

# British Naturism written evidence

## Executive summary

1. Little or no progress has been made in improving body image over the past decade indicating that a radical rethink is necessary;
2. There is substantial evidence that a more relaxed attitude towards the body would result in significant improvements and there is no evidence of any deleterious effects;
3. Policy is not going to work unless firmly evidence-based and that must take precedence over fear of causing offence;
4. Significant improvements are possible at little or no cost.

## British Naturism

5. Naturism is everyday life without any requirement for clothing. There are many motivations for practising Naturism including freedom, convenience, comfort, health, and belief.<sup>1</sup>
6. British Naturism (BN) is the internationally recognised UK national naturist organisation. We exist to unite and support naturists, to protect, and provide more naturist venues, to make social nudity acceptable in the UK and to provide comprehensive information on naturism and naturists around the world. We have over 9000 active members and represent over 4 million naturists nationwide. BN is a member of the International Naturist Federation which covers 37 countries worldwide.
7. We have been working on body image and body knowledge related issues for at least twenty years.
8. We are grateful to the Committee for accepting a late submission from us.

## Overview

9. The seriousness of the poor body image problem is now better appreciated than it was, but comparisons with past government reports<sup>2</sup> show that disturbingly little progress, if any, has been made. It is unlikely that continuing with the same strategies will produce the significant improvements necessary, and a radical rethink is required.
10. There is abundant anecdotal evidence, including some in the committee's survey report, indicating that a more relaxed attitude towards nudity provides substantial benefits. This is strongly supported by academic research.<sup>3</sup> Conversely, despite looking for them, researchers have not been able to find any evidence of deleterious effects of such an attitude.

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<sup>1</sup>British Naturism (undated), "*What is Naturism?*" Retrieved 10 Nov 2020 from <https://www.bn.org.uk/aboutnaturism/>

<sup>2</sup>For example Government Equalities Office (2013), "Body confidence campaign, Progress report 2013". GEO. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/body-confidence-campaign-progress-report-2013>

<sup>3</sup>We can provide a bibliography of the academic research.

11. A recurring theme in the survey report is the lack of realistic portrayals of people and it is surprising that the consultation does not ask why they are lacking. We address that question later in this submission.
12. It is common knowledge in the retail industry that packaging can greatly increase the attractiveness of the goods on sale<sup>4</sup>. For most children and many adults, the only person that they see “unpacked” is themselves, and all others are either “packaged”, or the product of the glamour and pornography industries. If people only ever see other people packaged, then their self-perception is bound to be adversely affected. Societal pressure, regulation and statute all act to prevent people, particularly children, from knowing what other people look like, and what they can expect to look like as they grow older.
13. British attitudes towards nudity are confused. On the one hand it’s possible to tune into Channel 4 and see unedited and unpixellated naked people choosing a “date”;<sup>5</sup> on the other hand it’s not unheard of for people innocently swimming or sunbathing nude to be the subject of complaint to the police, notwithstanding police guidance to the effect that this is lawful<sup>6</sup>. In other European countries there is a more relaxed, arguably more healthy, attitude towards nudity: for example, Germany, where the FKK movement gained considerable popularity historically<sup>7</sup>, and Nordic countries, especially Finland, where the sauna culture has the effect that nudity is matter of fact and it is popularly assumed that many deals are done between business colleagues enjoying sauna together<sup>8</sup>. Below (paragraph 5) we make reference to a current television commercial for a mobile phone company in Iceland which illustrates the contrast especially clearly.
14. Most social media providers have restrictive, simplistic, and harmful policies on what can be shown. Bodies hidden in sexualising clothing are accepted, but innocent, non-sexual nudity is generally banned. Facebook and Instagram have been forced to relax their policies a little, for example some breast feeding can now be shown and the nudity ban has been relaxed slightly, but their unwillingness to distinguish innocent depictions of the body from pornography remains a serious problem. There is also evidence suggesting that they find unrealistic, idealised images more acceptable than realistic ones, white skin more acceptable than black, and thin more acceptable than fat. The incidents recounted in the Guardian article "Instagram censored one of these photos but not the other. We must ask why" are not unusual.<sup>9</sup>
15. The problem of censorship, both self and imposed, extends to all parts of the media and even leads to dishonest factual programmes. For example "Andrew Marr's History of the World", an otherwise excellent programme, systematically falsified one aspect of history. A series of vignettes illustrating historical incidents dressed the

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<sup>4</sup>For example: Reimann M. et al. (2010). “*Aesthetic package design: A behavioral, neural, and psychological investigation*”. Journal of Consumer Psychology. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcps.2010.06.009>

<sup>5</sup>Naked Attraction <https://www.channel4.com/programmes/naked-attraction>

<sup>6</sup>British Naturism, "Naturism is Lawful" and linked College of Policing document. <https://www.bn.org.uk/policing/>

<sup>7</sup>BBC (2020). "Why Germans love getting naked in public". <http://www.bbc.com/travel/story/20201108-why-germans-love-getting-naked-in-public>

<sup>8</sup>Many, but see e.g. Finland Promotion Board. "Bare facts of the sauna in Finland". <https://finland.fi/life-society/bare-facts-of-the-sauna/>

<sup>9</sup>The Guardian. (2020) "Instagram censored one of these photos but not the other. We must ask why". Retrieved 20 Oct 2020 from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/oct/20/instagram-censored-one-of-these-photos-but-not-the-other-we-must-ask-why>

actors in invented clothing for "commercial reasons". The programme makers knew that it was wrong but in most cases gave no indication to the viewer what had been done.<sup>10</sup>

16. Children should find out what real people look like from the reputable media, not what fake people look like from the glamour and pornography industries. Regulation and self-censorship has led to children being denied essential knowledge. It is not coincidence that the country where nude adults can be shown on children's educational TV<sup>11</sup> has considerably better outcomes across a wide range of related indicators than the UK.<sup>12</sup>
17. Children are taught from a very young age that the body, and in particular some parts of the body, are objects of shame which must be kept hidden under almost all circumstances. That has many undesirable consequences. Body shame can result in a reluctance to talk about the body, even to health professionals, leading to late diagnosis of many diseases including several types of cancer. People can spend a lifetime worrying that they are abnormal in some way simply because they do not know what their peers actually look like.<sup>13</sup>
18. Research shows that children from naturist households have significantly more positive body self-concepts<sup>14</sup>. There is anecdotal evidence of naturist children providing body-image support to their non-naturist peers<sup>15</sup> which obviously should not be necessary.
19. The move to cubicles instead of communal changing in schools and leisure facilities has reduced opportunity to learn what other people really look like. Educational materials with just outline drawings are a missed opportunity. The strongly body-positive book "Tous à Poil!" has been popular in France, it has been adopted by at least one school district, but it is difficult to envisage a British school using it.<sup>16</sup>
20. In general body-image interventions have little effect.<sup>17</sup> However recent research into a nudity-based intervention demonstrated substantial and sustained improvement.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>BBC. "Andrew Marr's History of the World". <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p011pfzd> and correspondence with the producer. The clips "Christopher Columbus" and "Australia is 'discovered'" are examples.

<sup>11</sup>Metro (2020). "Presenter defends Danish TV show featuring naked adults in front of school children". Retrieved 20 Sep 2020 from <https://metro.co.uk/2020/09/20/presenter-defends-danish-tv-show-featuring-naked-adults-in-front-of-school-children-13298924/>

<sup>12</sup>For example: Ansari et al. (2010) "How Do I Look? Body Image Perceptions among University Students from England and Denmark" Fig 1b. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health. [https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2872285/Adolescent\\_fertility\\_rate\\_\(births\\_per\\_1,000\\_women\\_ages\\_15-19\)](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2872285/Adolescent_fertility_rate_(births_per_1,000_women_ages_15-19))

The World Bank (2020) "Adolescent fertility rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-19)" [https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?locations=DK-GB&name\\_desc=true](https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.ADO.TFRT?locations=DK-GB&name_desc=true)

<sup>13</sup>For example: The Naked Podcast (2020). "I just wish I could've met her...." at 50:45. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p08d93g9>

<sup>14</sup>Story, M. (1977). "Factors Associated with More Positive Body Self-Concepts in Preschool Children". The Journal of Social Psychology. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.1979.9711960>

<sup>15</sup>BBC (2020), CrowdScience. "Why am I embarrassed to be naked?". Interview with 14 year old at 24:23. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/w3cszv67>

<sup>16</sup>Franek and Daniau (2011). "Tous à Poil!" ISBN: 978 2 8126 0206 1. [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tous\\_%C3%A0\\_poil\\_!](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tous_%C3%A0_poil_!)

<sup>17</sup>Alleva, J. et al. (2015) "A Meta-Analytic Review of Stand-Alone Interventions to Improve Body Image". PLOS ONE. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0139177>

There is also recent research showing a causal relationship between social nudity and improved body image.<sup>19</sup>

21. Many of these topics are considered in greater depth in our 2016 report "Children Deserve Better".<sup>20</sup> That report addresses issues relating to children but most of the mechanisms and results also apply to adults.

## The impact of poor body image

22. We very much welcome the work of the Women and Equalities Committee on body image. It is a serious problem that requires much more attention than it usually receives.

## Contributors to poor body image

23. We have described some important contributors to poor body image above. Principally they are a culture of body shame and the almost complete absence of realistic points of reference.

## Government policy

24. There is strong evidence that a more relaxed attitude to the body and nudity would bring significant benefits. As described elsewhere in this document, comparatively minor changes to regulation and policy could be very effective. More in-depth research is needed, particularly as regards developing interventions that can be deployed on a large scale. However, there are some simple, and no cost, policy changes that could greatly reduce the need for them.

## Social media and the internet giants

25. As described above Facebook and Instagram are notorious for policies that prevent the posting of body-positive images. Photographs that show what real people really look like have to be self-censored, which reinforces the prejudices associated with particular body parts and poor body image.
26. There are similar problems with eBay, Amazon, and many other corporations with near monopolies on segments of the internet.
27. Many providers of WiFi block some body-positive web sites with little objective justification and the censorship frequently lacks transparency. For example the author of this submission recently found that the Marston's Pub Chain blocks the British Naturism web site stating, without explanation, that "*This site is unavailable*". In subsequent correspondence they stated that it was due to nudity, the assumption being that because the site depicted nudity it must automatically be offensive.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>West, K. (2020). "A nudity-based intervention to improve body image, self-esteem, and life satisfaction". <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJHD.2020.10033089>

<sup>19</sup>West, K. (2020). "I Feel Better Naked: Communal Naked Activity Increases Body Appreciation by Reducing Social Physique Anxiety". International Journal of Happiness and Development. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2020.1764470>

<sup>20</sup>Boura, M. (2016) "Children Deserve Better". British Naturism. [www.bn.org.uk/children](http://www.bn.org.uk/children)

<sup>21</sup>October 2020.

## Online Harms White Paper

28. We are surprised that the White Paper does not consider online content which promotes poor body image, or online censorship which bars body positive content.

## Advertising

29. The Call for Evidence asks, among other things, “How successful is the ASA at protecting the public from adverts that have a negative impact on body image?” We are surprised that it does not also ask the converse “Does the ASA prevent adverts that would have a positive impact on body image?”
30. There are very few UK adverts that are strongly body positive. Nudity can be used to great effect but the examples that we know of are from outside the UK. For example the current Icelandic advert *Allir úr!*<sup>22</sup> It is most unlikely that that advert would be allowed in the UK and in the UK those most needing to see it are those least likely to be allowed to!<sup>23</sup>
31. Conversely there are adverts that at first viewing may appear to be a harmless bit of fun but could be quite damaging. For example a current Duracell advert for batteries reinforces the aberration that children must not know that animals have sex and that they must not know what the body looks like.<sup>24</sup> In isolation the advert may be unimportant but cumulatively adverts such as this do have an adverse impact.
32. Regulations and guidance in this area should clearly distinguish between pornography and depictions of innocent, non-sexual nudity. Carelessly eliding the two, and the assumption that depictions of the naked body are automatically offensive or obscene, has the effect of unhelpfully reinforcing nudity and body knowledge taboos and preventing the depiction of wholesome and honest body images.

## Recommendations

33. Regulation and guidance, where they exist, should clearly distinguish between pornographic images and depictions of innocent, non-sexual nudity. The availability of wholesome, honest, informative images that show what real bodies look like should be viewed positively, instead of all too often being considered shameful or offensive and therefore strongly discouraged.
34. A public information campaign should help the public, and especially young people, understand that bodies come in all shapes and sizes and are not shameful. Whilst we appreciate that a culture that equates nudity and shame is deeply ingrained, as the Committee’s survey report clearly demonstrates, it has reached a level that renders it positively harmful.

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<sup>22</sup>Nova Communications (2020). “*Allir úr!*” (Smart watch advert, “All you need”) Retrieved 8 Nov 2020. <https://vimeo.com/475894734>

<sup>23</sup>Advertising Standards Authority (2020). “*The BCAP Code*” section 4.2. Retrieved 7 Nov 2020. <https://www.asa.org.uk/uploads/assets/846f25eb-f474-47c1-ab3ff571e3db5910/18d14aee-1da8-4b35-b9c2f58a5cfaffef/BCAP-Code-full.pdf>

<sup>24</sup>Duracell (2020). “*The Best Funny Pink Duracell Bunny Commercials EVER!*”. Commercial TV advert. 0:30 to 1:00. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BBCagWtnAmY>

35. The internet giants should also be expected to distinguish between innocent nudity and pornography, so that censoring of wholesome content and goods becomes a thing of the past.
36. The school curriculum should be enhanced so that pupils know what people really look like, the normal progression of aging including their own, and appreciate the enormous variations in relation to people's bodies. The first step is to remove the obstacles.
37. Conduct further research into what works, and act on the results.

**November 2020**

## Appendix 1: Quotes

38. *"I went from being a shy, overweight lady who didn't want to show myself to anyone, to being a confident Naturist lady". Fay Campbell.*
39. *"I have found that being a naturist has helped me not to worry about body image and actually be proud of my body, even though I now have only one testicle". "... you are treated with respect from understanding fellow-naturists. That has helped me through, and I now feel confident about my body." Andrew.*
40. *"As a naturist I take people for who they are, and not what they look like." Leah, 18.*
41. *"It might have even helped in my being successful in recent job interviews – the self-confidence I have gained in the last few years " Her one regret? Waiting until she was over 40 before trying Naturism! She says, "I have given up being obsessed about losing weight. I try to eat sensibly, exercise and try to have a positive outlook on life."*
42. *"Being naked was the only time I didn't feel awkward about how I looked. ... It was only when I had gained this renewed confidence that I was able to take control of my life, and with the help of a Channel Five programme, Diet Doctors, I have lost three stone and feel so much better for it. But I did that for myself, because I know I need to be healthy as well as happy!" Graham*
43. *"in just a few short weeks Naturism has taken me on a journey from absolutely hating my own body - to the point of not even looking at myself in the mirror getting out of the bath - to a feeling of complete acceptance of myself, lumps, bumps, wobbly bits, and all. I am over 50, overweight, and have had three children, and other factors in my life have led me to have very low self-esteem. Let's make sure future generations of women don't grow up with the same hang ups we did. Let's not continue to allow media and magazines to tell us what is beautiful. Let's give our daughters, nieces, grand-daughters, the gift of confidence and positive body image." Siobhan Crowther, abridged.*
44. *"It's funny how my confidence has just grown, just from being naked around other naked people."*
45. *"I am 14. ... Some of my friends are not body-confident what-so-ever. They are always saying all their flaws and they are all getting down about it and I feel that I have never really had that sort of view in my body because I am comfortable all around so I find myself thinking why are they so down about their amazing bodies like they have got so many amazing things that I wish that I had and yet they are down about it so I am always then the one comforting them and saying like loads of people have that type of body, you can show it off, you can conceal it, it is your body, so you can do what you want with it. Everyone is different and you should love yourself." Naturist girl aged 14 interviewed by BBC CrowdScience at British Naturism Suffolk.*
46. *"I grew up, as most of us did, almost never seeing non-sexual depictions of the human body. I found myself with a feeling of "corporal illiteracy" - clinical diagrams in a textbook are insufficient. You must see a diversity of actual, normal bodies, set in an appropriate context. I found Naturism the perfect antidote to this corporal illiteracy that had left me very insecure about who I am physically. You are among others who are relaxed and comfortable in their own skin. You see what human bodies really look like. I now do much better at holding myself to a realistic, healthy standard of what my body should be, because I am exposed to reality, and not just the extreme depictions we find elsewhere." Peter aged 30, abridged.*