

Prejudice

A British Naturism Briefing Paper - Malcolm Boura - March 2007

Naturism is non-sexual nudity often but not necessarily in a social context. Unfortunately there are some people unable to distinguish between nudity and sex, who deliberately confuse the two in order to further their own agenda or who are just simply prejudiced. There are often enormous differences between perceived public opinion and actual public opinion. Not surprisingly this leads to problems.

Although there is serious and unjustifiable prejudice against naturists it is less widespread than many people believe. However some people and organisations do ignore the general prohibition on unjustified prejudice so specific protection by law for naturists will probably be necessary.

We know from bitter experience that some councils, some officials, some employers and some providers of goods and services will not treat people fairly where naturism is concerned.

Some people believe that nudity is inherently harmful to children, women, the elderly or some other group of people.

The majority of people don't agree with them but rarely know enough about the facts to feel confident in challenging such mistaken beliefs.

Some people know that the general public are remarkably tolerant of naturism and nudity and that there are surprisingly high levels of support for naturism¹. However there is a widespread belief, even amongst naturists, that the majority of the population are implacably opposed to nudity under almost all circumstances². This means that naturists keep their guilty secret secret³ and few people realise just how many naturists there are. It also means that naturists faced with prejudice frequently decide that it is too risky to fight for their rights.

There are some very prejudiced individuals and they almost invariably assume that nearly everyone else shares their views. Most councils, councillors and officials behave quite correctly but we do meet with appalling prejudice from some. They usually start from the assumption that naturism is illegal and immoral and that in consequence they can act arbitrarily. Even those that should know the law, for example the police and CPS, sometimes make that mistake. This is made worse because people who are not prejudiced often believe that they are in a minority and that it is safer for their careers if they

prejudice *noun* ...

2 a (1) : preconceived judgement or opinion **(2)** : an adverse opinion or leaning formed without just grounds or before sufficient knowledge **b**: an instance of such judgement or opinion **c**: an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics.

take the easy option.

A potential cause of prejudice is religion but we only know of one incident in recent years. The Baptist minister concerned and his church were disowned by the other 6 churches in the town. It was entirely the product of the minister as there is nothing in the bible⁴ to support his

views. We have not researched other religions in any detail but most strictures on dress do seem more the result of culture than of religious fundamentals. Indeed nudity is an integral part of several religions.

When naturists get dressed the disguise is perfect and most naturists keep their naturism a secret for fear of prejudice. Consequently without a good quality survey it is impossible to determine how many naturists there are. The actual figures, according to an NOP poll, show that over a quarter of the UK population have sunbathed or swum nude and that there are well over a million people who describe themselves as being a naturist. At the time of the survey that was almost exactly the same as the membership of the Church of England.

There is specific legal protection against prejudice on grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation and various other things. The result is that many people assume that they can be reckless with respect to other groups and that they can ignore the general prohibition on unjustified prejudice that is provided by the Human Rights Act.

¹ See Statistics briefing note.

² But 9 out of 10 consider naturism to be harmless.

³ A couple (Anglican lay readers, health service worker, teacher, scout & guide leaders) went to a naturist swimming session about 40 miles from home. To their astonishment they encountered their next door neighbours and close friends of 20 years. Neither had dared tell the other that they were naturists.

⁴ A briefing note "Religion - Christianity" will be prepared.