This last idea may well explain the sex differences as regards hairiness but, again, the loss of body insulation would be a high price to pay for a sexy appearance alone, even with sub-cutaneous fat as a partial compensating device. A modification of this idea is that it was not so much the appearance as the sensitivity to touch that was sexually important. It can be argued that by exposing their naked skins to one another during sexual encounters, both male and female would become more highly sensitised to erotic stimuli. In a species where pair-bonding was evolving, this would heighten the excitement of sexual activities and would tighten the bond between the pair by intensifying copulatory rewards.

Perhaps the most commonly held explanation of the hairless condition is that it evolved as a cooling device. By coming out of the shady forests the hunting ape was exposing himself to much greater temperatures than he had previously experienced, and it is assumed that he took off his hairy coat to prevent himself from becoming over-heated. Superficially this is reasonable enough. We do, after all, take our jackets off on a hot summer's day. But it does not stand up to closer scrutiny. In the first place, none of the other animals (of roughly our size) on the open plains have taken this step. If it was as simple as this we might expect to see some naked lions and naked jackals. Instead they have short but dense coats. Exposure of the naked skin to the air certainly increases the chances of heat loss, but it also increases heat gain at the same time and risks damage from the sun's rays, as any sun-bather will know. Experiments in the desert have shown that the wearing of light clothing may reduce heat loss by curtailing water evaporation, but it also reduces heat gain from the environment to 55 per cent of the figure obtained in a state of total nudity. At really high temperatures, heavier, looser clothing of the type favoured in Arab countries is a better protection than even light clothing. It cuts down the in-coming heat, but at the same time allows air to circulate around the body and aid in the evaporation of cooling sweat.

Clearly the situation is more complicated than it at 42