

# Marius C. Vollberg

University of Zurich, Blümlisalpstrasse 10

✉ marius.vollberg@econ.uzh.ch

## Academic Positions

---

### SNSF Ambizione Group Leader

University of Zurich (collaborating institution: Swiss Center for Affective Sciences)

since 09/2024

Zurich, CH

### SNSF Postdoctoral Researcher

Universities of Geneva and Amsterdam

09/2022 – 08/2024

Multinational

Collaborators: Prof. David Sander, Prof. David M. Amodio, and Prof. Todd A. Hare

## Education

---

### Harvard University

PhD in Psychology (Cognition, Brain, & Behavior), 4.0/4.0

08/2022

Cambridge, US

Dissertation: "Algorithmic ingredients of bounded prosociality: Affective signals, empathy, and episodic simulation."

Dissertation committee: Prof. Mina Cikara, Prof. Daniel L. Schacter, Prof. Elizabeth A. Phelps, and Prof. David Sander

### Swiss Center for Affective Sciences

Visiting PhD Student and Swiss Government Excellence Scholar

09/2020 – 08/2021

Geneva, CH

Advisors: Prof. David Sander and Prof. Patrik Vuilleumier

### University College London

MSc in Social Cognition, highest distinction (best in cohort)

11/2015

London, UK

Thesis supervisors: Prof. Christoph Mathys, Prof. Molly J. Crockett, and Prof. Raymond J. Dolan

### University of Zurich

BSc in Psychology, Economics, and Biology, magna cum laude

07/2014

Zurich, CH

Thesis supervisors: Prof. Grit Hein and Prof. Philippe N. Tobler

## Publications (lead investigator unless noted otherwise)

---

### Unpublished

Dashti, D., Hare, T.A., & Vollberg, M.C. (in prep). People form and use inferences based purely on others' simple affective responses to outcomes. (trainee lead author)

Vollberg, M.C., & Gross, J. (under review). Selfish and prosocial individuals both distort their actions' impact, but

only selfish distortions are contagious.

### Published

Vollberg, M.C., Sander, D., & Hare, T.A. (2025). Trial-by-trial learning signatures in self-reported affect require introspection and are orthogonal to social choice. *Emotion*.

Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (2025). Postoutcome valence, not emotion prediction errors, as a primary predictor of behavior. *Collabra: Psychology*.

Vollberg, M.C., Stussi, Y., Pool, E.R., & Sander, D. (2025). Emotion and prediction errors: Which ingredients matter? *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*.

Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B.B., Vuilleumier, P., Sander, D., & Cikara, M. (2025). Place-related representations in setting the stage for empathy. *Cognition*.

Vollberg, M.C., & Sander, D. (2024). Hidden reward: Affect and its prediction errors as windows into subjective value. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 33, 93-99.

Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (2024). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggression.

*Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, 153, 1551-1567.

**Vollberg, M.C., Gaesser, B., & Cikara, M.** (2021). Activating episodic simulation increases affective empathy. *Cognition*, 209, 104558.

Werner Y.B., Hakanson, B., Martinek, J., Repici, A., von Rahden, B.H.A., Bredenoord, A.J., Bisschops, R., Messman, H., **Vollberg, M.C.**, et al. (2019). Endoscopic or surgical myotomy in patients with idiopathic achalasia. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 381, 2219-2229. (lead: methods, analysis; co-lead: writing)

**Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M.** (2018). The neuroscience of intergroup emotion. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 24, 48-52.

Hein, G., Engelmann, J.B., **Vollberg, M.C.**, & Tobler, P.N. (2016). How learning shapes the empathic brain. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 113, 80-85. (lead: software; co-lead: data collection)

## Grants, Awards, and Fellowships

### Grants.....

<b>Swiss NSF Ambizione Grant</b>	09/2024
<i>Swiss National Science Foundation (PI)</i>	<u>Bern, CH</u>

<b>Mind, Brain, Behavior Graduate Student Grant</b>	03/2020
<i>Mind, Brain, Behavior Interfaculty Initiative, Harvard University (PI)</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>2 x Anderson Research Grant</b>	04/2020 and 11/2020
<i>Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University (PI)</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>McMaster Research Grant</b>	04/2020
<i>Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University (PI)</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Professional Development Grant</b>	5/2019
<i>Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>6 x Elsie Hopestill Stimson Travel Grant</b>	2016-2022
<i>Department of Psychology, Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

### Awards.....

<b>Young Scientist Award</b>	09/2025
<i>Swiss Psychological Society</i>	<u>Bern, CH</u>

<b>Certificate of Distinction in Teaching</b> (graduate statistics)	03/2020
<i>Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Certificate of Distinction in Teaching</b> (undergraduate abnormal psychology)	09/2019
<i>Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Certificate of Distinction in Teaching</b> (graduate statistics)	03/2019
<i>Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Most Outstanding Student of the Year</b>	11/2015
<i>Department of Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Brain Sciences, University College London</i>	<u>London, UK</u>

### Fellowships.....

<b>Swiss NSF Postdoctoral Fellowship (Mobility)</b>	09/2022
<i>Swiss National Science Foundation</i>	<u>Bern, CH</u>

<b>Dissertation Completion Fellowship</b>	09/2021
<i>Harvard University</i>	<u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Swiss Government Excellence Fellowship</b>	09/2020
<i>Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI)</i>	<u>Bern, CH</u>

<b>Sinclair Kennedy Fellowship</b> <i>Harvard University (alternate for predoctoral stay in Geneva funded by SERI)</i>	09/2020 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Behavioral Science in the Field Program Fellowship</b> <i>MIT and Busara Center for Behavioral Economics</i>	01/2020 <u>Nairobi, Kenya</u>
<b>Fellowship in Psychobiology</b> <i>Sackler Oversight Committee, Harvard University</i>	09/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Full PhD Scholarship</b> <i>Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University</i>	08/2016 <u>Cambridge, US</u>

## Selected Conference Presentations and Other Talks

- Vollberg, M.C., & Sander, D., & Hare, T.A. (September 2025). Dissecting the analogy between affective and reward prediction errors. *Swiss Psychological Society Conference*.
- Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B., Sander, D., Vuilleumier, P., & Cikara, M. (May 2024). Place-related neural activity in setting the stage for empathy. *BBL/CIBM/FCBG Research Day*.
- Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B., Sander, D., Vuilleumier, P., & Cikara, M. (March 2024). The interplay between episodic simulation and empathy. *Annual Conference of the Society for Affective Sciences*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Sander, D., & Hare, T.A. (April 2023). Properties and predictiveness of affective prediction errors. *E3 Lab, Swiss Center for Affective Sciences*.
- Vollberg, M.C. & Sander, D. (November 2022). Hidden reward: Affect and its prediction errors as windows into subjective value. *Annual Research Forum, Swiss Center for Affective Sciences*.
- Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B., Sander, D., Vuilleumier, P., & Cikara, M. (May 2022). The interplay between episodic simulation and empathy. *Meeting of the Social and Affective Neuroscience Society*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (April 2022). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *Harvard Social Psychology Brownbag*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (March 2022). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *Phelps Lab, Harvard University*.
- Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B., Sander, D., Vuilleumier, P., & Cikara, M. (January 2022). The neural interplay between episodic simulation and empathy. *Alpine Brain Imaging Meeting*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (December 2021). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *Amodio Lab, New York University*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Gaesser, B., & Cikara, M. (June 2021). Episodic simulation sets the stage for empathic processing across political groups. *European Society for Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*. (chair)
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (April 2021). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *E3 Lab, Swiss Center for Affective Sciences*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (March 2021). Affective prediction errors in aggressive behavior. *Societal Challenges Seminar, University of Geneva*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Gaesser, B., & Cikara, M. (April 2020). The role of episodic memory in emotion. *Harvard Cognition, Brain, & Behavior Brownbag*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Hofer, M., & Cikara, M. (June 2019). Social learning and decisional constraints in the exploration of uncertain environments. *Aegina Summer School in Social Cognition*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Gaesser, B., & Cikara, M. (May 2019). Episodic simulation and intergroup empathy: Setting the stage for empathic processing. *31st Association for Psychological Science Convention*. (chair)
- Vollberg, M.C., Hofer, M., & Cikara, M. (April 2019). New perspectives on reactance theory. *Harvard Social Psychology Brownbag*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (April 2017). What do we mean by appraisal? Specifying determinants of empathic and counter-empathic emotions. *Harvard Social Psychology Brownbag*.

## Poster Presentations

---

- Dashti, D., Hare, T.A., & Vollberg, M.C. (June 2025). Computational principles in social inference from observed affect. *Psychologie und Gehirn Conference 2025*.
- Dashti, D., Hare, T.A., & Vollberg, M.C. (February 2025). Are inferences from observed affect sensitive to reinforcement learning principles? *Annual Research Forum, Swiss Center for Affective Sciences*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Sander, D., & Hare, T.A. (January 2025). Properties and predictiveness of affective prediction errors. *Alpine Brain Imaging Meeting*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Sander, D., & Hare, T.A. (July 2024). Properties and predictiveness of affective prediction errors. *Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (March 2023). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *International Convention for Psychological Science*.
- Vollberg, M.C., & Cikara, M. (February 2023). Affective prediction errors in persistence and escalation of aggressive behavior. *Society for Personality and Social Psychology*.
- Vollberg, M.C., O'Connor, B., Sander, D., Vuilleumier, P., & Cikara, M. (January 2023). Scene imagery sets the stage for empathy. *Alpine Brain Imaging Meeting*.
- Vollberg, M.C., Hofer, M., & Cikara, M. (July 2019). New perspectives on reactance theory: Don't tell me what to do unless \_\_\_\_\_? *Annual Conference of the Cognitive Science Society*.

## Research Experience and Training

---

<b>Swiss Center for Affective Sciences</b> <i>Swiss Government Excellence Scholar — Prof. David Sander and Prof. Patrik Vuilleumier</i>	09/2020 – 08/2021 <u>Geneva, CH</u>
<b>MIT GOV Lab &amp; Busara Center for Behavioral Economics</b> <i>Behavioral Science in the Field Program Fellow — Board of advisors (more than 5)</i>	01/2020 – 02/2020 <u>Nairobi, Kenya</u>
<b>Computational Cognitive Science Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology</b> <i>Cross-registration and research project — Prof. Joshua B. Tenenbaum and Dr. Matthias Hofer</i>	09/2018 – 01/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Computational Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, Harvard University</b> <i>Lab meetings and presentations — Prof. Samuel J. Gershman</i>	09/2017 – 05/2020 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Department of Psychology, Harvard University</b> <i>PhD student — Prof. Mina Cikara, Prof. Daniel L. Schacter, and Prof. Elizabeth A. Phelps</i>	09/2016 – 11/2022 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>World Health Organization Headquarters</b> <i>Assistant for the revision of the ICD and Zika emergency response — Dr. Tarun Dua</i>	01/2016 – 03/2016 <u>Geneva, CH</u>
<b>Emotion and Decision Making Lab &amp; Max Planck-UCL Centre</b> <i>Graduate student researcher — Prof. Raymond J. Dolan</i>	09/2014 – 11/2015 <u>London, UK</u>
<b>Zurich Center for Neuroeconomics, University of Zurich</b> <i>Research assistant — Prof. Philippe N. Tobler</i>	09/2013 – 06/2014 <u>Zurich, CH</u>
<b>Zurich Center for Neuroeconomics, University of Zurich</b> <i>Research intern — Prof. Philippe N. Tobler</i>	06/2013 – 08/2014 <u>Zurich, CH</u>

## Teaching Experience

---

<b>Teaching fellow for Intermediate Statistical Analysis in Psychology</b> <i>Department of Psychology, Harvard University — Dr. Patrick Mair</i>	09/2019 – 12/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Teaching fellow for Abnormal Psychology</b> <i>Department of Psychology, Harvard University — Prof. Joshua Buckholtz</i>	01/2019 – 05/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Teaching fellow for Intermediate Statistical Analysis in Psychology</b> <i>Department of Psychology, Harvard University — Dr. Patrick Mair</i>	09/2018 – 12/2018 <u>Cambridge, US</u>

<b>Teaching assistant for Computer-based Data Analysis</b> <i>Chair of Methods, Evaluation, and Statistics, University of Zurich — Prof. Carolin Strobl</i>	02/2013 – 05/2013 <u>Zurich, CH</u>
--	--

## Mentoring and Supervision

<b>Grace Han</b> <i>Undergraduate thesis student (role: co-supervisor)</i>	Fall 2025 <u>Zurich, CH</u>
<b>Damon Dashti</b> <i>PhD student researcher (role: supervisor)</i>	since 12/2024 <u>Zurich, CH</u>
<b>Marla Dressel</b> <i>Postgraduate researcher (role: co-supervisor)</i>	09/2022 – 12/2022 <u>Amsterdam, NL</u>
<b>Marie Zocca</b> <i>Undergraduate research intern (role: supervisor)</i>	07/2021 – 09/2021 <u>Geneva, CH</u>
<b>Fares Alouf</b> <i>Graduate research intern (role: supervisor)</i>	11/2020 – 11/2020 <u>Geneva, CH</u>
<b>Patricia Sieweyumptewa</b> <i>Undergraduate Summer Research Opportunities at Harvard (SROH; role: supervisor)</i>	06/2020 – 08/2020 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Maribelle Dickins</b> <i>Undergraduate research assistant (role: supervisor)</i>	09/2019 – 05/2020 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Hannah Pearson</b> <i>Undergraduate Summer Research Opportunities at Harvard (SROH; role: supervisor)</i>	06/2018 – 08/2018 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Johnna O’Sullivan</b> <i>Undergraduate research assistant (role: co-supervisor)</i>	09/2017 – 12/2017 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Chrystal Spencer</b> <i>Undergraduate Summer Research Opportunities at Harvard (SROH; role: supervisor)</i>	06/2017 – 08/2017 <u>Cambridge, US</u>

## Other Relevant Experience

<b>SPSP Roundtable for International Students</b> <i>Hosted a mentoring event for international graduate students and postdocs</i>	02/2022 <u>Atlanta, US</u>
<b>Methods Dinners</b> (workshops and talks) <i>Department of Psychology, Harvard University — co-organized with Prof. Tessa Charlesworth</i>	01/2019 – 12/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>German American Conference at Harvard</b> <i>Member of the organizing committee for the largest student-run transatlantic conference</i>	09/2017 – 11/2019 <u>Cambridge, US</u>
<b>Students’ Union, University of Zurich</b> <i>Elected member of the council and sustainability commission</i>	09/2013 – 07/2014 <u>Zurich, CH</u>
<b>Psychology Students’ Association, University of Zurich</b> <i>Mentor for first-year students</i>	09/2012 – 07/2014 <u>Zurich, CH</u>

## Service

**Ad-hoc reviewing:** Affective Science; Cognition; Cognition and Emotion; Cognitive, Affective, and Behavioral Neuroscience; Communications Psychology; Emotion; Motivation Science; Journal of Experimental Social Psychology; Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin; PNAS Nexus; Proceedings of the Cognitive Science Society; Psychological Research; Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology; Social Psychological and Personality Science; Social Psychology.

**Event organization:** Meeting group on Social Cognition at the University of Amsterdam (co-organizer); Harvard Social Psychology Brownbag (assistance); Social and Affective Neuroscience Society Conference (assistance); and the Annual Convention of the Society for Personality and Social Psychology (assistance).