

Crowds in Asheville lose their tops in support of womens' rights

By [Kelly Blessing](#) | The Daily Tar Heel

In the 60s, women burned their bras in support of women's rights. Now they're just losing them.

Recent rallies promoting women's right to go topless, including one in Asheville, have sparked controversy about the extent to which women should flaunt this freedom.

A multitude of topless women took over the streets of downtown Asheville Aug. 21 during a rally hosted by GoTopless.org, an organization that claims women have the same constitutional right as men to go topless in public.

The national group organized 12 rallies that took place throughout the country.

The Asheville rally, which drew thousands, according to onlookers, engendered debate among local activists and citizens.

It is legal in North Carolina for women to go topless in public, and it has been since a 1970 N.C. Court of Appeals ruling.

RJ Wells, an Asheville resident, said the message of the rally was lost because the demonstration was done inappropriately.

"I wholeheartedly support equality for all citizens, but the way to spread this message isn't by standing on a fountain, making a spectacle by screaming 'I want to see more titties up here,'" Wells said.

The U.S. Supreme Court has never officially ruled whether women can bare their breasts in public. The issue so far has been decided state by state.

But John Samples, director of the Center for Representative Government at the Cato Institute, said most courts probably wouldn't find such policies unconstitutional.

A New Jersey case in 2001 rejected a claim that laws distinguishing male and female toplessness violated the equal protection clause of the 14th amendment.

"Restrictions on exposure of the female breast are supported by the important governmental interest in safeguarding the public's moral sensibilities," stated the ruling.

Besides North Carolina, 11 other states have laws allowing women to go topless.

While toplessness is allowed in these states, many cities have ordinances prohibiting women to bare their breasts in public.

Sgt. Josh Mecimore of the Chapel Hill Police Department said Chapel Hill has no ordinance banning toplessness.

“The only exception is that local governments are allowed to regulate local businesses, such as topless and semi-nude bars,” he said.

Although it is legal for women to walk around topless in North Carolina, Carl Mumpower, a former vice mayor and councilman of Asheville, said laws, such as ones against indecent exposure and child abuse, were broken during the August rally.

Mumpower, who held an opposition rally earlier this week, questioned the morality of women going topless.

“But they should be free to do so,” Mumpower said in an email. “How they go about it and how they impact children by sexual performance in front of children is my issue.”

But Emily Murphy, a freshman at UNC-A who attended the rally said students and other bystanders did not seem bothered.

“A lot of people brought their kids to the rally, and they seemed perfectly fine, dancing to music and beating on drums.”

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