

Research Statement

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As a research assistant in a project on racism in Portugal led by Jorge Vala at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais,¹ I was puzzled by the conceptual ambiguity of social psychological approaches to groups, so during my PhD studies with Assaad Azzi at the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* I worked on the psychological distinction between social entities (i.e. units) and social categories.² As a postdoc researcher at CIS/ISCTE-IUL, I adopted a relational-models approach to social interactions,³ which assumes that humans relate to each other in four ways: communal, authority, equality, and market. Together with Sven Waldzus, I developed an experimental programme to test the effects of embodied constitutions of these models on group processes and intergroup relations.⁴ We found that touching and commensalism enhance ingroup communal sharing but not intergroup favouritism,⁵ and synchronicity (vs alternation) enhances the cognitive salience of communal sharing vs equality matching.⁶

Since moving to ULHT, I have started applying the relational models perspective to team settings. I have found that communalism mediates positive effects of touching on well-being and team performance,⁷ and have started a programme to test these effects experimentally.⁸ I have started collaborating with the core psychology research team at ULHT on their digitally-based cognitive stimulation programmes,⁹ as well as with Jorge Oliveira in particular in his work on neurocognitive processes in perception¹⁰ and neuroendocrinology,¹¹ with a view to gain a sounder footing to address hormonal and psychophysiological processes involved in the constitution of communal relations. Finally, I am collaborating in a cross-cultural analysis of the use of relational models in different types of groups and the psychological needs they fulfil.¹²

Underlying my current research and future plans is the concern with psychological 'glue' for social relations. First, I want to understand better the role of the communal (bonding) cognitive model of relating in the effects of touching on psychophysiological responses and subjective well-being. Second, I would like to study the role of oxytocin in the cognitive salience of communal stimuli (although the high cost of placebo development requires broader collaborations). Third, I want to continue to study social/cultural variation in the use of the relational models. Finally, fourth I want to further explore the role of the different relational models in the spread and resilience of social networks, based on my previous work.

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¹ Vala, J., Brito, R., & Lopes, D. (1999). *Expressões dos racismos em Portugal: perspectivas psicossociológicas* [Expressions of racisms in Portugal]. Lisboa: Instituto de Ciências Sociais.

² Brito, R., & Azzi, A. E. (2004). On the psychological distinction between social categories and social entities: A replication in Germany and Belgium. *Proceedings of the 2nd Workshop on Social Psychology in Belgium*. Brussels: Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie van België.

³ Brito, R., Waldzus, S., Sekerdej, M., & Schubert, T. (2011). The contexts and structures of relating to others: How memberships in different types of groups shape the construction of interpersonal relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 28(3): 406-431.

⁴ Cognitive Models of Intergroup Relations (PTDC/PSI/64219/2006) funded by the *Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia* with €135.000.

⁵ Brito, R., Waldzus, S., Schubert, T., Louceiro, A., Sekerdej, M., & Simão, C. An ingroup love that does not beget favouritism: Food sharing, touching, and communal relations.

⁶ Waldzus, S., Louceiro, A., Brito, R., & Schubert, T. W. The next dance is mine: Communitarity and equality expectations towards equivalent ingroup and outgroup members

⁷ Brito, R. (2013, June). Heart and Soul. Connected bodies, represented union. *Workshop in embodied and relational social psychology*. Colares, Portugal.

<http://embodiedsocialpsychology.wordpress.com/about/program/>

⁸ Brito, R., Oliveira, J., Morais, D., Waldzus, S., Gamito, P., & Barata, F. (registered study accepted for topic) The soothingly social touch: Does touch soothe through social proximity and facilitate further proximity? *Frontiers in Psychology* (specialty Frontiers in Cognition) Special Issue on Mechanisms of well-adjusted and disordered self-soothing: From Oxytocin and Thermo-Regulation to Addiction and Emotional Coping (Eds. M. Tops, H. Ijzerman, F. Buisman-Pijlman & S. Koole).

⁹ Gamito, P., Oliveira, J., Lopes, P., Morais, D., Brito, R., Saraiva, T., Bastos, M., Cristóvão, S., Caçôete, C., & Picareli, F. A. (2013). Assessment of frontal brain functions in alcoholics following a health mobile cognitive stimulation approach. In B. Wiederhold & G. Riva (eds). *Studies in Health Technology and Informatics* 191: 110-115.

¹⁰ Oliveira, J., Brito, R., Morais, D., Mariño-Lourenço, R., Barata, F., & Gamito, P. (in press). A pupillometric approach to the study of strength of memory signal following intra- and interhemispheric word recognition. In P. Gamito & P. Rosa (Eds): *I see me, you see me: Inferring cognitive and emotional processes from gazing behavior*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

¹¹ Nunes, M. B., Oliveira, J., & Brito, R. (submitted). Improvements in urinary serotonin levels and subjective mood states following intervention with occlusal splints for temporomandibular disorder.

¹² Onuki, M., Brito, R., Fiske, A., & Lickel, B. (in preparation). Relational models and psycho-social needs in groups: cross-cultural analyses