

# Do Female Bonobos Fake Orgasm?

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## 1 Introduction

Theory of mind (ToM) is the ability to attribute mental states—beliefs, intents, desires, pretending, knowledge, etc.—to oneself and others, and to understand that others have beliefs, desires, and intentions that are different from one's own[1]. There is controversy over the question whether animals other than humans have a ToM. The question is important when assessing the status of humans within the animal kingdom. The social tool of faked orgasm seems to be unique to human beings and thus it is a strong test for the demarcation of human versus animal. Faked orgasm thus provides a novel test of ToM in non-humans. Bonobos are enthusiastic performers of both sexual and deceptive acts and therefore are good subjects for the proposed study.

## 2 Premises and Proposition

Our argument is constructed like an old-fashioned polysyllogism, complete with climax.

### 2.1 Human Females Fake Orgasm

It is a widely known fact that human females can fake orgasm. Indeed, faking orgasm is more common, also among human males, than previously thought[2]. The motives and functions of faking orgasm vary considerably. A person may fake orgasm in order to protect or boost the sensitive egos of their partners; to mask their own insecurity and fear of intimacy; to terminate overlong sexual intercourse; or to enhance their own sexual experience. Some of us may even have witnessed this phenomenon as a participating observer.

### 2.2 Female Bonobos Experience Orgasm

Primates experience something similar to orgasm[3]. For female bonobos the matter is straightforward—they do experience orgasm[4].

### 2.3 Bonobos Deceive

Many animals deceive animals of their own (intraspecific deception, e.g., foraging deception) and other species (inter-

specific deception, e.g., mimicry)[5]. Primates, and prominently bonobos, do deceive each other[6]. Faking (or pretending) is a special form of deception, a form of Machiavellian intelligence.

### 2.4 Female Bonobos Fake Orgasm

Putting the above (2.1, 2.2 and 2.3) together, we pose the proposition (or hypothesis) that female bonobos can fake orgasm. And, appealing to probability, if they can they surely will.

## 3 Method and Apparatus

The hypothesis formulated in 2.4 can be tested by measuring the behavioural signs ('climax face', vocalizations) and the physiological correlates (increased blood pressure, heart rate, breathing rate, skin conductance; rhythmic pelvic and vaginal contractions) characteristic of true female bonobo orgasms and contrast them with potentially faked orgasms. Evidence will consist of discrepancies between these behavioural signs and the physiological correlates. The hypothesis can be tested using apparatus similar to that for studying human orgasm. Calibration can be done using masturbating female bonobos. Apart from enjoying frequent hetero- and homosexual intercourse, bonobos are also keen masturbators. As there is no partner, there is no motivation to fake while masturbating, and a behavioural and physiological profile of true orgasms can be obtained.

## 4 Discussion and Predictions

Sexual behaviour of humans and other animals is fraught with deception and manipulation. Female Indian langurs bob and weave in a typical estrous manner (pseudoeurous solicitation), faking their receptivity, copulating their way into the favour of an infanticidal male[7]. There is also a surprising piscine precedent of non-human faked orgasm: female brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) can perform a 'false orgasm'[8]. Given the validity of 2.1 – 2.3, the interest in ToM, and the relative ease in conducting the study, 2.4 concerning the presence of faked orgasms in bonobos will probably be confirmed within the next 5 years. Lacking eligible

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bonobos, we can only submit the hypothesis, but not conduct the necessary tests. Nevertheless, when other scientists succeed in proving faked orgasm in female bonobos, this result will have a major impact on our understanding of primate consciousness and ToM (and we will be happy to share the honours when they are awarded). The proposed research will raise many new questions, one of which challenges males everywhere: Can male bonobos distinguish between real and faked orgasms of their female partners, and if they cannot, do they have a partial ToM deficit?

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