

What's the Problem with Nudity?

Feeling a little exposed...



When did we lose our fur? And why does nakedness make us feel so uncomfortable? *Horizon* investigates the evolution of a uniquely human characteristic.

Ten volunteers undress inside a peep-show booth. They're being watched, and they know it. Behind a bank of two-way mirrors a row of anonymous eyes look on. But who's more uncomfortable, the watchers or the watched? A team of psychologists monitor their emotional responses. In this unique experiment, *Horizon* unlocks the bizarre relationship humans have with their naked bodies.

There are lots of theories about why we lost our fur. Charles Darwin guessed our ancestors simply found smooth skin more attractive, and over millions of years of selection, hairy humans lost out. But while the struggle to attract a mate explains why humans are still hairless, it can't explain why we lost our fur in the first place.

One theory is linked to sweat. Sweating is the most efficient way of cooling a large brain and active body and works best without fur. Humans sweat more than any other animal, closely followed by the patas monkey. This animal has thinner fur than other species, runs faster and further than other primates and lives a very similar lifestyle to our distant ancestors.

Moving on from why we lost our fur, the film explores how this development changed our minds. Without fur, our ancestors lost the need to groom each other. As the volunteers mimic primate grooming behaviour, touching the bodies of their companions, their experience quickly becomes uncomfortable, revealing how our perceptions of physical contact have changed.

And what role has clothing played in our psychology? From a purely practical adaptation at first, the items we chose to cover our bodies became powerful expressions of tribal belonging, and ultimately extensions of our sexuality and identity.

In this thought-provoking programme, *Horizon* explores the evolutionary origins of a uniquely human condition.

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SCIENCE

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DID YOU KNOW?

This programme forms part of the *Horizon* 2008/09 series (15 x 50')