

Scholarship Essay 2019

What Does Nudism and Nude Recreation Mean to Me?

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Heightened self-consciousness is not a stranger to the established love-hate relationship that a teenager forms with their body. Consequently, once self-consciousness introduces itself to observation, endless attacks toward confidence make impurity an emerging theme in teenage development. These internal battles foster an unnecessary humility that hinders an opportunity for self-growth.

However, the ability for nudism to allow people to reveal the parts themselves that they most fear is the key catalyst in conquering these battles that scream, “you are not good enough.” It is in this capacity of nudism to help construct non-judgmental perceptions of others and growth of confidence that I find it to be beneficial to a great extent.

On my first day of middle school, it was announced that gym class had become a requirement for one semester. Unfortunately, I couldn't control the influx of haunting images of the locker room that began to overwhelm my mind. The images consisted of boys being teased for their lack of commitment to the “buff and toned” male body image for which magazines have labeled the normative mold for the body. I

turn out these images became realities as when I joined gym in 8th grade, one of my classmates would approach me everyday and tell me that I looked “gross” because I am too skinny and I need to cure the “anorexia” (which is a disease I've never struggled with). With every comment came a more intense suppression of self-hate that made me feel as though my body was more important than the kind of energy I strived to insert into the world every day. This was my first time my self-perception as adequate was challenged by others more negative and - as I thought at the time - more “realistic” view of my body.

At this point, I didn't see myself as an honest assessor of my body. Instead, I fell victim to harassment as my classmates continued to point out the dichotomous relationship between the muscular body type that I should have and the skinny body type that I had previously thought to be acceptable.

Although my confidence began to decline, a shimmer of hope rested within my participation in the AANR at the Mountain Air Ranch (MAR). Every month, the MAR hosts a children's day in which kids between the ages of 1 and 18 can come and participate in various activities. As a leader of one of the activities, the three-legged race, it was my responsibility to exude confidence and excitement although I am in my most vulnerable and fear state: naked.

However there is a sense of ease in achieving the desired confident conditions needed to run these activities as I am surrounded by adults and at the time that the other middle schoolers who never once commented on the traits of my body but instead my outgoing personality. In fact, although surrounded by nude bodies, it was apparent that the body itself was never a topic of discussion. For this, a great significance in embracing nudity

is revealed: when one is nude, there is an absence of judgment as one's personality is revealed solely through their topics of discussion.

This contrasts with clothing because although clothes reflect one's interest and passions, it does provide an opportunity for commentary that can be rather negative. Therefore, with nudity comes a relief that brings with it self-confidence when it comes to our words being more important than our action and body. This relief, for me, is followed by a greater sense of self as I was forced to create discussion that reflected my interest which helped to combat the stirring insecurities that I was constantly reminded of in the locker room.

After the completion of these Kids Day weekends, I felt as though a weight of confidence forced its way upon my back and demanded its presence within my perception of others. Therefore when I got back to the locker room, self-advocacy became characteristic as I was able to tell my classmates that body image doesn't compare in specialty to one's true colors on the inside. Thorough this advocacy, I was able to tell classmates that his comments no longer hurt me as I started to believe in myself and that his criticisms toward me were insignificant. In the depletion of this negative atmosphere in the locker room came a greater ability for me to compliment my peers and ignore the impurities.

In a sense, my friend group began to embrace our impurities by complimenting them, as opposed to forging an excuse to see our imperfections as accidents and unwanted through denunciation.

At this point, it seemed that self-consciousness and low self-esteem, which were my biggest two obstacles, were no longer going to tie me down and prevent me from accomplishing self love. Embracing my body, which I continue to do today, started and continues because of the example that other AANR members set for me. In this case, that the characteristics of one's body are insignificant when compared to their personality and heart.

In conclusion, the freedom and exposure that comes in being able to express both my body and personality free from judgment hid the insecurities that were screaming to reveal themselves throughout my teenage years. More significantly, body image was the most negative agent of my personhood that constricted my ability to see the beautiful characteristic of both my body and those of my peers.

For this I believe self-love was a fantasy and only found in the land of modeling and fair takes. However, as nudity was the guiding force out of the judgment, I attribute it as the most significant positive element in my development as a person.

Thanks to nudity, I can go on from both middle school and high school being a more non-judgmental person as well as embrace the inner beauty that rests within our humanity. I am eternally grateful for the role nudity has had on my perception of my world and others.