Is sex a natural biological drive or is it socially constructed? As sociologists, we are inclined to say it is the latter, constructed upon the basis of the former. But this very general, conventionally palatable answer leaves everything dangling. How strong and how constant is the biological component, and by what mechanisms does it become transmuted into the myriad variations of sexual behavior? Can we predict on theoretical grounds who will do what with whom, and in what historical circumstances?

Let us say that sex is motivated by pleasure in the genitals, and that this physiological mechanism has been evolutionarily selected to promote reproduction. But genital pleasure-seeking does not account for many aspects of what people widely recognize as sex. Why are breasts considered sexy in some (but not all) cultures? A evolutionary biologist would answer that breasts signal a woman's mothering capacity. But this does not explain why adult males would derive pleasure from grabbing, touching, or sucking women's breasts; and it leaves us with the puzzle as to why we commonly distinguish between nursing (not usually considered sexy) and breasts as sexual.

Similar problems crop up as we move further afield from the reproductive organs. Why is kissing widely considered sexual? Why only in certain societies, and for certain kinds of kisses? What is the pleasure of touching lips and tongues, surely far from the biological mechanism of genital pleasure? Why is it sexually arousing (for some social circumstances), so that one thing leads to the other? Why is it that for some persons, the height of sexual pleasure is to combine kissing and licking with genital contact, sometimes touching the mouth to all parts of the body? This touches on the problem of fellatio and cunnilingus. Seeking genital pleasure explains why someone might enjoy having their penis or clitoris sucked; but why should some persons find it highly erotic to perform oral sex upon someone else?

Anal sex raises similar questions. One might account for anal penetration as penis-pleasure, in the case of the male penetrator. But if there is pleasure in passive anal sex in both homosexual and heterosexual intercourse, what is the mechanism of pleasure? Why are there other anal elaborations, enjoyed by some individuals or in some erotic sub-
cultures, including anal licking, "fist-fucking," and, relatedly, spicing sex with being the recipient or witness of defecation and urination.

There are a host of mild and relatively respectable examples of sexual attractions that have nothing to do with genitals: faces, hair (why should one like to run their fingers through a lover's hair? why should blondes—in some historical periods—be considered sexy?), or, as in Japan, the nape of the neck. In the nineteenth century, off-the-shoulder gowns were female high fashion, and men would proclaim the beauty of a woman's shoulders. We take it for granted that a sexual partner should preferably be attractive. Aside from the fact that standards of attractiveness vary historically, by what causal process can we account for how nongenital bodily features become sexually arousing? In the twentieth century especially between 1930 and 1950, women's legs were considered extremely sexy as they approximated certain ideal curves; even the remote appendages, ankles, insteps, and high-heeled shoes were capable of arousing erections and ejaculations. Various forms of voyeurism and sexual aggressiveness, as well as consensual love-making, were aimed at touching these objects. Again we must ask: where is the pleasure? Finding a mechanism to account for such erotic experiences is the general problem of all the examples we have been considering.

Let us list a few more types that need explaining: holding hands—why is that felt to be pleasurable, as well as part of a sequence of erotic behaviors? Why do incipient lovers sometimes play footsie under the table? Why is general body contact, hugging or being hugged by another person, in some social circumstances (but not in others) a major part of sexual pleasure? The kind of answer I am seeking will not be of the form "that is the way things are defined in this culture." And it does not help much to add "sexist" or "patriarchal" or "capitalist" to "culture" (or "regime"). There is an important component of bodily and emotional interaction in these social actions; these are not merely cultural signals, arbitrarily assigned out of the big code-book in the sky that many theorists envision as determining what happens in a particular epoch, until mysteriously the sky ruptures and another code-book is put in its place. We can make a stronger and less arbitrary explanation, by linking sex with theoretical models that include components of human bodily action; not surprisingly, I will shortly suggest a link to interaction ritual theory.

An important set of problems centers around masturbation. A purely evolutionary reproduction-oriented sex drive has difficulty explaining masturbation, especially as it occurs beyond allegedly supercharged adolescence and when intercourse is also available (e.g., evidence it occurs among married or cohabiting persons: Laumann et al. 1994, 82-83). If the mechanism is genital pleasure, masturbation is easy to explain, but another problem arises: why should intercourse be preferred over masturbation? Apparently there is some additional source of pleasure in another person's body besides the genital climax. Again if male masturbation is motivated simply by penis-pleasure, why is it typically accompanied by fantasy, and often by viewing pornography? Sheer organ-specific physical pleasure would seem to require nothing but tactile stimulation; yet these representational (shall we say symbolic? if so, of what?) aids seem to intensify the physical experience as well as increase their frequency. Moreover, the incidence of masturbation correlates positively with availability of sexual intercourse, not negatively as one might expect if there is a fixed quantity of biological sex drive to be used up (Laumann et al. 1994, 137-38). Instead, masturbation seems to stimulate other kinds of sex as well (as does pornography). Sexual turn-ons of one kind seem to sensitize sexual turn-ons of other kinds; it appears that sex is not merely an internal drive but a variable quantity that is controlled or constructed from without.

Freud confronted the same range of problems. His solution was to posit a general sexual drive, libido. At adolescence it settles upon genital organ-pleasure, but earlier passes through a series of stages in which it sensitizes other organs (oral / mammary, anal), hence these kinds of eroticism can be explained as displacements or regressions to previous libidinal stages. Shoe-fetishes and the sexual attraction of legs, hair, and indeed of beautiful form in general can be explained by the plasticity of libido, like a fluid that spreads anywhere and eroti-cizes anything it touches. Libido is a metaphor for something that unites the variety of sexual objects and pleasures, but it is far from an explanation. One major difficulty is that Freud takes sexual drive to be a naturally given quantity; the main role of social processes is to repress the sexual drive. I suggest that the contrary is the case: the amount of sexual pleasure-seeking has apparently increased historically. Both Freud, and his follower in this respect, Norbert Elias, hold that the civilizing process has brought about increasing repression of natural sexual functions, a view that I will show is historically erroneous. Erotic stimulability may have a biological origin, but it is enormously flexible. Here, too, I want to place the emphasis on just the opposite direction from evolutionary psychology or sociobiology with its image of humans (at least males) resembling rutting rams or spawning fishes driven to spread as many sperm cells as possible. Humans can live with rather modest amounts of sexual behavior, and when sexual behavior expands, both in quantity and in range of objects, that is due not to a primal omni-sexualizing drive to release sperm but to social processes that create sexual drive. The libido meta-
Let us agree, as a starting point, that sexual behavior is motivated by seeking pleasure. There is evidence that people must learn how to achieve sexual pleasure. An individual's first sexual intercourse, and early sexual experience generally, is often not very pleasurable. For females, even in an emancipated sexual atmosphere, it may be unpleasant, or it may be regarded as disappointing or oversold (evidence in Lynn Green's interviews with black and white teen-age girls about their early sexual experiences: Green 2001). For males, too, early sex experiences tend to have a higher level of negatives as well as lack of orgasm than at older ages, even though the youngest men spend more time in each sexual event than older men (are they ardent or incompetent?) (Laumann et al. 1994, 94, 117). A fair amount of sexual activity is unsuccessful and unsatisfying (Laumann et al. 1994, 368-71); this variation in experience is too easily shunted aside into a separate category, sexual dysfunction, overlooking the significance of the comparison for showing how sexual pleasure is socially constructed. Sexual pleasure is to a considerable extent learned in couple-specific interactions, so that it is not merely a matter of young, inexperienced persons learning how to have pleasurable sex, but of the inexperience being specific to each social relationship. Sexual pleasure-constructing behavior is learned; but what exactly is it that is learned? It is a form of social interaction, and this is what our sociological theory must explain.

Evolutionary biology has become a prominent theory in recent years because, among other reasons, it fills the gap left by the absence of a nonmoralistic general theory of sexuality. Since I would like to get on with the sociological analysis, and not keep being distracted by the invitation to a rather easy counterpolemic, I will briefly list here the reasons why as a sociologist I am not impressed with the explanatory power of evolutionary biology. Evolutionary biology gives no mechanism for just how the genital organs are implicated in sex, but only the global argument that somehow everything is arranged to contribute to maximal reproduction of selfish genes. Its focus of variation is between males and females, collecting evidence to support the view that males are programmed to impregnate as many females as possible (and to compete with other males to do so), while females are programmed for maternal behavior and for selectivity in choice of mates in order to maximize the chances of their offspring's survival to reproductive age. The theory is badly underdetermined as to both historical and individual variations in sexual practices. It fails to account for how people experience socially real sexual motivations, especially when these are at variance with the alleged biologically programmed motivations. For instance, the theory fails to distinguish, as most real people do, between maternal capacity and sexiness. In eroticized cultures, males make this distinction quite sharply, and do not prefer having sex with women who display only maternal traits. In eroticized societies (like the twentieth century), having large numbers of offspring (or indeed any offspring at all) is what the most erotically active are concerned to avoid.

My strategy is to make comparisons and explain variations. There is now good systematic survey data (Laumann et al. 1994). Since we are concerned more with processes and correlations than with sheer incidence of various kinds of sexual behaviors, the Kinsey reports and other more specialized samples continue to be revealing, when we ask the right theoretical questions of the data. Historical and ethnographic materials give strategic variations to explain. It is also useful to compare different kinds of sexuality: to compare males and females, and also gays, lesbians, and heterosexuals, the blind and the sighted; and to compare different kinds of behavior: intercourse, masturbation, oral and anal sex, rather than leaving each segregated in its own area of specialized research interest, or worse yet, its own interest group. Sexuality needs to be connected more directly to the central processes of social theory. It is an obstacle to approach sex primarily as a social problem, and even more so to substitute moralizing for explanation. In this respect, analytical blinders imposed by insurgent standpoint advocacy can be no less restricting than those of sexual traditionalists. Moralizing and advocacy about sex will enter my analysis here only as one more topic to be explained.
so as to make humans, compared to most other animals, much more attuned to individualized social interaction, and to honing many kinds and degrees of social ties with each other—and, above all, attuned to the prolonged interactional pleasures of sexuality. Contrary to the evolutionary biologists who see males and females as radically different, the former as selfish gene scatterers and the latter as mate-selective and protective mothers, I suggest that both males and females share the same biological hard-wiring that makes them mutually sensitive to the interactive buildup of attention and emotion in IRs. This is the aspect of human biology that explains the variety of erotic behavior; it also explains what makes society possible at all. The evolutionary biology model seems better oriented to explain a species with highly unsociable male animals, such as mountain goats.

In what follows, I will discuss three theoretical dynamics that mesh together to explain sexual interaction. The first, the selfish penis model (or individual genital-pleasure seeking), has already been discussed, mainly from the point of view of its shortcomings. It will continue to play counterpart to the following arguments. The most straightforward way to analyze selfish sexual pleasure is to study prostitution, which brings out quite brazenly all the unpleasant features of rational action or utilitarian exchange. The second dynamics is sexual interaction as interaction ritual producing solidarity. The dynamics of IRs also help explain nongenital sexual practices. Third is erotic prestige; here I will deal in a schematic way with historical changes in erotic stratification, explaining why erotic prestige-seeking became such a dominant motive in twentieth-century societies.

**SEX AS INDIVIDUAL PLEASURE-SEEKING**

The strongest empirical approximation to sex as selfish, individual pleasure-seeking is prostitution. In the ideal type, there is a simple exchange of customer's money for sexual pleasure. I will suggest the relevance of three kinds of empirical observations.

First: customers' interaction with prostitutes is often difficult and unpleasant, characterized by a high degree of distrust and cheating. Prostitutes are primarily motivated by money: they generally try to get as much money as possible from the customer, and give as little sexual labor in return as they can get away with. One variant, on the borderline of prostitution, is the b-girl (bar-girl) who hustles drinks for a bar which turn out to cost exhorbitant prices, by implying that a sexual deal will follow. Full-fledged prostitutes engage in various forms of bargaining, both as to price and quantity, such as charging a given sum for initial sex acts and asking for more to continue on to actual intercourse, sometimes stringing out the customer to continued renegotiations of what he thought was a done deal. Prostitutes in arenas with high turnover tend to minimize their work for the money, trying to hurry the customer through as quickly as possible. In short, a prostitute tends to act very much like a pure utilitarian actor in game theory: since this is a purely selfish exchange on both sides, the focus is on monetary bargaining and on shirking work. Prostitutes almost always demand their money up front, before performing; customers agree to this, apparently because the strength of their desire for sex is stronger than their willingness to calculate and bargain. In other words, the cooler head is on the side of the prostitute, hence the better bargaining position. For the same reason, prostitutes are in a better position to cheat their customers than the other way around. This is one reason why prostitution has a bad reputation; in addition to being condemned by moral puritans and advocates of exclusively marital sex, it also tends to have a quality of overt distrust and cheating. This is implied by the colloquial term "whore" used in the informal culture of customers for commercial sex. Even the customer bent on purely selfish sexual pleasure may often experience interaction with prostitutes as utilitarian to a degree that reduces the sensory pleasure to a unsatisfactory level.

The second micro-empirical observation is that prostitutes during intercourse frequently simulate the sounds of being sexually aroused: moaning and stereotyped expressions of what women in the throes of passion are supposed to say. This is part of the professional lore of prostitutes, the self-presentation that is considered the correct performance of the job. It may also be an instrumental twist on this pattern, insofar as prostitutes believe they can get men to ejaculate more rapidly this way and hence get their work done more quickly. Commercial telephone sex, in which women "talk dirty" for customers to masturbate, would seem to indicate that a main component of male sexual arousal and pleasure is the experience of participating in mutual arousal. All these observations point to the same conclusion: that even in situations in which sheer selfish sexual pleasure is the aim, there is a component of shared sexual arousal that is believed to enhance the pleasure. Since prostitutes typically have little emotional commitment and engage in cheating, this mutual arousal is generally faked; but the fact that they feel it is expected (and even useful) shows that the sheer individual pleasure-seeking model of sex does not account for all, or even very much, of sexual motivation.

Third: customers of prostitutes tend to find the most sexual satisfaction where the interaction is least like a distrustful, commercial transaction, that is, least like prostitution. Such are encounters where haggling...
over money is minimized, sexual performance is carried out as specified, interaction is sociable and friendly, and the prostitute becomes genuinely aroused rather than faking it. An example of the latter would be mistresses, who are further along the continuum specified by Zelizer (see note 4 of this chapter) toward long-term, multi-transaction relations. A related observation is that men often consort with prostitutes to have sex with women who are more beautiful than those they ordinarily have access to; my hypothesis is that there may be a negative (or zero) correlation between sexual satisfaction and the beauty of the prostitute. That is because the most beautiful prostitutes have high market demand, hence they receive more deference and can demand more (both monetarily and behaviorally) from their customers; hence beautiful prostitutes tend to cheat their customers more, engaging in more haggling and more shirking of performance. Less attractive prostitutes, conversely, have to put out greater effort in making themselves saleable; their lesser haggling and greater willingness to perform sexual work make them more pleasant to interact with, and thus produce more sexual satisfaction. Even in sex with prostitutes, interpersonal solidarity (personal liking) correlates with sexual pleasure.

**SEX AS INTERACTION RITUAL**

The most important features of sex are those that fit the IR model. I will stress again that the rituality of human actions varies on a continuum. Mutual focus and emotional entrainment may be zero, moderate, or high. The intensity of an IR depends upon the presence of a set of initial ingredients, plus the interactive processes by which the ritual builds up to pervade participants’ feelings and actions. Rituals produce outcomes such as social solidarity and symbolic significance only to the extent that the IR reaches higher levels of intensity. This is blatantly apparent in the case of sexual IRs. Sexual intercourse often fails to be an IR of much intensity, especially when carried out in the mode of one-sided pleasure-seeking on the utilitarian model. In what follows, I describe the mechanisms by which a full-scale sexual IR is built up. We start with the ideal type of highly successful sexual IRs, and go on to examine how various forms of sex can be explained as variants on this ideal.

The IR model fits most forms of sexual interaction, including both intercourse itself and ancillary actions like kissing. (See figure 6.1, which is a modification of figure 2.1 given in chapter 2.) Let us start with intercourse.

Figure 6.1 Sexual intercourse as interaction ritual.

1. Intercourse is bodily copresence of the strongest possible degree. It assembles a very small group, usually two persons (on orgies, see below).
2. Intercourse has a strong mutual focus of attention, the awareness of contact with each other’s body, and of the actions by which each other’s body affects the other.
3. The common emotion or shared mood is sexual excitement, which builds up over the course of the interaction.
4. Intercourse typically has a very strong barrier to outsiders; it is carried on in private, and there are strong taboos on others viewing it.

This high preference for privacy in sexual intercourse is a cross-cultural universal (Reiss 1986), suggesting that the dynamics of this intensely intimate IR, rather than culture, dictate the taboo. There are several ways in which bodily presence of observers can disrupt the buildup of sexual excitement in intercourse. Naive observers are likely to be caught up in the contagious sexual excitement and try to join in, thereby interrupting the mutual focus. Alternatively, if observers maintain their emotional cool, that tends to bring down the atmo-
sphere of sexual excitement. The two dynamics may be combined: observers may fight to control their own sexual excitement in observing others by reacting to the sight as obscene (i.e., highly improper), and thus intrude hostilely; a milder version, when observers feel they cannot intervene, is to turn the situation into humor by jeering, thereby detracting from the mutual focus of the lover-makers on their passion. Goffman (1981) noted that humans act like other animals, maintaining backchannel awareness of whoever else is in range who potentially could be part of the interaction; and hence there is tacit orientation toward them. In the case of sexual interaction building up to mutually engrossing levels, the presence of others is disrupting. Empirical confirmation comes from the lore of the pornography industry that male porn actors are relatively rare in their ability to maintain an erection in the presence of nonparticipant observers.

There are some violations of the privacy restriction, but these tend to confirm the operative preference for privacy. One type of violation is sex shows: live action intercourse is the rarest and most taboo (most "obscene") of all sexual displays (the dancer / stripper oriented to the customers is much more common); much of its attraction comes from the piquancy of its violation. Relatedly, some female photographers of male-oriented pornography are outstandingly successful in getting their female models into a state of visible sexual arousal (and hence create especially sexy photos, even of women who are not otherwise especially beautiful), by themselves stripping and making the camera servers may fight to control their own sexual excitement in observing others by reacting to the sight as obscene (i.e., highly improper), and thus intrude hostilely; a milder version, when observers feel they cannot intervene, is to turn the situation into humor by jeering, thereby detracting from the mutual focus of the lover-makers on their passion. Goffman (1981) noted that humans act like other animals, maintaining backchannel awareness of whoever else is in range who potentially could be part of the interaction; and hence there is tacit orientation toward them. In the case of sexual interaction building up to mutually engrossing levels, the presence of others is disrupting. Empirical confirmation comes from the lore of the pornography industry that male porn actors are relatively rare in their ability to maintain an erection in the presence of nonparticipant observers.

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Another type of violation are orgies or group sex. We have not much data on classic orgies (mostly known in ancient Greece and the Roman Empire). The hypothesis of IR theory is that a successful orgy works through mutual buildup of excitement all around, leaving no participant out, no "wet blankets" on this party; and that the result will be not merely a two-person bond but a group identity, with distinctive group pride and status, perhaps in their eliteness as sexual sophisticates. There is some evidence in the literature on 1960s group sex in communes with a free-love ideology; even in these settings most sex occurred serially among couples, and in relative privacy. Comparative data on the number of love ties in such groups indicates that the organization of communes containing mainly exclusive couple-ties were much less likely to break up than communes with multiple love ties (Zablocki 1980). This suggests that keeping a completely balanced and integrated group solidarity among more than two persons is difficult using erotic IR. The fact that many breakups in the highly multiple love-tie communes (which Zablocki called "smoldering") occurred in angry blowups over jealousy supports this interpretation.

Confirming evidence comes from data on swingers' groups (colloquially, wife-swapping or mate-swapping) (Bartell 1971; Gilmartin 1978). Such groups surround their uninhibited sex with rigid rules prohibiting singles (persons without partners) from attending; that is there is always an even exchange, with everyone taking part equally. Such groups also have taboos on members meeting each other for sex outside of the assembly of the entire group; in other words, the group develops a standard of jealousy, in this case prohibiting separate couple attachments (other than those among the preexisting couples who constituted the swinging arrangement) that would detract from the group solidarity. These comparisons show that a two-person group is not necessary, but that whatever the number of participants, they act to bond sharply among themselves sexually and exclude outsiders.

Copulation is a very strong example of the feedback processes that recycle back and forth between mutual focus and shared emotion. Such processes in IRs typically have a rhythmic pattern. In love-making we can clearly see three aspects: rhythmic intensification, rhythmic entrainment, and rhythmic synchronization. Here sexual ritual gives occasion for further refining the IR model.

Rhythmic intensification is the central physiological mechanism by which sexual excitement builds up. Copulation is a steady stroking of genital organs against each other; it is this rhythm which builds up excitement, with increasing speed and pressure, and leading to climax. The buildup of measurable bodily processes is strikingly similar in both males and females, including heartbeat, blood pressure, body temperature, and rapid breathing, reaching their maximum at the moment of orgasm or ejaculation. Both male and female genitals undergo vasocongestion or engorgement with venous blood; this produces a similar change in color both of the glans of the penis and labia minora to deep red or purple. In both sexes there is a two-to-four-second anticipation of the onset of orgasm (a long spasmodic contraction in the female, a feeling of being unable to control the ejaculation in males), with both undergoing a series of three or four major contractions at 0.8 second interval (Masters and Johnson 1966).

Of course, rhythmic intensification might be merely individual; that is, it can occur in solitary masturbation; and in copulation, one person might experience much more rhythmic intensification than the other. IR theory, as well as empirical observation, suggests that sexual excitement and pleasure become more intense when there is rhythmic entrainment: one participant intensifies their bodily rhythm as they are caught up in the other person's rhythm. This is a very strong instance of feedback cycles reinforcing an IR process; recall the evidence in chapter 2 that this happens in social interactions that are pleasurable.
but not erotic, such as animated conversation. Rhythmic synchronization occurs when the partner's bodily rhythms coincide. In sex with a high degree of mutual arousal, rhythmic entrainment leads to rhythmic synchronization. Such synchronization is not necessarily perfect, and may involve considerable variation (e.g., female orgasm may go on longer or more repetitively and involve many more spasms than male ejaculation, up to 12 or 15 contractions for a very intense female orgasm as compared to 3 or 4 typically for the male; Masters and Johnson 1966, 135-36); the IR hypothesis is that the more synchronization, the more the solidarity outcomes of IRs, and even moderate degrees of synchronization may produce considerable pleasure and solidarity.

In the terminology of the sexologists, this is called the "pleasure bond." But I would stress that this is not mere utilitarian exchange of individuals' pleasures, but is experienced as a collective achievement. The motive becomes pleasure in interaction, not pleasure in isolation. On the utilitarian model there is no motivation to continue with the same exchange partner if prospects for a better cost-benefit ratio emerge elsewhere; this is just the opposite of the "pleasure bond" produced by high-intensity sexual rituals.

Sex as intimate interaction ritual needs to be considered against the background of normal social interaction, in which persons rarely touch each other. Sex is so far from normal bodily interaction that it is no surprise that it can produce the strongest of all forms of solidarity. In enormous contrast to ordinary bodily interaction, making love allows a person to touch someone else's body; in high-intensity love-making, this may involve exploring, manipulating, doing things to every part of the other's body. And this bodily access tends to have reciprocal effects, as each partner mirrors or extends the action by doing it back to the other's body. Of course there are degrees of reciprocity: some love-making is more one-sided, often with male active and female relatively passive. IR theory says that the degree of reciprocity is a principal determinant of the degree of excitement and pleasure.

The pleasure in touching and mutually coordinating with another's body exemplifies the IR mechanism; it also operates in less intimate forms than intercourse. It is this mechanism that makes lap dancing and related commercial petting parlors a pleasurable commodity. In a previous cultural era, social dancing (i.e., male-female couple dancing in which partners held arms around each other's shoulders or waist, as distinct from historically earlier group dancing, and from the independent, nontouching couples dancing that became popular in late-twentieth century) gave a restricted version of this same kind of pleasure. Why was ballroom dancing pleasurable? We cannot take the answer for granted. It was a restricted form of male / female IR conveying a highly controlled degree of mutual sexual arousal. A commercialized version was taxi-dancing, a kind of very mild prostitution found primarily in the 1920s through the 1950s, in which women sold a small amount of sexual solidarity (Cressey 1932; Meckel 1995).

All this casts light on the difference between sheer individual genital pleasure and the interaction-generated excitement and pleasures of sex. Even in intercourse, the man is not just getting pleasure in his penis from the woman's vagina; he is copulating with—making love to—her entire body. Conversely, the woman gets pleasure to the extent that she feels her partner's body copulating in rhythm with her. Through feedbacks in the IR process (depicted in figure 6.1), the genital excitement itself is affected by the success of the sexual IR. The hypothesis is that the intensity of the ejaculation (number of spasms, shortness of refractory period, amount of sperm released) is determined by the intensity of the rhythmic buildup through entrainment and synchronization.

We have considered the ingredients and intensification process of sexual IRs; let us briefly review the outcome side:

1. Sex produces solidarity in the very small, two-person group. This special kind of intimate solidarity is called love. In recent centuries, people have come to distinguish conceptually between sex and love; nevertheless they are closely linked. Sexual intercourse does not always imply love, but in the ideal case it does. People understand that there are other kinds of love (altruistic love for strangers; family love; abstract religious love) but the primary referent of love is the sexual bond. The full force of Durkheimian solidarity is concentrated in this relationship. Ideally, the sexual lovers are fully identified with each other as a unit; they serve and protect the other. We can conceive of love without sex, but in the case of a contemporary pair-bonded couple, the love relationship without sex would seem incomplete in the most basic way. This is because sexual intercourse is the ritual of love; it both creates and recreates the social tie (since Durkheimian rituals need to be repeated periodically, as solidarity runs down in the interim), and symbolizes it. That is, it stands as a marker announcing both to participants, and to nonparticipant outsiders, that this is a very strong personal tie. Sexual access thus is the key boundary marker, and the primary test of loyalty.

2. Sexual IR, like other IR, produces emotional energy. In this respect, sexual IR is like other IR in transforming one emotion into another. In the general case, ritual transforms whatever initiating emotion the group shares and focuses upon, into an outcome emotion, the feeling of solidarity and individual strength as group member. In sexual ritual, the initiating emotion is typically sexual excitement, passion,
the outcome emotion is, collectively considered, love / dyadic membership solidarity; individually considered, it is long-term sexual drive. Since EE tends to be specifically directed toward particular kinds of previously successful IRs, sexually aroused EE makes the individual ready to be turned on to more of the same kind of sexual ritual.  

3. Sexual ritual generates symbols as memorials and tokens of the relationship. This is analogous to the way in which rings, gifts, and other memorials of a love relationship become its sacred objects, simultaneously signaling the tie and giving ancillary opportunities for showing respect for the relationship, or for breaking it. Here not merely objects but actions can serve as symbols of the relationship. In a conventional Durkheimian ritual, what the participants focus upon during the ritual becomes a symbol of the group. It is through this process that ancillary parts of sex take on significance as emblems of the entire sexual relationship. Breasts are not the primary sources of sexual pleasure, nor is the anus; but they can become symbols of the intimate interaction that goes on during love-making. For that reason, they are both taboo to outsiders, and a special emblem of being an insider, hence targets for sexual possession. A more obvious explanation might seem to be that breasts and anus, as well as lips and tongue, are sexual objects because they are naturally, physiologically programmed to be sensitive and arousable. But their sensitivity can also be just painful if contact does not occur in the process of rhythmic coordination among partners, such as if it occurs in rough, coercive, or unexpected sexual contact (or indeed in brusque nonsexual contact). For that matter, the genitals themselves are not pleasurable but are irritated or even quite painful if they are stimulated in the latter ways. It is the social context of micro-interaction that makes any of these bodily zones pleasurable; whatever biological programming there may be has to flow through rituals of social solidarity, which in turn gives them symbolic status (see note 5 in chapter 4).

4. The morality of sex is the feeling of rightness of sexual possession, of access to the other’s body and the exclusion of all other persons. Since ritual creates moral standards, the primary violation is sex with an outsider, and its response is moralistic, righteous anger. This is a very localistic morality, enacted in righteous anger toward those who violate it, and generally overriding the moral standards of the wider social group, which condemns violence.

The Durkheimian model holds that solidarity and the other outcomes of rituals are time-bound, fading away with the passage of time if they are not repeated. Sexual IRs too must be repeated regularly to keep up the sexual bond. Persons in stable couple relationships typically have sex about once a week (Laumann et al. 1994, 88) even relatively advanced ages. This is the same order of time as the weekly scheduling of religious rituals, suggesting that both kinds of solidarity rituals operate in the same way. Both imply that strong rituals keep up strong group relationships only for about a week. Very strong religious believers or Cultists have even more frequent ritual assemblies, and the same is true for lovers in very intense relationships. Kinsey (1953, 395) showed that most couples had a period in their lives when they were having sex once a day or more (about 10 percent having sex three or four times a day); this was probably the period of establishing the relationship, the climax of courtship. The temporal pattern apparently exists in all ritually mediated intense relationships; mutual participation in the ritual is most frequent when establishing the relationship, then falls off to a routine level. This occurs in the intensity of conversations in friendship ties, as well as in the initial frequency of ritual attendance for religious converts.

I have depicted sexual IR and its outcomes in terms of the ideal type. These are the primary effects of high-intensity sexual IR, and these dynamics are the basis upon which more complicated cases can be analyzed. If sex produces solidarity, how to account for prostitution or casual sex, where there is no solidarity tie? How do we account for seeking sex without seeking love? These can be handled as variants on the model. Since the IR model is a matter of variables, sex that involves relatively little mutual focus and shared emotion will be less satisfying. Sex with a prostitute is often low-intensity IR; as it approaches higher intensity, it takes on overtones more like love (even though it may not be possible to follow it up into a longer relationship). Similarly, casual sexual relations can go either way. I suggest as a hypothesis that high-intensity sexual relations, even if begun only with personal pleasure in view, tend to produce attachment, which eventually is socially indistinguishable from love. This is the theme (sometimes exploited in literature, also in life) of the hard-bitten, cynical individual who nevertheless becomes ensnared in a sexual relationship, thence into marriage and conventional symbols and feelings of solidarity. This may be a major way in which modern males, with their overtly individual-pleasure orientation, become seduced by their own seductions.

Obviously there exists casual, pleasure-seeking sex, without love ties. But sexual behavior cannot be explained merely by a fixed motive for genital pleasure. If there is such a drive, it can be greatly intensified, teased out, led up to, and dramatized by social interaction. Turn-ons are created by staged presentation of erotic special effects and by fantasies based on them; and these affect even how much sperm a male ejaculates and how often and how intensely both males and females...
climax. The mechanism by which this occurs is sexual IR. If there is pure selfish pleasure-seeking, the route that must be pursued to get a great deal of it is to engage in mutually interpenetrating interaction, in which the individual gets caught up in a multiply interlooping two-person skein of bodily and emotional feedbacks.

This turns the sociological question around: how can we explain when individuals seek low-solidarity sex? I suggest that the motive for seeking a great deal of selfish genital pleasure is built up by ritualized social interactions that give high social prestige to having a lot of this kind of sex. The key IR focused on sex, in this case, is not the copulation of the male / female couple, but the talking, posing, and jeering about sex that takes place in the all-male group, or sometimes in a larger community of social reputation that I will call a sexual scene. Thus the performance of any particular act of sex is affirming solidarity with that group membership rather than producing solidarity within the couple. Selfish sex remains a social symbol, but in this case representing prestige in the eyes of the larger group.\(^{13}\)

The general line of explanation will be that the mechanism of sexual IR generates symbols and motivations that become free-floating, beyond any particular relationship; individuals can thus attempt to strive for sexual pleasure, which is deeply mingled with social status, even if it is done in a nonreciprocal way. The complication is a familiar one in other contexts. Children get love from their mother, both emotionally and in the physical experience of bodily contact; they can also be quite selfish in demanding her love, contact, and attention. Sexual solidarity is a good; it is indeed an archetype of intense IR-produced solidarity and EE. It can be created by fully reciprocal participation in sexual IRs, but also in various degrees by one-sided and partial participation. It can further be manipulated, strategized as a topic of higher-order reflections and plots (e.g., seduction schemes), exchanged and coerced. There can be such a thing as manipulated solidarity and coerced solidarity. It is not surprising that there are love / hate relations, and that love is a favorite topic for twists of literary plots. Sexual love is a powerful, intimate dynamic, operating most powerfully in the micro-situation; it can become overlaid by complicated IR chains, full of the troubles of nonintimacy.

**NONGENITAL SEXUAL PLEASURES AS SYMBOLIC TARGETS**

We turn now to explaining some ancillary sexual rituals: first more public and respectable ones, then intimate displacements from the genitals. The issue is why is there sexual pleasure in activities that involve neither genital pleasure nor contribution to reproduction?

Begin with holding hands. Why is this sexually significant since there is very little tactile pleasure in it? The answer emerges from comparison. In everyday life, persons touch each other only in very limited and specific ways; each type of touch corresponds to a specific kind of social relationship. Most of the time, persons do not touch each other when they do so accidentally, this usually calls for an apology, indicating that touching is considered a violation. A highly ritualized (formally stereotyped and conventionalized) form of touching, shaking hands, is used to mark occasions when persons enter into a social relationship; this could be meeting a person for a first time, or renewing acquaintance with persons who are highly respected or otherwise significant. Handshakes are also used to signal the beginning and ending of a specific encounter that is marked by paying special attention to the immediate social relationship with the other. Goffman (1967) used handshakes, along with other greeting and departure rituals, as key examples for introducing the concept of interaction rituals in everyday life. There are many nuances here, since handshakes may be felt to be too formal for certain intimate relations, and not formal enough for relations of differential rank. The significant point for our purposes is that the type of physical touch correlates with the closeness of the social relationship.

Hand-holding differs from a handshake precisely in that it is held for a long time; a long handshake would be regarded as especially enthusiastic, and hand-holding suggests a permanent tie. Thus hand-holding is a typical mark of a love affair; it is used by those who are already sexually intimate as a kind of prolongation of contact, and also as an early, initiating step toward more intimate touching. Holding hands can serve as a signal to others that a relationship exists, operating as what Goffman (1971) calls a “tie-sign” in public. Even more importantly, holding hands is a signal sent by the participants to each other; here again there are subtleties, involving the amount of reciprocity in actively holding and the amount and time-pattern of pressure applied. Thus hand-holding is erotic in the context of a set of signals differentiating degrees of social distance and closeness; its pleasure is more emotional than a tactile sensation, although it is precisely through the feeling of the warmth and pressure of the partner’s skin that the interactional significance is conveyed and hence the emotion aroused and shared.

This description is drawn from Anglo-American culture of the twentieth century; but there are other cultural patterns, in which hand-holding does not have erotic significance. In traditional Arab culture, male friends hold hands in public; and in many cultures, women are especially likely to hold hands or link arms when they are in public places.
The comparisons help confirm the model, for they are drawn from societies in which one of two situations exist: (1) Women are strictly segregated from men, and not allowed in public at all, or if so, under robes and veils that prohibit any contact; in this case there is a greater differentiation of types of friendships among males. Or (2) women do venture in public and are open to male gaze and potential touching, that is, the public is a male sexist erotic sphere, and thus women cling to each other both for support and to display tie-signs that they are already connected and not to be touched by anyone else. On a very detailed, micro-level of analysis, we would expect that these kinds of male-male and female-female hand-holding do not have the kinds of pressures and patterns of rhythmic reciprocities that characterize erotic ties, and that make hand-holding into a miniature of the IR pattern of sexual intercourse itself.

What is said here about hand-holding applies also to hugging, stroking, and other forms of body contact. The willingness to begin an erotic relationship may begin by touching feet under the table (an important subrosa tactic in nineteenth-century Europe with its custom of large formal dinners), all the more readily since the contact could also be construed as accidental and thus, if necessary, deniable as a signal. All these contacts are experienced as pleasurable largely to the degree that they invoke emotions, both in anticipation, and in the buildup of reciprocity that is the key to IR attunement. Erotic IRs, in all their variants, show the IR model in an extreme form in which coordinating bodies with each other is the central mechanism as well as focus of attention. Nonerotic IRs also involve some degree of bodily coordination (e.g., common postures of respect at the religious service, or of enthusiasm in group cheering; see evidence in Hatfield et al. 1994), but these also focus attention on some third object of perception, which, in Durkheim's analysis, becomes identified with the feeling of participation in the group. In erotic IRs, the focus of attention is not just tacitly upon the bodily coordination but takes it as its explicit object. The other's body becomes the sacred object of the ritual; it is invested with high value, becoming something to be admired, caressed, protected, as well as exclusively possessed. The so-called tactile pleasures of sexual contact (at least nongenital sexual contact) are misconstrued as tactile because it is through focus upon the bodily sensations of contacting the other's body that the IR dynamics of rhythmically intensifying mutual focus are carried out.

Once again we must deal with apparent exceptions, instances in which hugging, stroking, prolonged touching are done without erotic interpretation. In contemporary Western societies, there are two main exceptions. One is touching between parents and children (or in other pseudo-parental relationships). These are relationships that are subject to incest taboos (and their analogies), where erotic relations are considered especially shocking; here I would suggest the touching is precisely graded, so that it indicates an intimate relation, but not an erotic one. The length of the touch is proportional to the permanence of the tie; a pseudo-parent may pat a child for encouragement, but prolonged holding on one's lap or in one's arms is reserved for socially committed parenting. Such parenting body contacts are limited not only in that they are not allowed to move outward to erotic zones (including the displaced ones that we will discuss later), but also in micro-detail. A parent-child hug that took on the rhythms of reciprocal caressing and mutual buildup in intensity would be viewed with suspicion.

The second exception is enthusiastic hugging or other touching used as ritual celebration, commonly seen in sports victories and other kinds of group congratulations. This celebratory bodily touching is distinguished from the erotic by specific patterns: it is typically much more agitated, often rough (slapping hands, slapping on the buttocks, even bashing forearms), pounding bodies rather than rhythmically caressing them. The element of violence makes the contacts brief yet sharply noticeable, and marks them off from erotic touching. A related form of body contact is hugging. This was adopted in U.S. culture in about the same historical period as was the celebratory bodily touching (1970s), as an emphatic form of greeting, designed to pass beyond the perceived stiffness of distant forms of greeting such as hand-shaking. Again we can correlate the uses of hugging with kinds of social relationships. It seems much in vogue among politicians and gushy socializers, and on highly ceremonial occasions of solidarity such as weddings and celebratory feasts and oratory. Hugging involves more of the body, expressing alleged intensity and permanence of social ties. Whether this is sincerely felt or merely a conventional performance, it remains strongly segregated from erotic body contact by micro-details: hugging is typically done around the shoulders, avoiding pressing of stomachs and thighs, and above all avoiding contact with the genital areas. It also has a different micro-rhythm. Celebratory hugging does not involve stroking of face, hair, neck, legs, etc. A hug is held, perhaps squeezed, to indicate social closeness; it does not focus on the other's body, singling out body parts one by one for attention; and it has a distinct time-limitation, without the reciprocal buildup that makes erotic touching into a ritual with a direction.

Kissing is similar to other bodily contacts in that its variety of forms can both signal different social relationships and operate as a form of sexual buildup and pleasure. The social relationships come out especially strongly when we consider what kinds of kisses are considered
inappropriate. Kissing on the cheek (or even more distantly, a pretend-kiss in which cheeks barely brush each other) marks a relationship that is supposed to be more friendly than a handshake, but would be considered something of a slight in an erotic relationship. In the direction, a kiss on the lips may be too much intimacy for family relationships; and a tongue kiss would be considered virtually incestuous if carried out between parents and children.

Kissing and other tie-signs can also be used to mark where a relationship is strictly erotic but not a personal tie. Customers do not shake hands with prostitutes; and generally there is an explicit taboo against kissing a prostitute on the cheeks or lips, even though the couple may engage in genital kissing. This is a way in which participants in commercial sex distinguish their relationships from romantic ones; these are explicitly one-shot sexual ties, without personal involvement; face and lip kisses signal long-term ties. It is likely that intermediate relationships between these extremes use more tie-signs; for example, we would expect mistresses (relatively permanent and exclusive yet commercial sexual arrangements) to do more kissing than prostitutes.

Why are some kinds of kissing erotic? The general pattern of sexual IRs holds: erotic kisses are those in which there is more rhythmic intensity, more reciprocal interaction in which each participant builds up the excitement of the other. Erotic kissing is prolonged; mere relationship kisses are brief, cutting off elaboration and sense of rhythm. Tongue kissing is especially erotic because it involves penetration into the other's body, and thus represents itself as especially close and unusual; because it especially forcefully intrudes itself upon the other's attention; because it can lead to reciprocal interaction, calling forth the response of the other, which is a key to erotic intensity. When one tongue stimulates the other tongue into action, there is the reciprocal effect that leads to buildup of excitement. Here again the interaction component is more important than tactile pleasure per se, although it may be hard to separate and hence the latter may be taken for the former. Lips may be soft and thereby pleasurable in some degree to touch, and sensory pleasure may be enhanced by perfumes (but also reduced by bad tastes and smells); but tongues per se are probably not especially sensually pleasurable apart from their motion in response to each other.

The IR mechanism at work in these instances operates through building up excitement; this is triggered by the passing of a social barrier into a realm of action that is generally not allowed, and which is symbolically connected with signaling erotic intimacy. In other words, when lip-on-lip or tongue kissing is conventionally taken as part of an erotic sequence, it is especially exciting to initiate. (Shortly, we will confirm this by comparing societies in which not kissing but other methods of excitement are used.) But mere cultural convention cannot be all the explanation. There must be some quality to this kind of kissing that contributes to the buildup of erotic excitement. It does not seem possible that merely any kind of kissing could be arbitrarily used to designate erotics; for example, deep tongue kissing could not be used for greeting in-laws while cheek touching would be reserved for a sign of erotics. A likely mechanism is that tongue kissing (and other kinds of prolonged mouth-on-mouth sucking) interferes with breathing; and since breathing is the single most apparent rhythmic activity of the body, these kinds of kissing both increase the intensity of one's own breathing, and that of one's kissing partner. Again the key dynamic appears: getting close to, or even into, another person's body so as to provoke their bodily action in response to one's own, setting up a cycle of mutual arousal. Thus there are two components of sexual excitement: first the excitement of passing normal social barriers on closeness; then the self-reinforcing cycle of excitement as mutual rhythmic intensification occurs.

It is instructive to compare cultures in which kissing is not used or is not erotically central. In the Trobriand Island society described by Malinowski (1929/1987), the mark of erotic intimacy, which served simultaneously as technique for building erotic excitement, consisted of biting and scratching the other. Especially at the peak of excitement, lovers would bite each other's eye-lashes (280-81). Here the sensory pleasure component seems absent; instead there is a very high degree of intimate contact, interfering with and controlling a part of the body that is otherwise out of the reach of other people. As Malinowski notes, bitten-off eyelashes also serve as public reminders and markers of one's erotic activities. Thus some of the excitement may come from an additional source, the anticipation of public reaction to one's erotic status.

Other highly developed erotic cultures, such as those depicted in sexual handbooks from medieval India, prescribe both kissing as well as scratching and biting techniques. The Kama Sutra, a handbook for courtesans and their patrons, describes an elaborate variety of love-bites and scratches. These are made with teeth or fingernails on various parts of the lover's body, ranging from innocuous and publicly visible marks on arms and shoulders, to more intimate marks on breasts, inner thighs, and genitals. These operate socially in two respects. They are possession marks, indicating the personal tie between the lovers, and serving to remind them of their past love-making and thus to rekindle passion. In this respect they operate just like Durkheimian symbols, emblems of the social tie. These can be displayed to outsiders and thus
mark boundaries, but also be displayed to each other, and even to one
self, to keep the emotions of the relationship alive.

The activity of biting and scratching also operates directly to build
up excitement. In the IR model (figure 6.1), they feed into the part
of the cycle where a common emotion intensifies the focus of attention
and feeds back into more strongly shared emotion. IRs are emotion-
transformers, turning virtually any emotional ingredients into shared
rhythmic intensities and thence into collective emotional energy. Here
the emotions derive from pain; the key is that the pain is turned into
reciprocally intensifying interaction, and thus into a different bodily
and emotional pattern. By the same logic, the Kama Sutra recommends
love-teasing, as well as scripted lovers’ quarrles, including anger and
beating, as techniques for building up erotic passion. Sado-masochistic
eroticism and its variants (including bondage and domination, sexual
humiliation, etc.) can be explained in this fashion; that is, they are all
techniques by which intense emotions are created that feed into erotic
excitement, and thus into a successful erotic IR. This is an alternative
explanation to Freudian ones, which seek an etiology in traumatic
childhood experiences. IR theory holds that whatever they may have
experienced, or not experienced, in childhood, individuals can learn to
build up these sorts of erotic ritual intensities. IR is also an alternative
explanation to male dominance, although it could coincide with this
in some cases. B&D, however, is mainly a male fetish to be dominated
by females; males probably take the initiative in this because they are
sexually more active, hence seek out variants that enhance the excite-
ment ingredients.

We come now to forms of erotics that are closer to the genital organs
but that do not directly produce genital pleasure: touching breasts, per-
forming oral sex, and receiving anal sex. Breasts are ambiguously erotic:
in modern (and especially Western) cultures they are a key visual rep-
resentation of sex, but elsewhere they have often been unimportant,
neither being prominently represented in erotics nor the focus of sex-
al activity. The modern West is perhaps most extreme among the soci-
eties in world history that have a culture of sexual practices oriented to
the breasts, including touching, squeezing, kissing, and sucking them;
modern pornography has a variant found nowhere else, called "tit-
fucking," with the man's penis between the woman's breasts, virtually
a totemic conjunction. It is little use as an explanation to note the arbi-
trariness of cultural variation. Nor do theories that explain all forms of
eroticism as male dominance provide an explanation of the historical
change: medieval societies were even more male-dominated than mod-
ern ones, whereas the modern erotic emphasis on breasts developed
in social epochs where women had a comparatively high degree of
freedom to manage their own sex lives. To bring out the macro-histoi-
rical conditions, we will need full-scale historical comparisons, which
are reserved for another publication. A key part of the explanation is
that modern societies are ones in which women have been allowed out
in public, and have been motivated to display their sexual attrac-
tiveness at a distance. In the West, this evolved through a series of
clothing styles that bared women's arms and shoulders, décolletage
and display of cleavage, as well as corsets and brassieres that pushed
the breasts up into prominent visibility. Such breast-display or breast-
teasing typically occurred in periods when women's legs were hidden,
so that sexual enticement was concentrated on the breast.15

Breasts, of course, could be taken as emblems for female sexuality
because they are markers of the sex; but this would not make them
sexual objects per se, any more than male beards, which pretty reliably
indicate adult masculinity, automatically become erotic symbols. So far
the line of argument suggests that breasts are erotic where they are
the best available, publicly visible representation of femaleness. But the
same would apply to other culturally arbitrary signs, such as long hair.
Although it is true that some sexual activity centers on stroking a
woman's hair, breasts receive more attention in pornography and in
love-making. Following our previous line of micro-analysis, I would
argue that the various forms of erotic breast-contact—squeezing, strok-
ing, sucking—create two forms of excitement.

First is the excitement of crossing a culturally marked intimacy step,
baring and touching that which has been prohibited and studiously
avoided in other socially acceptable touching rituals such as hugging
and patting; this is enhanced by the anticipation elicited by clothing
styles that focus attention on partial breast-display as a show of femi-
nine beauty. This is the psychological excitement of getting hold of
something that is an emblem of sexual desirability and social prestige.
In fact, touching breasts per se may give little tactile pleasure, but the
IR mechanism operates so that the excitement is interpreted as a plea-
ture that is felt to reside in the physical object, the flesh of the breasts,
in the same way that the psychological pleasures of kissing are felt to
be in the physical sensation of the lips.

A second possibility is interactive; that is, breasts are sensitive and
hence a lover manipulating a woman's breasts gets her aroused in
some way. That arousal might not be sexual turn-on, but if a key part
of the erotic IR is to start off a train of mutual excitement, even a non-
erotic (and nonsensory) excitement can play into the chain of feedbacks
that leads to high sexual arousal. The male lover plays with the wom-
an's breasts in part to invade what was sexually private, in part to get
a response from her, which in turn builds up his own response. In many
interactions, of course, the intrusion may be coercive and unsuccessful in building up mutual excitement; in a successful erotic IR, on the contrary, there is mutual entrainment of emotions and bodily sensitivities.

The problem of oral sex, as noted, is not with the pleasure of the recipient but of explaining why a person finds it sexually exciting to lick, suck, and kiss another's genitals. Once again there are two components. The first is the familiar antinomian dynamic; there is excitement just because it has been forbidden or unavailable. Clothing display and practices of modesty keep the genitals hidden above all else, sometimes confining copulation to the dark. The very hiddenness of genitals, as the ultimately nonvisible zone, can call forth excitement at finally viewing them close-up. The very shape of clothing that reveals some parts of the body while hiding others (such as brassieres, underpants, bikinis) calls attention to the shape and location of what is hidden. Display practices that gradually reveal some of the female body are especially likely to evoke erotic excitement through a train of actions oriented toward stripping bare and contacting the clearly marked forbidden. In Goffman's (1969) terms, this may be called an open secret, as contrasted with a closed secret; in the former, the existence of a secret is well known, in the latter the very fact that something is hidden is itself hidden.

Kissing the genitals, or licking and sucking with lips and tongue, combines this penetration into the ultimate backstage, with a ritual we have already discussed. Oral sex is also a form of kissing, the most intimate on that progression. Thus another motivation for oral sex is symbolic, representing the ultimate form of intimate possession. A male lover may feel that to totally possess the other is to possess her (or sometimes his) genitals, not merely in the most common fashion of genital intercourse, but in the extension of ritual contact to this most intimate zone. The same motivation may explain why an individual may want to receive oral sex. In the case of male-passive oral sex, the sensory pleasure of being sucked is probably less than vaginal (or anal) intercourse; teeth and palate are not naturally soft and pleasure-giving. But even if the sensory pleasure of having one's penis sucked is less than that of bodily penetration, it may be both more exciting because more antinomian and more unusual, and symbolically satisfying as an emblem of the ultimate intimacy. The same logic can extend to anal licking (both active and passive), as well as various forms of urine-and-feces-oriented sex; here the pleasure is totally psychological and symbolic, shaped by antinomian excitement of transgressing very strong taboos, the extreme mark of intimate participation, and by feedback excitement from arousing the other. This is presumably true a for-
In general, this line of explanation via the features that enhance the excitement and symbolic significance of IRs is an alternative to Freudian-style explanations. There is no necessary throwback to childhood traumas or repressed infantile wishes. Instead these are mechanisms that come into play when individuals become motivated to achieve very high levels of sexual excitement, and to surpass more conventional levels of excitement and intimacy.

To bring this analysis to an end, consider anal intercourse. On the side of the male penetrator, this is not hard to explain: it could be simply a method of penis-pleasure. In homosexual relations, anal intercourse is the closest approximation to vaginal sex. Comparisons shed some light on the social process. Reciprocal anal intercourse is most common among men with a strong gay identity, and least common among persons who have casual homosexual episodes (calculated from Laumann et al. 1994, 318). That is, men who consider themselves overtly gay typically trade off penetrating each other anally. If we infer that these men are most likely to have a high degree of erotic love-bonding, we can say that they prefer to practice a form of sex in which there is the fullest degree of full-body contact, surrounding, holding, and penetrating the other's body as well as reciprocally receiving all these from the passive side. This pattern of anal sex is a form of full-scale love-making, and thus correlates with the tightest social bonds.

The homosexual case suggests that anal intercourse operates as a high degree of bodily intimacy; that is, relatively less exclusively focused on the genital component (as in oral sex), more closely related to hugging (and thus overlapping with nonssexual love / solidarity). Heterosexual anal intercourse presents another analytical problem, but also a quasi-experimental comparison: here there is full-body contact (the generalized love component, as well as full-scale bodily possession), but genital pleasure is confined to one side. The attraction of anal intercourse for heterosexuals may be largely in the antinomian excitement, that is, its status as "kinky" variation, but it may involve enough shared excitement to make the IR solidarity mechanism work (see incidence data in Laumann et al. 1994, 99, 107-9a, 152-54).

The remaining major form of sex to discuss is masturbation. On the face of it, this seems to violate the IR mechanism at the outset: there is no group assembly, hence no mutual focus nor mutual feedback building up excitement. At the same time, masturbation is highly oriented toward objects, either fantasy or pornographic representations. In the terminology of chapter 2, masturbation is an instance of a third-order, solitary use of symbols that were charged up with significance in first-order erotic IRs and in second-order social circulation of symbols. The topic is best pursued in conjunction with the question of how sex is staged and presented in imagery. This is an appropriately Goffmanian task but too large to be attempted here, and will be reserved for a separate publication.

In summary, there are three main ways we can theoretically explain the mechanisms that bring sexual pleasure from nongenital and nonreproductive variants or forms of sex.

1. **Intimacy ritual.** The degree of body contact operates as a graduated series, a ladder of symbols that correspond to the degrees of social intimacy between the persons who touch each other in these ways. Relatedly, parts of the body tantalizingly displayed in clothing styles as a public display of social status (e.g., breasts) can become symbolic targets for rituals of possession.

2. **Enhanced mutual feedback amplification.** Bodily techniques for arousing the other person feed back into raising one's own arousal, and building up the spiral of mutual arousal. The higher degrees of erotic interaction are produced by getting into the center of the other's attention, turning on their body to involuntary rhythmic intensification, and riding physiologically on their arousal. This works best by playing on physiologically sensitive areas, but can operate through almost any part of the body. The erotic is interference with each other's body by mutual intrusion on one another's subjective attention via exciting or dramatic activities start off the individuals (separately, not yet in shared buildup) to bring the initiating emotional ingredient to a sexual IR. These can include the drama of sexual negotiation, chase, and play; conflict and pain; and the antinomian excitement of breaking taboos. As applied to figure 6.1, this factor occurs earlier in the causal chains, whereas the second mechanism is the central process of feedback intensification and rhythmic coordination. In all successful IRs, initiating emotions are transformed into the outcome emotions of solidarity and EE; in successful sexual IRs, these happen primarily in the course of the rhythmic buildup itself, less in the aftermath (i.e., in sexual IRs, the right side of figure 2.1 is pushed closer to the left side). As in all IRs, the initiating emotional ingredient may not be sufficient to set off the shared IR; it is not unusual for one person (especially the male) to be turned on by an emotion that spills over into sexual arousal, while the other person lacks both that specific emotion and the mutual turn-on. This is the scenario both for frustration and for sexual coercion.

3. **Enhanced emotional ingredients to initiate buildup of sexual excitement.** Exciting or dramatic activities start off the individuals (separately, not yet in shared buildup) to bring the initiating emotional ingredient to a sexual IR. These can include the drama of sexual negotiation, chase, and play; conflict and pain; and the antinomian excitement of breaking taboos. As applied to figure 6.1, this factor occurs earlier in the causal chains, whereas the second mechanism is the central process of feedback intensification and rhythmic coordination. In all successful IRs, initiating emotions are transformed into the outcome emotions of solidarity and EE; in successful sexual IRs, these happen primarily in the course of the rhythmic buildup itself, less in the aftermath (i.e., in sexual IRs, the right side of figure 2.1 is pushed closer to the left side). As in all IRs, the initiating emotional ingredient may not be sufficient to set off the shared IR; it is not unusual for one person (especially the male) to be turned on by an emotion that spills over into sexual arousal, while the other person lacks both that specific emotion and the mutual turn-on. This is the scenario both for frustration and for sexual coercion.
I have argued that sexual drive and sexual objects are constructed situationally: in the micro-interactional rituals that generate sexual emotional energy and symbolism, and in meso- and macro-structures that channel attention through social ranking and through opportunities for interaction, closing off some paths and opening up others. Let us conclude with a theoretical concept that comes into view in considering the construction of modern gay culture, but has a wider significance for understanding all kinds of sexuality. This is the concept of "sexual scene."

The "gay" scene is well named: it is an arena of excitement because of its intense focus of sexual energy. The gay scene separates out pure sexual negotiation excitement from the family-making negotiations that are combined in the heterosexual "dating" scene and its equivalents. It is this structure which became an attractor of attention, and a recruiter of new individuals to a gay identity. To be "gay" should be analyzed not so much as a personality but as a "scene" one participates in. It is a situational identity.

A "scene" is a Goffman-like concept, a "situation" of self-presentation elaborated into a series of repeated and overlapping gatherings. It has typical gathering places, public arenas for this "crowd" (which may be unknown or private as far as nonmembers are concerned), around which may be connected various private residential venues (e.g., in the case of the gay scene, bars and resorts on one hand, and party places and love nests on the other). A scene is like an IR chain, except that up to now I have treated the IR chain as an individual life course; a scene is a mesh of IR chains, connected both laterally and in the flow of time. One could describe a "scene" as a network with a high density of interaction and interconnection, but widely participatory insofar as it does not depend upon a constant center, and containing a great deal of indirect ties that make it easy to meet new partners. This is the structural formula for a community with a high degree of effervescence, continued over long periods of time.

Historically there have been a variety of sexual scenes, these arenas of overlapping encounters circulating a generalized emotional intensity and a shifting focus on the prestige center of sexual interaction. The prominence of sexual display and prestige have varied historically, and therefore, so have the sheer amount of sexual motivation generated. Schematically, we may distinguish three main types of societies:

1. Tribal societies in which sexual relations were generally regulated by corporate groups as moves in marriage alliance politics.

2. Patrimonial households of dominant aristocrats and their servants and retainers. These arrangements concentrated control of sexuality in heads of households, who sometimes used it for marriage alliances (more flexibly than in the rule-bound structures of tribal kinship structures), sometimes to collect sex-workers for their pleasure and prestige.

3. Modern societies in which individuals negotiate their own marriages as well as their sex lives upon a largely unregulated market of personal encounters.

In general, the first two types (1 and 2) did not have much in the way of sexual scenes that broadcast the excitement and prestige of sexual action (although particular historical instances could be singled out).

Sexual scenes that enhanced sexual motivation have existed both within these historical types and in periods of transition, and have moved increasingly into the center of public attention in recent centuries. Within (2) aristocratic societies, we could distinguish (2.1) places where courtly politics prevailed, usually at the residence of a reigning monarch, where some men and women negotiated their own sexual affairs in a hot-bed of intrigue over court influence. Within (3) individual marriage markets, we could distinguish three phases: (3.1) The early transitional phase when young people sought out romantic attachments in settings (like the London season or the Bath resort) under the influence of their parents concerned with family prestige and inheritance (this might be called the Jane Austen phase, since it makes up the topics of her novels). (3.2) A "Victorian" phase (which in fact began already in the eighteenth century) in which, since men still controlled most of the wealth, women restricted their own sexuality as an attraction to marriage. This is the period of sharply dual sexual standards and sexual undergrounds, a world of sexual backstages providing the materials on which Freud made his reputation. (3.3) An egalitarian phase (developing in the twentieth century but not yet fully realized) in which men and women have independent career resources; hence comes a tendency for sexual negotiations to be much less restricted to negotiating marriage, and for the dual sexual cultures to break down, as eroticism comes more directly into public view. This egalitarian or "sexually liberated" phase has also been characterized by lengthening periods of formal education for both sexes, thus creating places where young people could engage in intensive rating and negotiating of their attractiveness on a sexual marketplace.

The culture of sexual display is most intense in those situations where individuals of both sexes are concentrated in a repeated and overlapping web of interactions. Earlier, in discussing gay culture, I appropriated the term "scene" for the structural pattern underlying its
peculiar effervescence and high level of sexual arousal. We may speak of sexual "scenes" generally, wherever there are conditions for gathering a collection of people in this way: these are found in situations of courtly sexual politics, Jane Austen's marriage market at Bath, twentieth-century American high schools, and in the sociability surrounding certain occupations concentrated in particular places such as the theater world or the movie world. A scene is a floating, meso-level interaction ritual (or concatenated webs of IR chains) that keeps up a high level of emotional energy and mutual focus of attention. Here sexual display is broadcast, seen, commented upon, and reverberated. Individuals have known reputations based on how their display is taken by others. The structure of sexual scenes enhances sexual motivation within them.

Prestige-Seeking and Public Eroticization

Sexual scenes focus attention upon a hierarchy of erotic status. It is here that arises the ideal of the great lover, the belle of the ball (late-nineteenth century), the popular girl, the "big ass-man" (college slang from the 1950s), the "party animal" (late twentieth century). The source of their motivation is in the social structure. In modern times, the focus of attention has been placed on erotic ideals through scenes of sexual negotiation and the socializing that went along with it; that is to say, through the concentration of collective effervescence and stratification of participation in it. Since virtually everyone now goes through a life period when they are in the goldfish bowl of the sexual scene (in school, and sometimes elsewhere) as well as being surrounded by its images in the mass media, everyone is exposed to the motivating effect of this erotic ranking.

That does not mean, however, that most persons have extremely active sex lives. Why should the highly active erotic elite be so few? In part, for mundane practical reasons: it takes time and energy to have a lot of sexual affairs; since that is time out from work, such erotic elites must have considerable leisure or financial resources. In addition to time spent in negotiating, there must be considerable accumulated investment in erotic skills and techniques, and in erotic self-presentation. Having multiple sexual partners is correlated with relatively low frequency of intercourse; that is because there are relatively long periods in which they have little sex while establishing a new relationship. In contrast, persons with steady sexual partners tend to have higher frequency of sex, since they spend less time in search and negotiation (Laumann et al. 1994, 88-89, 177, 179).

In practical reality, an individual who wants to be part of the erotic elite has to make a choice between number of partners and frequency of sex. Highest frequency occurs in monogamous relationships, but these are rather common and not erotically prestigious; so the highly visible forms of erotic prestige come from pursuing multiple partners, even at the cost of lower frequency. There may be even further compromises to be made: high prestige comes from visibly beautiful partners, but to acquire multiple partners is easiest by exploiting the non-elite of the opposite sex, in the relatively less beautiful range. The idealized image of the person who has a steady diet of sex with a variety of beautiful partners is difficult indeed to realize.

Although the higher reaches of erotic stratification are remote and in a sense rather artificial, embodied images so to speak, and although the proportion of the population whose sex lives are highly active is small, this prestige hierarchy nevertheless has an effect on persons ranked throughout. Particularly among young persons living in public sexual negotiation scenes, there is a high level of attention paid to erotic stratification criteria, and acute awareness of who occupies what rank in the community's ratings. Erotic ranking moreover tends to spill over into all social relationships. Males and females tend to pair off at similar levels of erotic attractiveness, or to confine their round of affairs within the same rank level (Hatfield and Sprecher 1986). I suggest that same-sex friendships also tend to occur within similar erotic attractiveness rankings (I know of no formal study of this, but it fits personal observation). This attractiveness-level-segregation tends to occur because the social activities are organized by flirtation and sexual carousing. The erotic rank hierarchy is not merely a ranking of attractiveness but of sociable activity; those highly ranked attend more parties, and are at the center of the gatherings with the most prestige, the liveliest sexual effervescence.

The popular crowd is the sexual elite. Being in the center of attention gives greater solidarity, closer identification with the symbols of the group, and greater self-confidence. Conversely, those on the outskirts of the group, or who are excluded from it, manifest just the opposite qualities. Being part of the sociable / erotic elite produces an attitude of arrogance; the elite know who they are, and the enclosed, high-information structure of the scene makes visible the ranking of those lower down as well. The elite, at its most benevolent, is oblivious to those lower ranking; they may also engage in active jeering and scapegoating, or make the erotically inept or unattractive the butt of in-group jokes. The informal slang of all such groups marks out the different ranks: the lower ranking are known as "nerds," "wonks, plain Janes," "dogs," etc.
This is of course a somewhat simplified picture. In some school-age communities, young people cannot confine their social ties entirely to those of the same erotic rank. In very small communities (and similarly in neighborhood play groups) there may be not enough young people so that they can segregate themselves simultaneously by erotic rank and by social class, race / ethnicity, religion and other categories that they take seriously. In general, the more traditional the community in its concerns over these criteria of social ranking, the more these will override erotic attractiveness; thus there are indications in novels about social class in the early twentieth century that upper-middle-class boys at country club dances went out of their way to give an occasional dance to the unbeautiful daughters of good families, out of feelings or pressures of class obligation (e.g., O'Hara 1934). In contemporary youth communities, sports teams and other activities bring together individuals on criteria other than attractiveness, and tend to mix erotic rankings. But carousing and other sociable entertainment with a sexual theme bring the erotic ranking to the fore, and thus its own form of segregation tends to prevail over the others. I would suggest that the historical trend in American youth scenes has been toward reducing class and ethnic / racial lines and thus has made erotic ranking increasingly the main principle of prestige and of informal segregation (see, for example, Moffatt 1989). For example, black persons who are in the erotic elite are likely to pass into a trans-racial community of sociability stars, whereas less attractive individuals in all ethnic groups tend to stay segregated. This matching by erotic attractiveness is far from a historical universal, but probably occurs mainly in very modern societies. In tribal societies, kinship alliance obligations tended to fix sexual relations irrespective of personal qualities; in patrimonial households, social rank dominated sexual opportunities, so there was likely a good deal of sexual interaction crossing lines of erotic inequality, unattractive powerful men (especially older ones who dominated the harems) with attractive younger women.

Through these processes, I would suggest, the twentieth century became the most widely eroticized century to date, growing increasingly eroticized throughout the century. Our image of some prior historical periods as even more widely eroticized—notably classical Athens or decadent Rome—are skewed by concentrating on a small proportion of upper-class males. It appears that modern society is much more widely eroticized than aristocratic societies organized in patrimonial households; even though the latter may have had harems—which give us our image of uninhibited sexuality—the imbalance of females to males in harems meant that a large proportion of the men in such societies were deprived of sexual partners. Even if we counted by frequency of sexual acts, the total number must have been diminished by the presence of polygyny. As in the distribution of wealth, a high concentration of sexual property (or a high degree of stratification) depresses overall levels of enjoyment.

The shift in the modern mass media toward increasingly blatant sexual representation, including the outburst of pornography from the 1970s onward, explicitness about sexual matters formerly taboo in public discussion, and the politicization of erotic matters by the feminist, lesbian, and gay liberation movements, all rode upon the tide flowing from the display of erotic ranking in youth scenes. The eroticization of youth culture has become so widely influential because as public education has grown, the youth sex / sociability scene has expanded to include virtually the entire population and for longer periods of their lives. It also reflects the increasing egalitarianism of youth culture, that has quite self-consciously played down class and ethnic differences (such as through the homogenization of dress styles and the permeation of the casual leisurely style into almost all situations), leaving their focus on the main activity, the display of erotic attractiveness ranking. The result of this focus on idealized sexual symbolism, and on noting everyone’s rank within it, has been the increasing amounts of sexual activity of all kinds. We see this in the spread of the onset of sexual activity to increasingly younger ages; the overall incidence of intercourse; the spread of various ancillary sexual practices (Laumann et al. 1994). It is no doubt implicated in long-term increases in rape. Given the correlation between pornography and masturbation, one would expect incidence of masturbation to have risen as well.

Finally, I would suggest that the upsurge of the gay and lesbian movements has also been affected by the increasingly focused eroticization of youth culture. For the heterosexual elite in the youth scene did not entirely dominate a ranking of erotic non-elites emulating them, deferring to them, or retiring ashamedly before them. It also motivated social movements of rebellion against the simple hierarchy of the erotic party culture. The hippie movement of the 1960s may be seen as one such movement; for a few years at least, it fostered an alternative center of collective effervescence, partly by alliance with political protest movements, partly by dramatizing its own techniques of carousing and its own explicitly flaunted sexual participation. In other words, for a time the movement upheld an alternative scene, a network of gatherings that had erotic as well as other forms of locatable prestige. No doubt there was a fair amount of idealization of what went on in such scenes, and many of them may have been mythical imagery. Eventually, the techniques that gave the hippie movement its charisma
and its emblems of identity (drugs, rock music festivals, clothing styles that repudiated the sexual self-presentation of the prevailing youth culture) were taken over by the mainstream youth culture, and the old style of erotic / sociable hierarchy reasserted itself.

Nevertheless, it was out of these social movement scenes (in the structural sense that I have emphasized above), that several more sexual scenes became mobilized: the gay and lesbian scenes. These recruited among individuals who were most sharply stigmatized by the heterosexual prestige hierarchy, the butt of its jokes, and sometimes of ritual violence protecting the boundaries of heterosexual identity. Homosexuals were thus necessarily "in the closet" as long as they lived around the scenes that monopolized the attention of local communities, such as high schools that assembled teen cohorts, as well as colleges and country clubs for adults, which carried on highly focused sexualized festivities such as seasonal dances and a traditional round of parties, date nights, football weekends, and the like. Homosexuals could find a space in which to construct their own scenes only where they had both relative privacy and sufficient numbers to constitute a critical mass; such scenes existed around artistic communities in a few big cities. The counterculture movements of the 1960s and 70s offered new possibilities because they provided an alternative scene, a network of effervescent gathering places on a wider scale. The national gathering places of the civil rights / anti-war / hippie counterculture movement also provided room for a self-consciously energized gay movement, as well as for the lesbian movement, whose new scenes were found at first within the consciousness-raising groups of the feminist movement. These political movements provided the structural conditions under which homosexual erotic energy was built up. I am suggesting that these movements did not merely take preexisting closet homosexuality and bring it into the open, but built up this specific kind of erotic energy so that the amount of homosexual activity increased during this period.

This should remain true no matter what genetic propensity to homosexuality there may be. It is possible, in a multi-causal world, that some such genetic influences might exist; but it seems clear that they would be rather weak influences on behavior, given the strong situational variations in the conditions and kinds of homosexual action throughout history; widespread, institutionalized homosexuality in ancient Greece, for example (Dover 1978), and in tribal New Guinea (Herdt 1994), had very different forms of recruitment, social relationships, and sexual practices than the homosexuality that began to acquire a social identity in Western countries since the 1880s. Current attention on homosexual genes is a political ideology, explicitly adopted during the 1980s as a legal tactic to legitimate homosexuality as a legally protected minority.

This follows the general logic of my argument: specific kinds of sexual motivations are constructed by opportunities to take part in sexual IRs; and these in turn are shaped by (and reciprocally shape) the formulation and propagation of sexual symbolism idealizing and giving erotic prestige. It is the situational stratification produced by a strong focus of attention on such scenes that produced the widespread eroticization of the twentieth century. And not only in this century are there patterns that we can explain through the variability of IRs linked into sexual scenes. These scenes have taken different forms: the courtier cultures epitomized by seventeenth-century Versailles; the ballroom dancing of nineteenth-century respectable classes; and the dating and partying scene that came about with the individually negotiated marriage market and went on to construct an emergent focus of attention out of its own temporary hierarchies of sexual popularity, and that made a splash in the early twentieth century as "the Jazz age." There is no theoretical reason to think that we are at the end of such histories. IR theory implies that there are no fixed erotic essences; whatever biological substrate was once evolutionarily selected provides no more than ingredients upon which erotic energies, identities, and symbols are emergently constructed. The future may contain a great deal of erotic construction in directions yet unthought of.

The conditions that shape IR chains and the sexual scenes that link them are a key to understanding how erotic practices are historically shaped and who is attracted along what erotic path. Sexual passion is not primordial but a form of emotional energy, specialized toward particular symbolic objects because of the way in which they have become charged up with attention in particular types of interaction rituals. IR theory and erotic interaction mutually illuminate one another. Sexual pathways are IR chains just like any other.