

Drunken dorm antics disruptive

By John Silber
Collegiate Times

Earlier this year, Boston University proposed new regulations limiting overnight visiting in their dormitories and controlling alcohol use. These proposed regulations were greeted with strident objections by those who viewed them as

Commentary

an infringement on students' rights as "adults."

Properly understood, however, these new regulations are a defense of fundamental rights, such as the right to privacy and the right to study. The problems that led to these regulations at Boston University were not unique to that institution; they are widespread throughout the recent history of the American university.

Thirty years ago, most colleges and universities unashamedly assumed the role of "in loco parentis" — a Latin phrase meaning "in the position of a parent." This surrogate relationship was most obviously manifest in university living arrangements. Dormitories were sexually segregated, and there were elaborate regulations governing their use which came to be known as "parietals," another Latinism meaning "within the walls."

Curfews ensured that students were at least in the dormitory by a decorous hour — perhaps 11 p.m. during the week and 1 a.m. on the weekend. And if they did not spend the night in the dormitory, they were required to sign themselves out to a specific and approved alternative location.

Beginning in the 1960s these regulations were swept away. Students were reclassified as adults, free of parental regula-

tions both literally and metaphorically. In their newly liberated situation, many students' attempt at self-regulation was over-run in a so-called revolution of sexual promiscuity.

None of these changes would necessarily have affected the quality of life in dormitories had college students conducted themselves with the sort of consideration for others that was once assumed the mark of maturity.

At the same time, the rise of rock music introduced a new vehicle for inconsiderate behavior. College students began arriving in dormitories with the electronic capability to destroy the peace and quiet that are essential to intellectual work.

Let us be clear about this: the student who uses his stereo to destroy peace and quiet is invading the privacy rights of other students. Bad as this noise pollution was, another, and more extraordinary, invasion was added: sex was gradually transformed from an intimate relationship into a spectator sport, frequently imposed on unwilling roommates.

As president of a university, I began to receive complaints from students that their roommates were moving in "Significant Others" for occasional nights, or sometimes, for every night. I suspect the proportion of willing voyeurs is no greater among college students than among the general population. I do know many students were outraged at being made unwilling audiences of their roommates' sexual behavior.

The offending roommates insisted on their rights as adults, which they interpreted as broadly as necessary to justify their escapades. It is clear that such behavior is not an expression of freedom but of irresponsibility. Unfortunately, the English language lacks a term

meaning "one who has reached the age of adulthood while remaining an adolescent." This term would not properly apply to all college students, most of whom fully merit the label of "adult." But it is clear that some do not.

At Boston University, we are committed to the proposition that the dormitories are an extension of our educational program. We do not require upper-classmen to live in dormitories, but we are determined that for those who live there, our dormitories offer an environment that is supportive of education rather than actively hostile to it. In furtherance of this commitment, we have developed regulations that will effectively limit noise pollution and drunkenness and remove involuntary voyeurism as elements of college life.

One would have thought that few would object to these goals. Exhibitionists, perhaps, might find them threatening, but they must be no more numerous than the roommates they offend. Yet student after student argued that the proposed regulations violated their rights as adults. One student argued that anyone who was bothered by couplings in the bed across the room was simply too immature to be in college. Such a claim suggests that the adult rights are assumed to include the right to be as childish as possible. There was surprisingly little concern for the problems we were trying to examine — which, after all, are students' problems, caused by the inconsiderate behavior of other students.

We have learned from this experience that the Sexual Revolution has its own version of the Brezhnev Doctrine: no bit of sexual territory, once "liberated," must ever be lost to the enemy. That sexuality should be reduced to a public exhibition forced on an unwilling audience shows the fraudulent nature of the "liberation" that has been carried out in recent decades.

At Boston University, we are committed to restoring a modest level of decorum and concern for others in our dormitories. We make no apology for that.

John Silber is president of Boston University.

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