

Erin P. Riley, *The Promise of Contemporary Primatology* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 186 pp., US\$ 48.95, ISBN 978 1 62958 0 715 (paperback).

Erin P. Riley is a Professor and the Assistant Dean of Graduate Studies at San Diego State University. Her interests and training lie at the intersection of four areas: primatology, biological anthropology, environmental anthropology, and conservation. As a leader in the emerging field of ethnoprimateology, she is interested in the behavioural flexibility demonstrated by primates within the context of anthropogenic environments (e.g., at the edge of protected areas, forest-farm edges, or even urban centres where the environment has been shaped or altered by human activity). Riley's book, *The Promise of Contemporary Primatology* (Routledge, 2020), delves deeper into the author's ideas, perspectives, and themes first explored in an article she published in the *American Anthropologist* [Riley, 2013].

In *The Promise of Contemporary Primatology*, Riley offers a compelling twofold vision of contemporary primatology. First, she proposes studying the remaining primate populations with a modern lens. Traditional primatology is faced with the *unnatural problem* which seeks to observe primates' *natural* or *wild* behaviours (e.g., observe them as outside of anthropogenic influence). Riley argues that these *natural* or *wild* primate behaviours simply do not exist as humans and nature are inextricably connected. Further, she argues that since humans and primates have a long history of sympatric use of the same environment, the scope of interest in bioanthropology, behavioural ecology and primatology should be expanded to include inquiry into how animals respond to these anthropogenic changes; it is here that she believes behavioural flexibilities will become evident. By reframing this *unnatural* problem as an opportunity, contemporary primate research will be able to investigate species adaptability, socioeconomic variables, and new directions in conservation, she argues.

The second side to Riley's vision is for contemporary primatology to move beyond purely quantifiable scientific observations. Instead, she argues in favour of a dynamic, integrative approach to research: the *biosocial approach*. To accomplish this, Riley urges reflection on primatology's roots within traditional anthropology, calling for alliances with sociocultural anthropologists to draw on their expertise in descriptive qualitative methods (e.g., ethnographic research). Simultaneously, the field must orient itself outward, drawing on accepted and established methods and tools used in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities (e.g., ecology, conservation biology, and extended evolutionary approaches). Riley argues that this *biosocial approach* will produce strong, truly integrative research within contemporary primatology. In fact, her vision for contemporary primatology seems to mimic the behavioural flexibility she seeks to study in her subjects, it is one with the ability to shift to match current contexts.

The final chapter is a call to action for contemporary primatologists. First, she calls on established primatologists, urging them to encourage their students to engage in interdisciplinary training; and, secondly, she calls on in-training primatologists by urging them to seek out coursework and training outside of traditional primatology (e.g., offering sociocultural anthropology courses as starting points in both calls). Equally important, Riley does not narrow the language or material presented in her book to primatologists alone, but rather she writes a fun, accessible book, which has the potential to positively contribute to research. She hopes to spark interdisciplinary collaboration among contemporary primatologists both across the subfields of American anthropology (e.g., with a biosocial approach) and across disciplines (e.g., extended evolutionary approach).

The biggest challenge facing contemporary primatologists, which the author acknowledges,

is that this new hybrid direction will likely have to create its own niche spaces outside of the traditional scholarly journals to disseminate the mixed-methods research which will often take on forms other than standard scientific reports. Notably, this vast endeavour would require substantial effort to shift bureaucratic, cultural, financial, and logistical barriers to achieve the vision. If we are to accept Riley's version of contemporary primatology, we will have to begin to deconstruct current language to build a vocabulary that acknowledges the intrinsic connection between human and nature. Despite these challenges, *The Promise of Contemporary Primatology* is an enjoyable read, particularly Riley's ability to cleverly nest ideas and meanings throughout it. As a whole, this book would be a useful read for introductory anthropology or primatology courses, while some of the chapters, such as chapter 7 (*Primate conservation in the 21st century and beyond*) would be useful for lessons in conservation or ecology. In the final chapter, the title rings in as a chorus, marking a new dynamic and collaborative wave of primatologists. Yet, the duality of the title is that it is also an echo, calling back to Washburn's original paper *The Promise of Primatology* [1973], which formalized a founding

vision for American primatology. It is this intermingling of reflecting on the past, awareness of the current context, and outward vision to the future that makes the content of Erin P. Riley's book so enticing.

References

- Riley EP (2013). Contemporary primatology in anthropology: beyond the epistemological abyss. *American Anthropologist* 115: 411–422.
- Washburn SL (1973). The promise of primatology. *American Journal of Physical Anthropology* 38: 177–182.

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