

# Alberto Acerbi

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## Current position

Lecturer / Assistant professor  
Centre for Culture and Evolution, Department of Psychology, Brunel University London      2019 - current

## Areas of specialization

Cultural evolution, Cognitive anthropology, digital media, individual-based modelling, cultural analytics.

## Education

*PhD*, Anthropology, University of Siena (Italy)      November 2007  
*MA*, Philosophy (*cum laude*), University of Siena (Italy)      October 2002

## Previous positions

School of Innovation Science, Eindhoven University of Technology Researcher	2015 - 2019
Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, Bristol University (UK) Newton Research Fellow	2013 - 2014
Centre for the study of cultural evolution Stockholm University (Sweden) & University of Bologna (Italy) Post-doctoral researcher	2008 - 2012
Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig (Germany) Post-doctoral researcher	2007 - 2008
Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies, CNR, Rome (Italy) Research assistant	2004 - 2007

## Publications

### BOOKS:

1. **Acerbi A** (2020), *Cultural Evolution in the Digital Age*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
- translation in Arabic, Arab Scientific Publishers, Inc. (2021)
2. **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A, Smolla M (2022), *Individual-based models of cultural evolution. A step-by-step guide using R*, Routledge, in press. Online free version available at: <https://acerbialberto.com/IBM-cultevo>

### PREPRINTS:

1. Altay S, Berriche M, **Acerbi A** (2021), Misinformation on Misinformation: Conceptual and Methodological Challenges, available at: <https://psyarxiv.com/edqc8>
2. Youngblood M, Stubbersfield JM, Morin O, Glassman R, **Acerbi A** (2021), Cultural transmission bias in the spread of voter fraud conspiracy theories on Twitter during the 2020 US election, available at: <https://psyarxiv.com/2jksg>
3. **Acerbi A** (2021), Digital culture, available at: <https://osf.io/cjk4r/>
4. **Acerbi A**, Sacco PL (2021), The self-control vs. self-indulgence dilemma: A culturomic analysis of 20th century trends, available at: <https://osf.io/xgqt5/>
5. **Acerbi A** (2021), From storytelling to Facebook. Content biases when retelling or sharing a story, available at: <https://osf.io/br56y/>
6. **Acerbi A**, Snyder WD, Tennie C (2020), Ape cultures do not require behavior copying, available at: <https://www.biorxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.03.25.008177v1>

### JOURNALS:

1. **Acerbi A\***, Altay S\*, Mercier H (2022), Research note: Fighting misinformation or fighting for information?, *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*, 3, 1 (\*equal contribution)
2. **Acerbi A**, Charbonneau M, Miton H, Scott-Phillips T (2021), Culture without copying or selection, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 3, e50
3. Manvir S, **Acerbi A**, Caldwell C, Danchin E, Isabel G, Molleman L, Scott-Phillips T, Tamariz M, van den Berg P, van Leeuwen E, Derex M (2021), Beyond social learning, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200050
4. Morin O, Jacquet P, Vaesen K, **Acerbi A** (2021), Social information use and social information waste, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200052
5. Jansson F, Aguilar E, **Acerbi A**, Enquist M (2021), Modelling Cultural Systems and Selective Filters, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B*, 376, 20200045
6. **Acerbi A\***, Kerhoas D\*, Webber A, McCabe G, Mittermeier R, Schwitzer C (2020), The impact of the “World’s 25 Most Endangered Primates” list on scientific publications and media. *Journal for Nature Conservation*, 54, 125794 (\*equal contribution)
7. Brand CO, **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A (2019), Cultural evolution of emotional expression in 50 years of song lyrics, *Evolutionary Human Sciences*, 1, e11
8. Morin O, Sobchuk O, **Acerbi A** (2019), Why people die in novels: Testing the Ordeal Simulation Hypothesis, *Palgrave Communications*, 5, 2
9. **Acerbi A** (2019), Cognitive attraction and online misinformation, *Palgrave Communications*, 5, 15
10. Morgan TJH, **Acerbi A**, van Leeuwen EJC (2019), Copy-the-majority of instances or individuals? Two approaches to the majority and their consequences for conformist decision-making, *PLoS ONE*, 14(1), e0210748
11. **Acerbi A**, Tehrani J (2018), Did Einstein really say that? Testing content versus context in the cultural selection of quotations, *Journal of Cognition and Culture*, 18 (3-4), 293-311

12. Ruck D, Bentley RA, **Acerbi A**, Garnett P, Hruschka DJ (2017), Role of Neutral evolution in word turnover during centuries of English word popularity, *Advances in Complex Systems*, 20 (6-7), 1750012
13. **Acerbi A**, Kendal J, Tehrani J (2017), Cultural complexity and demography: the case of folktales, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 38 (4), 474-480
14. Morin O\*, **Acerbi A\*** (2017), Birth of the cool. A two-centuries decline in emotional expression in Anglophone fiction, *Cognition and Emotion*, 31 (8), 1663-1675 (\*equal contribution)
15. **Acerbi A** (2016), A cultural evolution approach to digital media, *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 10, 636
16. **Acerbi A\***, van Leeuwen EJC\*, Haun DBM, Tennie C (2016), Conformity cannot be identified based on population-level signatures, *Scientific Reports*, 6, 36068 (\*equal contribution)
17. van Leeuwen EJC, **Acerbi A**, Kendal RL, Tennie C, Haun DBM (2016), A re-appreciation of “conformity”, *Animal Behaviour*, 122, e5-e10
18. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C, Mesoudi A (2016), Social learning solves the problem of narrow-peaked search landscapes: experimental evidence in humans, *Royal Society Open Science*, 3(9): 160215
19. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C (2016), The effect of redundancy on cultural transmission and cultural stabilization, *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 130(1): 62-70
20. Pugliese F, **Acerbi A**, Marocco D (2015), Emergence of Leadership in a Group of Autonomous Robots, *PLoS ONE*, 10(9): e0137234
21. **Acerbi A**, Mesoudi A (2015), If we are all cultural Darwinians what’s the fuss about? Clarifying recent disagreements in the field of cultural evolution, *Biology & Philosophy*, 30(4): 481-503
22. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Herzog H (2014), Dog movie stars and dog breed popularity: A case study in media influence on choice, *PLoS ONE*, 9(9): e106565
23. **Acerbi A**, Bentley RA (2014), Biases in cultural transmission shape the turnover of popular traits, *Evolution and Human Behaviour*, 35(3): 228-236
24. Bentley RA, **Acerbi A**, Ormerod P, Lamos V (2014), Books Average Previous Decade of Economic Misery, *PLoS ONE*, 9(1): e83147
25. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Herzog H, Serpell JA (2013), Fashion vs. Function in Cultural Evolution: The case of Dog Breed Popularity, *PLoS ONE*, 8(9): e74770
26. **Acerbi A**, Lamos V, Garnett P, Bentley RA (2013), The expression of emotions in 20<sup>th</sup> century books, *PLoS ONE*, 8(3): e59030
27. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), Old and Young Individuals’ Role in Cultural Change, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulations*, 15(4): 1
28. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), The logic of fashion cycles, *PLoS ONE*, 7(3): e32541
29. **Acerbi A**, Jacquet P, Tennie C (2012), Behavioral constraints and the evolution of faithful social learning, *Current Zoology*, 58(2): 307-318
30. **Acerbi A**, Tennie C, Nunn CL (2011), Modeling imitation and emulation in constrained search spaces, *Learning & Behavior*, 39(2): 104-114
31. **Acerbi A**, Nunn CL (2011), Predation and the phasing of sleep: an evolutionary individual-based model, *Animal Behaviour*, 81(4): 801-811
32. **Acerbi A**, Enquist M, Ghirlanda S (2009), Cultural evolution and individual development of openness and conservatism, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*, 106(45): 18931-18935
33. **Acerbi A**, McNamara P, Nunn CL (2008), To Sleep or not to Sleep: The Ecology of Sleep in Artificial Organisms, *BMC Ecology*, 8(10): 1-12
34. **Acerbi A**, Parisi D (2006), Cultural Transmission Between and Within Generations, *Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulations*, 9(1): 1

## BOOK CHAPTERS / CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS:

1. Pianzola F, **Acerbi A**, Rebora S (2020), Cultural Accumulation and Improvement in Online Fan Fiction, in: *Proceedings of the Workshop on Computational Humanities Research* (Karsdorp F *et al.*, Eds.), CEUR: 2-11
2. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2014), Regulatory traits: cultural influences on cultural evolution, in: *Evolution, Complexity, and Artificial Life* (Cagnoni S *et al.*, Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 135-147
3. **Acerbi A**, Lampos V, Bentley RA (2013), Robustness of emotions extraction from 20<sup>th</sup> century English books, in: *IEEE BigData 2013 Proceedings*: 1-8
4. **Acerbi A**, Ghirlanda S, Enquist M (2012), Regulatory Traits in Cultural Evolution, in: *Proceedings of the Italian Workshop on Artificial Life and Evolutionary Computation* (Cagnoni S *et al.*, Eds.), University of Parma: 1-9
5. Pugliese S, **Acerbi A**, Miglino O, Marocco D (2012), Emergence of Leadership in a Group of Autonomous Robots, in: *Proceedings of the Post-Graduate Conference on Robotics and Development of Cognition*: 36-39
6. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D (2009), Orienting learning by exploiting sociality: an evolutionary robotics simulation, in: *IJCNN 2009 Conference Proceedings*, Piscataway, NJ, IEEE Press: 20-27
7. Marocco D, **Acerbi A** (2007), Adaptation and Social Facilitation in a Population of Autonomous Robots, in: *Proceedings of the Seventh International Conference on Epigenetic Robotics* (Berthouze L *et al.*, Eds.), Lund, Lund University Cognitive Science Series: 85-91
8. Cecconi F, Zappacosta S, Marocco D, **Acerbi A** (2007), Social and individual learning in a microeconomic framework, in: *Proceedings of the Econophysics Colloquium and Beyond*, Univeristy of Ancona
9. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D, Nolfi S (2007), Social Facilitation on the Development of Foraging Behaviors in a Population of Autonomous Robots, in: *Advances in Artificial Life. Proceedings of ECAL 2007* (Almeida e Costa F *et al.*, Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 625-634
10. **Acerbi A**, Parisi D (2007), The Evolution of Pain, in: *Advances in Artificial Life. Proceedings of ECAL 2007* (Almeida e Costa F *et al.*, Eds.), Berlin, Springer: 816-824
11. **Acerbi A**, Nolfi S (2007), Social Learning and Cultural Evolution in Embodied and Situated Agents, in: *Proceedings of the First IEEE Symposium on Artificial Life* (Abbass HA *et al.*, Eds.), Piscataway, NJ, IEEE Press: 333-340

## OTHERS:

1. **Acerbi A** (2021), Review of Joseph Henrich, The Weirdest People in the World, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture*, 5 (1): 91-96
2. **Acerbi A**, Brand C (2020), Why are pop songs getting sadder than they used to be?, *aeon*
3. **Acerbi A**<sup>\*</sup>, van Leeuwen EJC<sup>\*</sup>, Haun DBM, Tennie C (2018), Sigmoidal acquisition curves do not necessarily indicate conformity. Reply to Smaldino *et al.* (2018)", *Scientific Reports*, 8, 14016 (<sup>\*</sup>equal contribution)
4. **Acerbi A**, Sacco PL (2018), Folk-economic beliefs as "evidential fiction": Putting the economic public discourse back on track (Commentary on Boyer & Petersen), *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 41, e159
5. **Acerbi A** (2017), Review of Tim Lewens, Cultural Evolution: Conceptual Challenges, *Philosophy of Science*, 84(1)
6. **Acerbi A** (2013), The History of Our Emotions in Millions of Books, *Huffington Post (USA Edition)*
7. Ghirlanda S, **Acerbi A**, Enquist M, Nakamaru M (2010), The Sometimes Evitable Route to Conservatism and Persuasiveness. A Replay to Xue and Costopoulos, *Current Anthropology*, 51(2): 271-272
8. **Acerbi A**, Marocco D, Vogt P (2008), *Social Learning in Embodied Agents*, special double issue of *Connection Science*, 20(2-3)

**Recent/forthcoming conference presentations, invited talks and workshops**

- *Digital age: the long view*, CBEN Cultural Evolution, University of Tilburg, The Netherlands, November, 18-19, 2021 (keynote speaker)
- *Why is misinformation on misinformation successful?*, MatchPoints 2021 “Democracy and Culture in the Digital Age”, Aarhus University, Denmark, May, 27-29, 2021 (invited)
- *Attrattori culturali e disinformazione online*, La narrazione come incontro. Le teorie della narrazione tra cognizione, evoluzione e computazione, La Sapienza University, Roma, Italy, May, 21, 2021 (invited)
- *Digital age: the long view*, Centre for Logic and Philosophy of Science seminar, KU Leuven, Belgium, May, 14, 2021 (invited)
- *Digital age: the long view*, ROPH (Research on Online Political Hostility) seminar, Aarhus University, Denmark, April, 14, 2021 (invited)
- *From storytelling to Facebook. Content biases are stronger when retelling a story than when sharing it*, EHBEA 2021, online, March, 24-27, 2021
- *Cultural evolution in the digital age*, Plymouth Psychology Seminars, University of Plymouth, UK, November, 25, 2020 (invited)
- *Cultural evolution in the digital age*, Evolutionary Anthropology Seminars, University College London, UK, October, 20, 2020 (invited)
- *Cultural evolution on the web*, WebSci20, Southampton, UK, July, 7, 2020 (invited)
- *Digital age: the long view*, Seminar Series, Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University, UK, February 25, 2020 (invited)

**Teaching**

- Brunel University London, module co-leader - Psychology of social media - 2022
- Brunel University London, module leader - Statistics - 2022 and 2021
- Brunel University London, team taught modules - Evolutionary perspective on culture, Special topics in culture and evolution, Cross-cultural and evolutionary research methods - 2022, 2021 and 2020
- Brunel University London, guest lecturer - Individual differences, Introduction to Bioinformatics - 2020
- Ecole Normale Supérieure, guest lecturer - Introduction to Cognitive Social Sciences - 2020 and 2018
- Eindhoven University of Technology, module leader - Evolutionary Foundations of Innovation Science - 2018 and 2017
- University of West England, guest lecturer - Research Skills - 2018, 2015, and 2014
- Eindhoven University of Technology, teaching supervisor - Introduction to Modelling - 2017 and 2016
- University of Bristol, seminar series (8 seminars) - Anthropology and Well-being - 2015
- University of Bristol, guest lecturer - Contemporary Theory in Anthropology, Advanced Writing in Archaeology and Anthropology, Anthropological Methods - 2015 and 2014
- University of Bristol, teaching assistant - Contemporary Theory in Anthropology - 2013
- Stockholm University, guest lecturer - Human ethology - 2012 and 2011

**Supervision**

- two MSc projects and two BSc projects at Brunel University London (2020-2021)
- two MSc projects at Brunel University London (2019-2020)
- two MRes projects (co-supervision) at the University of Bristol (2014-2015)

## Academic service

### PhD PANEL MEMBER:

- Niels Lettinga: Environmental adversity and prosocial preferences, and a new methodology to increase the external validity of economic games, Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris - 2021
- Bradley Peter Walker: Evidence that Cultural Transmission Biases Differentially Influence Human Communication, The University of Western Australia - 2021
- Jose Segovia Martin: Social and cognitive constraints on the evolution of culturally transmitted variants: Models, experiments and theory, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona - 2020
- Simon Carrignon: Content-Dependent Biases in Social Learning Strategies: a multiscale approach, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona - 2019

## Grants and awards

- BRIEF award (2020): ~8,000 GBP
- Newton International Fellowship (2013-2014): ~187,000 GBP
- Wenner-Gren foundation (2010-2012): ~24,000 GBP

## Editorial board member

- Culture and Evolution (AKJournals)

## Reviewer

- **Books:** Berghahn Books, Cambridge University Press, MIT Press.
- **Grant Applications:** National Science Foundation (NSF), EHBEA 2014 Student Research Grant Competition, Swedish Research Council (Individual Grant Application), Knut and Alice Wallenberg Foundation (Wallenberg Academy Fellows)
- **Journals:** Acta Biotheoretica, Animal Behaviour, Advances in Complex Systems, Behaviour & Information Technology, Behavior Research Methods, Biology & Philosophy, Biology Letters, Cognitive Science, Cognitive Systems Research, Cognition, Connection Science, Current Zoology, Evolution and Human Behavior, Evolutionary Anthropology, Evolutionary Human Sciences, Evolution Medicine and Public Health, Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment, Frontiers in Psychology, IEEE Autonomous Mental Development, Interaction Studies, Journal of Evolutionary Psychology, Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulations, Journal of Cognition and Culture, Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, Journal of General Philosophy of Science, Journal of Theoretical Biology, Learning & Behavior, Mathematical Anthropology and Cultural Theory, Nature, Nature Human Behaviour, Nature Communications, New Media & Society, Palgrave Communications, Philosophy of Science, PLoS ONE, Proceedings of the Royal Society B, Royal Society Interface, SAGE Open, Scientific Reports, Synthese, The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science, Trends in Ecology and Evolution.
- **Conferences:** CHR2021, CHR2020, Applications in Cultural Evolution: Arts, Languages, Technologies 2018, ISBE 2016, ECSI 2014, ECAL 2013, EPOS V, WIVACE 2012, WIVACE 2008, SAB 2008, WIVACE 2007, ECAL 2007, EEG 2007, SAB 2006, WIVA III