

Naturism Increases Happiness and Positive Body Image

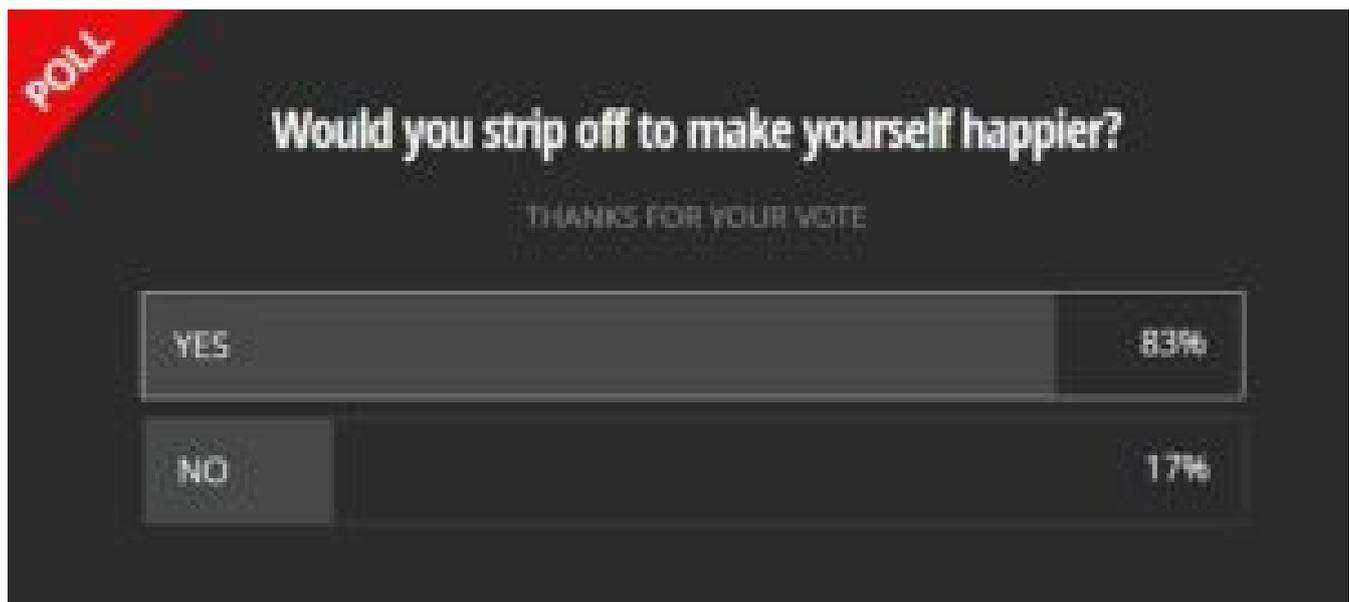
Written by Felicity Jones

Tuesday, 18 September 2018 18:07 -

At last, we have an actual research study about naturism and its positive effects on body image and happiness!

The research was [published online in the Journal of Happiness Studies](#) on January 21st, 2017. It set out to investigate the “possible psychological benefits of naturism.” As the author notes, naturists have long been making claims about how naturism improves self-esteem, [body image](#), happiness and has many other benefits.

But as the situation indicates, “very little empirical research has investigated these benefits or any plausible explanations for them.” This is sadly true. You’d think in an industry as big as this one, some organization would’ve funded this type of research by now.



Mirror UK ran a happiness poll in reporting on the new naturism research

The paper cites the few relevant studies that were conducted in the past 55+ years. There are a number of [studies that show how naturism or nudity benefits children](#) .

Marilyn Story’s research from the 80’s found that nudist kids had a more positive body image than non-nudist kids.

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In their 1988 study, Lewis and Janda found a correlation between childhood exposure to non sexual nudity and increased self-esteem as well as comfort with sexuality in adulthood.



Previous research studies demonstrate the positive effects of naturism on kids

According to this new research paper, none of the studies to date “have investigated the effects of actual naturist *behavior*.”

We know that public attitudes towards naturism and nudity are changing, and that [more Americans than ever are participating in naturist activities](#)

. Given that fact as well as the potential for naturism to help a lot of people with negative body image, this kind of research is long overdue.

The new research consisted of three different studies which took place in the UK.

Naturism Study #1

The first was an online study / survey of 849 British people. They were asked a series of questions about their experiences with naturism, body image, self-esteem and “life satisfaction.”

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Regarding naturism, they were asked if they'd ever participated in "clothes-free activities (i.e., activities in which you have been fully or partially undressed outdoors and / or in the company of other people (other than your close family or romantic partner)."

This question didn't use the terms "naturism" or "nudism" specifically because many people participate in it without using those labels. But there was such a positive response to this question that the researcher later said it may have been too "inclusive." The large number of would-be nudists made it harder to generalize their findings to the greater public.

From the online study they concluded: "Naturist activity predicted more positive body image, which in turn predicted higher self-esteem, and greater life satisfaction."



Naturism makes people happier!

To further validate their findings, they tested whether the reverse would be true and found that a person's "body image failed to predict participation in naturist activities." This is interesting because you'd think that people who had a positive body image would be more likely to try naturism or a social nude event.

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They also found the strongest relationship between positive body image and naturism for those who had the *least* experience with clothes-free activities. The more a person had experienced naturism, the weaker the relationship to positive body image. This suggests a plateau effect – people trying naturism for the first time have the most to gain in terms of improved body image. As a person spends more time in a naturist setting, that positive effect decreases (as a person becomes more comfortable with themselves).

Seeing vs Being Seen in Naturism

Part of the objectives of this research was to find out whether it was *being seen naked* or *seeing others naked* that related to a more positive body image. Based on previous research, the author expected to discover benefits of seeing “non-idealized” bodies (ie those that don’t fit current beauty ideals). What they discovered was that “seeing others naked predicted more positive body image,” while being seen naked did not.

This makes sense because a lot of stories about communal nudity and body image tend to focus on seeing body diversity and noticing how all bodies look different and are unique.



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Naturism Studies #2 and #3

The 2nd and 3rd studies of this research investigated how people felt before and after taking part in naturist events. The first was a charity event at a wildlife park to benefit polar bears (called "Bare all for Polar Bears"). The second was a naked day at a waterpark, an annual event organized by British Naturism.

The participants filled out questionnaires before and after these events. Like Study 1, they rated their body image, self-esteem and life satisfaction by choosing appropriate statements (such as "I do not feel good about my body" and "I am satisfied with my life.")

After both events, **participants reported more positive body image, greater self-esteem and life satisfaction. These results held true across all ages and genders.**

Research Weaknesses

In study #1 and #3, there were a lot more male than female participants. The first study had a large sample of 849 people, but only 94 were female vs 739 male. The 3rd study had 100 people with 83 men and 16 women. Though [most naturist events have more men](#) as I've discussed before, this is a pretty significant gender imbalance. The 2nd study was much smaller but with an even 12 men and 12 women.

Another issue was the lack of racial diversity as most participants of all 3 studies were White.

Although they found the same positive results in their participants regardless of gender, all this makes for a less representative study. Naturism also had the greatest positive effects in their 2nd study, which had an equal gender participation.

Future of Naturism Research

The study opens the door to a number of questions and ideas for future research. For example,

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one could investigate whether there is a *causal* relationship between seeing naked people and improved body image. A future study could also see whether the body type of participants matters in terms of the effects on their body image. And there are more questions about gender, such as: Would women benefit more from seeing naked bodies of their own gender vs men's bodies?

Conclusion

The study concludes that this research should be of interest not only to those in the body image field, but also to “public health practitioners who may come to see naturism as a cheap, almost universally available means of promoting healthy body-image, positive self-esteem and overall life satisfaction.”

Some might disagree with the words “cheap” considering membership rates of some nudist resorts, as well as “universally available” given that naturism is illegal in most public places. But it would seem generally easy and cheap to create a nudist environment for its psychological benefits – all you need is someone responsible in charge, an inviting place and a bunch of naked people.

Let's hope this study inspires more future research into the benefits of naturism!

This article was originally published on February 1, 2017.

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