Curriculum Vitae
September 2024

Lucas C. Coffman
Boston College Economics
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EDUCATION Harvard University, Ph.D., Business Economics, 2010
Case Western Reserve University, B.A., Mathematics, Economics, '04

PRINCIPAL EMPLOYMENT

01/20 – present	Assistant Professor of Economics, Boston College
07/16 – 12/19	Visiting Associate Professor of Economics, Harvard University
08/10 – 06/16	Assistant Professor, Department of Economics, Ohio State University
	Granted tenure by Ohio State Economics in spring 2016
08/14 – 07/15	Visiting Assistant Professor of Economics, Stanford University
08/11 – 03/12	Visiting Assistant Professor of Economics, Yale School of Management

RESEARCH AND TEACHING INTERESTS

Applied Microeconomics, Experimental Economics, Development Economics, Behavioral

TEACHING

As Instructor
PhD Experimental Economics: Boston College, Harvard Business School, Ohio State
Undergraduate Experimental Economics: Boston College, Harvard University, Ohio State
PhD and Undergrad Research Methods in Behavioral & Experimental Econ: Ohio State
MBA Answering Questions using Experiments: Yale School of Management

As assistant, both at Harvard
PhD Experimental Economics, for Alvin Roth
Undergraduate Policy Applications of Psychology & Economics, for Sendhil Mullainathan

PUBLICATIONS

"Non-Binary Gender Economics"
Forthcoming at *Journal of Political Economy: Microeconomics*
With Katherine Coffman and Keith M Marzilli-Ericson

Economics research has largely overlooked non-binary individuals. We investigate many of their economically-important beliefs and preferences. Average differences include: Non-binary individuals report more gender-based discrimination and less workplace inclusion than men or women. Anti-non-binary sentiment is stronger than anti-LGBT sentiment, and strongest among men. Non-binary respondents report lower assertiveness and confidence. They have different career and life aspirations, valuing career prosociality more and having children less. Their social preferences are similar to men's and less prosocial than women's, with age an important moderator. Stereotypes are inaccurate, as respondents often mistake the direction of group gender differences or exaggerate their size.

"Liquidity for Teachers: Evidence from Teach for America and LinkedIn"
Economics of Education Review, December 2023, 97
With John J Conlon, Clayton Featherstone, Judd Kessler, and Jessica Mixon

There are teacher shortages in the U.S. and around the world. In a three-year field experiment with a large teacher placement program, Teach For America (TFA), Coffman, Conlon, Featherstone and Kessler (2019) finds that providing upfront liquidity to prospective teachers in financial need dramatically increases the rate at which they start teaching through TFA. In this paper, we combine TFA administrative data, survey data, and publicly available data (e.g., LinkedIn profiles) to extend those results. We follow individuals for a few years post treatment and find that providing upfront liquidity not only increases the rate that financially constrained individuals join TFA but also increases the rate that they complete the full two years of teaching. Further, providing liquidity to those who need it increases their likelihood of being teachers at all—not just through TFA—through at least two years.

"Pathways of Persuasion" (unformatted, ungated version)
Games and Economic Behavior, November 2020, 124: 239-253
With Paul Niehaus

While economic theories of persuasion emphasize the role of self-interest, others emphasize other-regard. To study these pathways, we introduce a simple experimental framework where sellers use free-form conversation to convince buyers to raise their valuations for objects. We find sellers more frequently target buyers' self-interest, and changes in self-interest explain more variation in persuasion overall. Additionally, sellers' gains along one pathway come at a considerable cost along the other. However, when sellers target other-regard, they are at their most persuasive.

[Expectations Do Not Affect Punishment](#) [(unformatted free version)](#)
The Journal of the Economic Science Association, December 2019, 5: 182—196.

Expectations-based reference dependence has been shown to be important across a variety of contexts in Psychology and Economics. Do expectations play a role in moral judgment? The higher our beliefs are relative to an outcome, do we punish more harshly? This paper reports a series of experiments investigating the hypothesis that expectations as reference points per se affect punishment. The experimental design varies the expectation the Punisher holds just before she learns what actually occurred. In tandem with the manipulation, expectations are shown to vary significantly and substantially. However, punishment does not respond to these exogenous changes in expectations. After 17 sessions, 295 Punishers, and six experimental setups, expectations are shown not to affect punishment in any systematic way.

[“Liquidity Affects Job Choice: Evidence from Teach For America”](#)
The Quarterly Journal of Economics, November 2019, 134(4): 2203—2236.
With [John Conlon](#), [Clayton Featherstone](#), and [Judd Kessler](#)

Can access to a few hundred dollars of liquidity affect the career choice of a recent college graduate? In a three-year field experiment with Teach For America (TFA), a prestigious teacher placement program, we randomly increase the financial packages offered to nearly 7,300 potential teachers who requested support for the transition into teaching. The first two years of the experiment reveal that while most applicants do not respond to a marginal $600 of grants or loans, those in the worst financial position respond by joining TFA at higher rates. We continue the experiment into the third year and self-replicate our results. For the highest need applicants, an extra $600 in loans, $600 in grants, and $1,200 in grants increase the likelihood of joining TFA by 12.2, 11.4, and 17.1 percentage points (or 20.0%, 18.7%, and 28.1%), respectively. Additional grant and loan dollars are equally effective, suggesting a liquidity mechanism. A follow-up survey bolsters the liquidity story and also shows that those pulled into teaching would have otherwise worked in private sector firms.

[“Moral Perceptions of Advised Actions”](#) [(unformatted free version)](#)
Management Science, August 2019, 65(8): 3449—3947
With [Alexander Gotthard-Real](#)

Can an organization avoid blame for an unpopular action by hiring an adviser to advise them to do it? We present experimental evidence suggesting this is the case -- advice to be selfish substantially decreases punishment of being selfish. Further, this result is true despite advisers' misaligned incentives, known to all: Through a relational contract, advisers are incentivized to tell the decision-makers what they want to hear. In follow-up treatments, we show advice does not decrease punishment solely by affecting beliefs of how necessary the selfish action was. Finally, in treatments where advisers are available, selfish decision-makers act more selfishly.

[“The Size of the LGBT Population and the Magnitude of Anti-Gay Sentiment are Substantially Underestimated”]
Management Science, October 2017, 63(10): 3168—3186.
With [Katherine Coffman] and [Keith M Marzilli-Ericson]

We demonstrate widely-used measures of the LGBT population and anti-gay sentiment are misestimated, likely substantially. We experimentally compare standard methodology of questioning about sexual identity and anti-gay sentiment (direct questions, privacy, and anonymity) to a “veiled” methodology that precludes inference about an individual but provides population estimates. The veiled method increased self-reports of non-heterosexual identity by 65 percent, same-sex sexual experiences by 59 percent. Self-reports of *anti*-gay sentiment also rose substantially (e.g. discomfort with a gay manager). Most existing data on sensitive behaviors and beliefs rely on self-reports, but our results show respondents may lie even with privacy and anonymity.

[“Assessing the Rate of Replications in Economics”]
American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings, May 2017, 107(5): 27—31.
With [James Berry], [Rania Gihleb], [Douglas Hanley], and [Alistair J Wilson]

We assess the rate of replication for empirical papers in the 2010 American Economic Review. Across seventy empirical papers, we find that 29 percent have one or more citation that partially replicates the original result. While only a minority of papers has a published replication, a majority (sixty percent) have either a replication, robustness test or an extension. Surveying authors within the literature we find substantial uncertainty over the number of extant replications.

[“A Proposal for Promoting and Incentivizing Replications”]
American Economic Review, Papers and Proceedings, May 2017, 107(5): 41—45.
With [Muriel Niederle] and [Alistair J Wilson]

We make a two-pronged proposal to (i) strengthen the incentivizes for replication work and (ii) better organize and draw attention to the replications that are conducted. First we propose that top journals publish short "replication reports." These reports could summarize novel work replicating an existing high-impact paper, or they could highlight a replication result embedded in a wider-scope published paper. Second, we suggest incentivizing replications with the currency of our profession: citations. Enforcing a norm of citing replication work alongside the original would provide incentives for replications to both authors and journals.

[“Can Subtle Provision of Social Information Affect What Job You Choose (and Keep)? Experimental Evidence from Teach For America”]
American Economic Journal: Applied Economics, January 2017, 9(1): 96—117.
With [Clayton Featherstone] and [Judd Kessler]

It has been well documented that information about the actions of others can affect small-stakes decisions. We show that a subtle provision of such social information can also influence a very high-stakes decision: whether to take (and keep) a job as a public school teacher. In an experiment involving thousands of admits to Teach For America (TFA), those provided with data about the high matriculation rate in the previous year are more likely to accept the job. Moreover, this effect persists into the second semester of teaching, even though one-sixth of those in the control group who initially accepted the job have left TFA by then. As expected, the effects are stronger for those more marginal in their decision to join TFA. Our results suggest that social information can have a powerful effect on high-stakes behavior and should be considered as a potential tool for policy.

"Intermediaries in Fundraising Inhibit Quality-Driven Charitable Donations"
Economic Inquiry, January 2017, 55(1): 409—424.

Charitable donations are frequently raised by an intermediary: a fundraiser (that is not the charity) solicits and accepts donations and subsequently sends the proceeds to the charity -- e.g. a workplace campaign for United Way or a 5km walk for Susan G. Komen. Such fundraisers can greatly increase donations received by a given charity, but how do they affect what types of charities we support? This paper shows having funds raised by an intermediary can make donors insensitive to charity quality: Unattractive charities can receive the same financial support as attractive charities. In a series of experiments, when donations are framed as going directly, attractive charities receive larger (between 68% and 91% larger average donation across studies) and more (between 19% and 25% higher likelihood of receiving a gift across studies) contributions relative to unattractive charities; however, when donations for the same charities are collected by (meaningless) intermediaries running fundraising campaigns, donations become statistically indistinguishable across charities. The intermediary fundraiser does not affect donor recall of charity identity or evaluation of charity quality. Follow-up experiments suggest information overload in the intermediary fundraiser context clouds the judgment of the donor. Simply put, intermediaries in fundraising do not preclude acquiring information about charities, but the complexity provided by the nature of the transaction all but precludes using it.

"Pre-Analysis Plans Have Limited Upside especially where Replications are Feasible"
Journal of Economic Perspectives, July 2015, 29(3): 81-98
with Muriel Niederle

This paper assesses the potential upsides and downsides of pre-analysis plans (PAPs) and replications. We extend the model in Ioaniddis (2005) to make predictions for both PAPs and replications. A simple calibration of the model shows that under many reasonable parameters, PAPs have limited ability to shut off the probability a false hypothesis eventually gets published; however, they are very effective when hypotheses will only be tested once, or a couple of times (e.g. with large field experiments), which is exactly where replication work is less valuable. In that sense, the two are complements in improving the accuracy of beliefs.

"The Schooling Decision: Family Preferences, Intergenerational Conflict, and Moral Hazard in the Brazilian *Favelas*"
Journal of Political Economy, June 2012, 120(3): 359—397. (Lead article)
with Leonardo Bursztyn

This paper experimentally analyzes the schooling decisions of poor households in urban Brazil. We elicit parents' choices between monthly government transfers conditional on their adolescent child attending school and guaranteed, unconditional transfers of varying sizes. In the baseline treatment, an overwhelming majority of parents prefer conditional transfers to larger unconditional transfers. However, few parents prefer conditional payments if they are offered text message notifications whenever their child misses school. These findings suggest important intergenerational conflicts in these schooling decisions, a lack of parental control and observability of school attendance, and an additional rationale for conditional cash transfer programs—the monitoring they provide.

“Intermediation Reduces Punishment (and Reward)”
American Economic Journal: Microeconomics, 3(November 2011): 77—106.

This paper investigates how punishment changes when a transgressor does not directly interact with the injured party. In a laboratory experiment, third party punishment for keeping money at the expense of a poorer player is shown to decrease when an intermediary actor is included in the transaction. This is true (i) for completely passive intermediaries and (ii) even though intermediation can only decrease the payout of the poorest player and hurt equity. Thus current theories of fairness would incorrectly predict intermediation increases or does not affect punishment. Follow-up treatments provide evidence that intermediation reduces punishment predominately because when an intermediary is used, the selfish player does not directly interact with the poorer player; the direct link has been severed. As a result, in treatments when intermediaries are available, and principals can distance themselves from an outcome, punishment is almost entirely ineffective in moderating self-interest, and the poorest players are far worse off than when no intermediary is allowed. This paper also investigates moral decision-making and indirectness in a charity-reward domain. Consistent with the laboratory results, a framed field experiment shows rewards of a charitable behavior (donating mosquito nets) to decrease when the saliency of an intermediary (a charity) is increased. Together, the results show that moral decision-making is not always well predicted by the *overall* fairness of an act but rather by the fairness of the consequences that *follow directly* from an act. The implications of these results are that allowing indirect actions, perhaps through agents, suppliers, arm's-length transactions etc. may lead to increased anti-social behavior.

WORKS IN PROGRESS

“A Model of Information Nudges”
With Clayton Featherstone and Judd Kessler

Nudge-style interventions are popular, but they are often criticized for being atheoretical. We present a model of information nudges (i.e., providing a noisy signal about the utility of taking an action) based on Bayesian updating in a setting of binary choice. We use reduced-form and structural methods to conduct a meta-analysis of 67 information interventions and find that the sign and magnitude of the treatment effect varies in exactly the way our model predicts: treatment effects of nudges are more likely to be negative in settings when agents are unlikely to take the action in the absence of the nudge. Additionally, as we look across settings with higher and higher rates of taking the action in the absence of the nudge, the treatment effect starts out negative, becomes positive, peaks, and declines back to zero, producing a negative hump shape followed by a positive hump shape. From the theory and meta-analysis, we provide guidance for practitioners about the environments in which information nudges will positively affect a desired behavior and those in which they may backfire.

"Trying to Focus: The (In)Ability to Regulate Mind-Wandering"
With Hannu Kivimäki and Ian Krajbich

Keeping our minds on task is essential for productivity and well-being. Why aren't we better at it? One explanation might be the imperfect relationship between motivation and mind-wandering. A simple model might suggest more motivation equates to increased focus. Our results show this is not always the case. We test the effect of motivation on focus across a series of novel online experiments using roughly 2,700 participants logging over 1,250 hours of tedious work, where we measure, second-to-second, whether their mind is on task. To test the impact of motivation, every instance of mind-wandering comes with a cost, and we vary this price threefold across subjects. We contrast mind wandering with intentional task switching by allowing participants to pause their work at a lower cost. In Study 1 we find that deliberate task switching but not mind wandering is sensitive to cost. In Study 2 we find modest behavioral response of mind wandering to cost. More motivation \emph{per se} is not enough but we do find two instances where motivation affects mind-wandering. First, we find that timing is important: cost information presented at the same time as other task details is ineffective but a reminder immediately before (but not during) the task is effective. Second, incentives intrinsic to the task (e.g. the task is engaging) improve on-task rates substantially. The results indicate that mind wandering is distinct from other forms of task switching and may be more sensitive to intrinsic than extrinsic costs.

"Reducing Gender Differences by First Choosing for Others"
With Emine Tasci

Men and women often make very different economic decisions. These gender gaps often disappear, however, when they are choosing for *other* men and women. What if a decision-maker were to choose for an as-similar-as-possible other before choosing for themselves? Would the previous decision -- perhaps less prone to errors in confidence or to social and visceral forces – provide clarity on how they would make the decision free of such biases? Would this help close gender gaps? We test this mechanism across three contexts – whether to compete, to do non-promotable work, and to contribute ideas -- collecting data to pinpoint mechanism.

"Informing Students about Schooling: An At-Scale Experiment in the Dominican Republic"
With Jim Berry, Daniel Morales, and Christopher Neilson

We conduct an at-scale evaluation of interventions that present accurate, clear information on the potential benefits and costs of schooling to 7th to 12th grade students in the Dominican Republic. The two-year evaluation includes 1,812 schools in middle school, 75 percent of all public middle schools in the country, and 678 schools at the high school level, 65 percent of all public high schools. The broadest intervention consists of four 15-minute videos that discuss the benefits and costs of additional schooling, watched by classes altogether. We vary whether these videos present the benefits qualitatively -- e.g. schooling may increase wages -- or quantitatively -- for example, wage averages and distributions at different levels of schooling -- allowing us to isolate the impact of providing concrete, numerical information on the value of schooling. We also conduct one-on-one interviews through a novel tablet application, both with parents and children (about 7,000 students total). Half of these interviewees also watch a short video with quantitative information. To understand the mechanics behind our results, as well as the schooling decision in general, we conducted surveys to 80,000 students across our sample.

"Self-Image and Conspiracy Ideation"
With Collin B Raymond

Belief in conspiracies is growing, with dire consequences. We propose an explanation of conspiracy belief adoption that organizes the existing literature and expands our understanding. At its core, the model hypothesizes that a desire to move up, or cement one's status in, the social hierarchy drives conspiracy ideation: Believing this fundamental truth elevates me above all others who do not. The model makes five central predictions (i) a conspiracy cannot be trivial in nature, (ii) a conspiracy cannot be believed by most, (iii) a conspiracy needs to be believed by a few others, and (iv)+(v) lower status as well as those who care most about status are more prone to conspiracies.

"Work-Leisure Cue Interference" *Awarded $30,000 Ignite Grant from Boston College*

Our minds take cues from the environment to know what the set of potential tasks are. If the cues are associated with interfering tasks, say work and fun, one's mind will have a harder time staying on task. This set of experiments aims to pin down what these cues are – visual, geographic, temporal – and how to manage them to increase ability to stay on task, whether work or play.

"Using our Phones, Fast and Slow? A System I and II Explanation of Phone Over-use"
With Ryan Westphal
NSF SES, Decision, Risk and Management Sciences grant application under review

Smartphone app use is increasing, with potentially dire consequences. Understanding exactly why we cannot stay off our phones may be the key to finding the antidote. We propose an intuitive cognitive model of why we look like smartphone addicts: Evidence from cognitive neuroscience suggests a two-system model of decision-making: an automatic System I and a deliberative System II. We model decisions to use and to continue using smartphone apps as being made by System I, rather than as explicit choices borne of weighing costs and benefits. We build a novel smartphone application, "app", that allows us to collect rich data sets on smartphone app usage, and test predictions of that model. The net of these studies will provide data- and theory-driven prescriptions to help put us back in control of our own smartphone use.

"Simple Lab Measures Have High External Validity"
with Muriel Niederle and Jason Somerville
proposal accepted at The Annual Review of Economics

We aim to answer the question: how much can we learn from the laboratory? We start with lab results, and investigate how often they replicate outside the lab. External validity is a common criticism of laboratory studies and measures. We aim to add actual empirical evidence to this debate. To control for selection issues – e.g. we are more likely to recall results that have replicated – we will begin the process with an externally curated list of important laboratory studies or measures. Providing recent data on the external validity of laboratory results should provide guidance for future research and journals.

BOOK CHAPTERS

"How to Run Replicable Experiments"
Forthcoming. in Handbook of Experimental Economics Methods, Snowberg, Erik and Yariv, Leeat eds. Elsevier Press.
With Anna Dreber Almenberg

"Intermediation and Diffusion of Responsibility in Negotiation: A Case of Bounded Ethicality"
2010. in Handbook of Negotiation and Conflict Resolution, Oxford Press
With Neeru Paharia, Harvard Safra Institute, and Max Bazerman, Harvard Business School

ADVISING

Graduate Students
2025+, All Boston College: Yuval Lidany (co-primary), Emine Tasci (primary), Sravan Ramaswamy (primary), Yunus Coskun (primary), Ying Wang (co-primary)
2024: Alex Opanasets, Boston College, first placement Census Bureau (primary)
2023: Ryan Westphal, Boston College, first placement Brandeis (co-primary)
2022: Andrew Copland, Boston College, first placement ISO New England (committee)
2018: Tanushree Jhunjhunwala, Ohio State, first placement Washington College (committee)
2017: Siqi Pan, Ohio State, first placement U Melbourne (committee)
2016: Anthony Bradfield, Ohio State, first placement Ford (committee), Arjun Sengupta, Ohio State, first placement post-doc Nanyang Bus. School (primary)
2015: Alexander Gotthard-Real, OSU, first placement Pontificia Javerierana (committee), Dimitry Mezhvinsky, OSU, first placement Dept of Justice (committee)

Undergraduate students, and those later applying to graduate studies
2022: Lurein Perera, Boston College (letter writer) attended/attending Harvard GSD Master's
2020: Madison Singell, HBS RA (letter writer) attending Stanford GSB PhD
2016: John Conlon, Ohio State (honors, primary adviser) attended Harvard Bus Ec PhD, Luke Fesko, Ohio State (honors, co-primary adviser) attended Duke Econ PhD
2014: Tomás Moreno-Vazquez, Ohio State (honors, committee), Terry Pack, Ohio State (letter writer) attended Maryland Econ PhD, William Biscarri, Ohio State (letter writer) attended Illinois Physics PhD, Haochi Zhang, Ohio State (letter writer) attended Berkeley Haas Management PhD, Kabir Narang, Ohio State (letter writer)

Research Assistants for whom I have written letters
2021: Yuqian Zhang, Boston College
2019: Sam Pertl, Harvard (letter writer for Masters 2019 and PhD 2021) attended Chicago Masters
2018: Olivia Bordeu, JPAL (letter writer) attended/attending Chicago Econ PhD
2015: Marialejandra Guzmán Cruz, JPAL (letter writer for Masters in 2015 and PhD in 2021) attended/attending Ohio State Edu PhD
2014: Monroe Gamble, Missouri (letter writer) attending MIT Sloan PhD, Sruthi Chandrasekharan, JPAL (letter writer)

GRANTS AND AWARDS

2023 Boston College Research Incentive Grant for "Conspiracy and Status"
2022 $30,000 Ignite Grant from Boston College for "Work-Leisure Cue Interference"
2014-2016 USAID $1.26M grant for Belief Formation of the Returns to Schooling
2013 $100,000 Research Grant from Fundación INICIA (Dominican Republic)
2012 Behavioral Decision Making Initiative Grant (Ohio State)
2011 International Growth Centre Grant (LSE and Oxford)
2009 Harvard University Dissertation Completion Fellowship
2006, 2009 Harvard University Paul Warburg Funds, Research Award
2008 Harvard Program on Negotiation, Next Generation Grant

NEWS COVERAGE

Press for Coffman, Coffman & Ericson (2017):
The Atlantic, LA Times, Time, Pew Research, Slate, Psychology Today, Bloomberg (by Cass Sunstein), NPR Los Angeles, Freakonomics

Wall Street Journal "Why the NFL Draft Drives Economists Crazy," Sports Section, by Reed Albergotti, April 22, 2010.