Statement of Research Skills and Experience

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Although my PhD specialization is in behavioral and experimental economics, a unique combination of interests and experiences has made me well-versed in several areas. For example, a master's degree in public policy, which I obtained prior to starting my PhD, has made me well-acquainted with the US political system and the role of government institutions. Additionally, a secondary interest in applied microeconomics has allowed me to develop excellent econometric modeling and analysis skills. Lastly, having worked in interdisciplinary teams and with government agencies has helped me develop a strong work ethic, attention to details, and interpersonal skills.

My greatest expertise lies in developing original experiment designs and implementing them as computerized surveys, for which I typically use Qualtrics, REDCap, and oTree. At the same time, I am exceptionally proficient with managing and analyzing data using STATA (some of my STATA code is publicly available on zeeshansamad.com/research). Some examples of experiments that I have designed are demonstrated by my PhD dissertation, which is comprised of three essays, each of which makes novel contributions to the field of behavioral economics.

The first chapter of my dissertation presents an experiment that shows how people manipulate their beliefs so they can think well of themselves, even though their actions speak otherwise. In the experiment, subjects need to choose whether or not to donate some money to a charity in a setting where any donation is multiplied by 2.4 with an unknown probability p or by 0 with the remaining probability $1 - p$. As they choose whether to donate money, they are asked to think about the value of p and make a note of it to themselves. Next, subjects participate in another task that indirectly reveals what they *truly* think about the value of p. I find that both altruistic subjects (i.e., those who donate) and selfish subjects (i.e., those who do not donate) truly think that p takes a value of about 50%, but selfish subjects, through the earlier note to themselves, try to convince themselves that p takes a lower value. I show that the only plausible explanation for this discrepancy is that it allows selfish subjects to blame their selfish action on p, which, in turn, lets them continue thinking of themselves as altruistic individuals. The biggest novel contribution of this study is an experiment design that allows us to measure the *extent* to which people deceive themselves, something that has not been done before.

The second chapter of my dissertation conducts an in-depth study of an established cognitive bias called the *false consensus bias*, and provides some novel insights about how we develop this bias. I show that the underlying cause of this bias is our tendency to misjudge a distribution's *skewness*, not the distribution's *mean*. To do this, I conduct an experiment in which subjects first decide how

much to donate to a charity and then guess the amounts donated by other experiment participants. I find that subjects predict most aspects of a distribution correctly, but when it comes to the distribution's skewness, their predictions are systematically incorrect. In particular, subjects think that other people's altruism is closer, but not equal, to their own level of altruism than it really is. Moreover, selfish subjects exhibit a greater bias than altruistic subjects.

The third chapter of my dissertation, which is a collaborative work with faculty members from economics, computer science, and bioinformatics departments, estimates people's privacy concerns about genetic data. This study takes a novel approach of studying privacy concerns from an economics perspective. In an experiment, we ask subjects to choose between a risky option and a safe option, presenting it as a decision of getting a genetic test to half of the subjects and as a decision of making a financial investment to the other half. Crucially, all subjects' monetary gain and loss potentials are identical regardless of the scenario. Our findings show that subjects are more willing to tolerate risk to their genetic data than to their financial data.

In addition to these essays in behavioral economics, I also have a working paper related to applied microeconomics. In that paper, I use a large country-wide dataset to study the effects of a minimum wage law on informal sector workers. Using a difference-in-differences approach along with fixed effects, I find that a minimum wage law positively impacts wages of informal workers, even though the law is not enforced in the informal sector. Moreover, the impact on informal sector wages is greater in poorer regions of the country where the minimum wage law has a greater "bite."