

Research Statement

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I am an applied microeconomist with research interests in the economics of labor and education. In my work, I apply experimental methodologies in conjunction with the analysis of survey and administrative data to study employment dynamics in multi-racial and multi-ethnic settings, informal labor markets, and teamwork cooperation and conflict resolution in diverse groups. I am also interested in issues of diversity in education settings, focusing on strategies to support and encourage URM students. Below, I describe my current research and provide a brief overview of my future research plans.

My dissertation addresses policy-relevant research questions centered around historical and recent changes in the racial and ethnic composition of the U.S. population: how this composition affects employment and the broader labor market, and how inequalities in the labor market and opportunities could be alleviated.

I have three ongoing working papers examining hiring differentials, spillovers, responses to market conditions and to hiring policies in environments characterized by two or more racial or ethnic groups. In my job market paper, **“Hiring in a Diverse Labor Market: Spillovers Across Minority Groups”** I consider a labor market where White, Black and Hispanic workers are available for hire. I first investigate and compare White employers’ biases in beliefs and hiring against Black and Hispanic workers, and then test whether hiring experiences with Black (Hispanic) workers have positive or negative spillovers on biases in beliefs and hiring against Hispanic (Black) workers. Guided by a Bayesian framework featuring asymmetric updating and multiple worker groups, I design and implement an online hiring experiment with a geographically representative sample of nearly 2,000 participants in the United States. In the experiment, White participants (the employers) choose whether to hire White, Black, or Hispanic workers, and earn money based on the productivity of the hired worker on a real effort task. In order to limit social desirability bias, I use colors (Purple, Orange, Green) to identify workers’ race and ethnicity in the experiment. While employers are aware of the mapping between colors and racial/ethnic groups, they make decisions regarding the hiring of workers from groups Purple, Orange, or Green. My methodology is novel and proves to be effective in capturing White employers’ biases against disadvantaged minorities. My experiment shows that employers are biased against both Black and Hispanic workers, with more pronounced bias against Hispanic workers, and that Black hiring increases after hiring experiences with Hispanic workers, but the opposite is not true.

In the second chapter of my dissertation, **“Reaching for the Stars? An Experiment in Discrimination in Hiring”** joint with Tim Salmon (SMU) and Danila Serra (Texas A&M), we ask whether part of the observed bias against Black and Hispanic workers is due to the incorrect belief that, while majority and minority groups workers may be equally productive on average, top workers (the *stars*) are more likely to be found in the majority. Using an online hiring experiment modeled after the experiment I use in my job market paper, we first test whether the hiring of Black and Hispanic workers increases when “stars” from the majority (White) are not available for hire in the labor market. We find that it does, which is consistent with the hypothesis that White employers look for stars when hiring workers, and they tend to seek them about White workers. When this is not possible, they turn to minority workers. We then test the

effectiveness of an information intervention aimed at de-biasing beliefs about the distribution of stars across groups. However, the intervention proves overall ineffective.

In the third chapter of my dissertation, titled **“Navigating Diversity Hiring Policies”** (solo-authored), I experimentally study the effects of different hiring policies used to incentivize the hiring of Hispanic workers. I contrast the impacts of a hiring quota that imposes that 50 percent of workers are hired from the Hispanic worker group, a “2-for-1” hiring policy that allows employers to hire an extra worker (of any race or ethnicity) if they hire a Hispanic worker, and an extreme 100 percent quota that forces employers to only hire minority workers. I examine the long-lasting impacts of the policies on the hiring of White and Hispanic workers after the policies are lifted.

As part of my education research agenda, I have a working paper joint with Danila Serra, titled **“My Department Cares: Supporting Students Through Encouragement Emails”**, in which we examine the impact of an intervention aimed at increasing belonging, growth mindset, emotional well-being, and ultimately grades and retention of under-represented minority students majoring in economics at a large public university. We randomly selected students who received 6 weekly encouraging emails on behalf of the Department of Economics during challenging periods in the semester. We find evidence of a positive impact of the encouragement emails on women’s academic performance, driven by under-represented minority (URM) women. Our analysis of mechanisms using survey data points at improvements in URM women’s growth mindset and emotional well-being.

During my graduate studies, I have also been actively involved in two additional research papers. In **“Patch-Foraging in the context of Street-Vending: A Lab-in-the-field Experiment”** joint with César Mantilla (Universidad Javeriana, Colombia), we designed an exploration-exploitation dilemma task and conducted a lab-in-the-field experiment with 220 street vendors in Bogotá, Colombia to investigate street vendors’ behavior under uncertainty and increasing scarcity. In **“Can Different Modes of Communication Affect Gender Bias in the Workplace?”** joint with Miranda Lambert (Texas A&M), Tim Salmon, and Danila Serra, we employ a laboratory experiment to investigate which mode of communication – face to face, audio call, video call or instant messaging – is most effective at reducing possible bias against women in the contribution of ideas to team tasks.

In the years to come, I plan to pursue new research projects related to labor economics and the economics of education. One question that I was not able to address in my job market paper is whether the race or ethnicity of the employer matters for beliefs and hiring decisions. This is important since a diverse labor market is not only reflected in the potential workers but also among employers and hiring managers. This is something that I could easily study by expanding the setting of my experiment to include Black and Hispanic employers. Another research question I plan to pursue in the near future is whether the racial and ethnic composition of hiring committees, in particular the inclusion of “diverse” members (i.e., Black or Hispanic), leads to (positive or negative) changes in evaluations and hiring decisions concerning all under-represented minority candidates, as opposed to just those who “match” with the profiles included in the committee. With respect to my agenda on education, I am currently developing a proposal to access data from the Texas Education Research Center (ERC) to study topics related to the impacts of increasing diversity in classrooms. Inspired by the literature on the effects of same-race teachers on minority students, and in line with the themes explored in my job market paper, I am especially interested in exploring possible spillover effects from under-represented minority teachers (e.g., Hispanic) to under-represented minority students belonging to a different disadvantaged group (i.e., Black).