

# Healthy people and enhancement drugs

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Healthy people are more willing to take drugs to enhance traits that are not fundamental to their identity. According to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, people's willingness to take a pill or drug depends on whether the trait the drug promises to enhance is one they consider fundamental.

Authors Jason Riis (NYU, Harvard Business School), Joseph P. Simmons (Yale University), and Geoffrey P. Goodwin (Princeton University) examine the moral dilemmas that arise as technologies develop that not only cure disease but also enhance already-healthy people. As many young people without diagnosed disorders or deficits take Ritalin or Adderall to improve concentration or anti-depressants to lift their moods, this study examines what makes healthy people willing to take pills.

The researchers determined that people do not feel comfortable using a pill to enhance a trait they believe to be fundamental to their identity. But less-fundamental traits, including concentration, are more acceptable targets.

"We suggest that people's willingness to take psychological enhancements will largely depend on beliefs about whether those enhancements will alter characteristics considered fundamental to self-identity," the authors write.

During a series of studies, the researchers found that young people were less likely to agree to take a drug to increase their social comfort than

one that increased their ability to concentrate. The most common reason participants said they wouldn't want to take a pill was because it would "fundamentally change who I am."

Not surprisingly, the marketing message affected participants' responses. When the researchers tested different advertising taglines, they found that participants responded more positively to a drug promising to help them become "more than who you are," than one that would allow them to become "who you are."

"Together, this research converges to highlight the importance of identity expression and preservation in governing the choices and lives of consumers," write the authors.

Source: University of Chicago Press Journals

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