
Institute for Research in Marketing

Press Release

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Money ... it's more than an incentive according to U of M researcher

Subhead: It can motivate self-sufficiency and influence negative behavior toward others

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MINNEAPOLIS (Nov. 16, 2006) Why are some people more self-sufficient than others? Why are some people more willing to volunteer or help out than others? What makes some people seem stand-offish, while others move right in and help? Research conducted by Kathleen Vohs, assistant professor of marketing at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota, demonstrates that money – more specifically, people's exposure to the concept of money – can start to answer these questions. The research is published in the Nov. 17 issue of *Science*.

A series of nine experiments by Vohs and her colleagues establishes that money changes people's motivation to achieve their own goals for the better and their behavior toward others for the worse.

In one experiment, subjects exposed to the concept of money via a word puzzle task were later less helpful to a person in need. "The mere presence of money changes people," comments Vohs. "The effect can be negative, it can be positive. Exposure to money, or the concept of money, elevates a sense of self-sufficiency. People don't want to be a burden on others."

According to the findings, pictures of money, a tip lying on the table, thinking about your holiday bonus – all of these would make people behave self-sufficiently. Results indicate that these people also work longer before asking for help, are less helpful to others, and prefer to play and work alone. In addition, people who are exposed to the concept of money can even put more physical distance between themselves and a new acquaintance as compared to people who are not reminded of money.

"It's not malicious," says Vohs. "People are focused on their own goals – but unfortunately not others – and are motivated to work *really* hard to achieve them."

Vohs has an extensive background in psychology, and she applies her understanding of psychological science to business issues in order to advance theories in marketing. Her research specialties include self-control (particularly in terms of impulsive spending, overeating and making a bad impression); self-processes (such as self-esteem); and the effects of making choices on self-control ability.