

# Human gender roles influence research on animals

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In a recent study published in *Animal Behavior*, biology researchers Kristina Karlsson Green and Josefin Madjidian at Lund University in Sweden have shown that animals' and plants' traits and behavior in sexual conflicts are colored by a human viewpoint. They want to raise awareness of the issue and provoke discussion among their colleagues in order to promote objectivity and broaden the research field.

Lund researchers Kristina Karlsson Green and Josefin Madjidian have studied and measured how male and female traits and behaviour in animals' and plants' sexual conflicts are described in academic literature and also what parameters are incorporated for each sex in mathematical models of sexual conflict.

"We have found evidence of choices and interpretations that may build on researchers' own, possibly subconscious, [perception](#) of male and female. We have now identified and quantified terms used to describe male and female in sexual conflict research and seen that different terms are used depending on the sex being described. It is not just something we think and suppose", says Kristina Karlsson Green from the Department of Biology at Lund University.

Sexual conflicts among animals and plants mean that the male and the female disagree in various ways on mating and the raising of young.

Research on these sexual conflicts is an area that is growing rapidly. Therefore, it is especially important to make other researchers aware of

and alert to the fact that their own frames of reference pose a risk, say Kristina Karlsson Green and Josefin Madjidian.

Behaviour that originates from a [sexual conflict](#) always has a negative effect on the other partner and such behaviour should therefore be described in the same manner and using the same terms. It is thus possible to avoid making a subconscious distinction between the sexes. The two researchers claim that this is not the case today.

"In the literature, the male is described more in terms of activities to promote his own interests, while the female is described in more passive terms, such as that her behaviour is merely a reaction to that of the male. This is despite the fact that the behaviour of both sexes has a negative impact on the other partner while promoting the partner's own interests", says Josefin Madjidian.

Kristina Karlsson Green says that researchers are not always aware of their own perceptions of gender, but that it is important to be alert to these.

"Otherwise the [researchers](#) could interpret the results incorrectly, or miss parts of the conflict, such as the possibility of negative effects on the male of the female's behaviour", says Kristina Karlsson Green.

Provided by Lund University

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