



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Melbourne School of
Psychological Sciences

Ethics & Well-being Hub

The science of doing good and feeling well



ETHICS AND WELL-BEING RESEARCH HUB

One of the fundamental questions of human existence is: how should one live? Drawing on theories and methods from across psychology, we study the psychological processes that contribute to living ethically and well.

The Ethics and Well-being Hub seeks to develop and integrate expertise across social, personality, clinical, and developmental psychology—along with research in emotion, neuroscience, and decision making—to better understand how people make ethical decisions, how these decisions are shaped by processes within and around them, and how these factors influence their quality of life and mental health.

The Hub is innovative in its goal of linking the psychological study of morality and emotion processes. In doing so, it examines how benefiting others can also benefit the self and contribute to human flourishing. Hub researchers seek to develop an understanding of how acting ethically and experiencing well-being and personal meaning are intertwined. Taking seriously the interaction of the individual and their social context, it will generate new knowledge on how individual health and welfare interact with the social and cultural environment, and on the central importance of ethical behaviour to the 'good life'.

The Ethics & Well-being Hub is a unique initiative with a critical mass of researchers that will enable strong intellectual and social innovation.

ENGAGE WITH US

We welcome community and industry participation and seek to enable our partners to leverage our expertise in ethics and well-being research.

The Ethics and Well-being Hub is a highly active, collaborative, and internationally networked group of researchers who foster and lead rewarding partnerships world-wide. Drawing on a framework that links morality and emotion, Hub members conduct basic and applied research into the key social issues of our time.

These include:

- Understanding the causes and consequences of human conflict and cooperation
- Promoting sustainable environmental behaviour and animal protection
- Sustaining positive organizational culture and ethical business practices
- Uncovering what makes some people exemplary moral champions
- Understanding how culture contributes to mental illness
- Determining the most effective ways to regulate our emotions
- Discovering the benefits of a sense of meaning and purpose in life

Whether you are interested in sponsoring a research project, or forging a long-term strategic alliance, we'll help you launch a successful and rewarding collaboration with researchers who are leaders in their fields.



OUR RESEARCH

We will address key social issues of our time, such as understanding the antecedents and consequences of human conflict and cooperation, uncovering the determinants of sustainable environmental behaviour and animal protection, revealing the sources of positive organizational culture and ethical business practices, understanding moral exceptionalism and the factors that distinguish moral champions, tackling the intersection of values and psychological disorder, clarifying the most effective methods of emotion regulation and the temporal dynamics of mood, and probing the factors that impart a sense of meaning and purpose in life.

SOCIAL ACTION LABORATORY

Social Action Laboratory is primarily concerned with the antecedents and consequences of meaningful human social action. As we engage in meaningful everyday activities, we are influenced by our social and cultural landscape, while simultaneously participating in its construction. Our focal point of interest is cultural dynamics, namely, the stability and change of culture over time, and how our everyday activities (e.g., language use, storytelling, interpersonal interactions) contribute to the formation, maintenance, and transformation of culture. The current focus of the Lab's research activities is on culture and sustainability. Broadly conceived, that is, how culture intersects with sustainable lifestyles, and how we can transform our own cultures so that we can meet our needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their needs. We conduct theoretical and empirical investigations about how social and cultural processes can be harnessed for sustainable living.

psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/research/msps-research-groups/social-action-laboratory

SOCIAL/PERSONALITY LABORATORY

The Social/Personality Laboratory explores how people think about human diversity, including phenomena such as dehumanization, objectification and the stigma of mental illness. It also examines the nature of mental illness, and how it should be conceptualized, measured and classified. The Lab's main current focus is on how our culture is changing to become more sensitized to harm and suffering. We are carrying out people's concepts of mental illness, prejudice, trauma and other harm-related ideas are shifting, and what the societal consequences of those shifts might be for mental health and social harmony.

psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/research/msps-research-groups/social-personality-laboratory

MORAL PSYCHOLOGY LABORATORY

The Moral Psychology Laboratory is dedicated to understanding the psychological bases of moral and ethical judgment, decision-making and behaviour. We draw upon social and cognitive psychology to explore the nature of morality and sociality, how people make moral judgments, biases inherent in ethical decision making, and factors that shape ethical reflection and behaviour. By better understanding how moral decisions and behaviours unfold, we hope to offer insight into ways of improving ethical decision-making in public and private life.

psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/research/msps-research-groups/moral-psychology-laboratory

PERSONALITY PROCESSES LABORATORY

Our personalities shape our lives in profound ways. Personality helps explain why different people seek out different environments and experiences and respond in different ways to the same situations and events. Our traits are also readily perceived by others and influence how they behave towards us—thereby moulding our social world. The Personality Processes Laboratory seeks to expand our knowledge of the structure of personality, along with its underlying causes and downstream consequences for various aspects of our lives. One major strand of this work has sought to identify how personality is linked with wellbeing and human happiness: Which traits are most important for which aspects of wellbeing? What are the mechanisms through which our personality shapes the experienced quality of our lives? And how may efforts to boost well-being impact positively or negatively on people as a function of their personalities? Another major research focus concerns the links that personality traits have with prosociality and morality: What characteristics distinguish morally exceptional individuals from the average person? Who is more likely to give money to charity, or to help someone in need? How does our personality influence the principles we apply to distinguish right from wrong? Details of these and other projects within the Personality Processes Laboratory can be found on our website.

psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/research/msps-research-groups/personality-processes-laboratory

FUNCTIONS OF EMOTIONS IN EVERYDAY LIFE (FEEL) RESEARCH LABORATORY

Research conducted in the FEEL Laboratory explores emotional functioning across a variety of contexts in daily life. Our research focuses on how people's feelings fluctuate as well as when and how people seek to influence their emotions across time and situations. Emotions are present in almost every moment of our daily lives, adding colour to our experience of the world. Emotions can range from mild enjoyment or annoyance—often triggered by everyday pleasures or hassles, to intense joy or sadness—usually in response to more momentous events. While our emotions are often very helpful, they can also be incompatible with our goals or incongruent with situational demands. People may therefore often seek to control and manage how and when their emotions unfold using a variety of strategies. This ability to regulate emotions is thought to be critical to health and well-being. Our research explores people's emotion goals (i.e., how do people want to feel and why?), which strategies people use to manage their emotions, and how effective various means of emotion regulation are in different situations. The overarching aim of our research is to develop a richer understanding of everyday emotional functioning and its relation with psychological well-being and adjustment.

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PHYSICAL APPEARANCE RESEARCH TEAM

The Physical Appearance Research team is deepening our understanding of the myriad ways that human physical appearance manifests in, and impacts upon, our everyday lives. Members are conducting research on eating disorders and disordered eating behaviours, muscle dysmorphia and anabolic-androgenic steroid dependence, height and genital dissatisfaction and their potential modification, body ideals and adherence to masculine and feminine gender roles, body idealising social media content including thinspiration and fitspiration, measure and scale development for physical appearance constructs, weight stigma and weight discrimination, and the stigmatisation of psychological disorders for which physical appearance is central.

psychologicalsciences.unimelb.edu.au/research/msps-research-groups/physical-appearance-research-team

BEHAVIOURAL ETHICS, AFFECT AND MEANING (BEAM) LABORATORY

The BEAM lab is focused on examining motivational and affective processes involved in ethical decision-making and behaviour, how people regulate and respond to negative experiences, and determinants and consequences of living a meaningful life. Through this focus we tackle issues such as the ethics of meat-eating, how moral intuitions motivate environmental conservation and shape human cooperation, why aesthetic factors are important for moral decision-making, and the underlying processes leading to moralization. We also explore the role of adversity in promoting social connection and resilience, the relationship between meaning in life and prosocial action, how culture is critical to understanding the mental illness epidemic, and why the value we place on positive emotion may be doing more harm than good.

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OUR PEOPLE

DIRECTOR



Associate Professor Brock Bastian
Director, Ethics and Well-being Hub

In his search for a new perspective on what makes for the good life, Brock Bastian has studied why promoting happiness may have paradoxical effects; why we need negative and painful experiences in life to build meaning, purpose, resilience, and ultimately greater fulfilment in life; and why behavioural ethics is necessary for understanding how we reason about personal and social issues and resolve conflicts of interest. His first book, *The Other Side of Happiness*, was published in January 2018.

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MEMBERS



Professor Yoshihisa Kashima
Director, Social Action Laboratory

Yoshi's current research goal is to develop a social psychological theory of cultural dynamics, that is, how individuals' context specific activities in interaction with each other can generate and transform what we call culture. More specific projects include cultural comparisons in self and identity, narrative social influence in cultural transmission and transformation, cultural dynamics of nationalism, patriotism, and stereotyping, and connectionist modelling of cultural processes.

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Professor Nick Haslam
Director, Social/Personality Laboratory

Nick's research interests are in the fields of personality, social psychology and psychiatric classification, and he has published extensively in these and related areas. He is an international leader in research on dehumanization, objectification, stigma, social relationships and mental health. Within the university he is Co-Director of the Mental Health PhD program and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Graduate).

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Professor Simine Vazire
Professor, Ethics and Well-being

Simine is currently Director of the Personality and Self-Knowledge Lab at the University of California, Davis, and will join the Hub full-time in 2020. Her research interests include the limits of insight and self-knowledge, new methods for assessing personality and experience, and how personality and social relationships contribute to well-being. She is also an influential advocate for improving the validity of psychological research.

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Dr Simon Laham
Director, Moral Psychology Laboratory

Simon studies the social and cognitive bases of morality and sociality. He is interested in how people make moral decisions and what biases undermine ethical decision making. In trying to understand the factors that shape ethical behaviour and moral decision-making Simon seeks to offer insight into ways of improving ethical decision-making in public and private life.

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Associate Professor Luke Smillie
Director, Personality Processes Laboratory

Luke studies the structure, causes, and consequences of personality. Personality refers to regularities in behaviour and experience, summarised along several trait dimensions that can be usefully organised within taxonomic systems (e.g., the “Big Five”). Among other topics, Luke is interested in the psychological and biological processes that underlie major personality traits; how our personality influences our wellbeing and emotional experiences; and the interplay of personality, prosociality, and morality.

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Dr Katie Greenaway
Co-director, Functions of Emotions in Everyday Life (FEEL) Research Laboratory

Katie’s research focuses on social functioning in three main domains: identity processes, emotion regulation, and human agency. At its heart, Katie’s research aims to understand the formation and consequences of social connections between people. Katie conducts two broad programs of work that address these research goals. Katie’s first line of research explores how emotions shape our social connections, focusing on how emotion can be regulated to create social harmony or social distance. Katie’s second line of work explores how and why social groups improve personal and social functioning, with consequences for individual health and well-being as well as group productivity and communication.

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Dr Peter Koval
Co-director, Functions of Emotions in Everyday Life (FEEL) Research Laboratory

Pete’s research interests lie at the intersection of personality, social and clinical psychology, with a focus on emotional processes. He is interested in how the patterns of fluctuations in people’s feelings and their attempts to regulate their emotions relate to well-being and mental health. One of the central questions in Pete’s research is whether it is better to be emotionally flexible versus emotionally stable. To address these interests, Pete often studies emotional functioning in daily life by tracking people’s momentary feelings and their efforts to influence how they feel across everyday situations using smartphone surveys. The over-arching aim of Pete’s research is to understand what constitutes healthy emotional functioning in different everyday contexts.

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Dr Khandis Blake
Lecturer and Co-director, Physical Appearance Research Team

Khandis is an expert on the psychology of gender relations who uses nature/nurture frameworks to reduce conflict between men and women. Her research addresses big issues that profoundly influence people’s mental, social and economic wellbeing, including sexual conflict, female competitiveness, female and male empowerment, and intimate partner violence. The ultimate guiding principle of her work is to understand how insights from psychology and biology can be used to promote gender equity.

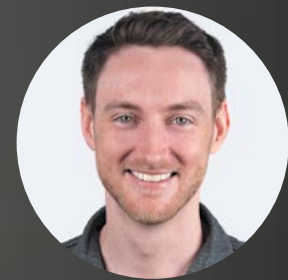
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Dr Elise Kalokerinos
Lecturer and ARC DECRA Fellow

Member, Functions of Emotions in Everyday life (FEEL) Research Laboratory. Elise studies how we manage and control our emotions, thoughts, and behaviours. This group or processes is called self-regulation, and the ability to self-regulate is at the heart of effective psychological functioning. However, it’s an area in which we face many challenges, and these challenges stand in the way of achieving our most important goals. Elise’s research focuses on how we can understand and harness self-regulatory skills, with a particular focus on the regulation of emotion—a domain in which self-control failures are both common and costly.

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Dr Scott Griffiths
Lecturer and Co-director, Physical Appearance Research Team

Scott’s research focuses on physical appearance in three main domains: (i) the experience and perpetration of appearance-related discrimination (e.g., weight stigma and ageism), (ii) the use of appearance-enhancing substances (e.g., anabolic steroids) and procedures (e.g., cosmetic surgeries), and (iii) the development, prevention and treatment of appearance-focused psychological disorders (e.g., eating disorders and body dysmorphic disorders).

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CONTACT US

We welcome your interest in our Hub. If you want to know more, or explore opportunities for collaboration, please contact the Ethics & Well-being Hub.

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