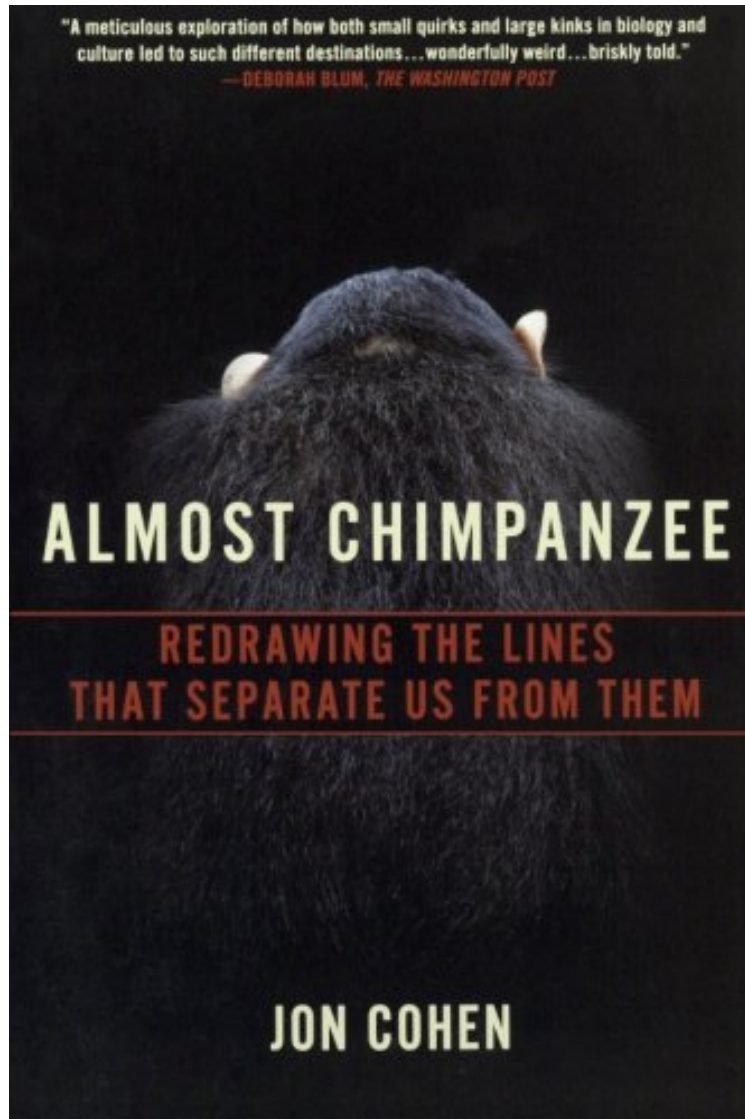


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Almost Chimpanzee: Redrawing the Lines That Separate Us from Them

Jon Cohen

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#1646829 in Books Jon Cohen 2011-12-20 2011-12-20 Original language: English PDF # 1 8.50 x .86 x 5.50l, .73 #File Name: 0312611765384 pages Almost Chimpanzee Redrawing the Lines That Separate Us from Them | File size: 20.Mb

Jon Cohen : Almost Chimpanzee: Redrawing the Lines That Separate Us from Them before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Almost Chimpanzee: Redrawing the Lines That Separate Us from Them:

6 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Chimps-R-Us it ain't! By Dawn Forsythe Chimpanzee lovers

everywhere are familiar with the t-shirt motif "98% chimpanzee." It simply and aptly points out the close genetic relationships between humans and chimps. We delight in seeing pictures of chimps enjoying the toys that we played with, or having a birthday party, or acting out in ways that seem surprisingly and lovingly human. With that background, I picked up *Almost Chimpanzee*, by Jon Cohen, expecting to be outraged and offended. As someone who looks into an ape's eyes and sees a spark of humanity looking back, I knew the book's premise - examining the differences between chimpanzees and humans, rather than the similarities - would cause me no end of aggravation. Instead, I found myself drawn further and deeper into the science that Cohen presents. "Goodall was pursuing noble and worthwhile goals, and indeed she, along with Yerkes and other pioneering chimpanzee researchers, deserves much credit for making people more aware of the intelligence, social needs, and emotional depth of our closest cousins," Cohen writes. "But I think the need to emphasize our similarities has abated." Ah, I can imagine my friends' exclamations of disagreement, even as I write this. Before I read the book, I would have added my own exclamations. (In fact, I probably did at some point.) But hear me out...I wasn't totally converted to all of Cohen's positions (I will never support the use of chimpanzees in research, for instance, and he hints that he favors some research as long as high standards of compassion are imposed), but the book challenged many of my convictions. That is a good thing, since sound policies in chimp care and conservation require us to consider the depths of scientific inquiry. That deeper examination, compliments of *Almost Chimpanzee*, reveals differences between chimpanzees and humans that are just as exquisite and profound as our similarities. I admit that it took me longer than usual to read this book. It is so crammed full of scientific explanations and research findings that I sometimes got lost in the nomenclature. Just when I felt like I was going to drown in unfamiliar terminology, however, Cohen comes through with a story or an interview that illuminates the point of his discussion. In that, he made the science understandable to a non-scientific reader like me. Cohen covers a wide range of subjects, from brain functions to language to genetics and evolution. On every topic, I learned something new. This was especially true with his discussion of research relating to language. I knew I was skeptical of claims about Kanzi and Koko and other apes involved in language research, but I didn't know why. Cohen introduces the reader to the FOXP2 gene mutation, and the path of discovery to how it draws the line between communication and language. He brings in Tetsuro Matsuzawa, who studies both wild and captive chimpanzees, to explain the difference between ape language research and his cognitive research. "Everyone admits that apes have primitive language at the word level. No one doubts that," Matsuzawa tells Cohen. But, Cohen explains, "the greater claims made by ape language research never persuaded Matsuzawa and most others in the field, because it is not good science. 'If you do ape language research, you cannot easily repeat what you have found, but I can always repeat my findings in front of you,' he said." Throughout the book, I found facts that startled me (wild chimps have an average life expectancy of only thirteen years!) and answers that had eluded me for years (do female chimpanzees experience menopause?). As the daughter of a Detroit Zoo chimp trainer, I was grateful for his insights into the evolution of the Detroit Zoo, from its status in the 1950s and 60s as chimp show opportunist to their thoughtful (though in some ways very sadly and I would say stupidly mistaken) development of a zoo-appropriate chimpanzee exhibit. Cohen's history of chimpanzee research policy in the U.S. is also quite helpful, especially as he dispassionately explains which groups did what, without the self-promotion that one often finds on organization websites. Above all, I found Cohen's objective treatment of various sides of thorny issues quite exhilarating. His description of scientist Richard Wrangham is also an apt description of Cohen's approach to this book. "He behaves, in short, like a scientist - curious, skeptical, intellectually honest, welcoming of criticism, and bound by data... [He] is an unusually humble cook of hearty food for thought..." I strongly recommend *Almost Chimpanzee: Searching for What Makes Us Human*, in Rainforests, Labs, Sanctuaries, and Zoos. It is a must read for any ape advocate who wants to explore a plethora of ideas not usually discussed by advocacy groups. It helped me understand the scientific basis for the relationships between chimpanzees and humans, and for the differences that make both of us special. Most especially, it introduced me to a new appreciation for the science that will fill the analytical holes my emotions and assumptions often covered over.

0 of 6 people found the following review helpful. *Almost Chimpanzee* Great Read! By Laura S. Adams This is a great book really for everyone. People who want to keep learning throuout life should read this. My husband and I both read it and loved it thanks

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Good science writing, but By algo41 Cohen is a good science reporter who understands his material. Section II, "Brains", got bogged down in documenting controversies about chimp language or lack thereof, but I learned a lot even in that section. Cohen's basic approach is to give a fair hearing to different scientists when there is a controversy, but I wish he didn't feel the need to give so much attention to scientists with outdated views, and he does not in Sections I and especially Section III. The bottom line for language is that chimps can communicate, even orally, and some modest amount of oral communication is apparently cultural; however, you can define language so as to exclude chimp capabilities if you include the ability to use recursion, or any but the most rudimentary grammar. Not just chimps but dogs can learn hundreds of human words, and also be taught to use symbols to communicate (see book by Brian Hare, a careful scientist, on dogs). Cohen also claims that chimpanzees do not have a "Theory of Mind" - but later in the book he sympathetically discusses the views of Michael Tomasello, who is a convert and now believes they do, based on various studies. Franz de Waal unaccountably does not even make the index, although he is mentioned at least

once (the index is not very good but de Waal is an important primatologist with an emphasis on primate capacities). Cohen himself has an experience in which he is following a chimp: Cohen stops to try to whack down some figs from a tree, but is unsuccessful, so the chimp comes back and helps him. Cohen uses the latest science to discuss all the ways in which our genomes differ from chimps - there were originally some misleading statistics on how close the genomes are. There are also some very interesting, although not fully accepted nuggets. One is that, based on genetic evidence, human ancestors may have mated with chimps after the species split from each other. What are very likely the oldest hominid fossils (110 individuals about 4.4 million years old) were of bi-pedal individuals who lived in forests, not on savannahs, which is generally thought to have been the setting for bipedalism! This book, like a few others I have read recently, do not distinguish biographical footnotes from footnotes which elaborate on the material: in one instance where I read the footnote, it contradicted the main text (note 8, p. 249), but mostly I find it too inconvenient to check! This is necessary in a time of very capable word processors?

In the fall of 2005, a band of researchers cracked the code of the chimpanzee genome and provided a startling new window into the differences between humans and our closest primate cousins. For the past several years, acclaimed Science reporter Jon Cohen has been following the DNA hunt, as well as eye-opening new studies in ape communication, human evolution, disease, diet, and more. In *Almost Chimpanzee*, Cohen invites us on a captivating scientific journey, taking us behind the scenes in cutting-edge genetics labs, rain forests in Uganda, sanctuaries in Iowa, experimental enclaves in Japan, even the Detroit Zoo. Along the way, he ferries fresh chimp sperm for a time-sensitive analysis, gets greeted by pant-hoots and chimp feces, and investigates an audacious attempt to breed a "humanzee." Cohen offers a fresh and often frankly humorous insider's tour of the latest research, which promises to lead to everything from insights about the unique ways our bodies work to shedding light on stubborn human-only problems, ranging from infertility and asthma to speech disorders. And in the end, Cohen explains why it's time to move on from Jane Goodall's plea that we focus on how the two species are alike and turns to examining why our differences matter in vital ways for understanding humans and for increasing the chances to save the endangered chimpanzee.

From Publishers Weekly How are we different from chimps? That's the question that Cohen (*Shots in the Dark*) sets out to answer in his absorbing account of current chimpanzee research. Too often, Cohen argues, scientists have focused on the similarities between the two species, when in fact it is an understanding of their differences that can reveal "what, exactly, it means to be human." Cohen's survey spans investigations into the chimp genome, brain, and physiognomy, with a fascinating chapter on chimp sex (one captive female chimp was observed "flipping through *Playgirl*, sometimes using a vacuum cleaner hose for stimulation") and a colorful portrait of Richard Lynch Garner, a 19th-century adventurer who lived in a cage in the jungle for 112 days, studying and recording chimp and gorilla language. The technical jargon of some sections can be difficult, but the book is otherwise readable and replete with surprising theories for the origins of human traits from "concealed ovulation" to endurance running. One scientist, for instance, believes that humanness derives from the simple fact that our babies, unlike their ape counterparts, can lie flat on their backs, which allows them to gaze into their mothers' eyes. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist What are the dividing lines between human and chimpanzee? What makes the first us and the second them? Science writer Cohen (*Shots in the Dark*, 2001) points out that with the mass of genetic data now available to researchers, it is no longer imperative to stress the similarities between humans and our closest cousins to bolster the argument for evolution; it is the differences between us that answer the question of what makes us human and not chimpanzee. By examining the blood (and DNA extracted from it), the brain (with language as the Rubicon that apes do not cross), and the body (why we are bipedal and the other apes are not), Cohen describes not only how we differ from chimpanzees but some of the theories of why. Talking with scientists from all walks of primate research, comparing and contrasting findings ranging from laboratory work, behavioral studies, attempts to teach language to apes and chimpanzees in zoos and other captive settings to what has been learned from the study of chimpanzees in the wild, the author has created a vital look at not only what makes us human but also what makes us almost chimpanzees. Cohen's humorous writing style, combined with his ability to make complex scientific theories comprehensible, makes for a book that is hard to put down. --Nancy Bent [An] engrossing new book . . . like something out of Beckett, or maybe the Marx Brothers . . . deeply skeptical. Jennifer Schuessler, *The New York Times* It has been years, decades really, since researchers worried about idealizing chimpanzees or emphasizing their similarities to ourselves. The shift is largely credited to the fieldwork and educational activism of another pioneering scientist, Jane Goodall. Indeed, as Jon Cohen points out in his gently provocative new book, *Almost Chimpanzee*, the conservation-minded Goodall deliberately dwelled on people-parallels. 'She believed that a critical mass of humans would most likely come to her cause if they imagined their own hands reaching for the curl of a chimpanzee's finger.' But today, Cohen suggests, it may be time to dwell again on our differences. Chimpanzees are well established as our closest cousins on Earth; some research sets the genetic difference at a mere one percent. On the other hand, even that slight deviation set us on widely divergent evolutionary

paths and, in the end, provided only one species with real power over life on Earth. 'Humans will determine the fate of chimpanzees,' Cohen notes. 'Chimpanzees of course will have no say in the fate of humans.' Cohen's book, then, is a meticulous exploration of how both small quirks and large kinks in biology and culture led to such different destinations. He searches for the best evidence of when human and chimpanzee ancestors first separated--usually fixed at about five million years ago--and whether it was a genuinely dramatic break. He mulls over why small genetic variances have such enormous impact, leading him into a wonderfully weird discussion of whether human-chimpanzee hybrids are possible--a notion dubbed 'humanzees' by some researchers . . . [Almost Chimpanzee is] a briskly told, clear-headed survey of research that looks at the innate differences between two closely linked species, never forgetting that one of those species--at least for now--stands as the most successful primate in the planet's history. There's a terrific section on life expectancy built around the evolutionary biology work of University of Utah anthropologist Kristen Hawkes that neatly connects everything from chimpanzee menopause to the role of elderly females in hunter-gatherer societies. And there's a fascinating look at the importance of cooking food, which allowed early humans to spend less energy sleepily digesting their dinners and more, apparently, devising a route to world domination. All of this leads to the ever-troubling question of what comes next. Many scientists working with chimpanzees in labs find their studies restricted or too expensive to maintain over the long term. And many conducting field research wonder how much longer the animals will last as a wild species, because of habitat loss, poaching and the notorious African bush meat trade. One scientist whom Cohen interviewed predicted that within 50 years only captive chimpanzees will be left alive, almost entirely due to the activities of their human cousins. Deborah Bloom, *The Washington Post* Almost Chimpanzee is an extraordinary journey into a world of great interest but--until now--little understanding. An astute observer and engaging writer on complex issues at the intersection of science and society, Cohen summons his prodigious talents in this examination of chimpanzee research and conservation. For too long, Cohen persuasively argues, chimpanzees have been presented and widely understood as 'almost human,' analogues worthy of attention and protection by virtue of their similarities to us. In this wide-ranging synthesis of genetics, epidemiology, anthropology, history, and the sociology of science, Cohen demonstrates how much we can learn about chimpanzees--and ourselves--by exploring their unique qualities. Paul Farmer, MD, PhD, Partners In Health, Harvard Medical School How human are chimpanzees? Jon Cohen, in his well-written and carefully argued report, provides an up-to-date examination of the question. The bottom line is that we are far from understanding chimp/human relationships, but Almost Chimpanzee is a fascinating look at how investigators are probing the unknowns and searching for definitive answers. David Baltimore, Nobel Laureate and professor at the California Institute of Technology It's often been said that we can look into a chimpanzee's eyes and see ourselves. Well . . . almost. And it's that very big almost that Jon Cohen so tenaciously explores in this extraordinary scientific odyssey. There are important matters at hand here--such as the uniqueness of speech and the origins of bipedalism--but Almost Chimpanzee is far from being a cold analysis. To get at the truth, Cohen clomps through malarial jungles, travels in an RV with a baby orangutan, even handles fresh chimp sperm. The result is world-class science writing that is also a rollicking adventure story--one that takes us to the ends of the earth and to the margins of our species. Hampton Sides, editor-at-large at Outside magazine and bestselling author of Hellhound On His Trail A dazzling look at a field in which no two scientists seem to agree on what makes us either human, animal, or both. Jon Cohen has a gift for bringing this issue to life: he gives our species its due without losing respect for our fellow evolutionary travelers, the apes. Frans de Waal, author of The Age of Empathy Precious animals are rapidly disappearing, victimized by hunters, collectors, and habitat encroachment. Among them, chimpanzees have earned a special place in humanity's imagination because we look in their eyes and see ourselves. Jon Cohen has done a magnificent, masterful job of showing us why chimps are not like humans, yet--or because of the differences--they must be saved, in the wild. Controversial? You bet. But it's high time humanity takes responsibility for both its sins: Killing species with the 'kindness' of making them us and through outright ruthless slaughter. Laurie Garrett, Pulitzer Prize winner and author of The Coming Plague: Newly Emerging Diseases in a World Out of Balance How are we different from chimps? That's the question that Cohen sets out to answer in his absorbing account of current chimpanzee research. Too often, Cohen argues, scientists have focused on the similarity between the two species, when it is in fact an understanding of our differences that can reveal 'what, exactly, it means to be human.' Cohen's survey spans investigations into the chimp genome, brain, and physiognomy, with a fascinating chapter on chimp sex (one captive female chimp was observed 'flipping through Playgirl, sometimes using a vacuum cleaner hose for stimulation') and a colorful portrait of Richard Lynch Garner, a 19th-century adventurer who lived in a cage in a jungle for 112 days, studying and recording chimp and gorilla language. [The book is] replete with surprising theories for the origins of human traits from 'concealed ovulation' to endurance running. One scientist, for instance, believes that humanness derives from the simple fact that our babies, unlike their ape counterparts, can lie flat on their backs, which allows them to gaze into their mothers' eyes. Publishers Weekly