

Exploring Racial Tensions in the Sorority house at the University of Alabama 16

Kappa Delta's a part of their family as we do, and about their favorite memories with the Kappa Deltas.

For the interviews with sorority members, I plan to ask how they feel about the staff and whether they have ever felt like the staff because of their particular role was judging them. As well as sorority members from other schools, The method of interviewing the alumni member will be based on questions such as: did you have staff while you were at Alabama? What was it like? What were the social roles? Has it changed?

Data

For the data section for this project, observations and interactions will be noted, as well as interview responses that will be collaborated into groups (staff members, sorority members from other states, and an active alumni member from other sorority on campus) including only the most important information.

Observations/Interactions:

- Sorority members always call staff members by name, and vice versa if staff members know their name.
- There is always laughter.
- Staff members usually always wear scrubs, it's the "uniform," I suppose. Except Ronald, he wears jeans and usually and Alabama t-shirt. They often wear Kappa Delta t-shirts. If it's cold Yoshie won't wear her scrubs and will wear jeans and a long sleeve shirt because it was "too cold this mornin"
- Sorority members stand at kitchen door often asking for assistance.
- Sorority members often forget to clean up after themselves.
- Staff members are happier to help members when they know them on a personal level. (Example: Recently I spilled everything out of my hands into the stairwell, I ran to grab paper towels and Ronald saw me urgently attempting to help and just replies with "I'll get it, I'll get it, don't you worry about it . . ."
- On the weekends, sorority members (perhaps intoxicated) make a mess in the kitchen, causing Ronald to have to arrive early Monday.
- When we had pizza ingredients to make in the fridge at all time, it was a MESS. Didn't last very long.
- Dance party after every skit day during rush.

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- Staff members sometimes attend parties and sorority members act like they are legitimately celebrities. (Ex: Yoshie attended the bar crawl, she has never drank alcohol in her life and everyone was so excited that she was there, tending to her every move).
- Ronald cleans dishes after dinner; everyone pours leftovers in trash and say's "thank you Ronald" and he just nods. Recently, I handed Ronald my plate with ketchup and mustard smeared all over it and said "sorry for making such a mess!" He replied with, "it's ok, just because it's you."
- Yoshie and Ms. Dee are the sweetest. Yoshie cleans upstairs bathrooms, takes out trash, and bakes! Mrs. Dee cleans downstairs bathrooms and living rooms. She loves to smile and loves to talk to everyone. Ronald was in the navy, he is the most difficult to get to know, but once you crack his shell- you are golden! He does it all- mops, cleans, fills water jugs, sweeps outside, and cooks. Ms. Janice has been here the longest, she is like mother hen and we are all her little ducklings. She mainly cooks. Mrs. Latoya and Barbra are the most fun. They come upstairs when they leave and we will hook them up with some alcohol. They like vodka on ice (ew). Mrs. Latoya is a great cook and she loves to hear feedback about her cooking. Mrs. Barbra is funny always laughing and making others laugh, she cooks and cleans- does whatever is needed.
- Yoshie will come upstairs and tell us that she has baked one of her treats and everyone runs downstairs and gets excited.
- Mrs. Latoya on the speaker one morning this semester around 10:30- "Hello to my little kittens upstairs, fried Fridays is served early!"
- It hurts staff member's feelings if they feel like we are choosing to not come to dinner or not eat downstairs in the dining room.
- Yoshie in particular sees sorority members coming out of the showers, brushing teeth, see's everyone's rooms. She seems girls on a more intimate level.
- Typical conversation with Yoshie: "Hey Ronald!" "Hey baby . . ." "How's your day?" "Its goin, its goin" "It's almost Friday . . ." "Yeah, it is . . . Budweiser time."
- Ronald is always sweeping, sometimes I think he just sweeps to sweep.
- Staff members don't ever sit down and eat but they will snack on certain foods.
- All staff members are related somehow except for Ms. Janice.
- Mrs. Janice has been here the longest, other members either ten or close to ten years.
- Rush Recruitment process: Two skits with real potential new members- we brought out the cooks. Potential new members were probably very confused. And we most definitely probably got fined for that, but it was worth it.

Staff Member Responses:

- Favorite aspect of being on staff at Kappa Delta?
 - "The girls"
 - "I tell you what, it's what you and I do now, we talk."
 - "Getting to know girls on an individual basis, about their lives, knowing their personalities, likes and dislikes"
 - Flexible job.

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- Discussing Racism:
 - Q. Whether the sororities will ever be integrated: A. "Hm . . . well I never thought we would have a black president and we do now, so I'm hopeful."
 - Q. Seen "the Help?" A. "Yes, I liked some parts of it and disliked others. I just wish everyone would be nice."
 - Q. "Do you think your job symbolizes racism at all?" A. "I don't think about it, I don't see color, I am here to serve and I treat people the way I want to be treated." A (2). "Although it may still exist in some hearts and minds, not in mine."
- How does it make you feel when seniors leave?
 - "Its hard, but its part of it. Yall move on. I've recently been getting sad and when I see certain girls walking through the house . . . I just wanna cry, I just turn my head."
- Which bathroom do you use?
 - "Upstairs. I use whatever I'm closest too." Q. "Do you think back in the day staff was only allowed to use bathroom downstairs?" A. "Of course, different bathrooms, different water fountains, the back of the bus. But these days, in this house- nah. Its too much to get down the stairs anyhow!"
- Racism in Alabama:
 - Q. "Do you think racism still exists?" A. "Unfortunately, yes" (We then discussed that perhaps as older decades become deceased racist tendencies will die as well). A2. "My girlfriend from up north came and visited and explained that "she couldn't live in Alabama" and that "it's like its still segregated."
 - Positive answer about racism: "No one is keeping you from doing what you want to do. Blacks can attend the university. If you choose to be a thug, that's your choice, if you choose to excel, that's your choice. It's about the effort you put in."
 - Q. "Do you think that because we are in Alabama, some of the girls in this sorority may have been raised racist?" A. "Most likely, it's the south."
- Do you enjoy serving sorority members?
 - "Yes, anything I can do for them- I'll do it . . . You have to let me know though. I'm no mind reader."
- What is one of your most significant memories?
 - "It's a sad memory, but a fond one." She went on to explain about how this year when her mother was sick, we allowed her to be with her from diagnosis until the end. She explained that she feared that she would lose her job because she had to take so much time off but that instead of losing her job we welcomed her back and made her feel missed and appreciated and also a sum of money gathered for her.
- When do you feel most appreciated?
 - "When the girls are happy and are talkative to me, it makes me feel really good to be around."
 - "When they tell me so, girls have told me that I brighten their day with my big smile. It makes me feel happy."

Interview with senior Kappa Kappa Gamma and her mother (also a Kappa).

Senior Kappa answers:

- All black staff, except for the cook is white. Head staff member is a homosexual male and loves his job. "He is constantly asking interesting questions and wanting to get to know all the activities we do. We love him."
- "We love our staff, and our staff is much happier when we have a good house mom (I guess you would consider her their boss). I have been through 3 house moms at kkg and the staff has been happier and happier with each house mom.. I have a close relationship with each staff member and they took care of me when I lived there and now when I visit every day!"
- "One staff member has worked in kkg for 30 years, has been there with the mom and senior Kappa and now her sophomore sister! Her daughter is also a staff member. They had a surprise party for her a few weeks ago to thank her for her 30 years of service."
- "One house mom has us leave our plates on the table, but the past two has us scrape our plates. it makes much more sense that way!"

Kappa Alumni answers:

- "I was extremely close with Mrs. Del when I was in college. I would walk down in the mornings and Mrs. Del would ask 'how would you like your eggs this morning Leigh?' and I could say: omelets, sunny-side-up, or scrambled . . . whatever I wanted she would make and I would walk back into the kitchen with my plate for it to be put on."
- "When my first daughter pledged Kappa on bid day I saw Mrs. Del and she gave me a huge hug and remembered my name!"
- "We might have been closer with the staff than the girls are now, because these days there are many actives so it makes it more difficult."
- There was no buffet when I was active, the cooks made our plates, but we cleaned them off.

Out-of-state Sorority Member Responses:

- Q. "Do you have a staff at your sorority house? What race are they? (Since yall are an all-white sorority, if they are another race other than white white, do you think it symbolizes racism or discrimination?) Do they cook all your meals? Are yall close with them?"
 - A. Pi Phi Beta, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. "Hahahah no honey, you have to remember we are farr from Bama. We have a Hispanic staff that serves and cleans up all our food. Hispanic maids and a white chef. The maids are very, very sweet and everyone always says hi and stuff but they really don't speak any English, soo... Everyone is super friendly but no one is like tight and actually talks to each other. Definitely closer to the maids than the kitchen staff though."
 - A2. Delta Delta Delta, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth Texas. "We aint go no tri delt staff." Q. "So... like no one? Who cleans?" "Haha sorry

not much help. There are some TCU housekeeping peeps that vacuum and clean bathrooms. They are all different races and genders. It's not like how yall have it there or how my mom had it in Auburn... It's just a job for them. Of course we use our manners with them and are nice, but no personal relationships."

Analysis/Discussion

At this time, it is imperative that I analyze the data received through interview responses and observations. When beginning this process, I assumed that I would find more negative feedback about the staff member's position on the basis of racism. The bias must be taken in account that perhaps staff members wouldn't have answered me negatively considering I am a sorority member myself, however, I expected to hear that at least sometimes, that this construct bothered them. However, overall they truly do enjoy their jobs so much that they acknowledge the aspects of race when asked about it, but that it doesn't bother them whatsoever. ✓

Participating in this assignment has encouraged me to become even closer with staff members and also observe and pay attention to their actions. When watching the interactions between staff members and sorority members, yes, there is a sense of serving and the racial construct is obvious, but there is always a sense of joy and comradery in the house between these groups that overcomes the racial construct. I wouldn't have it absolutely any other way. I believe that college is a time for growth and perhaps girls raised in the south with a racist background have learned to treat black's with more respect because of this dynamic. There is a feeling that is apparent throughout all through the house, a sense that members feel as if they have achieved a goal of some sort if they are "close" with staff members. Sorority members desire to be close to staff members. Maybe it is because we don't have our mothers or fathers at school, we feel as if someone