

# Gecia Bravo-Hermsdorff

RESEARCH FELLOW · DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICAL SCIENCE @ UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON (UCL)  
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I DESIGN PRINCIPLED STATISTICAL TOOLS AND LEARNING ALGORITHMS FOR STRUCTURED DATA, SUCH AS GRAPHS, AND FOR PROBLEMS IN CAUSAL INFERENCE, MODEL SELECTION, AND PRIVATE LEARNING.

## Education

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### Princeton University

Princeton, NJ, USA

PHD IN QUANTITATIVE & COMPUTATIONAL NEUROSCIENCE ([link](#))

2020

- *Dissertation*: “Quantifying human priors over abstract relational structures”
- *Selected courses (hyperlinked)*: Random graphs and networks, Mathematical physics, Natural algorithms, Theory of deep learning, Complex analysis, Statistical learning and nonparametric estimation, Machine learning & pattern recognition, Optimal learning, Abstract algebra, Computational complexity, Statistical optimization and reinforcement learning, Stochastic processes on graphs

### École Normale Supérieure (ENS Ulm)

Paris, France

RESEARCH MASTER IN COGNITIVE SCIENCES AND NEUROSCIENCE ([link](#))

2011

- *Dissertation*: “Neural basis of self-contingency detection in 5-month-old babies”

DIPLÔME DE L'ENS ([link](#))

2011

- Admitted via the “International Selection in Science” ([link](#))
- Three-year multidisciplinary program, coursework included: Computational neuroscience, Cognitive science, Decision theory, Biophysics, Logic, Mathematics, Statistics, Modeling, Ecology and evolutionary biology, Philosophy of science, Theoretical chemistry

BACHELOR OF SCIENCE ([link](#))

2009

## Employment

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### Dept of Statistical Science - University College London

London, UK

RESEARCH FELLOW

2022 - now

- **Causal Graphical Models for Relational Data** ( $\geq$  Oct 2023, with Kayvan Sadeghi): Systematically categorizing the conditional independence structures induced by natural maximum-entropy models of growing random networks, analyzing their asymptotic distributions, and characterizing the relevant notions of intervention.
- **Extrapolating Interventions** ( $\leq$  Oct 2023, with Ricardo Silva): Using our framework of *interventional factor graphs*, we show when and how data collected under different interventions can be used to characterize the outcome of (unseen) combinations of interventions ([link](#)). Currently working on a project on causal inference with *imperfect instrumental variables*.

### Google Research - Algorithms and Theory

US (remote) and London, UK

AI RESIDENT

2020 – 2022

- **Privacy**: Leading author on a paper proposing a class of data collection protocols that offer anonymity to users without the need for a fully-trusted central entity ([link](#)).
- **Geometric Deep Learning**: Developed and implemented (in TensorFlow) a permutation and rotation equivariant neural network architecture for analyzing images of cells from drug discovery experiments, with the aim of identifying compounds that are likely to be effective against the dormant phase of the parasite responsible for Malaria.
- **Graphs**: Implemented (production code in C++) a method for scalable computation of graph cumulants with up to 3 edges [G&B-H 2020 ([link](#))], with the aim of detecting atypical patterns of information propagation in social networks.
- **Entropy**: Developed private and communication efficient algorithms for estimating entropies (work published at NeurIPS, 2022). Implemented the algorithm from [Jian et al 2015 ([link](#))] for computing entropy in the sparse data regime (production code in C++).

# Teaching

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## PROBABILITY AND STATISTICS II STAT0005 (UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON) [\(link\)](#)

Fall 2023

- Last mandatory course for bachelors and masters students in the Statistical Science Department, lectures given by Kayvan Sadeghi. Topics included: transformation of random variables, relations between standard distributions, statistical estimation, consistency, method of moments, Bayesian inference, conjugate priors, asymptotic guarantees.
- I held three one-hour tutorial sessions per week covering the students' homework and questions.

## BIOMATH BOOTCAMP (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY) [\(link\)](#)

Summer 2016

- Month-long training in mathematical and computational tools for incoming PhD students in the computational neuroscience and computational biology programs, organized by Carlos Brody.
- I lectured for the probability module, and held afternoon sessions for exercises in: programming (Python), linear algebra, ordinary differential equations (ODEs), nonlinear dynamical systems, probability, Fourier transforms, convolutions, and signal processing.

## INTRODUCTION TO COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY) [\(link\)](#)

Spring 2015

- I held three one-hour sessions per week discussing relevant journal publications, and helped construct and grade the exams.

## LAB FOR INTRODUCTION TO EXPERIMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY (PRINCETON UNIVERSITY)

Fall 2014

- I held a weekly three-hour lab session with introductory lectures and exercises in: statistical analysis, MRI, EGG, psychophysics, experimental design, programming, computational modeling, and game theory.

# Awards and fellowships

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- **TOP REVIEWER AWARD FOR LEARNING ON GRAPHS (LOG) CONFERENCE (PRIZE OF \$1,500)** 2023
- **GOOGLE AI RESIDENCY NYC (ALGORITHMS AND THEORY BRANCH)** 2020–2022  
Competitive position for exploring research at Google
- **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH GRANT (\$5,000)** 2019  
Funding awarded by the Princeton Cognitive Science Department to selected research proposals
- **SCHOLARSHIP FOR LAKE COMO SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDIES IN COMPLEX NETWORKS** May, 2016
- **COGNITIVE SCIENCE GRADUATE FELLOWSHIP** 2016–2017
- **SCHOLARSHIP FOR BRAINS, MINDS AND MACHINES SUMMER SCHOOL** August, 2015
- **SCHOLARSHIP FOR SAMSI BAYESIAN NONPARAMETRICS WORKSHOP** July, 2015
- **PRINCETON PHD FELLOWSHIP** 2013–2019
- **ÉCOLE NORMALE SUPÉRIEURE (ENS ULM) “INTERNATIONAL SELECTION IN SCIENCE”** 2008
- **SCHOLARSHIP BY THE LIONS CLUB TO STUDY FRENCH LITERATURE IN FRANCE** Summer, 2006
- **BRAZILIAN CNPQ “SCIENTIFIC INITIATION” SCHOLARSHIP** 2006–2008
- **ENTRANCE EXAM FOR BIOMEDICAL SCIENCES DEGREE AT THE UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO DE JANEIRO** 2006  
Top Brazilian undergraduate program in biomedical sciences, completed 2 of 4 years before moving to France
- **99TH PERCENTILE AT THE EXAME NACIONAL DE ENSINO MÉDIO (ENEM)** 2005  
Nationwide exam for Brazilian students after high school
- **TRAVEL AWARDS FOR PRESENTING AT CONFERENCES:**  
YES causal inference workshop, Eindhoven, 2023 [\(link\)](#);  
Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) Scholar Award, 2022 and 2019  
NeurIPS Women in Machine Learning, 2018 and 2017  
International Conference on Complex Systems (ICCS), 2018  
Society for Industrial and Applied Mathematics (SIAM) Annual Meeting, 2018  
Multidisciplinary Conference in Reinforcement Learning and Decision Making (RLDM), 2017 and 2015  
International Conference on Mathematical Neuroscience (ICMNS), 2017  
Austin Memory & Learning Conference, 2015

# Publications

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**BOUNDING CAUSAL EFFECTS WITH LEAKY INSTRUMENTS.** [\(link\)](#)

DS Watson, J Penn, LM Gunderson, [G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), A Mastouri & R Silva. *UAI, 2024* [\(code\)](#)

**THE GRAPH PENCIL METHOD: MAPPING SUBGRAPH DENSITIES TO STOCHASTIC BLOCK MODELS.** [\(link\)](#)

LM Gunderson, [G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#) & P Orbanz. *NeurIPS, 2023* [\(poster\)](#)

**INTERVENTION GENERALIZATION: A VIEW FROM FACTOR GRAPH MODELS.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), DS Watson, J Yu, J Zeitler & R Silva. *NeurIPS, 2023* [\(code, poster\)](#)

**QUANTIFYING NETWORK SIMILARITY USING GRAPH CUMULANTS.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#)<sup>\*</sup>, LM Gunderson<sup>\*</sup>, PA Maudis & CE Priebe.

*Journal of Machine Learning Research (JMLR)*, 24(187):1-27, 2023

**QUANTIFYING HUMAN PRIORS OVER SOCIAL AND NAVIGATION NETWORKS.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#). *ICML, 2023* [\(demo, poster\)](#)

**PRIVATE AND COMMUNICATION-EFFICIENT ALGORITHMS FOR ENTROPY ESTIMATION.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), R Busa-Fekete, M Ghavamzadeh, A Muñoz Medina & U Syed. *NeurIPS, 2022* [\(video\)](#)

**STATISTICAL ANONYMITY: QUANTIFYING REIDENTIFICATION RISKS WITHOUT REIDENTIFYING USERS.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), R Busa-Fekete, LM Gunderson, A Muñoz Medina & U Syed. *arXiv, 2022*

**INTRODUCING GRAPH CUMULANTS: WHAT IS THE VARIANCE OF YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK?** [\(link\)](#)

LM Gunderson<sup>\*</sup> & [G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#)<sup>\*</sup>. *arXiv, 2020* [\(video, code\)](#)

**QUANTIFYING HUMAN PRIORS OVER ABSTRACT RELATIONAL STRUCTURES.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#). *Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University, 2020* [\(slides, demos\)](#)

**A UNIFYING FRAMEWORK FOR SPECTRUM-PRESERVING GRAPH SPARSIFICATION AND COARSENING.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#)<sup>\*</sup> & LM Gunderson<sup>\*</sup>. *NeurIPS, 2019* [\(video, demos, code, poster\)](#)

**GENDER AND COLLABORATION PATTERNS IN A TEMPORAL SCIENTIFIC AUTHORSHIP NETWORK.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), V Felso, E Ray, LM Gunderson, ME Helander, J Maria & Y Niv.

*Applied Network Science*, 4(1), 2019 [\(dataset\)](#)

**MODELING THE HEMODYNAMIC RESPONSE FUNCTION FOR PREDICTION ERRORS IN THE VENTRAL STRIATUM.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#) & Y Niv. *bioRxiv, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, 2019*

**QUANTIFYING HUMANS' PRIORS OVER GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TASKS.** [\(link\)](#)

[G Bravo-Hermsdorff](#), TD Pereira & Y Niv.

*Unifying Themes in Complex Systems IX. ICCS, Springer Proceedings in Complexity*, 281–290, 2018

*\*denotes equal contribution*

# Summer schools

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**MACHINE LEARNING SUMMER SCHOOL (MLSS)** [\(link, my video ~9min\)](#)

MAX PLANCK INSTITUTE FOR INTELLIGENT SYSTEMS

Summer 2020

Tübingen, Germany (virtual)

**COMPLEX NETWORKS: THEORY, METHODS, AND APPLICATIONS** [\(link\)](#)

LAKE COMO SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDIES

May 2016

Lake Como, Italy

**BRAINS, MINDS AND MACHINES (BMM) SUMMER COURSE** [\(link\)](#)

MIT CENTER FOR BRAINS, MINDS AND MACHINES

August 2015

Woods Hole, MA, USA

**BAYESIAN NONPARAMETRICS: SYNERGIES BETWEEN STATISTICS, PROB AND MATH** ([link](#))  
STATISTICAL AND APPLIED MATHEMATICAL SCIENCES INSTITUTE (SAMSI)

June 2015  
Durham, NC, USA

**COMPUTATIONAL AND COGNITIVE NEUROBIOLOGY SUMMER SCHOOL** ([link](#))  
COLD SPRING HARBOR LABORATORY ASIA

July 2010  
Suzhou, China

## Academic service and activities

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### Reviewer

#### JOURNALS

- Scandinavian Journal of Statistics (2023); Socio-Economic Planning Sciences (2019); Trends in Cognitive Sciences (2017)

#### CONFERENCES

- Learning on Graphs Conference (LoG) 2023; International Conference on Machine Learning (ICML) (2023, 2022); Conference on Neural Information Processing Systems (NeurIPS) (2022); WHMD 2021 NeurIPS workshop; NeurIPS Women in Machine Learning (2017, 2018)

### Mentoring

#### GRADUATE

- Jordan Penn — *PhD student at King's University College* Winter 2023–now  
I am helping supervise his project on analyzing phase transitions in dynamical network models.
- Emma Graham (now PhD student at Dartmouth) — *Master's student at UCL Center for Artificial Intelligence* Summer 2023  
I helped supervise her MSc thesis project on using Voronoi diagrams to study catastrophic forgetting in reinforcement learning.

#### UNDERGRADUATE

- Cristian Andronic — *Computer science major at Princeton University* 2016  
I proposed and supervised a project to build a navigation App to collect data for modeling naturalistic human mobility.
- Daniel J. Wilson (now PhD student at University of Toronto) — *Volunteer intern at Princeton Neuroscience Institute (PNI)* 2015  
I proposed and supervised a project involving coding a contextual bandit task in MTurk ([link](#)) to model human representation learning.
- Caitlyn Cap and Olamilekan Sule — *Summer interns at the Botvinick lab on PNI* 2014

### Science outreach

#### VOLUNTEER AT THE THE PRINCETON NEUROSCIENCE FAIR

Princeton, March 2018

- Event with fun neuroscience demonstrations for 4th grade of low-income households from the Christina Seix Academy.

#### SCIENCE OUTREACH VOLUNTEER AT STEM CIVICS CHARTER SCHOOL

Ewing, NJ, April 2017

- I performed a demonstration of a cerebellar illusion using glasses that distort ones aim as they throw a ball.

#### PEDAGOGY TRAINING

- One day workshop by the Alda Center for Communicating Science ([link](#)). Princeton, October 2018

### Hackathons

#### WEEKEND-LONG MIT QUANTUM HACKATHON (IQUHACK) ([link](#))

Remote, Feb 2024

- I worked on the IonQ challenge to reverse-engineer quantum circuits ([link](#)).

#### DAY-LONG BIOHACKATHON BY PRECISIONLIFE AND ME RESEARCH UK ([link](#))

UCL, Feb 2024

- Exploratory analysis of a large database of single nucleotide polymorphisms (SNPs) correlated with Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME).

#### WEEK-LONG PNI-INTEL HACKATHON ON MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF FMRI DATA

Princeton, Jan 2017

## Languages

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- **Human:** (BRAZILIAN) PORTUGUESE (*native*), ENGLISH & FRENCH (*fluent*), SPANISH (*basic*)
- **Computer:** PYTHON & MATLAB (*fluent*), MATHEMATICA, QISKIT, C++ & R (*functional*), JAVASCRIPT & HTML (*basic*)

## Selected talks

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- **A TAXONOMY OF CAUSAL MODELS FOR GROWING NETWORKS**  
*Northeastern University London Meeting on Networks and Time II, 2024* ([link](#))
- **CUMULANTS FOR NETWORKS**  
*Algebraic and Combinatorial Perspectives in the Mathematical Sciences (ACPMS), 2022* ([link](#))
- **GRAPH CUMULANTS: WHAT IS THE VARIANCE OF YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK?**  
*Learning with Graphs Summit (Google), 2022*
- **GRAPH CUMULANTS: WHAT IS THE VARIANCE OF YOUR SOCIAL NETWORK?**  
*Graph Mining Meeting (Google), 2021*
- **STATISTICAL ANONYMITY: QUANTIFYING REIDENTIFICATION RISK WITHOUT REIDENTIFYING USERS.**  
*Chrome Privacy Budget Meeting, 2021*
- **USING GRAPH CUMULANTS TO DETECT ATYPICAL PATTERNS OF INFORMATION SPREAD IN SOCIAL NETWORKS.**  
*MML Eng Meeting (Google), 2021*
- **ENTROPY ESTIMATION OF HIGH-DIMENSIONAL SPARSE DATASETS.**  
*Chrome Privacy Budget Meeting, 2021*
- **GRAPH REDUCTION BY EDGE DELETION AND EDGE CONTRACTION.**  
*International Conference on Complex Systems (ICCS), 2018*
- **QUANTIFYING PEOPLE'S PRIORS OVER GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATIONS OF TASKS.**  
*International Conference on Complex Systems (ICCS), 2018*
- **GRAPH REDUCTION BY EDGE DELETION AND EDGE CONTRACTION.**  
*SIAM workshop on network science (SIAMNS18), 2018*
- **CHARACTERIZING PEOPLE'S PRIORS OVER NAVIGATION TASK STRUCTURE.**  
*Princeton Cognitive Science Lunchtime Talk, 2017*
- **ASSESSING DECISION-MAKING IN PATIENTS WITH INSULA LESION USING VARIOUS NEUROECONOMIC TASKS.**  
*Regional conference in neuroeconomics at the Duke center for interdisciplinary decision sciences, 2016*

## Other research experiences

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- PHD CANDIDATE AT THE NIV LAB** ([link](#)) *Princeton University, 2014 – 2019*
- I developed methods to efficiently quantify human priors over relational data by exploiting the relevant underlying symmetry ([link](#)).
- PHD RESEARCH ROTATION AT THE BOTVINICK LAB** *Princeton University, 2013 – 2014*
- RESEARCH SCHOLAR IN NEUROECONOMICS AT THE MONTAGUE LAB** ([link](#)) *Virginia Tech, 2011–2013*
- I developed and validated computational models to explain human behavioral data from various neuroeconomic experiments, such as, multi-armed bandit tasks and the repeated ultimatum game. *Advisors:* Read Montague and Terry Lohrenz
- MASTER'S STUDENT AT THE COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND PSYCHOLINGUISTIC LAB** ([link](#)) *ENS Ulm, Paris, 2011*
- Researched the neural substrates of self-contingency detection in babies using functional near-infrared spectroscopy (fNIRS). I designed, coded, and built the experimental apparatus, and recorded and analyzed data from 61 babies. *Advisor:* Emmanuel Dupoux
- RESEARCH INTERNSHIP AT CALTECH EMOTION AND SOCIAL COGNITION LAB** ([link](#)) *Caltech, Pasadena, Spring 2010*
- I designed and carried out behavioral experiments to analyze whether humans express values learned via Pavlovian conditioning in an unrelated task without their conscious awareness. *Advisors:* Naotsugu Tsuchiya and Ralph Adolphs
- RESEARCH INTERNSHIP AT THE DEVELOPMENT AND NEUROPHARMACOLOGY LAB** ([link](#)) *Collège de France, Paris, 2009*
- Researched the molecular mechanisms involved in the emergence of cellular territories during the morphogenesis of the neural tube. *Advisors:* Elizabeth Di Lullo and Alain Prochiantz
- UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT AT THE PHYSIOLOGY OF COGNITION LAB** ([link](#)) *UFRJ, Brazil, 2007–2008*
- Studied the physiology of the visual system in monkeys (using intracranial recordings) and humans (using EEG). *Advisor:* Mário Fiorani

**RESEARCH INTERNSHIP AT THE INSTITUTE OF NEUROBIOLOGY ALFRED FESSARD** [\(link\)](#) CNRS, Gif-sur-Yvette, Summer 2007

- Researched the development of the neural crest by grafting quail and chick embryos *in ovo*. Advisors: Sophie Creuzet

## Three selected publications

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**QUANTIFYING NETWORK SIMILARITY USING GRAPH CUMULANTS.** [\(link\)](#)

G Bravo-Hermsdorff\*, LM Gunderson\*, PA Maugis & CE Priebe.

*Journal of Machine Learning Research (JMLR)*, 24(187):1-27, 2023 [\(video, code\)](#)

**A UNIFYING FRAMEWORK FOR SPECTRUM-PRESERVING GRAPH SPARSIFICATION AND COARSENING.** [\(link\)](#)

G Bravo-Hermsdorff\* & LM Gunderson\*. *NeurIPS*, 2019 [\(video, demos, code, poster\)](#)

**QUANTIFYING HUMAN PRIORS OVER SOCIAL AND NAVIGATION NETWORKS.** [\(link\)](#)

G Bravo-Hermsdorff. *ICML*, 2023 [\(demo, poster\)](#)