

# **THE MONEY TABOO: ITS EFFECTS IN EVERYDAY LIFE AND IN THE PRACTICE OF PSYCHOTHERAPY**

By: Richard Trachtman, Ph.D.

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**ABSTRACT:** A cultural taboo regarding discussion of money affects psychotherapists as well as the lay public. As a result, the psychological literature regarding money is sparse while issues relating to money are seldom addressed in our training, our self analyses or the treatment of our patients. This article cites some of the literature that does exist, discusses the reasons for and effects of the money taboo, provides a psychological definition of money and offers some case material that should help to focus thinking about money through the lens of psychodynamic, object relations and self psychological theories.

**KEY WORDS:** money; wealth; taboo; psychotherapy; object relations

Money is powerful, alluring, seductive. A “central motivation for many in our society,” (Krueger, 1991, p. 209) it is a screen onto which almost any psychological issue can be projected and a magnet which attracts all sorts of emotional concerns. John Stuart Mill wrote (Haight, 1977 p. 623): “It’s worth is solely that of the things which it will buy... Yet the love of money is not only one of the strongest moving forces of human life, but money is, in many cases, desired in and for itself.” There can be no question about the importance of money in the lives of our patients. It can cement relationships or undermine them. As “one of the richest fields in which to sow seeds of marital strife,”(Turkel, 1988, pp. 225-226) conflict over it is the primary cause for divorce. Individuals’ concerns about it can result in a wide array of problems including anxiety, depression, paranoia, impotence, impulse spending, gambling, social isolation, suicide, and murder. To address some of these problems there are three 12 step

programs: Gamblers Anonymous, Debtors Anonymous (which is for under-earners as well as debtors) and Business Owners Debtors Anonymous.

The philosopher, Jacob Needleman (1991) makes the following assertion, which this author believes is consistent with the goals of psychotherapy: “Money must become a tool in the only enterprise worth undertaking for any modern man or woman seriously wishing to find the meaning of their lives: We must use money in order to study ourselves as we are and as we can become.” (p. 72) Yet, due to an emotional taboo in our society which makes Americans, including psychotherapists, “seclusive, embarrassed or conflicted about discussion of money,” (Krueger, 1986, p. vii) it is, perhaps the most ignored subject in the practice, literature and training of psychotherapy. In this field money issues are addressed somewhat frequently only when it comes to setting and managing fees, an area that has strong practical as well as emotional consequences for therapists. (Allen, 1971; Eissler, 1974; Freud, 1932; Hilles, 1971) Even here though, “avoidance has been apparent” (Krueger, 1986, p. ix) and, “there is a striking paucity of discussion about the meaning of money in the transference-countertransference aspects of the [treatment] situation.”(Rothstein, 1986, p.299) Other considerations of money, having to do with its symbolic meanings and how it affects the thinking, emotions and adaptation of patients, are less well addressed in our literature. This paper will offer a discussion of the nature, reasons for, and consequences of the money taboo, addressing the psychological aspects of money and its effects on our patients’ lives.

As a tool for addressing the effects of the money taboo in psychotherapy, a psychological definition of money will be offered to help the reader conceptualize money as a projection of peoples emotional concerns. This definition suggests that people’s concerns about money have to do with their beliefs about whether or not they, or other people, have enough money. This places the definition of money into the realm of psychodynamic, object relations and self psychological theories. Supporting case material will be presented.

First, a brief summary of literature will provide some background on what has been written in this area.

### Brief Overview Of The Literature

In 1908 Freud identified money with feces and made a connection of money to anal eroticism. He also wrote (1917) of the unconscious, symbolic connection of money, through transformation of the instincts, with penises, babies and gifts. Ferenczi (1952) wrote about the ontogenesis of the interest in money as a progression from interest in feces through increasingly sublimated interests in mud, sand, prettily shaped and colored pebbles, more sophisticated collectibles and finally money. According to Turkel (1988) Fenichel enlarged on Freud's linkage of money with feces "by declaring that money can symbolize anything one can give or take: milk breast, baby, sperm, penis, protection, gift, power, anger, degradation. He viewed money as a source of narcissistic supply originating in an instinctual need for food and for omnipotence." (p.525) In Turkel's own more recent view, money in our culture "is also a symbol of worth, competence, freedom, prestige, masculinity, control, and security, all of which can become areas of conflict." (p.525)

The connection of money with psychopathology was established by Freud, who linked it with anal character traits and obsessional neurosis in the Rat Man case.(1909) Fenichel (1945) pointed out that that depression is often associated with compulsion neurosis and that very often fear of loss of money and of poverty play a role in the clinical picture of depression. More recently, Krueger (1991) covered a variety of topics related to the psychological meanings of money and their effects, including development models and identification involving money, addiction to money acquisition, and fears related to money, such as fear of autonomy, fear of wealth and fear of risk. He has also edited (1986) the one reasonably comprehensive collection of articles on money in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis.

In addition to the psychological literature there is some information about the psychology of money available in the financial literature. Close to the beginning of her best selling book, *The 9 Steps To Financial Freedom*, financial planner Suze Orman states “ most of my clients biggest problems in life today - even those that appear on the surface not to be money related - are connected with their early formative experiences with money.” She recommends to her readers, as the first step toward financial freedom, a psychological exercise; recalling their earliest memories about money and the painful feelings associated with these memories.

Another psychological approach to understanding people’s involvement with money was offered in a financial magazine. This article (Sullivan, 1994) presented a classification of money personalities based on a survey of 2,000 people’s “inner financial life.” It divided people into seven personality classifications as follows: 1) Hunters, who are characterized by an aggressive attitude toward the making spending and investing of money and who tend to have unsettled personal lives and a higher than average divorce rate; 2) Gatherers, who are the largest segment of the population, tend to be conservative as investors and who view money as security; 3) Protectors, for whom money is a means of shielding others; 4) Splurgers, who tend to be self centered and impractical and for whom money is simply a means of consumption; 5) Strivers, who more than any other group believe that money is power and leads to happiness, are domineering at home, think of wealth as a matter of luck or connections, have the lowest mean income and are jealous of those with more; 6) Idealists, for whom money means nothing more than security, who are likely to share what they have and are more likely than others to believe that money is the root of all evil, and; 7) Nesters, who are not emotionally involved with their money, are not materialistic but are possessive of what they do have, believe that one has to look out for oneself, and are the least likely to leave anything to their heirs. Whether or not this classification holds up, the characteristics attributed to each group may be useful to psychotherapists for assessment purposes.

## The Taboo Against Dealing With Money Issues

Why is it that the literature regarding the psychological meaning of money is so scant? As stated previously, there is a taboo regarding the subject of money in our society, to which psychotherapists are not immune. We Americans may complain about taxes, discuss the prospects of Social Security and brag about the great bargains we found or the killings we made in the stock market, but we seldom discuss our incomes, our indebtedness or, more generally, how we feel and think about money and how we relate to others because of it. As therapists, many of us tend to avoid exploring, for ourselves or with our patients, either the psychological meaning of money or the reality-based importance of our relationships to it. (Krueger, 1996).

In this author's experience, patients will rarely bring up money issues unless the therapist is willing to focus attention on them him /or herself. There is only one kind of therapy where discussion of money and how we relate to it, and to each other because of it, often comes up: marital therapy. It comes up there because disagreements over money and stresses connected to it are the most common reasons for marital discord. That, to a significant extent, is the result of the money taboo which results in lack of communication between couples about money. It is the rare couple that marries these days without having at least some sexual knowledge of each other. It is quite common, on the other hand, for couples to marry without knowing anything about each other's assets or debts or discussing assumptions about who will earn the money, how it will be spent, for what, or how these decisions will be made. Because fights over money are so often the presenting problem, marital therapists may be forced to address money issues with patients in more depth than may occur in individual or group therapy. But even in marital therapy, it is by no means certain that the couple's irrational, pre-conscious or unconscious ideas about money will be explored.

## Why Is There A Money Taboo?

Why is money a taboo subject? Freud's (1908) identification of the equation money = feces and its connection to anal eroticism suggests that shame is a powerful motive for reticence in money matters. A preoccupation with "filthy lucre" is experienced as unseemly. Similarly, identification of money with other issues that may become conflicted, such as power, sex, love or narcissism, may also result in inhibition of thinking or communicating about money. The reasons for a money taboo also have sociological explanations. According to Lloyd (1997). "In a society that claims to be a classless meritocracy on the one hand and a capitalist paradise on the other, there is no acceptable level of wealth. We have to pretend to be equal even as we know ourselves to have vastly different opportunities depending on our income. This contradiction necessitates that we speak of money euphemistically or keep quiet."(p.50)

Psychoanalysts, too, have offered sociological explanations. Fenichel offered one based on Marxist theory, which may seem odd in post cold war America where 40% of the population invest in the stock market. "One gains the impression" he wrote, " that this quite general characterization of money matters as 'indelicate' must fulfill a special function in the social ideology. This function must be a negative one: ignorance about financial matters and the effort to repress them as much as possible, lead to illusions about the true state of affairs in this field and about the possibilities for rational acquiring of wealth, and thus belong to those ... expedients for maintaining the present day class relationships through cunning." (pp.75-76) Translation? By keeping the proletariat from thinking clearly about money, the capitalist masters keep them in their place.

The importance of sociological or cultural explanations for a money taboo gain strength from the observations that this taboo does not exist, or is much weaker, in some other parts of the world. As part of my research into the psychological and social meanings of money, I have often asked individuals from other cultures about the money taboo. While some confirm the existence of such a taboo in their

countries, three of these individuals, physicians from Norway and Israel and a student from Switzerland, report that it is not considered particularly impolite to inquire about another person's income in these countries.

In workshops on Money and Relationships, as well as in informal research interviews, I often question people about the reasons for the money taboo. They give a variety of explanations for their reticence regarding money. For example, one person suggested that to ask or tell others about their money would be a social distancer. Another, who was wealthy, said that she had grown up poor and, when she thought of how much money she now had, she felt survivor's guilt. She also remembered her mother referring approvingly to wealthy neighbors who did not show off their wealth, by saying "You would never know they had money."

John Levy, who counsels individuals and families on issues of inherited wealth offers additional reasons for the money taboo among this population. (O'Neil, 1993) They are:

...good taste ("It's just not done."), fear of manipulation by others, ("It will give them power over me."), concern for their children's welfare ("If they know how much we've got, they will never make anything of themselves."), embarrassment or shame ("I don't deserve to be so much better off than most people.") and fear of being judged on this basis ("All they can see is my money.") (p.91)

The very nature of money can make it a source of anxiety and add to the taboo on thinking or talking about it. According to the dictionary, (Stein, 1982) money is "something generally accepted as a medium of exchange." But it's also defined as "a measure of value" and as "of account." This becomes a problem to the extent that people value each other and themselves in terms of money, as *persons of account* or as *of no account* based on income or net monetary worth. Our value as individuals can't be measured by money but it is undeniable that this is exactly what many people try to do. Rich or poor,

people don't like to be pigeon-holed based on the amount of money they possess and they may experience some shame when they do it to others.

### The Consequences of the Money Taboo

The Money taboo is a serious psychological problem because, though we do not talk freely about money, it is of major concern to almost everybody in America. This taboo keeps people from finding money's proper place in their lives. It keeps them from balancing their financial needs with other needs; such as love, family, self expression, self esteem, meaningful work and physical or emotional health. If people can recognize and overcome their irrational or destructive money-related beliefs and behaviors, money can become a valuable, life-enhancing force for them - a tool with which they can shape their lives rather than a cage in which they are confined. But, the taboo often turns money into a destructive force. Let's consider a few consequences of this taboo.

Despite common wisdom to the effect that money can't buy happiness it is certain that many people believe that enough money could make them happier than they are. Many people squander huge amounts of time and energy, thinking about and trying to acquire money because of this belief. Even when they are reasonably well off, people often make increasing acquisition and control of money a higher priority than either self actualization or cultivation of relationships - leading to many of the personal and interpersonal problems associated with money.

Even psychotherapists may assume some connection between money and happiness. Olsson (1986) writes that "Relative financial success, while not equal to happiness or contentment, is certainly one important ingredient in both." (p. 55) Does financial success really correlate with happiness? According to one report (Meyers and Diener, 1997) there is no clear correlation between living in a rich country and how happy people in that country seem to be, except that in very poor countries income does seem to predict well being. "But for those who can afford life's necessities, further wealth matters



surprisingly little. In the United States and Europe, the correlation between income and happiness is weak. Even the very rich - those surveyed among the Forbs' 100 wealthiest Americans - are only slightly happier than average. Wealth, it seems is like physical health. Although its complete absence can bring misery, possessing it is no guarantee of happiness.”(p. 6) Nonetheless, people believe money can make a difference. The same report suggests that: “Although few of us believe that money can literally buy happiness, many suppose that a little more money would make them a little happier. Moreover, the American dream seems increasingly to have become life, liberty and the purchase of happiness. In 1996 ‘being very well off financially’ led a list of nineteen goals among students entering college. It exceeded even ‘raising a family’ and ‘helping others in difficulty.’ Three quarters of those polled said that wealth was ‘essential’ or ‘very important’ - nearly double the proportion who said that in 1970.”(p.6) The question we must ask our patients is, “essential or very important for what?” What is it that they believe wealth will do for them? What is their fantasy? And, is it reality based or illusory?

Lack of communication about money can foster social divisions and illusions about others. Ironically, it is often the rich who suffer most as a result of the money taboo. Most of us have idealized fantasies about being rich and, because of those fantasies, may envy those who are wealthy. These fantasies are supported by the resistance on the part of the rich to discussing the realities of their lives and the reluctance of others to ask. Many believe that the rich are contemptuous of those with less money, which is sometimes true. But, if the wealthy are capable of contempt for those with less, the reverse is true as well. Writing about success (and having a lot of money is a common view of success) O’Neil , a management consultant who deals with many very wealthy people, writes the following (1993): “Envy and resentment cause most people to behave as if the highly successful have somehow been vaccinated against ordinary human suffering.” (p. 30) The rich can be dismissed by others who

assume that wealth insulates them from all sorts of problems. Even if they realize this is not so, envy may cause them to withhold an empathic, compassionate response to those with more money.

Wealth has its psychological hazards. O'Neil (personal communication) believes that, like others, the rich have emotional problems, but they find it harder to get help because having a fat wallet stimulates narcissism. They tend to view their therapists as hired help and treat them as such. If a wealthy person does not like the way a therapist is working to clean up his psyche, he is likely to fire that therapist as he would fire a poor housekeeper. Olsson (1986) adds that "Unprocessed countertransference and therapists' envy and subtle condescension can add to the isolation of the wealthy mentally ill" (p.55) who are likely to suffer from a variety of problems. These include: sociopathy; maternal deprivation resulting from the narcissistic character disorders of beautiful, vain mothers who have married rich men; paternal deprivation by wealthy fathers who often "pursue gold as an immortality symbol rather than the generativity issues with their own offspring" (p. 64); impaired identity and autonomy formation characteristic of a minority group including suspiciousness of outsiders, loneliness, and isolation and; weakened family structures characterized by multiple marriages and extramarital affairs.

To the extent that the money taboo undermines psychotherapists' ability to understand their own money issues and to explore the issues that affect their patients, it has a negative effect on their therapeutic effectiveness. It is helpful if people are able to communicate thoughts and feelings about money to psychotherapists, especially when those thoughts and feelings are causing problems in adaptation. When they do, or if it is difficult for them to do so, it helps if psychotherapists can encourage exploration of this area. This may alert patients to the possibility that their money related attitudes and behaviors are negatively affecting their lives. But too many of us are as inhibited as our patients in thinking about or discussing money issues, which may be one reason why many of them can tell us all

about their sex lives but won't even tell us how much they make. When we can't address our own money issues, we also can't control our own countertransference reactions to our patients' money or their money related attitudes and behaviors.

Freud (1913) recognized the money taboo and the importance of confronting it when he wrote, "...money questions will be treated by cultured people in the same manner as sexual matters, with the same inconsistency, prudishness and hypocrisy. [The analyst] is therefore determined beforehand not to concur in this attitude, and in his dealings with patients to treat of money matters with the same matter-of-course frankness that he wishes to induce in them toward matters of sexual life." That was written as part of his advice on handling of fees. But even he was not immune from avoidance when it came to his own money issues. He remained as blind about his own relationship to money as many of us are today about ours. Referring to his father's financial setbacks, he admitted that he preferred to suppress rather than explore their impact on him. About the "hard years" he wrote "I think nothing about them was worth remembering." (Gay, 1988, p.8) This is a striking statement for a man to whom exploration of traumatic childhood memories was a linchpin of early psychoanalysis. It illustrates the difficulty with which we are all faced when dealing with money issues.

As with Freud, many of us continue to be blind in this area with regard both to ourselves and to our patients. Until we first understand and overcome the money taboo in our personal and professional lives, we therapists can not effectively help our patients with money related issues. It is a problem in our profession that money issues are so infrequently addressed in our training or our personal analyses.

#### A Psychological Definition Of Money

When we can't talk or think about the source of our money related problems it is hard to overcome them. This becomes even harder to the extent that we are discussing money as an internal, psychological phenomenon rather than as a purely external one. According to Needleman (1991) "... money is an

invention, a mental devise, very necessary, very ingenious, but, in the end, a product of the mind.” (p. 176) Yet we don’t even have a good psychological definition of money to assist us in our understanding of it. In order to help us think more clearly about money as a psychological phenomenon, a new and different definition of it is offered here. It is based on the fact that we all, to some extent, depend on others’ attitudes and behaviors toward us while, at the same time, how we think of and care for ourselves are essential ingredients of psychological well-being. It is also based on the fact that all of us have irrational, magical ideas about what money can do for-or-to us and others. What causes us to be so concerned about money is largely our beliefs about what will be the attitudes and behaviors of others toward us, as well as how we believe we will treat ourselves, depending upon whether or not we have enough of it. The definition is based on the idea of projection of these beliefs onto money. It is as follows:

Money, psychologically speaking, is our projection onto coins, bills, bank accounts and other financial instruments of our beliefs, hopes and fears about how those things will affect who we are, what will happen to us and how we will be treated by others or by ourselves based on six possible conditions. We think of these conditions as follows: 1) I do have enough money, 2) I don’t have enough money, 3) I have too much money, 4) s/he does have enough money, 5) s/he doesn’t have enough money and, 6) s/he has too much money.

A few examples will demonstrate the utility of this definition. “Enough” usually has a positive connotation as in the phrase “I have enough money to be comfortable.” But it could have a negative implication as well, as in “He has just enough money to make him think he can lord it over me.” The psychological implications of the idea of “not enough money” can be many. It may mean that “I will not be loved because I don’t have enough money” or that “I don’t have enough money to cause jealousy or attract the attention of thieves.” It could mean, as one of my patients feared, that “I will end up living on

the street and starve” or, as was the case with another patient, that “Because I don’t have enough money, I can’t buy drugs, won’t get addicted and so will be okay.” With regard to the idea of “too much” consider these thoughts: “Because I have too much money nobody will ever love me just for myself.” ; “I’d better not let my wife go to work because, if she has too much money, I will no longer be able to control her and she will leave me.”; and “I can do whatever I want and don’t have to worry about what others think, because I have too much money (and power) for anybody to mess with me.” Clearly, thoughts about the sufficiency of money have important personal and interpersonal meanings and it is these meanings that the psychological definition of money, offered here, highlights.

An important money-related question which this definition raises but does not clarify is, “What is enough, or too much, or not enough?” The whole issue of perception of need and recognition of limits in regard to money should be of great interest to therapists. If the above definition does not answer the question, it at least helps to clarify the issue by indicating the six conditions in reference to which the question of enough may be raised. The question of what is enough must be answered in the context of another question, “Enough for what?” Answering this question requires clarity regarding our motives, values, aspirations and the like; certainly an area where psychotherapy can be helpful.

The above definition of money puts it squarely into psychodynamic, object relations and, to a lesser extent, self psychological theories. It makes money a symbol, generated defensively in response to our experience with or expectations of others, as well as our expectations of ourselves. To a large degree it also makes money an extension of self and object representations and forces us to understand it in terms of our images of ourselves and others. Narcissistic grandiosity or devaluation may be an important elaboration of these images. Money may be seen in terms of a characteristic associated with a self or object image or as a part-object similar to a nurturing breast or powerful phallus. Revisiting the examples given in the preceding paragraph will illustrate this point. The statement “I have enough money to be

comfortable,” treats money as a need fulfilling object or part-object. “I can do whatever I want because I have too much money,” makes money an extension of a grandiose self image. The thought that not having enough money to buy drugs will be a protection makes money into a toxic object which can affect a helpless self.

Two cases will illustrate the psychodynamic and object relational aspects of patients perceptions of money.

### Case I

The importance and complexity of psychological determinants of our attitudes toward money first came to my attention in the case of one patient I treated some years ago. In the mid 1980s, one of those times when recent MBA graduates could make huge salaries as stock traders, a young man, who was about to graduate from business school, came to see me for therapy. One of his presenting complaints was that he was very conflicted over whether he should take a high paying and high pressure job as a stock trader, or a lower paying but more relaxed one. The therapy initially dealt with his very rational discussion of the pros and cons of each choice. Eventually though, as memories from his childhood were uncovered, the underlying basis for this conflict became clearer.

As a young child, this man had become aware that his father, a passive man who worked at a low salaried job, was somehow different from other men he knew. While all of the other fathers in the neighborhood were the breadwinners and fairly successful financially, his mother had been the mainstay of his family. This made the young boy feel that his father was somehow unmasculine, though the issue wasn't quite clear in his mind. The cultural image of a masculine man, of which my patient was aware, was one of someone who made money. In his family, though, to be a man was to be passive, while the breadwinner role was that of a woman. This created confusion regarding the relationship of money to masculinity in my patient. If he made a lot of it he was like the other men in his neighborhood who he

considered masculine - but he was also somewhat like his mother who he thought of as feminine. If, on the other hand he did not make much money he was not like the other, masculine men - but also was not like his feminine mother. Therefore the question of whether to make a lot of money or to take a more relaxed job that paid less was an issue of sexual identity.

Although I was not thinking much in terms of object relations at the time, the above information can be understood in these terms as well. Seen from this perspective, the earning of money becomes an attribute of the object and, through identification with the object, also an attribute of the self. The conflict was not so much over with which object to identify as an earner money, but over the confusion of earning with gender.

Also, because this young man felt ashamed of his father, he felt guilty about his wish to earn a lot more than him because, if he did so, he believed he would be showing his father up and humiliating him. From an object relations perspective, the patient was concerned about whether he would experience his image of self as too aggressive if he earned more than his father. Only when the attribute of being a potentially high earner were attributed to the self image was the self experienced in this way.

Another aspect of his conflict had to do with the patient's wishes to be close to the father. The older man had covered his lack of financial success with a condescending attitude toward businessmen and those who made a lot of money, defensively viewing them as morally inferior because of their interest in money. Should he become financially successful, my patient feared, his father would disapprove of him. Since he had partially identified with his father's negative attitude toward money makers, he would feel ashamed of himself if he opted for the high money career. In object relations terms, his image would be of a greedy self, undeserving of the morally superior object's admiration. Although they were not fully explored at the time, a review of this material makes clear that narcissistic issues of grandiosity (the wish to make huge amounts of money) and devaluation were also involved.

This case illustrates the overdetermined nature of money in an individual's psychology and how, when money becomes attached to self and object images, it can lend many meanings to them.

Only after this young man uncovered and worked through these unconscious memories and the attitudes associated with them, was he able to make a career choice that was relatively conflict free. The question of money became more reality based and less a measure of his masculine identity or morality. He took a reasonably well paid job as an assistant to a Wall Street analyst which, while challenging and enjoyable, was not as frenetic as that of a trader. He still made far more than either of his parents ever had, but he did not experience himself as aggressive or greedy as a result of this. Neither did he feel that his father was denigrated by his success.

## Case II

The previous case illustrated how money can be experienced as a part or extension of whole object or self representations. Another case illustrates how money can be experienced more as a part-object.

It is common in working with children and adolescents to employ, as part of the assessment process, a question which goes something like this: "If you had three magic wishes and could wish for anything you desired, what would you wish for?" Very often the answer involves money. Answers such as "a million dollars" or "all the money in the world" are common. I have started using this question with adults and find that they, too, very often wish for money. Though, they tend to be more defended in regard to their id impulses and are likely to say something like "Money. Not a lot, just enough to be comfortable" or "Enough money so that I'll never have to worry." Whether used with children or adults, it is the follow up questions that reveal the significance of the patient's response.

One of my patients, a seventeen year old male chose for his three wishes "money, a house and an island." When prompted to elaborate he had trouble identifying how much money he would want, finally saying "as much as it would take to never run out during my lifetime". Further exploration of his



fantasies revealed that would live all alone on his island, having a constant flow visitors, mostly girls, but no permanent connections to anyone in particular. He wouldn't miss anyone.

The patient was a very passive young man. At a time in life when the individual usually “registers gains in purposeful action” (Blos, 1962, p.128) he hated school, was always bored because he had no compensating interests, and had no idea what he wanted to do with his life. Clearly, for this young man the wish for money was a substitute for the richness of meaningful object relations and an interesting life. Viewed in terms of psychosexual development, enough money to meet his needs for all lifetime was both a sign of passive oral dependent needs and a repudiation of them since it would allow him the pseudo-independence of living alone without anyone, yet having all of his needs met without having to do anything. In object relations terms, money was a breast, a need fulfilling part-object. The breast-like attributes of money were further illustrated by another comment made by this young man. “I never worry about money as long as I know I can get more.”

### Discussion

That discussion of money is a taboo subject in our society, not just for the lay public but for psychotherapists as well. Consequently it threatens our capacity to help our patients. It is a goal of psychotherapy to enhance the well-being of individuals and families, and their capacity to meet their own needs with both insight into their own motives and values and with a realistic understanding of the factors affecting their lives. We are hindered in addressing what Mill (cited earlier) called “one of the strongest moving forces in human life,” when the money taboo inhibits our patients from bringing up money related issues and hinders us from pursuing such issues with them. When we can't even talk or think clearly about our own money related issues we are hindered from understanding our resistance and countertransference.

There are many aspects of our relationship to money, only some of which have been touched on in this article, which bear attention in treatment, as well as in research and training. They include anxiety and depression, narcissism, object relatedness, fantasy and reality orientation, personality types, ego mastery, addictive behavior, risk tolerance in regard to investing, interpersonal relations and response to trauma. Reality issues, which have been written about elsewhere, such as fee setting and collection, the effects of insurance and managed care on engagement of patients and on treatment outcomes, and the impact of poverty on adjustment should be rethought in terms of the intrapsychic meanings of money to our patients. The special needs and problems of the wealthy, a minority group that is seldom thought of as having either needs or problems, also deserves greater consideration.

It is important for therapists to think about how these issues affect them in their own lives as well as in their role as therapists. This can be done through personal analysis, self analysis, supervision, reading and other forms of professional education. If we can overcome the money taboo within ourselves and with our patients this will contribute to helping them break down an important barrier to communication and understanding in their relationships with others. Only as cultural attitudes toward discussion of our money related fantasies, beliefs, attitudes and behaviors become more open will we, as a society, become able more freely to address these issues. Perhaps, as Freud did with sex, if we professionals face these issues within ourselves and with our patients, we can become pioneers in changing the attitudes of our culture.

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