

Marius C. Vollberg

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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Unpublished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.....

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| Swiss NSF Ambizione Grant | 09/2024 |
| Swiss National Science Foundation (PI) | <u>Bern, CH</u> |
| Mind, Brain, Behavior Graduate Student Grant | 03/2020 |
| Mind, Brain, Behavior Interfaculty Initiative, Harvard University (PI) | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| 2 x Anderson Research Grant | 04/2020 and 11/2020 |
| Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University (PI) | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| McMaster Research Grant | 04/2020 |
| Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University (PI) | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| Professional Development Grant | 5/2019 |
| Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| 6 x Elsie Hopestill Stimson Travel Grant | 2016-2022 |
| Department of Psychology, Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |

Awards.....

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| Young Scientist Award | 09/2025 |
| Swiss Psychological Society | <u>Bern, CH</u> |
| Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (graduate statistics) | 03/2020 |
| Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (undergraduate abnormal psychology) | 09/2019 |
| Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| Certificate of Distinction in Teaching (graduate statistics) | 03/2019 |
| Derek Bok Center For Teaching And Learning, Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| Most Outstanding Student of the Year | 11/2015 |
| Department of Experimental Psychology, Faculty of Brain Sciences, University College London | <u>London, UK</u> |

Fellowships.....

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| Swiss NSF Postdoctoral Fellowship (Mobility) | 09/2022 |
| Swiss National Science Foundation | <u>Bern, CH</u> |
| Dissertation Completion Fellowship | 09/2021 |
| Harvard University | <u>Cambridge, US</u> |
| Swiss Government Excellence Fellowship | 09/2020 |
| Swiss State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (SERI) | <u>Bern, CH</u> |

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

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. *Amadio 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

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

Teaching Experience

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

Mentoring and Supervision

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

Other Relevant Experience

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