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HOW TO STUDY PERSONALITY DIFFERENCES IN PRIMATES

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Individual differences that are commonly construed as personality differences are increasingly studied in prosimians, old and new world monkeys, and apes. Primatologists thereby focus on the psychobiological mechanisms, ontogenetic processes, adaptive advantages, and phylogenetic origins of individual differences within and between species. Yet meta-theoretical and methodological foundations of their primary empirical investigation are still not well established. What do we understand by personality differences at all? What methods are suitable to study them empirically in nonhuman primates? And how can personality differences be analyzed statistically? This symposium provides an overview about basic meta-theoretical concepts of personality, and different methodological approaches and methods of measurement. Participants present a meta-analysis of methods of personality measurement used in primate studies. Ethological quantifications of personality differences are demonstrated in zoo populations of chimpanzees. The utility of observer ratings and their power to explain patterns of friendship are shown in captive rhesus macaques. A longitudinal study in zoo populations of gorillas demonstrates the utility of observer ratings of personality differences for captive management. Particularly illuminating, yet also methodologically challenging are personality studies on wild populations. A study in Japanese macaques demonstrates some of these challenges and discusses interesting opportunities to validate personality differences with life-history traits. We close with a presentation of factor analytic methods to statistically identify basic dimensions of individual differences in empirical data.

Keywords: personality, individual differences, measurement, methods of analysis