

MANVIR SINGH

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PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

2023– Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis
2020–23 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

2025– Contributing Writer, *The New Yorker*
2023– Affiliate Member, Institute for Psychedelics and Neurotherapeutics, University of California, Davis
2020–25 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

2023–25 Field Studies in Wild Religions, Templeton Religion Trust, \$99,552
2021–23 Multidisciplinary Prize (with M. Derex, J. Peña, C. Molho), IAST, €18,220
2015–19 Graduate Research Fellowship Award, National Science Foundation
2016–17 Frederick Sheldon Traveling Fellowship, Harvard University, \$25,000
2016 MBB Graduate Student Award, Harvard University, \$5,000
2015 MBB Graduate Student Award (with S. Mehr), Harvard University, \$3,500
2012–13 Fulbright Scholarship, Danish-American Fulbright Foundation

OTHER AWARDS & HONORS

2023 Margo Wilson Award for Best Paper in *Evolution and Human Behavior*
2022 Richerson Award for Best PhD in Cultural Evolution, Cultural Evolution Society
2021 New Investigator Award, Human Behavior & Evolution Society
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

^ Trainee

Books

Singh, M. (2025) *Shamanism: The timeless religion*. New York: Knopf; London: Allen Lane.

Journal Articles (Peer-reviewed)

- * Singh, M. (in press) Subjective selection, super-attractors, and the origins of the cultural manifold. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.
- Fitouchi, L., Singh, M., André, J.-B., & Baumard, N. (in press) Prosocial religions as folk-technologies of mutual policing. *Psychological Review*.
- Bertolo, M., Snarskis, M., Kyritsis, T., Yurdum, L., Bainbridge, C. M., Atwood, S., Hilton, C. B., Keomurjian, A., Lee, J. S., Mackiel, A., Mak, V., Shin, M., Bitran, A., Shilton, D., Delasanta, L., Do, H., Lang, J., Irani, T., Kangatharan, J., Lafleur, K., Malko, N., Atkinson, Q. D., Singh, M., & Mehr, S. A. (2025). The Expanded Natural History of Song Discography, a global corpus of vocal music. *Open Mind* 9:844–863.
- * Singh, M. & Hill, K. (2025) Loss of dance and infant-directed song among the Northern Aché. *Current Biology* 35:2444–2447.
- Molho, C., Peña, J., Singh, M., & Derex, M. (2024) Do institutions evolve like material technologies? *Current Opinion in Psychology* 60:10193.
- Graziosi, M., Singh, M., Nayak, S. M., & Yaden, D. B. (2023) Acute subjective effects of psychedelics within and beyond WEIRD contexts. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 5:558–569.
- *† Fitouchi, L. & Singh, M. (2023) Punitive justice serves to restore reciprocal cooperation in three small-scale societies. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 44:502–514.
- Yurdum, L., Singh, M., Glowacki, L., Vardy, T., Atkinson, Q., Hilton, C., Sauter, D., Krasnow, M., & Mehr, S. A. (2023) Universal interpretations of vocal music. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120:e2218593120.
- * Singh, M. & Mehr, S. A. (2023) Universality, domain-specificity and development of psychological responses to music. *Nature Reviews Psychology* 2:333–346.
- Nayak, S. M., Singh, M., Yaden, D. B., & Griffiths, R. (2023) Belief changes associated with psychedelic use. *Journal of Psychopharmacology* 37:80–92.

- * Singh, M. (2022) Subjective selection and the evolution of complex culture. *Evolutionary Anthropology* 31:266–280.
- Hilton, C. B., Moser, C., Bertolo, M., Lee-Rubin, H., Amir, D., Bainbridge, C. M., Simson, J., Knox, D., Glowacki, L., Alemu, E., 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., Salenius, A., Andelin, J., Antfolk, J., Madhivanan, P., Siddaiah, A., Placek, C. D., Salali, G. D., Keestra, S., Singh, M., Collins, S. A., Patton, J. Q., Scaff, C., Stieglitz, J., Ccari Cutipa, S., Moya, C., Sagar, R. R., Anyawire, M., Mabulla, A., Wood, B. M., Krasnow, M. M., & Mehr, S. A. (2022). Acoustic regularities in infant-directed speech and song across cultures. *Nature Human Behaviour* 6:1545–1556.
- * Singh, M. & Glowacki, L. (2022) Human social organization during the Late Pleistocene: Beyond the nomadic-egalitarian model. *Evolution and Human Behavior* 43:418–431.
- * Singh, M. & Garfield, Z. (2022) Evidence for third-party mediation but not punishment in Mentawai justice. *Nature Human Behaviour* 6:930–940.
- * Fitouchi, L. & Singh, M. (2022) Supernatural punishment beliefs as cognitively compelling tools of social control. *Current Opinion in Psychology* 44:252–257.
- * Singh, M. (2021) The sympathetic plot, its psychological origins, and implications for the evolution of fiction. *Emotion Review* 13:183–198.
- * 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. (2021) Beyond social learning. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 376:20200050.
- * Singh, M. (2021) Magic, explanations, and evil: The origins and design of witches and sorcerers. *Current Anthropology* 62:2–29.
- * 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.

Journal Articles (In progress and pre-prints)

- * Singh, M. & Hoffman, M. Commitment and impersonation: A reputation-based theory of principledness. *Pre-print available at psyarxiv.com/ua57r*
 - * Singh, M. & Fitouchi, L. Retributive sentiments track deterrent and compensatory concerns in a small-scale society.
- Graziosi, M., Nayak, S. M., Singh, M., & Yaden, D. Social-spatial confluences: The modulation of mind perception in Psychedelic, Religious, Spiritual, and Mystical (PRSM) experiences.
- * Singh, M. & Hoffman, M. Individualist moral principles and the expansion of the moral circle. *Pre-print available at osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/pqem7*

Encyclopedia Articles

Singh, M. (2025) Cultural universals. In M. C. Frank & A. Majid (Eds.), *Open Encyclopedia of Cognitive Science*. MIT Press.

Letters and Commentaries

- ^Elster, E. & Singh, M. (in press) Strategy and experience required: Social learning cannot alone explain the varieties of supernatural belief. *Religion, Brain, and Behavior*. [Commentary on Gervais]
- ^Katiyar, T., Bonnefon, J. F., Mehr, S. A., & Singh, M. (2024) Discovering the unknown unknowns of research cartography with high-throughput natural description. *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 47:e50. [Commentary on Almaatouq et al.]
- Singh, M. (2022) Cognitive and evolutionary foundations of superstition and paranoia. *Current Anthropology* 63:456-457. [Response to reply by Planer and Sterelny]
- Singh, M. (2021) Science, delusions, explosive cockroaches, and other issues surrounding witchcraft and sorcery. *Current Anthropology* 62:22-24. [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.]

POPULAR AUDIENCE

- Singh, M. (2025) Why I wear the turban. *The New Yorker*, June 21.
- Singh, M. (2025) The president who became a prophet. *The New Yorker*, May 17.
- Singh, M. (2025) Beyond the curve. *The New Yorker*, March 31. [Published online as “Medical benchmarks and the myth of the universal patient”]
- Singh, M. (2024) Talk sense. *The New Yorker*, December 30 and January 6, 2025. [Published online as “How much does our language shape our thinking?”]
- Singh, M. (2024) The post-moral age. *The New Yorker*, September 16, pp. 22–26. [Published online as “Are your morals too good to be true?”]
- Singh, M. (2024) Read the label. *The New Yorker*, May 13, pp. 20–24. [Published online as “Why we’re turning psychiatric labels into identities”]
- Singh, M. (2024) How gullible are we? *The New Yorker*, April 22 and 29, pp. 61–65. [Published online as “Don’t believe what they’re telling you about misinformation”]
- Singh, M. (2024) “Dune” and the delicate art of creating fictional languages. *The New Yorker*, February 28.
- Singh, M. (2024) Genghis the good. *The New Yorker*, January 1 and 8, pp. 58–61. [Published online as “The Mongol hordes: They’re just like us”]
- Singh, M. (2023) Red shift. *The New Yorker*, October 2, pp. 14–18. [Published online as “Is an all-meat diet what nature intended?”]
- Singh, M. (2023) Lives in the balance. *The New Yorker*, June 19, pp. 24–29. [Published online as “How dowries are fueling a femicide epidemic”]
- Singh, M. (2023) You first. *The New Yorker*, February 27, pp. 22–26. [Published online as “It’s time to rethink the idea of the ‘Indigenous’”]
- Singh, M. (2022) The evolutionists. *The New Yorker*, November 28, pp. 78–83. [Published online as “How the Huxleys electrified evolution”]
- Singh, M. (2022) The ‘shamanification’ of tech CEOs. *Wired*, July 14.
- Singh, M. (2022) The idea of primitive communism is as seductive as it is wrong. *Aeon*, April 19.
- Singh, M. (2022) It’s easy to blame mental health issues on tech. But is it fair? *Wired*, March 30.
- Singh, M. (2021) Is coping with PTSD harder for US soldiers? *The Guardian*, June 11.
- Singh, M. (2021) Beyond the !Kung. *Aeon*, February 8.
- 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 [Letter]. *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

- 2025 Evolution and Human Adaptation Seminar Series, University of Michigan
 International Forum on Consciousness [Keynote]
 Deconstructing the Universal Mind Workshop, National Science Foundation
 New York Society for Ethical Culture
 Psychedelic Science Seminar, Center for the Science of Psychedelics, University
 of California, Berkeley
 Cultural Analytics Series, Berkeley Institute for Data Science, University of
 California, Berkeley
 Harvard Museum of Natural History
- 2024 Human Behavior and Evolution Society Conference [Plenary]
 Mind, Technology, & Society Speaker Series, Department of Cognitive and
 Information Sciences, University of California, Merced
 The International Association for the Cognitive and Evolutionary Sciences of
 Religion Conference [Keynote]
 Morality Reimagined Speaker Series, University of California, Davis
- 2023 Department of Evolutionary Anthropology, Duke University
 Centre for Behaviour and Evolution, Newcastle University
 Department of Anthropology, University of California, Davis
 Experience as Medicine Series, Wavepaths
 CompMusic/NeuroMusic Lab, Keio University
 Concepts in Dynamic Assemblages Workshop II, Princeton University
 Amsterdam Psychedelic Research Association
 Société Psychédélique Française
 From Evolution to Cognition to Fiction Workshop, École Normale Supérieure
 Séminaires d'Écologie et d'Évolution de Montpellier, Université de Montpellier
 Hopkins-Oxford Psychedelic Ethics Workshop, Oxford University
 Department of Anthropology Colloquium, Stanford University
 Finnish Interdisciplinary Conference on Psychedelics [Keynote]
 Department of Psychology, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
 PRSM Lab, Leiden University

- 2022 Economic Sociology Seminar, MIT Sloan
 Concepts in Dynamic Assemblages Workshop I
 Sophia Club, Aeon Media
 Center for Psychedelic and Consciousness Research, Johns Hopkins University
 Mind, Technology, & Society Speaker Series, Department of Cognitive and
 Information Sciences, University of California, Merced
 Social Evolution and Behaviour Lab, University College London
 School for Human Evolution and Social Change, Arizona State University
 Neurobiology Research Unit, Copenhagen University Hospital
- 2021 Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion, Masaryk University
 Evolutionary Anthropology Seminar Series, University College London
 Campfire Series, World Experience Organization
 Evolutionary Anthropology Research Group, Durham University
 Dondena Seminar Series, Bocconi University
 John Tooby and Leda Cosmides: Honoring 40 Years of Innovation
 Insight Conference 2021
 Evolution and Social Cognition Team, École Normale Supérieure
 Department of Anthropology, Kent State University
 DySoC Webinar Series on Human Origins and Cultural Evolution
 Department of Anthropology, University of Utah
 Behavior, Evolution, and Culture Speaker Series, University of California, Los
 Angeles
- 2020 Reasoning Lab, Naval Research Laboratory
 Department of Anthropology Colloquium, University of New Mexico
- 2019 Department of Religious Studies Seminar, Victoria University of Wellington
 Department of Psychology Colloquium, University of Auckland
 Lunch Series, Human Dynamics Group, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
- 2018 Mind and Development Lab, Yale University
 Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for the
 Science of Human History
 Department of Religious Studies, University of Otago
- 2017 Social Lunch, Department of Psychology, Harvard University
 Boston Area Morality Group

CONFERENCE & WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

Includes only those talks or posters presented by M. Singh; excludes invited presentations.

Singh. M. (September 2023) “The varieties of psychedelic use.” Presentation at: Insight Conference 2023; Berlin, Germany.

Singh. M. (May 2023) “Indigenous uses of psychedelics.” Presentation at: Annual American Psychiatric Association Meeting; San Francisco, California.

- Singh. M. & Glowacki, L. (June 2022) "Human social organization during the Late Pleistocene: Beyond the nomadic-egalitarian model." Presentation at: Human Behavior & Evolution Society Conference; online.
- Singh, M., Zeng, T.C., Aygen, A., Bollée, J., Choi, J., Kaur, N., Kunaparaju, A., Mackiel, A., Nhuquynh, N. Owens, A., Quintana, S., Sanders, S., Stasta, C., Xue, M., Yin, H., Barrett, J., Moya, C., Baumard, N., Blasi, D., Chaudhuri, P., Crockett, M., Mehr, S., Tamir, D., Tangherlini, T., Tehrani, J. (April 2022) "Introducing Anansi, a global story database." Speed talk at: European Human Behaviour and Evolution Association Conference; online.
- Singh. M., Kaptchuk, T., & Henrich, J. (June 2021) "Small gods, rituals, and cooperation: The Mentawai water spirit Sikameinan." Presentation at: Human Behavior & Evolution Society Conference; online.
- Singh. M. & Garfield, Z. H. (June 2021) "Third parties arbitrate but do not punish in Mentawai justice." Presentation at: Cultural Evolution Society Conference; online.
- 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

F = Fall; W = Winter; S = Spring

Professor

Human Evolutionary Biology, University of California, Davis (S-2024, S-2025)

Shamanism and Witchcraft, University of California, Davis (W-2025)

Ecology, Nature, and Society, University of California, Davis (F-2025)

Invited Instructor

Evolution, Behaviour, and Cognition, University of Auckland (S-2019, S-2020, S-2021, S-2022)

Evolution & Human Behaviour, University of Auckland (S-2020)

Teaching Assistant

Sophomore Tutorial in Human Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University (S-2019)

Game Theory & Social Behavior, Harvard University (F-2015)

Principles of Ecology, Brown University (S- 2011, S-2012)

Supervised Research

Evolution of Principled Behavior, Harvard University (S-2016)

Evolution of Music, Harvard University (F-2015)

Guest Lectures and Seminars

Andalas University; Boston University; California State University, Long Beach; École Normale Supérieure; Harvard University; Indiana University, Bloomington; Massachusetts Institute of Technology; Mind Foundation; Pennsylvania State University; Tufts University; University of Copenhagen; University of Kansas

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Journal Reviewing

American Anthropologist; American Psychologist; Behavioral and Brain Sciences; BioSystems; Clinical Psychology Review; Current Anthropology; Current Biology; Developmental Science; Emotion Review; Evolution and Human Behavior; Evolutionary Behavioral Sciences; Evolutionary Human Sciences; Human Nature; Humans; Journal of Experimental Child Psychology; Journal of Experimental Psychology: General; Journal of Psychology and Psychotherapy; Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute; Journal of the Royal Society Interface; Method and Theory in the Study of Religion; Nature; Nature Communications; Nature Human Behaviour; Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B; PLOS One; PNAS; PNAS Nexus; Proceedings of the Royal Society B; Religion, Brain, and Behavior; Religions; Science Advances; Social Psychological and Personality Science; Trends in Cognitive Sciences

University Service

2025– Cognitive Science Program Committee, University of California, Davis

Grant Reviewing

Cultural Evolution Society Transformation Fund; National Science Foundation

Other Service

2020– Member, Scientific Board on Cultural Behavior and Data Science, École Normale Supérieure

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 (native); Indonesian (conversational); Mentawai (conversational); Punjabi (conversational); Spanish (conversational); French (basic); Hindi (basic)

FIELDWORK EXPERIENCE

2024 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (July)
2022 Orinoco River Basin, Colombia (May, November)
2020 West Sumatra (Mentawai, Enggano), Indonesia (December–January)
2018 Tanna, Vanuatu (August)
2017 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (April–August; October–December)
2015 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (May–July)
2014 Siberut Island, Mentawai Archipelago, Indonesia (June–August)