



them," John noted. He added that males who attempt to enter the pool area bare-chested are politely asked to put a shirt on.

John said he agrees with this rule. "It's more modest if you wear a T-shirt," he remarked.

John said that he also wears a shirt when swimming at public facilities closer to home. Even though he's one of the few males wearing a top in those settings, he said that his attire doesn't seem to draw attention.

"People don't really mind it at all," said John, 15, from St. Mary's Church in Rushville.

John said he doesn't think it's appropriate for males to don skimpy trunks and females to wear string bikinis when they go to the beach.

"It just shows a little too much," he said. "People think they can just do what they want."

According to Betsy and Rebecca, modesty is a policy that should also be followed more closely in their church. Because Holy Cross is just up the street from Ontario Beach Park, they sometimes spot people at Mass whose swimsuits are at least partially re-

and Flesh

field.

Betsy lives a five-minute walk from Ontario Beach Park — also known as Charlotte Beach — and enjoys heading to this popular Rochester hangout with her friends during the summer. She said she wears a bathing suit when she's near the water or swimming, but puts a shirt and shorts over the outfit at all other times.

"It just makes me feel more comfortable. I'm not one who likes to stand out," Betsy said.

Rebecca, also, wears a swimsuit at the beach but not in other public settings.

"The beach is more acceptable," Rebecca said.

Rebecca and Betsy acknowledged that many convenience stores and restaurants post reminder signs, warning that patrons will not be served unless they're wearing a top.

"That's so you're not exposing yourself out in public," Rebecca said. Betsy added that most restaurant patrons don't wear skimpy clothing, so she wouldn't feel right about eating in her swimwear, either.

Meanwhile, there are even swimming spots where covering up is still the norm. In the summers of 1995 through 1997, John Hebding and his family vacationed at Catholic Familyland, an Ohio camp that offers recreation for families in a spiritual setting. There, John said, females are required to wear one-piece bathing suits in the swimming area. Males are required to wear T-shirts — "but not white shirts, because you can see right through

vealed.

"I don't think you should do that. You're in God's house," Betsy said. Meanwhile, Rebecca thought it would be a better idea if these people waited until after Mass to change into their swimwear.

"Church is a time for being humble and not having people look at you," Brian in Penfield agreed.

Otherwise, though, Brian said he finds no issue with baring his chest at the beach and in other public places where shirts aren't required or expected.

"I'm pretty comfortable with myself. I don't think about it much," he said.

But is it permissible for a woman to be topless in some of those same places? Yes, according to a 1992 decision by the New York State Court of Appeals, which gave women the right to go bare-chested wherever men are allowed to. The decision arose from protests lodged by a women's group known as the Coalition for Topfree Equality. The case's two defendants had been arrested for baring their breasts in a Rochester public park.

"I think they had a point. We have to allow different people to act differently," Brian said.

However, Brian said he doesn't expect to see any woman exercising this right.

"I'd be real surprised," he said.

Coming next week

Volunteers

WHAT MESSAGE DO YOU SEND?

When teens wear skimpy outfits to youth-group events, Nora Bradbury-Haehl said she doesn't automatically slap the "inappropriate" tag on them.

"What they wear is an important part of who they are. And teenagers do experiment a lot," explained Bradbury-Haehl, youth minister at St. Joseph's Church in Penfield.

Bradbury-Haehl said that if a youth reveals a noticeable amount of skin — such as a boy going shirtless or a girl wearing a halter top — she normally leaves it up to other youth-group members to raise the issue.

"Teens often pick that stuff up from a peer better than if an adult was trying to tell them what to do," Bradbury-Haehl said.

Yet Bradbury-Haehl also stressed that she will talk privately to teens whose style of dress has become consistently suggestive.

"I've asked them what the image is they want to send, because this is what I perceive," Bradbury-Haehl said.

"If they have a habit of dressing very seductively," she added, "I would have an ear to the ground about whether they were involved in early sexual activity or were sexually abused."

On the other hand, Bradbury-Haehl doesn't advocate for teens to constantly cover themselves from head to toe. Some previous generations in American culture, she said, may have been overly conservative.

"I think it has to do with our own attitudes about sex. We tend to see it as something secretive and almost evil," Bradbury-Haehl remarked. "(But) there's nothing evil about our bodies. By making that stuff so forbidden, it almost makes it seem more appealing."

Bradbury-Haehl noted that clothing (or lack of it) should not be the only gauge of moral standards.

"It's not what we put on our bodies that makes us pure or impure. It's what's in our hearts and minds," Bradbury-Haehl commented.

She explained that Americans are no different on the inside than they were prior to, say, the 1960s, when the bikini came into vogue.

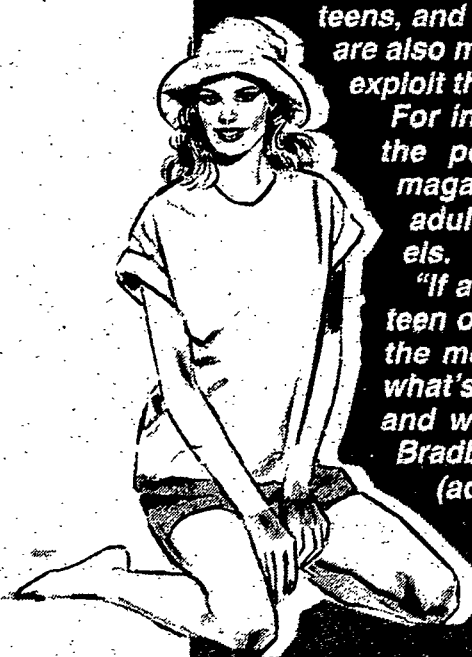
"People had the same motivations and drives," she said. "The common denominator is being human."

The comparatively relaxed modern standards about nudity or partial nudity, she said, have both pluses and minuses.

"There's less mystery about sexuality for teens, and that's a good thing. But there are also more people out there ready to exploit them," Bradbury-Haehl said.

For instance, she said, along with the pornography industry, many magazines for teens and young adults feature scantily clad models.

"If a teenage girl picks up Seventeen or Cosmopolitan, she looks at the message we're sending about what's attractive and appropriate, and what it means to be female," Bradbury-Haehl said. "And then we (adults) condemn the young people."



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