

## Think Twice Before Complimenting a Nudist

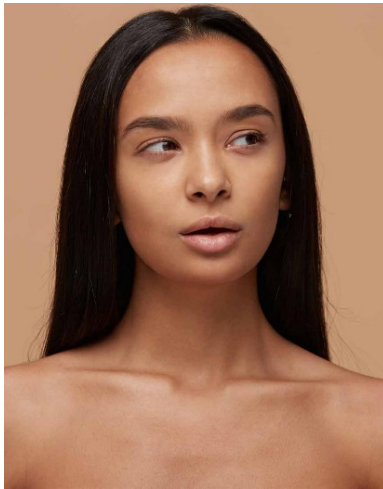
By Matthew McDermott

*You look amazing nude.*

*Your boyfriend better look out!*

*You're a beautiful young woman.*

*You're the kind of young person we love to see become a nudist!*



These compliments are all positive, saying something nice about the person they're directed at.

**And they're the wrong thing to say.**

Compliments like these make nudism a negative experience for women and young people and ultimately drive them away from nudism.

But they're nice things to say, right? Why would they cause problems?

### Directing Attention at the Wrong Things

These compliments tell the recipient about where others' attention is directed. The intended message may be positive, welcoming, and encouraging. But the more subtle underlying message is, "I'm sexually judging your body."

Compliments make a person aware that someone is judging their body. Even if the comment is something positive, it voices a judgment. It tells the person that they're being measured.

When a person judges someone on their appearance—even subtly—they sent the exact same message that non-nudist society gives about bodies. The message is that bodies are sexual, and to be judged and evaluated. With this, all the nudist ideals about it being safe and open and equal comes crashing down.

Whatever the motivation, a compliment still plays into the dynamics of clothed society, contrary to the ways that nudism seeks to be different. The subtext of a compliment speaks much more loudly than the complimenter usually realizes.

### Tipping the Scales

One of the most appealing aspects of naturism is how it puts people on the same plane. Naturists know that what others see, and what they see of others, doesn't matter. Social naturism established a shared trust when all of the participants are vulnerable together.

These compliments destroy *all* of that.

To compliment someone makes the complimenter a judge, and the recipient the judged. To give the compliment is to claim authority over the other person.

If a middle-aged-or-older man tells a woman in her early twenties that she's good-looking, he is making a very loud assumption of power over her. Most women, in response, would probably think that everything she had heard about nudism was nonsense. And they wouldn't be back.

### Instead of Compliments...

If there is nothing else to say to someone else other than to compliment them on their appearance, it's far better not to speak at all.

If there's no good reason to talk to a stranger besides commenting on their looks, a simple smile and a "Hello" is enough. Unless the stranger says something more substantial in return, it's fine to move on without another word.

If a stranger needs directions—for example, they're walking around with garbage in their hand, in search of a receptacle—it's simple enough to guide them towards what they're more likely looking for.

If a stranger is nearby and they seem a little nervous about approaching, it's okay to say, "These chairs over here aren't occupied. Feel free to take any of them."

And after any of those, unless the stranger says something more substantial in return, it's fine to can move on without another word.

The key is to limit the interaction to the other person's benefit. Unless they choose to engage further, the next step—where people respond with something about how good-looking they are, or how well-defined their muscles are, or *any other compliment*—is one that never needs to be taken.

### Making It Better for Everyone

Some readers may feel insulted: they don't need a primer in basic human interaction. Others might think feel like this is prejudiced against them, just because they're men, or because they want to be nice to other people, or because...because...because...

Too bad.

All nudists need to pitch in to stop this dynamic of people being (supposedly) complimentary, and other people (actually) being made uncomfortable, and pushed away.

Instead, it would be better to concentrate on a key-value that naturists share: that social nudity brings everyone closer together. And in that context, the best approach is to avoid doing anything that pushes people apart.

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