

# Op-Ed

## Dorm prisons

# Students feel stricter regulations as infringement of rights

by John Silber  
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self-regulation. None of these changes would necessarily have affected the quality of life in college dormitories had college students universally or even predominantly 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. There could hardly be a better example of technology rapidly outrunning the ethics that ought to have guided its use.

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 relation 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 everynight. 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 needed to cover their escapades. It is clear that such behavior is not an expression of freedom but of license. Unfortunately, the English language lacks a term meaning "one who has reached the age of majority 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 upperclassmen to live in dormitories, but we are determined that for those who live there, and 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 an incident 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 address -- which, after all,

are students' problems, caused by the inconsiderate behavior of other students.

We have learned from this experience the 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.

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