

Alexandra (Alex) Ballyk

Department of Economics
University of Toronto
150 St. George Street
Toronto, M5S 3G7, Canada

Phone: +1-647-927-1190
Email: alexandra.ballyk@mail.utoronto.ca
Website: <https://sites.google.com/view/alexballyk>

Research Interests: Experimental Economics, Behavioral Economics

EDUCATION

Ph.D. in Economics, University of Toronto 2025 (Expected)
Committee: Yoram Halevy (supervisor), Tanjim Hossain, Anne-Katrin Roesler
M.A in Economics, University of Toronto 2019
B.A.&Sc. in Economics and Chemistry (Dean's Honor List), McGill University 2018

RESEARCH

Paternalistic Persuasion (Job Market Paper)
Gender Differences in Job Application Strategies: An Experimental Investigation
with Annabel Thornton
Preference Aggregation in Social Choice Under Risk

GRANTS AND AWARDS

Grants

UofT Economics Ph.D. Student Grant (\$7,139.50) 2024
Institute for Gender and the Economy (GATE) Grant (\$5,000.00; with Annabel Thornton) 2023
UofT Economics Ph.D. Student Grant (\$2,800.00) 2021

Awards

Ontario Graduate Scholarship (\$15,000.00) 2024
Ontario Graduate Scholarship (\$10,000.00 \times 2) 2023, 2019
Canada Graduate Scholarship - Master's (\$17,500.00) 2018
Faculty of Arts and Sciences Graduate Admission Award (\$6,333.00) 2018
Arts Research Internship Award (\$4,000.00) 2017
Tomlinson Engagement Award for Mentoring (\$300.00 \times 2) 2017, 2016
J.W. McConnell Scholarship (\$3,000.00) 2014

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Course Instructorships 2022
Applied Game Theory (ECO316)

Teaching Assistantships 2018 - present
Behavioral and Experimental Economics (ECO438/1250, ECO421, ECO331)
Game Theory (ECO326, ECO316)
Intermediate Microeconomic Theory (ECO206, ECO204, ECO200)
Principles of Microeconomics (ECO101)

Research Assistantships 2017-2021
Shari Eli, Marlène Koffi and Aloysius Siow (University of Toronto)
Yoram Halevy (University of Toronto)

Chris Barrington-Leigh (McGill University)

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

2024: GATE Research Roundtable, CIREQ Ph.D. Students' Conference, Canadian Economics Association Meetings, ESA World Meetings (accepted), ESA North American Meetings (scheduled)

2023: CIREQ Ph.D. Students' Conference, Canadian Economics Association Meetings

2022: Spring School in Behavioral Economics (poster)

PROGRAMMING SKILLS

Programming Languages and Software: Python, MATLAB, oTree, Stata

Web Development: HTML, CSS, JavaScript

CITIZENSHIP AND LANGUAGES

Citizenship: Canadian

Languages: English (native), French (fluent), Spanish (proficient)

REFERENCES

Yoram Halevy
Department of Economics
University of Toronto
150 St. George Street
Toronto, M5S 3G7, Canada
yoram.halevy@utoronto.ca
+1-416-978-4417

Tanjim Hossain
Department of Management
University of Toronto Mississauga
3359 Mississauga Road
Mississauga, L5L 1C6, Canada
tanjim.hossain@rotman.utoronto.ca
+1-905-569-4425

Anne-Katrin Roesler
Department of Economics
University of Toronto
150 St. George Street
Toronto, M5S 3G7, Canada
ak.roesler@utoronto.ca
+1-416-978-5283

Paternalistic Persuasion (Job Market Paper)

Paternalistic experts (“Advisors”) often seek to make decision-makers (“Choosers”) better off by persuading them to change their behavior. Given that Choosers may be unwilling to make certain behavioral changes, an optimal recommendation accounts for Choosers’ response to the recommended change. In a setting where Choosers are wary of recommenders’ incentives, I experimentally investigate whether Advisors send optimal recommendations and why they may fail to do so. I find that up to 79% of Advisors fail to send optimal recommendations. Instead, up to two-thirds send recommendations that would only be optimal if Choosers were required to follow them. When it comes to correcting this mistake, I show that prompting Advisors to think about Choosers’ likely response to a recommended change is much more effective than repeating the interaction and providing feedback about Choosers’ behavior. The initial mistake is thus consistent with a failure to focus on recommendations that Choosers are likely to accept.

Gender Differences in Job Application Strategies: An Experimental Investigation

with Annabel Thornton

Job-seekers may react strategically to their beliefs about a job opening’s “competitiveness”: the quantity and quality of people applying to it. We investigate how gender differences in such beliefs may make women less likely to apply for high-paying yet competitive jobs. We design a job application game where members of a group are either ranked randomly or based on their performance on a math and science test. Without knowing their rank, they select one of three “jobs”: two yield large payoffs to the best-ranked player who selects them, while the third guarantees a small payoff to all who select it. We find that willingness to apply to a job decreases in the perceived competitiveness of its applicant pool, but is more sensitive to the believed quality of the pool than the believed size thereof. Furthermore, gender differences in these beliefs create gaps in willingness to apply to the highest-paying competitive job. Our findings highlight when and how policies that reveal the competitiveness of a job’s applicant pool (e.g., by disclosing the current number of applications) may increase the proportion of qualified female applicants.

Preference Aggregation in Social Choice Under Risk

Politicians, CEOs and many other types of “dictators” make social choices: choices that influence both their own and others’ welfare. When a dictator’s preferred alternative differs from recipients’, it is unclear which preferences they aggregate and how they determine this set of admissible preferences. This paper introduces an experimental framework that can answer these questions in two-person social choice problems, and applies it to study social choice under risk. I find that over one-third of dictators aggregate their recipient’s risk preferences, and these “aggregators” admit wide ranges of preferences that are both more and less extreme than their own. However, risk-averse and -seeking aggregators favour preferences similar to theirs: risk-averse (-seeking) aggregators rarely admit risk-seeking (-averse) preferences. Additional results suggest that recipients’ preferences carry the greatest weight when dictators’ own preferences are incomplete. These findings highlight the context-dependence of social choice, which has important implications for the design of public and private institutions that rely on such decisions.