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My research integrates behavioral economics with experimental methods to study ethical behavior and prosocial exchange. In particular, I study how informal communication systems facilitate trust and honesty and self-motivate individuals to make pro-social choices in environments where monitoring technologies are unavailable or costly to implement.

My dissertation utilizes experimental data to investigate behavioral factors that make informal communication credible and studies interventions and policies that aid in formation of successful partnerships. The first essay “Do as You Say or Say as You Do: the Effect of Timing of Communication on Deception”, joint with Kirby Nielsen and Arjun Sengupta, identifies an important behavioral regularity: individuals are more unwilling to lie about a past action than break a promise about an action they will take in the future. We conduct a controlled laboratory experiment that uses a real-effort task to simulate a manager-worker environment. We show that a communication regime where a worker communicates about his intended effort on a task is less effective in soliciting truthful information than a regime where he communicates about his past effort. Workers are more likely to over-promise than over-report given a particular level of effort. Additionally, workers are more likely to reduce effort over time when they have made a promise, while workers who have to report on realized effort ex-post maintain a steady effort level until the time of reporting. The difference in behavior we document suggests that not only are there costs from engaging in deceptive behavior, but also that these costs vary with the temporal order of action and communication. Furthermore, we replicate our results using standard binary games where we vary when the communication opportunity is presented to players. Overall, our results reveal that the timing of communication is a critical feature that merits attention in the design of mechanisms for information transmission in strategic settings.

The second essay of my dissertation “Promises and Guilt”, co-authored with Arjun Sengupta finds that non-binding statements of intent serve as powerful psychological contracts to induce trustworthy behavior in individuals. This analysis disentangles potential motivators of such psychological costs, and identifies individuals’ preference for being consistent as a key driver. The third essay “Partners without Partnership: Team versus Individual Behavior with Non-binding Commitments”, joint with Kirby Nielsen, Arjun Sengupta and John Kagel, documents an instance where introducing informal communication channel fails to induce cooperative behavior. I find non-binding commitments to have negligible effect when decisions are made by teams, rather than by individuals. Talk is much cheaper coming from teams than from individuals, and teams on the receiving end are unable to anticipate this.

A second theme of my research focuses on group contests and tournaments. I study how groups manage social hierarchies in a competitive environment. In “Inter-team contests with Power Differentials” (accepted at *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization*), I document how individuals in advantaged groups differ from those in disadvantaged groups in inter- and intra- group processes. In my next major research project I am focusing on knowledge transfer within teams. Specifically, I evaluate how having an avenue to solicit and share task-relevant knowledge with peers affects an individual’s effort in own acquisition of knowledge.