

January 1968

Comment

Rachel Scott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/dlr>

Recommended Citation

Rachel Scott, Comment, 45 Denv. L.J. 620 (1968).

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Denver Law Review at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Denver Law Review by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact jennifer.cox@du.edu, dig-commons@du.edu.

Comment

COMMENT

BY RACHEL SCOTT*

THE last thing a student militant wants to admit is that his compatriots are themselves more oppressive than the administration. On the Kansas State University campus, students traditionally have had a voice in their own affairs. In fact, it is the kind of a voice that activists on more progressive campuses dream about.

Now, conservatives at Kansas State are acting like dogs-in-the-manger with student rights. Recently, students — under the approving eyes of a comparatively liberal administration — began to exercise their long acknowledged but seldom exercised right to make decisions. They did so, however, more in the spirit of restraint than enlightenment. In a bittersweet victory last year, women voted for “self-limited” hours for junior and senior women. However, they added a compromise clause that gave each living group power to modify the rules.

Predictably, 11 of 16 living groups, the sororities, clamped stringent restrictions on hours in spite of anguish among the liberal minorities within each group. This might be compared to the United States Congress passing a sweeping civil rights measure, then allowing each state to modify and interpret the law as it saw fit. Just as Negroes object to state modification of civil rights bills, so, in this case, did a minority within each of the 11 sororities. However, the protests were not loud enough. There was no legitimate channel for appeal, since the rules were approved by the minority of those in the living groups and sanctioned by the votes of a majority of women on campus.

Thus, ironically, while students on other campuses complained of oppression from the administration, at Kansas State — where students were given practically free reign to make their own decisions — coeds in sororities opted to self-impose restrictions.

Such issues are seemingly trivial in the turbulence of larger campus and social concerns. But the student is affected by his environment — whether it be an unhappy family life or an 18-story dormitory. Those who would agree with such arbitrary restrictions should realize that creativity is an important part of education. For some students, creativity is born of a spontaneity that cannot survive in an atmosphere of strict regulation, built on negative reinforcement. The student who does not conform is always “thrown against

* Student participant, Kansas State University.

a wall of punishments," effectively dampening the spirit of free inquiry necessary for learning.

While other students may welcome the security of having decisions made for them, they simultaneously forfeit the chance for self-determination. How can a student actively participate in the educational process without, at some point, making important decisions about where he is going with his life? Like Nora in Ibsen's *The Doll's House*, the girl who never leaves the shadow of a protector — father, institution, or husband — will never be her own person. She is her father's daughter, her husband's wife, her son's mother, but never anything for herself. Perhaps the transitional period from home to husband — the college years — is the one best chance for a woman to break the bonds of dependency and find herself. Such personal decisions are too vital to education to be denied, whether by students or administrators. This is not meant to be an argument for a return to administration control of student life, but it is offered as an example of another breed of parietal control disguised as democracy.

The student is a member of a special community. As such, he has traditionally lived under privileged conditions on many campuses. On the contemporary campus, what were once privileges have now become liabilities as the campus is pushed by increasing student mobility and action toward merger with the larger society around it. And, as this larger society insures its citizens certain basic rights, inviolate against the will of the majority or minority, so should the university community recognize certain basic rights for its members.

It is hard to quarrel with democracy. But it should be realized that democratic decisions do not inevitably reflect wisdom. Student reformers whose goal is to give students power to make the decisions that affect their lives should realize that once they have accomplished that goal, they may be no more satisfied than before with the decisions that are made.