Great strides have been made in the neurosciences towards understanding the neural mechanisms underlying human behaviors. After the discovery that macaques have neurons that discharge during both the observation and the execution of a movement, there was increasing interest and success at finding indirect evidence for the presence of these “mirror neurons” in humans as well. Although the ability to imitate is largely absent in monkeys, the link between recognizing and understanding action goals of other individuals and imitating the actions of other individuals does not seem a far evolutionary leap; therefore, several studies have confirmed the imitative ability of the mirror system in humans. The human mirror system has undergone several significant changes during the evolution of hominoids and hominins that as a result allowed for complex imitation, the unique ability for hierarchically complex learning of sequential information, and the ability to understand the intentions and emotions of others. These behaviors were necessary pre-adaptations for pedagogy, language, and complex culture. How and why these stages of mirror neuron evolution occurred are not clear from the neuroscience literature and may be better addressed by paleoanthropology. Herein, I argue that the process of Early Stone Age tool manufacture could have been a necessary selective pressure for these changes to the human mirror system. The results of a preliminary functional near-infrared spectroscopy experiment may shed some light on the involvement of the mirror system during Early Stone Age tool production in modern humans under varying communicative, pedagogical contexts.

Based on ethnographic research conducted over the course of a year, this paper explores aging female sex workers' struggles for legitimacy and worker rights in Costa Rica. Using narrative and interview data collected in and around Asociacion La Sala (an NGO located in the red-light district of San José, which fights for the rights of sex workers and attempts to provide a variety of care services to female sex workers), I examine the role of history and identity in these women's strategies to improve their daily living and working conditions. In the process I interrogate the promise that history and a consolidated identity hold for these women as they seek political representation and state benefits.