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Contact Information

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Professional Experience:

Assistant Professor, Economics Department, Cornell University, 2007-present
Assistant Professor, Economics Department, Dartmouth College, 2006-2007
Faculty Research Fellow, National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), 2009-present
Research Fellow, Population Studies Center, Institute for Social Research, 2006-2007

Graduate Studies:

Ph.D., Economics, Harvard University, 2006
M.Sc., Mathematical Economics, London School of Economics, 2000
A.M., Statistics, Harvard University, 1999

Undergraduate Studies:

A.B., Economics, Harvard University, *summa cum laude*, prize for best economics student, 1999

Honors, Scholarships, and Fellowships:

2005-2006	National Bureau of Economic Research Pre-Doctoral Health and Aging Fellowship
2005-2006	Institute for Quantitative Social Science Fellowship
2005-2006	Center for Justice, Welfare, and Economics Dissertation Fellowship
2005-2006	Institute for Humane Studies Dissertation Fellowship
2005-2006	Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Dissertation Fellowship (Honorary)
2004-2005	Harvard Economics Department Chiles Foundation (Merit) Fellowship
2001-2004	Harvard University Merit Fellowship
2001-2004	National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellowship
1999-2001	British Marshall Scholarship

Research Papers in Progress:

Benjamin, Daniel J., James J. Choi, and A. Joshua Strickland (2007). "Social identity and preferences." NBER Working Paper 13309, August. Revise and resubmit, *American Economic Review*.

Abstract: In two laboratory experiments, we test whether social identities can affect time and risk preferences. We find that when we make ethnic identity salient to Asian-American subjects, they make more patient choices. When we make race salient to white and black subjects, white subjects make more patient and less risk-averse choices, and non-immigrant blacks make more risk-averse choices. Our ethnic and racial identity results are consistent with U.S. demographic patterns in economic outcomes. Making gender identity salient causes risk aversion to conform to the gender risk aversion stereotype the subject believes is relatively more common. Our findings provide support for the hypothesis that cultural differences help explain differences in economic outcomes.

Benjamin, Daniel J. (2008). "Social Preferences and the Efficiency of Bilateral Exchange." Cornell University and Institute for Social Research mimeo, September.

Abstract: How efficient is bilateral exchange that is based on social preferences such as altruism or a concern for fairness? I analyze a simple exchange game: A purely self-regarding first mover transfers some amount of a commodity to a second mover. Then the second mover, who has social preferences defined over the self-regarding aspect of payoffs, transfers back a different commodity. Rather than focus on a particular functional form of social preferences, I identify key properties of existing models that drive behavior and determine how efficient the equilibrium is. I find the equilibrium will be fully efficient if either (1) the second mover's transfer is a small amount of money, or if (2) the second mover's social preferences cause him to behave in accordance with a "fairness rule" (such as the 50-50 sharing norm). The results may explain why small-scale transactions with discretionary monetary payment are common, and suggest that norms of fair behavior promote efficiency in exchange environments.

Benjamin, Daniel J., Sebastian A. Brown, and Jesse M. Shapiro (2006). "Who is 'Behavioral'? Cognitive ability and anomalous preferences." Harvard University mimeo, May.

Abstract: In this paper, we ask whether variation in preference anomalies is related to variation in cognitive ability. Evidence from a new laboratory study of Chilean high school students shows that small-stakes risk aversion and short-run discounting are less common among those with higher standardized test scores, although anomalies persist even among the highest-scoring individuals. The relationship with test scores does not appear to result from differences in parental education or wealth. A laboratory experiment shows that reducing cognitive resources using a "cognitive load" manipulation tends to exacerbate small-stakes risk aversion, with similar but statistically weaker effects on short-run impatience. Explicit reasoning about choice seems to reduce the prevalence of these anomalies, especially among the less skilled. Survey evidence suggests that the role of cognitive ability may extend to adult behaviors that are related to small-stakes risk preference and short-run time preference.

Publications:

Benjamin, Daniel J., and Jesse M. Shapiro (2009). "Thin-slice forecasts of gubernatorial elections." Forthcoming, *Review of Economics and Statistics*.

Abstract: We showed 10-second, silent video clips of unfamiliar gubernatorial debates to a group of experimental participants and asked them to predict the election outcomes. The participants' predictions explain more than 20 percent of the variation in the actual two-party vote share across the 58 elections in our study, and their importance survives a range of controls, including state fixed effects. In a horse race of alternative forecasting models, participants' forecasts significantly outperform economic variables in predicting vote shares, and are comparable in predictive power to a measure of incumbency status. Participants' forecasts seem to rest on judgments of candidates' personal attributes (such as likeability), rather than inferences about candidates' policy positions. Though conclusive causal inference is not possible in our context, our findings may be seen as suggestive evidence of a causal effect of candidate appeal on election outcomes.

Benjamin, Daniel J., Christopher F. Chabris, Edward L. Glaeser, Vilmundur Gudnason, Tamara B. Harris, David I. Laibson, Lenore Launer, and Shaun Purcell (2007). "Genoeconomics." In Weinstein, Maxine, James W. Vaupel, and Kenneth W. Wachter (eds.), *Biosocial Surveys*. The National Academies Press: Washington, D.C.

Benjamin, Daniel J. (2003). "Do 401(k)s Increase Saving? Evidence From Propensity Score Subclassification," *Journal of Public Economics* 87(**5-6**), 1259-90.

Abstract: Despite the enthusiasm of policy makers and the public for tax-advantaged saving incentive programs, economists are still debating whether such programs actually succeed in increasing saving. This paper evaluates the effects on private and national savings and on components of households' saving of 401(k)s, a tax-deferred saving incentive program that has quickly become one of the principal vehicles for retirement saving in the United States. By comparing 401(k) eligible and ineligible households' wealth, this paper estimates that, on average, about one half of 401(k) balances represent new private savings, and about one quarter of 401(k) balances represent new national savings. Responses to eligibility vary considerably, however, with households who normally save the most largely contributing funds they would have saved anyway. This paper improves on previous research by (1) employing propensity score subclassification to control more completely for observed household characteristics, (2) controlling for more household characteristics, including several correlated with unobserved savings preferences, and (3) adjusting the observed measure of households' wealth to reduce measurement error.

Rind, B., and Benjamin, D. (1994). "Effects of Public Image Concerns and Self-Image on Compliance," *Journal of Social Psychology* 134(**1**), 19-25.

Abstract: Many studies have demonstrated that an actor can induce a target individual to comply with a request by manipulating the target's impression of the actor. This paper investigates whether a target is more likely to comply with an actor's request when concerned about the impression *he himself* is making on others. A confederate approached male shoppers sitting either alone or with a female companion in an American shopping mall and attempted to convince the male shoppers to agree to purchase raffle tickets. The presence of a female companion was expected to heighten the male shoppers' concerns about public image. The effects of self-image on compliance were also examined, using foot-in-the-door (FITD) strategy. The shoppers who were with a female companion agreed to buy more tickets than the shoppers who were alone did, but compliance did not differ as a function of strategy. Thus, concerns about public image affected compliance more than concerns about self-image did.

Conference Papers:

Benjamin, Daniel J., and Laibson, David I. (2003). "Good Policies for Bad Governments: Behavioral Political Economy." Presented at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston's Conference on How Humans Behave: Implications for Economics and Economic Policy, Cape Cod, 10 June 2003.

Abstract: Given that people make mistakes in processing information and pursuing their own interests, is there a role for government policy in helping people to make better decisions? Not necessarily, because politicians are just as prone to make mistakes (or abuse power), with potentially tragic consequences. To address this delicate balancing act, we endorse a precept of "benign paternalism": Government policies should channel behavior without restricting freedom of choice. To take one example, the government could potentially help compulsive gamblers by enabling them to set for themselves, before they enter a casino, a binding liquidity limit for the day. Such policies could lead to very dramatic behavioral changes without giving government true authority to control our lives, and without giving private agents an incentive to reject authority through black markets and other corrosive violations of the rule of law. We discuss examples of policy interventions that we believe would generate significant welfare gains without reducing consumer liberties. We advocate testing these proposals with small-scale field experiments.

Chabris, C., Benjamin, D., and Simons, D. (1998). "How well do chess masters remember famous chess positions? Implications for theories of spatial expertise." Presented at the Workshop on Object Perception and Memory, Dallas, 19 November 1998.

Abstract: Two experiments tested whether the memory representations used by chess masters (1) are lists of familiar clusters or chunks of chess pieces or (2) include only information about important or relevant pieces. First, 24 masters recognized famous chess positions they were likely to have previously studied. When a position was modified from the correct one, participants detected the change more often if it affected the "meaning" of the position than if it did not, even if the non-meaningful change affected more pieces. Second, two grandmasters recalled a similar set of positions without prior study; most of their errors did not alter the meaning of the positions. In each experiment memory for unimportant pieces was retained as well, though not as strongly as for important pieces. These results support a hybrid model in which chunks of pieces, global categories, and meaning are all represented in the visual memory of chess masters.

Work in Progress:

"Genetic Influences on Economic Behavior" (with Christopher Chabris, Edward Glaeser, & David Laibson)
"Underinference and Overinference" (with Matthew Rabin)

Research Grants:

2006-2009	National Institutes on Aging, Program Development Award, "Social Identity and Preferences" (D. Wise, Program Director; D.J. Benjamin, Co-PI)
2006-2007	National Institutes on Aging, Contract Grant, "Cognitive SNP Panel: AGES Implementation" (V. Gudnason, PI; D.J. Benjamin, Consultant)
2005-2006	Harvard Law School's Program On Negotiation Next Generation Grant
2005-2006	Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Dissertation Grant for Behavioral Economic Research
2004-2009	National Institutes on Aging, P01, "Psychological Factors in Economic Lifecycle Decisions" (D. Wise, Program Director; D.I. Laibson, PI; D.J. Benjamin, Consultant)
2004-2005	Kennedy School of Government Taubman Center Small Grant for research on state government (joint with Jesse Shapiro)
2003-2005	Russell Sage Foundation Small Grant in Behavioral Economics (joint with Jesse Shapiro)