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## PRESENTS



## I. THE TABOO OF THE HUMAN BODY

The wide-spread taboo attaching to the human body is a noteworthy phenomenon of social psychology. Clothing is worn, not merely for protection or for adornment, but to conceal various parts of the body from view. Clothes are not needed for protection in swimming, gymnastics, tennis and certain other sports, nor in rhythmic dancing. In most of these diversions there can be no question of adornment; in some cases garments interfere with the purpose of the activity; in some they may even be detrimental to health. Yet social pressure compels the wearing of some clothing in all these pursuits.

This taboo of the body is fairly universal. It is found among savage and civilized races alike, and prevails in all climates. Most investigators in this field have been interested in the origin of clothing rather than in the rise of the taboo. The two problems are distinct, though closely related. The origin of the impulse to cover the body has been variously explained by different writers. It has been attributed to the need of protection from cold, insects, dampness, excessive heat, rough soil, thorns, evil spirits, etc.; or to the craving for adornment, especially in order to promote sexual attraction. A number of writers ascribe the origin of clothing to a primitive modesty instinct, which would make the body taboo a native or inherent trait of the human race. J. C. Flügel (1) reviews these conflicting theories at length. The reader is referred to his monograph and the sources which he cites for full treatment of the topic.

*(Flügel's treatment of the psychology of clothing is thorough and well-balanced, except for his frequent interpretation of the phenomena in terms of a far-fetched sex symbolism. Attention should be drawn especially to the works of Havelock Ellis, Suren, Langdon-Davies, and Wundt, and the articles by Dunlap, Sanborn, and Bliss, cited in Flügel's bibliography, which treat of the modesty response and body taboo).*

The present paper is not concerned with clothing as such, but only in its relation to the taboo which requires concealment of some portion of the body by a covering device. Nor shall we consider the esthetic, hygienic, and ethical problems connected with clothing and nakedness, except in so far as they bear on the psychological aspect. *(The pleasing or displeasing effect of the uncovered human body on the beholder has an undoubted psychological bearing, and the effect of nudism on health and morals becomes at times a factor in the social attitude toward the practice).*

Of special psychological interest is the strength and persistence of the taboo - the fairly general social ban on human nakedness prevalent at the present time and in many earlier cultures. The experiences associated with contraventions of the taboo are all phenomena for psychological investigation. The effects on human behavior and attitudes of breaking the taboo form the main topic of the present paper. Among the

Greeks, in their golden era, the taboo was partly lifted. Games and athletic contests were engaged in by men and boys, in the nude, before crowds of spectators.

*(Thucydides, bk. I, 6. Plato, Republic, V, 452. Girls apparently wore a short tunic in foot-races and a pantlet for wrestling. Plutarch (Lycurgus, 14, 15) states that Spartan girls and boys marched 'unclothed' in certain processions and engaged 'unclothed' in athletic contests. According to Athenaeus (XIII, ch. 20) young men and girls wrestled together 'unclothed' in the gymnasiums in Chios in his own time. But the adjective gymnos used in all these passages often means lightly clad or in undress rather than completely nude. I have found no vase pictures of naked girl athletes, though there are innumerable such representations of men and boys. Since the Spartans did not adorn their pottery with pictures, this is not conclusive with respect to Spartan girls. In consultation with colleagues in the Greek and archeology departments, I have made an extensive examination of the classic writers and modern books on Greek athletics. They furnish no decisive evidence that the body taboo was lifted for girl athletes. But weight should be given to the statements of many classic authors that boys and girls were treated very much alike in the Spartan system of education).*

The very term gymnastics signifies literally unclothed exercising. The Greeks also emphasized the nude in art, a trend which was followed by the Romans, and was revived during the Renaissance after centuries of rather rigorous restriction.

Numerous other instances of dispensing with clothes on special occasions are noted among various peoples, ancient and modern, the most common being in out-door bathing and the posing of artists' models. In the main, however, the taboo has held in respect to general social intercourse. Nor are there any great regional differences except in respect to the amount of clothing prescribed. The Fuegians, living in a sub-arctic zone, wear little or nothing; (*C. Darwin, Naturalist's voyage (Journal of researches), London: John Murray, 1845, p. 213*) most African tribes cover at least a small, portion of the body. The Eskimo, though compelled by climate to wear heavy clothing, strip off everything but a small pantlet within their igloos. (*W. Thalbitzer, The Ammassalik Eskimo, part I, p. 29*).

Historically, the taboo has taken a number of different social forms. Rigorous anchorites have held it sinful to contemplate one's own body. This complete taboo has been sometimes inculcated in modern girls' schools as well as in nunneries. The taboo to exposure of the body before any one, even those of one's own sex (objective taboo), is one degree less rigid. A third form, still less restrictive, is the familial taboo, which forbids exposure as between parent and child and even between husband and wife.

Among the Semitic races this form of the taboo seems to have prevailed in early times. We read that when Adam and Eve discovered their nakedness they made aprons to cover themselves, although they were alone. (*Genesis*, 3: 7). And when Noah lay naked in a drunken stupor, his two sons walked backward, carrying a garment with their faces turned away, and covered their father without looking at his body. (*Genesis*, 9: 21-23.) It thus appears that the taboo among the Hebrews was not specifically sex directed, but was distinctly familial. A taboo of the same sort existed among the Romans. (See *Cicero, De officiis*, I, 129; *Plutarch, Marc. Cato*, c. 20).

The least rigid type limits the taboo to exposure of the body before those of the opposite sex, which carries with it the prohibition of nudity in any mixed group. By the term social nudism is meant the lifting of this intersex taboo.

In addition to these different types, the taboo has varied widely on the degree of covering prescribed and the parts of the body which are required to be covered. While these distinctions are not especially germane to our study, it should be noted that the taboo is not always directed toward sex differentials. "The Turkish woman veils her face; the Chinese would be ashamed to show her naked foot in public; the Arab has no concern at showing herself naked but covers the back of her head. In Assam the women cover the breast only; among certain tribes of the Philippines only the navel is accounted indecent." (*H. Surén, Man and sunlight - Engl. trans - , Slough: Sollux Publ. Co. 1924, pp. 87-88. Herr Surén has traveled widely and writes from personal observation*).

Early in the Christian era arose the notion that the human body is shameful and that to expose any portion except the face and hands is indecent. This led to the complete taboo already noted. But with the Renaissance the Greek ideals began once more to be felt. The two opposite ideals of body grace and body shame contended with varying results. In general a compromise was effected, whereby the display of the human form was sanctioned in art, but forbidden in nature.

In recent times the extent and direction of the body taboo has varied in different races and generations; but, however directed, it has remained essentially a taboo, and generally an intersex taboo. In most Western lands men and boys may bathe together in the nude, but not when women are present.

The taboo in its social form has been especially rigorous in the Anglo-Saxon races. In America, under Puritan influences, it became transformed from a mere social convention into a moral principle. Any uncovering of the entire body, except in the privacy of one's own chamber, was termed 'indecent exposure' and was (and is still) subject to severe legal penalties. Missionaries promulgated this doctrine among primitive peoples. Converts were provided with ample garments, which in tropical

climates often proved injurious to health and bodily stamina. At home, certain paintings were proscribed and statues were provided with the conventional fig-leaf.

The body taboo reached its climax in the mid-1800's. In England and America clothing was multiplied, especially for women, and it became improper to mention almost any detail of the human body in a mixed gathering. A woman was allowed to have head and feet, but between the neck and ankles only the heart and stomach were permitted mention in polite society. (*The taboo of certain words as indecent or profane, and the exclusion from social conversation of such topics as the excretory and reproductive functions, belong to a separate field of investigation, though intimately connected with our topic*).

To expose the ankle (even though properly stockinged) was considered immodest. An interesting episode occurred at Brook Farm, a radical settlement formed in the 1840's in Massachusetts. A few ultra-radicals in the group attempted a protest against the prevalent taboo. They made it a point to sit before their front doors quite unclothed on Sunday mornings when the rest of the community were passing on their way to church. (*G. W. Curtis, in Editor's easy chair, Harper's Mag., 1869, 38, p. 270. Mr. Curtis had spent some time at Brook Farm in his boyhood*). This seems an almost isolated instance, and was referred to later (during my boyhood) almost in a whisper.

The reaction started toward the close of the 19th century, when certain fin de siècle unconventionalities in clothing appeared. At the time they were regarded as daring contraventions of social laws—today they would seem quite commonplace. It was some 15 years later that the revolt began in earnest. Fewer clothes, especially for women, became the order of the day. The elaborate bathing costumes of the Victorian era gave place to one- or two-piece bathing suits, which have become progressively modified on certain beaches to the minimum requirements of Anglo-Saxon standards of decency. All this, however, was merely a dimensional modification of the taboo. The underlying principle - concealment of certain parts of the body - still remained, and was quite as strong as in the past.

Recently in some parts of the United States sun-bathing has begun to be adopted, but almost always in solitude or with segregation of the sexes. The obvious benefits to health from this practice have overcome many of the traditional objections to bodily exposure in the open and have led to some challenge of the taboo itself. In particular, familial nudism has become more common.

At the same time, reports of the German nudist movement reached America and were received with less shock than would have been the case a few years before. The accounts were not always accurate, and the stories told regarding the less thorough-going nudism in France were misleading and often calumnious.

In the spring of 1931 the Merrills' book, *Among the Nudists* (3) appeared, a pioneer work in English, which gave a detailed account of the movement for social nudism in Europe, particularly in Germany. The authors, a young married couple, describe their own experiences at a nudist park near Lübeck, drawing an attractive picture of the life there, its benefits, and attractions. About the same time Parmelee's *New Gymnosophy* (5) became available for American readers. In this book the theory of nude living is treated from every standpoint and its beneficial effects emphasized. Though the psychological side is not given separate treatment, there are many details which bear on this aspect of the question.

## II. SOME CONTEMPORARY OPINIONS

Although raised in a family and community where the body taboo was strongly emphasized, I had for many years questioned the reasonableness of the traditional attitude. Being without definite knowledge of the nudist movement in Europe, the Merrills' book attracted my attention. There was a certain hesitancy, due to life-long training, about going boldly into a book-store and asking for a volume bearing such a title. The inhibitory effect of the taboo was finally overcome, and the perusal of the book aroused interest in the psychological aspect of nudism as well as in its practical value. Whereas social exposure of one's body had been associated in my mind with exhibitionism, this account indicated that, as practiced in Germany, social nudism is altogether devoid of exhibitionistic elements. If so, then the taboo has merely a conventional basis, and may or may not be reasonable.

To test the practical value of nakedness I formed the habit of daily sun-bathing in seasonable weather. A secluded garden at home and a shielded roof in summer made this feasible, the outcome being a notable improvement in general health. A natural corollary was the discarding of clothing at night. (*One who is accustomed to sun-bathing can sleep comfortably without covering in a room of 70-72° F., except during two or three hours when the vital processes are lowest; then a single sheet is sufficient. When lying in a room of this temperature without covering I often experience the sensation of being covered with a soft, filmy tissue.*)

It is of psychological interest to determine the general attitude of the community toward sun-bathing and social nudism. This I was able to test in a limited sector of society. For the past eighteen months I have made it a point to mention my sun-bathing to friends and acquaintances whenever opportunity offered. Contrary to expectation, scarcely anyone appeared shocked at the notion of complete body exposure— at least in solitude. All seemed interested. Many responded most cordially, or suggested that I had joined the nudists. (*To several conservative friends who asked whether I put on a bathing-suit, I admitted wearing spectacles and wrist-watch. The incongruity of this 'garb' always extinguished the shock.*)

I found a number of cases in which married couples were accustomed to bathe in the ocean or lakes without suits; and several men who had given up wearing clothes at night. There were families here and there who were bringing up their children to spend part of the time without clothes, in the house or yard—often boys and girls together—the latter practice serving as an antidote to the harmful sex-curiosity and prurient thoughts which are otherwise inevitable in adolescence. Since these data were collected from different parts of the country and were apparently not due to any organized 'movement,' they seemed to indicate a definite social trend among the intelligensia class in America.

As regards social nudism, - that is, the association of adult men and women, quite unclothed, for exercise and sport - the attitude generally was less favorable. Many were definitely shocked at the notion, or treated it with ribaldry. Others, while open-minded, were inclined to believe that such association would inevitably foster immorality. A few were favorably predisposed. Nor could one readily predict the attitude of a given individual from previous knowledge of his or her general character and disposition. In the main the conservative individual reacted unfavorably; the progressive mind was disposed to think the experiment worth trying. But there were notable exceptions. I was surprised at the adverse opinion expressed by some who would be regarded as distinctly liberal in thought, and at the receptive attitude shown by some ultra-conservatives. In general those of the younger generation were inclined to be open-minded or neutral, while middle-aged and elderly people were either strongly opposed or else quite favorable.

The objections urged against social nudism were of the most diverse sorts. The most naive was that "even savage tribes wear some clothing." This was not an isolated opinion —it was mentioned several times. The fallacy lies in the word even. The prevalence of a custom among savages is no evidence of its utility among civilized peoples.

There were the usual objections on ethical grounds. And in many cases those who saw no such difficulty were averse to social nudity for esthetic reasons; the average human body is ugly, they declared, and needs clothing to mitigate the displeasing effect on the beholder. One rather portly friend (a psychologist) who voiced this sentiment, modified the usual conclusion by adding that if we were all compelled to show ourselves naked, we would take greater care of our bodies, and would be more shapely.

None of these objections seemed to weigh against the benefit to health and body stamina which exposure of the body to light and air affords. The only objection that appeared worth considering was the suggestion offered repeatedly by male friends, that the uncontrollable virile reflex might cause embarrassing situations.

In the fall of 1931 the Merrills were preparing a second book, dealing with nudism in our own country (4), and wished to include the opinions of representative physicians, psychologists, and philosophers. At their request I furnished a list of some 85 American psychologists, chosen on a strictly objective basis—a list comprising the past officers and councilmen of the American Psychological Association. To all these a questionnaire was sent, asking their opinion on social nudism for exercise, sport, and recreation. The authors were warned in advance that psychologists are flooded with questionnaires of all sorts, and are consequently averse to answering unless especially interested in the subject or alive to its scientific value. As was to be expected, not more than half responded, and many of these simply expressed a lack of knowledge on the subject. A few mentioned certain benefits to be expected from the practice and certain objections, without expressing any definite opinion. Those who gave a personal judgment were about equally divided for and against the practice of social nudism (4, ch. 9). A number of those who favored nude exercise questioned the advisability of its practice by both sexes together.

A striking characteristic of the replies was the fact that the opinions were all based on purely theoretical grounds. Apparently no American psychologist of the group examined had ever had the experience of social nudism. This is perhaps accounted for by the newness of the practice and the legal difficulties which it encounters in America.

The question is of such importance in social psychology that it deserves a first-hand study by those interested in social behavior. Two fundamental psychological problems are involved: (1) Is the traditional taboo of the human body an inherent factor in human nature? (2) Is social exposure of the body indecent or obscene, as the general opinion and laws of most civilized lands insist?

### **III. AN EXPERIENCE IN SOCIAL NUDISM**

On the occasion of the recent International Congress at Copenhagen I had an opportunity to test these questions to a limited extent by personal observation. Landing at Bremen some 10 days before the meeting, I went at once to Klingberg, the resort visited and described by the Merrills. The place itself and the life there have been so fully portrayed in their book (3), and more recently by a young American woman, Jan Gay (2), that they need only be sketched briefly.

A small comfortable inn, the Landhaus Zimmermann.

Near this a park of many acres, thickly planted with pines among which many narrow sandy paths lead hither and thither. Within this park a number of small cabins for sleeping quarters, several leveled open spaces for games, and a sun-exposed grassy slope for sun-bathing. Across the public road from the park, on the borders of a lake

some two miles in diameter, a private bathing beach belonging to the establishment, well screened from the road.

Paul Zimmermann, the owner, is a pioneer in the practice of nudism. He acquired this property in 1903, before the movement really started in Germany. Here he brought up his family according to nudist principles, planted the property with trees, and when the necessary seclusion was attained, extended the privileges of the park and beach to accredited guests, who must show their good faith and proper motives before they are granted admission. Meals are served at the Landhaus, where clothing is required (*This because the Landhaus is outside the park, and therefore a quasi-public place. In many nudist parks no clothes are worn at meals*) - usually some sport suit, without stockings or tie. In the park and at the bathing beach clothing is usually dispensed with. A bald head may be protected by a cap. Shoes or sandals are worn by those with tender feet; short trunks are worn by women during the menstrual period. For the most part the guests wear no clothes whatever. I arrived in the evening. After breakfast next day I read and signed the regulations and was given a formal admission card to park and beach. Herr Zimmermann showed me over the park, which happened to be quite deserted, and then took me across to the bathing beach. There we found some 30 men and women, of all ages, including a number of children. Some were lying on the grass, sun-bathing. Others were seated on benches chatting. A few were exercising or playing volley ball. A number were swimming in the lake. We hung our clothes on hooks at the open-air garde-robe, and Herr Zimmermann introduced me to a party of men and women grouped together, seated on a bench, or lying on the grass.

It was my first experience in social nudism; yet I felt no embarrassment whatever at my own lack of clothing, nor any shock at the sight of the men and women about me in the same condition. One of the men was English, one American, the other men and women were German. We chatted for a while without the slightest constraint on my part. Then I joined some of the group for a swim in the lake.

It has long been my conviction that the wearing of clothes for bathing is an absurdity. As well stuff the ears with cotton when listening to a concert, or put on dark glasses in order to enjoy a picture gallery or a drama. But it had never before been my fortune to bathe without a suit, in any body of water larger than the household tub. The new experience exceeded all expectations. The difference between bathing with even the scantiest suit, and bathing in the nude, can only be compared to the difference between a partial and a total solar eclipse—the phenomena in each case belong to two distinct categories. After a few minutes in the water we came out into the warm, sunny air, to lie on the grass or on a blanket, first running to and fro or engaging in a game of ring-toss in lieu of a rub-down. One chatted awhile with his neighbors, men and women, then another dip, and so for hours. It was not unusual to indulge in a dozen dips a day. The children of course were in and out of the water all the time.

Later in the morning most of the group returned to the park, to roam in the pine woods, or engage in ring tennis, or lie on the hill-slope for a sunbath, before dressing for dinner. Many of the visitors, including the writer, combined work with recreation. Some read or wrote or studied, some instructed one another in German or English, some sketched and painted, while sun-bathing.

In the afternoon much the same program. In spite of the seeming monotony one never grew satiated. The Merrills came in 1930 determined to spend a week if the first day did not prove too shocking. They stayed a month. Last year Miss Gay came for a week and remained six. Since I could neither postpone nor forgo the Psychological Congress, my visit was limited to eight days; in other circumstances it would have extended to at least a month.

The diet at the Landhaus is strictly vegetarian. The authors whom I have cited suggest a certain unpalatability in the fare for a steady regimen. The present writer found no such difficulty. For eight days he had no trouble in confining himself to what was set before him, without resorting to the neighboring Waldschanke, where a meat dinner could be obtained. The Landhaus is also strictly non-alcoholic, and smoking is prohibited in the park, though not elsewhere. This union of vegetarian diet and other restrictions with the practice of nakedness is common in nudist communities and is held to be an integral part of the cult. (*Many, perhaps the majority, of the Klingberg visitors were not vegetarians.* Personally I see no reason for the connection. Social nudism means the lifting of an unreasonable taboo. On the other hand the value of complete abstention from meat has yet to be demonstrated.

After two nights at the Landhaus, I was fortunate enough to secure a cabin in the park. This particular cabin was appropriately called the Rousseau-hütte. The park cabins are small and of rustic design. A rude bunk, with an upper berth; a table and chair; a wash basin and mammoth pitcher (but no waste receptacle); hooks for clothes, and a floor of pure sand. Everything in keeping with the ideal of nature living. Rooming in the park itself, one is able to experience not only sun-bathing, but air-bathing at all times.

For me there were three especially notable phenomena in the life at Klingberg. The first was the sudden and 'painless' removal of the body taboo. The naked bathing and swimming was another episodal experience more deeply felt even than the first.

The third striking experience was the morning gymnastics. Soon after 7 the physical culture teacher, Herr Lühr, strolled into the park beating a tom-tom. At the sound the guests trooped from the Landhaus, from the park cabins, and from neighboring pensions, and gathered at the tennis court. Those from outside the park threw off their bathrobes, which the cabin dwellers had dispensed with, and all formed a circle on the hard court. The exercises consisted of running, arm swinging, body bending of various sorts, leg lifting, and other vigorous muscular activities. They lasted about an hour.

There is a distinct joy in the free movements of the naked body which is lacking when one is clothed in the conventional gym-suit. There is also a delight in watching the play of muscles in those about one. The drill was accompanied by the rhythmic beat of the tom-tom, while the teacher shouted directions and set the pace.

After the exercises, which left one in a glow, everyone sped to the Moorteich, a small pond within the park, for a plunge, and the park-dwellers repaired to the open-air shower at the pump for morning ablutions before dressing for breakfast.

Had I not already practiced sun-bathing, this would have ranked as another episode. Though the experience was not entirely new, I found a vast difference between sun-bathing in the solitude of one's own garden, apprehensive lest a neighbor peer through the hedge, and this sun-bathing in a group of friendly men and women, without fear of prudish comment. The first is a task, the other a recreation. There is also a peculiar joy in wandering naked through the cool pine woods, whether by day or by moonlight, which is far superior to airbathing in a restricted garden. (*Stanley Hall describes an experience of his own in air-bathing (Recreations of a Psychologist; New York: Appleton, 1920, pp. 324-5); and Benjamin Franklin in 1768 speaks of spending half an hour or more naked in his room before breakfast, reading or writing, and terms it "a bracing or tonic bath" (Works; Hartford: Andrus, 1845; pp. 215-6). Both tried the experience in later life).*

#### **IV. PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF NUDISM**

This sketchy account of an actual experience of nudist life, which it has been difficult not to elaborate and punctuate with emotional adjectives, will explain why for the first few days the writer forgot to psychologize. One is so filled with the many novelties, so intent on enjoying the strange and absorbing mode of life, that he has no time to analyze the experience—no thought of studying the problem of social nudism as it bears on the body taboo. It was perhaps the third day that the psychologist began to emerge from the human being. By that time I had seen and experienced enough to offer a tentative answer to some of the questions which have been raised on theoretic grounds by psychologists and others.

##### **1. Breaking of the Taboo.**

Foremost in interest to psychologists is the basis of the body taboo. Is it a fundamental human trait, as many have maintained—inherited, or at least an inevitable consequence of man's social life? There is, for example, the curious relation of the nausea response to nystagmus and vertigo—an apparently native or early acquired association between remotely connected phenomena. Is the shame response to one's own nudity, or the shock response to the sight of nudity, a primitive response-pattern of this sort?

No one who has been through an experience of social nudity in favorable and proper circumstances will hesitate to answer this in the negative. In some cases the taboo and its customary responses slough off at once. On questioning the men stopping at Klingberg I found that for some the maladjustment lasted only a few minutes, for others it persisted during the first day—after that social nudity seemed perfectly natural and the power of the taboo was entirely broken.

I had no opportunity to find out the duration of the taboo in the women. It certainly vanished in every case after a short time. To cite an instance. An Englishman and his three daughters came one evening to the inn for admission cards to the park. The father and eldest daughter had been at Klingberg earlier in the season; the younger girls (in the late teens) had not. Next morning they all came to the gymnastic class. The two younger girls exhibited not the slightest trace of discomfort or self-consciousness, (*The untanned skin made it possible to observe the differential behavior of new arrivals*) although this was their first experience in social nudism.

I am unable to give any statistical data as to the duration of the body taboo in nudist surroundings. But my observations and the reports of others, make it certain that for the normal human individual who is not entirely dominated by the taboo the habitual responses disappear in a remarkably short time.

The attitude of the men and women at Klingberg cannot be attributed, like the Brook Farm demonstration, to rebellion or protest against established conventions nor yet to a latent exhibitionism. The behavior of every one was natural and unconstrained. No action suggested that any one felt he was doing something unconventional or daring. Everyone seemed (like the writer) to be simply enjoying the life and making the most of this unusual experience. (*This appears also in the photographs of nudist groups and individuals reproduced in the works cited (2-5) and in nudist magazines*). The group was not random but it certainly was not composed to any great extent of radicals, or social rebels, or faddists. There were none whom I should class as perverts or neurotics.

## 2. Shame and Modesty.

The body taboo gives rise to two sets of responses—the reaction to exposure of one's own body and the reaction to the sight of the exposed bodies of others. Modesty is the reaction attending fulfillment of prevailing conventions as to body-covering; shame is a result of (usually inadvertently) violating these conventions; while exhibitionism is a deliberate defiance of the prevailing code.

At Klingberg the social code was entirely different from that of ordinary life, owing to the removal of the body taboo. The shame reactions which ordinarily accompany body exposure— blushing, shyness, labored breathing, gestures of concealment— were entirely wanting in this environment, after one had become adjusted to the new code.

And there was no ground for exhibitionism, since the entire convention of concealment had been swept away.

It would be a mistake to conclude that modesty itself disappears. But, oddly enough, there is brought about an entire reversal of the modesty concept. Attitudes and gestures which in ordinary society are indicative of modesty become highly immodest in a nudist group. Certain responses and attitudes which are traditionally immodest are now indicative of natural, ingenuous modesty.

For example: In the ordinary environment, if one is inadvertently caught naked, the natural response is a gesture to conceal some part of the body. The Moslem woman covers her face; the Occidental man or woman covers at least the pubic region. This modesty reaction is typified in art by the protective gestures shown in certain statues and paintings and by the conventional fig-leaf. In a nudist park any such gesture or adornment would be distinctly immodest. I never saw the slightest suggestion of such a reaction or attitude at Klingberg. I believe that no decent man or woman would have made such a response, even involuntarily. At the morning exercises those who lived outside the park usually came wearing a bathrobe or dressing gown. Some threw this off, others kept it on till the exercises started, if the air was cool. But usually the robe was unfastened and thrown open, so that the front of the body was quite exposed. To have drawn it together when talking to one of the opposite sex would have been as immodest a gesture as the failure to do so would be in a social gathering elsewhere. In sun-bathing, men and women often lay side by side, now exposing the back to the sunlight, now at full length on the back with feet apart and arms stretched wide to get the utmost benefit from the rays. There was never an incipient gesture of concealment when others strolled by. Yet so natural was this readjustment of behavior that it passed unnoticed. Even the trained psychologist did not observe the phenomenon or appreciate its significance for several days. It has not, so far as I know, been mentioned in the literature.

### 3. Shock and Diffused Attention.

The other aspect of the taboo is its objective effect. When any tabooed part of the body is exposed, the response in the observer is shock. The attitude of curiosity regarding concealed parts has been called inspectionism, which is the counterpart of exhibitionism.

The shock experience manifests itself in various sorts of response—rapid heart-beat, disturbance of the circulatory system, blinking, turning the head, turning around or moving away, etc. Sometimes it produces motor paralysis or fascination which inhibits withdrawal temporarily. Intense shock may be accompanied by excited verbal behavior expressing disapproval, indignation, etc., which often reappears long afterwards, when the event is recalled. *(An odd combination of inspectionism and shock has been*

*frequently reported, in which the subject deliberately views the exposure through field glasses or by some even more labored means, and then manifests the shock behavior).*

In a nudist environment the shock-response quickly disappears. And since nothing is concealed, there is no room for curiosity or inspectionism, whether natural or pathological. At the start there may be special attention to those parts of the body which are ordinarily hidden. But since the whole body is uniformly exposed, there is no focus to attract the observer's attention. Soon the effect is merely the appearance of the 'organism as a whole'; one notices the general contour of the body, whether male or female, rather than any specific sexdistinguishing features. This has been brought out clearly by the Merrills (3, pp. 42-44), and is described from the woman's standpoint by Miss Gay.

*(From my own experience, and that of habitues of nudist parks with whom I talked, I should say that this preoccupation [with sex] is not great. To be sure, the first time one enters [a gymnasium] class one is aware of other people's bodies to a considerable degree, but when one mingles all day, day after day, with naked men and women, a penis comes to be not much more unique than an elbow or a knee, and little more remarked; and the contours of one woman seem very much like those of another, save that certain of them are more shapely" (2, p. 54).* My own observation fully confirms their statements. Frank exposure arouses no shock in the observer, while a concealment gesture would be decidedly shocking.

In the park, clothing of obvious value (shoes, caps, etc.) was accepted in the same way as complete nudity, though certain forms of apparel might appear inappropriate. *(I recall the surprise occasioned one day when a young man entered the water wearing a bathing cap on his closely cropped head. It transpired that he had promised his family to wear something when he went swimming).* Nor did the mingling of the clothed with the nude produce any feeling of shock. On reaching the beach, or before leaving, one would often stop fully clothed to chat with a group of naked persons of both sexes. An artist who was subject to sciatica wore a complete costume most of the time, and at the afternoon teas in the park there were frequently fully clothed visitors.

Only one type of experience at the park produced in me the semblance of a shock, which did not entirely disappear in the few days of my residence. This was the morning ablutions at the open-air shower. To await my turn at the pump, while a woman soaped and showered, with a final rub-down, and a man or two stood shaving near by, all completely nude, seemed a bit too suggestive of intimate family life. Not so the massaging of a man or woman on a table outside the park house, which usually occurred after breakfast, while the writer wrestled with psychological terminology at a table near by. Work as well as play in the nude seemed perfectly appropriate.

As regards the effect of unshapely bodies on the beholder, I am not in a position to speak. Apart from two or three men with obtrusive paunches, the park dwellers were quite wellformed. I did not find the abdominally rotund bodies any more displeasing in the flesh than in conventional attire. Doubtless the sight of a badly misshapen body or one covered with eruptions, open wounds, etc., would arouse disgust. In such cases clothing becomes a matter of utility, rather than a fetish.

#### 4. Eroticism.

There remains to consider the effect of social nudity on intersex attitudes and relations. The American writers already cited are agreed that nakedness, properly pursued, is no stimulant to eroticism and has no deleterious effects on sex morality. Miss Gay mentions the case of a young man and woman, obviously in love, who kept constant company during the daytime in the park without flirting and without his ever so much as touching her body—while in the evening, when they were clothed, he would often fondle her (2, p. 56). The Merrills' description of the behavior of young men and women in the Koch School gymnasium at Hamburg points to the same conclusion (3, pp. 135—143). (*The subject is treated more fully in a recent work, L. C. Royer, Let's go naked (Trans, fr. French), New York, Brentano's, 1932, pp. 192. This volume, which appeared since the present article was sent to press, describes the author's experiences in several nudist resorts in Germany*).

During my stay at Klingberg I observed the tendency of men to seek women and chat with them in an unconstrained way. The slight sex barrier usually noticeable in social gatherings was absent; but there was no petting or flirting, no trace of ribaldry, no presumptuous behavior based on the exposure of the body. I saw and heard nothing to suggest that social nudism induced the virile reflex—certainly not after the first shock at the novel situation was gone. (*Little information could be gathered on this point. Popular writers avoid the topic altogether. It has been suggested to me by psychologists that the reflex may be stimulated only by specific individuals of the opposite sex; also that tactual stimuli are more potent than visual*).

One of my pleasantest memories is a scene one afternoon when a group of young men and girls visited the park. On one of the courts four older men and women were playing ring-tennis. Above, on a steep slope, a flight of steps with log edges led to a higher clearing. On the three top steps a dozen or more of these boys and girls were seated, side by side, watching the play and chatting together. The air was filled with shouts and laughter, as they 'kidded' one another and bandied words with the players below. There was no trace of ribaldry, no unseemly behavior called forth by the universal nudity.

Irregular sex relations may and undoubtedly sometimes do take place at nudist parks. Human nature is not transformed by putting off clothes, and there are instances of scandal at summer resorts where the usual dress conventions prevail. My observations, and the wider experience of others, lead to the conclusion that social nudism does not in any way foster eroticism—that it tends if anything to promote a saner sex outlook and more natural relations between men and women, even during the years of early sexual maturity.

*(According to psychoanalysts the accidental or covert observation by children of the genitals of adults is an important factor in producing later neuroses. The problem remains whether social nudism serves to correct this tendency or accentuates it. Cf. a group of articles in Zsch. f. psychoan. Pad., 1928-9, 3, 44-91. Most of these writers are inclined to believe that nudism fosters sex neuroses, and cite instances from their clinical observations. It should be noted that they come in touch professionally with the neurotic cases only—cases which might have developed in other situations as well. Their data are by no means convincing. Observation of children at the nudist park fails to show any special interest in sex anatomy.)*

##### 5. Near-nudism and Pseudonudism.

There is a wide difference between social nudism as practiced at the parks and gymnasiums, and the near-nudism which prevails on the modern bathing beach, in athletic contests, and on the stage. However much of the body is exposed, so long as there are prescribed limits to nakedness the taboo remains. The loin-cloth of the athlete, the brassière bathing-suit, meager though they be, denote adherence to the age-long tradition. The French colony at Villennes and similar resorts in our country recognize the taboo or are compelled to pay deference to it by legal requirements. This reduction of clothing to the minimum is in no sense social nudism so long as the taboo is expressly recognized. It remains to be determined whether the easy camaraderie of the nudist parks is present in such resorts, or if the wearing of some needless clothing leads to inhibitions which interfere with the full enjoyment of the bodily freedom. *(Considered from the hygienic standpoint, there is some evidence of a healthful effect of sunlight on the gonads, which is not obtained where any sort of loin-cloth is worn. I am informed by one who had previously spent some time at Villennes, that he derived much benefit [at Klingberg] in the parts covered by a slip [at the French resort]—most notably in the strengthening of the testicles.)*

The display of near-nudism on the stage is a fairly new development in America. Recently, in a certain type of show, artistic posing of quasi-undraped models has come to be a recognized feature. The effect is generally pleasing; it appeals to the esthetic sense rather than to the erotic. Yet to one who has had experience in social nudism the esthetic effect is distinctly marred by the conventional brassiere, however transparent, as well as by the so-called cache-sexe. They detract from the artistic unity

of a beautiful body—like a price label on a fine painting, or a cataloguing tag on the arm of a statue.

The near-nude dances practiced on the modern stage are for the most part unesthetic. There are occasional instances, such as the fan dance in a recent revue, which meet every requirement. But in general the obvious motive is an appeal to the erotic. The strip acts of the burlesque stage are even more clearly designed to arouse sex emotion. One garment after another is removed with seductive gestures; the breasts are first coyly covered with the hands and then partly revealed. The motive is obviously to focus attention on those parts which are conventionally proscribed and to arouse erotic feelings. This pseudonudism is a form of visual ribaldry. It is either sheer exhibitionism or a catering to inspectionism. In contrast with such displays, the matter-of-fact disrobing of men and women together at Klingberg and in the nudist gymnasiums is entirely lacking in sex significance to the beholder, and arouses no more erotic feeling than taking off a cloak or an overcoat at a party.

The difference between near-nudism and nudism, one concludes, lies in the presence or absence of the body taboo. Even though the prohibited zones have become more and more restricted, the fundamental concept of taboo remains and influences our behavior and attitudes. Social conventions reinforce this notion and raise it to the level of a moral principle. Any contravention becomes indecent and exhibitionistic. The most striking phenomenon in the life at a nudist park is that this taboo disappears almost at once, and without any detrimental effect to one's world-view or morals. One quickly realizes that the human body is not indecent. This conclusion may not be consciously formulated—in most cases it probably is not. But its implicit acceptance is shown in every act and phase of behavior.

#### 6. Community Nudism.

It would be faulty logic to generalize from my limited experience, even though supplemented by the more extensive observations that others have reported. One cannot easily determine whether breaking the traditional taboo would be feasible or beneficial to the community at large. The group at Klingberg is not a random sampling. Those who come to the park have usually gone beyond the average person in challenging the body taboo; and careful examination of motives by the owner of the park serves to weed out those who are drawn hither by idle curiosity or with prurient intent. In the nudist gymnastic clubs in Germany a similar selective process occurs. And the bands of youths (*Wandervogel*), who roam about Germany and frequently indulge openly in nude bathing are less permeated with traditional restrictions than the older generation. The evidence is therefore not conclusive. A crucial test might be to introduce a prudish spinster or an officer of some anti-vice society into one of the nudist centers. If their ethical attitude were the result of a pathological nature the experience might lead to a nervous breakdown. Given a normal individual, one could

observe whether the shock experience persisted in full intensity or gradually disappeared. It would be enlightening also to test the effect of a sane nudist life upon youths accustomed to treat the body and its functions in a spirit of ribaldry. In the absence of such evidence it is impossible to reach universal conclusions. I have simply described observed facts and drawn what appear to be legitimate inferences.

Two conclusions of considerable psychological importance were satisfactorily established: (1) Since the traditional body taboo can be readily, almost immediately broken without detrimental results, it is not a fundamental human trait. (2) Social nudity is not in itself indecent; only a widespread and persistent social convention has made it so.

## **V. SUMMARY**

A brief historical review indicated that among civilized races and savages clothing has been adopted to a great extent for body concealment as well as for protection or adornment. In some races this body taboo has been familial; under Christian influences it has come to be largely intersexual; in Anglo-Saxon lands it has risen to the level of a moral principle.

Recently there has been a growing tendency to discard superfluous clothing and to limit the taboo to a few sexually distinctive parts of the body. This has resulted in modifying the taboo, but not in abolishing it. In the last few years the practice of sun-bathing has weakened the taboo; but since the sexes are segregated in America, the intersexual restriction still persists. The nudist movement in Germany is a real challenge to the body taboo.

The attitude of the writer's friends and acquaintances toward social nudism is reported, and the opinions of psychologists in reply to a questionnaire are cited. All these opinions were found to be based on theoretic grounds and not on personal experience. The writer spent a week at a nudist park in Germany and describes his experiences and observations. The data gathered, supported by findings of earlier writers, led to the following conclusions regarding the psychological effects of social nudism:

1. On coming into contact with a nudist group, the subjective experience of shame and the objective experience of shock tend to disappear at once or after a short time, so far as could be observed.
2. Where complete exposure of the body, except for protection from sun, rough soil, etc., is the universal practice in a group, there is no embarrassment or self-consciousness due to one's own nudity. The modesty attitude does not vanish along with the taboo, but its manifestations are almost diametrically reversed. Any gesture

of concealment becomes an attribute of immodesty. Such gestures or attitudes were never observed; they would be socially discountenanced.

3. Where the entire group are unclothed, the sight of the naked body ceases to arouse curiosity. Nudity is accepted as a natural condition. Since there is nothing to focus the attention on any specific part, one has merely the impression of the body as a whole, and sex differentiae no longer possess special significance.

4. The writer's observations and the testimony of others indicate that social nudity is not productive of eroticism. There is less sexual excitement, less tendency to flirt, less temptation to ribaldry, in a nudist gathering than in a group or pair of fully clothed young people.

5. The taboo is present so long as any part of the body is covered, not for protection but for concealment. This distinguishes genuine nudism from the near-nudism of athletics and the pseudonudism of the stage.

6. It is not clear from the data at hand whether the practice of nudism could be applied with advantage to the community at large.

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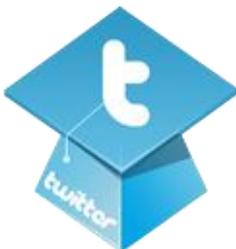
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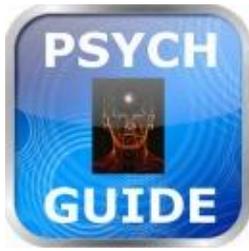
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