and engagement (Schmitt et al., 2015) whereas H−S relate to outcomes like turnover intentions (Schaubroeck et al., 1989) and low engagement (Bakker & Sanz-Vergel, 2013). Both types of stressors relate positively to strain through a variety of mechanisms (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Bauer

et al., 2007) which captures the negative well-being consequences of experienced stress (Kahn & Byosiere, 1992).

In Study 2 we explored three primary outcomes, demonstrated as relevant by previous socialization and stressor research—turnover intentions, employee engagement, and employee strain. We present non-directional (i.e., two-tailed) hypotheses, as this is exploratory research based on the inconsistent, limited extant research on hazing's effects.

Hypothesis 1. Reports of workplace hazing will relate to turnover intentions

Hypothesis 2. Reports of workplace hazing will relate to employee engagement levels

Because, relatively uniformly, evidence indicates socialization and stressors evoke stress, and existing research indicates hazing yields consistent links to stress outcomes we predicted:

Hypothesis 3. Reports of workplace hazing will relate positively to reported employee strain levels

Given that new employees broadly experience stress during the socialization phase (Nelson, 1987), we considered a more conventional, organizationally sanctioned form of socialization as a relevant comparison target to understand hazing's unique consequences. Specifically, we focused on onboarding, the strategic HRM process to orient and introduce new employees to their work environments and demands. Such onboarding efforts benefit employees and organizations by informing, welcoming, and guiding the newcomer (Klein & Heuser, 2008). Typical onboarding activities include touring the workspace, meeting with an HR representative, completing a formal orientation session, and being assigned a mentor (Klein et al., 2015). Because newcomers generally experience heightened stress, comparing the outcomes of onboarding and workplace hazing will provide a clearer picture of the unique effects of hazing, above and beyond a typical new employee experience. Broadly, we expected different newcomer experiences for individuals who undergo traditional onboarding and those who undergo hazing, which we predict to observe in reports of turnover, engagement, and strain levels:

Hypothesis 4. Reports of turnover intentions will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

Hypothesis 5. Reports of engagement levels will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

Hypothesis 6. Reports of strain levels will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

2.3.1 Sample and measures

In contrast to Study 1, we obtained responses only from new employees, regardless of their experience with hazing to reduce volunteer bias issues possibly resulting from overtly recruiting hazed employees (Dillman et al., 2009) and reduce issues of memory-related confounds (Rindfleisch et al., 2008). Study 1 revealed some employees experience hazing up to a year after hire, whereas some classify new employees as workers in the first 60–90 days of employment (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2013). Therefore, we recruited only people who had begun a job within the past six months. To better understand the effects of hazing, specifically, as a form of socialization and stressor, we used a quasi-experimental design (Grant & Wall, 2009). We collected data from two distinct groups, comprised of employees similarly situated in the employee lifecycle. We recruited one group of employees who self-reported having experienced hazing at work, and another who self-reported having not experienced workplace hazing. This comparison group, rather, reported having experienced new employee onboarding (Klein & Heuser, 2008).

This research began more than six months after data collection for Study 1 ended, and no MTurk workers from Study 1 were eligible to participate in this study. We recruited part-time and full-time U.S. workers who had begun a new job within the past six months, minimum age of 19 years old, and current residence in the U.S. Respondents were asked if they had experienced newcomer hazing in their new job (i.e., "Full-time or existing group members demanding you complete irrelevant, embarrassing, unsafe, harsh, ridiculous, or unrealistic task requirements because you are a new member"). Those indicating they had experienced these demands were directed to a Qualtrics survey which included the measures detailed below. Respondents who met the qualifications but did not report hazing in their new job were directed to an alternate Qualtrics survey for the purposes of comparison. All respondents completed identical measures, excepting

the workplace hazing scale, and were paid $0.60 for their participation.

Before testing hypotheses, we screened the data and removed five participants from the hazed group and 11 from the comparison group since they failed all three attention check items included in the design. After checking the data for multivariate and univariate outliers as well as careless responses, an additional 22 participants from the hazed group and 32 participants from the comparison group were removed. Resulting group demographics ($N = 200$; $N = 177$) are provided below.

Hazed employee group respondents ($N = 200$) ranged in age from 19 to 70 years old ($M = 29.49$; $SD = 8.27$ years), were primarily male (64%), full-time (84%) employees. A plurality of respondents in this group were white (43%; 38% Asian, 6% Black, 5% Latino, 4% American Indian or Alaska Native). 29% of respondents were entry-level employees, 25% were intermediate (i.e., non-managerial) employees, whereas 46% of respondents were at least first-level managers or supervisors (20% middle managers). 72% of respondents had completed at least a 4-year degree, with only 5% having completed no college work at all.

Comparatively, very little, if any, demographic differences existed between the hazed employee group and comparison employee group. Respondents ($N = 177$) who did not report hazing ranged in age from 19 to 68 years old ($M = 30.28$; $SD = 9.45$ years), were primarily male (60%), full-time (86%) employees. A plurality of respondents were white (40; 35% Asian, 7% Black, 6% Latino, 6% American Indian or Alaska Native). 23% of respondents were entry-level employees, 31% were intermediate (i.e., non-managerial) employees, whereas 47% of respondents were at least first-level managers or supervisors (24% middle managers). 79% of respondents had completed at least a 4-year degree, with only 4% having completed no college work at all. Similarly, across all respondents, the majority of employees worked in relatively small to moderately sized workgroups, with 76% of employees working in a group of 50 or fewer people.

Excepting the first scale, all respondents, regardless of their group (i.e., hazed or comparison), completed all outcome measures, which were presented in random order to control for order effects.

Only respondents in the hazed group responded to the 15-item Workplace Hazing Scale (WHS)[3] developed by Mawritz et al. (2020). Respondents indicated how frequently in the course of their work they experienced a number of hazing demands at the hands of coworkers (e.g., "Given unimportant tasks to complete") using a 6-point Likert-type response scale (*1 = Never; 6 = More than once daily*). Estimates of internal consistency were excellent ($\alpha = .94$; 95% CI [.93, .95]). These respondents also responded to four items, similar to Study 1, asking more about their workplace hazing experiences, including (a) duration of hazing, (b) a qualitative description of their hazing experience, (c) the overall frequency of hazing, and (d) the indication that hazing had ended. The third and fourth items were derived from Study 1, such that we generated a set of response options for each question based on common experiences reported in that earlier study.

In addition to typical demographic questions, all respondents answered three questions about their own work history experiences with hazing, including (a) if they had ever been hazed at work, (b) if they had ever been in a workgroup that hazed new employees, and (c) their estimate of what percentage of new employees are hazed at work every year. The last question addressed possible issues of social desirability because reporting estimates of others' workplace hazing is less likely to activate impression management issues possibly raised by asking for self-reports of these experiences (Tourangeau & Yan, 2007).

All respondents completed a 4-item Turnover Intentions Scale (Wilson & Holmvall, 2013), including items like "I have spent time looking for another job" using a 4-point Likert-type response scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree; 4 = Strongly Agree*). Estimates of internal consistency were good for both groups ($\alpha = .88$; 95% CI [.85, .91] and $\alpha = .89$; 95% CI [.86, .91].

All respondents completed the 9-item Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli et al., 2006), which includes items like "My job inspires me" using a 7-point Likert-type response scale (*1 = Strongly Disagree; 7 = Strongly Agree*). Estimates of internal consistency were excellent for both groups ($\alpha = .96$; 95% CI [.96, .97] and $\alpha = .94$; 95% CI [.92, .95]).

All respondents completed the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg et al., 1997), which required participants to indicate how frequently in their time on the new job, compared to usual, they have encountered a number of psychosomatic experiences (e.g., "Unhappy and depressed") using a

[3] We thank the authors for the use of this scale and note we cannot provide scale items as part of our submission, at their request. The manuscript is forthcoming in *Human Relations*. Labeled hazing categories are provided in our manuscript, but we cannot provide item wordings as part of our agreement with the authors for use of the scale.

4-point Likert-type response scale (*1 = Less than Usual; 4 = Much more than usual*). For both groups, estimates of internal consistency were good ($\alpha = .88$; 95% CI [.85, .91] and $\alpha = .91$; 95% CI [.89, .93]).

2.3.2 Data analysis and results

Because of the variety of workplace hazing instances we observed in Study 1, and the lack of extant research on workplace hazing's correlates, we tested and present information on the overall scale score of workplace hazing (i.e., the arithmetic mean of the 15-item WHS) and the mean scores for each of the five categories of hazing (i.e., segregation, verbal abuse, task-related hazing, physical abuse, and testing). The scale authors provide these five categories to conceptually group the scale's 15 items with three items in each category. We did not conduct a factor analysis on these items, because they likely present a formative, rather than reflective, model of workplace hazing (Coltman et al., 2008) and we could not present the results of the factor analysis without revealing the items. We provide internal consistency estimates of each 3-item category subscale and inter-category correlation values in Table 2. Testing category- and overall-scale level relationships is justified in our research to better illuminate the specific effects of different types of workplace hazing, given the qualitative differences of workplace hazing we observed in Study 1 (e.g., physical abuse and testing hazing are not interchangeable).

To test the relationships of workplace hazing and its sub-categories, we proceeded in two steps. First, we examined the bivariate correlations between the three outcome variables and the six workplace hazing scores (i.e., overall workplace hazing score, each of five category scores). Any statistically significant correlations between a hazing score and an outcome then prompted us to determine the predictive relationship of that hazing score, controlling for demographic variables. Thus, we conducted a series of hierarchical regressions, with relevant hazing scores entered in the second block, and demographic control variables (i.e., age, gender, education level, job level) entered in the first block to statistically account for alternative explanations of variance in outcomes.

Descriptive statistics and correlations for relevant measured variables for both groups are presented in the top half of Table 1. We present correlations between workplace hazing categories, among the hazed employee group, in the bottom half of Table 1.

Reports of workplace hazing were similar to Study 1. Employees from a broad range of professional settings reported experiencing workplace hazing, with a variety of hazing demands. For many respondents, items from the WHS exhaustively captured their hazing experiences. Temporally, 14% of the hazed sample reported their hazing had not yet ended, whereas others stated their hazing lasted about eight weeks ($M = 7.69$ weeks, $SD = 6.61$ weeks). In describing their hazing experiences overall, 6% of hazed respondents reported it was a single instance, 36% indicated it had occurred only a few times, while 44% indicated they had been hazed more than just a few times, and 14% reported it was very frequently experienced. Like Study 1, many hazed respondents did not experience an overt end to hazing: 16% reported they knew hazing had ended because another employee told them, 38% knew hazing had ended based on group-based norms and common knowledge on how things are done, and 44% reported there was no clear end to the hazing, but just noticed the hazing stopped.

Regarding the prevalence of workplace hazing, the combined sample ($N = 377$; i.e., all respondents, hazed and non-hazed employees) indicate 66% of our overall sample had experienced hazing at work in a previous job, and 53% reported they had previously worked with a group that hazed new employees. Similarly, across respondents, estimates of new employee hazing were relatively high, such that respondents estimated about 53% of new employees experience workplace hazing in a given year. Correlation and regression results relevant to the hypotheses are shown in Table 2.

Hypothesis 1. Reports of workplace hazing will relate to turnover intentions

Workplace hazing was positively related to reported turnover intentions, $r = .21$, $p = .003$. Four categories of workplace hazing were positively related to turnover - segregation ($r = .15$, $p = .032$), verbal abuse ($r = .26$, $p < .001$), task-related ($r = .19$, $p = .007$), and testing ($r = .17$, $p = .016$). Thus, we conducted five hierarchical regression analyses to test how each of these hazing variables explained variance in turnover intentions, controlling for demographic differences. This analysis indicated that the overall hazing score ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .014$, $\beta = .19$), verbal abuse ($\Delta R^2 = .05$, $p = .001$, $\beta = .24$), and task-related ($\Delta R^2 = .03$, $p = .015$, $\beta = .18$) explained variance in turnover intentions, controlling for demographic differences. Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Hypothesis 2. Reports of workplace hazing will relate to employee engagement levels

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and bivariate correlations for measured variables for Hazed and Comparison Employee Groups.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Range	1	2	3	4	5	6
Hazed Employee Group[a]									
1. Age	29.49	8.27	19–70	–					
2. Work Group Size	67.05	148.12	1–1500	-.09	–				
3. WHS[c]	3.32	1.13	1.00–5.67	-.22**	.10	.94			
4. Turnover Intent	2.78	0.80	1.00–4.00	-.10	.09	.21**	.89		
5. Engagement	4.58	1.39	1.00–7.00	-.18**	.18***	-.09	.09	.96	
6. Strain	2.49	0.68	1.00–4.00	-.30***	.11	.31***	.61***	.07	.91
Comparison Employee Group[b]									
1.Age	30.28	9.45	19–68	–					
2. Work Group Size	81.33	181.52	4–1500	-.07	–				
3.									
4. Turnover Intent	2.41	0.90	1.00–4.00	-.34***	.12		.88		
5. Engagement	5.11	1.00	1.89–7.00	.04	.09		.08	.96	
6. Strain	2.26	0.78	1.00–3.67	-.37***	.13		.65***	.21**	.88

Descriptive Statistics for, and bivariate correlations between, measured predictor variables for Hazed Employee Group

Variable	M	SD	Range	7	8	9	10	11	12
7.WHS[a]	3.32	1.13	1.00–5.67	.94					
8. Segregation	3.68	1.27	1.00–6.00	.82***	.87				
9. Verbal Abuse	3.33	1.40	1.00–6.00	.88***	.75***	.90			
10. Task Related Hazing	3.66	1.25	1.00–6.00	.79***	.65***	.61***	.84		
11. Physical Abuse	2.57	1.57	1.00–6.00	.77***	.44***	.59***	.45***	.91	
12. Testing	3.37	1.38	1.00–6.00	.87***	.62***	.70***	.63***	.64***	.89

Note
Internal Consistency estimates are displayed in the diagonal.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
[a] $N = 200$.
[b] $N = 177$.
[c] Workplace Hazing Scale.

Overall, workplace hazing reports did not relate to levels of employee engagement, $r = .09$, $p = .190$. Only the physical abuse category yielded a significant relationship to engagement ($r = .23$, $p = .001$). Thus, we conducted a single hierarchical regression, regressing employee engagement onto physical abuse, controlling for demographic variables. The results indicate physical abuse explained variance in employee engagement, controlling for demographic differences, ($\Delta R^2 = .02$, $p = .029$, $\beta = .14$). Hypothesis 2 was partially supported.

Hypothesis 3. Reports of workplace hazing will relate to employee strain levels

Workplace hazing was positively related to employee strain reports, $r = .31$, $p < .001$. Each category of hazing was also positively related to employee strain, with correlation coefficients ranging from .18 to .31, and all coefficients were significant at or below $p = .011$. Six consecutive regression analyses, to test the predictive effects of each hazing variable, controlling for demographic variables, indicated all hazing variables explained a significant portion of variance above and beyond demographic differences. ΔR^2 values ranged from .02 to .06, and β values ranged from .13 to .25, with all statistics significant at or below $p = .05$. Hypothesis 3 was supported. See Table 2 for all results.

Hypothesis 4. Reports of turnover intentions will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

Hypothesis 5. Reports of engagement levels will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

Hypothesis 6. Reports of strain levels will differ for employees who are hazed compared to those who undergo traditional organizational onboarding

Differences in outcomes are shown in Fig. 2 for the two samples. Concisely, hazed employees reported significantly higher levels of turnover intentions, t (375) = 4.14, p < .001, Cohen's d = .43, lower engagement, t (375) = −4.28, p < .001, Cohen's d = .44 and higher strain, t (375) = 3.15, p = .002, Cohen's d = .33, compared to a very similar group of new employees who did not report being hazed in the current job.

Table 2. Incremental predictive relationships between workplace hazing factors, and measured organizational outcomes.

	Outcome								
	Turnover Intentions			Engagement			Strain		
	r	ΔR^2	β	*r*	ΔR^2	β	*r*	ΔR^2	β
Hazing	**.21****	**.03****	**.19*****	**.09**	**.00**	**-.01**	**.31*****	**.05*****	**.24*****
Segregation	.15*	.02	.13	-.02	.01	-.08	.18*	.02*	.13*
Verbal Abuse	.26***	.05***	.24***	-.02	.01	-.11	.31***	.06***	.25***
Task-related Hazing	.19**	.03*	.18*	.03	.00	-.04	.25***	.04**	.20**
Physical Abuse	.11	.01	.07	.23***	.02*	.14*	.27***	.03*	.18*
Testing	.17*	.02	.14	.13	.00	.03	.26***	.03*	.18*

Note
$N = 200$.
$^*p < .05$; $^{**}p < .01$; $^{***}p < .001$.
Regression results shown for predictor above and beyond demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender, employee status, job level) entered in first block of hierarchical regression (estimates of first block not shown for space).
Predictors were entered individually in the second block of a regression, such that, other than a first block of demographic characteristics, only one predictor was tested in the model.

2.3.3 Discussion of study 2

The results of Study 2 further clarify the picture of workplace hazing we developed in Study 1. Across all respondents, our results align with limited existing estimates of workplace hazing's prevalence—50-70% of our overall sample had experienced hazing at work or been part of a group that hazed new members, even if they did not engage in hazing directly. Moreover, our results indicate that hazing seems to last about eight weeks, primarily involves multiple—although not typically high-frequency—encounters and does not always feature a clear cessation.

Importantly, our results offer a first look at the predictive effects of workplace hazing for new employees. Overall, workplace hazing does not yield extraordinarily strong relationships with turnover intentions, engagement, or strain. The relationships we uncovered, however, aligned broadly with our predictions, wherein hazing presents a stressor to employees—such that we most consistently observed hazing's relationships with strain, the negative consequences of stressor exposure. In general, hazing was related to negative outcomes (turnover intentions and strain) and yielded little relationship to positive outcomes (engagement). Physical abuse hazing's positive relationship with engagement and insignificant relationship with turnover intentions, albeit surprising, also support the notion of hazing as a challenge. Comparing the effects of hazing categories like physical abuse or testing with aspects like verbal abuse or task-related hazing indicates not all hazing seems to operate in the same way, although all categories relate to strain, supporting the role of different categories of hazing as challenge or hindrance stressors. Interestingly, segregation hazing

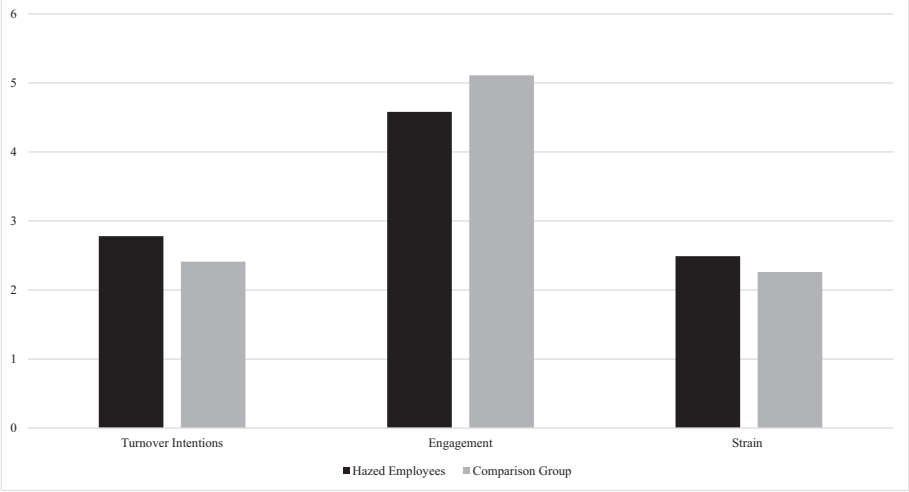

Fig. 2. Reported levels of turnover intentions, engagement, strain for hazed and comparison new employees.

yielded the weakest relationships with outcomes, although our results indicate segregation and exclusion are quite common forms of hazing employees. Rather than a uniformly detrimental set of correlates, our results indicate workplace hazing relates in complex ways to outcomes of interest.

Of note are the comparative outcomes for employees who experienced competing forms of newcomer socialization. Respondents who underwent a hazing process reported higher turnover intentions and strain and lower engagement than those who underwent a traditional onboarding process. This highlights the differing socialization processes and how newcomers may respond to alternative inculturation methods.

3 Discussion

The combined results of these two studies show that hazing is a common form of new employee socialization (over 50% of our respondents) across a diverse range of industries, occupations, and occupational levels. Hazing demands occur along a spectrum from seemingly harmless to more severe. The descriptions of hazing demands we report do not exhaust the means by which groups may haze new members but reveal some common themes in the content of hazing—exclusion, work-based hazing, and personal affronts—and the structure in duration and termination of hazing. Although our results indicate hazing ends within 8–10 weeks on the job, the broad range of hazing's duration affirms such induction activities more typically end based on newcomers earning inclusion in the eyes of group members, rather than a set schedule. In line with TOS, when hazing ends, then, depends not on time, but on proving oneself to the group, often without an overt message or rite signaling its end.

Our results indicate while both onboarding and hazing result in strain for new employees, hazing is especially stressful, and we found some evidence of its positive relationship to turnover intentions *and* engagement. This aligns with a perspective of workplace hazing as a stressor presented to new employees, who already face a relatively stressful experience of transition (Nelson, 1987). The comparison group of onboarded employees reported significantly lower levels of strain than the hazed employee group which indicates hazing places additional demands on newcomers. The emerging research on hazing's utility to group members enacting it (Cimino, 2011; Cimino et al., 2019) alludes to the conflict between the needs of the individual and his/her group. Socialization requires newcomers to adjust to their group's demands and although such adjustment may not benefit the individual in the long run, it serves the longevity and survival of the group (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Our findings confirm that the newcomer experience involves potentially negative consequences and that even organizationally-administered onboarding is not without some downside (Ellis et al., 2015). However, when hazing is incorporated into the socialization process, the new employee may experience even greater stress which may lead to an early exit from the firm. In line with TOS (Schein, 1971), few moments in the employee lifecycle are as critical to long-term success than the early days when the new employee is learning how the organization truly operates and what the culture is like (Allen & Shanock, 2013). Missteps by organizations in this formative transition time may lead to undesirable outcomes.

SMEs that value employee tenure and engagement would do well to review their indoctrination processes to determine how healthy and welcoming these early encounters are for the newcomer. Discovering that hazing may lead to early-tenure turnover and lower engagement provides organization leaders with evidence of the importance of a welcoming new employee socialization process. SME leaders who subscribe to the 'small is beautiful' philosophy may recognize that rolling out the welcome mat may lead to positive, productive relationships between managers and their employees and lead to better organization outcomes (Lewis et al., 2020). Those who emphasize cost reduction may determine that retaining recently-hired employees is a less costly way to ensure that sufficient talent is available to meet the organization's production demands. Thus, asking new employees to run the gauntlet of hazing rather than onboarding them in welcome fashion may result in high rates of early-tenure turnover and serve to increase costs and render profits elusive (Bauer et al., 2007).

3.1 Limitations and future directions

We acknowledge the limitations of our sample. Amazon MTurk-derived samples, while more representative than those derived from single organizations (Buhrmester et al., 2011; Goodman et al., 2013; Woo et al., 2015), do not perfectly represent the American workforce. Knowledge-based vocations, for example, were over-represented and blue-collar workers were underrepresented in our sample. Our samples of hazed employees may have posed issues of range restriction. That is, employees who suffered the most severe effects of hazing may have left their

jobs quickly, and therefore did not qualify (i.e., they were not employed) for our studies.

Our cross-sectional design precludes any causal conclusions. We followed recommendations (Spector, 2019) for conducting cross-sectional research, specifically by statistically accounting for individual differences as other explanations of variance in outcomes and by including analyses based on a quasi-experimental design. We also conducted tests to explore the effects of common method bias (CMB), namely Harman's single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003), which did not reveal any evidence of CMB, such that a single factor did not explain a majority of the variance (40%) in a factor analysis of all measured variables. We acknowledge the possibility of CMB in our research and assert the ethical issues of conducting a true experiment to study the causal effects of workplace hazing limits the possibility of such work.

We further acknowledge the presence of confounds and possible third variables we did not measure or control for. Future research may consider using an outcome reported by a different source (e.g., friend/family member's observations of strain) rather than relying only on self-report, or on accessing a sample of employees prior to their first day at work, in order to measure longitudinal effects of hazing (e.g., pre-hazing levels of variables v. post-hazing levels of variables).

We tested the effects of hazing, broadly, and its more specific categories. Although this provides an initial picture of the effects of specific hazing activities, we also acknowledge it multiplies the statistical tests we conducted. The majority of our predictions were non-directional, and we conducted only the statistical tests, and more specific analyses (e.g., hierarchical regression) justified to address those predictions based on evidence we possessed.

Primarily, this research provides a description of workplace hazing and some of its relevant correlates, and we hope future research can use this exploration to test more focused questions and predictions on workplace hazing. Additionally, the intriguing comparisons with standard onboarding offer future researchers avenues to explore relative to the differences between benign onboarding and more noxious hazing as a new employee socialization process.

4 Conclusions

These studies add to the nascent stream of research on workplace hazing and offer contextual and content details from those who have experienced it. Viewed through the theoretical lenses of socialization and stress, we explored important organizational outcomes − turnover, engagement, and strain − and found that workplace hazing can result in some detrimental effects for new employees. We also found that traditional onboarding, while also resulting in stress for newcomers, is a less-stressful newcomer socialization process for employees. The current research showed that workplace hazing is frequently encountered in a broad range of work environments to workers at all levels within organizations and occupations.

Because much remains to learn about this socialization process, we look forward to continued investigation of its attributes and outcomes, and believe future efforts will benefit from our theoretical and empirical foundations laid here.

Conflict of interest statement

The authors whose names are listed immediately below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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