

MANVIR SINGH

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What explains the form of complex practices and beliefs that recur across human societies, especially in the domains of law, religion, and art (e.g., property, shamanism, witchcraft, music, story)?

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

2020– Post-Doctoral Research Fellow, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse

EDUCATION

2020 Ph.D. in Human Evolutionary Biology
Harvard University

2012 Sc.B. with Honors in Human Biology: Evolution, Environment, & Ecosystems
Brown University

OTHER AFFILIATIONS

2020– Associate, Department of Human Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University
2018–19 Visiting Student, Institut Jean Nicod, École Normale Supérieure
2018 Visiting Student, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History
2017 Visiting Scholar, Andalas University
2012–13 Research Fellow, Centre for Social Evolution, University of Copenhagen

GRANTS & FELLOWSHIPS

2020– Post-Doctoral Research Fellowship, Institute for Advanced Study in Toulouse
2015–19 Graduate Research Fellowship Award, NSF
2016–17 Frederick Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, Harvard University
2016 MBB Graduate Student Award, Harvard University
2015 MBB Graduate Student Award (with S. Mehr), Harvard University
2015 Predissertation Fellowship, Harvard University
2012–13 Fulbright Scholarship, Danish-American Fulbright Foundation
2011 REU Fellowship, Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, NSF
2008–12 Citigroup Scholarship

OTHER AWARDS & HONORS

2020 Diverse Intelligences Summer Institute (DISI) Research Fellow

- 2018 Best Student Paper, International Association for the Cognitive Science of Religion
- 2017 Student Showcase, Cultural Evolution Society
- 2015 Editor's Choice Selection, *Oikos*

PUBLICATIONS

* Corresponding author

† Co-first author

PEER-REVIEWED

- * Singh, M., Acerbi, A., Caldwell, C., Danchin, É., Isabel, G., Molleman, L., Scott-Phillips, T., Tamariz, M., Van der Berg, P., van Leuwen, E., & Derex, M. (in press) Beyond social learning. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*.
- * Singh, M. (in press) Magic, explanations, and evil: On the origins and design of witches and sorcerers. *Current Anthropology*.
- * Singh, M., Kaptchuk, T. J., & Henrich, J. (2021) Small gods, rituals, and cooperation: The Mentawai water spirit Sikameinan. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 42:61-72.
- * Singh, M. & Henrich, J. (2020) Why do religious leaders observe costly prohibitions? Examining taboos on Mentawai shamans. *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 2:e32.
- * Mehr, S. A., Singh, M., Knox, D., Ketter, D. M., Pickens-Jones, D., Atwood, S., Lucas, C., Egner, A., Jacoby, N., Hopkins, E. J., Howard, R. M., Hartshorne, J. K., Jennings, M. V., Simson, J., Bainbridge, C. M., Pinker, S., O'Donnell, T. J., Krasnow, M. M., & Glowacki, L. (2019) Universality and diversity in human song. *Science* 366:eaxx0868.
- * Singh, M. (2018) The cultural evolution of shamanism. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 41:e66.
- *† Mehr, S. A., Singh, M., York, H., Glowacki, L., & Krasnow, M. M. (2018) Form and function in human song. *Current Biology* 28:356-368.
- * Singh, M., Wrangham, R. W., & Glowacki, L. (2017) Self-interest and the design of rules. *Human Nature* 28:457-480.
- Ioannou, C. C., Singh, M. & Couzin, I. D. (2015) Potential leaders trade-off goal-oriented and socially-oriented behavior in mobile animal groups. *The American Naturalist* 186:284-293.
- * Singh, M. & Boomsma, J. J. (2015) Policing and punishment across the domains of social evolution. *Oikos* 124:971-982.

LETTERS & COMMENTARIES

Singh, M. (in press) Science, delusions, explosive cockroaches, and other issues surrounding witchcraft and sorcery. *Current Anthropology*. [Response to commentaries]

Bertolo, M., Singh, M., & Mehr, S. A. (2021) Sound-induced motion in chimpanzees does not imply shared ancestry for music or dance. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 118:e2015664118. [Letter in reply to Hattori & Tomonaga]

- Singh, M. (2020) Why people rarely divine by flipping coins. *Current Anthropology* 61. [Commentary on Boyer]
- Singh, M. (2018) Why is there shamanism? Developing the cultural evolutionary theory and addressing alternative accounts. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 41:e92. [Response to commentaries]
- Singh, M., Glowacki, L., & Wrangham, R. W. (2016) Self-interested agents create, maintain, and modify group-functional culture. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 39:e52. [Commentary on Richerson et al.]

IN PROGRESS

Moser, C., Lee-Rubin, H., Bainbridge, C. M., Atwood, S., Simson, J., Knox, D., Glowacki, L., Galbarczyk, A., Jasienska, G., Ross, C. T., Neff, M. B., Martin, A., Cirelli, L. K., Trehub, S. E., Song, J., Kim, M., Schachner, A., Vardy, T. A., Atkinson, Q. D., Antfolk, J., Madhivanan, P., Siddaiah, A., Placek, C. D., Salali, G. D., Keestra, S., Singh, M., Collins, S., Patton, J. Q., Scaff, C. H., Stieglitz, J., Moya, C., Sagar, R. R., Wood, B. M., Krasnow, M. M., & Mehr, S. A. (in revision, *Nature*) Acoustic regularities in infant-directed vocalizations across cultures.

- * Singh, M. (in revision) Subjective selection and the evolution of complex culture. *Pre-print available at psyarxiv.com/4t2ud*
- * Singh, M. & Hoffman, M. (in review) Commitment and impersonation: A reputation-based theory of principledness. *Pre-print available at psyarxiv.com/ua57r*
- * Singh, M. (in review) The sympathetic plot, its psychological origins, and implications for the evolution of fiction. *Pre-print available at osf.io/p8q7a*
- * Singh, M. & Glowacki, L. (in preparation) Human social organization during the Late Pleistocene: Challenging the nomadic-egalitarian model. *Pre-print available upon request.*

POPULAR AUDIENCE

- Singh, M. (forthcoming) Revisionist prehistory. *Aeon*.
- Singh, M. (2021) The power of prohibition. *Kulturaustausch*, January.
- Singh, M. (2020) Psychedelics weren't as common in ancient cultures as we think. *Vice*, December 10.
- Singh, M. (2020) The cute critter rewriting our understanding of prehistory. *Atlas Obscura*, October 23.
- Singh, M. (2020) Marriage is dead, long live marriage. *Aeon*, March 31.
- Singh, M. (2019) Violence and the Inuit [Commentary]. *The New York Review of Books*, December 5, p. 58.
- Singh, M. (2019) People suspected of witchcraft are still being persecuted and killed. *Vice*, October 30.

Singh, M. (2019) What makes the sympathetic plot a universal story type? *Aeon*, October 8.

Singh, M. (2019) Modern shamans. *The Conversation*, May 2.

INVITED TALKS

“The nature and origins of religious super-attractors.” (November 2020) Reasoning Lab, Naval Research Laboratory.

“The nature and origins of religious super-attractors.” (October 2020) Department of Anthropology Colloquium, University of New Mexico.

“The cultural evolution of shamanism.” (June 2019) Department of Religious Studies Seminar, Victoria University of Wellington.

“The cultural evolution of shamanism.” (May 2019) Department of Psychology Colloquium, University of Auckland.

“Form and function in human song.” (February 2019) Lunch Series, Human Dynamics Group, Massachusetts Institute for Technology.

“Documenting and explaining recurrent cultural traditions.” (November 2018) Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History.

“Magic, explanations, and evil: On the origins and design of witches and sorcerers.” (October 2018) Mind and Development Lab, Yale University.

“Why are there shamans and witches? On the design and origins of some religious near-universals.” (August 2018) Department of Religious Studies, University of Otago.

“The psychological and cultural evolutionary foundations of shamanism and religious self-denial.” (October 2017) Social Lunch, Department of Psychology, Harvard University.

“The biological basis of culture.” (April 2017) Department of Anthropology, Andalas University.

“The evolution of cooperation.” (April 2017) Department of Anthropology, Andalas University.

“Whence shamanism?” (January 2017) Boston Area Morality Group; Cambridge, Massachusetts.

CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Includes only those talks or posters presented by M. Singh

Singh, M. (April 2019) “Motivations to satisfy proximate psychological goals shape culture.” Presentation at: Investigative Workshop on Social Norms and Institutions; National Institute for Mathematical and Biological Synthesis.

Singh, M. (October 2018) “Magic, explanations, and evil: On the origins and design of witches and sorcerers.” Presentation at: Cultural Evolution Society Conference; Tempe, Arizona.

Singh, M. (July 2018) “The cultural evolution of shamanism.” Presentation at: Human Behavior and Evolution Society Conference; Amsterdam, Netherlands.

- Singh, M. & Henrich, J. (May 2018) “Self-denial by shamans promotes perceptions of special powers and religious credibility.” Poster at: Future Directions on the Evolution of Rituals, Beliefs, and Religious Minds; Erice, Italy.
- Singh, M. (May 2018) “The function of punitive justice in a small-scale society.” Presentation at: Harvard-Yale Conference on Human Evolution, Yale University.
- Singh, M. & Henrich, J. (April 2018) “Self-denial, supernatural power, and religious credibility.” Poster at: Mind, Brain, and Behavior Showcase, Harvard University.
- Singh, M. (September 2017) “The cultural evolution of shamanism.” Presentation at: Cultural Evolution Society Conference; Jena, Germany.
- Singh, M., Mehr, S. A., & Glowacki, L. (April 2016) “The natural history of song.” Presentation at: Mind, Brain, and Behavior Open Science Conference, Harvard University.
- Singh, M. (September 2015) “The cultural design of the Mentawai taboos.” Absentee presenter at: Creating ASEAN Futures 2015; Padang, Indonesia.
- Singh, M. & Boomsma, J. J. (June 2013) “Punishment and policing across the social domains.” Presentation at: Inclusive Fitness and Game Theory Workshop; Arolla, Switzerland.
- Singh, M. & Smith, R. J. (August 2012) “Frenemies: Large females evict smaller males in the biparental burying beetle *Nicrophorus investigator*.” Poster at: International Society for Behavioral Ecology Conference; Lund, Sweden.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Invited Instructor

- Evolution & Human Behaviour*, University of Auckland (Spring 2020)
- Evolution, Behaviour, and Cognition*, University of Auckland (Spring 2020)
- Evolution, Behaviour, and Cognition*, University of Auckland (Spring 2019)

Teaching Assistant

- Sophomore Tutorial in Human Evolutionary Biology*, Harvard University (Spring 2019)
- Game Theory & Social Behavior*, Harvard University (Fall 2015)
- Principles of Ecology*, Brown University (Spring 2012)
- Principles of Ecology*, Brown University (Spring 2011)

Supervised Research

- Evolution of Principled Behavior*, Harvard University (Spring 2016)
- Evolution of Music*, Harvard University (Fall 2015)

Guest Lectures and Seminars

- “Shamanism.” (Lecture: April 2020) *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Pennsylvania State University.
- “The pleasurable origins of the sympathetic plot.” (Lecture: March 2020) *Cultural Evolution*, École Normale Supérieure.
- “The sympathetic plot.” (Lecture: February 2020) *Explaining Beauty*, Harvard University.
- “Shamanism.” (Lecture: November 2019) *Biological Anthropology*, Tufts University.

“The sympathetic plot.” (Lecture: November 2019) *Explaining Beauty*, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

“Bio-cultural anthropology.” (Lecture: October 2019) *Research Methods in Biological Anthropology*, California State University, Long Beach.

“Shamanism.” (Lecture: April 2019) *Introduction to Cultural Anthropology*, Pennsylvania State University.

“The pleasurable origins of story.” (Lecture: February 2019) *Explaining Beauty*, Harvard University.

“Rules, religion, and culture.” (Lecture: November 2015) *Biology of Aggression*, Harvard University.

“Game theory & ESS.” (Seminar: February 2013) *Social Evolution*, University of Copenhagen.

“Punishment.” (Seminar: October 2012) *Animal Behaviour*, University of Copenhagen.

BOOKLETS

Distributed by Tony Shenton; available at Harvard Museum of Natural History, Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory, and independent bookstores throughout the United States.

death&rabbis (2015)

A graphical juxtaposition of gods of death and various rabbit breeds.

Zoostalgia (2012)

A celebration and introduction to the Pleistocene Megafauna.

Lifecycles (2012)

Oversized newsprint pamphlet showcasing thirteen odd animal life cycles.

The Evolutionist's Doodlebook (2011)

Illustrated, whimsical interpretations of evolutionary biological concepts.

OTHER PROJECTS

“The Future Perfect: Version Alpha” (with Anti-Matter Collective; Winter 2016)

Co-creator of experimental play about future ethnographers studying Paleolithic peoples and shamanism.

LANGUAGES

English (fluent); Indonesian (conversational); Mentawai (conversational); Punjabi (conversational); Danish (basic); French (basic); Hindi (basic); Spanish (basic)

FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

2020 West Sumatra (Mentawai, Enggano), Indonesia (1 month)
 2018 Tanna, Vanuatu (2 weeks)
 2017 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (7.5 months)
 2015 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (2 months)
 2014 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (2 months)

REVIEWING

American Anthropologist; Behavioral and Brain Sciences; BioSystems; Clinical Psychology Review; Current Anthropology; Current Biology; Emotion Review; Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences; Evolutionary Human Sciences; Human Nature; Journal of Experimental Child Psychology; Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy; Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute; Nature Communications; Philosophical Transactions B; PLOS One; Religion, Brain, and Behavior; Religions