

# Streaking: A Mad Dash To Where?

By ROBERT D. McFADDEN

It is an art form? Is it an uncontrollable urge? Is it political? Perhaps perverse? Healthy? Naughty?

Streaking—the new spring rite of sprinting in the nude, preferably before a big gawking audience—was praised, put down and generally laid bare yesterday in a series of interviews with psychiatrists, sociologists and other educated guessers, including some streakers.

And even as these experts expounded their theories, the phenomenon spread from the nation's collegiate campuses to shopping centers, factories, spring-training baseball diamonds and the hallowed halls of the Michigan State Capitol.

## 'A Form of Assault'

Clad in the latest accessories—sneakers, neckties, masks and body paint—streakers pranced at West Point, rode bicycles in Rhode Island, tok to motorcycles in Iowa and hopped a fire-truck in Florida. It was, in fact, a big day for streakers.

A coterie of devotees at the State University Center at New Paltz, N. Y. organized the New Paltz Intramural Streaking Club. And at Fordham University, where jaybirds swung in the trees outside a coed dormitory, officials pronounced streaking—and inciting to streaking—an offense punishable by suspension.

Amid the frolicking, there emerged some more or less considered analyses.

"Streaking is a put-on, a form of assault," said Marshall McLuhan, the author and communications theorist who is director of the Center for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto.

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In a telephone interview, he added:

"It's an art form, of course. All entertainment has elements of malice and power in it. Streaking has a political point, too. It's a form of activism."

Professor McLuhan also had a linguistic point to make, noting that streakers are nude but never naked. "It's only when you don't want to be seen that you're naked," he said. "A stripper backstage is naked, but when she is in front of audience she is wearing her public."

Dr. Robert Michels of the New York Psychiatric Institute at the Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, described streaking as "the defiance of accepted cultural norms—more naughty than sexual."

"I see it as a continuation of fads of provocative and socially amazing behavior," Dr. Michels continued, "much more in line with panty raids, swallowing goldfish and doing consecutive whatever's... startling and astounding. Disturbing. The inherent meaning is just silly."

If there is a political point, he said, it is that young people are telling an older and more powerful generation that "social customs and norms are based on arbitrary rules."

## Energy Crisis Cited

Dr. David Abrahamsen, a Manhattan psychoanalyst and the author of 10 books, said he thought streakers were "trying to liberate themselves" after a "long winter without sexual outlets." Dr. Abrahamsen also drew a relationship of sorts between streaking and the energy crisis.

The gasoline shortage, he said, has made it more difficult for youngsters to use cars parked in shady lanes. The resulting sexual frustration, he said, has contributed to the streaking phenomenon. Dr. Abrahamsen, a Norwegian, also suggested that streaking might "give a lift to nudism."

Dr. Robert J. Lifton, a professor of psychiatry at Yale University, called streaking a prank in the long collegiate tradition—"a challenge to authority and a mockery

of authority." But more is involved, he said, "like sex, the sexual revolution and social mores."

But, Dr. Lifton added, "there are three things I'm sure it's not: It's not a return to the fifties; it's not a sign of the corruption of American morality and it's not a threat to national security."

A Yale streaker, one of four placed on probation for a midnight dash with a flaming torch, said it was simply a prank. "We had no message to get across," he said. "It's very important for everyone to keep a perspective on the fact that we're illegal students and college

students are supposed to have fun."

A cadet at the United States Military Academy at West Point, said that he was one of dozens of streakers who dashed around the post in the buff "with the officers chasing us."

"We did it to relieve the monotony," he said. "Everybody was hanging out the windows cheering."

In other streaking action yesterday, Mark W. Nunes, a 21-year-old self-styled drifter from Crow's Landing, Calif., dashed through the central corridor of the Michigan House of Representatives at Lansing. He was clad in boots and a ski mask, and was seized by security guards, who said they were thinking of charging him with either indecent exposure or disrupting a legislative assembly.

Baseball games in Miami, Atlanta and Statesboro, Ga., were invaded by seventh-inning streakers, and a pitcher at Jacksonville State in Alabama said a streaker ruined his no-hitter by forcing him to serve up a double.

Dozens of shoppers gawked in amazement in Rutland, Vt., yesterday when two male streakers ran the length of a local shopping center and tumbled into a car, which sped away. Streakers also sprinted through a shopping center in St. Louis and a factory yard in Schenectady, N.Y.