



Psychological Inquiry >

An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory

Volume 18, 2007 - [Issue 1](#)

4,291 Views | 295 CrossRef citations to date | 19 Altmetric

TARGET ARTICLE

Some Costs of American Corporate Capitalism: A Psychological Exploration of Value and Goal Conflicts

Tim Kasser, Steve Cohn, Allen D. Kanner & Richard M. Ryan

Pages 1-22 | Published online: 05 Dec 2007

Cite this article <https://doi.org/10.1080/10478400701386579>

Sample our
Behavioral Sciences
Journals
>> [Sign in here](#) to start your access
to the latest two volumes for 14 days

Full Article

Figures & data

References

Citations

Metrics

Reprints & Permissions

Read this article

Share

Abstract

Psychology rarely examines the effects of economic systems on people's lives. In this target article, we set out to explore some of the costs of American corporate capitalism and its focus on self-interest, competition, hierarchical wage labor, and strong desires for financial profit and economic growth. Specifically, we apply recent cross-cultural research on goal and value systems ([Schwartz, 1996](#); Grouzet et al. 2006), as well as a variety of other types of evidence, to demonstrate how the aims and practices that typify American corporate capitalism often conflict with pursuits such as caring about the broader world, having close relationships with others, and, for many people, feeling worthy and free. We hope that by bringing to light the value and goal conflicts inherent in this economic system, psychologists might begin to systematically investigate this pervasive yet paradoxically ignored feature of contemporary culture.

Acknowledgements

The following people read and made helpful comments on earlier drafts of this manuscript: David Duemler, Mary Gomes, Virginia Kasser, Malte Klar, and Sharon Shavitt. We particularly thank the editors of Psychological Inquiry for their steadfast support of this article and their encouragement.

Notes

*

¹It is possible that the psychological impacts of economic phenomena were discussed without referring to “capitalism.” Scholars in some fields use words such as “industrial society” and “market society” when referring to capitalism that may have been missed in our search. We also note that we did not include book reviews or comments on other articles in our search results.

²In the current target article, we use the term “internalization” to refer to the process of taking in and eventually regulating beliefs and/or behaviors that were originally outside of the person. Sometimes people integrate beliefs and behaviors with the self and feel autonomous, whereas other times they internalize in a less self-determined and more controlled fashion (see [Deci and Ryan 2000](#)). As we shall demonstrate later in the article, internalization of capitalistic ideology and behavior frequently is of this latter, less optimal type.

³Even economist [Adam Smith \(1776/1976\)](#), on whose work much of ACC's claims about self-interest rest, did not himself see self-interest as the sole motive that could support capitalism—he argued that “empathy” and “generosity” were other important motives necessary to balance greed and create a balanced, healthy society.

⁴It is worth noting that these empirically-based findings conflict with some of the standard assumptions of mainstream (neoclassical) economic theory, which pictures capitalist economies as well-oiled machines that can be put to any use. From a neoclassical perspective, participants in a capitalist economy could just as easily live a

life of voluntary simplicity and use the productivity of capitalism to protect the environment as to live a life of conspicuous consumption and burden the environment. We hold that this picture is not consistent with the available data.

⁵Fair or not, it is clear that wealth inequality is problematic in many regards, including both mental and physical health ([Albee 1986](#); [Wilkinson 1996](#)).

Related Research Data

[Social stratification and the transmission of values in the family: A cross-national assessment](#)

Source: Sociological Forum

[THE CONSTRUCTION AND VALIDATION OF A CONSUMER ORIENTATION QUESTIONNAIRE \(SCOI\) DESIGNED TO MEASURE FROMM'S \(1955\) 'MARKETING CHARACTER' IN AUSTRALIA](#)

Source: Social Behavior and Personality An International Journal

[An Introduction to Ecological Economics](#)

Source: Unknown Repository

[The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation.](#)

Source: Psychological Bulletin

[Intrinsic and Extrinsic Work Orientations as Moderators of the Effect of Annual Income on Subjective Well-Being: A Longitudinal Study](#)

Source: Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

Related research ⓘ

People also read

Recommended articles

Cited by
295

Information for

[Authors](#)

[R&D professionals](#)

[Editors](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Societies](#)

Opportunities

[Reprints and e-prints](#)

[Advertising solutions](#)

[Accelerated publication](#)

[Corporate access solutions](#)

Open access

[Overview](#)

[Open journals](#)

[Open Select](#)

[Dove Medical Press](#)

[F1000Research](#)

Help and information

[Help and contact](#)

[Newsroom](#)

[All journals](#)

[Books](#)

Keep up to date

Register to receive personalised research and resources by email



Sign me up



Copyright © 2025 Informa UK Limited [Privacy policy](#) [Cookies](#) [Terms & conditions](#)

[Accessibility](#)

 Taylor and Francis Group

Registered in England & Wales No. 01072954
5 Howick Place | London | SW1P 1WG