

RESEARCH ON NUDITY, CHILD MOLESTATION AND SELF-ESTEEM
AS IT RELATES TO BOTH NUDIST AND NON-NUDIST CHILDREN

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The initial premise precipitating this research was that nudist children have a higher likelihood of being sexually molested by an adult than their counterparts in the non-nudist world. Several items of interest were researched, including self-esteem (both in children and in adults who grew up as nudists), the normalcy of nudists, sexual habits and practices of both nudists and non-nudists, statistical frequency of molestation and previous court rulings involving child custody where nudism was an issue. Both empirical and anecdotal information is presented.

Societal attitude toward nudity:

Margaret Mead, in her extensive anthropological study Male and Female, stated that “there are surprisingly many American children today who literally do not know the genital difference between males and females.” And in her own column in Redbook magazine, she stated, “. . . current subculture trends [speaking of nudism] will influence society so that . . . children can run free . . . without wearing clothes. . . . What we need is . . . freedom from prudery.”

Dennis Craig Smith in The Naked Child interviewed numerous adults who were raised as nudists. One such adult stated (page 134), “Our society is a bad atmosphere to bring children up in. Out there is swinging, sexual promiscuity and even violence. I’ll take the nudist camp; you can have the rest of society who think if you take your clothes off you suddenly will be corrupted.”

Helga Fleischhauer-Hardt is a psychiatrist and former president of the School for Parent Education in Reinack/Basil, Switzerland. In the explanatory text for her book, Show Me!, she states, “Seeing parents nude is not harmful and to be avoided, not seeing parents and other family members nude is what causes sexual trauma and poor sexual adjustment.”

Self-Esteem:

The entire body of research indicates that nudist children have a better self-image which fosters better self-esteem. Marilyn and Norman Story in “Body Self-Concept of Nudist and Non-nudist Preschool Children” (a study written up for the Journal of Social Psychology) wrote: “In terms of how positive they (children) felt about their bodies, their attitude toward their genitals and what the research termed ‘total body self-concept,’ nudist children and adults scored higher than non-nudists in all categories.”

Marilyn Story herself served as an expert witness in a case in Tennessee. A portion of her written testimony stated, “Over the past 20 years, I have conducted and published several scientific studies of nudist children . . . and have served as an expert witness. Some of the findings of my studies were that nudists generally had more conservative attitudes and values than non-nudists . . . and nudist children had higher body self-concepts than non-nudists.”

Fleischhaure-Hardt states, “A child who has never been allowed to see his parents and brothers and sisters naked see nudity as something shocking. Children will only have a sense of their bodies as something “good” if they receive much tenderness and devotion from their parents from birth.”

Normalcy of Nudists:

Dennis Craig Smith and William Sparks, in Growing Up Without Shame, summarized a large volume of research with this comment (page 191): “For the most part, the social nudists did not indicate a noticeable departure from their social-economic-status peers in terms of the evidence of psychiatric treatment. . . . Similarly, L. Gross, the editor of Sexual Behavior, printed, “The nudist movement was a good and healthy place to raise children and . . . nudists, as a whole, seem to be of sound psychological health.”

Amy Clark, for her article in the University of Florida student publication Orange & Blue, observed a family of six nudists as the four children interacted with the parents in both nude and non-nude settings. Her comment was, “. . . [the parents] are also very open with their children about bodies. . . . Questions about why certain body parts look the way they do . . . have been asked. Both parents feel it is most appropriate to answer the questions matter-of-factly.” Steve Vickers, life-long nudist, is quoted in Amy’s article (page 24) as stating, “Often times, you find better relationships between kids and their caregivers in a nudist community.”

Two quotes from the video Welcome to Our World are indicative of the caring and family-like closeness that is fostered in a nudist environment. One mother at a club in Florida states, “Children that grow up in a nudist environment have probably the most grandmas, grandpas, aunts and uncles in the entire world.” A man at another club simply says, “We are one big family.”

In his book, Dennis Craig Smith interviews adults who grew up as nudist children. One of these, Clara, states, “We did have a nice close group of people at the camp. It didn’t matter that we were nudists; we could have been bridge-clubbers. . . . It could have been a church camp.

Sexual Attitudes and Activities of Nudists and Non-nudists:

L. Castler researched the sociopsychological aspects of living in a nudist environment and wrote them up for the Journal of Social Psychology. He made two observations that are pertinent here. First, in general, he stated (page 307 – 323), “A high moral tone . . . seems to pervade most nudist camps.” And, in addressing attitudes in nudist youth, he wrote, “. . . [nudist teenagers] recognized that nudism was giving them a more realistic outlook toward sex than their non-nudist friends possessed.”

M.S. Weinberg in a professional journal called Social Problems, stated (page 311 – 318), “Sexual interests are very adequately controlled in the nudist camp . . . , in fact [they] are controlled to a much greater extent than they are outside . . . except for clothing modesty.”

Andrea Cooper, writing for Detail magazine, observed the following: “Anyone who thinks nudity is automatically sexy hasn’t spent much time with nudists. When they get naked they like to do it in a wholesome, family-friendly atmosphere that would resemble a Baptist church supper if the Baptists went for strip volleyball.”

Again, Dennis Craig Smith summarizes these concepts on page 47 of The Naked Child, “. . . intimacy, whether people are dressed or undressed, cues sexual arousal. . . . being nude watching TV or playing shuffleboard is [not] sexually stimulating. The situation has far more to do with sexual arousal than the outfit.”

J.H. Court, in Australian Psychologist magazine, stated, "The social nudism experience, by its very nature of being a social activity, is self-chaperoning.

But what about teens who are actually in the situation, confronted by their own nudity and that of others? The following three quotes are directly from the youth who have experienced these phenomena.

Danielle, age 16, in an interview in Teen People Magazine stated, "Sometimes a guy will think being a nudist means I'm "easy," but I make it clear that's not true. . . . Other people probably think nudists are constantly thinking about sex, but you don't become one for sexual reasons."

Deborah, who grew up a nudist, told Dennis Craig Smith in an interview, "Actually I never had sex with a nudist. We were too much like family."

David, who also grew up a nudist, told Smith, "Most of my friends would not like the camps because they're too tame, too respectable for them. Those were non-nudists [pregnant girls], but it didn't mean they were less sexually active. In fact, no one ever got pregnant at the camp or at the JWSA [youth] convention – at least not that I heard about." Smith summarized David's attitude by stating, ". . . [he] explained that sexual activity was easier to engage in "on the outside" – with non-nudist peers – because the rules are so strict at most of the clubs they attended. . . . The children were very carefully supervised when at the camp."

Perhaps the most telling information is purely statistical, as quoted by Richard Pearl in his master's thesis. In a Harris Poll taken in 1986, 57% of American 18-year-olds answered positively (yes) to the question, "Have you ever engaged in sex?" A similar poll taken by Smith and Sparks **in the same year**, showed that nudist teens have an incidence of sexual intercourse in only 26.7% of the cases by age 18. Both polls were done scientifically and it does not require an expert in statistics and standard deviation and margin of error to observe a significant difference.

Sexual Abuse of Children, Nudist and Non-nudist:

Darkness to Light, an organization dedicated to preventing child sexual abuse, has a thorough course of study for adults. Most of the current officials (2009) of the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR) have taken this course. The information, of course, is applicable both within and without the nudist environment. Darkness to Light states, "More than 80% of sexual abuse cases occur in one-adult/one-child situations." In the AANR Youth Camps, there is never a situation where there are not at least two adults chaperoning activities, even in the middle of the night.

Darkness to Light also states that "30 – 40% of children who are sexually abused are abused by family members. . . . Fewer than 10% of abusers are strangers." Again, this is a statistic developed in the non-nudist environment. Sexual abuse does not focus on any one subgroup of society, although Darkness to Light points out that situations where the child is permitted to be alone with a coach, teacher, or member of the clergy is more likely to foster the abuse. Adults who care about children will see that doors are left open, that activities are public, and that adults working with children are put on notice that other adults are watching all activities.

The incidence of abuse by family members is substantiated in several studies, including Dr. James Docherty's book Growing Up, A Guide for Children and Parents. Dr. Docherty is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Medicine (Great Britain). He states (page 93), "Victims [of sexual abuse] are just as likely to be abused by people they already know – abusers may be anyone around, relatives or even members of the [immediate] family." He reinforces this again on page 96 when he states, "Unfortunately, many young people are abused by their father, stepfather or other close relative."

So what is the incidence of sexual abuse in the nudist environment? Aileen Goodman, in her book Therapy, Nudity and Joy, summarizes the findings of Marilyn Story: "Dr. Story found that only 5% of the nudists had sexual contact with a family member other than a spouse, while 14% of the non-nudists had such an experience. And to the question 'Have you ever raped or attempted to rape a person?,' nudists were 0% and non-nudists 3%."

Herbert S. Roth, a clinical psychologist licenced in the state of California, gave the following written testimony as an expert witness in a case in Tennessee: "Over more than a few decades of nudist activity, I know of only one incident of adult-child impropriety, more quickly and appropriately dealt with in that nudist group than would have ever been the case had something of like nature occurred in school, church, or home. . . . Salacious sexual behaviors may, of course, occur regardless of state of dress or undress."

Legal Precedents:

There is so much misunderstanding about the philosophy and activities of a nudist environment that it makes unbiased judgement nearly impossible. Smith and Sparks state it this way (page 121), "Our society does not understand what sexual openness means. It equates being nude with sexual activity. Unfortunately, our society considers it 'normal' for people to be uncomfortable about their anatomy, unresolved about sexuality, and confused about what constitutes actions that lead to destructive behavior. 'Normal' people remain clothed at all times. There are, therefore, no provisions in our legal system to deal fairly with those individuals who believe differently."

There is case law on both sides of this issue, but it serves no useful purpose to state situations where the nudists have been treated unfairly by a biased judge. Here are two brief statements made by judges who realized that nudists are just as "normal" as other folks.

In *Maty v. Mosely*, the judge stated: "The question would be whether or not the children are adversely affected by it [nudism], and I don't find from the evidence that they have been or that they predictably will be."

In *Hadley v. Cox*, the opinion of the Florida District Court of Appeals was written as follows: "He [the father] offered no witnesses or tangible evidence that the daughter's visits at the [nudist] camp were detrimental or harmful to her." The court ruled in favor of the mother being allowed to take her daughter to a nudist camp.

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