Research Statement

I am a doctoral candidate and Teaching Fellow at the University of Warwick, UK. My research interests are in the field of behavioural and experimental economics with a specific focus on individual decision making in a strategic environment. A common thread in my research agenda is to study the heterogeneity in individual preferences and economic behaviour. Following is a brief description of my current working papers and future research plans.

My job market paper titled “Gender Roles and Bargaining Behaviour: A Lab Experiment in Bangladesh” examines the effect of gender roles and norms in bargaining decisions. There is a vast literature that suggests systematic differences in behaviour are driven by the gender of an individual. This paper contributes to the existing literature by providing an alternate explanation to the observed gender differences in behaviour. The basic idea is that, men and women behave differently in social situations and take on different roles, due to the expectations that society puts on them. I suggest that, in absence of differences in ability, differences in norms associated with gender identity or roles can help explain differences in economic outcomes. However, it is difficult to provide evidence that behaviour is driven by norms identity without controlling for the specific norm, especially with non-experimental data. So, in this paper I design and implement an experiment to use the method of priming to make differences in gender norms salient and examine how that affects bargaining behaviour. I use a novel method of priming where subjects read a 150 word paragraph about heterogeneity in behaviour; in the treatment conditions, before participating in the task. This experiment design lends itself to comparisons to real world interactions where gender based expectations are generated and we are reminded of our gender identity in most aspects of life. I examine bargaining behaviour among university students in the first lab experiment in Bangladesh, a model developing country according to World Bank reports. This paper aims to contribute to the experimental literature on developing countries, which often neglects the student population as most studies are aimed at rural population. The main results show that, due to the prime, both men and women responders ask for a lower minimum acceptable offer when they are partnered with a male proposer, after controlling for personality traits, intelligence and risk preferences. Moreover, both men and women are equally responsive to the prime and the prime influences behaviour of both in a similar manner. Consistent with the literature, I find no significant difference in the Proposer behaviour. The results suggest that expectations associated with specific
gender roles drives behaviour, rather than gender of an individual itself. The policy implications are far-reaching; if differences in behaviour can be generated by making gender norms salient, then affordable policy can be implemented to reduce the existing biased gender expectations.

My other working paper addresses an equally compelling question especially relevant for economic organisation- in my co-authored paper “Cooperation and Positive Mood in Repeated Interactions” (with Eugenio Proto and Daniel Sgroi) we examine the relationship between induced mood and cooperative behaviour in a repeated interaction using the Prisoner’s Dilemma game. The psychology literature suggests that relationship between positive mood and interpersonal relationship is highly complex and very sensitive to the environment. Accordingly, we analyse this relationship in the laboratory, which allows us the best possible scenario to control for the environment. We induce positive and neutral mood by using a combination of the most popular mood induction processes (MIPs): Velten MIP- where subjects read statements and Music MIP- where subjects listen to a piece of music. To shed light on the mechanisms through which positive mood affects cooperative behaviour, subjects play different variants of the repeated prisoner’s dilemma game. To test the mechanism of complex decision process, subjects play both a finitely repeated version and a repeated version with unknown end. Furthermore, we compare treatments where subjects are allowed to communicate within each other with treatments without communication, in order to assess the possible mediating effect of communication in the relationship between positive mood and cooperation. Finally, we complement our analysis by eliciting subjects’ beliefs in some treatments. Surprisingly, we find that participants in the positive mood condition choose to cooperate significantly less than participants in the neutral mood condition. We check for different mechanisms and finally provide evidence supporting the idea that individuals under positive mood are more selfish and inward looking and use different processing strategies based on the complexity of the decision. The deductions based on data analysis and empirical research is policy relevant for a variety of disciplines.

In the paper titled Mood, Risk and Belief: Motivations in Social Dilemma together with Daniel Sgroi, I further examine the effect of positive mood on social dilemma. We specifically explore the concept of multiple motives of mood, risk and belief on the Public Goods game and the Trust game. The basic idea is to check if the effect of mood is still persistent if ambiguity is introduced in decision process. Subjects play a real effort task to earn endowment for the games and ambiguity is
introduced by not revealing the actual endowment earned. We find that people in positive mood put in more effort compared to people in neutral mood and perform better in the cognitive intelligence test. However, we find that mood in presence of ambiguity is overpowered by beliefs and decisions in public goods game and trust games are driven mostly by belief rather than participant's mood.

Another joint paper that I am currently working on is looking at personality traits and the role of theory of mind in co-ordination games. Preliminary data from pilot study suggests that player’s co-orderate if they predict their partners to score high on extraversion. However, due to Self-projection bias, predicted extraversion scores can be overstated as extraverted individuals are likely to believe that their partners are also extraverted. Additionally, we find that players possessing perceivably similar attributes are more likely to co-orderate with each other. This is loosely related to my job market paper which is based on the idea that behaviour is driven by expectations about certain features of other players. Relating that to personality would indicate that certain personality traits, e.g. extraversion is crucial in forming expectations while playing a coordination game.

As an extension of my job market paper, I wish to carry out similar experiments in a developed country, and carry out a comparative study to comment further on the role of gender norms in generating gender differences in behaviour. I am also interested in working with behavioural nudges. For this, as a part of a team I have submitted bid for a project in Egypt, which aims to study how behavioural nudges can be used on medical professionals to get better performance and patient satisfaction.

In my future research I plan to work further in behavioural and experimental economics and in applied microeconomics. I am interested in working on research with policy implications, Academic interest in understanding behaviour, heuristics, emotions and biases is a relatively new field in economics but one which is now widely regarded as an area of paramount importance in social sciences and has far reaching implications in other disciplines, including but not restricted to, law, statistics, intelligence analysis, philosophy, finance, business, management, psychology, sports sciences, military strategies et al. It is my contention that the scholarly deductions of my research will lend it-self profoundly to various and inter connected disciplines of social sciences.