

A Sociedade Capitalista de Consumo e seus Efeitos sobre a Identidade: uma abordagem macro cultural

The Consumer Capitalist Society and Its Effects on Identity:
a macro cultural approach

La Sociedad Capitalista Consumista y sus Efectos sobre
la identidad: una aproximación macro-cultural

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Resumo

De acordo com a psicologia macro-cultural, devemos identificar os fatores macro-culturais (instituições sociais, artefatos e conceitos) a fim de compreender o fenômeno psicológico. O objetivo deste estudo é descrever os modos de vida e de identidade que o capitalismo atual produz o enquanto fator macro-cultural. Entendemos que o sistema econômico e social do capitalismo em que a produção, distribuição e consumo dos produtos dependem do investimento de capital privado para o lucro em mercados livres. Entendemos por identidade os jogos de ferramentas culturais que as pessoas usam para se definir. Conclui-se que o capitalismo de consumo pode estimular um estilo de vida individualista, a concorrência, a propriedade privada, a instabilidade ou vida livre, valores hedonistas e o culto do aparente ou superficial. Traços de personalidade que poderiam explicar o atual aumento de transtornos mentais como ansiedade, estresse ou depressão.

Palavras-chave

Capitalismo, Identidade, Consumismo, Psicologia Política, Psicologia Macro-Cultural.

Abstract

According to macro cultural psychology we need identify the macro-cultural factors (social institutions, cultural concepts and artifacts) in order to understand the psychological phenomenon. This theoretical paper aim to elucidate which ways of life and identity produced current capitalism as a macro cultural factor.

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We mean by capitalism an economic and social system in which production, distribution and consume of goods depend on invest on private capital and profit-making in the free markets. We mean by identity the kits of cultural tools that people utilize to define and understand themselves and others and to act in a concrete way. It is concluded that consumer capitalism foster the individualistic self that includes competition lifestyle, private ownership of property, instability or liquid life, and hedonism values or worship apparent. Personality traits which could explain current increase of mental disorders like anxiety, stress or depression.

Keywords

Capitalism, Identity, Consumerism, Political Psychology, Macro Cultural Psychology.

Resumen

Según la psicología macro-cultural debemos identificar los factores macro-culturales (instituciones sociales, artefactos y conceptos culturales) con el objetivo de comprender el fenómeno psicológico. El objetivo del trabajo consiste en describir las formas de vida e identidad que produce el actual capitalismo en tanto factor macro-cultural. Entendemos por capitalismo un sistema económico y social en el que la producción, distribución y consumo de productos dependen de la inversión de capital privado con ánimo de lucro en mercados libres. Entendemos por identidad los juegos de herramientas culturales que la gente utiliza para definirse. Se concluye que el capitalismo de consumo puede fomentar el estilo de vida individualista, la competencia, la propiedad privada, la inestabilidad o vida libre, valores hedonistas y el culto a lo aparente o superficial. Rasgos de personalidad que podrían explicar el actual aumento de trastornos mentales como la ansiedad, el estrés o la depresión.

Palabras clave

Capitalismo, Identidad, Consumismo, Psicología Política, Psicología Macro-Cultural.

Several cultural psychologists have emphasized the mutual relationship between culture and mind (Bruner, 2008; Esteban, 2008; 2010; Esteban, Bastiani y Vila, 2009; Valsiner & Rosa, 2007). According to macro cultural psychology (Esteban y Ratner, en prensa; Ratner, 2006; 2008; in press) to understand our psychology and behavior is to understand the social institutions, cultural concepts and artifacts that we consume. In this sense, a psychological phenomenon is part of society, embodies and promulgates the political interests which dominate macro cultural factors as social institutions, infrastructure, artifacts, and cultural concepts (Ratner, 2008). According to this approach psychology is a “cultural specimen” (Ratner, in press) which have cultural origins, characteristics, mechanisms (operating system), and functions. The roots of these ideas are the Vygotsky seminal works (Vygotsky, 1978; Ratner, 1991) and the Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

One of the fundamental principles which drive Vygotsky’s developmental psychology is the transition from “lower” psychobiological processes (reflexes, temperamental traits, rudimentary conscious processes) to “higher” cultural conscious psychological functions (voluntary memory, verbal thought, direct attention and so on) (Vygotsky, 1978; 1998). Vygotsky argued that higher psychological functions develop in the process of cultural development. In broad sense, the higher psychological phenomena are stimulated and constituted by social relations; their constituents are social artifacts or mediational means such as linguistic symbols. Mediational means denotes the fact that people actively use cultural artifacts (for example a flag), practices (football match), and concepts (“Barça team is more than football club”) as their tools for navigating the world. Using cultural tools or “the glasses of human culture” (Zaporozhets & Elkonin, 1971:12) people develop new psychological qualities, lifestyles and behaviors. These new psychological qualities, lifestyles and behaviors are not derived from lower processes; they are qualitatively new formations that can not be reduced to more elementary biological mechanisms. Of course, higher processes require a biological substratum; however the human brain enables socially organized psychological phenomena (del Río, 2002).

The term macro cultural factor is derived to Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory, in which he delineated four types of nested systems that can powerfully shape development: microsystem (such as the family or school); the mesosystem (which is two or more microsystems in interactions); the exosystem (external environments which indirectly influence development, for example parental workplace or media); and the macrosystem (the larger sociocultural context) (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). He later added a fifth system, called the chronosystem, that is to say, the evolution of the systems over time. The macro cultural psychology is a perspective that emphasizes the macro culture factors or macrosystems as the basis of culture and of psychology (Ratner, in press). Macrosystems are the cultural contexts, not solely geographically or physically, but emotionally and ideologically (Esteban, 2010). Examples of macrosystems are Communism, Western culture, Islam, Christianity, Capitalism. In this paper we examine the traits and effects of capitalism as a macro cultural factor in relation to identity as a psychological phenomenon. Then, the macrosystem or macro cultural factor is important because determining the specific properties of other contexts or systems that occur at the level of everyday life and steer the course of mind and behavior. Each macro-factor, such as capitalism, includes social institutions, for example the International Monetary Fund (IMF) or the World Bank; artifacts, for instance money, and cultural concepts such as

liberalism. Moreover, each macro cultural factor (for example capitalism) has a subjective side or psychological factor. That is to say, macro factors foster specific psychological traits like selfish or dissatisfaction.

In broad strokes, the major postulate of macro cultural psychology is that psychology it takes form of macro cultural factors, incarnates the features of macro cultural factors (Ratner, 2006; in press). People consume, internalize or absorb some macro cultural factors that become powerful cultural tools to define and understand the world. This general theory and methodology, that psychological phenomena have macro cultural origins, characteristics, and functions, directs attention to the particular cultural factors which become the operating system of our psychology (Ratner, 2008), they become the “technologies of self” (Burkitt, 2002) because we perceive, think, and feel through cultural factors. According to Ogbu (2001) ecocultural niches require different repertoires of psychological skills. In this line of reasoning, sociocultural activities give form to psychological phenomena by imparting a specific content and mode of operation to them and that are required for success in a particular niche. For example, worldwide sociodemographic trends include movement from rural residence, informal education at home, subsistence economy, and low-technology environments to urban residence, formal schooling, commerce, and high-technology environments (Greenfield, 2009a). These cultural activities require and enhance intellectual skills such as abstract thinking, sophisticated visual-spatial skills (iconic representation and spatial visualization), grasping relations, and symbolic thinking that permeate other aspects of life (Greenfield, 2009b; Ogbu, 2001).

The aim of this paper is to analyze theoretically what kind of identity is being generated by current capitalism. We postulate that capitalism is a macro cultural factor that includes institutions, cultural concepts, practices and artifacts. It is a “technology of self” (Burkitt, 2002) that amplifies and constructs some psychological phenomenon.

The consumer capitalism as a modern lifestyle

There is no consensus on the definition of capitalism. There are a variety of historical cases over which it is applied, varying in time, geography, politics and culture. Economists, sociologists, anthropologists, politics, philosophers, historians have taken different perspectives on the analysis of capitalism (Seldon, 2007). However, there is little controversy that private ownership of the means of production, creation of goods or services for profit in a free markets, and prices and wages are elements of capitalism. According to Giddens (2001:854) the capitalism is “a system of economic enterprise based on market exchange. “Capital” refers to any asset, including money, property and machines, which can be used to produce commodities for sale or invested in a market with the hope of achieving a profit. Nearly all industrial societies today are capitalist in orientation – their economic systems are based on free enterprise and on economic competition”. Therefore, we can consider that this economic-politic-social system is characterized by the private property ownership exists; individuals and companies are allowed to compete for their own economic gain; and free market forces determine the prices of goods and services.

Following the macro cultural psychology, we consider the capitalism a macro cultural factor that affects on psychology and behavior. The capitalism is a macro cultural factor or macrosystem because included cultural concepts, institutions and artifacts in relation to

psychological functioning. In other words, it is postulated that capitalism organizes the form and content of psychological phenomena, and are the function, or telos, of psychological phenomena. Specifically, we mean by psychological phenomena the “identity”, that is to say, the story or stories by means of which phenomenon is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others (Giddens, 1991; Esteban, Nadal y Vila, 2008). For me the identity is more general than the self. By “self” I mean the answer to the question “who I am?”. That is to say, a self-definition or explicit definition that we make about ourselves: “I am friendly, I like football and I am a fan of Barça”. By identity I mean the totality of qualities and traits, as of character or behavior, which are peculiar to a specific person or specific group of people. Is more than self-concept because it includes implicit or embodiment of traits of mind and behavior, which person cannot report in his or her self-definition. For instance, a person cannot mention the selfish in his or her self-concept. However, he can really be a selfish person. Then, the self-concept is the explicit ourselves traits and the identity is the explicit and implicit ourselves traits.

Our basic argument is that the identity -and the self-concept- is not a natural or biologic product (Esteban, 2009; Esteban, Bastiani y Vila, 2009) but is a cultural phenomenon, linked to cultural-historical-political forces. In other words, how one thinks about oneself (self-concept) and be (identity) in a certain historical period depends on cultural concepts, artifacts and social institutions. The identity is an element, or part, of macro cultural factors. This argument is Darwinian (Ratner, in press) because we advocate that new environments require new identities. Social life produces emergent dimensions of identity that transcend psychological and physiological levels of analysis. Although people are highly active in the process of self-making and it seems to be an individual and individualizing pursuit, or interpersonal and dynamic narrative event, it is also and primarily a collective and collectivizing one because the materials available for self-understanding are a function of cultural self-concepts (shared notions of personhood), artifacts (flags, money, books) and social institutions (work, family, school, media). In that sense, for example, the individualistic self involve a set of culture-confirming ideas and images of success, competence, ability that foster the exercise of one’s goals and desires and so independence and self-reliance while opposing most external interference upon one’s own interests. That is a consequence of a certain cultural environment based on political individualism: liberalism, anarchism, ethical egoism, existentialism, hedonism, libertarianism, bohemianism. People interiorize and adopt these traits in order to be successful in their lives.

Capitalist economic practices became institutionalized in Europe between the 16th and 19th centuries, although some features of capitalist organization existed in the ancient world, and early forms of merchant capitalism flourished during the middle ages. Capitalism has been dominant in the Western world since the end of feudalism; it gradually spread from Europe, particularly from Britain, across political and cultural frontiers. In the 19th and 20th centuries, capitalism provided the main, but not exclusive, means of industrialization throughout much of the world (Seldon, 2007).

Such a system or a macrosystem is based on some cultural concepts which affect the structures in which people function. For example, if it is belief of the culture that parents should be solely responsible for raising their children, that culture is less likely to provide resources to help parents. This, in turn, affects the structures in which the parents function. In this sense, capitalism is based on the premise of separating the state and business activities because capi-

talists believe that markets are efficient and should thus function without interference. The market is the most fair and efficient arbitrator of resources. The classical political economists Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Jean-Baptiste Say, or John Stuart Mill published analyses of the production, distribution, and exchange of goods in a capitalist economy that have since formed the basis of current cultural concept of capitalism. According to Smith (1977) we have to foster “the system of natural liberty”. Smith devised a set of concepts that remain strongly associated with capitalism today, particularly his theory of the “invisible hand” of the market, through which the pursuit of individual self-interest unintentionally produces a collective good for society. Nowadays, the consumer capitalist system is dominating the world. Several social institutions, for example banks, enterprises or think tanks, support this economic model.

The psychological effects of consumer capitalism

Several sociologists have studied the consequences of capitalism in our lives and societies (Bauman, 2005; 2007; Castells, 1996; 1997; 1998; Giddens, 1991; 2001). However, psychology has not been pay attention to this reality (see Kasser & Kanner, 2004; Ratner, 2006; in press; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Schwartz & Ward, 2006; for exceptions). The aim of this paper is to reconsider the psychological effects of capitalism on identity and contemporary lifestyle. We mean by “consumer capitalism” an economic, politic and social system in which the means of production are predominantly privately owned and operated, and in which investments, distribution, income, production, and pricing of goods and services are determined through the operation of a free market economy. For us, capitalism and consuming life are synonyms. Consume is the essence of capitalism and cannot be divorced from it (Bauman, 2007).

According to macro-cultural psychology point of view, capitalism interferes with belief-systems, politics (capitalism in political philosophy means liberalism), religion, and moral. For example, Rand was one of the biggest supporters of laissez-faire capitalism, in economy means allowing industry to be free of government restriction. She was the first person to morally justify capitalism with a new code of morality: rational selfishness. She did not justify capitalism on the grounds of pure practicality, that it is the best wealth-creating system, or the supernatural, that god or religion supports capitalism, or because it benefits the most people, but because it is the only morally good socio-political system because it allows people to be free to act in their rational self-interest for their own sake and by their own mind (Rand & Branden, 1964).

It is expected that one macro cultural factor, consumer capitalism, affect a wide range of psychological phenomena: mental illness, personality, identity, motivation. In fact, several American scholars have showed some psychological effects of the consumerism and capitalism way of life: the creation of infinite needs, the “paradox of choice” –overabundance of choices (Schwartz & Ward, 2006), craving for sensory stimulation and hedonistic material pleasure, impulsive and hyperactive behavior (Kasser & Kanner, 2004), dissatisfaction with the traditional, familiar or “solid life” (Bauman, 2005), craving for novelty, identifying self with commercial products (Cross, 1993), self-aggrandizement and promotion, self-expression, failure of historical memory, sense of entitlement (a right to have products), concern with appearance/impression-management versus substance, prioritizing materialism over social relations (Dienes & Seligman, 2004), and deteriorating interpersonal relations, happiness, and

personal fulfillment (Ratner, 2006:128-129). For us, this psychological traits show certain contemporary way of constructing identity, the individualistic identity.

The individualistic identity as a product of capitalism

Keller (2007) has defined two prototypical environments: urban, educated, middle-class families of Western societies and traditional, subsistence-based, rural farming families with little formal education. Both environments emphasize different conceptions of the self and different psychologies. Western, urban, middle-class families embody the cultural mode of independence with the self being autonomous and separate. That is, the self is viewed as integrated whole composed of values, abilities, preferences, feeling states or personal attributes. In contrast, the rural village families embody the cultural model of interdependence with the self being intrinsically interconnected with others and joint or corporate agency. That is, the interpersonal or societal obligations, hierarchical social order, and interpersonal adjustment are central to self-definition. According this research line, the normative person in the first ecocultural model would be a bundle of attributes, preferences; independent from others; expresses and affirms an independent self; actions are “freely” chosen contingent on one’s own preferences, goals, intentions; and actions are diagnostic of the self and actively controls, influences others. In contrast, the normative person in the second sociocultural model would be a node in a set of relations; maintains relations with others; affirms an interdependent self and one’s social position; actions are responsive to obligations and expectations of others (preferences, goals interactions are interpersonally anchored); and actions are diagnostic of the nature of relationships and actively references, adjusts to others.

A recent review of empirical cross-cultural research demonstrates that capitalistic economy in urban ecologies with commerce, formal schooling, and high-technology environments shifts cultural values in an individualistic direction and developmental pathways toward more independent social behaviors and more abstract cognition (Greenfield, 2009a). It seems reasonable to argue that consumer occidental capitalism model foster individualistic identity. We mean by “individualistic identity” the tendency to view the person as a unique and independent entity whose behavior is influenced by a set of internal characteristics, such as personality traits, abilities, and motives. This conception promotes the exercise of one’s goals and desires and so independence and self-reliance. In the consumer capitalism context, one’s goals and desires are to have objects and money. The freedom and autonomy, explicitly or implicitly, are valued above all else and expanded opportunities for self-determination are regarded as a sign of the psychological well-being of individuals and the moral well-being of the culture, and we take choice as the critical sign that we have freedom and autonomy (Schwartz & Ward, 2006).

The individualistic liquid identity syndrome

According to sociologist Bauman (2005), the passage from “solid” to “liquid” modernity has created a new and unprecedented setting for individual life pursuits, confronting individuals with a series of challenges never before encountered. Liquid modernity or liquid life means that social forms and institutions no longer have enough time to solidify and

cannot serve as frames of reference for human actions and long-term life plans, so individuals have to find other ways to organize their lives. Individuals have to splice together an unending series of short-term projects and episodes that do not add up to the kind of sequence to which concepts like “career” and “progress” could be meaningfully applied. Such fragmented lives require individuals to be flexible and adaptable, that is: to be constantly ready and willing to change tactics at short notice, to abandon commitments and loyalties without regret and to pursue opportunities according to their current availability. Then, in a liquid modernity it is more difficult to control our life because it is uncertain. About thirty-five years ago, Seligman proposed that clinical depression may be the result of lack of control, or learned helplessness. Owing to the explosion of liquid consumerist life, people could now experiences control and personal autonomy to a degree that people living in other times and places would find unimaginable.

In sum, in liquid modernity the individual must act, plan actions and calculate the likely gains and losses of acting (or failing to act) under conditions of endemic uncertainty. According to Bauman (2007) the passage from “solid” to “liquid” modernity means the passage from “society of producers” to a “society of consumers”. In a liquid consumerist way of life security is given up in order to enjoy increased freedom, freedom to purchase, to consume, and to enjoy life. This is the “consumerist syndrome”. “The *consumerist syndrome* to which contemporary culture is increasingly surrendered centres on an emphatic denial of the virtue of procrastination, of the “delay of satisfaction” precept –those foundational principles of the “society of producers” or “productivist society”. In the inherited hierarchy of recognized values, the “consumerist syndrome” has dethroned duration and elevated transience. It has put the value of novelty above that of lasting” (Bauman, 2005:62). According to macro cultural psychology, this current way of life has to affect to psychology (Ratner, 2006; in press).

The consumerist capitalism in a liquid world (culture of disengagement, discontinuity, and forgetting) has destabilized the older institutions of identity formation (family, job, school, residence, church, and so on), and has created the consumerist syndrome. “The consumerist syndrome is all about speed, excess and waste” (Bauman, 2005:84).

One of the values associated with capitalism is materialism. Defining materialism as the placing of a high value on money, appearances (social and physical) and fame, a series of studies, mostly by Kasser and his colleagues, demonstrate that materialism consistently correlates with mental illness. Specifically, it has been reported that highly materialistic people are significantly more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, substance abuse and personality disorder (Kasser & Kanner, 2004).

According to James (2008) higher rates of mental disorders are the consequence of excessive wealth-seeking in consumerist and capitalist nations. Current estimates are that as many as 7.5% of Americans have an episode of clinical depression before they are 14. This is twice the rate seen in young people born only ten years earlier. Moreover, the most extreme manifestation of depression, suicide, is also on the rise, and it, too, is happening younger. Suicide is the second leading cause of death (after accidents) among American high school and college students. In the past 35 years, the suicide rate among American college students has tripled. Throughout the developed capitalist world suicide among adolescents and young adults is increasing dramatically (Shwartz & Ward, 2006). In line with this situation it has been defined a new pathology, *influenza*.

Affluenza as placing a high value on money, possessions, appearances (physical and social) and fame, and this becomes the rationale behind the increasing mental illness in English-speaking societies. The affluenza is a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more, unsustainable addiction to economic growth. James (2008) explains the greater incidence of affluenza as the result of “Selfish Capitalism”, the market liberal political governance found in English-speaking nations as compared to the less selfish capitalism pursued in mainland Europe.

Contrary to the declared promise of the commercials, consumerism is not about the satisfaction of desires, but about arousing desire for ever more desired, and preferably the kinds of desires that cannot in principle be quenched. The prizing of endless increases in material wealth may lead to feelings of worthlessness and dissatisfaction because in cultures of overabundance and greed people experience disconnection between their wants and needs. In sum, “materialism appears to be toxic to subjective wellbeing” (Kasser & Kanner, 2004:45).

Shwartz & Ward (2006) has analyzed the psychological consequences of the proliferation of options that the modern world provides. The authors suggest that we live in a culture world in which freedom and autonomy are valued above all else and in which expanded opportunities for “self-determination” are regarded as a sign of the psychological well-being of individuals and the moral well-being of the culture. For expanded opportunities for “self-determination” and freedom and autonomy they mean to take choice. In other words, to take choice is the critical sign that we have freedom and autonomy according to a capitalistic point of view. It is axiomatic that choice is good, and that more choice is better. However, the authors argue that in capitalistic societies like United States proliferation of options or choice, and with it freedom, autonomy, and self-determination, can become excessive, and that when that happens, freedom can be experienced as a kind of misery-inducing tyranny. In the quest for the best option increase the unhappiness and regret choices. One of the values associate with materialism society is the hedonism. In a consumerist and superficial life style people expect perfection in all things. This is an unrealistic high expectation. According to the studies reported by Shwartz & Ward (2006) people who search the best option obtain high regret scores, and high regret scores correlate with negative scores on happy, satisfied with life, optimism or depression. Emphasis on freedom of choice, together with the proliferation of possibilities that modern life affords, have contributed to unrealistic expectations which causes frustration and regret.

Conclusion

Liquid modernity provides an explosion of choices. The number of products or options available has increased dramatically: TV channels, telephonic companies, clothes, varieties of foods, retirement pensions, medical care, different computers, gas services, heterogeneity of families, different kinds of jobs, plurality of religions, and so on. However, several researches has suggested that materialism, extreme consume way of life, could be toxic to subjective wellbeing (Diener & Seligman, 2004; James, 2008; Kasser & Kanner, 2004). The consumerist society foster individualistic identity associate with the creation of infinite needs, hedonistic material pleasure, impulsive and hyperactive behavior, dissatisfaction with the “solid life”,

craving for novelty, concern with appearance, and deteriorating happiness and interpersonal relations (Ratner, 2006). The individualistic liquid identity syndrome is the negative psychology effect of the consumerist capitalism. It means by individualistic liquid identity the product of cultural capitalistic tools (concepts like materialism, artifacts like money, and institutions like markets) that people utilize to define and understand themselves and others and interiorize explicitly and implicitly. The individualistic liquid identity syndrome affects people that give high value on money, possessions, autonomy, appearances (physical and social), fame and independence. For example, different studies proof some negative dimensions of capitalism. In particular, it has been suggested that ideologies and practices of modern corporate capitalism, epitomized by the United States of America but becoming increasingly globalized, push individuals toward pursuing personal goals that have a detrimental impact on their well-being. In other words, the ideologies and institutions of corporate capitalism foster, maintain and encourage a set of values based in materialism, self-interest and selfish, strong desire for financial success and economic growth, hedonism, high levels of consumption and interpersonal styles based on competition. Values and practices that often conflict with pursuits such as caring about the broader world, having a close relationships with others, feeling worthy and free, share products and efforts or solidarity (Bakan, 2004; James, 2008; Kasser, 2002; Ratner, 2009; Schwartz & Ward 2006).

Future research is needed to study the relationship between the individualistic liquid identity and wellbeing in order to clarify the picture, that is to say, to precise the negative traits of capitalism. Base on literature, addressed in this paper, it is suggested that consumer capitalism foster individualistic liquid identity syndrome which is associated with mental disorders like anxiety, stress or depression. To study that hypothesis quantitative and qualitative studies are needed. Richis & Dawson (1992), for example, reviewed the construct and measurement of materialism and concluded that materialism is appropriately conceptualized as a consumer value. Another example is the qualitative study of Martin & Wajcman (2004). They studied the narrative identities of 136 managers, a key group in the current capitalism. They concluded that managers' career stories were dominated by a "market" narrative, in which they placed themselves as strategic actors making choices in a social world constituted by market-like interactions. They show how managers focused on requirements and possibilities of individual autonomy through reflective identity formation (Martin & Wajcman, 2004). "Consumer value" or "market narratives" could be ways to concretize and to study empirically the relationship between capitalism and people life.

According to macro-cultural psychology, the task of social scientists is to foster social reform –transforming and changing unconstructive macro-cultural forces (Ratner, 2006; in press). In doing so it is needed to study the psychological consequences of macro-cultural forces in order to assess the positive and negative influences. In line with this reasoning, we could study how people and societies can mitigate the negative psychological effects of the consumerist capitalism. We should take into account the different life styles that coexist in the contemporary society and the strength and weakness of capitalism right now.

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