

# MATTHEW CASHMAN

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## Houlden Fellow

Warwick Business School | Behavioural Science Group

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CITIZENSHIP	United States, Italy		
EDUCATION	2023	Ph.D. MIT Sloan Marketing Committee: Drazen Prelec (chair), Rahul Bhui, David Rand	Cambridge, MA
	2008	A.B. Hamilton College Chemistry & Philosophy	Clinton, NY
EMPLOYMENT	2023 –	Univ. of Warwick	Fellow Houlden Fellowship (3yr) Warwick Business School Warwick, UK
	2023–	MIT	Affiliate MIT Sloan Cambridge, MA
	2021 –	Harvard	Affiliate Culture, Cognition, & Coevolution Lab Prof. Joe Henrich Cambridge, MA
	2015–2017	Harvard	Lab Manager Moral Psychology Research Lab Prof. Fiery Cushman Cambridge, MA
	2010–2015	L.E.K. Consulting	Consultant Strategy and due diligence for private equity and corporate clients Boston, MA
	2010	Chungdahm	English Teacher Seoul, SK
	2008–2009	Eze Castle Software	Analyst Software for hedge funds Boston, MA
AWARDS	2025	Award for Outstanding Postdoctoral Achievements (research), University of Warwick	
	2025	Univ. of Warwick Primary Data Support Fund	£5,000

2024	Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Postgraduate Programs (teaching), University of Warwick	
2024	Univ. of Warwick Primary Data Support Fund	£4,000
2021	Harvard Kennedy School Program on Negotiation Next-Generation Grant	\$5,000
2019	Harvard Dean's Competitive fund <i>Pl: Prof. Fiery Cushman</i>	\$34,000
2006–08	Henry B. Watkins Scholarship for First-Generation College Students	\$48,000

## PUBLICATIONS

Voelkel, J.G., Stagnaro, M.N., Chu, J., Pink, S., Mernyk, J.S., Redekopp, C., **Cashman, M.**, [Qualifying Strengthening Democracy Challenge Submitters], Druckman, J.N., Rand, D.G., Willer, R. (2024). Megastudy testing 25 treatments to reduce antidemocratic attitudes and partisan animosity. *Science*, 386(6719), eadh4764.

The Strengthening Democracy Challenge, an N= 32,059 study, finds that 23 of 25 interventions designed to reduce anti-democratic attitudes and partisan animosity are effective. These interventions are also effective in reducing support for undemocratic practices and partisan violence, among a variety of other secondary outcomes.

**Cashman, M. P.** & Cushman, F. A. (2020). Learning from Moral Failure. In Schwenkler, John & Lambert, Enoch (eds.) *Becoming Someone New: Essays on Transformative Experience, Choice, and Change*. Oxford University Press.

Pedagogical environments are often designed to minimize the chance of people acting wrongly, and this is surely a sensible approach. But could it ever be useful to design pedagogical environments to permit, or even encourage, moral failure? We consider the possibility that moral failure can be an especially effective tool for fostering learning, and the costs involved.

Cao, C., Cao, X., **Cashman, M.** *et al.* How do successful scholars get their best research ideas? An exploration. *Mark Lett* 30, 221–232 (2019).

We interview 24 authors to ask how they got the ideas for 64 of their papers. More than three quarters of the papers were inspired by holes in the literature, by a “stylized fact” that the current literature cannot explain, or by an interaction with a manager. The rest fall into several smaller categories that to a large extent can be seen as special cases of the three big ones. We describe how papers from each of the three big categories help move the literature forward.

## UNDER REVIEW

[Conditionally accepted, *J.LEO*] **Cashman, M.**, Maciejovsky, B., Wernerfelt, B. 2025. *Small talk as a contracting device: trust, cooperative norms, and changing equilibria*.

We show experimentally that even very brief small talk with a potential trading partner functions as contracting device by enhancing trust and cooperation. In contrast to formal contracts, pre-deal socializing can cover contingencies that are truly unforeseen, and unlike relational contracts, it is independent of repeated play.

**Cashman, M. & Prelec, D. 2025. *The Positional Order Effect: How Sequential Timing and Self-Interest Drive Prosocial Consumer Choice***

We provide experimental evidence for a positional order effect that encourages cooperation specifically among self-interested participants. In one-shot Public Goods Games where players move one after another but *do not* observe others' moves, self-interested players contribute more to the public good when they are at the beginning of the sequence and less as order increases. Telling payoff-maximizers that everyone moving after them has their move made randomly for them eliminates the effect, suggesting they are conditioning their own moves on the as-yet undetermined moves of other players. This has direct implications for consumer choice in charitable giving, among other settings.

WORKING

**Cashman, M. 2025. *From Pluralistic Ignorance to Common Knowledge with Social Assurance Contracts*.**

I introduce social assurance contracts as a mechanism for safely revealing a hidden consensus. Many people privately hold controversial beliefs, but remain silent due to fear of social censure. In this case, beliefs discussed in the public sphere do not accurately reflect true, underlying beliefs. This prevents honest and open discourse and can fuel political polarization. Social assurance contracts surface suppressed beliefs *safely* by revealing hidden consensus only when sufficient support has been privately committed. Formal analysis shows this mechanism can resolve coordination problems and mitigate free-rider issues related to expressive acts, allowing honest expression and expanding the space of publicly-expressible beliefs (the Overton window).

**Cashman, M. 2024. *Humans as next-token predictors: measuring the flow of memes through minds*.**

I develop a widely-applicable, content-agnostic, quantitative measure of culturally-transmitted information. Using cloze completion tasks I estimate entropy (bits per character or word) with a treatment group (those that have been exposed to a target work, Readers) and a control group (those who have not been exposed) and take a difference measure between those estimates. This quantity is a representation of the information from the target work that is in Readers' minds.

CONFERENCE TALKS	2025	IAREP	Talk
	2025	Human Behavior & Evolution Society	Talk
	2025	Thurgau Experimental Economics Meeting	Talk
	2024	Society for Judgment & Decision-Making	Poster
	2024	Cogsci	Poster
	2024	Cognitive Science of Culture	Talk
	2024	Winter American Marketing Association	Talk
	2023	Society for Judgment & Decision-Making	Poster
	2023	SPUDM	Short talk
	2023	IAREP-SABE	Talk
	2021	Society for Judgment & Decision-Making	Poster
	2021	Int'l Conference on Thinking	Talk
	2021	Max Planck Summer Institute	Short talk
	2020	Cogsci	Poster

	2019	Human Behavior and Evolution Society	Talk
	2019	Boston JDM Conference	Talk
INVITED TALKS	2024	Harvard Human Evolutionary Biology	
	2024	MIT Sloan Behavioral Group	
	2024	Harvard Psych. Cushman-Greene-Cikara meeting	
	2024	UPF Center for Brain and Cognition	
	2024	Decision Research @ Warwick	
	2024	Culture, Cognition, and Co-ev. Lab	PI: Joe Henrich
	2024	MIT Brain & Cognitive Sciences Cog Lunch	
	2023	Konstanz Social Norms Workshop	
	2023	Warwick Modeling Group	
	2023	University of Warwick Psychology	
	2023	WBS Behavioural Science Lab	
	2021	Culture, Cognition, and Co-ev. Lab	PI: Joe Henrich
	2020	Human Cooperation Lab	PI: Dave Rand
	2020	MIT Sloan Marketing Seminar	
	2019	Culture, Cognition, and Co-ev. Lab	PI: Joe Henrich
	2019	Human Dynamics Lab	PI: Sandy Pentland
	2019	MIT Neuroeconomics Lab	PI: Drazen Prelec
	2017	Moral Psychology Research Lab	PI: Fiery Cushman
	2016	Moral Psychology Research Lab	PI: Fiery Cushman
TEACHING	2025	Lead, Big Data Analytics	WBS
	2024	Economics of Wellbeing	WBS
	2023, 24	Data-Driven Decision Making	WBS
	2020	TA, Psychology and Economics	MIT Economics
		<i>Prof. Drazen Prelec</i>	
	2020, 23	TA, Applied Behavioral Economics	MIT Sloan
		<i>Prof. Drazen Prelec</i>	
	2010	Instructor, Chungdahm Institute	Seoul, South Korea
		<i>Full-time English teacher for 11-17 y.o.</i>	
SERVICE	2023	Ad hoc reviewer	Experimental Economics
	2020–23	Advisory board member	MIT Open Publishing
	2019	Ad hoc reviewer	Emotion
	2016	MPRG meeting planning	Harvard Psychology
VOLUNTEER	2016–18	MAPS Public Benefit Corporation	
		<i>Consulting work for a non-profit pharmaceutical company developing a novel treatment for PTSD</i>	
	2013–15	Fellow, MIT Center for Collective Intelligence	
		<i>Managed Climate CoLab teams as part of research on crowdsourcing</i>	

**SKILLS**                      Developed video interaction platform for online experiments with oTree  
Linux day-to-day, Bash & Python for general scripting use  
Python + NumPy + pandas or R for statistics, oTree / Django for stimuli

**REFERENCES**            **Drazen Prelec**  
Digital Equipment Corp LGO Professor of Management  
MIT Sloan; Departments of Economics, Brain & Cognitive Sciences  
[dprelec@mit.edu](mailto:dprelec@mit.edu)

**Birger Wernerfelt**  
J.C. Penney Professor of Management; Professor of Marketing  
MIT Sloan  
[bwerner@mit.edu](mailto:bwerner@mit.edu)

**David Rand**  
Erwin H. Schell Professor and Professor of Management Science  
MIT Sloan; Department of Brain and Cognitive Sciences  
[drand@mit.edu](mailto:drand@mit.edu)

**Joe Henrich**  
Ruth Moore Professor of Biological Anthropology  
Harvard University Department of Human Evolutionary Biology  
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