Research Statement

My research uses lab experiments to examine questions relating to Law and Economics, particularly the role race and communal norms play in deciding individuals' investment into cooperation with police and general pro-social behaviors. Specifically, I've used instruments such as "stealing games'', a unique twist on the ultimatum game sometimes referred to as the "reverse dictator" game where players are paired up given the chance to "steal" part of an endowment that has been "earned" by their partner, have provided unique insights into pro-social and anti-social behavior as well as the effectiveness of deterrence schemes and general public policy.

The way we speak about the decisions respondents make in these experiments is often very different from how these choices are presented to them. The majority of these papers attempt to use "neutral" language meant to foster a lab environment that is "context-free." This is consistently the case in studies that use stealing games as they describe the act of stealing as "transferring money from the other player's account to your own."The justification for doing this is based on legitimate concerns about not wanting to unintentionally introduce bias into the decisions of respondents. Presenting an action as "stealing" may give it negative moral connotations and dissuade respondents from choosing to do it. Yet, draining this action of its moral character may defeat the purpose of the experiment. Studying crime necessitates understanding why individuals may choose to take immoral actions to benefit themselves. Additionally, we cannot be sure that actions taken in this "neutral" environment are similarly indicative of real world behaviors for all groups.

In my job market paper, I examine how supposedly "context-free" environments designed for experiments focused on crime and punishment can be interpreted very differently by White and Black respondents. This is because there's reason to believe White and Black Americans have very different perceptions of and relationships with the police and other government institutions. Thus, its logical to assume that whether or not they are mentioned in our presentation of the game and the decisions available to respondents can potentially have very different effects on a White or Black respondents. With this in mind, how can we be certain that our approach is not unintentionally tailored more to one group than the other? The results of this experiment do indeed suggest that what we call "context-free" may not actually carry the same meaning for all groups. Whilst the willingness to steal reported for White respondents reflected a unique behavioral response to all frames, the willingness to steal of Black respondents in a "context-free" environment appeared to mirror their decisions in a game of explicit chance held in a casino rather than their much more reticent actions in the frame that explicitly mentioned the possibility of repercussions from the police. This suggests that behaviors of respondents may be more or less indicative of real world preferences based on racial group even in a supposedly "neutral" setting. It may then be pertinent to re-evaluate how respondents may have read context into a scenario they've been

presented with when interpreting results inherited from previous experiments, particularly in regards to race-treatment group comparisons.

I also examined the effect of priming in the paper "Social Identity and Preferences: A Replication," which I co-authored with Nathan Fiala. In this paper, we attempted to replicate the results of a 2010 experimental study that stated Asian Americans were primed to make more patient choices when their ethnic heritage was made more salient– in keeping with predictions of Self-Categorization theory. The original paper was motivated by the revealed investment priorities of Asian Americans and how their higher average investment into human capital and higher willingness to invest in tax-deferred savings accounts set them apart from other identity groups. However, the possibility of convenience sampling was particularly troubling for this experiment as the study was conducted on a sample of students from Ivy league universities and thus would only give insight into those with already high capital accumulation. In conducting a replication study on a sample of the general population with a greater diversity in educational attainment, we failed to corroborate the result that priming Asian American respondents towards their ethnic heritage, using an adapted version of the original priming questionnaire adapted for non-students, made them choose more patient options when asked to complete the same choice games as the original study. These results suggest not only that the replicability of lab results and the robustness of claims should be rigorously tested, but that it is important to keep your sampling methodology in mind when considering the population your results speak to.

My research journey has additionally taught me to be vigilant about the accuracy of my tools outside the lab. This led me to address the topic of possible racial disparities in the use of force by police theoretically in the paper "Non-homogenous Force and Factors that can Obscure Racial Bias in its Application by Police" which I co-authored with Mike Shor. This paper notes that Black and White suspects, as mentioned above, approach interactions with police very differently due to heterogeneous preparation strategies for such encounters used by Black and White families. This suggests Black and White suspects may invest into cooperation with police differently in such interactions. We ultimately formulated a theoretical model that makes officer use of force a function of investment into cooperation and define racial bias in policing, not as a disparity in the observed rate of force used against suspects, but a willingness by officers to apply force at a higher rate of cooperation for a member of one racial group than another. This means racial bias in the application of force can exist even when there is no evidence of differences in observed rates of force, showing how racial bias may be concealed in empirical investigations of officer-involved shootings and other "high level" uses of force. Furthermore, the number of distinct levels of force can make this bias harder to detect empirically.

Ultimately, I believe lab-based experiments are a valuable complement to empirical investigations of behavior. This is especially true in instances where the true

motivations that may inform actions may be concealed or misidentified by too hasty an analysis of empirical data. My work is largely motivated by a want to help refine analytical tools through examinations of experimental procedure, and looking for blindspots in conventional approaches touted by the literature. In the future, I look to design an experiment to see if investment into compliance is heterogeneous across identity groups in interactions with police, as it is massively pertinent to the theoretical results I have previously explored with colleagues that may complicate the identification of racial bias in policing. Yet, doing so will require that I delve much deeper into experimental design to ensure the behaviors I look at are properly indicative of real world behaviors for all groups.