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Advancing Women's Mental Health Research Across Disciplines

WOMHER International Graduate Conference 2024

Theme 3: *Feminist critique and norms in contemporary research*

The Female Turn – how evolutionary science shifted perceptions about females

This talk explores how and why evolutionary biology has shifted perceptions about females during the last three decades. Traditionally in sexual selection, the evolutionary theory about sex differences, females were assumed to be coy and passive in sexual encounters and only mate with one male, but perceptions has come to include active sexual strategies and molecular analyses of parentage have revealed frequent female multiple mating in a wide range of species. This development provides an account of progress in science, but these shifts in perceptions didn't happen momentarily. Traditional

perceptions were criticized and defended, new suggestions met with skepticism, hence this is a history of controversies and negotiations of scientific knowledge. Who were the pioneers? Where did they get their ideas from? What resistance did they meet and how did their ideas and findings get recognized? Drawing on feminist science studies and sociology of scientific knowledge, I chart the development of perceptions about females in the international sexual selection community. The analyses are based on interviews with researchers working on different animal groups as well as the publication record in the field. A key argument is that a gender perspective is important to understand the history of shifting perceptions about females, and also to shed light on what continues to be neglected in sexual selection research.



Malin Ah-King, *Stockholm University, Sweden*. Evolutionary biologist and gender researcher, specializes in feminist science studies and interdisciplinary gender/biology research.

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The social determinants of global women's mental health

A large literature supports the efficacy of psychological interventions delivered ('task-shared') by non-specialist providers for common mental disorders (CMDs: depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder). However, studies in real-world settings increasingly identify lack of attention to social determinants of mental health (SDMH) as derailing therapeutic benefits and impeding provider buy-in. Mapping closely onto the Sustainable Development Goals, some of the most pervasive SDMH: gender inequity (including gender-based violence; GBV), financial hardship and displacement disproportionately impact women and often co-occur.

A decolonial shift in global health research is urgently needed, away from asymmetrical power imbalances

towards recognising shared problems between low, middle and high-income countries. Migration is blurring distinctions between 'local' and 'global', worldwide. Key drivers of migration such as conflict and climate change are risk factors for CMDs and SDMH, creating a growing need for effective, scalable interventions.

In this presentation, Dr Keynejad will discuss the background, methods, and findings of her PhD and post-doctoral research developing and evaluating a brief psychological intervention for pregnant women experiencing GBV in rural Ethiopia. She will discuss the relevance of global mental health research to women's mental healthcare in diverse settings, the importance of engaging with complexity and confronting power dynamics.



Roxanne Keynejad, *King's College London, UK.*
Psychiatrist and clinical lecturer in the Centre for Global Mental Health and Section of Women's Mental Health. Expertise on social determinants of mental health, and mental health of women experiencing gender-based violence.