

"I am a Kappa. What is expected of me? What are Kappa standards? How do they affect my life as a member of the Fraternity?" Twenty-six years ago former Fraternity President Sally Moore Nitschke, *Ohio State*, responded to these questions in her article entitled "Your Character, The Criteria of hers" published in the Spring 1983 issue of *The Key*. Sally's words are as appropriate today as they were when she wrote them.

How often these questions are asked. And how difficult they are to answer. Let me share with you some of my thoughts about Kappa standards: what they are, where you find them and why they are so important.

Each individual member of Kappa Kappa Gamma has a value system, goals and personal objectives shaped by her life experiences. Each chapter becomes a collection of those individuals on a campus, unique in its historical traditions and geography. Each chapter too has its heritage, new or of long standing, which gives it a particular ecology at any given moment.

The Fraternity is a composite of these different individuals at different points of our lives bound together by the fragile ties of sisterhood. Unity in diversity is the key. The strength of our Fraternity is not the many who are alike but the many who are different but who **share like ideals**. Kappa has maintained for these 113 (now 139) years a continuity of membership and strength of accomplishment of which we all are proud.

I believe that is because of the undergirding of values upon which all else is based that Kappa has endured. These values we know as Kappa standards. They are accepted by consensus by the substantial majority of our members as criteria by which to measure our individual actions.

Standards then are those criteria for individual excellence not covered in the *Constitution, Bylaws, and Standing Rules* or found outlined in our many manuals, though of course these resources aid and enhance them. Standards are those values our members accept, understand and translate into their lives. They are not rules stated by ideals to aspire to. These values are so important that they can never be taken for granted because in Kappa they take on a special meaning. Because we are Kappas any single action of an individual may have an almost limitless effect upon others. **Our lives do affect one another**. The Fraternity, each chapter and every member are like a braided rug; for our aims, our work, our good times, our joys, our sorrows are so entwined with one another that when something happens to one of us, we are all affected.

The results of this interdependence are that one of us becomes stronger. Standards help each of us know who and where we are. Kappa provides through the opportunity we have to live and work together, a constant chance for self-renewal. Kappa standards are defined and redefined by each member through the years in their lives as undergraduates and alumnae.

Yet you can not assimilate these values by learning words and their definitions. You learn instead attitudes, habits and ways of thinking. You do not learn ethical principles; you emulate ethical (or unethical) people. You do not analyze or list the attributes you wish to develop; you identify with people who have those qualities. The nurturing of Kappa standards goes on each day. It goes on in the classroom, on the job, at parties and in the chapter house. It is communicated more through what you do than what you say.

Yet don't think for a moment that your task is to hold fast to ancient edicts of no relevance to you. Kappa standards are not enshrined as historical documents or stowed in the archives; they are the vital force of a viable organization. And it is your job, and a hard one indeed, to recreate those values, continuously. Standards are living changing things, as open for misuse and decay as for renewal and reinforcement. And one thing is certain, standards are never more important than the value you place upon them.

Where can you find these standards? You hear the words often: you have learned the ideas as a pledge (new member); you say the phrases regularly. Kappa standards are stated clearly and simply in the Fraternity purpose, the promises we make to one another and in the moving beautiful words of our ritual.

The purpose of Kappa Kappa Gamma is to unite women, through membership, in a close bond of friendship, seeking to instill in them a spirit of mutual love and helpfulness, to the end that each member and the Fraternity-at-large may attain social, moral and intellectual excellence.

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In the Fraternity purpose the criteria for excellence is clear. Close bonds of friendship, spirit of love and helpfulness and excellence in social (used in the broad sense of belonging to a group), moral (concerned with the judgment of the goodness of human action) and intellectual (pertaining to the intellect) affairs.

Consider too the promises you made as a pledge (new member) -----

"I give my name and interest . . ."

Your name is your badge as bright and representative as the key you wear. You are known as someone who adheres to and represents the standards of Kappa Kappa Gamma. Through you, people will know Kappa. Your interest is your time, your talents and your best efforts on behalf of your chapter. You thus pledge to attend every meeting; you accept jobs asked of you because it will help the group; you take an active interest in the lives of your sisters because your lives through friendship are intertwined.

And because of your name and what it represents, and your interest and what it accomplishes, you and the Fraternity prosper. Even more important because of your interest and accomplishments you grow as an individual. Individual growth and Fraternity excellence are synonymous.

"I will avoid injuring the name of Kappa Kappa Gamma . . ."

Your promise to always make your chapter proud that you represent them, not because you act for Kappa Kappa Gamma but because by your adherence to the excellence Kappa asks of you, you are *proud of yourself*. Kappa excellence comes from the commitment of each member to the deepest values within herself. Kappa is honored by the actions and accomplishments of each individual and of course can be diminished by actions which detract.

"I will be womanly and true."

How many definitions there are of the terms "womanly and true." As new roles emerge for women in home, jobs, careers and community these basic values still belong to today's women. The values of compassion, courtesy, civility, tolerance and understanding are attributes of the "womanly and true."

The standards expressed in the purpose, the promises we make and the ritual provide us with the dual challenges of responsibility and accountability. We are all accountable to each other in the most fundamental ways. Through our chapter life we can articulate these standards and suggest appropriate expectations which can apply the kindest, most subtle influence for good upon each of our members.

So for me **Kappa is an action word**. I hope that you never again hear the words of our ritual without relating them to your own life. **Kappa is** its members. It is judged by the women who are a part of it. Kappa standards are those values you share with countless women through the years **which you have put to work** in your lives.

You will find, I think, that you will never be quite the same again.

Self respect cannot be bought.

It is never for sale.

It comes to us when we are alone.

In quiet moments, in quiet places

When we suddenly realize

That knowing the good

We have done it.

Knowing the beautiful

We have served it.

Knowing the truth

We have spoken it. (Judge Myers)