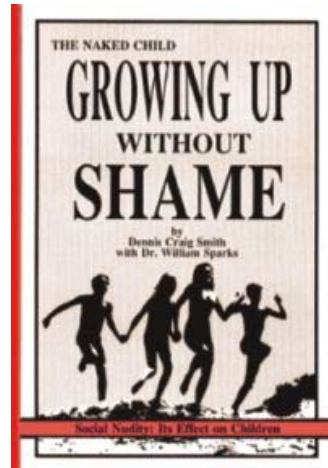


Is Family Nudity Child Abuse?

*Nudists have long endured the rantings of "experts" who think that family nakedness encourages "incest, parental abuse, over stimulation, sexual obsession, school failures, sexual deviancy, exhibitionism, homo/bisexuality, etc." But Dennis Craig Smith was unwilling to accept these opinions as fact. He began a search for the truth ten years ago that led him to naturist camps and beaches to interview and survey adults who had grown up in nudist families. He found well-adjusted people who blatantly disprove the "experts" theories. This article, excerpted from *Growing Up Without Shame* by Dr. Smith, summarized his findings. Reprinted with the author's permission.*

Preface

Does exposure to nudity cause sexual hang-ups in children? Will an open physical environment have negative effects on the personalities and sexual development of young people? Will seeing their parents nude cause children to develop what some experts call an over-balanced attachment to mother and father, and seduction anxiety? Or, as other experts believe, will nude experiences in the physically open family inevitably lead to incest, create terrible guilts and frustrations, and arouse parent-child rivalries? Will the children in families where nudity is common be the victims of more school failures and possess more sexual obsessions than those reared in families where nudity is not allowed?



In many homes today, parents are abandoning the Victorian-based notions of modesty and are far more relaxed about members of the family seeing each other nude. At the same time, an increasing number of authorities are writing about and warning of the grave consequences for the children of physically freer families. The issue is simple. If the dire results they foresee can be proven to be inevitable — or even possible in most cases — the warnings should be heeded. But if they cannot be proven through evidence, we should speak out against them.

What are the consequences they predict? Are they legitimate threats to your children's mental and emotional health? Are you harming your children emotionally if you allow them to casually see you nude during their pre-adolescent and adolescent years? Surprisingly, in spite of the scientific requirement of proof, these "experts" offer little more than personal experience or theory to back their claims.

For this reason, *Growing Up Without Shame* was written. Within the following pages is the report on a study that addresses the questions listed above and gives the reader a chance to compare the opinions of the experts with the real-life experiences of adults who grew up in open physical environments. This book is the result of five years of research and writing plus added years for follow-up on some of the cases. *Growing Up Without Shame* represents the first systematic attempt at studying the effects of a physically open environment. We know this study is the first. We hope it is not the last.

Introduction

Small children completely lack a sense of modesty. Infants feel no compunction about exploring all parts of their bodies and exposing themselves to others' view. They have no instinctive negative attitudes about the bodies they were born with. This they must learn from older, "wiser" generations.

Because we, as a society, are becoming daily more aware of the importance of a good self-image, we tell our children to feel good about themselves, to feel good about who and what they are. It seems logical to assume that a child, to feel good about him/herself, must feel good about all his parts and all his body functions. Whatever sex, whatever age, all children should feel that their bodies are not innately guilty of some shameful, unspeakable crime against decency.

So we tell our children their bodies are good, created in holiness by God. But we are not consistent. In the same breath we tell them that there are parts of themselves that are shameful. These parts must never be exposed in the presence of others — even though those other people have the very same parts, created in the very same way. The very names of those parts are taboo.

THE NAKED CHILD: GROWING UP WITHOUT SHAME

To emphasize the unspeakable nature of those portions of our bodies, we use special words. We say *down there*, and *my thing*, never penis or vagina. When speaking of the functions of those organs, we are equally hesitant to speak openly. Down there is dirty. We need to *go to the bathroom*, we don't need to urinate. Jokes with references to sex or elimination are called *dirty* jokes. All references to those sinful, evil segments of ourselves are treated differently than are references to our hands or feet or heads.

All these euphemisms, these substitute words and phrases, have to do with our sex organs or their functions. They speak loudly to children, making it clear that, despite anything adults may say to the contrary, the human body is not all good. There are certain portions that are distasteful and offensive. The impression children get is that many adults wish to pretend that those parts do not even exist.

The authors have undertaken this study to bring common sense into this issue. We cannot allow the contradiction that exists between what we say on one hand, and what we do and demand in behavior on the other, to continue if we wish to give our children positive attitudes toward themselves. We must reach some accord between what seems to be a very basic and logical approach to giving children positive feelings about their physical reality and self-worth and the literature on raising children which warns against the "dangers" of exposing them to nakedness: specifically, the nakedness of adults during the children's pre-adolescent and adolescent years. To reach this accord, we set out to discover whether the dire results some authorities warn against have occurred in any significant number of nudist children; and if the effects, when they did occur, had any relationship to the fact that the children saw their parents nude.

In reviewing the literature, we found only speculations: examples of what authors (usually psychiatrists or psychologists) had interpreted as a cause-and-effect relationship in a patient's experience. Words like obviously resentful, and terrible guilts and frustrations, were used to describe the results of what these authors read as "over-stimulation, caused to the children by their viewing their parents' genitals and becoming sexually attracted to their parents." We wanted to know if the attraction to the parents was greater among nudist children than is normal and to be expected.

We hoped through this investigation to determine whether sexual problems and precocious sexual arousal were caused by nakedness in the family or by the mystery and taboos that surround sexual matters in non-nudist homes. Child psychologists, pediatricians, the writers of newspaper advice, television talk-show experts and neo-Freudian psychiatrists tell us of the grave consequences of nudity in the home. But are the consequences inevitable? Are they even real? How often, if at all, do nudist children show these distressing symptoms? We could get no data that answered those questions.

It seemed the only way to learn the truth about these beliefs was to interview adults who had grown up in families where this kind of exposure to human anatomy existed. We devised an interview procedure that would look into their social lives, their sex lives, and their self-concepts. When we had accumulated enough facts through these interviews we could determine what evidence existed to indicate that psychological problems were caused by early knowledge (first-hand) of other people's bodies. Only then could we see if there was any real correlation between what was believed and what was actually happening. Only then could we get reliable answers to at least a good number of the questions all conscientious parents, nudist and non-nudist alike, are certain to ask.

These questions are important for they deal with very vital aspects of child rearing. Will childhood experiences in a nude family warp the personalities of children? Does the nudist lifestyle, or a very open "immodest" home environment, cause children to become frustrated, burdened with anxiety, and over-stimulated? For that matter, what is over-stimulation and how is it measured?

We used three methods of gathering subjects. We advertised in numerous publications we knew were read by nudists, we visited various nudist clubs and camps, and we drew on personal knowledge and contacts made during the research. Through our advertising, we received responses from Canada, Australia, Germany, England, and throughout the United States. During our visits to nudist camps we were able to tape interviews with a number of the individuals who had responded to our ads. At such times, we completed in-depth questionnaires dealing with their lives and backgrounds. As time passed, one other source became available to us. The Free Beach Movement supplied us with a good number of contacts, although most of the people in this group were not raised in nudist families but became nudists through the influence of friends or relatives.

We are indebted to the many people without whom this research could never have been conducted. First of all, we wish to thank those who answered our ads, who consented to taped interviews, or who agreed to fill out the very personal, sometimes bothersome questionnaires. Thanks also go to the members of the staff of the Bare in Mind

THE NAKED CHILD: GROWING UP WITHOUT SHAME

nudist newspaper and its publishers, Beg and Thelma Manning. They supported and co-operated with us from the very beginning when nearly everyone else was too skeptical to take an interest in or believe in what we were doing. We want to thank Nada O'Connell, who along with Thelma was the first nudist contact we made, and whose enthusiastic endorsement and encouragement made things easier during a very difficult beginning.

We owe much to the members and management of the nudist clubs we visited during our research: Glen Eden Sun Club, Olive Dell Ranch, Samagatuma Nudist Resort, The Swallows, and the Treehouse Fun Ranch, as well as to the many travel clubs and free-beach groups who assisted us in contacting subjects and gathering data for our study. We are deeply indebted to the trustees of the American Sunbathing Association and its branch, the Western Sunbathing Association, and to Ed Lange, Jackie Davison, and Jason Loam of the Elysium Institute in Los Angeles, California.

Special appreciation must go to Candice Kurstin-Young, who helped set up the framework of the research questionnaire. She provided advice and guidance throughout the length of the project. Other friends also deserve special thanks for their support from the very first time the idea was broached. Of these, Dr. Lou Pippin of California Polytechnic State University at San Louis Obispo, was a particularly helpful advisor and consultant who did much to keep our enthusiasm up and our frustrations down. Finally and most importantly, we wish to thank Barbara Bolton, who has assisted in organizing the entire project, who has traveled extensively to do interviews, make contacts and do needed research, and whom these authors consider a close and most valuable associate.

Excerpts from Chapter VI: What Does It All Mean?

In [our study] we have listened to many others, both male and female, who were a part of the open environment of a physically casual family structure and/or the social nudist movement. None of them spoke...of an all-consuming passion to see bits and pieces of underwear or bodies belonging to the opposite sex. They spoke very little, if at all, of physical, sexual curiosity. It may well have existed, at least in some. We can't know for sure. But it was not mentioned.

...The experts warn about the terrible guilt and frustration that will develop in a child exposed to nudity. We didn't find them in the people we interviewed. We found normal childhood problems of adjustment, but we also found a group of adults seemingly satisfied with themselves, and very willing to raise their children as they were raised, with nakedness as part of their everyday lives.

We were told that when children saw their parents nude, they would be over-stimulated. We found it difficult to quantify over-stimulation. But when we spoke to the adults who grew up in a nudist environment, we were told that it was more stimulating for them to go to a regular beach, where everyone wore suits, however small, than to play volleyball or sun at a nudist park where everyone wore nothing. They said the mystery was gone.

Consider once again the young man we quoted earlier, who sat at the edge of the volleyball court at his junior high school. He wasn't interested in the game. He was tremendously stimulated by what he and his friends called "a beaver shot." a lightning quick glance at the pure white cotton triangle that covered a girl's genitals. This man said he thought of nothing else. Even allowing for the exaggeration of youth, we can acknowledge that he might possibly have been preoccupied with sex. It appears that facts might serve to prove the "experts" wrong.

Bonnie Johnston, for example, has been aware of her parents' bodies since her mother's breast was her only source of nourishment and her father's body warmth was the security that put her to sleep. Other girls who have grown up surrounded by human nudity tell us that the nakedness is not important as long as it is not banned. They say that knowing they are loved is far more important. Some even mention that they were able to develop into adults without fear or shame because of the nudity that surrounded them. None speak of over-stimulation. Whether Bonnie will become over-stimulated by the sight of her parents as she enters puberty only time and further study will tell us, but the risk certainly appears to be small.

Without previous studies on which to base their conclusions, the experts told us that children, especially during the years from nine to thirteen, should not be allowed to see their parents nude because it would be harmful to them. It seems clear to us now, after five years of study that this unfounded bias and conjecture has been very misleading. But, more than that, it has caused real harm to more than one generation of American children. It has been, in a way, something akin to doctors telling women in third-world countries that breast-feeding could be harmful and that artificial formula was better for their babies. In light of the effects of that misinformation, it is clear that some warnings by "experts" can be irresponsible and dangerous.

THE NAKED CHILD: GROWING UP WITHOUT SHAME

This book is not being represented as the definitive study on the effects of social and family nudity in the lives of children. Our claim is only that it is the first. We believe that the research reported in this book has answered a few questions. But it has raised others that are very vital. Our nudist subjects were very open in their discussion of their sexual experiences as adults and even as children. There is some evidence that non-nudists are less willing to speak on such matters, even though they did not grow up unaware of sex. We need to know what is "normal" sexual expression for a child. And, obviously, we need many more studies before we can draw any firm conclusions from the information we have so far gleaned.

We recognize that it is impossible to draw absolute conclusions regarding "normal" human behavior. We are all so different, and there are so many factors that contribute to our growth. But it is scientifically inexcusable to push aside and refuse to study an issue that, at present, is so overrun with unfounded conclusions and unbridled emotion as is the question of family nudity and its effect on growing children. We have tried to give the reader some information that will help him or her make an informed decision for or against the open lifestyle. We also have tried to arouse in our readers enough curiosity to cause them to continue the investigation for themselves and to demand more studies that will take this issue out of the shadow and into the bright light of day. Only when an assortment of books presenting careful studies on this subject are available for anyone to read can we feel confident that the decisions made by those opposed to family and social nudity are based on fact and not just on frightful fantasies.

We live in a time when the human anatomy is examined, extolled, studied, and lectured about, and at the very same moment is also exploited, ridiculed, and excluded from social acceptance. We insult ourselves by calling our bodies obscene, pornographic, lewd, base, dirty, immoral, or evil, and in so doing deny the basic truth of our own existence. Our anatomy is *us* — and it is none of those terrible things.

We need to take a number of steps back and look at our own image and then decide, in that moment of reflection, why we have so much trouble living with our physical reality. In this self-examination, we can be helped by the experiences of others. There are some families who have learned what Margaret Mead and others were trying to tell us about the need for understanding our natures and not hating our physiology. These singular adults have created in their children individuals more resistant to the negativism of our modern society. They seem at ease with the rigors of living together in a society dependent, as ours is, on our ability to relate to one another with love and understanding.

This book, and the five-year study it represents, looked at the families who found a way to overcome the fear of exposing themselves, both physically and intellectually, to each other. We asked questions which today's society faces, and we sought answers among those who have personally reached solutions to our social dichotomy. The authors questioned many nudist boys, girls, men, and women in search of the secret that made them comfortable in circumstances that upset so many of us. What we learned was that the viewing of the unclothed human body, far from being destructive to the psyche, seems to be both benign and totally harmless or to actually provide positive benefits to the individuals involved.

We look forward to seeing more research that will delve deeper into this discovery which, to say the least, is in total opposition to all that the "experts," unconcerned with facts, continue to tell us.

Other Documents Available from this study:

Appendix A is the actual empirical data collected.

Appendix B is the survey Smith and his sociologist team used.

There is also an extensive Bibliography of source material on nudism, sexual behavior, and children cited in this study.