

FIELD EXPERIMENTS IN MARKETS

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September 2015

ABSTRACT

This is a review of the literature of field experimental studies of markets. The main results covered by the review are as follows: (1) Generally speaking, markets organize the efficient exchange of commodities; (2) There are some behavioral anomalies that impede efficient exchange; (3) Many behavioral anomalies disappear when traders are experienced.

1. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, the study of economics is virtually synonymous with the study of markets, with the most notable illustration being Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*—arguably the discipline's inaugural contribution. The Scottish economist's treatise was followed by seminal contributions from numerous luminaries such as Alfred Marshall, John Maynard Keynes, Friedrich Von Hayek, Kenneth Arrow, Gary Becker, and Robert Lucas. While the range of topics studied by economists has undoubtedly expanded in the years following the *Freakonomics* revolution, markets remain the centerpiece of the discipline's intellectual mission. For example, in the 14 years since 2001, eight Nobel prizes in economics have been explicitly for research on markets, and of the remaining six, two were for econometric methods that are most frequently applied to the study of markets.

The methodological tools deployed by economists have evolved from the narrative and deductive arguments of the likes of John Stuart Mill, going on to introduction of elementary mathematical methods by the likes of Leon Walras, followed by the formal decision-theoretic mathematical machinery used by the likes of John Hicks and Gerard Debreu, the game-theoretic analysis of scholars such as James Mirrlees and George Akerlof, and most recently, the arrival of agent-based modeling. These theoretical contributions have been complemented by a huge volume of empirical work, with some of the most notable studies relating to international trade and financial markets. Without doubt, our understanding of how markets function has advanced immeasurably due to the efforts of the aforementioned scholars.

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Until the 2002 Nobel prize, one of the most important contributions to our understanding of markets—Vernon Smith’s (1962, 1965) real-stakes double oral auctions—remained under the radar of most mainstream economists. Smith’s experiments, which followed in the footsteps of Chamberlin (1948), spawned a massive experimental literature investigating market processes. Subsequent scholars have examined alternative institutions, such as conventional auctions (Coppinger et al. 1980), decentralized bilateral bargaining (Hong and Plott, 1982), and posted prices (Plott, 1986). They have also varied the information structure to study important phenomena such as asset bubbles (Smith et al., 1988), while other studies have examined the possibility of social preferences interfering with the market-clearing process (Fehr et al., 1993). The single most important conclusion emerging from the early experimental literature was one that no theoretical or non-experimental study had ever convincingly demonstrated: markets lead to the efficient exchange of commodities, and that this occurs even when many of the traditional assumptions of “perfect markets” break down, i.e., when there is a small number of price-setting traders who have incomplete information, and in the absence of a centralized orchestrator such as the nebulous “Walrasian auctioneer” (Hayek, 1945; Smith, 1982).

Compared to conventional naturally-occurring data, the key advantage offered by the laboratory experimental methods pioneered by Vernon Smith was the ability to artificially control how much traders valued the commodities being traded (known as inducing values), as this allowed researchers to accurately estimate demand and supply schedules, thereby permitting precise welfare analysis. This point should not be understated: while mainstream economics embraced Adam Smith’s theory of the “invisible hand,” it took almost 200 years for economists to present plausible evidence of the phenomenon. Despite the fundamental importance of this result, laboratory experiments in general (let alone ones used to study markets) remained a niche tool. One of the reasons for the relative lack of enthusiasm among many mainstream economists was the perceived artificiality of laboratory experiments: many scholars were concerned that the small stakes, the restricted strategy space, the inexperience of subjects, and the scrutiny of the experimenter all contributed to empirical insights that were of limited value to understanding naturally-occurring markets (Levitt and List, 2007). In particular, many behavioral anomalies that were regularly detected in laboratory experiments, such as the endowment effect (Knetsch, 1989) and reciprocity in zero-reputation environments (Fehr and Gächter, 2002), were inconsistent with both the premises and the conclusions of the neoclassical model, and were being used as an intellectual platform to challenge mainstream economics.

Just as the theoretical and empirical literatures on markets developed in line with the advancement of the available methodological tools, so too did the sub-literature on experimental studies of markets with the advent of field experimental techniques in the early 2000s. This change was a fundamental step towards unifying empirical methods as in many situations, field experimental techniques offered the advantages of both conventional naturally-occurring data and laboratory experimental data with neither set of disadvantages. Empirical economists who would previously

reject laboratory experimental data due to a perceived lack of realism embraced natural field experiments as an elixir for the endogeneity problem associated with naturally-occurring data.

In particular, field experiments allowed researchers to investigate real traders operating in real markets without the researcher having to surrender control over the environment. Consequently, the literature offered more sophisticated answers to questions such as: “how prevalent is ethnic discrimination in rental markets?,” (Ahmed and Hammarstedt, 2008), “what are the productivity consequences of increasing wage rates?,” (Gneezy and List, 2006), and “what is the impact of business training on the microfinance market?,” (Karlan and Valdivia, 2011).

Markets are a large and extremely diverse area of research and many of the other studies in this volume cover important components of the literature. In this review, we focus on the overarching conclusions. Moreover, in light of the literature’s relative youth, we also discuss some of methodological issues associated with the literature.

In our review of the literature on field experimental studies of markets, we present three main conclusions. The first is the most important: generally speaking, markets organize the efficient exchange of commodities. Second, consistent with much of the laboratory experimental literature, there exist behavioral anomalies that impede markets’ ability to organize the efficient exchange of commodities. Third, many behavioral anomalies disappear when traders are sufficiently experienced in their roles, rehabilitating markets’ ability to organize the efficient exchange of commodities.

This review is organized as follows. Section 2 is the preamble, where we discuss: how markets are defined; the studies that will be covered by this review; the classification of field experimental studies of markets; and the advantages and disadvantages of field experiments when studying markets. Section 3 is a presentation of the main results in the literature. Section 4 is a discussion of the key methodological insights for scholars considering the use of field experiments in an empirical market study. Section 5 provides closing remarks, including a discussion of possible future field experimental studies of markets.

2. PREAMBLE

The importance of markets to academic economics is self-evident, and many of the earliest contributions to the experimental literature in general (Chamberlin, 1948; Smith, 1965) and to the field-experimental sub-literature in particular (List, 2004) were studies of markets. Accordingly, when the editors of this volume approached us with the idea of writing a literature review on field experiments in markets, in addition to being delighted and honored by the proposal, we regarded it as a very logical component of a volume dedicated to field experiments.

As any author of a literature review is well aware, deciding on which studies to include can be somewhat problematic as one attempts to balance the desire for parsimony with efforts at being

comprehensive. In addition to this conventional challenge, we encountered an unexpected difficulty: finding an operationally suitable definition of a “market.”

2.1. DEFINING MARKETS

Somewhat perversely for a concept so central to the discipline of economics, economists scarcely provide a definition of a market (Hodgson, 2008). As an illustration of this bizarre lacuna, the otherwise comprehensive 1987 edition of the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* does not even contain an entry on “markets”! (This omission is corrected in the second edition published in 2008.) As we will see, a serious challenge for a review article is that given any reasonable definition of a market, an overwhelmingly large number of research contributions can be classified as studies of a market.

In light of the absence of a textbook definition, the layperson’s dictionary definition is an obvious starting point. According to Merriam-Webster, a market is: “The course of commercial activity by which the exchange of commodities is effected,” or, alternatively: “A meeting together of people for the purpose of trade by private purchase and sale and usually not by auction.” This concurs with the broad, Austrian-inspired definition offered by the second edition of the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics*: “All forms of trade or exchange that involve private property, defined loosely as assets under private control,” (Hodgson, 2008).

In an effort to deploy specialist concepts and to narrow the characterization, the *New Palgrave Dictionary of Economics* offers a different definition along the following lines: “Markets involve multiple exchanges, multiple buyers or multiple sellers, and thereby a degree of competition. A market is defined as an institution through which multiple buyers or multiple sellers recurrently exchange a substantial number of commodities of a particular type. Exchanges themselves take place in a framework of law and contract enforceability. Markets involve legal and other rules that help to structure, organize and legitimize exchange transactions. They involve pricing and trading routines that help to establish a consensus over prices, and often help by communicating information regarding products, prices, quantities potential buyers or potential sellers. Markets, in short, are organized and institutionalized recurrent exchange.” (Hodgson, 2008).

According to the broadest definition, markets cover the organized exchange one would encounter in a stock exchange, the relational exchange that is commonplace between two firms with a repeating supply arrangement, the one-off, haphazard exchange that may be observed under Craigslist, and the completely informal transaction whereby a teenager shovels snow from a neighbor’s driveway in exchange for \$20. If one switches to the narrower definition, one could make an argument for excluding all but the stock exchange example. However, the specter of *potential* or *latent* competition combined with the existence of a legal system that permits civil lawsuits together ensure that one could make a perfectly legitimate argument for classifying all

four of the examples as market transactions according to *both* the broad *and* narrow definitions. This complicates the process of selecting which studies to include in the literature review.

2.2. STUDIES COVERED BY THE LITERATURE REVIEW

As indicated above, starting with a broad definition of markets leaves us struggling to exclude studies from our literature review. After all, the industrial organization literature—a huge literature—is automatically subsumed into the markets literature. As an illustration, if one examines the latest (at the time of writing) issue of the *American Economic Review* (105:2), there are 14 papers, of which we regard 10 as being about markets. Informally browsing other issues of the same and other leading journals confirms that a majority of economics papers can be classified as a market study of some sort.

Field experiments constitute a small minority of papers published in journals such as the *American Economic Review*; thus, perhaps restricting our attention to field experimental studies of markets will make the coverage manageable. At this point, we note that we are employing the Harrison and List (2004) definition of field experiments, which means the union of artefactual, framed, and natural field experiments, to the exclusion of conventional laboratory experiments.

- *Conventional laboratory experiments* employ a standard subject pool of students, an abstract framing, and an imposed set of rules.
- An *artefactual field experiment* is the same as a conventional laboratory experiments, but with a non-standard subject pool.
- A *framed field experiment* is the same as an artefactual field experiment but with field context in either the commodity, task, or information set that the subjects can use.
- A *natural field experiment* is the same as a framed field experiment but where the environment is one where the subjects naturally undertake these tasks and where the subjects do not know that they are in an experiment.

The easiest way to restrict our attention to field experiments is to use the electronic paper repository www.fieldexperiments.com (note that this is a highly incomplete database but it is accurate in the sense that any included paper is definitely a field experiment). Again, somewhat informally, we look at the first 50 of the approximately 350 listed papers in alphabetical order, and we find 25 papers that can reasonably be classified as studies of markets, covering topics as diverse as the returns to education, large-scale blood donation, ethnic discrimination in rental markets, behavior in sealed-bid auctions, real vs. hypothetical willingness-to-pay for consumer goods, and the manipulation of betting markets.

As an alternative, we also conducted a JSTOR search of articles containing the words “field experiment” in the title sorted in reverse chronological order. Again, out of the first 50 papers, we found 25 that can reasonably be classified as studies of markets, also covering a wide array of

topics such as: the demand for insurance, vote buying in West Africa, microfinance in Guatemala, skilled immigrants in labor markets, pricing health products, female entrepreneurship, and product customization.

The main conclusion that we draw from this informal search and classification exercise is that an exhaustive review of field experiments on markets is impossible. Moreover, even if one were to make it feasible by reviewing a randomly-selected sample of the papers, it is not clear that such a review would be of much scientific value given the diversity of topics covered by field experiments on markets.

In light of the above, this review will deliver extra focus on methodological issues. We will survey a broad range of field experiments with the goal of giving insight on recurring methodological issues that arise.

Another factor to consider is the other contributions in this volume, as many of them cover topics that overlap significantly with “markets.” To avoid needless replication, we will cover the following topics minimally at most: marketing; issues specifically relating to developing countries and anti-poverty interventions; discrimination; education; and labor markets.

2.3. CLASSIFYING FIELD EXPERIMENTS IN MARKETS

Our review will cover the overarching results in field experimental studies of markets without structuring the results around a classification of the studies. However in the background, it is instructive to keep the following classification in mind as it helps organize the types of contribution. We classify the literature along three primary dimensions.

First: studies that investigate a specific market institution with the aim of gaining a better understanding regarding how it functions, versus studies that do not. Thus, for example, Lucking-Reiley (1999) uses a framed field experiment to test the revenue equivalence of first-price sealed bid and Dutch auctions; this clearly constitutes an investigation of a specific market institution. On the other hand, Bertrand et al. (2010) study the effect of advertising content on demand for the advertised product; the highly context-specific nature of the investigation combined with the lack of focus on the rules of the exchange process render this study as *not* an investigation of a specific market institution.

Second: studies where the empirical modeling is structural versus reduced-form (consider them as the two end-points of a spectrum). We define structural modeling as an econometric specification derived from explicit modeling of the optimization problems faced by the different decision-makers. Typically, this includes an equilibrium concept to reconcile the decision-makers’ optimization as a step toward developing an econometric specification. Such models are primarily *deductive* methods of building knowledge. In contrast, in a reduced-form model, the econometric specification can be interpreted at face value rather than the end point of a series of optimization

problems by agents. Reduced-form modeling corresponds to an *inductive* approach toward building knowledge.

The choice of structural versus reduced-form modeling in field experimental studies of markets is more noteworthy than in typical economics research. For most fields, the researcher makes a largely unrestricted choice between the two techniques on the basis of the standard pros and cons: on the one hand, structural models involve more arbitrary assumptions (thereby risking serious specification errors) and they can be particularly data hungry; on the other hand, structural models can help inform more statistically efficient econometric specifications (including superior extrapolation), and they permit welfare and counterfactual analysis.

In empirical studies of markets, researchers face an additional hurdle when considering structural models: in markets with large numbers of buyers and sellers interacting physically and verbally, it may be very difficult to model the strategy space in a way that is both tractable enough to permit the derivation of an estimable econometric specification, and complex enough to capture the institution's essence. For example, despite well over a century of seasoned effort by the profession's biggest names, economists are yet to offer a substantive advance over the basic Walrasian model of demand and supply using modern game-theoretic techniques, and this is primarily the result of the environment's intractability (Al-Ubaydli et al., 2012). (An alternative route taken by some studies, such as Gjerstad and Dickhaut (1998), is to relax the strict rationality assumption and use agent-based modeling to derive testable predictions.) Thus, in the context of the literature on field experimental studies of markets, in many institutions, we find an extraordinary dearth of structural models because of their infeasibility. The consequent abundance of reduced-form models reflects researchers' efforts at inductively learning about markets with any method that comes to hand. There is much to be gained from filling this gap in the literature since markets that are difficult to model are the heartbeat of modern economies, and concrete welfare analysis of real markets is the holy grail.

Third: studies where all theoretical and empirical modeling conforms to the neoclassical blueprint, versus studies where explicit consideration is given to behavioral alternatives to the neoclassical model. A useful operational definition of neoclassical models is ones where each decision-maker maximizes expected utility over her own money outcomes, and where uncertainty is modeled according to rational expectations. The most frequent behavioral alternatives to the neoclassical model correspond to a breakdown of egoism (e.g., inequity aversion, reciprocity in one-shot environments) or a breakdown of expected utility (e.g., loss aversion, ambiguity aversion).

As in the case of the structural versus reduced-form dimension, the neoclassical versus behavioral dimension is noteworthy in the empirical studies of markets literature. Ever since the days of Adam Smith, there has been a vibrant debate over whether unregulated markets can deliver efficient outcomes. The debate crosses over disciplines and remains a highly politicized issue. According to the first welfare theorem, a market operating under the conditions of the neoclassical model will operate efficiently. As such, when researchers posit behavioral alternatives to the neoclassical

model as being superior, in many cases, they are not merely attempting to refine the predictive accuracy of the narrow model at hand; rather, they are attacking the first welfare theorem by undermining its tenets. Conversely, when a study rejects a behavioral alternative to the neoclassical model, it is often attempting to rehabilitate the first welfare theorem. Naturally, these trends are not absolute, and many insightful contributions to the behavioral versus neoclassical debate reflect attempts at refining our understanding of a specific market scenario only. However in general, consumers of the literature on empirical studies of markets should bear in mind that studies that empirically investigate behavioral preferences are often trying to make a much more significant point about the efficiency of unregulated markets and the desirability of corrective government intervention. Accordingly, such studies are associated with a political and/or sociological undercurrent that emotionally inflames the debate.

In summary, similar to most literatures, the field experimental studies of markets literature involves a mixture of studies that focus on general principles as well as those that drill deeper into specific cases (i.e., specific market institutions). However *unlike* most literatures, structural modeling is underrepresented in the field experimental studies of markets literature due to the difficulty of tractably modeling even the simplest markets. Further, in the context of behavioral versus neoclassical modeling, the field experimental studies of markets literature is an intellectual battleground for a much larger and more significant debate over the first welfare theorem and the desirability of government intervention in markets. As such, even somewhat mundane issues such as the existence of the endowment effect (List, 2003) can become flashpoints.

2.4. WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF FIELD EXPERIMENTS?

Most types of data can be classified into one of three categories: naturally-occurring data, laboratory experimental data, and field experimental data. The merits of experimental data as a whole compared to naturally-occurring data are well understood (Kagel and Roth, 1997), and more recently, economists have extensively debated the pros and cons of laboratory and field experimental data (Levitt and List, 2007; Falk and Heckman, 2009; Frechette and Schotter, 2015). While the general principles presented in those debates apply well to empirical studies of markets, there are some idiosyncratic factors that are worth mentioning.

As discussed above, markets are especially interesting because economists are constantly searching for evidence of their ability to deliver efficient outcomes. Assessing efficiency requires knowledge of the agent's preferences over different outcomes; most commonly, this refers to buyers' (sellers') values (costs) of the commodities being traded. Generally speaking, this is very difficult because the values are homegrown (meaning that they are assigned organically rather than explicitly by an experimenter), and so the information has to be extracted from the traders. Further, in most market institutions, traders are faced with strong incentives to *misrepresent* their true valuations over commodities—specifically to gain a bargaining advantage. (In studies of discrimination in the marketplace, there is an added incentive to conceal true valuations: not

wanting to be perceived as a bigot due to—for example—harboring animosity toward people of a certain race.) One of the most commonly used methods for eliciting trader values is surveys (also known as contingent valuation); in spite of the deployment of a variety of complex schemes, they remain costly, unwieldy, and unreliable methods of estimating values (Diamond and Hausman, 1994).

Experiments offer researchers a way of assessing efficiency: researchers can induce values rather than relying on homegrown values that are extremely difficult to recover. Note that this is distinct from the most commonly cited advantage of experiments, which is that they permit randomization. This is why Vernon Smith’s real stakes experiments (Smith 1962, 1965) are retrospectively considered so path-breaking: they were the first systematic and transparent demonstrations of a “regular” market equilibrating according to Walrasian dynamics.

To a large extent, the virtue of being able to induce values is restricted to laboratory experiments. In natural field experiments, researchers can easily *influence* homegrown values, but only in limited circumstances can they *induce* values, and full-information is usually required for assessing efficiency. One intelligent workaround is for a researcher to use confederates whose values are induced and whose behavior is strictly controlled by the researcher, and to have the confederates interact covertly with a regular trader who is unaware of the experiment (List, 2006). While the regular trader’s values are homegrown and unknown, knowledge of the confederate’s value only can be sufficient for assessing some issues pertaining to efficiency.

Efficiency is not the be-all and end-all of market studies, however; there are a wide range of intellectually valuable questions that do not relate to efficiency and, more importantly, do not require knowledge of values. The literature on discrimination in the market place is a good example as techniques can be deployed to detect and evaluate discrimination without necessarily knowing the values of the commodities being traded. Auction studies that focus on comparing the revenue-generating properties of different schemes (rather than the efficiency of the allocation) also fall into this category. In these situations, the usual pros and cons associated with natural, laboratory, and field-experimental data apply.

3. MAIN RESULTS

3.1. CONVENTIONAL COMMODITY MARKETS

In our opinion, the most important result in field experiments in general (let alone field experimental studies of markets) is no more than a replication of the most important result in laboratory experiments in general. We therefore regard the result as being the most important result in experimental economics, and certainly one of the most important results in empirical economics (if not *the* most important).

Result 1.1: Markets based on decentralized trade successfully organize the efficient exchange of commodities.

The flagship paper for this result is List (2004). To properly understand this paper, one needs to first cover two of its pivotal antecedents, Chamberlin (1948) and Smith (1962), both of which were conventional laboratory experiments.

In Chamberlin (1948), subjects were divided into buyers and sellers and assigned a value v that was private information (the induced value). The traders participated in a market for a fictitious commodity where buyers were seeking to purchase one unit and sellers were seeking to sell one unit. In the event of a successful trade at price p , the buyer would earn $v - p$, and the seller would earn $p - v$; failure to trade would result in earnings of zero. Thus, the value operated as a reserve price for traders. This payoff structure allows the experimenter to draw a step-wise demand and supply schedule, which in turn permits the prediction of an equilibrium price, and the designation of intramarginal and extramarginal traders. For full efficiency, all intramarginal traders should trade, and none of the extramarginal traders should.

The Chamberlin trading environment operated according to the following rules.

- During the trading round, traders had the opportunity to mill around and try to secure a trade via unrestricted verbal negotiations, within ear-shot of other traders.
- Upon successfully negotiating a trade, the two traders would notify the experimenter, at which point the trade price would be publicly declared.

A crucial feature of Chamberlin's experiment was that the earnings were entirely hypothetical; subjects were instructed to behave *as if* they were earning real money.

The primary variable of interest (retrospectively) was: actual rents realized as a proportion of potential rents, known as the efficiency. This is equivalent to examining the extent to which intramarginal traders managed to trade vis-à-vis extramarginal ones. Almost equivalent is examining the extent to which, and speed with which, trading prices converged to the predicted equilibrium price.

Chamberlin found that prices were volatile, and that they converged to a below-equilibrium price, implying less-than-fully-efficient exchange. He ascribed this to the possibility that in his experiments, buyers were better bargainers than sellers because most subjects only had real-life experience being buyers.

Vernon Smith reasoned otherwise, positing three potential reasons for the failure of the Chamberlin market to equilibrate in the predicted fashion. First, the lack of financial incentives; second, the lack of experience (subjects would play a very limited number of rounds); and third, the limited circulation of information; in particular, only trade prices were truly public, and regular bids and offers were usually known only by the pair of traders involved.

Smith (1962, 1965) tested his hypotheses by introducing financial incentives, giving the subjects more experience trading, and by changing the trading rules from Chamberlin's decentralized bilateral bargaining with public prices to a double oral auction. In Smith's setup, which resembles a traditional trading pit, all bids and offers were public information, including those that actually led to trades. As a result, prices rapidly converged to the Walrasian equilibrium, and extremely high levels of efficiency were observed. A huge subsequent literature confirmed the robustness of these findings.

As remarked earlier, Smith's work was the first convincing demonstration of Walrasian dynamics and of the invisible hand, and this was possible because of induced preferences (values). Despite the magnitude of the intellectual leap taken by Smith, there was still an intellectual gap between Smith's results and real, non-artificial markets due to his reliance on conventional laboratory experiments. Decades of research in social psychology had demonstrated that the unusual conditions associated with conventional laboratory experiments could generate behavior that was unreflective of behavior outside the laboratory (Levitt and List, 2007). Thus, the challenge for subsequent scholars was to see if there was some way to make use of Chamberlin's and Smith's innovations in the field.

This brings us to List (2004), which was nominally a field-based *mélange* of Chamberlin (1948) and Smith (1962, 1965). Ideally, List would have run a natural field experiment. However scholars are yet to discover a way of inducing values in a manner that is compatible with natural field experiments' defining characteristic: the subject being unaware of their participation in an experiment. Certainly, an experimenter can covertly *influence* a subject's homegrown value via, for example, advertising; however constructing precise demand and supply schedules requires knowledge of the exact value.

Survey methods could, in principle, allow the research to bypass the need to induce values. However they are yet to provide the solution for several reasons. First, there remains significant controversy over survey methods' ability to deliver accurate estimates of homegrown values (Diamond and Hausman, 1994). Second, constructing demand and supply schedules that can be tractably analyzed requires a small, contained market and a short time horizon. Such markets are quite difficult to come by in practice, and if they are covertly constructed by an experimenter, adding something as unusual as contingent-value surveys would surely undermine the experimenter's efforts at maintaining the subjects' ignorance of the experiment.

Thus, List conceded that with the tools available at the time (and still today, to the best of our knowledge), the closest he could come to a natural field experiment of a market with a known demand and supply schedule was a framed field experiment. List's task was therefore to find a real market with the following two features. First, it would be a market where a representative sample of traders would be willing to participate in an experiment. Second, it would be a market that could be effectively mimicked in a laboratory environment with a small number of traders.

In the end, List chose the decentralized bilateral bargaining market that was selected by Chamberlin, and that is currently deployed in the trading of sports paraphernalia and collector pins. Why did List choose a Chamberlin market rather than a double oral auction, such as those that can be found in the Chicago Board of Trade, a double electronic auction similar to those operating in modern stock exchanges, or any one of the numerous alternatives? For sure, the primary motivation was feasibility rather than the belief that these two markets were in some way systematically more interesting or representative than other markets. In particular, being a keen trader in the markets afforded List the knowledge and the contact network necessary to formulate and run the experiments. See List (2011) for more advice on executing natural field experiments.

List's (2004) Chamberlin market differed slightly from its progenitor in that the sellers worked from fixed trading desks, and the ability to move around the trading area was restricted to the buyers. This was to more closely mimic the markets being studied: sports paraphernalia exhibitions look similar to farmer's markets, whereby sellers display their wares at fixed installations and in the immediate proximity of other sellers. Also, the commodity being traded was less abstract than the completely fictitious commodity in Chamberlin (1948) and Smith (1962, 1965): it was a real item from the market being studied, but damaged so that it would have no intrinsic value, and so that the experimenter was free to induce values as required. The induced demand and supply schedules for some of the rounds can be seen in Figure 1 below, where the equilibrium price is predicted to lie in the range \$13-\$14.

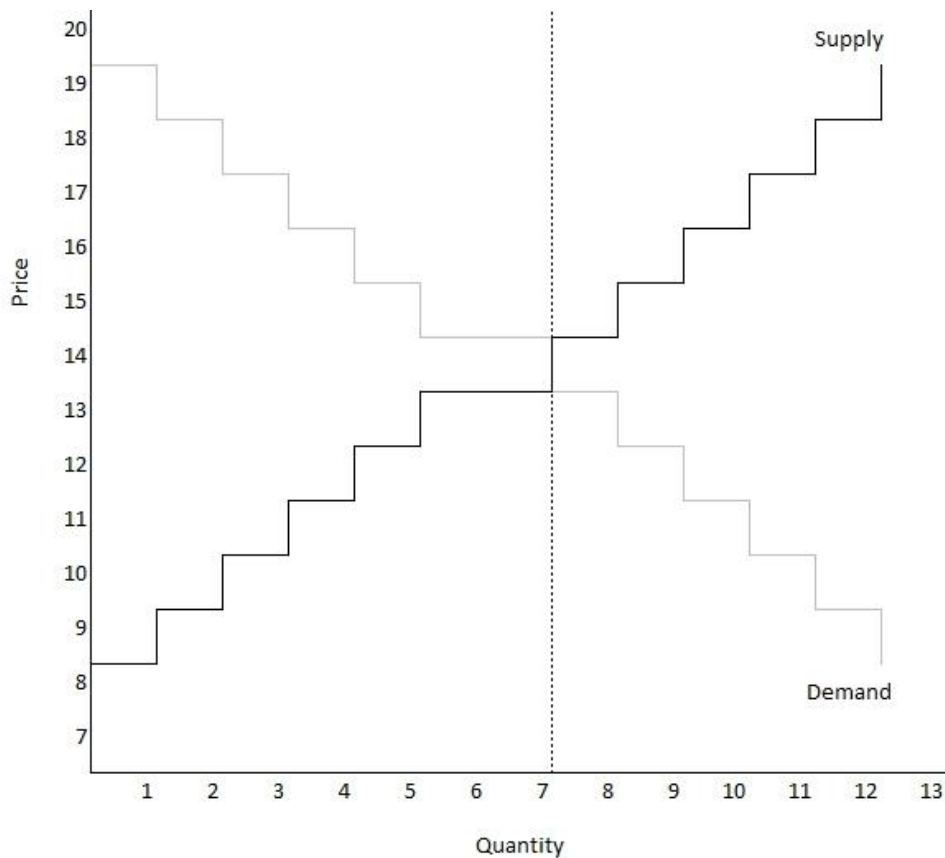


Figure 1: Demand/Supply Schedules Used in the Symmetric Markets in List (2004)

These differences were largely cosmetic. From a scientific viewpoint, the key differences were those that rendered List (2004) a framed field experiment: the subjects were real buyers and sellers from sports paraphernalia and commemorative pin markets, and each occupied their natural role with a natural level of experience, and the stakes (induced values) were calibrated to natural levels.

List (2004) experimented with different genders and ages of participants, and, more importantly, with different-shaped demand and supply schedules, including some highly asymmetric systems where one out of demand or supply was perfectly elastic. Overall, he found consistent convergence of prices to equilibrium (average trade prices were always in the range \$13-\$14), and consequently, high levels of efficiency (95% on average for later trading rounds). The efficiency was achieved without requiring bids and offers to be public information, as in a double oral auction. This is notable because at a casual level, most markets are not typified by public bids and offers, and so it would be concerning for economists if their flagship model for predicting prices depended on institutional features rarely seen in practice.

List and Price (2006) repeat List (2004), but they had a smaller number of sellers each of whom could sell multiple units. They also observed efficiency levels of the order of 95%.

Relatedly, Haushofer and Zurlinden (2013) stage a double auction game with 220 residents of the informal settlement of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. Each participant is assigned the role of buyer or seller and given a reservation price of 20 or 10 KES, respectively. Transaction prices converge rapidly to slightly over 11 (but less than 12) within 4 rounds, and the rate of convergence is strongly associated with mathematical ability in both buyers and sellers. When roles were switched, offered prices dropped more rapidly, suggesting that observational learning plays a role in the development of market behavior. In general, the paper finds evidence that neoclassical price theory can accurately predict market behavior with non-standard subjects.

Likewise, Waichman and Ness (2012) run an artefactual field experiment in which 45 German farmers and 45 students participate in one of three decentralized bargaining markets, differing only in market size. Subjects are randomly assigned a reservation value and the role of buyer or seller. The allocative efficiency ratio is, on average, higher than 80% in all treatments, though statistically significantly lower than 100%. There is no significant difference between the farmers' and students' trading volumes and prices; however, in two pairs of treatments and in the pooled data, farmers create surpluses that significantly exceed those of students and those predicted by market equilibrium. Waichman and Ness's results confirm that neoclassical competitive theory predicts the allocative efficiency outcome of this type of market well. Both studies are at odds with Chamberlin (1948), but lend support to List's (2004) results

To add theoretical structure to these empirical insights, Miller (2013) presents a General Convergence Theorem explaining the convergence of markets to the competitive equilibrium (CE). This theory posits that if prices converge in a market in which there are no loss-generating trades or profitable units left untraded, the prices and quantities must converge to a CE. To demonstrate this model, Miller modifies Gode and Sunder's (1993) zero-intelligence agent (ZIA) market simulations by adding status consciousness to the agents and running both Smith and Chamberlin market treatments. He finds that all experiments converge to the CE according to the General Convergence Theorem.

To the best of our knowledge, other than a handful of experiments (a few of which we just mentioned), List (2004) did not spawn a wave of induced-value framed field experiments in a manner similar to Smith (1962, 1965), and so there are few other studies to report. For the reasons discussed in Section 2.3—the difficulty of developing a tractable model—the few studies that do investigate Walrasian dynamics do not employ any structural modeling. Thus, while papers such as List (2004) add significantly to our understanding of the market process, there remains a large theoretical gap that economists need to fill.

Before discussing some of the other market institutions studied in the literature, we briefly take a detour relating to the work of Friedrich Von Hayek. The general equilibrium version of the Walrasian model that was advanced by Kenneth Arrow and Gerard Debreu is tractable because it is a decision-theoretic model rather than a game-theoretic one: agents are price-takers and nobody in the model actively sets prices. The model is associated with the list of “perfect market”

assumptions that is familiar to undergraduate economics students—and often derided by non-economists for their implausibility: perfect information (of all prices), no externalities, price-taking behavior (possibly justified by having a continuum of traders), and rational expectations.

Employing a narrative mode of argument rather than the mathematical modeling techniques now considered mainstream, Hayek (1945) regarded these assumptions as unnecessary for markets to serve their most important function—facilitating the efficient exchange of commodities. Rather than the static and certainty-filled markets of the Arrow-Debreu universe, Hayek regarded markets as being inherently dynamic and unpredictable. He characterized the environment as being driven by price-setting, risk-taking entrepreneurs who would make new markets and eliminate existing ones through a process of creative destruction. Insofar as an equilibrium price even exists, a Hayekian economist believes that the path *to* the equilibrium is where the market creates value; in contrast, a traditional neoclassical economist regards the out-of-equilibrium activity as a nuisance, and the equilibrium as being where the rubber meets the road.

Vernon Smith attached the name the “Hayek hypothesis” to the idea that none of the perfect markets assumptions was necessary for the efficient functioning of a market (Smith, 1982). Smith’s laboratory experiments provided strong evidence to support this view: the double oral auctions led to efficient exchange even though the number of traders was small (around 20), the traders set prices, information was incomplete and imperfect, expectations were not necessarily rational, and there was no centralized orchestrator. Al-Ubaydli and Boettke (2012) reviewed the field experimental literature—including the studies considered in this paper—and they also found strong support.

Result 1.2: Result 1.1 holds even when many of the conditions of the standard neoclassical model break down, specifically when the number of traders are small, traders are price setters, information is incomplete and/or imperfect, expectations are not rational, and there is no centralized orchestrator (Al-Ubaydli and Boettke, 2012).

The environment in List (2004) and List and Price (2006) clearly violates the standard perfect market assumptions and looks much closer to the sort of market that Hayek envisaged (see Joyce (1984) for an experiment with an actual Walrasian auctioneer). We urge scholars to more seriously consider the Hayekian approach as they design future field experiments since neoclassical modeling techniques have yielded essentially no testable predictions since Walras (1874). For more on Hayek’s work, see Boettke (2012), Boettke and O’Donnell (2013), Boettke and Candela (2014), and Boettke, et al. (2014).

3.2. FINANCIAL MARKETS

In conventional markets, traders are certain of the value *to themselves* of the commodities being traded, and they are imperfectly informed about the commodities’ values to other traders. The job of prices is to give each trader information about how much the other traders value the different

commodities, thereby helping each trader to decide how to allocate his or her resources across the available commodities. Efficiency is gauged by the extent to which commodities end up being consumed by those who value them the most. Equivalently, inefficiency is indicated by prices that result in sub-optimal consumption.

In classically-conceived financial markets, each commodity being traded is valued equally by all traders (apart from risk preferences), but the traders are imperfectly informed about what that value is. If traders are heterogeneously imperfectly informed about the common value, then the job of the price is to disseminate information about the commodity's fundamental value. Inefficiency is indicated by prices that depart significantly and persistently from the commodity's fundamental value. The most common illustration is an asset bubble.

Financial market experiments are attractive for the same reason that conventional market experiments are: in real financial markets, we are rarely aware of the fundamental value of the asset, primarily due to incomplete information about the underlying probability distribution. (A good example of an exception is mechanized gambling, such as a roulette wheel.) A laboratory experiment, such as Smith et al. (1988), affords researchers the opportunity to manipulate the information available to traders while retaining full information about the true value of all the commodities.

An additional analogy with conventional market experiments is that natural field experiments in financial markets are relatively uninformative because the commodities' fundamental values are unknown. Consequently, when we are looking to make definitive statements about efficiency in financial markets, framed field experiments are the closest that we can get to natural field experiments.

A key difference between studies of financial and conventional markets is that the additional structure makes theoretical modeling easier. While models still fail to capture the process of making bids and offers in a fully satisfactory way, the literature has delivered highly sophisticated structural models of how rational expectations of asset values are formed, and how traders respond to the flurry of information released continuously in such markets (Bikchandani et al., 1992; Celen and Kariv, 2004).

Result 1.3: Evidence on the efficiency of financial markets is mixed; while the general tendency is toward efficient prices, systematic deviations of limited magnitude are regularly detected.

One method that researchers have employed to investigate the efficiency of financial markets is experiments that measure the incidence of Bayesian decision making in strategic settings: if everyone behaves in a Bayesian way, then information is aggregated efficiently and, in the context of asset markets, asset prices will approach their fundamental value as quickly as possible. In Alevy et al. (2007), professional traders are placed in a common state of the world and each is given a private, independently drawn signal about the true state of the world. Each has to declare the state of the world he or she believes that the traders are in based on all of the available

information, and in a randomly determined sequence. Thus, the first trader can base his or her decision purely on his or her private signal, but the second one can also make use of the first trader's statement, and the third trader can make use of the first two traders' statements, and so on. Professional traders are found to be Bayesian 76% of the time. Superficially, this suggests that in a parallel market setting, asset prices would bear some reflection of the fundamental value, but that they may also stray. Alevy et al.'s (2007) data offered some support for this view, with traders entering reverse information cascades (herding on the wrong state) 3% of the time.

Cipriani and Guarino (2009) modify the Alevy et al. (2007) design to allow traders to trade assets, where the returns to holding the assets depend upon the real state of the world. Similar to Alevy et al. (2007), the authors find that decision-making is largely rational, but with a small percentage of traders engaging in anomalous behavior, including irrational abstention, contrarianism, and herding. Drehmann et al. (2007) conduct a similar framed field experiment, but with the addition of positive and negative externalities in some of the treatments. Similar to the other two papers, they also find a moderate level of rational (Bayesian) decision-making.

Drehmann et al. (2004) is a framed field experiment where the theoretical model predicts no rational herding because the price performs its function—aggregating market information. In support of the model's predictions, the authors fail to detect any significant herding. However, prices deviate systematically from the theoretically predicted levels, and they attribute this to contrarian behavior among a subset of traders.

List and Haigh (2010) examine a model of options trading that makes sharp predictions about how traders should respond to the potential for future upside investment news vs. downside investment news. In their framed field experiment, they find that professional traders largely adhere to the model's predictions.

A separate strand of the literature on field experiments in financial markets examines trading behavior without necessarily tying it to efficiency, and without requiring full information of assets' fundamental values. This includes many studies which investigate the susceptibility of professional traders to behavioral anomalies (Haigh and List, 2005). Note that when such studies are used to draw conclusions about efficiency, then the evidence should be considered indirect: theoretical models present sufficient rather than necessary conditions for efficiency, and so a breakdown of the initial conditions or any intermediate step does not alone imply inefficiency. We defer our discussion of these behavioral anomalies studies to section 3.4 below.

Overall, the number of framed field experiments of financial markets that permit a direct assessment of efficiency is small, and it is miniscule when compared to the vibrant laboratory experimental literature that was inspired by Smith et al. (1988). This is understandable because the chief protagonists in financial markets are people whose time is relatively expensive. For example, Drehmann et al. (2004, 2007) use McKinsey consultants. Conventional markets are typically populated by traders whose time can be purchased for amounts that fall within most research

budgets, such as the flea market traders in List (2004), meaning that framed field experiments are feasible. Nevertheless, we urge the profession to try to conduct more such experiments, especially in light of the limited usefulness of natural field experiments for the assessment of issues pertaining to efficiency.

3.3. SINGLE AUCTIONS

Auctions are considerably easier to model theoretically than most market institutions for two reasons. First, once the opening bell rings, only one side of the market (the buyers) is active. Second, there are a lot more restrictions on the strategy space of the active side. For example, in a sealed bid auction, conditional on their value, a buyer has no decision to make beyond selecting one number. While sealed bid single auctions are very common in practice, we are unaware of any naturally-occurring sealed bid double auctions.

As a result of the elevated tractability, models of auctions are able to produce a much richer variety of testable predictions than models of standard markets, which have barely gone beyond the predictions posited by Walras in the nineteenth century. Structural modeling becomes an option (Brown and Morgan, 2009; Ely and Hossain, 2009). This is particularly exciting for field experimentalists because in the case of conventional markets, scholars require knowledge of the values of market participants to be able to investigate the limited range of testable predictions. Thus, while field experimental investigations of conventional markets are typically restricted to being framed field experiments, with natural field experiments being incompatible with induced values, field experiments of *auctions* can easily be natural field experiments.

A further reason for the comparative ease of field experimentation with auctions is that auctions are inherently one-off exercises, meaning that the researcher can oversee and potentially control the entirety of the process. In contrast, conventional markets are fluid entities that sometimes have no perceivable starting or ending point (such as purchasing a good on Amazon), and they entertain much larger numbers of buyers and sellers.

Due to the expanded opportunity for generating testable hypotheses, and the relative youth of the literature on field experiments, in our opinion, the literature is yet to produce the sort of overarching conclusions that we are interested in for the purposes of this paper. We are particularly interested in results pertaining to efficiency, yet, to the best of our knowledge, these have not attracted anywhere near the research effort that they receive in laboratory experiments on auctions (Kagel and Levin, 2014).

Instead, the literature on field experiments in auctions is more focused on the issue of revenue maximization from the seller's perspective as a function of factors that can be manipulated easily in a theoretical model and in practice, such as the seller's stated reserve price (Ostrovsky and Schwarz, 2009) or the auction type (Lucking-Reiley, 1999). Accordingly, in this section, we give

a brief overview of some of the most important papers, with an emphasis on those that contain methodological lessons.

An auctions field experimental paper that contains an instructive blend of theory and empirics is Hossain and Morgan (2006). They use a 2x2 natural field experiment whereby they sell matched pairs of CDs and Xbox games on EBay. Their key treatment variable is shipping costs: they compare bidding patterns across a high shipping cost treatment versus a low shipping cost treatment. To complete the design, they cross that treatment with a high total minimum bid versus low total minimum bid treatment. Together, the design allows them to verify several basic predictions of auction theory. They report that increasing the total minimum bid decreases the number of bidders and the probability of sale, but it increases the expected revenue conditional on sale. These results accord well with standard auction theory.

As such, increasing the shipping costs while decreasing the minimum bid tends to increase the overall revenues (including shipping) obtained by the seller. This result holds true for both Xbox games and audio CDs, as long as the total minimum bid is less than 30% of the retail price of the object. Interestingly, this effect disappears when the total minimum bid is more than half the retail price, achieved in this experiment when an \$8 total minimum bid was applied to CDs. Though surprising from the point of view of rational bidding theory, the authors point out that this result can be explained with a simple model that involves bidders tending to ignore the size of shipping costs in an auction unless shipping costs become unusually large.

Related to this research are the innovative framed field experiments of Lucking-Reiley (1999) and Katkar and Reiley (2006). The first study, as noted above, represents an early example of how the internet can be used to test economic theory. Lucking-Reiley (1999) uses Internet-based auctions in a preexisting market with an unknown number of participating bidders to test the theory of revenue equivalence between the four major auction formats. Katkar and Reiley (2006) tests the auction theory related to reserve prices, and in this way is in the spirit of Hossain and Morgan (2006). More specifically, Katkar and Reiley (2006) designs a natural field experiment to compare outcomes in auctions with secret versus public reserve prices. Katkar and Reiley (2006) auctioned 50 matched pairs of Pokeman trading cards on eBay. To gain identification, each card was auctioned twice, once with a minimum bid of 30% of the card's book value and once with a minimum bid of \$0.05 and a secret reserve price equal to 30% of the card's book value. The use of a secret reserve price resulted in lower earnings for the sellers than did making the reserve price known. Interestingly, keeping the reserve price secret reduced i) the probability of selling the card, ii) the number of serious bidders in an auction, and iii) the winning bid. Thus, contrary to the beliefs of many eBay sellers and to the predictions of models of rational bidder behavior, using secret reserve prices instead of public reserve prices actually lowers a seller's expected returns, by lowering both the probability that the auction will result in a sale, and the price received if it does result in a sale. We consider these types of studies as ripe for replication and further study, as the internet remains a useful, though under-utilized experimental laboratory.

List and Lucking-Reiley (2000) test predictions associated with multiunit Vickrey auctions using a sports card field experiment. Theoretically, there should be demand reduction in uniform price auctions compared to Vickrey ones, and the authors find evidence of this. Moreover, consonant with theory, the demand reduction is shown to be inefficient, and switching to Vickrey auctions to eliminate the inefficiency does not adversely affect the seller's revenues.

Online auction websites also offer researchers the opportunity to test the effects of reputations. Modeling the effect of online reputations is more challenging than modeling more basic features, such as the effect of a reserve price or auction type, and so the associated field experiments rely on reduced-form econometric methods. Both Jin and Kato (2006) and Resnick et al. (2006) manipulate seller reputations and find—as expected—evidence that superior reputations lead to superior outcomes.

As explained above, an advantage of field experiments is the expanded strategy space compared to laboratory experiments. Grether et al. (2015) exploit this to find evidence of cyber-shilling in online automobile auctions: groups of buyers are found to behave in a peculiar manner that suggests that they have been enlisted by sellers to work on their behalf.

Finally, another strand of the literature examines charity auctions. Carpenter et al. (2008) repeat Lucking-Reiley's (1999) investigation of revenue differences, but in the context of an auction that is designed to raise money for a charitable cause. This paper again displays the advantages of using single auctions rather than double ones: the environment can be tractably modeled and sharp predictions derived. They find that, contrary to theory and previous laboratory experiments, first price auctions outperform second price auctions and all pay ones. They speculate that familiarity with the first price format is a key factor in explaining the results.

3.4. BEHAVIORAL ANOMALIES

Behavioral economics has substantially enhanced the profession's intellectual toolkit. Early on, laboratory experiments were the field's dominant empirical method. The precision and ease of replication associated with laboratory experiments allowed researchers to produce a laundry list of robust (in the laboratory, at least) deviations from the neoclassical model, such as the endowment effect, bounded rationality, and altruism. However, many mainstream economists have expressed reluctance to accept these findings due to their dependence upon laboratory experiments, which they regard as an ungeneralizable source of data. Further, the field's conclusions are often deployed as a means of attacking the first welfare theorem, thereby politicizing the debate (intentionally or otherwise), and attracting criticism unrelated to the generalizability of the supporting data.

For those with an exclusively methodological qualm with the flagship results of behavioral economics, field experiments present an avenue for potentially resolving the controversy. In fact, numerous attempts at exploring behavioral biases in a field setting have found the initial, laboratory-based conclusions to be robust, with important implications for markets.

A welcome feature of the behavioral experimental literature is that a researcher's choice between structural and reduced-form modeling is not restricted by the intractability of structural models. Similar to auctions, the environment can be simplified in a manner that permits the construction of insightful models.

The first behavioral anomaly that we discuss is a derivative of the huge literature on prospect theory, which is a refinement of expected utility theory.

Result 2.1: The endowment effect and loss aversion are observed in real markets and impede efficient exchange.

The following draws heavily from the literature review by Ericson and Fuster (2014). The endowment effect is defined as the observation that people seem to attach additional value to things they own simply because they belong to them.

The typical laboratory demonstration (Knetsch, 1989) involves randomly assigning subjects one of two commodities with similar values (such as a mug and a candy bar). The experimenter then offers the subject the opportunity to trade the assigned commodity for the other one. If the observed likelihood of ending up with good 1 (e.g., the mug) statistically depends (positively) upon the initial assignment, then this is evidence of the endowment effect. It is often explained by appealing to loss aversion: the loss in utility associated with giving up a good exceeds the gain associated with its acquisition.

If the endowment effect is strong and widespread, then it impedes the market's ability to allocate goods efficiently, as it makes people "irrationally" reluctant to trade. The first welfare theorem requires that, conditional on the market value of initial endowments, final consumption be independent of initial endowments, which is inconsistent with the endowment effect.

The laboratory evidence of the endowment effect is strong, though it is not absolute (Plott and Zeiler, 2005, 2006). In the field, the evidence is more mixed. List (2003) mimics Knetsch's (1989) design, but covertly to ensure that the experiment is a natural field one. In a sports paraphernalia exhibition, he recruits participants for the completion of a survey in exchange for a small amount of money and a sports card. The sports card is one of two comparably valued ones, and the assignment is randomized. After being assigned the card and completing the survey (allowing time for the subject to build a sense of attachment to the initially-assigned card), the subject is offered the opportunity to exchange it for the remaining card. List detects the endowment effect, albeit primarily in the case of inexperienced traders (we will discuss experienced ones below): 20% of those randomly assigned card 1 traded it for card 2, and 26% those randomly assigned card 2 traded it for card 1 (these figures should sum to 100% if subjects do not suffer from the endowment effect). List (2004) also finds similar results, also in a field setting, as do Englenmann and Hollard (2010). Inexperienced traders are present in most markets, including sports paraphernalia markets, and so these experiments suggest that the endowment effect may well impede efficient exchange in real markets. Apicella et al., (2014) runs an endowment effect experiment with an isolated tribe

of hunter-gathers, finding that only those that have increased exposure to modern society display the endowment effect.

In the context of financial markets, Haigh and List (2005) find indirect evidence of the endowment effect in a field experiment where the participants are professional traders from the Chicago Board of Trade. Subjects are asked to bet on lotteries designed to detect—among other things—the presence of loss aversion. Previous laboratory experiments with standard student subject pools had demonstrated the prevalence of loss aversion; contrary to what was detected in sports paraphernalia markets, Haigh and List (2005) found that loss aversion was even stronger among professional traders, confirming the possibility of the loss aversion (and hence the endowment effect) interfering with efficient exchange.

Labor markets are another setting where loss aversion has been shown to drive supply-side behavior. Hossain and List (2012) find that workers in a high-tech Chinese manufacturing facility supply more effort when an incentive is framed as a loss instead of a gain. Fryer et al. (2012) finds the same result with urban teachers. Tests of loss aversion when the experimenter does not control the reference point have proven more mixed with Goette, Huffman, and Fehr (2004) and Fehr and Goette (2007) finding evidence in favor and Andersen et al. (2015) finding evidence against.

The second behavioral anomaly that we will cover is bounded rationality, i.e., limits to a decision-maker's ability to optimize. Many different forms of bounded rationality have been investigated by economists. In the context of field experiments, the opportunities are more difficult because preferences are almost always homegrown rather than induced.

Result 2.2: Bounded rationality is observed in real markets and impedes efficient exchange.

The winner's curse is a form of bounded rationality that has been observed in field experiments. It is defined as the tendency for winning bids to systematically exceed the value of an auctioned item in common value actions under uncertainty. The winner's curse is an impediment to efficient exchange because it can lead to a winning bid from a buyer who—unbeknownst to him or her—values the item less than the seller does.

In laboratory experiments, testing for its presence is straightforward: an item is assigned a common value and subjects are randomly assigned independently and identically distributed signals of the common value drawn from a distribution that is common knowledge. Bidding then proceeds according to English auction rules, and the winning bid is compared to the induced, common value. Laboratory experiments regularly detect the winner's curse (Kagel and Levin, 1986).

Harrison and List (2008) used framed field experiments to test for the winner's curse's presence when the bidders are professional auction participants drawn from sports paraphernalia exhibitions. They find that professionals successfully avoid the winner's curse unless they adopt unfamiliar roles.

Hou et al. (2009) investigate the winner's curse using a natural field experiment on eBay. They purchase collector coins that have been professionally certified, and then they advertise them for auction without full information about the degree of certification, thereby manipulating the degree of uncertainty about the common component of the coins' values. In this natural setting, they find that for coins posted as uncertified, 83% of the 60 auctions that they arranged resulted in a winner paying more for the coin than its purchase value.

Another form of bounded rationality is limited mental accounting ability. As noted above, Hossain and Morgan (2006) investigate the sensitivity of online shoppers to the breakdown of an item's price between its direct cost and the shipping and handling cost. Rational shoppers should be indifferent to the breakdown conditional on the total cost. By randomly varying the components in a natural online auction setting, the authors demonstrate that charging a larger shipping cost leads to greater revenues for the seller. They also show how this case of bounded rationality can be partially attributed to loss aversion.

List and Haigh (2005) employ a framed field experiment to investigate the prevalence of the Allais paradox among professional traders at the Chicago Board of Trade. They find that professionals do indeed exhibit behavior consistent with the Allais paradox. Anomalies such as this and Hossain and Morgan (2006) imply the availability of unrealized arbitrage earnings and hence the potential inefficiency of the market process.

List and Millimet (2008) also employ a framed field experiment to study the prevalence of consistent preferences in a sports card market populated by children. They find that among children with experience trading, 38% exhibit preferences that violate the generalized axiom of revealed preference (GARP).

Another example of such bounded rationality in markets can be found in Anderson and Simester (2003), who explore consumer reactions to \$9 endings on prices. They use a natural field experiment to partner with a retail catalog merchant by randomly selecting customers to receive one of three catalog versions that show different prices for the same product. By systematically changing a product's price by varying the presence or absence of a \$9 price ending, they can explore various features of neoclassical theory. For example, a baseball bat may be offered to all consumers, but at prices of \$39, \$34, and \$47 in each catalog version. Anderson and Simester (2003) find a positive effect of a \$9 price on quantity demanded, large enough that a price of \$39 actually produced higher quantities than a price of \$34. This finding is puzzling in that their data can reject the theory that consumers turn a price of \$34 into \$30 by either truncation or rounding. This finding gives hard evidence on an interesting topic and demonstrates the need for a better theory of how consumers process prices, and more specifically, price endings.

The third deviation from the neoclassical model that we consider is social preferences, whereby decision-makers have preferences over the outcomes of others, conditional on their own outcomes. There are so many varieties of social preferences that the literature is yet to offer a unified model.

However, the models that have been studied have generated a wide range of structural and reduced-form insights. These include pure altruism, warm glow (Andreoni, 1990), inequity aversion (Fehr and Schmidt, 2001), reciprocity (Dufwenberg and Kirchsteiger, 2004), guilt aversion (Battigali and Dufwenberg, 2007), and others.

Similar to the other behavioral anomalies, social preferences represent a breakdown of the premises of the first welfare theorem, and so in principle they impede the ability of the market to allocate resources efficiently. However, among the behavioral anomalies, a distinguishing feature of social preferences is that in practice, they often offer a potential solution to a coincidental market failure. For example, in a one-shot market setting in the absence of external enforcement, a fear of fraud may prevent an efficient exchange from taking place; however if both parties have a concern for fairness or justice, then the efficient exchange may yet occur. This is an example of the theory of the second best (Lipsey and Lancaster, 1956).

Result 2.3: A concern for fairness and other forms of social preferences are observed in real markets though it is unclear whether it enhances or impedes the prospects for efficient exchange.

One particularly rich vein of market field experiments is studies of the gift exchange hypothesis. Akerlof (1982) suggested that problems of asymmetric information, namely managers' inability to specify worker effort in contracts in a perfectly enforceable way, can be attenuated by social preferences. By giving workers a "fair" wage in excess of the market wage, managers can induce a "fair" level of effort, which exceeds the minimum enforceable level of effort, hence the expression "gift exchange." While the original context is labor markets, the mechanism applies in many isomorphic settings, such as the investment game (trust game; Berg et al., 1995).

Fehr et al. (1993) was the first laboratory demonstration. Managers are paired anonymously with workers for one-shot interactions. Managers select the wage, it is reported to their partners, and the workers complete play by selecting effort. The efficient outcome is high wage, high effort, but the Nash equilibrium (by backward induction) is minimum wage, minimum effort. The authors detected a strong, positive relationship between wages and effort, and they also observed average wages and effort well in excess of their permissible minima. They attributed this to a combination of positive reciprocity and inequity aversion.

Investigating social preferences in a field experiment is challenging because, in the presence of repeated interactions, it is difficult to design an experiment that allows researchers to distinguish between reputational concerns and social preferences as explanations of behavior (List, 2006). In the laboratory, the high levels of experimenter control over the environment make it easy to circumvent the problem as the experimenter can create a one-shot environment, as in Fehr et al. (1993).

Gneezy and List (2006) offer one practical solution: focus on jobs where it is natural to employ people once and for a short time period, and where the job differs sufficiently from the workers' long-term career plans that it is unlikely that they would seek a recommendation from the manager.

The two jobs were library cataloguing and door-to-door fundraising, and the recruitment pool was college students. The authors found results that initially confirmed Fehr et al.'s (1993) lab findings—worker effort responding positively to above-market wages—but that over time, productivity reverted to the baseline level associated with the market wage.

Other contributions to this volume (von Wachter) cover this literature in detail, as Gneezy and List (2006) spawned numerous gift exchange field experiments. The review by Fehr et al. (2009) confirms that there is robust evidence of the presence of social preferences in labor markets, especially reciprocity. In some cases, the social preferences clearly promote efficient exchange by helping combat the problems arising from asymmetric information. In other cases, social preferences impede efficient exchange. For example Kube et al. (2013) mimic the design in Gneezy and List (2006) but they introduce an arbitrary wage cut. They find that it leads to a persistent diminution of productivity due to a revenge motive. As Akerlof and Yellen (1989) speculated, and in the spirit of Keynes (1936), this could be a source of involuntary unemployment at the macroeconomic level.

Anderson and Simester (2008) is a study of social preferences that is tangentially related to the gift exchange literature. The authors collaborate with a mail-order catalog firm to study the effect of allowing for the price of larger sizes of clothes to exceed that of smaller sizes. They find that a subset of customers regard such a pricing system as “unfair” and react by substantially decreasing their purchases, a manifestation of negative reciprocity. Like Kube et al. (2013), this is an example of social preferences impeding efficient exchange.

Perhaps somewhat further removed from the gift exchange literature is the work that explores identity and trading patterns in markets. For example, Bramoulle et al. (2010) investigate the effect of relationship formation—that is, of agents preferring to trade with specific agents—on market outcomes. In a series of simulations with agents of two different types, they find that more relationships develop in a model where agents learn from round to round than in a model of random trading partner selection, that relationships make participants more likely to trade, and that relationships reduce overall surplus by encouraging inefficient trades. In experiments set at a sports paraphernalia exhibition and at a flea market, the authors find statistically significant spontaneous (unprompted) relationship formation, increased likelihood of extra-marginal buyers executing trades (and a corresponding efficiency loss), and evidence of lower overall surplus for repeated trades (i.e., trades within relationships).

Relatedly, Bulte et al. (2015) conduct Hawthorne markets with subjects in Sierra Leone that have extraordinarily limited market experience (43% of subjects reported buying or selling something more than once a week). The first set of results looks at market outcomes when subjects engage with members of their village versus other villages. Across these two treatments the authors find lower levels of economic efficiency than earlier work (measured as a percentage of predicted surplus). The second set of results look at the variation in efficiency induced by the introduction of a middleman to act as a negotiator for the buyer. The results show that efficiency rises when the

middleman is introduced, suggesting social norms around haggling are important for determining market behavior in the sample.

Also along the lines of negative social preferences engendering inefficient outcomes, there exists a large field experimental literature on discrimination, and it is the subject of a chapter in this volume (Bertrand and Duflo). The deployment of field experiments for studying such phenomena is particularly instructive due to the socially unacceptable nature of discrimination; the scrutiny of an overt experiment would motivate subjects to try extra hard to avoid appearing as if they discriminate, even if they do actually discriminate in their day-to-day lives (Al-Ubaydli and List, 2015).

Although the excellent chapter by (Bertrand and Duflo) catalogues a variety of field experiments that test for discrimination in the marketplace, a brief overview of the empirical approach is worthwhile to provide a useful benchmark (see also Riach and Rich, 2002 and List, 2006). The work in this area can be parsed into two distinct investigation techniques: personal approaches and written applications. Personal approaches include studies that have individuals either attend job interviews or apply for employment over the telephone. In these studies, the researcher matches two testers who are identical along all relevant employment characteristics except the comparative static of interest (e.g., race, gender, age). Then, after appropriate training, the testers approach potential employers who have advertised a job opening. Using various outcome measures the researcher then reports differences based on the variable(s) of interest.

Under the written application approach, which can be traced to Jowell and Prescott-Clarke (1970), carefully prepared written job applications are sent to employers who have advertised vacancies. The usual approach is to choose advertisements in daily newspapers within some geographic area to test for discrimination. Similar to the personal approach tests, care is taken to ensure that the applications are similar across several dimensions except the variable of interest. One recent study that uses the written approach is due to Bertrand and Mullainathan (2002), who manipulate perception of race by randomly assigning white-sounding or black-sounding names to resumes sent to various prospective employers in Boston and Chicago. They find that the simple name manipulation makes a large difference: the “white” applicant garners an interview request for every eight resumes sent whereas the “black” applicant must send out fourteen resumes to gain one interview. Adding positive background information to both resumes exacerbates, rather than attenuates, this difference.

More recently, when designing discrimination field experiments, researchers often seek to distinguish between the two major economic theories of discrimination: statistical and animus. In the former, preferences remain neoclassical, and behavioral responds to category (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.) as the category carries statistically useful information about factors that do directly affect profits/utility, such as productivity, criminality, and so on. Setting aside moral considerations, this type of discrimination can help grease the wheels of the market process as it denudes the difficulties associated with imperfect information. In contrast, animus reflects

negative social preferences, and so it likely impedes efficient exchange. Thus, for example, if bigotry prevents people with long hair from entering the labor market, and 30% of the population has long hair, then the foregone output is highly significant.

Discrimination field experiments therefore gauge subject responses to a vector of observable attributes, where one dimension—the category being studied (race, gender, etc.)—is varied randomly. To isolate animus, the vector of the remaining observable attributes includes the variables that the category is most plausibly proxying for, thereby eliminating the category's role as a statistical tool (List, 2004). For example, if, hypothetically, employers discriminate against people with bushy eyebrows because they tend to drive red cars, and driving a red car is bad for business, the researcher will present employers in the experiment with people who have bushy eyebrows and that manifestly do not drive red cars, meaning that any residual discrimination toward them is the result of animosity.

This kind of design is not perfect. First, it requires that the researcher can capture all the statistical channels linking the category to payoff relevant information. In the bushy eyebrows example, perhaps the employer is worried about the potential employee having a second car. Second, it requires that the subjects are carefully considering all available information when making decisions. If they are boundedly rational and overwhelmed with information (or are not paying attention), they may resort to statistically-motivated discriminatory heuristics even in the presence of information that renders the heuristic redundant. Thus, in the bushy eyebrows example, the employer may not notice that the bushy-eyebrowed job candidate is driving a red car.

Studies employing the above technique have been used to study a wide array of phenomena, such as employment (Bertrand and Mullainathan, 2004), vehicle sales (List, 2004), housing sales (Ahmed and Hammarsted, 2009), and taxi rentals (Castillo et al., 2012). While some, such as List (2004), find that observed discrimination in a particular context is primarily statistical, others, such as (Gneezy et al., 2012) produce convincing evidence of animus. Hence, the discrimination literature contributes to the broadly mixed conclusions on social preferences: they exist in the marketplace, and they sometimes facilitate and sometimes impede efficient exchange.

Finally, an extensive body of field experimental evidence on social preferences in a context slightly removed from conventional market scenarios is the literature on charitable contributions (List, 2009). For example, efforts at soliciting financial donations in a natural field setting have consistently resulted in non-zero donations that cannot be plausibly reconciled with reputational concerns masquerading as social preferences. See, for example, List and Lucking-Reiley (2002), Landry et al. (2006), and Karlan and List (2007).

The behavioral anomalies discussed above are by no means exhaustive; in the interests of parsimony, we have examined the subset that we feel provide the best exposition of the main results and that is most instructive.

3.5. EXPERIENCE AND BEHAVIORAL ANOMALIES

Laboratory experiments have amassed huge amounts of evidence of behavioral anomalies within laboratory environments. The previous section surveys market field experiments and finds that there is considerable evidence of behavioral anomalies in field settings too, some of which impede the ability of markets to allocate goods efficiently. However, the field prevalence is certainly weaker than that found in the laboratory, and a closer examination suggests that this is at least partially systematic.

Result 3: There is evidence that some behavioral anomalies that impede efficient exchange and can be observed in real markets diminish and potentially disappear with market experience.

This conclusion remains a considerable source of controversy because it falls into a larger methodological debate about the desirability of laboratory vs. field experiments (Levitt and List, 2007; Falk and Heckman, 2009; Al-Ubaydli and List, 2015), and, to some extent, the even larger—and highly politicized—debate over the efficacy of decentralized markets as a mechanism for allocating resources.

As mentioned above briefly, in his investigation of the endowment effect, List (2003) found that its strength diminished with the market experience of the subject, and was absent for the most experienced market professionals. List (2003) presents non-experimental evidence that this is more likely due to treatment rather than selection, and this is supported by the experimental evidence in List (2011). Further evidence that professionals are systematically less loss averse than college students is presented in List and Haigh (2010), which is a test of options models. Notably, however, in Haigh and List (2005), the same authors found that myopic loss aversion was more prevalent for professional traders than for college students participating in the same experiment, indicating that the effect of market experience does not uniformly reduce the incidence of behavioral anomalies.

Despite detecting the Allais paradox among professional traders, using parallel experiments with college students, List and Haigh (2005) find that it is weaker for professionals.

In their study of Bayesian decision-making in financial markets, Alevy et al. (2007) found that professionals were *less* likely to be Bayesian than college students, though it did not affect their earnings. However, in certain settings, professionals exhibited a lower propensity to be drawn into reverse cascades, which the researchers were able to attribute to superior inferential capabilities. Moreover, unlike college students, Bayesianism among professionals did not differ as the domain switched from gains to losses. Lending credence to the causal role of experience in improving performance, in later rounds, like professionals, college students began to harmonize behavior across gain/loss domains. Further, the degree of Bayesian decision-making among professionals was also positively correlated with the reported intensity of the professionals' trading activity.

Along similar lines, in List and Millimet's (2008) study of GARP violations among children participating in sports card markets, the authors found that GARP violations were significantly lower among experienced traders, including experience that was randomly assigned via a treatment that caused subjects to increase their trading activity.

In their study of the winner's curse, as mentioned above, Harrison and List (2008) find that experienced traders assuming natural roles did not suffer from the winner's curse.

These field experimental findings follow in the footsteps of a large number of laboratory studies that find that even within the laboratory, behavioral anomalies diminish with the controlled experience that the subject is exposed to during their brief participation. For example, in their investigation of the endowment effect, Plott and Zeiler (2005) discover that it disappears once paid practice rounds and feedback on elicitation methods is introduced. They conclude that the previously observed endowment was more likely the result of subject misconceptions rather than fundamental features of human preferences. Similarly, as mentioned above, Vernon Smith (1962) attributed the successful equilibration of his double oral auctions, as compared to the failed equilibration of Chamberlin's (1948) decentralized markets, partially to the fact that subjects were able to amass significant experience on how to operate in a double oral auction.

The difficulty of running field experiments in general, and in particular of mimicking the precise structure of a specific laboratory experiment in the field, means that the evidence on the interaction between experience and the incidence of behavioral anomalies is limited. However, the conclusion that the majority of studies support—that professional experience diminishes the incidence of (and sometimes eliminates) behavioral anomalies that impede efficient exchange—should not come as a surprise. After all, impeding efficient exchange is tantamount to leaving money on the table, either at the individual or collective level. As such, all parties have an intrinsic incentive to actively seek to rid themselves of their behavioral anomalies. One imagines that a stock trader afflicted by the endowment effect will suffer below average earnings until they remedy the situation.

Even if people are ignorant of their biases, or find that they are incapable of doing anything about them, the market imposes a selection force that will tend to weed out the sufferers since they will have inferior trading performance. There is a rich mainstream (Witt, 1986; Blume and Easley, 2002) and heterodox (Hayek, 1945) literature that argues this point.

4. METHODOLOGICAL INSIGHTS

Due the inescapable breadth of the definition of a market, we have provided a necessarily cursory review of the literature on field experimental studies of markets. Despite the disparateness of the studies considered, we believe that there are some central methodological insights that can be garnered.

Conclusion 1: Inducing preferences for all participants in a natural field experiment is currently impossible.

The leading insight that we take away from the literature is that at the moment, nobody has developed a way of truly inducing preferences (values) for all participants in a natural field experiment. If one relaxes the requirement that the preferences of *all* participants be induced, then confederates can provide a partial workaround. For example, in List (2006) and Castillo et al. (2012), a confederate with induced preferences is given strict instructions on how to behave in the market, and remaining participants, who are unaware that they are participating, have homegrown preferences. This allows the researcher to study parts of the market process. However the equilibrium and welfare properties of the market cannot be studied due to the incomplete information on preferences.

This means that while field experiments such as List (2004) represent a significant addition to the foundational work of Smith (1962, 1965), we are yet to open the black box of demand and supply in a naturally-occurring market and definitively observe what is happening to demand, supply, actual prices, equilibrium prices, and surplus. The extensive literature on psychological priming (Bargh and Chartrand, 2000) gives us many suggestions on how to influence homegrown preferences covertly, thereby retaining the key feature of a natural field experiment, but the informational bar for testing the most important theories of market economics require more than this. As such, we believe that if scholars were to develop ways of precisely inducing preferences covertly in naturally occurring markets, then the intellectual returns would be massive.

Accordingly, until such an advance is made, there remains a fundamental tradeoff when choosing between framed field experiments and natural field experiments to study markets.

Conclusion 2: Scholars must be particularly careful when considering generalizing laboratory experimental evidence on behavioral anomalies to natural market settings.

The generalizability debate is large enough to be studied separately (see the symposium at the end of Frechette and Schotter, 2015). One point that is worth making without wading too deep into the broader debate concerns behavioral anomalies and the market. By their very nature, markets are natural settings with enhanced financial incentives, and they are characterized by evolutionary forces that aggrandize the influence of actors who optimize well and generate surplus for themselves and others. Moreover, the same forces diminish the influence of those that optimize poorly and fail to realize surplus for themselves and others.

Consequently, scholars need to be very careful when they want to extrapolate behavioral anomalies from laboratory settings to field ones. It is in professional trader's interests to avoid suffering from behavioral biases, meaning that we should be unsurprised to find that they suffer from them less than college students operating in low stakes, low experience laboratory experiments.

Social preferences are an exception to this very specific line of argument (though not to the broader laboratory vs. field debate) because they do not necessarily impede efficient exchange, and in fact they may promote it by compensating for the market's failings.

Conclusion 3: Distinguishing between social preferences and reputational concerns in natural markets can be extremely challenging because of the difficulty of constructing environments with zero reputational concerns.

As discussed above, depending upon the circumstances, social preferences can both facilitate and impede efficient exchange, meaning that there is much to be gained from studying their prevalence in the marketplace. Researchers designing experiments must be cautious when interpreting data as being supportive of the existence of social preferences due to the specter of the Folk theorem: often, behavior that can be attributed to social preferences can also be explained by reputational concerns.

Laboratory experiments can eliminate reputational concerns between subjects by employing anonymity and perfect stranger designs. Such techniques are scarcely available to field experimentalists. Moreover, as List (2006) demonstrates, seemingly innocuous changes in background variables can have a big impact on the prevalence of reputational concerns. In his study of the trust game in a natural field experiment conducted at a sports paraphernalia exhibition (executed with the assistance of confederates), List found that whether or not traders were locally-based, and whether or not there had been an announcement and/or an implementation of third-party quality certification, all had a profound impact on the observed trustworthiness of traders. Examining the pooled data suggests the presence of either weak social preferences or weak reputational concerns; parsing the data according to sources of reputational concerns that are obvious to an industry-insider like List—and not so obvious to a layperson—suggests the absence of social preferences.

As a reminder, we know from the huge charitable contributions literature that social preferences exist, and have a significant impact upon the economy. Conclusion 3 is not about disavowing the existing of social preferences; rather it is about how careful one has to be when attributing market behavior to them.

Conclusion 4: Researchers should make use of agent-based models to inform designs for market field experiments, and to generate welfare prescriptions.

Theoretical models of conventional markets are currently significantly less informative than theoretical models in other fields due to the difficulty of constructing a tractable model. This is not for lack of trying—a substantial literature emerged in the 1980s applying game theory tools to conventional markets in an effort to build upon the foundational analysis of Walras, and its contributors included some of the most illustrious names in economic theory. Unfortunately, testable predictions could only be produced in the most abstract of environments, meaning that empirically-minded economists are forced to rely on inductive methods to learn about markets,

and econometric specifications are almost always reduced-form. This is contrast to, for example, the auctions literature, where rich structural models can be estimated, and sophisticated theories tested.

With the advent of powerful personal computers, agent-based modeling has been expanding in economics. However, to the best of our knowledge, it has been seldom deployed for improving our understanding of conventional markets. Gjerstad and Dickhaut (1998) is an example of how agent-based modeling can plug some of the holes resulting from the analytical intractability of conventional markets: the authors are able to produce a model that better captures the price dynamics of double oral auctions than previous efforts based purely on the Walrasian model.

Puzzlingly (to us), Gjerstad and Dickhaut's (1998) has not led to a flurry of follow-up studies in spite of the rich intellectual returns that we associate with improving our understanding of markets. Their contribution predated the recent proliferation of field experiments; as such, we regard building upon their work by combining agent-based models with field experimental methods as even more fruitful, and we encourage scholars to make use of the available tools.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

Markets are the heartbeat of the economics profession yet we still know so little about them. The best way for scholars to improve our knowledge of markets and the market process is for us to combine the insights that can be garnered from all available sources: neoclassical theory, agent-based modeling, narrative-deductive reasoning, laboratory experiments, field experiments, and naturally-occurring data. In this regard, the study of auctions is exemplary: all types of theoretical and econometric modeling, and all types of data, have combined to deepen our understanding.

The difficulty of producing tractable theoretical models of markets means that we have to squeeze the alternative sources of knowledge even harder. Accordingly, field experiments have an enhanced role in developing our understanding of markets, and it is a role that has been seized upon by the profession during the last 15 years.

In our review of the literature, we have arrived at three main conclusions:

1. Generally speaking, markets organize the efficient exchange of commodities
2. There exist behavioral anomalies that impede markets' ability to organize efficient exchange
3. Many behavioral anomalies diminish and sometimes disappear when traders are sufficiently experienced, rehabilitating markets' ability to organize the efficient exchange of commodities

If scholars were able to produce a structural model of a market in disequilibrium and to estimate using field experimental data, thereby permitting welfare analysis of a market in disequilibrium, we would regard this as a huge intellectual leap for the profession. At the moment, this does not

seem possible; we therefore urge the profession to more seriously consider agent-based models combined with field experiments as an intermediate step.

A final remark concerns financial markets. The small number framed field experiments that have been conducted so far provide mixed evidence on the ability of financial markets to operate efficiently. Given the manifest importance of such markets to the global economy, we urge the profession to forge greater links with professional traders in order to facilitate more research in this vein.

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