

MEDIA REVIEW**WILEY**

The promise of contemporary primatology

Erin P. Riley

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The Promise of Contemporary Primatology provides an introspective examination of the current field of primatology; a field centered on the study of nonhuman primates, many of which are increasingly threatened by dramatic, rapid anthropogenic changes to natural environments. Author Erin Riley convincingly argues for an ethnoprimate approach to be more widely applied in primatology and presents its strengths throughout the volume. In my opinion, this book provides important considerations for students entering primatology and working primatologists that do not currently include a human element in their research. With current climate changes, there are probably no remaining nonhuman primate populations that are not influenced by humans at some level. Riley provides a way forward for those that want to utilize an ethnoprimate approach to work toward positive conservation outcomes.

Riley focuses the first part of the book on a history of North American primatology and situates it within anthropology. She highlights Franz Boas and his conceptualization of the four fields of anthropology and provides a timeline for the multidisciplinary development of primatology by scholars in psychology, zoology, ethology, and anthropology. Riley focuses on early lab work by Robert Yerkes, field work by Clarence Ray Carpenter, writings by Earnest Hooton (who was instrumental in making a place for primatology in anthropology), and promotion by Sherwood Washburn (whose trainees made up many of the early American primatologists). She then moves to the conception of methodologically rigorous primate behavioral ecology and socioecology under the influence of sociobiology and evolutionary biology in the 1970s and 1980s. This history section is light and could have been expanded to include details on the importance of feminist scholars in changing the early focus of primate field studies from male-biased to more holistic.

A valuable aspect of this book is the context Riley provides around the often-tense relationship between sociocultural and biological anthropology through an overview of how the American Anthropological Association (AAA) and the four-field journal *American Anthropologist* represented biological anthropology over the years. She argues that blurring the boundaries between sociocultural and biological anthropology is key to an integrated approach to many anthropological questions. Riley highlights how the fields of anthropology complement one another and shows that sociocultural anthropology and primatology, in particular, need to be integrated to fully understand the shared history and ecologies of humans and nonhuman primates.

Riley demonstrates how certain practices in sociocultural anthropology, like reflexivity and thick description, could improve primatological research. The goal of ethnoprimateology is to understand how human–nonhuman primate communities coexist and negotiate space in ecological relationships that can vary from predation and competition to mutualism and commensalism. This range of contexts requires a mixed set of methods and theoretical frameworks that ethnoprimateology provides. Riley underscores that in shared habitats, humans create new niches for nonhuman primates and the animals select and modify these niches, which leads to an interplay of co-niche construction between the species. She uses her own research experience to show how one can more fully adopt community ecology and study the human–nonhuman primate interface.

Riley emphasizes that the ecological conditions experienced by many of the globe's nonhuman primates have changed greatly in a short amount of time as anthropogenic pressures on them have grown. Alterations to primate habitats are happening faster than the evolutionary time scales we typically consider. However, Riley argues that if human activities are not viewed as interference in the “natural” lives of nonhuman primates but rather as part of their ecology there is an opportunity for primatologists to study primate flexibility and adaptation to changing conditions. She demonstrates that sympatry between anatomically modern humans and our Hominin ancestors with many nonhuman primate species, both extinct and extant, is extensive, providing the time depth needed for some co-evolutionary processes. Even where associations between humans and nonhuman primates are fairly recent, anthropogenically modified habitat can be viewed as a natural experiment allowing us to examine whether change in variables important to socioecological models lead to predictable responses as primates adapt. The time span that humans have been a selective agent on nonhuman primate behavior, social structure, and social organization varies along a continuum, offering opportunities for comparison.

I think this is the most important message in Riley's book—the value of studying primates in disturbed habitats. The field of primatology often de-values studies that are not conducted in “pristine” natural habitats. However, Riley argues that it is, in particular, the level of disturbance that is informative. If primatologists use the frameworks of behavioral plasticity and niche construction to study nonhuman primates in modified environments, then behavioral characteristics like variability in social learning and innovation between individuals and species can be compared.

In essence, Riley is hypothesizing that conservation primatologists will be more successful if they apply an ethnoprimate lens—a powerful message. Since conservation outcomes are unlikely to be successful without participation and buy-in from local human populations, people must be part of the consultation, planning, and implementation stages for any conservation project. Riley argues that the conservation value of habitat outside of protected areas can be safeguarded with an approach that works to understand both human and animal needs in a shared landscape. Involving and empowering people in the study of local fauna can increase their appreciation and change attitudes toward species viewed as pests. Riley points out that while conservation biologists and social scientists may have issues collaborating due, in part, to methodological, and epistemological differences; primatologists trained as biological anthropologists and working within anthropology departments are better situated to collaborate with sociocultural anthropologists and to learn to apply new methods in their own to work at the human-animal interface. Thus, ethnoprimate is the perfect approach to understanding some key issues in primate conservation including crop foraging, human–nonhuman primate disease transfer, and human hunting patterns in association with dietary preferences and taboos.

This book will be an excellent resource for classes focused on ethnoprimate, those interested in why primatology fits within anthropology, and the benefits that arise from this positioning. Overall, I think this book is especially important for conservation primatologists, coming at a time when many primatologists are recording numerous, increasing threats to their study subjects. Riley shows that, unlike strictly biological approaches, ethnoprimate leverages the strengths of the four-field approach in anthropology as a tool to help meet conservation goals.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Julie Teichroeb: Writing-original draft; writing-review & editing.

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