

It's a shame we are still dealing with body shame

Last Sunday's Enquirer featured a story of a young woman struggling with anorexia, an eating disorder not uncommon among (mostly) teen girls and women.

When the subject of the article said "You'll be surprised how many people think the same thing" (as she does about her body image), she wasn't kidding.

While incidents of anorexia have continued to skyrocket among young women ... the issue of negative body image is endemic and hurting an entire generation of women.

A recently completed six year study by Dr. Brene Brown from the University of Houston found 90 percent of respondents aged 18-80 struggle with negative body image. Ninety percent. This is not a niche issue. This is a national epidemic.

Why does it matter? Because body image is, according to Dr. Brown, the one issue that comes closest to a "universal trigger" for causing feelings of body shame. "Body shame is so power-



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NOTHING TO HIDE

ful and often deeply rooted in our psyches it actually affects ... sexuality, motherhood, parenting, health, aging and a woman's ability to speak out with confidence. Unfortunately, how a woman views her own body may have little to do with her actual appearance."

The issue is the media "ideal" of the "perfect body" that is young, extremely thin, toned, nubile with large breasts, perfect hair, teeth and skin.

Fewer than 5 percent of women will fit this model and almost no woman could really live up to this. The majority of runway models meet the Body Mass Index (BMI) criteria to be considered

anorexic. The average U.S. model weighs 117 lbs and is 5'11 while the average U.S. woman weighs 140 lbs. and is 5'4.

And as Andrea, from last week's article noted, many women look in the mirror and, regardless of the reality, see themselves as overweight. Even anorexics.

Media and culture have, through perpetuation of this unrealizable ideal, created a toxic environment that dishes out self-loathing and low self-esteem for women with every turn of a magazine page or viewing of a TV show or commercial.

The only amazing thing is more women aren't anorexic, bulimic or clinically depressed because of it.

But just because all women aren't anorexic or on Xanax doesn't mean they're OK.

Too many women are coping but not living ... surviving not thriving. Far too many women (and men) don't feel good about their bodies and as noted above, it affects everything else.

Everything.

I'm going to suggest a

solution that may surprise you. Take off your clothes.

It sounds crazy and counterintuitive. And, its way too simple. No pills, therapy, electroshock, residential treatment centers.

Simple, yes, easy, no. There will be discomfort.

Too many women in our culture are so uptight about their bodies they can't bear to look at them ... at least not for long. So, going nude in your home (and you can work up to this) for a few minutes at a time ... working up to several hours ... will be stressful at first.

One Hollywood actress took this approach after realizing she was becoming anorexic. "I developed a devastating case of body hatred. Striving to achieve the airbrushed status of popular stars ... I hired an esthetician, dermatologist, and chiropractor, became a member of a gym ... and nipped ... my food."

The recommendations from naturist websites seemed strange ... but she went along. "I stood nude before the mirror and showered myself with

words of love and beauty, accepting my body as is in that moment. Okay, I was desperate. I did this for months, first cringing at the sight of myself, then adapting, then finding enjoyment.

"It had taken about a year to hammer the idea of my hideousness into my brain and took considerably less time for me to rediscover my comfort. How do you tell the world that being naked saved you from yourself without receiving ridicule in return?"

The answer is ... you don't. Many will scoff or ridicule what I am suggesting. But the simple truth is when you are alone and naked confronting yourself in the mirror there is no escape. Sure, you can put clothes on ... continue to perpetuate the self-loathing, denial and pretense.

But if you stick with this exercise you will start to experience a change. A change in your feeling about you. You will begin to accept you ... and then like you ... and then love you. And you can't really love anyone

else ... your husband, lover, children or anyone else until you love you.

When you can love and accept you ... you can move on. Naturism is all about body acceptance. And the first body you have to accept is your own.

We are dealing with a post-Victorian prudish hysteria society combined with an impossible, sexualized media ideal that conspire to have us hate, loathe and be ashamed of our bodies.

When the message of fear and inadequacy is so ingrained in the culture is there any surprise that we cannot accept our own body? Or others? No good ever comes from hate.

If you can find peace with the skin you're in, healthy adjustments will follow. Freedom and the truth love the open air and sunshine. Given the chance, so do our bodies.

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