

-he different stages of the monthly sexual cycle. The inescapable conclusion is that the mandrill and the gelada have brought their genital signals forward to a frontal position for some reason. We know too little about the life of mandrills in the wild to be able to speculate as to the reasons for this strange occurrence in this particular species, but we do know that wild geladas spend a great deal more of their time in an upright sitting posture than most other similar monkey species. If this is a more typical posture for them, then it follows that by having signals on their chests they can more readily transmit these signals to other members of the group than if the markings only existed on their rear ends. Many species of primates have brightly coloured genitals, but these frontal mimics are rare.

Our own species has made a radical change in its typical body posture. Like geladas, we spend a great deal of time sitting up vertically. We also stand erect and face one another during social contacts. Could it be, then, that we, too, have indulged in something similar in the way of self-mimicry? Could our vertical posture have influenced our sexual signals? When considered in this way the answer certainly seems to be yes. The typical mating posture of all other primates involves the rear approach of the male to the female. She lifts her rear end and directs it towards the male. Her genital region is visually presented backwards to him. He sees it, moves towards her, and mounts her from behind. There is no frontal body contact during copulation, the male's genital region being pressed on to the female's rump region. In our own species the situation is very different. Not only is there prolonged face-to-face pre-copulatory activity, but also copulation itself is primarily a frontal performance.

There has been some argument about this last point. It is a long-standing idea that the face-to-face mating position is the biologically natural one for our species, and that all others should be considered as sophisticated variations of it. Recent authorities have challenged this and have claimed that there is no such thing as a basic posture as far as we are concerned.