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## Nudists in the Know: Investigating Social Assumptions of a Clothed Society

Sandra E. Schroer

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NUDISTS IN THE KNOW: INVESTIGATING SOCIAL ASSUMPTIONS  
OF A CLOTHED SOCIETY

by

Sandra E. Schroer

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Submitted to the  
Faculty of The Graduate College  
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2001

NUDISTS IN THE KNOW: INVESTIGATING SOCIAL ASSUMPTIONS  
OF A CLOTHED SOCIETY

Sandra E. Schroer, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2001

This work is an institutional ethnography on the ruling relations of clothing in society. Research was conducted through a standpoint methodology which combines interviews, participant observation and the first hand experiences of the researcher.

The interview data reveals nudists' belief in a social preoccupation with body ideals and the power structures created by some uses of clothing. The subjects in this research apply their experiences in both the clothed world and the non-clothed world to expose the implications of the social structures of clothing which appear to effect interpersonal relationships, gender and disability, inequality, prejudice and ageism.

In addition, the standpoint reveals reflexive sociology in which the experiences of being a researcher are considered as they pertain to the role of clothing in professional capacities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Sandra E. Schroer

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
LIST OF TABLES.....	v
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. WHAT IS SOCIAL NUDISM?.....	6
Overview.....	6
Sexuality.....	8
Demographics.....	11
History.....	15
Highlights in the Early History of Nudism in the United States.....	15
III. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....	21
1930s.....	21
1960s.....	23
1980s.....	24
IV. METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK.....	25
Statement of Purpose.....	25
Methodology, Institutional Ethnography.....	26
Conceptual Framework.....	28
Beginning in a Standpoint.....	39
V. GETTING NUDE AND MEETING NUDISTS.....	42
The First Step.....	42
Nude Years Eve.....	43

## Table of Contents--continued

### CHAPTER

Learning From Disabled Nudists.....	50
Jim.....	53
The Reflexive Sociologist.....	56
Disabled Nudists as Educators.....	61
Body Acceptance.....	66
Communication.....	67
VI. WHAT DO NUDISTS KNOW?.....	70
Friendship in the Lifestyle.....	71
Social Interactions.....	77
A Friendly Dyad.....	78
Brunch.....	85
A Nudist's Perspective.....	92
Perspective on Social Problems.....	95
The Power of Self Acceptance.....	99
Sex and Sexuality.....	103
Family Recreation.....	109
VII. CONCLUSION.....	114
Suggestions for Future Research.....	117
APPENDICES	
A. Letter of Permission From the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board.....	118
B. Resort Rules and Regulations.....	120
C. Nudist Participant Vocabulary List.....	122
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	125

## LIST OF TABLES

1. AANR Survey Results.....	13
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This study will discuss the social impacts associated with practicing social nudism. It will describe what nudists know about clothing in our society. This study is not exclusively about nudists, nor nudism. It is also about the general clothing oriented public from a nudists perspective. Therefore, the research questions to be addressed in this study are: What do nudists know about social norms, concerning dress, in our society? Why do they know this? And, what can others learn from them?

For this study I conducted eighteen personal in-depth interviews with male and female adult subjects over the age of twenty-five, who self-identify as social nudists. The interviews took place on private properties where social nudism is a legal activity and within settings that were comfortable and natural for each participant. For some participants this meant interviews were conducted in their homes or vacation homes. For others the interviews took place in a public setting such as a lounge area, within a nudist facility or a public restaurant. When appropriate to the location, interviews were conducted in the nude.

Research was also conducted through participant observation as I attended social functions at nudist gatherings between March of 2000 and October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2000.

The approach I took in conducting this research is a form of qualitative research known as institutional ethnography which includes the researcher's standpoint in the work. Therefore, unlike other forms of interviewing and research, I do not claim objectivity in this work. Instead I acknowledge my standpoint and its strengths in the work. As a practicing social nudist of eight years I acknowledge my place in this research. Not only do I subscribe to the lifestyle of nudism, I also worked for two years as the director of recreation at a Midwest nudist resort. My expertise as both a nudist and a social scientist allow me to reveal insights within the data that would not be apparent to many researchers. I believe it also increased the depth and richness of the data I collected from interview subjects, by using my existing relationship with them to nurture mutual trust and understanding.

By studying the beliefs and practices of nudists I expect to reveal socially prescribed norms and assumptions within the everyday world. Through nudist practices people claim they are released from socially prescribed role expectations which restrain and often define who we are and how we interact with each other in social situations. Furthermore, these expectations flow over into expectations of ourselves and often work as boundaries which define who we are, whom we will socialize with, how we will interact and how we feel about ourselves. These expectations also influence social policy and law. Nudism challenges people of all ages to question common assumptions about topics such as, body image, sexuality, respect of self and others, male-female relationships, social norms, friendships aging

and ablism. It teaches lessons of acceptance, tolerance of both self and others. For some it reaches deeply into a system of personal principals and values. For others it is a simplified lifestyle with direct connections to nature, health and/or spirituality.

By learning about body acceptance we may come to understand how it affects perceptions of self worth. We may see more clearly the harmful effects of a social preoccupation with body ideals as it pertains to women and female adolescents. We may see its influence on personal relationships, power structures and the socialization of children. Each of these lessons is important for two reasons. First, it is a step to creating a more tolerant society of people who embrace diversity. Secondly it is a step to creating a society of people who respect themselves and benefit physically from the belief that they are OK and have something to offer to society no matter what they look like. Furthermore it may foster an acceptance of others as they are, and for whom they are thereby reducing the power of inequality between young and old, fat and thin, handsome and ugly, loved and rejected, worthy and burdensome.

Through this study of nudists and nudism I will reveal how a social preoccupation with the body, in the non nudist (textile) world, is a significant contributing factor in negative and harmful practices which are at the present time socially acceptable such as the social rejection or intolerance of diversity, unattractiveness, disfigurement and ageing.

Data collection was conducted by interviewing friends and

acquaintances, through my personal network within social nudism. Since the nudist community is a very close knit community and one which actively encourages educating the public about its beliefs and practices, subjects were willing and excited to take part in this research project.

There were no known nor anticipated risks to subjects in this study. To date, no subject has expressed discomfort with participation nor any concerns or negative side effects associated with participation.

I did comply with all HSIRB requirements (Appendix A). In order to assure respect and safety for each participant, subjects were extended the option of discontinuing the interview process at any time, as stated in the subject consent form which each of them signed. At no time did any subject express the desire to discontinue their participation in the research.

All data, collected during interviews and participant observations remain confidential for each subject. In order to assure this confidentiality and privacy all written data pertaining to subjects identity, and all information which may be used to identify a subject are disguised by the use of pseudonyms. Personal characteristics, which potentially could identify a subject were either altered or edited out of the analysis in order to further protect the subjects' confidentiality.

At the request of many of the participants, I feel obligated to note that the use of pseudonyms was viewed negatively by many of the

participants. Upon informing them that this procedure was a mandatory precaution regulated by institutional review boards, the subjects complied by consenting. However, many stated that they viewed it as a violation of their right to take a personal stand on behalf of their beliefs and their lifestyle. One subject, Don, stated it as follows:

As long as people hide behind fake names your research in nudism will keep a feeling of secrecy. That secrecy is dangerous to nudism because it keeps people thinking there's something wrong with it. How can we ever hope to change societies' ideas about the body if we can 't represent nudism even in scientific research?

It should also be noted, and is later revealed through research, that open communication, disclosure and honesty are characteristic of nudists. Therefore, it is not surprising that some subjects took offence to mandatory pseudonyms.

Regarding the location of observations, fictitious names were used for all facilities in which observations took place. Observations and interviews were conducted in two states in the United States. While the number of facilities in which interviews took place was limited, the subjects represent a multitude of different resorts. Their voices are presented in this research therefore, an extensive variety of resort culture is represented through their expertise and cumulative years as practicing nudists.

## CHAPTER II

### WHAT IS SOCIAL NUDISM?

#### Overview

Social nudism is the practice or lifestyle of enjoying everyday life and its interactions without clothing. Nudists are generally self defined. By this I mean that due to the nature of nudism researchers cannot conceptualize nudism and then place subjects either within the definition or outside of it. To attempt to do so would lead to an inaccurate representation.

Some people, who consider themselves nudists, enjoy vacations or the occasional weekend trip to a nudist resort, bed and breakfast, beach or campground. For these nudists, life outside the isolation of the occasional nudist destination remains conventional and follows traditional social norms regarding the use of clothing in public, home and workplace. These nudists many participate in nude social activity only once or twice a year. It may be a form of recreation specifically for the adult couple or it may include all members of the family.

Other forms of self identified nudists claim to adopt this as a lifestyle. For these participants, being nude is a way of life. Their use of clothing is based on four things: (1) the logical response to the conditions of nature; (2) a respect for the feelings of non nudists; (3) respect for the law; and (4) the desire to adorn

the body.

Many of these nudists seek ways to live in seclusion. They may buy property where they can live a secluded lifestyle. In the city they may alter their home and yard to accommodate nude living without fear of imposing on others or of social sanctions. Privacy fences and opaque window curtains are two more obvious examples.

For those who cannot adapt their home for nudist living there are recreation sites where they camp and interact with other nudists. These are most often called nudist resorts. Nudist resorts, like nudists, differ in their definitions however there is one, general, common characteristics: all nudist resorts recognize the practice of nude social interaction as a healthy acceptable form of recreation which is based on a mutual respect of self and others.

Most nudist resorts are run on a membership base. This is necessary due for financial stability since many of these resorts are small and owner managed. Co-ops' are another common type of camping facility. In the co-op facility all members share in the maintenance and managing of the campground. For some it is a requirement of membership in addition to annual dues. For others the strong feeling of community fosters cooperation and facilitates the volunteer coordination of recreation events, parties and this means that the core of their visitors purchase annual memberships in order to enjoy the facility as much as they would like.

At one time most were members only clubs in which visitors were expected to join in order to return for a second visit. Now,

however, nudist resorts, like other main stream recreation centers welcome visitors. Many have indeed become vacation destinations and would no longer benefit from a membership program.

### Sexuality

It should be made clear that nudism is not exhibitionism. Nudists do not seek to expose themselves to unsuspecting members of the public. Furthermore they do not wish to impose on others who are not of like mind. While many would admit they would like to be able to recreate everywhere nude or exercise the equality of male and female toplessness in parks or beaches, it is against nudists social norms to exploit the body among those who do not subscribe to the same beliefs and understandings. The difference between voyeurism and nudism is that nudists are active and equal participants of non sexual nude interactions, while voyeurs seek to observe others nudity for the sake of sexual pleasure (Kelly, 1998).

It's not unheard of for a resort to draft seemingly radical guidelines for people who are visiting for the first time. Contrary to what the public believes, it is not done to hide the true activities of the nudists within. Instead it is a safety precaution to eliminate people who might attempt to enter the resort in order to prey on or gawk at naked people. The safety of women and children, in particular, is taken very seriously by nudists. Most resorts believe that by requiring nudity on formal introductory tours they are able to weed out those with inappropriate motives.



In fact, my personal experience supports this. During the years that I worked in a nudist resort there were a few isolated times when someone would enter the resort for the day and sit somewhere fully clothed and just watch others. These people made the nudists so uncomfortable that members of the management, such as me, would approach them and give them the option of either joining the others by trying nudity immediately or leaving. Most choose to leave once they realized they were being watched themselves.

Mandatory nudity upon entering a resort is not uncommon, however, it is often viewed as unwelcoming to new comers who would sincerely like to try the experience but may take some time to muster the courage to take the first step. An alternative is the clothing optional resort where every individual is given the choice to either be nude or wear an article of clothing whenever they feel the need. Even in this circumstance it should be noted that most all participants choose nudity, after all that is why they attend in the first place. However, should one member of a family feel less comfortable with being nude, for whatever reason, the family can still recreate together. Consequently, in a clothing optional resort it is not uncommon to see people in different stages of undress, such as a pair of shorts but no top or visa-versa.

Mandatory or optional nudity is also a customer service concern and in fact many resorts believe they are dealing in such a niche market that they are not worried about losing business. Other common rules used to discourage those with the wrong mind set in-

clude: mandatory introductory tours, photocopying ID's, the no single males rule and the use of a generally unpleasant person to check guests in (somewhat like a bouncer in a bar).

Other resorts and campgrounds use strict member guidelines to control behavior, however, such rules are frowned upon by most nudists who generally agree it is not necessary. The reason for the rules is the same, it quickly identifies those who may be at the facility for inappropriate reasons. The problem with strict guidelines for members is that innocent people may be misunderstood and all members feel watched by management and guarded in their everyday actions. Some extreme examples of member rules, which I have experienced include: no alcohol, mandatory nudity in all common areas, no public displays of affection (including hand holding and hugging your own spouse) and no nudity at dances (See Appendix B).

Nudists share a fear of being misunderstood in the textile world and ultimately of losing their right to exercise their freedom and socialize in the nude. One reason for this lack of public understanding is due to a cultural preoccupation with sex. Our culture does not distinguish a separation between nudity and sex therefore, the preconceived notion is that all nudists are beautiful and sex crazed. The lifestyle of swinging is often confused with nudism by members of the textile world. Nudists struggle with trying to project the safe and non-sexual image which they associate with. Extreme regulations within resorts are one way management attempts to address this issue.

Nudists and women in particular, are encouraged to pay attention to their feelings when around others and particularly when around male nudists whom they have not met before. Any time a woman feels uncomfortable about someone they are encouraged to tell a friend or management about the feelings. It is believed by many nudists that your gut feelings deserve to be listened to. In practice it encourages women to share their concerns and validates their feelings. In a culture where women are challenged to prove personal violations such as sexual harassment and even rape and are often blamed for their own victimization in such cases, the validation of feelings and concerns, based on one's gut feelings is not only socially progressive but on an individual level it is emotionally healing.

### Demographics

An overview of nudism is important before one can clearly communicate the significance of its existence. However, like social research on nudism, little has been done in the way of demographic research even by the nudist organizations themselves until recently. For this reason, the demographic information will contain data predominantly from the 1980s and the year 2000, only as it relates to the United States.

There are two main formal nudist organizations in the United States, The Naturist Society and the American Association for Nude Recreation. These trade organizations exist to serve families who

share an appreciation for opportunities to recreate without clothing. Each publishes a magazine for its members which focuses on topics of interest and legal issues pertinent to the practice of nudism. For example articles may include reviews of nudist resorts in the U.S. as well as many tropical destinations. These reviews will often talk about the amenities, entertainment, beaches, rules for behavior and even the social atmosphere of the resort.

Articles on legislative issues keep nudists apprized of legal battles throughout the nation. For example nudists who make use of commonly accepted beach areas are occasionally the subjects of spontaneous ticketing in areas where local authorities have previously overlooked the practice of nude sun bathing and swimming. In an attempt to protect nudists, articles are written to share information about beach locations that are nudist friendly and those where people have recently experienced legal problems. One article titled, "Storm of Morals-Based Legislation Slows Across Political Landscape" discussed the actions of radical religious right members in special interest political organizations, which apparently were losing their stronghold (O'Brien, 1995). Articles such as these are often a call to action. In fact, the AANR has been known to retain professional lobbyists in an attempt to maintain legal rights for nudists.

These trade publications are also a forum for sharing personal thoughts on beliefs and practices of nudism. Many times letters to the editor will spark a debate among nudists who disagree on common resort rules or philosophical perspectives. These debates will then

be aired in print within two or three consecutive issues of the publication. Many times their topics will become a source for round table discussions at national and regional nudist conventions. Some common topics of debate often include the admitting of singles to family nudist resorts or the common no body jewelry rule (each of these controversial topics will be discussed in detail later in this study).

In 1989 The American Sunbathing Association, now renamed the American Association for Nude Recreation (AANR), surveyed its 50,000 family memberships comparing this market niche to the general population. According to AANR (Table 1) the results of this survey revealed the following demographic information.

Table 1  
AANR Survey Results

	Nudists	General Population
Married	64%	58%
Income less than \$20,000	14%	45%
Age Bracket: 35-64	75%	30%
Some College Education	75%	39%

Of the 75% with some college education, 21% received a college degree and another 22% went on to do graduate work. The general population figures show that 13% earned a degree with 9% doing grad-

uate work. The average age of the nudist in this membership is 48 years old. Nearly half the nudists had an income level of more than \$40,000 per year. Their favorite recreational interests were reported as bicycling, tennis, swimming, camping, hiking and walking. Respondents appeared to be about 33% more physically active in these activities than the general population. According to the AANR website (1999) membership remains at 50,000.

The Naturist Society claims a membership of 20,000 people (ANNR website, 1999). Note that neither of these reports accounts for practicing nudists who chose not to belong to a trade organization nor membership. Based on a 1983 Gallup Poll, commissioned by the Naturist Society, they claim that 72% of Americans approve of nude beaches as long as participants are sensitive to others and refrain from offensive activities. They also claim that 15% of all adult Americans have participated in a coed activity while nude and that "25% percent of young Americans enjoy sunning and swimming nude" (Naturist Society Membership Brochure, 1999). More recent research indicates these figures have risen slightly to reflect greater tolerance and support for nudist recreation (Story & Baxendall, 2000). Furthermore, the naturist society states (Naturist Society Membership Brochure, 1999):

- Over 33 million Americans are part of our active demographics. At least 161 million support our right of choice. (The Roper Poll found even higher levels of support and participation)... this degree of support and participation isn't matched by legal measures to sanction the lifestyle and to enable its practice.

Their credo is well stated under the heading "Who are the Naturists," naturist being another term for nudist. In its entirety this credo is inclusive of many nudists' beliefs and therefore serves as a good summary of nudism and its principals. The following statements taken directly from the Naturist Society Membership Brochure (1999) are offered as a partial description of a hard core, card-carrying nudist.

Naturists enjoy getting naked! Naturists are concerned with environmental protection and decry the abuse of natural resources in the name of progress and profit. Naturists feel a compelling kinship with all other creatures born naked as themselves. Naturists are open about the body but do not believe in imposing their views on those of dissenting opinion. Naturists do not equate sexuality with nakedness. Naturists place rationality above blind conformity to society's temporary fashions and rules. Naturists believe that "Clothes Make the Man" into a victimized pawn of the State. Naturists may skinny dip alone and with family members or feel comfortable with body freedom in larger social gatherings. Naturists work to obtain legal recognition of clothing-optional recreation areas.

Many nudists or naturists choose not to belong to a formal organization partly because they do not subscribe to one or more of these statements and feel they are not comfortable testifying to such stringent boundaries. They simply like to sun bathe and relax.

## History

### Highlights in the Early History of Nudism in the United States

Nudism is not a new craze. It was not even new to the 60's or 70's when we saw a surge of journal articles rooted in Kinsey's research. Social nudism existed in other countries long before it arrived in the United States. In fact, some of its origins are based,

in part, on cultural practices such as communal bathing which is not uncommon in other societies. In the United States, the beginning of Social Nudism is attributed to two factors, a popular focus on the scientific pursuit of health and physical fitness in the U.S. in the late 1800's and immigration.

In the late 1800's, fitness and health advocate Dr. John Harvey Kellogg was developing and promoting the Battle Creek Sanitarium and its Adventist health concepts. The world famous Sanitarium was used as a health spa for the rich and famous (Carson, 1957). Kellogg's philosophy was based on the Seventh Day Adventist's theory of vegetarianism, physical fitness, spirituality and healthy living. Kellogg was at the front of health and nutrition research (Lowe, 1976). A week at the Battle Creek San promised a full physical work up, innovative diets, hydrotherapy and daily exercise (on the roof top, gymnasium). Though no direct connection can be made between Kellogg and nudism, he was a strong advocate of the physical benefits of the wind, sun and air on the skin and body. So much so that sun baths, with people clad in nothing other than his design of a white linen loin cloth, were a famous part of the daily regime for all guests at the Sanitarium.

In 1898 a competitor of Kellogg's, Bernarr Macfadden also began promoting the concepts of physical fitness, vegetarianism, sunshine and health. His philosophy, though it eventually also included a radical religion of his own design, was a crusade against alcohol, tobacco, white bread, corsets, medicines and muscular inactivity.



He was a successful publishing tycoon with a readership of fifteen million people through the publication of ten news papers, twenty magazines, fifty books and his most well known magazine, "Physical Culture."

In 1928 Macfadden read "The Future of Nakedness," by John Langdon-Davis and was impressed with the idea of incorporating nudism into his philosophy of physical and mental health. Langdon-Davies wrote (cited in Nansen, 1994):

Why do people fear to take off their clothes? We already know the answer. It is through a fear which custom and social pressure can eliminate, the fear of outraging modesty; and through a fear of which everybody nearly is ignorant--the fear of being less sexually attractive naked than in full dress. (p. 58)

Macfadden surmised that sexual tension could actually be reduced by putting men and women together in nude social settings (See Nansen, 1994).

As Macfadden wrote about nudism in his, Physical Culture Magazine, Kurt Bartel, a German immigrant living in New York became an avid follower. He and his wife were reminded of their involvement in the Nacktkultur movement in Germany. Longing for the practice of nudism they ran an article in two German, New York news papers and announced the development of "The American League for Physical Culture" (Nansen, 1994). In 1929, after locating three other couples they established the first nudist campground, "The Garden of Eden."

In 1933, what is now the second oldest nudist camp, opened. Zoro Nature Park was established on 200 acres in Roselawn, Indiana. The name for the park came from the ancient religion of the early

sun worshipers known as Zoroastrians. Owner operator Alois Knapp was a believer in the healthful attributes of nudism, however, his establishment was primarily a camp ground for those who simply wanted to be nude. In his opinion nudists didn't need a set of common beliefs before they could take their clothes off and enjoy the sun.

Knapp was responsible for establishing many of the guidelines still used for behavior in nudist camps and establishments such as no photography, alcohol, overt sexual behavior or littering. Another rule Knapp established was no singles. He believed if singles were allowed the ratio of men to women would quickly reach two hundred-fifty to one. In his opinion this would lead to resentment and discomfort for families. He also upheld a strictly nude rule, nudity was not an option at Zoro, as it is in some of today's establishments.

Nudism was thrust into the nations limelight with the popularity of Queen Zorine of the Zoro Garden nudist pageant. Zorine, whose real name was Yvonne Stacey, was introduced to nudism through the health and physical fitness aspect. Born in Missouri, Stacey was a social service worker who was stricken with pneumonia while visiting her sister in Chicago. She entered a sanitarium weighing only 95 pounds but left healthy at 115 pounds and became a firm believer in the benefits of clean living. While recovering in the Sanitarium, she was also introduced to sun baths and Elois Knapp. Fully recovered and with a new lease on life, she joined the Nude Culture Guild in Chicago and soon became the first public spoke's person for

nudism.

The year was 1934. It was the second year of the Chicago Worlds Fair. Knapp and Stacey along with a dozen or so other nudists were featured, not on the carnival midway but in a drama in the "Chicago Century of Progress Exposition." Columbus Day, 1934 their presentation played to more than 114,000 spectators. Following the closing of the Chicago Worlds Fair, Stacey and her troupe were invited to present at the San Diego Worlds Fair. By this time Stacey, or Queen Zorine, was receiving extensive press coverage which gave her the opportunity to promote the practice of nudism.

Once in San Diego, the drama was done away with in favor of a new style of the exhibit. Just inside the main gate of Balboa Park, the home of the San Diego Worlds Fair, was a shaded park. With the help of Otto K. Olesen, the famous Hollywood lighting engineer, a beautiful fantasy of lighting, lush foliage, streams and a water fall were created in the park. Above, stone benches were built in amphitheater style which overlooked the park. From these benches, spectators could watch a twenty minute reenactment of daily nudist life (which took place five times a day). Stacey and her fellow nudists, cooked, read, lounged around and played volleyball while thousands of visitors looked on and listened to the narration of Dr. Frederic S. Merrill, who described the meaning of nudism in modern life and testified to its physical merits.

During its two year run the exhibit saw 360,000 visitors. On the midway police closed numerous burlesque shows for assorted

improprieties but never questioned the appropriateness of the nudist presentation. Queen Zorine was the perfect example of proper respectable nudism. Stacey, as cited in Fox, 1994 stated that "nudism stands for physical and mental health--a body radiating with vitality and a mind open to respect and to reverence for that body, our most precious possession, and a willingness to study its needs" (pp. 29-30).

In her farewell speech to the press, as she left the San Diego Worlds Fair in 1935, Stacey stated, "We have shown thousands the moral and physical benefits of nudism and we have destroyed the illusion that in God's greatest handiwork--the human body--there can be anything shameful" (as cited in Fox, 1994, pp. 29-30).

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s small mom and pop nudist camp grounds emerged but talk of nudism went quiet as the nation turned from health research to war and war recovery. The 1960s saw the emergence of swinging in some nudists parks and from there the definition of nudism was clouded. In the late 1960s and early 1970s true nudism (without swinging) experienced a resurgence with the idea of communal and organic living but all too often it was associated only with a radical hippy life style. This put nudism on the fringe of society which made it an interesting topic for social science research.

## CHAPTER III

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Little research exists on nudism, however, it follows an interesting pattern. It appears to be clustered into three main time periods, the 1930s, the 1960s, and the mid 1980s.

#### 1930s

Very little research is available on the subject of social nudism since the last onslaught in the 1980s. I was surprised to find a few journal articles dating back as late as 1930s. At that time nudism was experiencing a lot of publicity through the outreach of Queen Zorine and the World Fairs. It must have sparked the interest of a few social scientists because discourse began on the subject. It appears there were two scientific camps on the subject. Social scientists were observing it and Psychologists were criticizing it. For example, in response to nudists claims of health benefits Sandor Lorand M.D. (1932) published an article criticizing the practice of nudism and referring to as a neurosis.

Lorand cited four or five examples of adolescent psychiatric patients he was aware of, all of whom reported dysfunctions in their relationships and developing sexuality. His explanation for the dysfunctions was that each of the adolescents had been exposed to nudism. Unfortunately what Lorand failed to note was that he had no other exposure to nudists and furthermore, his psychiatric

practice would never treat someone who did not have existing problems whether they were nudists or not. Secondly, many of the subjects cited in his article were experiencing what would now be considered, common characteristics of puberty such as masturbation and sexual experimentation.

One year later, Howard Warren (1933) from Princeton University, published an interesting article on the subject of nudism. Titled, "Social nudism and the Body Taboo," this article began by talking about nudity as a universal taboo in societies everywhere. According to Warren (1933) there are three expiations for the human impulse to cover the body: (1) protection, (2) adornment to promote sexual attraction, and (3) a primitive modesty instinct.

Warren (1933) visited a German nudist resort in order to establish his own first hand account of the body taboo. From a standpoint methodology he concluded that the traditional body taboo is not a fundamental human trait, but something that is socially constructed and easily overcome without "detrimental results" (p. 181). Furthermore, based on his observations he wrote that "nudity is not in itself indecent; only a widespread and persistent social convention has made it so" (p. 181). His report was refreshingly honest and lead him to criticize the negative reports from psychological standpoints which he believed were based on the study of "neurotic cases only." He stated that "these opinions [the opinions of psychologists] are based on theoretic grounds and not on personal experience" (p. 181). In his conclusion he reports six important

findings from his research:

1. Shame (a subjective experience) and shock (an objective experience) disappear in social nudist situations.
2. In nudist situations the modesty attitude is diametrically reversed so that gestures of modesty (such as covering oneself) become grossly obvious and are therefore actions of immodesty.
3. The nude body is viewed as a whole and therefore sex differentiation is no longer significant or arousing.
4. There is less eroticism, sexual excitement, flirtation, and "temptation to ribaldry" in a nudist situation than in clothed social situations.
5. Partial concealment is more erotic than full nudity.
6. Data is not conclusive as to whether or not the benefits of nudism would be advantageous to all society. (p. 182).

The next cluster of research on the subject of Social Nudism was sparked by Kinsey's research in the 1940s, however, the journal articles based on this research did not start appearing until the 1960s. Historically this was the first time anyone had attempted to apply social statistics to the study of nudism. Casler, (1964) reported on "Sunshine Village" (fictitiously named) a nudist resort west of New York City. In his study Casler interviewed both nudist members of the resort and non nudists whom he contracted to visit this resort and act as a control group in order to compare their observations with those of the experienced nudist.

#### 1960s

Two years later, Martin Weinberg became the most well known researcher on the subject when he published three articles between 1966 and 1970 also based on quantitative data on nudists. Weinberg's data collection was conducted by observation, 101 interviews and 617 questionnaire surveys (Weinberg, 1966).

Conclusions of both Casler and Weinerg were objective. Unlike Lorand, they simply reported the statistical findings and highlighted the important points which had surfaced during interviews, many of which were points originally discussed in Warrens (1933) six points of conclusion. No attempts were made to pass judgment on the mental stability of nudists. Most findings focused the common practices of nudism, beliefs about nudism and some projections as to the purpose or origin of these practices and beliefs.

#### 1980s

The next research to surface was conducted in the 1980s when it appears nudism underwent a restructuring and trade marketing strategy.



## CHAPTER IV

### METHODOLOGY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### Statement of Purpose

Many people who participate in nudism share common beliefs about the practice. I use the word practice here because for many people it is also an evolving and ever-changing influence in their lives. Some may begin by enjoying a nudist social event with others and later find that it has impacted their lives both within the seclusion of the practice and outside in the greater, more public areas of their lives. Most nudists testify to indicators of positive change in their lives, once they became involved in the practice of nudism.

This study will discuss the social impacts associated with nudism. However, I intend to approach this from a more indirect and somewhat covert manner. I will not spend time simply telling you what a nudist does, feels and then attempt to project an explanation as to why. Inadvertently, one cannot avoid addressing these topics. However, this study will describe what nudists know about the use of clothes. This study is not exclusively about nudists, or nudism. It is about the general clothing oriented public from a nudist's perspective. Therefore the three research questions to be addressed in this study are: What do nudists know about social norms in our society? Why do they know this? And, what can others learn from

them?

### Methodology, Institutional Ethnography

The methodology for this work was inspired by the teachings of Dr. Dorothy Smith (1987). Her approach to uncovering the macro-world structures through the micro experience is a sound fit for the work of looking at social realities created by clothing. It is her call to sociologists to "focus on the ultimate structure producing the outcome at hand" (Ritzer, 1996, p. 329) which lead me to nudists as a means of revealing the everyday structures created by clothing in human social interactions. It is her belief that much of social scientific research focuses on known and identified structures. The more illusive structures, which she believes are present and relatively unquestioned, may in fact be responsible for social assumptions that go unquestioned. Furthermore, that these assumptions may be a form of macro structure which works as an organizer of everyday living (Ritzer, 1996).

Dr. Smith's (1987) approach to investigating the actual social processes and actions which organize everyday life through inquiry from a contextual standpoint is called Institutional ethnography. It is the "exploration, description and analysis of such a complex of relations, not conceived in the abstract but from the entry point of some particular person or persons whose everyday world of working is organized thereby" (Smith p. 60). Unlike traditional uses of the term institution which usually refer to an establishment, Smith extends

the term to forces or ruling apparatuses which organize social life. Therefore, it is appropriate and scientifically advantageous to apply Dr. Smith's concepts and methodology to the study of clothing and its structural process in society. Clothing is a way of doing, which organizes social interaction.

The institution, in this institutional ethnography, is clothing. The standpoint from which the scientific inquiry is conducted is from that of nudists. This is a collective of persons whose lives are not only organized, daily, by the ruling relations of clothing, but also who choose to set themselves apart from that structure by rejecting the common assumption of the necessity of clothes in everyday life. They work, shop and function in the clothed world for a portion of their daily lives then they engage in recreational and functional activities with other nudists for another portion of their lives.

It is necessary to identify the fact that nudists have reached a level of awareness of the institutional structures of clothing. And, though they must function in the every day world as productive members of society, they also consciously choose to reject that formal organizational process in an attempt to refocus the order of everyday living. The action of living part of one's life without clothing, in a social context, appears to reveal some processes of the ruling relations of clothing. These processes are discussed later in this following study.

It is important to identify the standpoint from which one

conducts an institutional ethnography because it is central to locating the experiences of every day living. Smith (1987) writes, "the everyday world as the matrix of our experiences, is organized by relations tying it into larger processes in the world..." (p. 11). The focus remains on the experiences and experiences can only be expressed through the subjects relevance of a lived reality. In this study the standpoint of nudists will serve as the expressed source of experiences.

I will also identify the standpoint of the researcher, myself, in order to strengthen the analysis of the research. Standpoint methodology rejects the concept of objectivity and detachment believing that all research must begin from some position. Instead it recommends identifying and acknowledging the presence and position of the scientist in the work. In doing so one strengthens the work through shared perspectives with the research participants in ideological discourse. Not by claiming a higher ground or better understanding of the experience of others based on one's professional training or position in the scientific arena.

### Conceptual Framework

Clothing in our society has taken on a power of its own. Its use is never questioned only its situational applications. In fact, as a society, the only times we sanctify the absence of clothing is during personal hygiene practices, private sexual encounters and medical interventions. Clothing has moved from a functional tool to

a social force. By this I do not simply mean that it has become an unquestioned social fact, which indeed it has. What I mean is that beyond being a social given we have given it power. We take for granted that it has also become a powerful force in controlling and defining social interaction. Furthermore, it is instrumental in defining who is personally and publicly acceptable, attractive, valuable and normal. How did we come to this Consensus?

What then does it mean to do clothing? We speak of ways of "doing as contextualized, interactional practices, enacting or performing the existing cultural typifications" (Ritzer, 1996, p. 313). We do clothing when we take this inanimate tool (clothing) and empower it with action. As a form of communication, this empowered symbol moves from a conscious to unconscious function. We tend to move through life's daily activities unaware of how deeply rooted clothing is in our society, yet, as we continually reproduce how we do clothing we are reproducing structure. Clothes are a part of our language and therefore, they are instrumental in the construct of our reality. We take for granted that clothing is a part of us and every social interaction we take part in is influenced by its presence or absence. We view life clothed. This is the consensus.

To assess how we came to this consensus one must put aside objectivism in favor of a theory which acknowledges the actor in the production of the structure. Objectivism implies an awareness in two aspects, awareness of one's own cultural and situational perspective of the topic to be investigated and an awareness of the situational

perspective of the other. In addition one must be able to put aside personal influences and subjectivity in order to do justice to the inquiry. In the case of assessing clothing, however, this is not possible. One cannot look at the predominance of clothing in our society and say, objectively, that we are not a part of its influence. Each of us is an actor in the structure of doing clothing. Since we cannot get outside of culture, clothing is pervasive.

A more constructive approach to investigating clothing and the social practices which are bound by its prevalence, is standpoint methodology, supported by a theory which integrates agency and structure. This theory, sometimes called structuration or practice theory, was developed by Bourdieu and Giddens. Bourdieu's (1998) view was that since our individual consciousness, which he refers to as our habitus, is created through the experiences we are exposed to in our various fields, then our perspective from which we would attempt to explain the actions of subjects within a study would be limited by our own habitus. In other words, each of us has a consciousness or reality from which we relate to our world and our fields.

If we claim objectivity and then attempt to explain the actions of others, we are overlooking the impact of our cognitive reality or habitus and its power over how we perceive things. Furthermore, it would be a greater mistake to disregard the words of subjects and imply that we know better, what the true meaning for their actions is. We are prisoners of our own changing habitus and can never be

without the subjectivity that is inherent in it.

The structuration of doing clothing can, therefore, be analyzed through a standpoint methodology in order to analyze how we are dependent on the presence of clothing. First, we must take a genealogical step back through history and consider the origin of power associated with doing clothing. Second, we must question what presently appears normal, typical, right and given. In order to do so one must also define a theoretical formula from which to build, then one may view society and its clothing practices from a different perspective.

It's easy to look at clothing practices and admit their influence in our society. For example, fashion expresses needs and desires in a way which may remain somewhat hidden from the wearer of the article. However, we are never far from the meaning behind our choices in fashion. The illusion or imagery in a particular fashion article may have a direct psychological meaning for those who find themselves attracted to it. Women's clothing with large square shoulder pads may be an unconscious attempt to convey strength. The image of strength may not be directly obvious to the wearer. Often the image is created in conjunction with a popular actor or actress. If the character has desirable attributes one may associate the character's look with the attribute and attempt to adopt it in order to fulfill a need (Hollander, 1994). What we tend to miss is the origin of the need and the depth of power associated with the message imbedded in that origin. For this reason, men are also subjects of

control under the influence of the symbolic and mechanical uses of clothing.

Clothing is one tool which has more recently been adopted by women as a means to signify equality and social power in our society. However, it has not been completely successful because it is not original. Mens clothing has always been designed to work well in the situation it was created for. Business suits are cut to hide individual body definition and create a uniform shape for men. They resume their natural drape, from the shoulders down, every time the wearer stands or moves. Work clothes reflect the demand of the job and are designed to be functional whether it is a farmer's coverall or a forester's hiking boot. Men's fashions are so functional, in fact, they are often adapted in everyday wear under the notion of *fad* or *fashion*.

Women's wear, on the other hand, has traditionally accentuated her sexuality and impeded her ability to be anything but dependent (Gilman, 1994). Not until the 1940s, when women began wearing slacks (due to the necessity of their factory jobs manufacturing war equipment) did women begin to integrate functionality into fashion. Still the only way women were able to integrate function into fashion was by adopting male fashion characteristics (Hollander, 1994).

This is an example of the historical origin of power surrounding the body image and doing clothing. It is an ongoing power struggle between socially defined gender ideals and logic. In contemporary western society as women gain power the culturally



determined ideal body image becomes thinner and thinner. One could question if it is an attempt to maintain control over women by placing increased value on thinness as a representation of femininity (Faludi, 1991). The more equality women gain the more they are expected to be visions of femininity and that femininity becomes redefined until it is something unattainable and unhealthy just as it was in the 1800's and earlier. John Lock (as cited in Wollstonecraft, 1988) wrote the following observations regarding the use of bindings and corsets on women and children in the mid 1600's.

Narrow breasts, short and stinking breath, ill lungs, and crookedness, are the natural and almost constant effects of hard bodice, and clothes that pinch. That way of making slender wastes and fine shapes, serves but the more effectually to spoil them. Nor can there indeed but be disproportion in the parts, when the nourishment prepared in the several offices of the body, cannot be distributed as nature designs. Therefore what wonder is it, if it being laid where it can on some part not so braced, it often makes a shoulder or a hip higher or bigger then its just proportion. (p. 187)

Today we have popular garments such as bras, corsets, backless dresses and bathing suits which accentuate and sexualize specific parts of the female body (Laurie, 1981). Two hundred years after Lock's observations we continue to reconstruct the ideal body through clothing which, limits its overall physical functionality and endangers the health of women.

Though many theorists tend to apply the inequality of clothing practices between men and women with their struggle for power, Gilman (1994) states that women are responsible for the perpetuation of their own oppression by the way they socialize the young and maintain the status quo, for example, by labeling physical frailty as

feminine and attractive. This is a perfect example of structuration in action.

Structuration relies heavily on symbolic language and common sense, or logic. It is based on the idea of duality between the agents and the structure, not a dualism in which the two are at odds with one another (Ritzer, 1996). What Bourdieu and Giddens brought to the concept of structuration strengthened it and expanded its function as a social theory. In relation to clothes a material phenomena, they are without transformative capacity unless instantiated with codes and normative sanctions which are rooted in symbolic language (Giddens, 1984).

The first part of duality is structure. It is sets of rules and resources, without the context of time and space, other than the structures which exist in memory. Structure is also the medium for application of the rules and resources, in social contexts, as well as the outcome of them.

The second part of the duality includes the agents. These are people or collectivities who interact with each other and use the rules and resources often without knowledge of their influence. In other words the agents do not consciously choose a rule and apply it to a context they simply know them and respond to them and with them. This is practical knowledge (Giddens, 1984). It exists in social practices that are common in everyday activity such as rules of eye contact in interpersonal communication.

Thirdly, is structuration, which includes the time and space

factor in situations as well as the contextual element and reproduction of the system. Structuration feeds back into structure and produces (and reproduces) the social rules by which we function (Giddens, 1984).

Through structuration we can view the practice of doing clothing as an activity by which we, as individuals, produce and reproduce the socially defined norms of our time. Furthermore, we can see clothing as an activity by which individuals produce and reproduce clothing as an institution, as Gilman pointed out, in its cultural, political and historical dimensions.

All structuration must begin with language. It is the only tool of symbolism through which we know how to communicate. It defines our reality and at the same time is the door to knowledge. Giddens recognized the power of language and in fact was able to link memory and perception to the use of language very convincingly. He was also able to stress the role of language within the process of developing a consciousness. He taught that discursive consciousness is the ability to put one's awareness into language. However, this awareness or perception is molded by one's grasp of language, time or temporal input, and a like consciousness, a collectively produced and sustained reality, which is established unconsciously by social forces prior to one's ability to construct and use language. Furthermore, he states that this is a feedback loop which not only continues to develop and change the perceptions of each individual, but also feeds the collective social structures which serve as an

unconscious foundation for understanding what we feel, hear, touch, smell and taste.

He wrote about avoiding the use of the term subconsciousness in favor of using "unconsciousness," and convincingly distinguishes between the terms and his understanding of their meaning. Then he explains his dismissal of them. He writes that to imply that one's action has been the force of a subconscious influence is to imply that human agency is defined in terms of intentions. In other words he refuted Freud's belief that the subconscious was an active developed force which served as a driving mechanism for intentional actions which the actor cannot or will not take responsibility for (Ritzer, 1996).

Giddens (1984) preferred to see actions as motivated by an unconscious force. In his approach to have intention implies a knowledge of the possible outcome of ones actions when in fact, the actions may simply be unintended doings. This is his support of the term agency, which implies power where the use of the term subconscious does not. "Agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place" (Giddens, 1984, p. 9). It is the outcome of the action which, due to the complexity of social existence, may inadvertently impact others. These activities of others also impact our actions, and perceptions of experiences and therefore are a force, outside the actor, which may complicate the effectiveness of intended actions. Once again we see his use of a collective feedback loop.

Bourdieu moved beyond the implications of language and challenged others to look at the reality it constructs. What he wanted to establish was that he believed there was no opposition between individuals, society and their practices. In fact, he believed one was responsible for the other. He also saw the relationship between habitus and field as a dialect, habitus being the internal structure people use to process and respond to input from their social world and field being the overall network of relationships which establishes or develops the habitus.

The role of habitus and field in the application of doing clothing offers a framework for study to understand how we, as a collectivity, have become so dependent on the presence of clothing. In fact, it explains how we control agency and how we draw on clothing as a resource or tool from which to view ourselves as individuals. It explains clothing as an institution. We no longer think about doing clothing we simply respond to the social rules we are all aware of without regard to their impact or purpose. This is further complicated by celebrities, fashion, the media and modern marketing tactics which are based on a conscious awareness of human insecurities and reproduces them to the benefit of a manufacturer. It is justified by calling the insecurities a form of human nature when in fact it is a form of structuration produced and reproduced by agency.

One is reminded of the statement regarding structure as revealed by Sociologists by thinking away the unique attributes of

individuals and their particular relationships and leaving only that which is invariant ( Brush, personal correspondence, 2000). This is exactly what Bourdieu (1998) is warning against when he states "the structure of a group (and hence the social identity of the individuals who make it up) depends on the function which is fundamental to its construction and organization" (p. 39).

How did we come to empower clothing? At a simpler time in human history clothing was more than likely donned for protection (Payne, 1965). Animal pelts and plants may have been the original materials used for body coverings. The uses for clothing were rational and based on the protection of the body from natural elements such as cold weather, sun exposure and perhaps physical contact with abrasive elements like thorns and poisonous plants. At some point in time the use of clothing may have been expanded to include articles of adornment. These probably represented wealth, power, or status.

Somewhere between those days and the present clothing took on completely different meanings. One could argue that religious influences eventually governed a demand for modesty. In fact there are multiple reasons for the evolution of clothing but the important point is that through time the rationale for clothing has changed through social forces and its agents.

Today people in our society uses clothing to determine whom we will associate with, who will be popular, who we will defer to and even who we will label as deviant or criminal (Rubin, 1992). We

dress for all public occasions and even many private situations. Clothing is often used as an indicator of being normal or abnormal. We clothe to conduct social interaction, to shape bodies, to accentuate sexuality and invite attention. In fact, we now associate with a need for clothing to the extent that we even clothe to sleep and to get wet (swimming). The rationales behind clothing are no longer evident and yet it has moved from being a personal tool to being an assumed presence in all situations. It is now an unquestioned social structure created and recreated by agency.

#### Beginning in a Standpoint

As a standpoint methodology it is imperative to this study that one understands the lives and practices of nudists. It is also necessary to clearly describe the position and perspective of the researcher. Like many nudists I have a dual perspective, that of a nudist and of being clothed. However, I also have the trained perspective of a researcher to add the analytical quality of this study. That was not always the case. Prior to pursuing an academic career I experienced my own introduction to nudism.

Seven years ago a local camping resort, affiliated with a large national chain, claimed bankruptcy and sold to new private owners. Shortly after taking possession of the property the new owners announced that it would become a family nudist resort. The media went wild. Many local citizens in the surrounding areas had visited the resort due to the campground's extensive indoor facil-

ities, which include two banquet halls, a café, indoor pool and group as well as individual camping sites not to mention all the other outdoor amenities. There were company picnics, family reunions, weddings, corporate retreats and general daily family recreation, during its operation as a traditional camp ground. Because of this, many people felt a direct connection to the facility and therefore, it was a great community controversy when it became a nudist resort.

Citizens were terrified. I was curious. The man I dated at the time reluctantly suggested that we call and get some information about the place. I agreed, with some trepidation. My fear was not of nudism as I defined it, but of how an organized facility which called itself a nudist resort might define it. For myself nudity was natural and rational. It required no moral contemplation. I was comfortable cleaning house nude, sleeping nude, getting up with my children in the middle of the night nude, and swimming nude. As a child I had dreamed of a better world where girls could cut grass on a hot day without a shirt on, or lay in the sun. To me, all these nude activities were rational and void of any sexual overtones. They simply didn't require clothing.

When the information arrived I was a bit scared. I questioned my friend's motives. I thought perhaps I wasn't enough for him, perhaps he wanted to involve us sexually with other people or watch me with others. I sincerely wanted to try nudism but I wanted assurance that he and I were doing this for the same reasons and



that we would leave immediately if I became uncomfortable. He whole-heartedly agreed so we choose to attend the New Years Eve dance, a costume ball. Off we were to meet nudists in the know.

## CHAPTER V

### GETTING NUDE AND MEETING NUDISTS

#### The First Step

What does one wear to a nudist costume ball? I could only imagine. My fear was that we would commit a gross nudist faux pax of some sort. We would arrive dressed as animals or in togas and everyone would point and say "Oh look, the new-bees thought we were serious about costumes." I decide I would call the resort and simply ask. That's all it would take, a simple phone call. It took me three weeks. Many times I tried but I felt so silly. I imagined them laughing at me or worse yet questioning my true motives for wanting to attend. I didn't really want them to know who I was, that way I wouldn't be embarrassed if I arrived and wanted to leave right away. But I made the call.

The woman who answered sounded so normal. I told her we were coming to the New Years Ball and wondered what people at the resort would be wearing. I didn't want to mention that we were completely clueless about the entire experience but I seemed to fall in that direction anyway. She laughed and asked if we had been to a nudist resort before. I couldn't lie. I said never. She asked if I was coming with my husband, I lied and said yes.

For some reason I was afraid that boyfriend and girlfriend wouldn't work, as though the relationship wasn't legitimate enough

to admit us as a couple. Maybe people had to be married. I thought singles might be viewed as more likely to drift apart and prey on other couples, or worse yet perhaps they were the prey. I was trying to anticipate all the right answers. Then she asked what our last name was. I took a shot at it and gave her my boyfriend's last name. She must have looked it up in the reservations because she responded with both our names. She never questioned if we were actually married or not.

By the end of the conversation I was totally at ease. She had turned out to be a real person, who understood that we may be nervous. She told us to wear whatever we wanted. No one would make us be nude. We could do that at our own pace. Costumes consisted of parts and pieces. This sounded fun. We were told to bring a towel to sit on and to keep it with us wherever we sat. There would be lockers for our belongings. We simply needed to check in and pay the grounds fees of \$35 before entering the resort.

#### Nude Years Eve

We arrived at the main office and stopped to check in. I stayed in the car while my boyfriend went in and registered. I wanted to see what the people were like in the office but I was afraid I would chicken out too early and not even give the event a chance. I watched through the car window as my boyfriend paid at the counter. A blond woman took his money, handed him something and he turned to leave. I couldn't see what she looked like aside

from a mane of thick blond hair. I watched to see if she would flirtatiously toss that hair or throw her head back and laugh at everything he said. It didn't happen.

When he returned to the car, I watched his face for a reaction or some clue to play off of. "What happened?" I finally asked. "I paid" he said flatly. "That's all?" "Yep," he replied. We turned the car toward the gate and entered the park.

I was nervous and the only way I knew to deal with it was to say so. "Me too" he replied. He slowed the car, "do you still want to do this?" he asked me. He was so considerate and sincere. I knew I could say no and we would go home immediately. On one hand I knew he would never blame me for it. But my mind constantly searched his words and movements for signs of ulterior motives, sexual excitement, pressure, disappointment in me or my reactions. I watched his body language. I found nothing insincere. I search within myself and I could find no logical reason not to try this, so we proceeded to the clubhouse where the party would take place. He reached over and took my hand, "We'll leave if we don't like it." It was the we that reassured me.

When we entered the clubhouse, the door closed loudly behind us. There were two rows of long banquet tables on the opposite side of a dance floor. There were only about 20 or 30 people seated there. The rest of the room was empty and all eyes turned toward us. I remember seeing the large backs of everyone and thinking, big, they're all big. It was unattractive. White, bare backs,

seated on colorful towels.

To my relief there was nothing exceptional about the room, no waterbeds on the dance floor or strobe lights or mirrored ceilings. It was quiet. No music had started yet. There was a fire in the large fieldstone fireplace at one end of the room with a few couches and chairs in front of it. To the left we saw another section to the building and we headed toward it. We walked past the other guests. It was clear they all knew each other. We were the outsiders, new-bees, white tails. But to my surprise as we passed the table they all smiled and said hi. No one had a costume or remnants of one.

We walked down a wide hall that opened into a large pool with wood beam cathedral ceiling rising above it. A group of people were playing water volleyball and the noise echoed. Off the sides of the same hall, opposite each other, were two bathrooms. They were marked men's and women's and I didn't look forward to being separated from my boyfriend even for a minute. As we stood there looking at them a man and woman walked out of the one marked mens. They seemed casual about the whole thing and I took as a sign.

No one yelled at them and the more I thought about it the more I liked the idea. Of course, why would you have to separate men and women in locker rooms if they are already nude together. I was relieved and happy that we could undress together. We were taking something that had always been a private thing and moving it into a public thing. More importantly we were taking something that is socially labeled as private, with negative connotations, and proving

it irrational. Being naked would no longer be just for the two of us. Our being naked together would no longer, exclusively, mean physical intimacy. From here on out our nakedness, together, would mean something different and I felt it was elevated to a higher form of intimacy. We were not losing a sacred corner of our private life. Rather, we were making a public statement about our relationship. We were sharing a private side of ourselves with others and this implied an incredible strength in our relationship. We decided to leave the costumes in the locker.

With renewed enthusiasm we emerged hand in hand from the men's locker room. I felt like I was on cloud nine though my stomach was still in a knot. I decided to make all decisions rationally for the rest of the evening. I would not allow emotion to control my perception of right and wrong. I did not want emotion to impede this learning opportunity.

People were walking past us and they were not the least bit surprised by our nakedness, nor about our brazen display of nakedness together. If we did this in Hudson's people would say it was a display of sexually intimate exhibitionism (and in Hudson's they would be right). But here, it was logical and completely void of all connotations of sexual intimacy. I liked the logic of it all. Nudity was not sex. My nude body was not a bad thing. My breasts were no more a nasty part than was my foot.

We returned to the banquet room and chose a table. People looked at us occasionally and smiled a pleasant, friendly smile but

no one talked to us. Some of the people had left and a DJ was setting up on the dance floor. Occasionally someone would walk by in a partial costume of ears and a tail or a funny tie and hat. Things were getting a bit more interesting, the energy level was picking up a bit but we still felt like outsiders. We had a glass of wine from the bar. But all in all things were looking rather dull unless we started interacting a bit. However, unsure of the norms or social rules we were not comfortable walking up to people and introducing ourselves. Maybe that isn't done here.

We decided to walk around the building again, maybe someone would notice we were new and introduce themselves. We were even plotting ways to get to meet people but somehow we always found reasons that it might not be acceptable. We thought about saying, "Hi, didn't we meet you at . . . ," no that wouldn't work in a place where anonymity is respected. Or, saying "Hi, we're new here . . . ," that wouldn't work anywhere. How about, "Oh, where did you get your towels, I love them."

To make things worse we couldn't tell which people were like us and which were not. Some wore jewelry but other than that there were no clues. What if we got into a conversation with people that burped out loud and used words like irregardless. Just about then we heard someone in the pool calling for volleyball players. It was the perfect opportunity to interact with people and get to know some of their names. The social rules were already in place for meeting people in casual team atmospheres. We knew how to do this.

Within ten minutes we knew the names of our four other team mates. We also knew we had something in common with these people, physical activity and sports interests. What we didn't know were all the things we would usually begin relationships with. Such as, what they did for a living and what type of a social class they functioned in. General income classifications and education. Cues for this type of information were not available, except possibly in speech patterns. Generally people garner information of this sort from social settings, personal clothing and accents such as the car one drives. But in a nudist resort all indicators other than speech and possibly hair styles are removed.

I won't pretend that at this point I was relieved of all notions of the importance of social class relations. What I found instead was that I looked harder for indicators. I resorted to stereotypes as a way of classifying those I would socialize with and those I would not. I looked at tattoos, piercing, body language and even habits such as smoking as indicators of who people were and who they were like. Nudism did not relieve my preconceived notions of whom I would socialize with and who I would not, it diminished it but it also reconfigured it by exposing me to many people I would not otherwise be exposed to both above and below my perceived social status. In time I learned to rely less and less on indicators of status and began to open my mind to a new way of accepting others as they were, especially those that were different from me. Not better or worse, just different.



As the night wore on, we felt more and more accepted by the group. When we returned to the banquet room the DJ was playing music and people were dancing. We were so excited about our new experience and liberated feelings that we spent the rest of the night switching from the dance floor to the pool for more volleyball. At a nudist resort one doesn't have to change clothes in order to switch sports. One can go from a formal dinner party to a baseball game simply by changing shoes. You're appropriately dressed for every occasion. This allows for more variety in activity also. Where else could one dance at a costume ball and play water volleyball in the same night.

I'm not quite sure when it happened but at some point in the evening we realized we were in. People were asking for us on the volleyball teams and introducing us as though we were old friends, to all the regulars whom we hadn't met yet. We watched others very closely for behavioral clues. Friends hugged friends as they greeted each other. It seemed OK for us to hold hands and hug each other. No one blinked an eye when we kissed on the dance floor. But looking around us we noticed that behavior here was the same as it would be anywhere. We saw no one push any limits of intimacy or disrespect of others. What was acceptable in public was acceptable here.

That was New Years Eve, 1992. We returned for a St. Patrick's Day dance in March and had much the same experience, only this time people knew us and called us by name. We were invited to sit with a group and once again thoroughly enjoyed ourselves.

I even visited the resort alone one evening. I sat by the

fire, read a nudist publication and talked with the couple who owned the resort. I learned more about the practice of nudism and what the vision was for this resort. I felt safe there, even by myself. I felt reassured that everything I hoped to find in nudism was really true. But my education was only beginning.

Two weeks later I joined the staff of the resort as the first, full time, director of recreation. My duties included anything that needed to be done to make people comfortable and entertained during their stay. This included programming entertainment, tours for new visitors and orientations for first time nudists (white tails). Later I worked on the promotion of the resort through public relations efforts and outreach programs which I designed to educate the general public about the practice of nudism. I became an advocate for social nudism and an expert on the topic. As a final note, three years later, I married the boyfriend.

#### Learning From Disabled Nudists

Social nudism, as a lifestyle, boasts of numerous benefits. One of the most common claims made by nudists, and the nudist trade organizations, is that nudism is about body acceptance. With the aid of work produced by scholars such as Susan Wendell and Irving Zola it is the nudists' claim to body acceptance which I will address in this chapter.

In the years 1993 through 1995 I worked in the position of Director of Recreation at the Midwest's largest nudist resort.

Nudism was rather new to me at that time but I took to it easily and with great enthusiasm. Even as a child I believed there was a lack of rationale behind many uses for clothing. I specifically remember the unreasonable social expectation that I, a physically undeveloped child of 12 or 13, should have to wear a shirt while working in my yard, when my father could go without in the heat of the day. To top it off on more than one occasion at hardware stores or coffee shops, my father was congratulated on what a fine son he had, referring to me. This only added to my confusion. If they couldn't tell I was a girl then why must I wear a shirt when I'm hot? So, what first attracted me to social nudism was the rational use of clothing but, what I learned beyond that was much more than I expected.

In my research as a Sociologist I have directed my work at developing a theoretical understanding of the lifestyle, beliefs and the people who choose to identify themselves as nudists. What I did not expect was that in doing so I also discovered a lot about people in main stream society, those who nudists refer to as textiles or the textile world. My sociological work in nudism is a standpoint methodology. Like many other researchers, I have a dual perspective in my standpoint. I am a nudist and yet, clothed, I must function daily in the textile world.

Some of the most insightful people to work with and recreate with have been nudists with disabilities. I didn't realize in the beginning of this work that, disabled people were going to be so pre-eminent, however, it did turn out that way. For this study I relied

on the voices of these nudists to introduce the principles of nudism. In most social circumstances persons with disabilities become the outsider and the abnormal. However, in nudism I believe they are the leaders in teaching the principles which are the foundation for all nudist practices and collective beliefs. It is the perspective of the disabled nudist which introduces those without visible disabilities to the concepts of body acceptance, self acceptance and social tolerance. They are the exemplary subject from which all nudists and non-nudists may begin to discover their own socially contrived views regarding standards of normalcy and the acceptance of the self. deBeauvoir (1993) states, "For the body being the instrument of our grasp upon the world, the world is bound to seem a very different thing when apprehended in one manner or another" (p. 34).

My position continually comes into play in this work and therefore, we also learn about us as researchers. My first experience involving a nudist with a disability was while I was still working at a nudist resort. One of my duties was to organize a regional nudist convention. It was at this convention that I met Lucinda. At first I was drawn by curiosity. Here was a young woman, moving down the campgrounds dirt roads using an electric wheelchair. Her physical deformities were obvious and yet she chose to be completely nude. As we passed each other, she greeted me with a warm smile. She seemed thoroughly happy to be there.

I saw her many times during the convention and noticed how

people were drawn to her. Something about her was so vibrant. It was as though she were a source of positive energy and everyone wanted some of it. Most of all I enjoyed watching her on the dance floor. She was rarely alone there, but when she was she didn't leave the dance floor. In dance she moved the top of her body to the beat of the music and turned her chair from left to right and then around in circles. At one point I joined her and was overwhelmed by her warmth, her electric personality. I was awe struck by the thought that this woman with so much to overcome was embracing life with everyone, in the nude. A sense of shame came over me when I thought of all the times I was concerned with imperfections in my body.

Years later as I reflected on my meeting with Lucinda I began to question societies' perceptions of the ideal body and how these perceptions might affect ones self concept. Body acceptance is an enormous challenge for most people who do not live with a disability so, I wondered how it correlated with persons living with disabilities? In order to develop a better understanding I contacted another disabled nudist, whom I have now known for many years, and invited him to be a part of this research. It is his voice which will appear in the following text.

### Jim

By most standards' Jim would be described as an attractive man. He has dish water blond hair and a trim build. Sitting in his wheel

chair his body leans slightly to one side but otherwise he has no visible disfigurement. Jim is a 34-year-old man who was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy when he was a baby. He has a hearing disability for which he uses two hearing aids, one in each ear. He is able to walk with the help of two crutches but he actually prefers to use his sport chair. This is a wheel chair which is adapted for maneuverability and speed. In the past he has shared stories with me of playing in a wheelchair basketball league. He drives, lives alone and for the past 10 years has supported himself financially through a career in computer programming. He is the youngest of four boys and has one sister younger than he. His parents live about two hours away from him.

Jim is an active man who is well liked in the resort. However, like many persons with a disability, his first category of identification is often disabled. Unlike nondisabled persons, his gender classification of male, comes second. For those who don't know him he is the disabled guy or, the guy in the wheel chair. The gender classification is somewhat discredited by many observers. It becomes overshadowed by the disabled label. Then assumptions are made about his level of masculinity. Jim stated that people are often surprised to see him involved in a sport activity or a team competition.

Standing with the aid of his crutches or supported by the edge of the table, Jim can shoot pool. In the water the buoyancy offers just enough help to enable him to stand without his crutches. This allows him to compete in water volleyball. By using his sport chair

he is competitive in tennis, basketball, ping-pong and any other challenge he has an opportunity to try. When he's not competing, he is often the referee. Aside from sports Jim loves the dance floor.

The nudist resort is now his full time home. Here he travels the grounds the same as everyone else, in a golf cart. He often carries a resort radio. The resort managers feel that people who live here know the facility, the people and the park regulations. For this reason they ask the residents to assist in reporting repairs and problems. Jim is one member and resident who has volunteered to do this. He gets around so he's likely to know if anything needs fixing or if there have been any complaints.

One of our discussions took place at a dance in the clubhouse of the resort. We began to talk casually about his goals and dreams for his future. He stated that he really wanted to be married one day and have children. However, he was not willing to settle for just anyone. He wanted to meet a woman who understood the nudist lifestyle and believed in it as he did. He stated that it was really important to him that his children are raised as nudists.

It was during this conversation that Jim also told me about growing up and going to school. He attended all the same schools his brothers had and spent a lot of time learning by watching their mistakes. His one regret was that he didn't have a sport chair when he was in school. When I asked him why that was important, he explained that throughout his school years he insisted on using crutches so that he was standing like the other kids but it was

always slow and exhausting. When he discovered sport chairs, he had no idea how much they could change his life. He had not realized how much energy he could have. The sport chair was like a door to another lifestyle. By conserving his energy, through the use of the sport chair, he was able to change his life dramatically and began to experiment with competitive sports. No longer an onlooker he began to leverage the assertive nature he believes he had been born with. His confidence grew and so did his opportunities.

These words are very similar to those spoken by Irving Zola (1991) when he described his first experiences using a wheel chair while traveling:

Completely unanticipated was the difference in my physical condition at the end of my trip: I now arrived untired and not needing of nap . . . . My conclusion was straightforward: I had always been tired, sore and cramped but with no pre-polio and pre-wheelchair experience for comparison, these experiences had been cognitively inaccessible. I had thought of them as part of the physical condition, the inevitable experience resulting from my disability. ( p. 4)

### The Reflexive Sociologist

The day I went to interview Jim, I found he was not in his trailer. Neighbors stated they had not seen him so I went to the clubhouse. I found him there, in the hot tub with two other men. He was sitting on the second step going down into the water. His crutches were on the dry edge next to him. Jim mentioned that his shower head was broken in his trailer so he came up to the clubhouse for a shower. He asked me if I wanted to talk there in the clubhouse but I suggested we go to his trailer. I was concerned that people



would interrupt us in the clubhouse and that I may not be able to get Jim to reveal his true thoughts to me if others were around.

While Jim worked to get his crutches securely positioned underneath his weight, I excused myself and went to the bathroom. I thought the timing would be just about right. By the time I finished in the bathroom, Jim would have moved from the hot tub into the locker room. As a matter of fact, I was wrong. As I sat in one stall of the co-ed bathroom, Jim passed by my door and sat on a bench, just on the opposite side of the stall partition and in front of a locker where he had put his shoes and clothing.

It dawned on me that this was something not every researcher experiences. Nor do friends of the opposite sex often encounter situations where commonly private practices, such as bathroom use, are conducted within the same room. Indeed, many families and married couples do not even share a bathroom at the same time. Our culture insists on males and females having separate bathrooms in public places. In all fairness privacy is offered as a choice. This resort does have separated facilities should one choose to use them, however, many people feel that once you have seen each other nude you have reached a different level of relating to each other. Therefore, a simple stall door between one's self and others is plenty to create the privacy one may desire in order to care for one's body functions.

As I stepped out of the stall I turned around and faced Jim. He simply said he needed to get his shoes on and we could go. I

watched as he struggled with one shoe. I wondered if people are often too eager to help him. If I offered, would it offend him? I decided it would and so I simply waited patiently. I became aware of how much quicker my life moves along. I realized I had to make a conscious effort to stand still and wait. I wasn't annoyed just not used to taking things one at a time. I often have two or three things going on at the same time. But for Jim, each task received his full attention.

As we left the building I also wondered if I should open the door for him. I decided against it. We walked through the parking lot to his car. I asked if he minded if I just left my car there and rode with him. He replied, "not at all, I'm glad you realize I don't bite." Jokingly I replied, "I don't care if you bite. I just don't want to drive." We laughed together and as he worked his way into the driver's seat he stated that he doesn't have many visitors at his place. I wanted to dig into that a bit deeper but decided to wait.

When we arrived at his trailer, a mutual friend of ours saw us and yelled, "hey, Jim, Sandra's looking for you." We all laughed then another friend waved and called out, "how come he gets all the good-looking women?" This kind of friendly banter is not at all uncommon in the nudist resort just as it would be among many friends. It's a kind of teasing that indicates a level of intimacy between friends, which Ivy and Backlund (1994) refer to as intra-friendship teasing. However, we did encounter some awkward decisions. I was

about to enter this man's home, alone with him. Do we leave the door open or close it? It was a bit cool to leave it open but I believe we were trying to legitimize my visit as one of business and not intimacy. We decided to leave it open and made quite a public spectacle of ourselves as we stood on the deck and tried to prop the door open. I felt as though I should turn and, for the sake of any curious on lookers, make a grand statement that I was going to interview him now. Instead I just closed the screen door and found a seat inside.

Jim offered me refreshments and then sat in a chair opposite from me. I looked around. The place was a bit untidy but clean. I asked him if he cleaned it himself. He laughed, looked at the small messes and replied, "not lately." Then he told me he had some ladies that come and clean whenever he needs help with it. I was having trouble transitioning into the formal interview so I handed him the consent form he would have to sign before we could officially begin the interview. While he read it, I undressed.

It dawned on me that I was somewhat uncomfortable at first. But I believe the reason was that for the first time I was crossing role expectations for myself. Never before have I attempted to combine my work in Sociology with my lifestyle as a nudist. In most cases it would be inappropriate. For example, I would never consider going nude at the University. Therefore, one might say my expectations for my professional life are very different from those of my recreational life. But in this case I was bridging between the two

and this raised feelings of concern.

In the resort my friends have known me for years as the instigator of fun and play. My years as the recreation director in this facility established a very different reputation for me. Now, after returning to school and gaining credibility as a student of sociology, I was less confident of being taken seriously at the resort. Would friends acknowledge my expertise as a sociologist? Would they accept that I was conducting legitimate research in the field of sociology for the academic pursuit of knowledge? Could I project my professional image without clothing?

As I undressed in front of Jim, I was suddenly aware of a difference between us. We were now researcher and subject and this caused a moment of conflict for me. Jim, on the other hand, never seemed to notice. We have been nude around each other many times, so for him, being a subject in this study was nothing different from having a conversation in the clubhouse. He trusted me as a friend so being an interview subject was not a leap into a different role. It wasn't defined by clothing. The problem was mine. I was experiencing discomfort at not knowing which me I was. The clothed me or the nude me. I made a conscious decision to push past this new discomfort. I pulled my shirt over my head and when I brushed my hair out of my eyes I saw he was still reading the consent form. He was still Jim. He made a joke about the statement in the form which reads, "As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, . . . ." "You mean I could get

hurt doing this interview?" he asked. "Yes," I replied, "you might laugh your ass off."

I suddenly felt much better, but cold. I suggested that we close the door and he stated he was relieved to hear that. He didn't want to mention it but he was chilled too. He also didn't want to be the first one to suggest that we close that door for fear of making me uncomfortable alone with him in his home. Now that I was nude also and he was making jokes about the consent form, I felt I had bridged that gap between a clothed role and nude role. He handed me the signed consent form. We placed the tape recorder on an end table closest to him. It laid next to the remote control and a cell phone so it was rather inconspicuous. I turned it on and we began.

#### Disabled Nudists as Educators

I believe one reason so many people were drawn to Lucinda the weekend that I met her was because she served as a role model for all. Wendell ( 1989) states that acknowledging, accommodating and identifying with a wide range of physical conditions, and I would add variations, is the road to self acceptance. Being with Lucinda helped others learn to accept whatever they felt was a fault in their own body. Jim stated it this way:

I think my presence probably has impressed many people that have come here to the park, to understand that wow there's this guy that can play darts, play volleyball, he's handicapped, wears crutches and there's nothing that stops him. Many of my friends have told me that they have told other friends, "man this guy at \_\_\_\_ (name of the resort) he can

do different things that I never thought he could do." And I found this very rewarding, very interesting that they have said that because I never really expect anything in return.

The fundamental premise of social nudism is to look at oneself and accept that we are all, each and every one of us, outside of the cultural ideal, that often the condition of the body is outside of our control and finally to look at people as greater than the sum of their parts. After all, Zola (1991) also wrote that being physically able was a temporary state and therefore, acceptance of one's own disability is the acceptance of an inevitable part of oneself. Perhaps this reality is very difficult and uncomfortable for many people to accept. Perhaps this is the source of fear many feel toward those with disabilities. It is also similar to the fear of being nude. Both are examples of extreme vulnerability.

The reference one hears, regarding a lack of clothing is always in negative terms as though to not have clothing is equated with being at a loss. Likewise, people equate nudity with being at a loss. We even extend this loss, this nudity, to our functional personal artifacts making statements such as, "I feel naked without my pager." What we are actually saying is that we feel vulnerable. So why do we equate nudity with a loss? What can we learn from people who experience a true physical loss but, claim that through the nudist lifestyle, they have overcome that loss.

Disabled nudists question the existing arrangements and provide social support for individuals to explore alternative ways of seeing themselves and others. West and Zimmerman (1987) state that

“social movements do the same. They can provide the ideology and impetus to question existing arrangements, and the social support for individuals to explore alternatives to them” (p. 146.). So while social nudism does not classify as a major social movement, equal rights for persons living with disabilities does. Furthermore, nudists who live with disabilities question the existing arrangement because they also have an understanding and belief system which supports exploration into the understanding of the body. They are in touch with their bodies.

While I would not advocate the removal of clothing from society as a social movement, I would advocate the education of society on the impact clothing has on our perceptions and our construction of reality. Clothing, in itself, is not the root of all evil. Even nudists use clothing to protect their skin from too much sun, and cold (though they have been known to enjoy playing in the rain) and to function in social roles which require it. However, disabled nudists, as educators, have a lot to teach. They have a unique opportunity because they are already involved in the social movement toward disability acceptance and they have a unique understanding of the body. They are aware of it, they think about it and they speak about it.

Persons with disabilities are not as far outside the cultural ideal of the body (Wendell, 1989). Part of what makes the disabled feel too far from the cultural ideal is the use of clothing to normalize body types. To complicate things further Lucinda mentioned

that many times persons with disabilities "are not even encouraged to look good or dress well" (Coney, 1994. p. 99). In Jim's case, he realized, early in his career that clothing was going to play an important role in how he was perceived.

Sandra asked, "How do you have to dress for work?" Jim responded, "I can dress casual." Sandra replied, "can you?" and Jim said, "But I normally dress up." Sandra said, "do you? A suit?" and Jim responded, "no, no, not a suit. Dress pants, dress shirt, no tie. You know, kinda between casual and dressy." "Now, you say you don't need too though" asked Sandra and Jim said "no, I don't need to." "So why do you choose to?" asked Sandra. Jim laughs before he responds as though he has been cornered and I laugh back) "Ah ha, gottcha." Jim responds, "I don't know" (more laughter) "I just do it cause I look . . . they know . . . it's a thing like to show them, the people at work, that I look good dressed, you know, there being with clothes on." "Does it help you then, project a professional image?" asked Sandra, to which Jim replied "correct," (He states this without hesitation.) Sandra asked if that gave him more credibility as a professional, to which he responded "Correct!" Sandra went on, "and is that a challenge otherwise, because of your disability?" Jim's reply was,

Correct, Yes! You know at times I'll wear jeans and a casual shirt. But then most of the time I'll wear dress slacks. A more professional look. Even though the CEO doesn't do that. What I find is if that's what he wants to do, it's his company, that's all right with me. I have no problem with that. It's the professional image that I project so they know, so that I get the respect. I know I get the respect in return. I'm here to work as a professional.



Sandra asked, "Where did you learn that?" Jim replied, "I don't know." (He states this as though he wonders where I come up with some of these questions. I laugh in response to the look he gives me.) Sandra asked, "Do you think that just observing society you realized you may have to do that?, or did someone teach you that?"

Jim replied,

Yeah, I observed . . . it was a fact. It was something I picked up. See, in my previous jobs I had to be dressed every day. No suit, dress up with a tie. Had to wear a tie. I had to dress up but my boss, she could wear casual clothes. Which I found a little bit off, I wasn't sure why. So I ended up figuring out, Ok it was a credibility thing. Because I was dressed up professional, you know to look like . . . to be a professional. If I was to go from department to department, they see me, I'm dressed up, not casual.

Sandra said, "So there would be no question as to what your roll was supposed to be," to which Jim replied,

Correct. They knew I was a professional and that I was there to work as a professional with my abilities. But I just picked it up along the way. Cause I knew that it's true around the world. Unfortunately, sometimes you have people who think that they are in a suit that they are high class. They think their high class. They forget about the respect. They forget about giving respect. They think if there in suit and the whole nine yards they're supposed to be given everything. They forget about given respect to people who are secretaries or you know what I mean.

Books such as, "Dress for Success" (Malloy, 1988) as well as fashion magazines and even sales consultants in department stores teach a wealth of information on how to create body shape illusions in the pursuit of the ideal body image. With the use of color, styles, lines and fabric designs, people can create the illusion of having slimmer hips or broader shoulders but this usually based on a fully developed, normal body. Apparently, there is little help

out there to even attempt to normalize the body type of a person with a visible disability.

However, when all natural body variations are revealed in nudity, they become equalized. The person living with a disability or disfigurement, whether it is a man in a wheelchair or a woman with a mastectomy, is engulfed by all the body variations present in a social nudist gathering and suddenly is no longer the one person who appears different. No longer the other.

This is not to say that a wheelchair or a mechanical arm would not draw attention to the person using it. I do not mean to imply that nudists are so pure in thought that they do not notice when a person is using a wheel chair. I mean that beyond the tool, the person using it feels they are given an opportunity to be an expressive, embodied, human being. Furthermore, it appears that the tool is identified for what it is, a tool and not mistaken for the identity of the person using it.

### Body Acceptance

Nudists with a disability state that they feel they are accepted as a person (Lorimer, 1994).

Jim said,

I find I'm more accepted (His voice inflection makes this answer sound as if it's a question) here in the nudist community because they realize, many people realize that well, we all have some kind of hang up or some kind of disability. We're not perfect, um, we come in all shapes and sizes and disabilities. We learn to help each other one way or another.

Sandra asked, "What about in the outside world (textile)?" to

which Jim responded,

The outside world? Now that's a different perspective. The outside world, there are people who don't understand what nudism is all about, what it does for you, things like that. Many girls that I've come across, or not just girls, guys, they're not sure exactly what I can do. The reason I think is that they don't quite understand, they've never been exposed to having friends that have a disability. They don't know how to react. They don't know how to say things, you know?

When those without a disability view those who live with a disability with pity or sympathy they act on the assumption that to have a disability is the equivalent of being less than whole and thereby less than them. When I spoke with Jim, however, he stated that he believed this was an assumption based on ignorance. He said, "Right. They think it's pain all the time. Well it's not always pain. I feel just like anybody else." Sandra asked, "So is that kind of a limitation of a quote unquote 'normal persons' perspective? Are they limited because they can't imagine how..."

Jim said

They can't imagine how . . . Well the reason is, is because they don't know . . . I think it's because they never really have interactions with people with disabilities. And the people with disabilities, like me, I can say that it doesn't hurt. I can say "I can do this" and it doesn't hurt. Or I can do this and it does hurt. Over time they find out I can play volleyball, you know I can do things. And they say wow. He's almost as normal as any other person.

### Communication

Throughout my research with nudists, open and positive communication skills was a reoccurring topic of discussion. This was true when talking with Jim also with one difference. Most subjects

mentioned open communication with friends as a new skill they have developed through friendships with other nudists, which were based on acceptance and trust. This was true for Jim but he mentioned that for him it was first and foremost a survival skill.

Jim said,

I always had a good time watching one of my brothers run out the door after he pissed my dad off. He'd run off for the rest of the night (breaks into laughter) and wouldn't come back till like eleven or twelve, you know. Wait till my dad cools off and come back in. (We laugh together)

Sandra asked, "so you couldn't do that if you had a fight with your dad?" to which Jim replied, "no." Sandra said, "you had to stay there and figure it out, work it out?" to which Jim responded, "right." Sandra asked, "do you think you have a different way of communicating with your dad then your brothers did? Jim said,

Yeah. I needed to develop that because . . . , up till I was young, like two years old up till I was about five, my folks always had put me up in the front seat of the vehicle so I could always hear them. But when I got too big they put me in the back and I never, I had a hard time hearing. They didn't realize until I got to be about five or six. They don't know if it has anything to do with being . . . , my disability, my cerebral palsy, that can be a part of it. Some defects come into play, and hearing is part of your balance, but I learned in my childhood to try to communicate cause I wasn't able to move fast enough. So I had to find different ways to talk, deal with problems. I couldn't run away from them.

Secondly, Jim and many others talked about communication in their relationships with others. For some it was communication with friends or within a marriage. For Jim, it was a factor in relating to single women he meets.

Jim said, "Social nudism is accepting who people are, personalities, and not always with clothes on," to which Sandra asked, "Do

you get to know a woman better if your talking to her nude than if your talking to her somewhere clothed?" Jim said,

Um, um good point. Probably yes, cause if she doesn't have any hang ups about what she's wearing and she's willing, probably more willing to talk to me . . . How do I put that? Because then I know I can feel her personality, I can see where she is, where she's coming from with her personality.

## CHAPTER VI

### WHAT DO NUDISTS KNOW?

What do nudists know about social norms in our society? No other public situation in life exposes an individual to enough bodies that they can see with their own eyes that no body's perfect. Everyone is outside the cultural ideal. Therefore, when one talks of being normal what they mean in actuality is to be not perfect in terms of a cultural ideal. Some bodies are disproportionate, most have scars, some are without parts such as a leg or breast, some use tools to help them move or function. More often people have birthmarks, skin discolorations or curious muscle developments from a repetitive role in their everyday work. Nudity, therefore, is the great equalizer. In addition, everyone is born with the qualifications to become a nudist. In this sense it may be the only form of recreation, in deed, the only lifestyle in which membership is truly nondiscriminatory.

How do nudists know this? While it may be impossible to completely remove the influences of a social consensus on clothing, nudists have the unique perspective from which to explore the power of that consensus. Unlike textiles, nudists as agents in the duality of structuration, do question the rules and applications of clothing and are empowered to do so by their everyday practices of social nudism. They have reorganized their feedback cycle of

structuration, agency and structure. Thus, their practical knowledge is different from members of the textile world because even though their knowledge originated from the same structuration, it has moved to a level of active agency. Nudists are aware and conscious of the influences of the presence of clothing in social situations. They view clothing as an institution, "a complex of relations forming part of the ruling apparatus organized around a distinctive function" (Smith, 1987, p. 160).

### Friendship in the Lifestyle

Of all the topics that emerged in interviews, friendship was by far the most common. Every individual I spoke with talked about their friendships with other nudists. Interestingly, this topic was completely unsolicited. I have no questions in my interview protocol which directly enquire about friendships. This raised a few questions for me regarding research on friendships. I wondered if all social organizations are able to create as strong a bond between its members, given that they have the interests of the organization in common. For example would members of the Masonic Lodge or an antique car club describe their friendships within those organizations the same way nudists describe theirs? Without further expanding my study and interviewing members of such social organizations I cannot empirically answer the proposed question. I can, however, offer the opinions and experiences of the subjects in my study, many of whom belong to additional organizations outside of nudism. They

make their own comparisons as they experience them in their everyday lives.

There are two main interconnected components to the development of friendships in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. First is the development of leisure time in the United States based on technological advancements in industry and their impacts on the economy. The second is the reconstruction of friendships based on these advancements. So, while the development of leisure originated from a social macro movement one can also see it's implications on individuals and their friendships through a more micro or social interactionist perspective.

According to Silver, (1990) there has been a shift in the social construction of friendships in the United States, one which bases the formation of friendships on the mutual exchange of expressivity rather than an instrumental process. Prior to the growth of our commercial society ones mode of labor was not clearly distinguished from one's mode of leisure. The farmer, for example was likely to work from sun up to sun down. His social circles would revolve around farming and family. The people he was likely to converse with were other farmers, members of agricultural support systems, and his own family network. Friendships within this system were likely to be business networks as well as a social network. Therefore, the friendships within it were likely to be relationships of mutual benefit.

Following the industrial revolution and later, the formation



of a middle class in the United States we witnessed, through the emergence of shift work and the eight-hour work day, the development of leisure time (Kornblum, 1994). This leisure time or discretionary time is separate and different from obligatory time in that it is based, in content, on freedom, personal satisfaction, play and/or creativity (Pronovost, 1998). In fact one area of sociological research focuses primarily on the development of leisure in United States and other industrial countries (Field, 2000). The literature review of this specialized area reveals an increasing value of discretionary time, while work constraints, which often includes home maintenance, appears to be demanding more obligatory time (Schor, 1992; Kacapyr, 1997). One way to deal with these conflicting goals is to combine leisure time with the home or work. This is represented in the use of recreational vehicles such as motor homes and the purchase of time shares or resort memberships. In this way, one can justify the time away from home and job by combining an obligation with an application of leisure.

Today, entirely leisure oriented industries exist such as the resort industry, tourism and travel industry, RV industry and the hobby industry. People now have the liberty to develop friendships, not only on a network of calculated interests, but on common interests and compatibility. Furthermore, individuals have the economic freedom to expand their geographical opportunities for friendship. In support of that geographical freedom the government funds extensive highway systems, national parks and preserves (Kornblum,

1994). With the financial security provided by the economic stability of the United States, workers quickly take to the roads and planes to explore destinations beyond their residential and business locations. This may expose individuals to a more diverse pool of potential friends with similar interests.

As I reviewed the available research on friendships, my intent was to illustrate the recent discourse on friendships, not to present an exhaustive or conclusive report. I limited the findings to those journal articles which pertained to friendships in a social context and/or friendships in later life such as the baby boom generation. This allowed me to eliminate findings based on demographic groups who would be experiencing a very different stage in their lives, such as childhood or college age groups, and would likely have different exposures to potential relationships than most of my subjects. Some interesting speculations (Adams & Blieszner, 1998) about the baby boom generation include that they may be different as a cohort because they share a common place in historical processes which had major social impacts such as the civil rights movement, the war on poverty and the women's movement. These experiences may have offered more opportunities to develop cross-gender and interracial friendships which might ultimately foster friendships with greater tolerance, common values, affective friendship processes and the openness and honesty that was the hallmark of their youth.

The age range of my subjects is between 36 and 74. Admittedly it is a wide range, however, demographically it encompasses the

entire baby boom generation as well as the generation prior to the baby boomers. It is also representational of the adult age range one is likely to observe in most social nudist gatherings. Age integration is another characteristic of nudism, therefore, age differences do not appear to be a factor in initiating and developing friendships.

Ellen and Caleb (ages 69 and 74) said, "we have a different outlook on life. Nudism is keeping us younger (Ages 69 and 74). We hang out with younger people. Outside nudism our friends are our age."

This also supports the idea that many nudists speak of when they mention the lack of observable indicators of social stratification in nudism. Samantha said,

There are a lot of very wealthy people in this park but you don't know it. People don't act. You don't know who's wealthy and who isn't, whose middle class, white collar, blue collar. It's just not an issue.

One explanation for the apparent lack of social stratification may be due to the cohort effect of baby boomers.

Communication technology may also influence the character of friendships. No longer relegated to writing letters and long distance phone calls, friends may now contact each other more frequently and with less time invested in the correspondence. E-mail has allowed people from all over the world to either develop otherwise logistically unlikely relationships, or to maintain frequent contact with established relationships. Even the development of answering machines, long distance carrier competition, and cell phones may

influence the quality and frequency of communications between friends.

Each of these components, the development of leisure time, economic stability of the nation, the reduction of geographic barriers, and the development of communication technology, may have a significant impact on the breadth and characteristics of friendships in the twenty first century. However, according to Wellman (as cited in Allan, 1998) they have also contributed to the establishment of friendships based on "ties with a more individualized focus" (p. 688).

The individual and the development of the self are issues which come out of the concept of identity in late modernity. According to Allan (1998) as job security becomes less reliable and the guarantee of careers in trades and crafts less promising the solidarity of socioeconomic groups also weakens. Individuals and their families are often forced to relocate far away from extended family and their communities of origin. These experiences break down the strength of social classes as an identity group. As role expectations, which accompany levels of social stratification, become less defined and less reliable as an indicator of one's identity, individuals begin to look to diverse groups outside of family and career, to create an identity unique to them, the self. These support groups emerge as "lifestyle," defined as "having a common identity that is built upon divergence from others" (Allan, 1998, p. 697). Nudism is one such lifestyle.

The impact of identifying with a lifestyle is believed to increase the depth and strength of friendships within that lifestyle group because the members support the development of the individual. This type of support was referred to frequently in the interviews I held with nudists. As well as many other aspects of friendship related to the aforementioned theory on development and the self in lifestyle groups.

Along with a shift in the social construction of friendships and the emergence of leisure there appears to be a shift in values among the baby boomer generation and a few of their predecessors. Henslin (1999), refers to this as a "value cluster." It includes "four interrelated core values: Leisure, Self-fulfillment, Physical Fitness as seen in the natural food industry and holistic health movement and Youngness," a focus on the enjoyment of an entirely new life following retirement (p. 48). Each of these core values is expressed by one or more of the nudists I interviewed. Therefore, I conclude that nudism is a form of recreation that combines lifestyle through a cluster of common values which are prominent in U.S. culture among the current generation in power, the baby boomers, and their friends. Furthermore, that the adoption of the value cluster facilitates friendships of depth, breadth, and length.

#### Social Interactions

I had a full day of interviews planned when I arrived at the nudist resort. I paid twenty-two dollars for a day of grounds fees,

the customary charge for use of the resort and all it's facilities for one day (not including camping), then I entered the park. It was a quiet, cool day in May. Remarkably warm for May in the Northern U.S. There were not many people in the park but then again it was still early for a Saturday morning. Many people who would arrive to spend the weekend camping would still be driving at this time of the morning. Then again, not many nudists were likely to be out for a nude camping weekend yet. Most people who would come for the weekend would be members who had permanent park models in the resort.

My first interview was scheduled for 9:00 a.m. It was with a gentleman I had known for about six years. I drove up to his trailer, a large fifth wheeler he tows all over the U.S. There didn't appear to be anyone home, but I knocked any way. No one answered. This could have set my entire schedule back. I decided to drive around and see who was out. To my delight I found Roy and a few other men working on the roof of a new park model that had recently been moved onto a lot. He greeted me with a hug. I asked for his wife and he told me she was in their trailer.

### A Friendly Dyad

The first interview I ever conducted for this research project was with Samantha so I was pleased to find her at home. I felt I owed her a great deal for opening up to me for that first interview, but in fact she believed it had a wonderful and positive impact on

her life. She came to me one night at a dance in the resort and thanked me for interviewing her. I asked why she would thank me and she stated that going through the process of being interviewed made her think about her life and the things she had said in the interview. One of which was that becoming a nudist gave her the confidence to begin changing her life and her goals. When she later reflected on that statement she realized there was a career change she had dreamed of making one day and she questioned what she was waiting for. The following week she enrolled in an accredited massage therapy school. I was anxious to ask her how it was going.

I knocked on the door and Samantha called for me to come in. She didn't even know who it was but in the resort it was likely to be one of only a few people. I let myself in. In the living room, taking up most of the space in the center of the floor was a massage table. I put my book bag down as she came from the back of the small mobile home where their bathroom and bedroom were. She was nude, and wore no makeup. Her hair had not yet been brushed. She smiled with surprise when she saw it was me and greeted me with a full hug.

I explained I was there to conduct more interviews and I wondered if she had time to do one herself. I wanted to hear about her new career and see if things had changed since our last interview. She told me she had a few massages scheduled for later in the day but until then she was free. Then she suggested I also interview another woman, Kelly. I had never met Kelly, she was rather new to

the resort so likewise she would not know me either. I wondered if this would have an impact on her willingness to submit to an in-depth interview of her nudist lifestyle. Samantha suggested she call her but got a busy signal when she tried.

I was surprised they had phones. But, then again, many people were investing so much in these summer homes that they are actually resembling a mini suburban community. In this two square block section of the camp ground only semi permanent park models remain. All other campers are using other sections of the resort. People in this area clearly have discretionary money to invest in a summer home. After all, expenses include annual memberships, lot rental, electric bills and then the actual mobile home. Most of which were now decorated with decks, three season rooms, driveways (paved or white gravel) and gardens. So why was I surprised by a phone?

When Samantha re-dialed Kelly's number it went through but to my surprise her greeting was very informal. No hello, no hi. "Who were you talking to?" she boldly asked. It seemed strange to me that a friendship could progress to a level of comfort so quickly. Kelly and her husband had only been in the resort for a year. "Are you busy right now?" she asked her. I cringed at being the source of inconvenience on such a spur of the moment invitation. She went on.

Sandra's here and she's doing interviews for her Master's thesis . . . you know Sandra . . . well maybe you don't. Just come over you'll recognize her when you see her. I'm sure you've met her. Any way I thought you'd be a great one to interview. OK, bring it with you. Bye.



As they talked, I looked around the room trying to appear as though I was not listening in on the conversation. The room was small however, so it was difficult. I suddenly became aware of my formal and somewhat distant appearance. I was fully clothed in casual jeans and a T-shirt and I carried a portfolio style book bag. While this was not a completely professional look it did construct a persona of difference between us. In this setting Samantha would think it was strange if I continued to remain clothed. I have never been around her clothed. I also feared it would have an impact on the way Kelly felt about disclosing to me. Especially if we, in fact, had never met before. I realized I needed to level the playing field. Or in the case of my relationship with Samantha, I at least needed to be myself, as she knew me. This reconfirmed my belief in conducting the interviews on their terms, meaning the terms in which they would best identify with me. I stood up and began removing my clothing, carefully folding each garment and placing it on Samantha's couch.

When Kelly arrived, a few minutes later, I immediately felt like the outsider in the group. She and Samantha were distributors for a nutritional supplement product line and this gave them a topic of conversation which I could not enter. Instead of interrupting, however I decided to openly listen to their conversation, observe their body language, and consider this friendship as it was being acted out in real time, in front of me. Why ask them about their friendship when I could also observe it in context and action.

My first observation was of their common language. These two friends, with the bond of a common lifestyle and the added interest of nutrition and health, communicated with a series of personal idioms of both verbal and non verbal forms which were significant to them. Samantha commented on Kelly's appearance with an intimate knowledge of her body. Her expertise as a massage therapist gave her the ability to identify stress in Kelly based on the way she was sitting and holding her body. However, this would not have been as obvious to Samantha on a stranger. She knew Kelly, knew her body as a therapist and knew her body as a nudist. This is a detail unique to Samantha's talent as a therapist. She explained it this way, "I think I'm more intuitive in massage than others. People are comfortable with me more so than others therapists, I wonder why?". Rita offered an answer, "You motivate people."

Watching these two friends together one could not tell whose house we were in. They were both as comfortable in the house as if it was their own. There appeared to be a very small personal space around each of them so that physical intimacy was more two like family members rather than two friends of only a year. I was interested to find out more about Kelly and her experiences with nudism and perhaps more about her relationships with others.

She described her first nudist experiences to me. She and her husband own a boat and Kelly was comfortable sunning topless in the boat when they were alone. They went to Jamaica one year for a vacation and noticed the topless women on the beach. When she re-

ceived a massage, the woman suggested that she might be more comfortable in the massage without her suit. Kelly was not offended but also not convinced. Later in the vacation they ventured to the nude side of the beach and sat near a nude family. After watching the interactions of the children and the closeness of the family, she began to consider the idea of nude being an acceptable option on the beach. She began to go topless. While walking the beach one day they discovered a hidden cove being used exclusively by nudists. They enjoyed it so much they returned to the cove every day.

Not all Kelly's experiences were as positive in the beginning. Even though she had a good experience in Jamaica, she still had a preconceived notion that nudists were, "all young, beautiful and sex crazed." So, much to her dismay while in California her husband surprised her by arranging a tour of a nudist resort. This would be their first experience with organized nudism. She was furious at her husband and to make things worse, when they arrived they were expected to disrobe at the front office and then were separated for individual tours of the resort. Kelly recalled, "I was more angry than anything, but a little concerned. It didn't make sense why they would separate us." Once she was inside the resort with a female tour guide, she changed her whole attitude. "I saw families, children, volleyball, and was sold within 15 minutes. I wanted to stay." They loved it and spent the day there.

Eventually they joined a resort but it didn't work out well for them. When they visited the resort they now attend, they liked it

immediately. Kelly said,

The old place started to swing. Women were wearing too much lingerie. I started to wear outfits (nudist jargon for personal adornments of scanting clothing or theme costumes). I was getting up worrying about my hair and makeup. Eventually we dressed for everything. It became the exact opposite of what we wanted in nudism. Everyone here is nude not fancy. It's more friendly.

I was interested in Samantha and Kelly's perception of friendships in nudism. They suggested I have brunch with them and the Saturday morning brunch group. "You'll get a lot of data there," stated Kelly. I was not aware of such a group but, it sounded like a great opportunity to watch friends together in a social setting, so I accepted. I looked forward to listening to this group in their Saturday morning interaction. It seems the group had been meeting for a year or so at one couple's trailer and everyone contributed something to the brunch. It was open to anyone who wanted to join them but tended to be the same core group most of the time. As we walked to brunch, I continued to ask questions about friendships.

Many nudists talk about the lack of social stratification in nudism so I asked Samantha how she and her husband have chosen people to initiate friendships with. She replied,

Pretty much, interest in common and . . . well like, to travel with. To travel with another nudist couple is great because you can get a suite. Even a one night stopover you can share a room, you know? It's not a big deal. Cause you get up in the morning and you know space is limited, but you cook breakfast and don't have to worry about how you look, the way your hair is. People tend to worry about that stuff more when they wear clothes. Like is my makeup on? Everything has to be on. Where a nudist will get up in the morning and walk out with their hair all sticking up. You know? It's like "good morning. This is me.

Samantha also stated that since she and her husband became involved in nudism their friendships with couples have increased. She went on saying,

we have way more friends. We've always had friends where a lot of times they were his friends or my friends and then you get together. But his friends, you're so so with the spouse or it's just a business thing. Here we have friends in common. Our friends are our friends, as couples, and they just keep accumulating. We have all kinds of friends from all walks of life, with different interests.

Later in the study, when I asked other participants about their friendships in nudism, I heard similar responses. Ruth said, "I always had problems making friends. Not here, we were accepted immediately." Vikki said, "At home you watch more TV and don't interact with others. Here, (at the resort) you slow down and make relationships. Relationships are stronger because there are no pretenses. Friendships last forever here."

### Brunch

We walked down a garden path which separated two trailers and rounded the back corner. I saw a large stainless grill outdoors on the patio of one trailer. A man stood there flipping pancakes. Others hustled around with various dishes and utensils setting up a serving area on the porch. There appeared to be about 12 to 15 people there. I seemed to be the only one left unclothed. It was a bit cool to be nude and most people had something on. I had a sweatshirt and shoes on. I suddenly felt like a novice in front of the people who I had not met before. Intermingled with these new

faces were folks I have know for many years. They greeted me and teased me about it being too chilly for nudity. I suddenly felt confused about my roles again.

I had intended to make others comfortable by showing my inclusion in the lifestyle. However, It seemed to be backfiring. I was actually appearing different because no nudist in their right mind would be nude, outside on a day like today. I imagined that those who knew me were questioning just how sincere I was about nudism. They couldn't know how many years I had been involved in the lifestyle or just how involved I was. I had to rely on those who knew me to set the others at ease.

Before I could introduce myself Samantha and Kelly announced to everyone that I was there to observe and talk with the group about nudism. Don and Nola, a couple I also interviewed for the study, arrived and seemed glad to see me. They were a great help in starting conversations which related to my study. They were so enthusiastic that they encouraged others to express their opinions openly. As the meal went on, I mentioned that I would like to use the information in my study. I offered to leave out anyone who did not want to be included however, not one person wished to be excluded. They were so anxious to talk that the flow of conversation was difficult to control so I decided to simply listen once again and throw in an occasional probing question.

We were seated on the deck at the back of a park model, a small mobile home designed for resorts living. This particular one

had an elaborate glass sun room attached as well as the deck and the patio where the grill stood. To one side of the deck was a table where six people sat. They were not exclusively couples. Some were, however, the closeness of the friendships among this group makes it acceptable and normal for males and females of unrelated couplings to bond friendships.

Samantha mentioned the topic of cross gender friendships in our earlier interview. For her, having male friends in platonic friendships was a new experience which she directly attributed to nudism. She stated that by removing clothing from interactions one not only removes barriers of class distinctions but also removes barriers of power which includes power relations in gendered interactions. Once those barriers are removed one is open to learning about the individual and through that experience Samantha personally learned that men could be sensitive caring friends. She stated, "Oh, I have a lot of men I can sit and talk to. I never had men friends before. Because you just don't do it. So yes, it (nudism) opens up your world of people."

Elsewhere on the deck and patio were clusters of people sitting in deck chairs with their breakfast plates held on their laps. The conversation flowed freely. I asked how nudism was different from other social organizations and heard the following responses. One replied, "We're more accepting of other people," and another said, "This is more friendly than a non nudist campground," and another response was, "I'm more comfortable with myself here than in other

clubs we've been in."

From here the conversation took a humorous turn. The people of the group began to build jokes from one another's comments. The jokes were on both the textile world and themselves. It was a perfect example of the comradery in the group, the relaxed and celebratory nature of their conversations and most importantly the level of light heartedness through which this group of nudists view the world through the body.

Nola commented that "nudists joke more. There's more material." Perry said, "If you go to an optional beach it's friendlier on the nude side than the prude side." Wendy said, "Of course it was more friendly, because the woman next to you had tits and you could see them." Perry responded, "that's partly true, curiosity begins the interest in nudism. Breasts on the beach." Wendy replied, "for women, her husband first drags her out but then women become more militant about staying in nudism. More hard core." Don said that "clothing is a status symbol. In the nudist resort what are you going to do say, "he's got a better hat then I do?" Wendy commented, "Try dressing in a two-man tent before you can go out. That doesn't happen in a nudist campground. We're more logical. Even if we had to dress, we would get out of the tent first. And why can't I drive home naked?"

Time was getting on and many of the men in the group were anxious to get on with their projects. On this particular morning they were working together on the trailer of a new member who had



recently moved in at the end of their road. This family consisted of a man, his wife and some older children. The man had been diagnosed with terminal cancer and had chosen to spend his last days living in the resort with his family and friends. He bought a relatively new but used park model and leased the lot at the end of the gravel road, which overlooked the lagoon. Over the past few weeks the men of this group had set the trailer up, built a deck and were now rebuilding the roof for the family. It was not a financially charitable project as much as it was a show of community support of a friend. It was another indicator of the level of compassion and intimacy that nudists feel and show for each other.

There are other situations where friends help each other with projects however this is typically associated with socially stratified classes. Karen Walker (1995) states that working class friendships typically provide material assistance; while middle class friendships are likely to involve shared interests and leisure pursuits. If Walkers research is correct, it appears this may be one additional way that nudists are different. If friendships in the textile world tend to be segregated in the way the friendship manifests itself, I would argue that nudists may have bridged that segregation due to their reduction in the importance of social class differentiation. The men of the brunch group not only shared the interest of nudism and it's leisure life, but also reach out, and share material assistance with one another.

After everyone had picked up their plates, the men moved on to their project. Kelly suggested that some of us could continue our conversation at her place, so we walked back through the small garden paths to her park model. As we settled in the garden room attached to her living room one could see the open spaciousness of the resort. Blinds were on the windows, however, they were used to block out direct sun not to obstruct the view of others. One could walk past and see in just as well as one could see out at the resort. Privacy, in this section of Kelly's house was not necessary.

We were joined by four other women obviously still interested in continuing the conversation. Their interest in my research was reassuring. We sat around the sunny room and enjoyed a little heat. Aside from all the other topics we discussed that afternoon I was interested in hearing their perceptions on friendships in nudism. Samantha had shared so many thoughts on the subject that I wanted to know how other women felt.

Our conversation went on. I asked, "Are your friendships with female nudists different from your friendships with women in the outside world, the clothed world?" Samantha responded,

I have single women friends here, which I didn't have. Their lifestyles are different, their interesting to talk to. It's nice to have single friends you don't worry about. You trust them. It's a trusting situation.

Sandra asked, "Do you share more with other women here than what you would share elsewhere?" Samantha, "Yeah." Sandra, "Do you?" Samantha, "Absolutely, I would, yeah." Emily said, "Here (at the resort) we are present in the communication, not isolated in a box. We

listen." Ruth said, "We share things together." Samantha, "I can share things here that I want kept a secret." Kelly said, "At home the neighborhood might change and outside we wouldn't know the new folks. Here we met them right away." Ruth said, "My neighborhood did change and I never met the new people." Kelly said, "Friends are everywhere (in nudism) you can joke with friends here and no one will take it wrong. We have friendly bickering between friends. Extraordinary friendships. We will grow old together." Ruth responded, "At one time the park (this nudist resort) closed, went bankrupt. People lost money in investments. But the fear was how will we be with our friends now?"

I asked the women about their husbands and their husband's friendships. There seemed to be a reoccurring topic in my interviews regarding the perception that men had closer relationships with other males in nudism. The women agreed. Samantha said, "The guys (their husbands) are close, they hug, they talk on the phone during the week." Kelly said, "Yeah, just to chat and see what's going on. They've never done this with friends who aren't nudists."

Later, in separate interviews two gentlemen supported this idea of nudism fostering close friendships for them. Don said,

I can easily say I've got the closest friends now that I've ever had in my life. And it's not that we socialize at their home or at our home. We see each other here or we e-mail each other or we talk on the phone. It was strange for me, sure I can hug a female friend, give her a kiss whatever, friendship but, to hug another guy . . . very strange for me. That's not the way I've been in my entire life. When I see . . . (A male friend of his at the resort) I give this guy a hug, every time. That's just the way he is. That's the way I am around him and sometimes I think about that. It's strange having a

friend that close that you feel that comfortable with.

When I asked Gary what nudism could teach other people he summed it up this way: "Basic friendship of people. We're helpful with each other. Go to your (textile world) neighborhood and you may not even know the people next door.

#### A Nudist's Perspective

In talking with nudists I discovered that they share a similar view of society. Most speak of feelings of freedom associated with nudism and how that freedom affects their lives. Many even associate the freedom with health and stress relief. There is an over all sense that our society, the textile society is obsessed with the body even to the point of no longer associating many manifestations of this obsession with the origin of the problem, which nudists believe is a lack of respect for the self and one another.

I asked each participant what a nudist was. Most related it to the actual practice of recreating and socializing without clothing. Tamara said that "a nudist is a person who feels comfortable in a social setting with their clothes off. Cloths off is not necessarily sexual." Ford's response was,

a nudist is a person who is very comfortable with the body regardless of its shape. People are expected to be a certain shape and we don't worry about it as much. It's a relaxing way of life. When you take your clothes off the titles disappear. People go by who they are personally.

Samantha said, "A person secure with themselves, um, prefers natural things, enjoys nature. I think it all goes hand in hand. Likes

people, very social."

As I spoke further with participants, they usually described some very deep convictions toward nudism. It became apparent that this is more than recreation to them. I asked them what nudism meant to them. Don said,

You hear people that tell you to close your eyes and dream of a comfortable place, like a tropical beach or something like that and it soothes you, puts you at peace. That's probably what it is for me only it's reality. Instead of just thinking of a place I would like to be that's tranquil and stress free you can actually be here. It's, being clothes free is in itself, whether it's at a nudist resort or at home a peaceful atmosphere. And I do think about being here or being someplace else nude as a way to relieve stress or to just get away from things for a few minutes during the day.

Don uses an interesting term when he speaks of being "clothes free" the double meaning implies not only being without clothing but also to be free from the social constraints associated with clothes. This is further expressed in his reference to reflecting on a peaceful place as a way of reducing stress while in the textile world. For Don, that world is associated with stressful situations not present in the context of nudism. Brian had a similar response.

There's some add on TV with this hippie-type woman telling people to go to a "beautiful place" (or some such thing) in their minds. I think for me it would be the resort at the right time. The right time would be dancing to, say, "Wonderful Tonight," having had a couple of drinks so I actually feel like I'm dancing, with the lights down, the weather warm and the doors (to the clubhouse) open and other nude people on the dance floor. There are times like that in which I really feel I could use the word "magical." It's so peaceful. But it's more than just peaceful. It sounds trite, but what has gone through my head at such times is "this is so cool," (because were nude) and I have thought of other people who I think might love it too if they'd give it a try. But they wouldn't because nude recreation has such a PR problem. Anyway, I've told Tamara on more than one occasion, "this is where I am

happiest." And on those special nights, it is.

Many of the women I interviewed talked about their experiences with self acceptance and body acceptance. They state a sense of security in their appearance due to a lack of pressure to present oneself in relation to social expectations. The expectations here are that one will be nude and yet even that is not mandatory. If a woman (or man) keeps something on it does not raise suspicion nor criticism. Goffman (1997) refers to the way people perform role expectations, as they relate to social class, as the presentation of self in everyday drama. The tools for the drama include makeup, costumes and props all of which project a socially prescribed persona.

For many women functioning in the everyday world involves a series of convincing presentations of socially prescribed roles at the expense of the self. This is true for men too, however, in a gender stratified society where male dominance is still the controlling power in ruling relations, it is women who struggle daily to fit into the social characters they are playing. Functioning as a mother, a wife, a career person or a community activist requires that one take on the norms for the role and play the part at the expense of the self. And the tools with which to do so are clothes, makeup and artifacts (Rubin, 1992).

In the words of the women whom I interviewed they repeatedly stated that there was a great relief in not being expected to live up to body ideals or role presentations.

Nola: Well to me it means self acceptance and freedom. You know and body acceptance. Helps you get over ideas like you need to wear clothes all the time, you think your fat (laughs) you know. You just learn to accept yourself, how you are.

### Perspective on Social Problems

Nudists express a feeling of social responsibility to share what they believe they understand about society. They identify that their perspective affords them a unique view of life and society. They are still conscious of respecting those who do not subscribe to or understand their views. They feel a sense of protectiveness over their own right to their lifestyle as well as others right to disagree with that lifestyle. Ford thought that "Nudists need to understand how others feel about nudism and should respect those who are not nudists and honor their belief too."

The compassion displayed by many nudists extends to those who may not understand their lifestyle. Don gave a good example of this when he was describing the thoughts he and his wife Nola dealt with shortly after buying a new home in the city. Don said,

What can I do hear to make it look more appealing yet give me more privacy? And it's not so much to keep your neighbors out as it's so that you don't frustrate them saying, "we've got nudists next door and they don't care if our kids see them out nude" you know, that kind of attitude.

Don and Nola took precautions to protect the feelings of others who may inadvertently be exposed to the lifestyle they lead in their own home. Don said,

We can lay on the deck, and last summer I put a motion sensor in a basement window near the front of the drive way. So if anybody knocks on the front door and nobody answers, and they decide to walk down the driveway to the back of the house there will be a little beep. And it's not so much their going to embarrass me and there's not going to be this shock when they turn the corner and I've got nothing on but a towel. At least they may realize I was laying there in the sun nude. It's not going to be the same reaction as if I stand up and say, "Hi, what do you want?"

Respect for individual beliefs is a core principle of nudism. Therefore, it should not be surprising that nudists feel responsible for taking precautions to alert others to their possible exposure to nudity. Many nude beaches post signs stating, "beyond this point you may encounter nudity." It's considered fair warning, which leaves each individual the choice of whether one will proceed forward into the posted area or not. It also transfers the responsibility of entering that area of the beach, or private property, to the individual.

Many participants in the study expressed concerns in general about our society and common social problems of the time period. They voice their concerns about different ways people are isolated. They believe the isolation stems from a general social practice of differentiating people based on physical appearances. In their opinion, society has developed into such a complex system that clothing now contributes, through nonverbal language, to the separation of people and to the labeling of people as others. Therefore, it also contributes to social pressures to fit in, look normal, and conform. Kelly remarks that "young teenage girls in the mall all look the same. They're from the same cookie cutter."



Nudists describe some social problems as emerging out of a form of alienation. Furthermore, they associate this alienation with the ideology and belief systems which are supported by different uses of clothing and the negative connotations regarding the body, which are prevalent in society. Ruth said that "children are shooting each other because they feel outside and not accepted." Kelly responded that,

Here (at the nudist resort) it's OK to be different. Young people can play together. There is less mystery about the body so they're not so obsessed with it. It teaches young men more respect for women.

The participants posit that some consequences of living in a clothed minded world are inequality, stratification and alienation through the power differentials created in the way members of the textile world do clothing. Gary remarked,

Society is so judgmental. When all the clothes go all you have left is the personality. Here, people aren't judged by their bodies. At the beach people judge. Even I would comment about a large person on the clothed beach but not even think about seeing a large person here. Nudism makes people accept themselves and others as is. Children in our society are shooting each other. It's the thoughts that are messed up. Society is messed up. We can't even talk about God in school. Kids don't have a good moral base. Their idols are baseball and hockey player who are violent.

Ford said,

We're brought up to believe in the presentation and power of clothing. Society is somewhat less formal now. For instance in the 1950s boys wore a suit and tie to school. Now even prominent people are dressing casually. We are beginning to realize that we can be casual. But it may be one of our social problems. Stress on designer labels increases competition. Certain clothing elicits certain behavior. Look at uniforms. Don't get me wrong. We need clothing to keep some structure in our society. But nudism has its place for relaxation. Crime would be down if we could be nude. But we

need structure in the world.

Another explanation was offered by Don who was a police officer at one time. He spoke of an incident which recently happened in the nudist resort during a musical festival. While he was conducting business on stage with one of the bands, (as a volunteer coordinator) his wife Nola, brought a plate of food to him back stage. The security people who were local towns people hired for the weekend, and not professional security personnel, overreacted to her presence on stage and their position of authority. They were forceful in attempting to remove her from the area and in her defense Don was involved in a physical altercation with them. Don said,

Yeah, yeah, these were just a bunch of thugs. You put a shirt on them and their instant security for the weekend. And their dealing with people who are drinking and are nude. They're just waiting for something to happen.

Sandra:

You just said a really important thing there. It didn't matter who they were when they came in, but you put a shirt on them and it gave them authority in their eyes. (Clothing as a designator of power). It was the shirt itself that symbolized authority?

Don:

My feeling is if you had put a staff hat (and no clothing), even if it said security on it, and put them in this park nude and said you guys are security this weekend, they would have dealt with people totally different. There's no doubt in my mind because then they're at the same level but, they represent the park.

Don, Nola and their friends believe that the action exhibited by the security people in this incident, was directly related to the association with a perceived authority given to the article of

clothing, which designated a position of power. Nudity, on the other hand, would have equalized this sense of power over others. The use of a hat or arm band could then be a designator of authority among equals.

With daily power differentials removed from social interactions, the possibility for relationships between people also changes. Ellen said,

There is no badge of rank. No one is showing off what they paid for a piece of clothing by a label or style. So you know very little until you speak with people. Once you talk to them you hear how they think. So you must talk to people to decide who you are like.

Nudists agree that one way relationships change in nudism is through an absence of biased judgments against others. Ford remarked that "nudism allowed me to see people in a different way, not to judge. When you take your clothes off you're all the same."

### The Power of Self Acceptance

Nudism also appears to have significant impacts on both men and women and how they feel about themselves. Nola said,

I've brought a friend out here once who has a colostomy bag. A single female, now if that were me, I would have had trouble doing that. She had no problem and it was funny cause she sat in the hot tub, nobody was in the hot tub, she went to sit in the hot tub and within minutes there was five men around her.

Don asked, "Just enjoying her company?" and Nola responded, "Yes, Just enjoying her company." Don replied, "Well, I don't think they were interested in her colostomy bag (we all laugh, as he implies that they were simply attracted to her). They were genuinely in-

terested in sharing a conversation with her." Nola said, "She's a neat woman and it was just really cool that nobody else had a problem with it either. People danced with her and made her feel comfortable, like it just doesn't matter." Kelly said, "I used to worry about stretch marks or my figure. (Now she is going to model in a nudist fashion show). I never would have done that before." Samantha said, "I'm doing more public speaking. I find it's easier to speak in front of other people now." Ruth said,

The first time I went to a nudist resort I was concerned about what people would think of me nude, because of my weight. But I felt like I fit in. I was hooked right away. I couldn't wait to go back. I had a learning disability as a kid and both teachers and kids would look down at us. If the teacher asked me a question in class, I couldn't speak, I would just freeze. Some teachers would do it deliberately to embarrass you. Now I'm more accepting of myself. I can speak my mind.

Sandra asked, "What does nudism offer women?" Ruth replied,

You don't have to be a certain size or look. Exposure to others gave me the desire to improve myself. But it wasn't the same as feeling bad about myself from the outside pressure of the world to be perfect. It's a personal desire. Nudism helped me do this. Your not getting the message from TV and Radio it's from friends who want to see you reach your goals. That's different. This has been more helpful than eight years of therapy. My therapist knew I was going to a nudist resort too. He encouraged me.

Males that responded to the topic of body image and how nudism affects their self esteem, related it to their experiences while growing up. For the women, nudism appears to positively impact their self esteem as well as the way they interact in their everyday lives. They speak of making changes in their careers, opening businesses, relating to other people differently and with self-confidence. The male participants, on the other hand. Did not men-

tion indications of nudism changing their work or personal success. They spoke more of self confidence, reassurance in their self worth, physical normalcy and communication.

Ford said,

Women are always comparing themselves to other women. Men don't have the same problem. Men are only worried about penis size. Women compare more. The positive thing about nudism for women is that they can become more self confident about their body. They realize beauty adds are a false impression. They seem to be happier women. More positive outlook. Positive things for men? They learn that the body is not important. They start asking more about what kind of person someone is. They look at themselves too and become a better person. You spend your time not judging others and then this time can be spent working on oneself, learning what you really are.

I asked other men if nudism had changed their lives in any way and I began to see two patterns. First, many of the male subjects related feelings of doubt over their bodies while growing up. Particularly when it was related to competitive sports. And, that nudism had helped them feel more normal. Ford said that when "growing up I had very little self confidence. I thought my physical shape wasn't good enough. I was always the last one picked for sports." Brian said,

I used crutches as a child for two years so I couldn't do sports. Of course I felt like the odd kid. I Gained weight, didn't fit in. One positive thing about nudism is body acceptance. I never had a beefy physique. We (both he and Tamara, his wife) were late bloomers in high school. Then at the resort, I didn't think about myself much. You see a variety of bodies and compare yourself to others and find your not as abnormal as you thought you were.

Tamara mentioned that "even men with negative feelings about their genitalia still come to the place (a nudist resort)."

Secondly, many participants spoke of male communication and

relationship. This is was reflected on in the previous chapter on friendships in which they agreed that male nudists communicate differently than non-male nudists. Specifically, these participants believe that male nudist communication patterns were more open, include more physical contact and non-verbal communication and that this communication leads to deeper friendships between males. This leads to questions which warrant further scientific investigation but for the purposes of this study, the simple discovery of such beliefs is sufficient. Phil said that males

we're more open. I find that all are a lot more open about the body, period. Where as so many people put clothes on and hide their feelings, and hide their inhibitions. They just won't open up and talk. On the aspect of medical I find myself, since I've been a nudist (for 10 years) I can speak to my doctor a lot more freely. I'm not scared . . . or to hide body parts or information that might be personal. I have no problem going to speak to my doctor.

Ford said,

My doctor mentioned nudism to me when he was treating me for a heart problem. He said, "you gotta relax, take it easy. Why don't you go to a nudist camp?" Men who are nudists take care of themselves more. They get regular care from their doctor. It's because of the open communication and a comfort with their bodies. They can be nude in front of a nurse and there is no fear of having sexual feelings. They respect women and respect the nurse's position as a professional. Their nudity is not related to their sexuality. As a nudist you should never be embarrassed nude in front of anyone.

Don said,

It probably improved my personality about 100% just in dealing with people. Because I was a police officer for six years where you withdraw. You don't need to get close to people. It's not good to get close to people your dealing with and you.

Nola said that Don had gotten better just since she'd known him, "as far as getting closer to people. Because at first when I

first knew you I don't know too many people either one of us was really close to." Don replied, "But I can easily say I've got the closest friends now that I've ever had in my life." The women seem to agree that this open communication positively affects their relationships with their husbands. Emily said, "When we're here (she and her husband) we're together, we're more relaxed here." Samantha said, "We have things in our men that other women don't have." Caleb said that

nudist men have a more realistic view of their partners. With young nudists who fall in love, they know what kind of person their going to get. Ellen (his wife of 51 years) hasn't aged to me. I don't see it. I realize that all life is change but I don't see it. Nudity has helped me see a whole person, a whole body. There would have appeared to be a sudden change if I didn't see her nude on a daily basis. I feel close to you here (he says to Ellen). When we're here (the resort) we're together.

### Sex and Sexuality

If one was to attempt to learn about sexuality in social nudism through the nudists publications and trade organization's one would encounter a series of defensive canned responses. This is often the case when one attempts to talk to nudists about the subject as well. Nudists are so protective of the right to practice their lifestyle and of the potential for misunderstandings that many rely on the guidance of prepared responses to questions regarding sexuality in nudist social interactions. Often these responses defy logic, such as stating that sex is absent from nudism. This is a potential weakness in all research on nudism and in fact became a highly

publicized joke when in 1976, Martin Weinberg published a study on nudism which was filled with questionable statements made by nudists in response to interview questions, which may have been consciously intended to avoid disclosing nudist beliefs to non-nudist researchers.

For example, he was told of the existence of a no staring rule, no sex talk rule and one respondent reportedly stated that he tried to always look at others from the jaw up. To my knowledge no such rules exist, if they ever did. Receiving data such as this is not surprising however, considering that the researchers and his assistants were outsiders to nudism and were therefore, a potential threat to the integrity of nudists values and practices. A standpoint methodology overcomes this barrier. It opens communication between me and my fellow nudists to the point of revealing previously uncharted data and topics, regarding sexuality and nudists.

The most commonly asked questions regarding nudism relate to sexuality and public sex acts. It seems to be the most difficult topic to help non-nudists understand. In my past work as a public relations spokesperson for social nudism, I have discovered it is the topic which receives the most questions. Questions are either about how often sexual activities are a part of nudism and what kind of sexual activities nudists engage in. Many times people are unable to accept the answer to their question. It is beyond many people how nudity and sex can be separated.

This information is not exclusive to my experience as a public



educator. Nudists are questioned regularly about the very same topic. There is such a stigma surrounding sexuality and nudity, in fact, that many nudists are secretive about the lifestyle. They hide their participation in it from friends, family and even their adult children. This may have an over all negative effect on social nudism in that it potentially perpetuates the idea that it's secretive because there is something dirty about it. For this reason nudism, as a trade organization works hard to overcome the sexual stereotypes that the media often applies when reporting news about nudism and nudist resorts. In their attempt to combat negative stereotypes, they have successfully demonized the topic of sexuality.

Gary said that

sex is healthy. The nudist organizations are so worried about the sexuality that they wind up creating the curiosity about it. Then they draw attention from it. (Meaning free advertising by capitalizing on the public's obsession with sexuality and nudism in the media).

It is a common topic of debate in nudists publications and in fact there is strong evidence in this study to suggest that nudism is in fact sexual. However, it appears to be sexual in a healthy and celebratory way. In addition, many nudists are not concerned with the individual choice that couples may make regarding their sexuality. This is consistent with the non-judgmental attitudes they claim to have adopted. Ford (age 72) says,

I've had sexual thoughts there (at the nudist resort). You suppress them more. It's the rules and expectation that you will. You can't suppress sexuality all together. It's here. Maybe when I'm 95 I'll be able to suppress it. But your protecting the right to be a nudist by suppressing. Swingers? You can enjoy the people and not have to accept or enjoy what

they do. Don't judge.

In spite of these non-judgmental ideals, however, many nudists are discriminatory against couples who practice swinging. Swinging is the act of one couple engaging in sexual activity, in private, with other consenting singles or couples. This variation of sexual activity is usually thought of as negative and potentially harmful to the overall image of nudism. In defense of nudism, many nudists differentiate swinging from nudism as a completely separate lifestyle. Some even deny that it ever takes place, however, evidence appears to reveal that some nudists participate in swinging and keep it private and separate from their more public lifestyle of nudism. Others do not engage in swinging at all and openly state that they differentiate themselves from those who do. It should be noted that although empirical evidence does not yet exist to attempt to determine the percentage of nudists who do engage in swinging, it is likely to exist in non-nudist lifestyles also and therefore, may not be appropriately associated with social nudism. Gary said that "swingers should not be put down for their lifestyle any more than nudists. If we're going to condemn swingers for their lifestyle than we better not be surprised when society condemns us for nudism."

As for titillation, many nudists agree that it is present in nudism. However, it is the illusion of sexual accessibility that some find titillating. A sort of safety net which allows them to enjoy the stimuli with the safety of knowing it will not lead them to compromise their values. Ellen (age 70) says that

Titillation is there, (at the resort) we like to see different shapes. But it's safe because we know and agree that sex acts will not be a part of it. All of life is sexuality. People think because we're older we have no sexuality. This is a natural sexuality. Society needs deep plunging necklines and sexy clothes. Here it's different.

One only needs to attend a Halloween party in a nudist facility to see how nudists embrace sexuality and in doing so desensitize it. As stated earlier, public acts of sexual interaction are not tolerated, however, nudists have a humorous way of playing with sexuality and often at the expense of conservative norms in the textile world. Through costumes nudists laugh in the face of social norms by exposing fears and taboos, by decorating and elaborating sexual body parts and by rejoicing in the experience of being human. They believe the body is good and pure just as it is, and is therefore, fair game for most any decoration. One example includes a couple, dressed in army fatigues. He wears the top half of the uniform. She wears the lower half of the uniform. The opposite half, on each of them is left uncovered. The signs around their necks read, "upper GI" and "lower GI." Another example is a woman wears an oversized hat which she can see out of. It covers her entire head and rests on her shoulders where yarn is attached to it and drapes around her back and her breasts. Her breasts are then painted to look like large eyes peeking through the yarn hair, her belly button becomes the nose, a smile is painted above the edge of her pubic hair and the pubic hair itself appears to be a beard.

One might also see various animal costumes, monsters, space aliens and an assortment of body paintings. When one does not need

to conceal body parts, the options for costuming seem endless. The Halloween celebration exemplifies the comfort nudist's feel with the body and sexuality. This comfort, according to the participants, also is reflected in their personal relationships with their partners. Samantha mentions, "It's made us more free with each other, sexually. More relaxed, experimental, everything. I think it's been good for our marriage. Kelly says,

sex can be spontaneous with your partner. If we're here in our place (their trailer) and we're nude, we see each other walking around and it's great. You get excited and you just go into the other room for a while.

Emily replies, "Yea, you don't have to plan for it, you don't get dressed up for it and then undress for it. You do what you want at the moment you want to." Kelly says, "and when you're done you go right back to doing what you were before. Sex doesn't have to be a big event. It's great." Vicki says, "but the outside world doesn't understand. We can't even share stories about the things we do together here, as friends. People always think it's sexual." Caleb and Ellen spoke up saying,

The spontaneity of being nude together (as a couple) is sexual. (Publicly in the resort) There's no sex involved, after all it's a human being your looking at not an object. But once you start to dress them, you begin to do the opposite. You objectify it. Add clothes and you sexualize it. Clothing is central to sexuality not nudity. For example "When I first met you (to Ellen) it (an erection) happened with clothes on and I would have to push you away to regain control. But here I dance close to you.

Due to their unique perspective on clothing and it's influence, nudists believe in a separation between sex and nudity. They believe that not being able to separate the two is a weakness rooted

in the way the textile world portrays relationships, women and sex in the media and in social expectations and norms in everyday life.

Phil said,

There's a lot of our generation, who are very closed minded to nudism because of their upbringing. They were taught that when a woman takes off her clothes or a man takes off his clothes, there's only one purpose and that's sex.

Don said,

Well what's going on socially with television and nudity, people aren't just nude in these. If they take their clothes off it's a romantic scene or sex scene or whatever, it's not just nude people in movies. That would be boring.

Nola said,

my hair stylist said her husband had rented a video the other night and it was a nudist colony and they were all having sex. I said, "well, obviously it was made up. It's not like that." But I have to tell people over and over. You don't just go out and have sex with people and everybody's watching. Just cause you take your clothes off does not mean you're having sex. It's just like totally the opposite.

Phil added, "Well society is the one who put clothing on us to begin with. I mean it's got everyone's mind thinking that if it's nude it's sex. It's the way we were taught."

#### Family Recreation

The most critical judgment of nudism to overcome is the idea that nudism is a family lifestyle. Because of a cultural protectiveness of children, and an adult preoccupation with sexuality we, as a society are fearful of the idea of children being exposed to nudism. Recent research suggests there is no measurable, significant harm to children who are exposed to familial nudity in appro-

priate contexts (Okami, 1995). In previous research of children exposed to nudity Story, (1984) found that children, raised as nudists had a more positive body image of themselves when compared to children of non-nudist families.

In conclusion I offer the following personal observation of nudist family interaction. On one cool spring morning when I was visiting a nudist resort I observed a beautiful exchange of tenderness which, outside of this spacial context, would probably have been described as one of the most intolerable of all perversities. From my vantage point in an outdoor hot tub I could see the shower room through its glass wall. This room, not unlike others in nudists resorts was an open, co-ed shower room which consisted of one ceramic stall measuring approximately five feet wide and fifteen feet long. The stall was equipped with six separate shower heads, at one end, was a hand-held shower attached with a clip above a seat for physically challenged and elderly guests. The room was visible through its sliding glass doors which opened onto the patio. Glass doors, such as this are not uncommon in nudist facilities. Unlike the textile world, many barriers such as walls are unnecessary. Showering is not considered a private matter, simply a functional one.

As I sat contemplating, I saw a man walk into the shower room. His sizeable stature commanded attention. He was built like a wrestler, tall and muscular. He pushed a baby stroller in front of him and at his side was a small boy about three years old. The man

moved the stroller closer to the windows and away from the shower heads and water. He removed his robe and then helped the little boy with his. Next he turned the water on and waited for it to warm, he guided the boy under the stream and turned the next one on for himself. He helped the little boy reach the lever on the liquid soap dispenser which was fixed to the wall. As he did so the soap squirted across the child's tummy and they both laughed. Though I couldn't hear them, I watched them talk as the man bathed the boy and shampooed his hair. Together, side by side, they showered.

When they finished the man moved the boy closer to the wall where the hand-held shower was. He took it from its clip and handed it to the child. Realizing the independence and power of his new toy, the boy jumped around and squirted everything as though it were a target. Even the man was apparently fair game and didn't seem to mind. In fact he appeared to enjoy the playful nature of the whole encounter. The man turned to the stroller and with great care bent down and lifted a tiny nude infant to his chest. Skin to skin, they stepped into the stream of water and I watched as the gentle giant expertly bathed his baby while holding it tightly to his own body.

When cued by a nod of the head the boy sat on the shower seat, pointed the shower head at the baby and the man and fired away. The man lifted the baby in and out of the gentle stream that brother was controlling. Bathing this baby was a family affair. But it was more than shower time. They were all lingering in the water, taking far longer than is necessary to get clean. They were playing to-

gether and smiling. The baby kicked and squealed with delight as the man repeatedly lifted the baby up over his head, varying the intensity of the stream of water against the baby's bottom. Then he would press him tightly to his chest again and plant a kiss on his head.

For whatever reason the play time came to an end. A woman stopped by, spoke with them for a few minutes and walked away again. The man was left to dry and dress the children. He wrapped the baby in a blanket and placed him back in the stroller. He helped the boy into a fluffy bathrobe and slippers and together they all made there way back to their campsite.

From the expert execution of the whole event, I surmised that this was a common practice for this family. This was not a man grudgingly doing his wife a favor. This was not an absentee father babysitting his children. Their body language, which was the only tool available for my analyses, could best be described as comfortable, familiar and intimate. The children touched daddy. Through birth they were biological extensions of one another, therefore, a rational act such as bathing together required no apology or secrecy.

They publicly exercised a routine necessity of human hygiene without shame. Never once did I see the man hesitate to touch the children or his own body. In the context of showering the children were comfortable when the man touched them in order to bathe them. But beyond function this was also a public statement of familial affection much more akin to a father son football game than any-



thing sexual or perverse. However, this is one reason nudism and its participants are often considered deviant.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION

Social nudism is the practice or lifestyle of enjoying everyday life and its interactions without clothing. In our society clothing is taken for granted, so much so that outside of fashion, it is not talked about at all. We rarely hear anyone question the concept of wearing clothing. In fact people are so ingrained in the act of wearing clothing that they are often incapable of discussing the topic outside of its practical functions and adornment usage. Clothing is taken for granted and not discussed because an attitude exists that clothes are a given, an unspoken fact. This is the state of being "clothed minded." This should not be confused with being modest for this term narrows the concept of clothing to that of simply covering the private body. Clothing, however, has much broader influences in our society and the term "clothed minded" attempts to address its full magnitude.

The reference one hears, regarding a lack of clothing is usually in negative terms as though to not have clothing is equated with being at a loss. Likewise, people equate nudity with being at a loss. For example, one might say, "I feel naked without my earrings." We even extend this loss, this nudity, to our functional personal artifacts such as our favorite pen, or business cards, once again making statements such as, "I feel naked without my pager."

So why do we equate nudity with a loss? What we are actually saying is that we feel vulnerable.

In today's society not wearing clothing is usually associated with private matters such as personal hygiene and sexual practices. Nudists believe this narrow vision of nudity is a barrier to a deeper understanding of ourselves. By talking to nudists we begin to understand that their belief system may open doors to understanding the doing of clothing.

Throughout this research we have discovered the following things about nudists. They enjoy recreating with others while nude. They feel an openness toward the body and body issues but do not believe in imposing their views on others who are not like minded. Nudists do not equate sex with nudity. They prefer to consider the logical uses of clothing and seek rationality as opposed to blindly accepting cultural norms. They believe that clothing is a ruling relation in the structuration of society.

It is clear that nudists feel a sense of acceptance and toleration toward others that is different from that of the textile world. This is exhibited in their discussions of feeling equalized through nudity. It is also reflected in the interviews and discussions with nudists with disabilities, whether it's a visible or an invisible disability, as they speak of feeling as though they are accepted and in fact have an opportunity to reveal perspectives on social interactions that are not available to the able bodied and the clothed.

Through standpoint methodology, this research was able to delve into the lives and beliefs of nudists. In doing so we also reveal some potential weaknesses in non-standpoint methodology. For example, one strength of standpoint methodology is that the researcher is aware of the experiences that the subjects are reflecting on and therefore, is able to present their voices with more accuracy and understanding. Secondly, we expose experiences through reflexivity, of the researcher as she interacts with subjects as a professional. Many observations which are revealed through this reflexivity, would not otherwise be identified.

Nudists believe that friendships, personal relationships and sexuality can be enhanced through nude social interactions and the adoption of nudist principles which include self acceptance and tolerance. They embrace life through embodied experiences and in doing so report a feeling of freedom which initiates personal growth and change.

As for the textile world, nudists believe we live in an age of social problems which are rooted in alienation, intolerance of individualities and a general distortion of body ideals and sexuality. It is their opinion that these distortions are contributing factors to one's feelings of being separate from the experiences of the body. This separateness may culminate in social violence, self degradation, ageism, prejudice and even personal health issues.

### Suggestions for Future Research

Conducting this study has revealed many opportunities for future research topics. I see a need for further updates in research on families who practice nudism. One suggestion for a research question could include looking at the marital stability of adults who were raised as nudists. One could also look at the development of relationships between nudist children and their fathers. Do nudist fathers show indications of being more involved in their children's daily lives and the care of those children?

One could also look at gender stratification among nudists. Is there truly more equality between the sexes in nudism? Do male nudists communicate differently, perhaps more openly with each other? Do male nudists seek medical attention more often than non-nudist males?

Personally I would like to continue researching different aspects of the lives of disabled nudists. I believe significant research on this topic could benefit the lives of many persons living with disabilities. Furthermore, as this study indicates, persons with disabilities have much to teach those who are able bodied regarding self acceptance and overcoming ones prejudices based on socially constructed body ideals.

In general, I believe nudists have much to teach the textile world. Their message is one of unity through nudity, the great equalizer, because no body's perfect.

Appendix A

Letter of Permission From the Human Subjects  
Institutional Review Board

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Human Subjects Institutional Review Board



Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008-5162  
616-387-8293

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

Date: 28 April 2000

To: Timothy Diamond, Principal Investigator  
Sandra Schroer, Student Investigator for thesis

From: Sylvia Culp, Chair *Sylvia Culp*

Re: HSIRB Project Number 00-03-21

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "Investigating the Social Assumptions of a Clothed Society" has been **approved** under the **expedited** category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application.

Please note that you may **only** conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 28 April 2001

Appendix B  
Resort Rules and Regulations



Welcome Have a wonderful stay and come back soon!!!

~~~~~ PLEASE DRIVE SLOWLY - SPEED LIMIT IS 9 ½ MPH ~~~~~

Thank you for choosing \_\_\_\_\_ Resort. The following information is provided to help you to enjoy and utilize the resort to it's fullest potential. Our basic request is Common Courtesy.

- Quiet Hours:** 12:00 a.m. to 8:00 a.m. Please be considerate, of others, treat them exactly how you would like to be treated.
- Parking:** Fire and Safety regulations allow no more than 2 vehicles parking per site. Park only on your designated site.
- Pets:** Pets, are allowed in the Park, they must be registered at the office. All Pets must be on a leash, under control & quiet at all times, there are no exceptions, even if you think your pet does not need to be. Please clean up after your pet. Only service animals are permitted in buildings. A pet run area is provided.
- Trash:** Please place all trash in the trash dumpsters located throughout the park.
- Public Phones:** Located at Clubhouse , Bathhouse 1, and Beach area.

#### Swimming Pool - Hot tub - Conservation Pool - Lake

- \*\* No Lifeguard on duty
- \*\* Babies must wear swim pants
- \*\* Skinny-dipping ONLY
- \*\* Swim in the sandy beach area only.
- \*\* Fisherman stay 50 ft. From beach
- \*\* NO SWIMSUITS OR CUTOFFS

We are a family oriented resort, and guests are expected to conduct themselves accordingly. Anyone who abuses the Park rules will be escorted out of the Park. We reserve the right to refuse service to anyone.

- Alcohol/Drugs:** Alcoholic beverages are permitted in moderation. Illegal drugs are not permitted at all.
- Boats:** Nudity is not allowed on \_\_\_\_\_ Lake proper. Motors are not allowed in the lagoon or \_\_\_\_\_ Lake.
- Body Contact:** We request that all body contact be limited to simple expression of affection and friendship. Improper conduct (overt sexual activity) will not be tolerated at any time, including Dances.

Resort is a clothing-optional resort and we skinny dip in pool, hot-tub, lagoon, and conversation pool. This is a family oriented facility and guests are expected to conduct themselves accordingly. Anyone who abuses the Park rules will be escorted out of the Park. No Liquor is sold on the premises, no glass bottles are allowed in the Club House, or commons areas within the Park. \_\_\_\_\_ Cafe is open week-ends. We have fire rings, but no Bar-B-Que pits. Pets must be registered in the office, they are not allowed in rental units or any buildings on the premises, unless they are utility dogs. There is a curfew for children under the age of 18. No cameras are allowed. For your protection, always sit on your own towel. A current, accurate driver's license or photo ID is required for admittance into the Park, and a photocopy of the ID will be made. We reserve the right to refuse admittance to anyone.

Appendix C

Nudist Participant Vocabulary List

## VOCABULARY

The following vocabulary list was compiled by the participants in this research and is not intended to be exclusive.

AANR- acronym for the American Association for Nude Recreation. A nudist trade organization with a focus on family recreation.

Card caring- a nudist or naturist who has joined one of the trade organizations such as the AANR or The Naturist Society.

Clothes-compulsive society- Phrase sometimes used (probably facetiously) to suggest that nonnudists have a compulsion that needs to be changed.

Clothing optional (C.O.)- originated as a literal description of having the choice to either wear clothing or not to wear clothing. Often used as a synonym for nude. Can be used as a code word to fool the uninitiated. For example, an internet mailing list is called The CO Digest, which appears innocent enough when someone walks by and looks at your computer screen.

Gathering- a nudist convention. Term coined by the Naturist Society.

Landed club- a nudist facility such as a campground or resort.

Naked- to be without clothing. To be exposed. This is not a term often used by nudists. It appears to have negative connotations, as though to be naked implies a lack of choice or an experience of loss. More often associated with sex.

Naturist- often used interchangeably with nudist however, the term has a different meaning for those who adopt it. Associated with a nudist philosophy which combines the nude lifestyle with a holistic sense in accordance with nature.

Newbees- inexperienced nudists or first time visitors.

Non-landed club- a travel club. A group of social nudists who gather at homes or rented facilities where nudity is allowed or can be practiced with discretion.

Nude- the natural state of the body. Is often associated with choice, freedom and nature. Implies a positive attitude toward the natural state of the body.

Nudes vs. Prudes- tongue in cheek distinction between nudists and nonnudists.

Outfits- personal adornments of scanting clothing or theme costumes.

Splash party- a term used by some groups to describe an event where a swimming pool is rented for nude use. Often associated with non-landed clubs.

Swingers- People who engage in various forms of partner swapping or sharing in sexual encounters. Implies consensual choices involving couples or singles with couples. Does not always involve intercourse. Is not directly associated with nudism nor naturists. Publicly, the practice is considered a negative thing among nudists.

The Naturist Society- A nude lifestyle oriented trade organization with a focus on political activism, human rights, and a holistic body attitude in accordance with nature.

Topfree- a term used to describe a law that allows women to legally expose their breasts. Implies being free of something undesirable.

Topless- a term avoided by nudists who believe it implies something missing or less than.

Textile- a non-nudist person associated with a clothing oriented society.

Textile world- the clothing oriented society.

White tails- first time visitors to a nudist facility or activity. A direct reference to their white bottoms in contrast to their tanned body parts.

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