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An International Journal for the Advancement of Psychological Theory

Volume 18, 2007 - Issue 1

3,886 257

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

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Pages 1-22 | Published online: 05 Dec 2007

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

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Abstract

Psychological research has shown that the target audience of American corporate capitalism and its focus on material desires for financial success and status is a narrow, homogeneous group of people. This research varies from the broad, inclusive research that typifies the broader social sciences. The worthy and meaningful aspects of life in this era of pervasive capitalism are being lost.

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Acknowledgements

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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 can be either self-determined or controlled. This latter, less optimal form of internalization is the focus of the current target article.

³Even economic theories that make claims about the benefits of capitalism for self-interest and autonomy could support the claim that capitalism is a necessary condition for human well-being and that it is a good idea to pursue these motives.

⁴It is worth noting that the standard of living in the United States is higher than in most other countries. Pictures of the standard of living in the United States can be found in a recent issue of the neoclassical journal *Journal of Economic Surveys*. It is not clear how 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](#)).

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