

Humboldt Kolleg

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Global Challenges of the 21st Century

- 1) Technological development and human health/ quality of life*
- 2) Climate change and environmental sustainability*
- 3) Democracy and cohesion in Europe*

How Cognitive Biases and Depression May Interact in Social-Economic Decision Making

Depression is known to affect the manner in which individuals perceive social exchanges, in particular negative exchanges. Difficulties are thought to partly arise from depression-related guilt and rejection sensitivity. We thus examined whether individuals with elevated levels of depression report more guilt after engaging in a series of controlled negative exchanges. To this end, we utilized a multi-round multi-shot Ultimatum Game in which participants were sequentially paired with (1) altruistic and (2) unfair allocators. State guilt and perceived fairness ratings were collected throughout the Ultimatum Game. Participants' responses in the game were analyzed via a series of mixed model analyses of variance (ANOVAs). We further present two mediation models in which rejection sensitivity is proposed as a mediator between depression and self-reported guilt. Perceived fairness of the offers and harm caused were proposed as potential moderators. We found out that rejection sensitivity partially mediated the relationship between depression and guilt – a finding that is consistent with theoretical models of depression. Overall, our findings may contribute to the development of novel treatment approaches to address interpersonal processes in depression. Theoretical implications and interpretive caveats will also be discussed.

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