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NEW APPROACHES IN THE STUDY OF GREAT APE PSYCHOLOGY AND WELL-BEING: THEORY, METHODS, AND APPLICATION

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Despite similarities between humans and nonhuman primates, it is uncommon to study psychopathology in primates other than humans using the terms and tools of psychiatry. Instead, pathological behaviors in nonhuman primates are often described in isolation without being distilled into recognizable syndromes. For example, the assessment of psychopathologies among great apes typically relies on description and measurement of broad categories of abnormal behaviors. While traditional approaches can inform us about specific behaviors, they provide little insight into the etiology, sequelae and epidemiology of various psychopathologies. Thus, there is little potential for coherence with clinical approaches or integration with our modern scientific understanding of psychological conditions. The lack of data about normative rates and expression also presents challenges for understanding the evolution of these conditions. Addressing these theoretical and methodological limitations is vital for the care of chimpanzees. Developments in theory and method have raised new questions and challenges for the scientific, advocacy, and sanctuary communities regarding the nature and epidemiology of psychological conditions among chimpanzees and other great apes. Some studies have reported psychological conditions, such as post-traumatic stress disorder among chimpanzees. A thorough understanding of the prevalence and expression of psychological conditions among great apes will inform diverse efforts for implementing protections and providing care for them in a range of settings. The proposed session aims to include researchers who have advanced theory, methods, and application with respect to great ape psychology and well-being. Speakers will provide brief presentations, followed by discussion of applications, harmonization, and ongoing challenges.

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