

Public attitudes

A British Naturism Briefing Paper - Malcolm Boura - April 2007

In many ways naturists find themselves in a similar position to that of the gay community of 10 or 20 years ago.

- Some people evince prejudice and fear based on ignorance and indoctrination. Fortunately for naturists, these people are a small and shrinking minority.
- Only a minority of naturists are brave enough, some would say foolhardy enough, to "*come out*", but the number is growing.

The public are much more accepting of and supportive for naturism than many people believe possible. Levels of participation are also much higher than most people expect and they would be higher still if it wasn't for fear of prejudice.

The 2001 NOP survey asked questions about peoples attitudes to naturism and naturists. It showed that:

- Nearly half of adults consider naturists to be sensible.
- Nine out of ten adults consider naturists to be harmless.
- Only 2% of adults thought that naturists were criminal.

The survey also showed that children in the household had no discernible difference in most circumstances. The exceptions were a small effect for gardens 64/69% and public swimming pools 57/64%.

Surveys in other countries have found similar results. Naturism is much more generally accepted than most people imagine could be possible. There are many people with neither interest in nor inclination to naturism who nonetheless have no objection to the naturist behaviour of others.

It is amazing what a high proportion of complaints about nudity are on behalf of somebody else. The complainants assume that people will be offended or harmed and that they personally must do something about it. "*Children*" or "*family*" are also often given as reasons for being against nudity. The mantra "*No nudity, there's children about.*" has been repeated so many times that many people assume that nudity is harmful and don't find out the facts. Prudery is demonstrably harmful to people of all ages and there is no objective evidence that nudity does harm to anyone.

There are also people who act against naturists because they think that that is what most people want. Political myth correctness! Fortunately most public bodies take a more sensible, evidence based approach and they are reflecting the growing public acceptance of, and enthusiasm for, naturism.

Attitudes are changing. People are generally becoming more accepting of nudity both in the media and in real life. There is an increasing recognition that nudity is not always connected with sex.

One participant in a TV programme that featured naturists wrote:

"Several other parents at my six year olds' school saw me starkers on the TV (and some of the teachers too!). As it turns out another parent admitted to me that he goes to Cap d'Agde for his hols too!

And there has been not one adverse remark about it all!"

When The Wright Stuff discussed naturism the program had an unusual format - there were no calls or e-mails on

the naturist issue. Despite an audience of several million there were no emails or phone calls in opposition to naturism so the producer allowed the studio discussion to flow without interruption.

The author was interviewed by BBC Radio Cornwall in March 2007 and the interviewer was scornful when told that few people objected to naturism. He said something like "*Wait and see what the phone response is like*". There were no phone calls opposed to naturism.

A survey on Merseyside¹ found that visitors to a beach on the Wirral when invited to state their dislikes listed dogs (27.1%), litter (14.5%), naturist beach (6.8%) and car park (6.3%). The figure for dislike of naturists is almost identical to the "disgusting" figure of the 2001 NOP poll. Notably dogs are disliked by four times as many people, and litter by twice as many as voice a dislike for naturists.

There is much more tolerance of, support for and participation in naturism than most people realise. The presence of children has little effect on attitudes. Levels of tolerance, support and participation are increasing.

¹ Quality of Coastal Towns, Merseyside Coast Visitor Research 2000, Summary of North Wirral Coastal Park.