

Shaken self-confidence? Certain products and activities can fix it

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Someone who has momentarily lost confidence in her intelligence is more likely to purchase a pen than a candy bar, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. The pen helps restore her belief in herself as an intelligent person.

Authors Leilei Gao (Chinese University of Hong Kong), S. Christian Wheeler, and Baba Shiv (both Stanford University) look at how subtle manipulations such as having someone write with his or her non-dominant hand can measurably reduce a person's self-confidence. The authors call this the "shaken self," and believe it persists until the person is able to do, acquire, or think about something that restores the self-confidence.

"We show that threats to an important self-view can momentarily shake one's confidence in that particular self-view, resulting in the choice of products that help restore confidence in that self-view," write the authors.

In one of the studies, the researchers asked participants to write about health-conscious behaviors with their dominant or non-dominant hands. Then some of the participants wrote essays about the most important value in their lives (an activity designed to restore confidence). All participants assessed their moods and self-esteem levels and then chose between a healthy snack (an apple) and an unhealthy snack (candy bar). Participants whose confidence was shaken (by not using their dominant hand) who didn't get to self-affirm with the essay were more likely to

choose the healthy snack—to restore their health-conscious confidence.

The authors focused their research on the "shaken confidence" phenomenon in people who were generally self-confident rather than people who chronically lack self-confidence.

"Specifically, we show that the effects of lowered self-view confidence on consumer choice can be eliminated by both direct self-view bolstering strategies (for example, purchasing products to restore the specific shaken self-dimension) as well as indirect strategies (for example, affirming an unrelated self-value)," write the authors.

Source: University of Chicago

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