

Decision Processes Colloquium

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“Predicting Behavior in Economic Games by Looking Through the Eyes of the Players”

Social scientists rely on economic games to understand human cooperation. The standard assumptions are straightforward: self-interest is defined by the Nash equilibrium and fairness by the equality norm. We take a different approach by asking players directly about how they define their self-interest (what would give them the most pleasure) and how they define fairness and normative obligations (what they think they ought to do). Player-defined measures of “wants” and “oughts”: (1) predict the majority of ultimatum-game and dictator-game offers, (2) predict avoidance of social expectations to cooperate (i.e., exiting behavior in the dictator game), and (3) mediate greater cooperation in a dictator game after a positive mood induction. In brief, adopting players’ perspectives helps us understand who cooperates, why they cooperate, whether they will avoid cooperation, and how positive affect makes them more cooperative.

