

Family Rituals Interview Assignment

“Family rituals are activities or behaviors that are predictably enacted by family members and that take on symbolic meaning. Rituals may be big annual events, or small and even mundane everyday practices -- just so long as family members attribute symbolic meaning to them.” Looking at this general definition, I struggled picking a ritual to talk about with a family member. My family has a lot of normal traditions surrounding our holidays or birthdays, which is a common norm for most American families, but for this assignment I really wanted to push myself and think deeper about a ritual my family does unique to us that we attribute a great deal of symbolic meaning to, and what I came up with and am going to discuss in this reflection paper is my family’s annual tradition of eating a specific meal the night we get a deer every hunting season.

In more detail, the ritual my dad spoke about was every season before we deer hunt, we enter the woods, and we say a hunter’s prayer and thank God for blessing us to be able to partake in hunting that year. We also pray that we will be able to get something and remain safe while we are out. We then wait, we hunt, and when we get a deer, we field dress our own deer. While getting the deer ready to bring to the meat processor, my family eats a specific recipe the night we get the deer. We make our family’s venison tenderloin recipe with mushrooms, onions, and cheese. Our meal the night of the kill is something I considered to be the main part of the ritual, but my dad’s perspective made me realize it’s so much more than just that. Hunting is a long and symbolic process that takes a lot of time preparing before the season even starts. I’d like to say that me and my family have a pre-ritual of getting everything ready to go before opening day. Some of the things we continue to do the same each year include making sure our guns are

sighted properly and everything is working safely and efficiently. We also have to buy our licenses for the current season, have all of our warm clothes scent proofed, check the blinds and stands, and then, the most fun part, we buy the same delicious snacks which includes beef sticks, cosmic brownies, and then putting them in bags that don't make any noise. These were all things I didn't consider to be a part of the annual hunting ritual because I've always thought of it as being more about what my family did to celebrate after the hunt, but with my dad's perspective I was able to recognize that what we do before we go out is just as meaningful and symbolic as what we do after the hunt.

I chose to interview my dad for this assignment because I find myself bonding with my dad the most when we are hunting and fishing together. He is the one who made me realize I have a passion for being outdoors and respecting the wilderness. In terms of family traditions, my dad has always implemented the same rituals he had growing up with me in my childhood. For a lot of my school assignments, I typically go to my mom for advice or ask for her participation and I thought this would be a great opportunity to learn more about our annual hunting season ritual and make my dad feel more included while I'm away at college.

My dad expressed to me that nobody else besides him hunted in my family as he was growing up. His brother (my uncle James), his sister (my aunt Darcy), and his biological dad had no interest in hunting. My dad had somewhat of an unpleasant childhood, as he was in and out of foster care and he told me that his foster dad was the one who taught my dad how to hunt, and he was the one who started the tradition that my family still continues today. I have never asked my dad about this before, but it was really sweet hearing him describe to me that his foster dad taught him many other life skills besides hunting and fishing that he still uses today.

I believe this ritual emphasizes a lot of values and beliefs my family embodies. We value respect, honor, safety, love, and God. In having this hunting ritual, we are taking the time to perform this act that symbolizes all of these things. My family has always prioritized safety by making sure the equipment and overall environment we are hunting in is one that is secure. We also value being humane towards anyone or any animal, we do not believe in trophy hunting, we simply hunt and fish to provide food for our family. My dad has always stressed the importance to always remain humane during the hunt, and hunt with the intent to kill as efficiently as possible. This takes a lot of time and training to practice safety and to understand the anatomy and logistics that go into hunting that most people who do not hunt are not aware of. Our family's tradition of eating our meal the night of the kill means a lot to my immediate family since I am an only child and have no siblings. My parents take pride knowing I will continue this ritual with my own children someday. I know this tradition means the world to my dad each year, for many reasons. He enjoys it and continues to do it annually because he has a passion for hunting and being outdoors, but he also equally enjoys spending quality time with his family. He loves having this dedicated time set aside to go out with me, and then to enjoy a nice celebratory meal. He stated, "knowing that I took something that God blessed me with and being able to feed and provide for my family is unlike anything else." My entire family is very passionate about being outdoors and hunting and fishing, so knowing that my family has this generational ritual/meal that celebrates this incredible moment each season is something that I don't take for granted, and I feel blessed to be able to continue every year.

I believe growing up in a small town in central Wisconsin these types of post-kill hunting traditions are pretty common for families of my geographic background, so I believe an outsider would observe this ritual and be able to convey that my family likes to take time to enjoy a meal

that we were blessed with and that we value each other being able bodied and in good health to participate in hunting each season. I think most people from my area would view this ritual as being very typical. For an outsider with a different opinion and understanding of hunting, who may not have had the same exposure to deer hunting whether that is due to cultural, religious, geographic differences, might view my family's ritual as being more negative given they're looking at it from that outside perspective. This is something that I was able to understand more growing up, that hunting is not for everyone, and my family has taught me to be very aware of this and how to be respectful towards others and their values and opinions during hunting season.

New family members have been socialized into learning about this ritual every year around hunting season in a very implicit way, as my parents and I express how excited we are to get something and have our tenderloin meal together. I asked my dad, "are outside members of the family allowed to participate in this ritual?" and he had to stop and think for a minute. He had never really given it much thought before, but my dad has invited new members of the family or even family members who had an interest in going out where they didn't have interest previously. My dad just expressed for safety reasons, depending on who they are outside of the family and how much trust he's established with them would make him more inclined to say yes or no to being allowed to hunt our land. Normally if we go out to public land in our area, we've gone with new members of the family and have had a blast!

After completing this interview and taking some time to reflect on my family's ritual I have realized that this is the one time of the year that my family uses these specific skills, and we are beyond blessed for what we have received during this time. By participating in this ritual every year, I've gained new skills, new memories, and it has given me time to spend time with my family and what we've accomplished together. My dad was beyond proud to be included in

this assignment, and he kept expressing to me that this tradition means so much to him, and it means even more that I will continue this ritual with my own family one day. Throughout my childhood this ritual within my family has remained constant every season, and it is something I truly feel blessed to be a part of and look forward to annually.

List of my interview questions:

- Please describe this ritual with as much detail as you can.
- What does this ritual mean to you?
- What is the history or origin of this ritual?
- Why do we continue this ritual as a family?
- Are outside members of the family allowed to participate in this ritual?