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Sorority Traditions

by Anna DeVoy

Folklore F101

11-3-90

Traditions are an essential part of folklore. Folklore takes place when people interact with each other on a regular basis. Traditions are categorized as being a form of learned behavior which contributes to group identity and solitary. Many groups have esoteric traditions which categorize them as folk groups. An example of such a folk group is a sorority. Members in a greek system are considered a folk group because of the certain traditions that are relevant to their existence. One such folk group is a sorority who practices traditions.

One such tradition which every girl starts out doing is rush. Each sorority invites girls over to look at the house and meet some of the members who already belong to the sorority. If the sorority agrees on the girl, the sorority extends a bid to the girl for her to join. If she wants to join, she then becomes a pledge. Pledging consists of weekly meetings, interviews of actives, and learning of history of the chapter.

During pledgship, girls learn of other such traditions that the whole active chapter participates in. Formal dinners usually take place once a week. This consists of girls dressing in nice clothes and wearing their pins, either pledge or active pins on formal dinner days. Then before dinner, announcements are usually made consisting of any and everything. Grace is sang by everyone after

announcements. Many songs are traditional with each chapter having their own unique songs learned by the members.

Along with the formal dinners, sororities have secret handshakes, firesides, and secret symbols. Each of these activities are secret and known only between the members of the sorority. These secret activities and symbols are there to unite members of a sorority nationwide.

The major activity that is probably one of the best kept secrets is initiation. Not only is it a time for pledges to rejoice, but for actives to rejoice, too. Now, the pledges are officially part of this group. Many chapter secrets are revealed at this initiation which makes pledges more of a member of the house.

There are also certain traditions that take place in social situations which many times include boys and fraternities. Such dance traditions are barn dances, spontaneouses, crush kegs, holiday formals, and pledge formals.

These sorority activities all are established at the beginning or colonizing of each chapter. After certain years, the traditions are written laws and become repeated activities for the chapter. Not only are these sorority traditions usually practiced by each chapter, but they are practiced yearly. These traditions are kept alive by the actives who teach the pledges. They teach by pledges repeating the actives' actions or by being informed through pledge meetings.

Some folk groups, like sororities, are created to continue old-country traditions. These girls are all bonded by their committmentt to keeping their traditions alive. Because these girls share the same traditions and interact with each other on a regular basis, they are classified as a folk group. Observing a sorority shows how certain traditions are kept alive.

The sororities perform events year round. Each chapter has a lot of activities going on weekly and many times daily. I will be able to study a sorority by interviewing girls from a house. These interviews I will conduct on tape with questions already prepared before the interview. I will also use my experiences that I have of going through rush, pledging, and being an active member. The books I will refer to are books that I have obtained through my sorority. My pledge book contains information on other chapters and my chapter history. Another book is on how to rush girls. I will conduct my interviews with the girls bringing pictures or talking in their rooms so as to conjure up memories that they may have. My interview questions are going to be open ended enough to be able to spread to more than just what the questions are asking. In other words, my goal is to ask questions that will lead to many memories about the tradition of the sorority.

I plan to start the conversation with questions similar to these: What made you decide to rush? What made you decide to pledge your house and eventually become an active member. What are some traditions practiced as pledges?

What are some traditions practiced as actives? How has the sorority affected the way you act? How has the sorority made you closer to your sisters? How important are traditions in your house and are some more important than others? What are some of the major differences between being a pledge and learning the traditions, and being the active and teaching them? What are some of the most enjoyable social experiences you have had with the sorority? How important is the sorority to you?

I had two people who I had interviewed, Jen Dziubinski and Tracey Jones. Jen is a member of Alpha Xi Delta and one of my sorority sisters. She is originally from South Bend, Indiana and a sophomore here at Indiana University. She has a major of radiation therapy and next year will be attending IUPUI. She has been a member for approximately one year and shows a lot of pride in Alpha Xi Delta as it shows in the interview. The interview was conducted outside of the house on a brick walk nearby. The people walking around are our fellow sorority sisters going in and out of the house. Jen's insecurity about a taped interview caused me to allow her to read the questions ahead of time. So while her answers are somewhat formal and thought out, the true feelings of what she thinks of Alpha Xi Delta are just as clear as my next interview with Tracey Jones.

Tracey also a member of Alpha Xi Delta at Indian University. She is a junior as a telecommunications major and originally came from Anderson, Indiana. Since Jen, Tracey, and I are from the same pledge class, she too has

only been a part of the house for about a year. Tracey also has the same pride for Alpha Xi Delta. We conducted our interview in a fellow sister's room. She did not have the chance to prepare beforehand by reading the questions. Even though her answers are very chopped up, her messages are very direct in her answers.

Transcriptions

Anna DeVoy: This is Jen Dziubinski speaking. She is a member of Alpha Xi Delta.

Anna: What made you decide to rush?

Jen Dziubinski: Basically on a large campus like I.U., sometimes people feel like they need a smaller place where they can fit in and just be themselves, and to me joining a sorority or for someone, a guy joining a fraternity, it gives us an opportunity to feel secure in the people that we are with and where we are living.

Anna: O.K. What made you decide to pledge your house and eventually become an active member?

Jen: Well, I guess, um, I've known I've always wanted to be part of the greek system, and when I went through rush, you basically know where you fit in and the people that you kind of, um, like to associate with, and meeting

some people here, I really, really enjoy their company and after that it's just kind of an instinct that you go with and you know that you belong there.

Anna: What are some of your traditions practiced as pledges?

Jen: Well, we have a weekly pledge meeting and, um, in that we have to learn a lot of the different things about Alpha Xi Delta, and we also have some philanthropy projects that we participate in such as Head Start, um some other things are the formal dinners, and candlelights and various traditions like that.

Anna: What are some traditions practiced as actives?

Jen: Basically the actives have a lot of the same as the pledges except like we have a weekly chapter meeting. Um, Formal dinners, candlelights—a lot of those things are the same. We also have the philanthropy projects. So, a lot of people are involved in a lot of different things in the house, but we also have are traditional type things.

Anna: So, what's the difference between a pledge and an active?

Jen: Basically, we both do the same thing, but the pledges have to go through the process of learning all about the sorority, and all of the history of it. Which is a big part of, um, knowing why Alpha Xi Delta exist and how important it is to each of us.

Anna: How has the sorority affected the way you act, like on campus and stuff?

Jen: I guess that's a difficult question, because you should

always be yourself, no matter who you are with or what what you are doing, but basically, it just gives me more of an opportunity to look back at myself and to kind of notice what I'm doing. Because when you're in a greek system you not only represent yourself but you also represent the sorority and you always have to be aware of what you're doing. Because you no longer, you're still an individual, but you also are part of a group.

Anna: How has the sorority made you closer to you're sister's?

Jen: Well, um, basically living all together, although there are many of us, we all have the opportunity to get together with each other every once in a while whether it's at dinner or at a different activity or maybe even a social activity, and doing different things, like even working at a philanthropy project, you might work with someone you never really knew that before, and you get the opportunity to know people more in-depth and to know them as a person more and that just brings the whole house closer together.

Anna: How important are traditions in your house and are some more important than others, like serenading and gunning?

Jen: Well, I guess that every tradition is important in Alpha Xi Delta just because that is what makes it up. That is a big part of what makes up the house and the, the sisterly sisterhood of it all, and um, I really

myself, couldn't rate which ones more important than each other because the gunning and serenades are important, and so is something like a candlelight, um, uh, the candlelight is just like where you know somebody might become engaged become laveled to um, her boyfriend, and so even our formal dinner is just as important as that where we are all brought together and we get time to spend with each other. So, basically, I think all of our traditions are just as important as one another.

Anna: What are some of the most enjoyable social experiences you have had with the sorority?

Jen: Um, socially I think that...

Anna: Like some of the dances you really enjoy, why did you enjoy?

Jen: I guess, so far, as the dance I've enjoyed the most is pledge dance, and I'm really looking forward to now our Red Garter Ball because during the pledge dance, we all didn't know each other all that well just being new pledges, and it gave us the opportunity to get all dressed up and look our best and just go out and have a good time, and I think that, um, each social event gives us an opportunity to meet new people which is a big part of being in the greek system. Because although it is more than being social, that is a big part of it, and that we get the opportunity to meet many, many people and bond with them or become friends

with them.

Anna: Have you had any memorable, uh, social gatherings like, at parties, like themes?

Jen: Well, basically every social gathering gives us an evening to remember like our, uh, red tie party with Pi Kappa Phi. Each of the girls got a tie and, um, the guy came and found us and we just basically got to know him. And even some of our dances, like Red Garter Ball and pledge dance, you get to know each of your, each of your sisters' dates and in that way you meet new people and you become more involved. And that can sometimes lead to get more involved on campus. And then we also have things where it is just our house. Which, um, we had a halloween party and we are also having a Christmas get together, which kind of gives us the opportunity to focus on ourselves, too, which is really nice.

Anna: You mentioned fraternities, how do you get paired with a fraternity?

Jen: Well what we do is we gun them. In the first week, which is like taking them over.....

Anna: Gunning consist of what?

Jen: Basically, like taking them over maybe pizza or breadsticks or balloons, and we just decorate little things and take it over to them. Or maybe just watch Monday night football, and then our serenades we put together like a little act like a bunch of singing and dancing and we go over and perform in front of them,

and we just kind of, um, want to show them our talent and who we are, and then we just go through the Panhellenic Association that pairs us with them.

Anna: How important is the sorority to you?

Jen: I think it's really important because I have gained many friendships here that I think will last me a lifetime, and I think that was one of the main reasons why I decided to join a sorority, and I have many, many friends here who I think I'll know for the rest of my life and that I really, really care about a lot.

Anna DeVoy: This is Tracey Jones speaking. She is a member of Alpha Xi Delta. What made you decide to rush?

Tracey Jones: Uh, both of my sisters rushed and I was unhappy with dorm life.

Anna: Did they rush this sorority?

Tracey: No they did not rush this sorority.

Anna: Were they in a sorority?

Tracey: Yes, they were.

Anna: What made you decide to pledge your house and eventually become an active member?

Tracey: Pledge this house? What made me pledge this house? Um, I was fond of the girls, fond of the girls who rushed me. I had no ties with anybody, so it wasn't

prior knowledge, so it was basically the girls that I met during rush.

Anna: What are some of the traditions practiced as pledges?

Tracey: Traditions?

Anna: Yeah, like, ah formal dinners....

Tracey: Yeah, we had formal dinners. We went to one meeting, required meeting per week. Um, I don't know. Let's see, what else? We had some study hours, and a couple other function type things, required type things.

Anna: What are some traditions practiced as actives that are a little different than as pledges?

Tracey: Traditions?

Anna: Like, something you do, like we have gunning, stuff like that.

Tracey: O.K um, I think as actives, you're able to, um, as actives you don't have to do studying anymore, obviously, I don't know. You're not required to do that. It's more on your own bases, um, you still have to do the meeting type thing. But you're given the opportunity to hold an office, um, for the house, not necessarily for the, um, not just for your class. Um, like you said, we have gunning with other houses, so like we pair with with other fraternities and stuff, and on, on you know with fraternities. We also have like other dances such as barndance, Christmas, uh not Christmas, holiday dance, um. We have a pledge formal, other type

dances like that, uh, and spontaneous, we don't know when they are coming, they just tell us we have a dance tonight and we go, and just basic things for people who are graduating and, um, people who have certain achievements that we might not get elsewhere.

Anna: How has th sorority affected the way you act, like on campus?

Tracey: The way I act?

Anna: Yeah.

Tracey: I am a lot better, a positive attitude, extremely positive, um. I wasn't very, um, happy with the with dorm, just because I wasn't as close, yeah, I wasn't as close with the girls, like, it was a smaller group of girls, and now I have a hundred girls, which I know and I feel I could do stuff with and I didn't feel like i had that in the dorm and, um, it's given me a lot of self confidence and the feel, the feeling that I can rely on a hundred other girls.

Anna: How important are traditions in your house, are some traditions more important than others?

Tracey: Well some of the traditions, obviously, like the dances and stuff are going to be mildly very, very wanted so obviously they are going to be pretty strong.

Anna: Well, which ones are the most important to you?

Tracey: Which ones are the most important to me? I don't think the traditions will be the most important to me as far as the house. I think it would be just be having the people around me more than likely, that's not the requirement, it's the people not the events.

Anna: What are some of the most enjoyable social experiences you had with the sorority?

Tracey: Um, the night that I got my bid or whatever you want to call it, the night that they asked me to join the sorority was very, I liked that because the girls that I had met through rush, that who were already in house were, it was exciting to be with them, and it something as far besides small talk. Um, when I was initiated obviously and, um, kind of made me feel like you're finally fulfilling finally done with something, um and when I moved in thing, when I moved in here for the first time like the first couple of days, that was great, because I got to, I got to actually talk to people all the time, and it made you feel a lot closer to the people.

My interviews started out first with rush which is every sorority girls' first step. It consist of each sorority inviting girls over to look at the house and meet some of the members who already belong to the sorority. If the sorority agrees on the girl, the sorority extends a bid to the girl for her to join. That also depends on if the girl

likes that house. The process is a long one that takes up to nine days altogether. It is a long and nervous process that many girls go through. There are many reasons for deciding to rush, and it seems that each girl has her own individual reasons. Both Jen and Tracey state that they rushed mainly because they were unhappy with dorm life. They wanted to find a group of people that they could fit in with. They felt that they need a place they could feel at ease.

Soon after rush the girls receive their bids to the sororities. This is the night Tracey felt was the most memorable. It is filled with a night of partying and happy cheer. After this night starts pledgeship. During pledgeship, girls learn of other such traditions that the whole active chapter participates in, such projects that Jen mentioned like philanthropy. Also, pledges participate informal dinners, weekly meetings, interviews of actives, and learning of history of the chapter.

Tracey also mentioned that initiation was another memorable moment because of its significance to her. For at this moment, she mentioned that she felt as she has now become a part of the sorority. At initiation many chapter secrets; handshakes, symbols; are revealed which makes pledges more of a member of the house. After initiation more responsibilities are put on the girls and a flood of activities bombard the girls. Activities range from spontaneous, holiday dances, barndances, senior ceremonies, candlelights, serenades, formal dinners weekly

meetings. Although becoming active fills your date book up, both the girls mentioned how much closer it makes you to your sisters.

Tracey gave her answers to imply just how important sisterhood is to her. To her she felt that the traditions themselves weren't very important. They both mention how much closer they feel to their sisters especially while doing some of the traditions. In fact, they fell very strong about the sorority. For Tracey it has given her more self confidence and a positive attitude. Both these attitudes can help her in her life both socially and academically. For Jen, she feels that she must be at her best even on campus, so that she represents our sorority the best that she can.

Because the sorority is set up the way it is, its existence relies solely on member to keep it alive. So in other words a folk group is keeping its own folk traditions alive by initiating new members into the folk group. All of this showing how much people need to belong to folk groups and to have many things in common with people.

Although I feel that my research was not as in-depth as more time could have allowed me to get, but I have researched the subject to an extent. I feel that traditions are very important to the sorority. It is important both to keep it alive and to create harmony in the house. In the interviews conducted, both the women had showed surprise at the question of how important the traditions are to the sorority. Then they turn around and show the importance of

being with their sisters. The reasons they are together though is because of the traditions they are keeping alive. So, even though the women don't realize the importance of the traditions, it is what they mainly have in common. The sorority and its traditions keep the sisters bonded and give them that one thing in common that will keep them friends forever. So while the women and sometimes even myself don't see the importance of doing our rituals, in reality it is what is bonding us together in the first place.

I feel that I could have made the paper somewhat better by asking more questions that would go into more of how my people feel towards the sorority personally. I believe that it was more important to find out exactly the attitude the girls had to each other more than to the traditions. Also, my questions should have been more in-depth even though it is hard to ask in-depth questions because some sorority secretes cannot be told.

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Folklore F101

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One such tradition which every girl starts out doing is rush. Each sorority invites girls over to look at the house and meet some of the members who already belong to the sorority. If the sorority agrees on the girl, the sorority extends a bid to the girl for her to join. If she wants to join, she then becomes a pledge. Pledging consists of weekly meetings, interviews of actives, and learning of history of the chapter.

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1. What made you decide to rush?
2. What made you decide to pledge your house and eventually become an active member?
3. What are some traditions practiced as pledges?
4. What are some traditions practiced as actives?
5. How has the sorority affected the way you act?
6. How has the sorority made you closer to your sisters?
7. How important are traditions in your house? Are some traditions more important than others?
8. What are some of the major differences between being a pledge and learning the traditions, and being the active and teaching the traditions?
9. What are some of the most enjoyable social experiences you have had with the sorority?
10. How important is the sorority to you?

*Very good proposal.
(Please include something on serenading.)*