

GALLEY



While the men-in-rooms issue is a major concern of the college, it reflects a situation much more serious, as expressed in Monday night's community meeting. The situation becomes aggravated because Bennington girls are primarily self-oriented rather than community-oriented, and many seemingly do not care about other people's feelings. The situation becomes aggravated because there is no awareness of "community" here.

The present thinking revolves around the question of autonomy vis-a-vis rules -- but the two ought not to be intertwined. Our outlook ought not to be autonomy in order to circumvent the existing rules, but rather, autonomy to encourage individual and community growth.

There are some convincing arguments for autonomy at Bennington:

- 1) There is at present no community at Bennington. This is not simply due to apathy and selfishness on the part of students or anyone else, but it is due to the current climate of opinion. Things being what they are at the present moment, small 'communities', i.e., autonomous student houses, can better satisfy the "need for community" which is the fundamental element now lacking.
- 2) There can be no community unless it be an active community. Ad hoc communities are irrelevant and harmful; they aren't even communities. The need to determine one's own destiny must be satisfied: the communities must decide the decisions that affect them, not simply adhere to them.
- 3) The 'rule of the tyrants' (who ostracize minorities within the houses) is sufficiently widespread to elicit serious concern. This cannot be tolerated: yet such a situation does not develop necessarily, and with autonomous government would probably disappear. The only way to arrive at mature community involvement is through personal involvement which cannot be incorporated in a rule. This happened in Kentucky, which is as much, if not more, self-oriented than Bennington. One such example was when \$200 was given to a community for home improvement. Before the community had been acting on its own decisions, all the strong members fought among themselves. After they had achieved the security and positiveness of making their own decisions, they became genuinely and actively concerned about the less able members of the community.
- 4) The houses might become distinctive and even exclusive temporarily, but this would be lessened as students became oriented toward the responsibilities of their living situation. Further, the total community would become stronger as the various parts became stronger.
- 5) The decisions that affect the total community could be acted upon more effectively than at present. Community involvement is a maturing process that begins on a small scale, e.g., autonomous houses, and is later applied to the larger community. More time, effort, and interest would be available for the total community, as well as more homogeneity and positive thinking. It would bring the college together, because it would bring the houses together and encourage in students the habit of thinking and acting together.
- 6) No other proposal permits true growth of the student or the community.
- 7) The concern for the "total image" and the problem of alienating alumnae and trustees would die of inanition, as sensitive issues would not be formulated as 'college policies'.

It might be that the men-in-rooms issue cannot be settled. But this, although important, is not the paramount concern. Rather, as long as we continue to worry about the "Bennington community" when there is at present no community, we encourage static thinking. That is our helplessness, that is our concern and our lack of concern. Our goal now must be to develop a community, and that seems most feasible through autonomous student houses.

Autonomy does not imply anarchy, but rather independent democracy. Community should not merely imply friendly interaction but, rather, active decision-making and participation. When we understand this, then we can progress to even more pressing problems.

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