

March 16, 2023

Re: Long-term Primate Research Sites & their Governance

Dear Board of Directors of the American Society of Primatologists (ASP), International Primatological Society (IPS), and American Association of Biological Anthropologists (AABA),

I hold a doctorate in Evolutionary Anthropology (Primate) awarded from the University of New Mexico in 2021. I am currently a Postdoctoral Associate at Yale University, in a program and with a mentor that have no relationship to the issues I am raising in this letter.

Recently, I began publicly discussing and reporting the extraordinarily harmful journey that I have been on in an effort to see my dissertation through completion and my doctoral research to publication. I worked at three long-term chimpanzee research sites during the course of my education, including Kanyawara, Ngogo, and Gombe. My doctoral research was built around the combination of my newly collected data, including immunogenetics, pathogens, and hormones, with long-term data from these research sites related to demography, ecology, behavior, and health/physiology. This combination of new and existing data was foundational to my research proposal and hypotheses, agreed upon at the start of my dissertation, a condition of grants awarded me through outside sponsors of my research, and a condition of the grants of my mentors, particularly at University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, NM. On February 18th, 2023, I received a letter cutting my ties to access to long-term data at all three of these sites and roadblocking a finished manuscript ready to be sent to publishers; essentially preventing me from publishing nearly all work from my Ph.D. training. No scientific justification, or detailed justification in general, was provided, despite my repeated requests for this to be disclosed to me in writing. These events remain an open issue of contention, as I move through several reporting processes to resolve this and restore my work to active status, and to ensure that enough flags are raised that this never happens again, with these particular junior and senior scientists or anyone else in primatology.

An unintended and unexpected consequence of my public disclosure of the events related to my work, is that a respectable number of private messages have come my way from other primatologists, all early career, reporting similar negative experiences relating to their work in anthropology and primatology. I STOP HERE TO EMPHASIZE THAT THE IDENTITIES OF THESE INDIVIDUALS WILL BE PROTECTED BY ME. I WILL NOT DISCLOSE THEIR NAMES OR AFFILIATIONS. I knew of examples prior to my negative experiences of individuals who had struggled in my own research circle against abuses of power, but the messages I have received over the past year suggest this is much more widespread than even I knew. Of the double digits reporting to me, all, but one individual, were primatologists or working at primate research sites. Of the primate researchers, all, but one, were working with chimpanzees. Reports have ranged from harassment at fields sites, to roadblocks to publication, including attempts to alter datasets to influence research outcomes, delaying individuals to try to starve them out before publications, and preventing future access to long-term primate research sites where individuals trained during their graduate degrees. None of these individuals reaching

out to me knew me personally or professionally. I knew them, and they probably knew me, by name only, if at all, before I shared my story. Given the difficulties that can come our way for reporting this kind of behavior by senior PIs, I can only imagine that there are many more individuals out there with scars from their experiences in primatology. The individuals who did reach out to me were incredibly brave, having no knowledge of me and knowing that these kinds of communications can result in further (wrongful) negative consequences. As a mentor of graduate and professional students for more than eight years now, and the kind of human being that is inclusive and kind, I applaud their bravery and feel a responsibility to their story beyond my own.

What I have experienced is reprehensible, what is being reported to me is reprehensible, and I am asking for involvement and discussion among researchers of all affiliations and levels of practice in the field of primatology, with leadership from ASP, IPS, and AABA, revisiting the reach and power of field site directors over research scientists and their data products produced at primate field sites or with primate biological samples in the laboratory sourcing to wild and captive primate communities. No trainee or early career scientist should lose their work and hefty investment from their graduate training, theses, dissertations, or early career grants/funding because someone decided to wield power and control over valuable research products after the research was carried out. And, no trainee or early career scientist should experience the kind of debilitating harassment, bullying, and academic abuse, that I am currently reporting and that others are reporting to me.

Sincerely,



Dr. Sarah Renee Phillips
Postdoctoral Associate
Yale University