

PSYCHOLOGISTS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Psychologists for Social Responsibility Supports the Occupy Movements

Psychologists for Social Responsibility (PsySR) – an international organization of psychologists and allies promoting social justice, human rights, peace, and environmental sustainability – expresses its strong support for the Occupy Wall Street and other Occupy movements that have spread to hundreds of cities and towns throughout the United States and the world. From a psychological perspective, this broad and growing movement can serve as a source of inspiration, hope, and unity for millions of citizens both angry and despairing about their own personal circumstances and the country's social and economic future. These occupations have thus far not coalesced around specific demands. That is neither problematic nor cause for concern. They have already succeeded in highlighting the deep problems facing our society and illuminating possible ways to address them.

The protesters stand for the revival and renewed appreciation of genuine democracy. They remind us that democracy is about the active and daily involvement of all in decision-making, not solely voting every four years for leaders who promise to carry out “the people’s will.” They remind us that democracy is about everyone playing a meaningful role in shaping society’s future. They remind us that democracy is about the voices of people without wealth being as strong as those of the most wealthy. And they remind us that genuine democracy is *not* about corporations and powerbrokers operating unfettered to benefit the few at the expense of the many, as articulated in a recent PsySR statement against “corporate personhood” (see www.psysr.org/corporate-personhood).

As psychologists, we know that having an active role in shaping one’s life is an essential component of well-being. A major psychological contribution of the Occupy movement is its ability to galvanize the collective energy, creativity, skills, and perspectives of people across the social spectrum, tapping into the powerful renewable resource of genuine communities of collaboration and of resistance. The elements of self-organization that have rapidly emerged empower both individuals and groups and open a way out of social passivity and its psychological consequences, including fear, loneliness, greed, entitlement, psychic numbing, and violence.

The Occupiers have refused to accept the growing inequality that threatens the democracy and social fabric of our country. A newly released Executive Compensation Survey shows that company executives’ pay increased 20% from the prior year and the national ratio for CEO to worker pay was 325 to 1 – despite massive layoffs and scant hiring since the recession officially ended two years ago. Meanwhile, economic inequality in the United States is now at its highest level since at least the 1920s, and possibly ever. Research shows that extreme inequality in society is associated with a more problematic life for all – not just those living in poverty. More unequal societies have higher rates of severe emotional problems, infant mortality, and substance abuse. They also experience higher rates of violent crime, child abuse, and obesity. Relatedly, poverty increases the risk that children will struggle in school and adults will struggle with work, among other problems. These problems are not the fault of people living in poverty but are symptoms of a social

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structure that prevents citizens from truly altering that reality for tens of millions of Americans and billions around the world.

The Occupiers' slogan "We are the 99%" indicates their desire and commitment to speak for and appeal to the vast majority who suffer from a political and economic system that is failing to serve the interests of that majority while showering fabulous wealth upon the most affluent 1%. The Occupy movement challenges the prevailing discourse driving economic and political decision-making, a discourse that has insisted on a scarcity of financial resources for those without work, adequate education, access to health care, and safe environmental conditions. It calls for the more equitable distribution of the world's resources. The Occupy movement also provides an inspiring model of nonviolent action that highlights the problems in our society and provides a model for social change. Occupiers and their supporters have maintained their nonviolent commitment even in the face of provocation from sometimes brutal police officers, recognizing the humanity and commonality of interests shared with the police.

PsySR thus welcomes and supports the Occupy movements. We encourage our members, our professional colleagues, and all citizens to support occupations in all of our communities aimed at challenging a business-as-usual status quo that harms far too many of the nation's citizens while only a few truly benefit.

For more information and inquiries, please contact us at info@psysr.org.

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