

Academic Article

Powerful, seductive and alluring? Money in private practice

By Terry Naughton



Money and therapy

Rowe (1997) states that “we recognise money, but we don’t know what it means. We alone of all the animal species use money, but we don’t understand it. How could we, when money has for us many different meanings?” (p.12). Referring to money, Krueger (1986) observed that it is one of the most emotionally charged elements in present-day life. The only other two competitors for such varied and strong emotions, fantasies and strivings are sex and food. Some of the words used by Trachtman (1999) to describe money are – “powerful”, “seductive” and “alluring” (p.275).

Unexamined thoughts and feelings about money can have a great impact on the therapeutic process (Newman, 2005). Money may be associated with a number of themes that are relevant in therapy as suggested by Shapiro (2007), which include boundaries, family of origin, trust, conflict and power. Chan-Brown, Douglass, Halling, Keller and McNabb (2016) highlight the importance of thought and personal history while Barth (2001) believes issues related to self-worth, feelings of deprivation, concerns about envy and competition may also be present. Meaning making is a common theme in therapy and is an important component in the therapeutic process and Tudor (1998) suggests that the meaning of money becomes a central focus of therapy.

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(Trachtman, 1999; Tudor, 1998)

Introduction

One of the most commonly ignored aspects of psychotherapy in training, literature and practice is money, often resulting in therapists disregarding it (Krueger, 1986; Monger, 1998). This article will explore and outline the relevant literature on money as it relates to counsellors and psychotherapists who work in private practice. The topics of money and therapy, symbolism of

money, money as a taboo, lack of training, therapeutic process, fee setting, fee concessions, discomfort charging a fee and ethics will be explored in detail in addition to considerations for changing current practices with regard to how money is dealt with in therapy. Finally, conclusions reflecting on the importance of the role of money in private practice will be outlined.

Symbolism of money

While it is accepted that money is essential to living, it is also shrouded in symbolic meaning. Geistwhite (2000) notes that money has been symbolically linked to faeces, penis, and breast. Tudor (1998) suggests it represents guilt and dirt. However, Krueger (1991) maintains that money can symbolise self-esteem, esteem of others, potency, power, worldliness, or acceptance and for some clients, money may be viewed as a method to prevent separation and individuation. According to Freud (1913) “money matters are treated by civilised people in the same ways as sexual matters, with the same inconsistency, prudishness and hypocrisy” (p.131). In the literature on this topic, there are references to the similarities between therapy and prostitution. This relates to the acceptance of a fee (often cash) for a service. This is what Schonbar (1967) refers to as the “selling” of a human relationship, however, he later suggests that such concepts may be devised by clients in order to defend against closeness towards the therapist (Schonbar, 1986).

Money as a taboo

In the practice, literature and training of psychotherapy, money is one of the most ignored topics and, while it remains unaddressed, it leads to an emotional taboo regarding financial matters (Trachtman, 1999; Tudor, 1998). “Most of us have learned to talk more easily about sex, yet remain seclusive, embarrassed, or conflicted about discussing money. Money may be the last taboo in our society” (Krueger, 1986, p. vii). This theme of money as taboo runs throughout the literature (Dibella, 1980; Tudor, 1998; Trachtman, 1999) and is confirmed by Shapiro (2007) who states that talking

“The teaching is focused on the work of psychotherapy while excluding exploration of the business of doing psychotherapy”

(Pasternack, 1988)

candidly about money is regarded as inappropriate, intrusive and rude, by much of society. Lanza (2001) confirms this, adding that money is a complex of paradoxes.

Gans (1992) asserts that while money is a taboo subject, it is also a gateway to the unconscious, which includes primitive affect, features of personality and aspects of orality and anality especially withholding, depletion and greed. Challenging topics that were once combined with money issues were split off from the rest of self. By inviting elements of the unconscious to present themselves, these topics may be reacquainted. This may result in their importance being highlighted in aspects of life other than purely financial.

Lack of training

It is generally agreed that one such subject matter that requires explicit attention in training is the topic of fees. While there is a dearth of literature on the subject of fees in therapy, there is even less on the issue of fees and training (Monger, 1998; Tudor, 1998; Trachtman, 1999; Newman, 2005). Shields (1996) proposes that in the training sphere, without examination of the resistance related to money that may be present for both client and therapist, an opportunity to facilitate the client’s experience is lost. Shapiro (2007) notes that therapists have been trained to explore issues of abuse and sexual behaviour, eating disorders,

mental illness and drug and alcohol issues, therefore, they can also be trained to sensitively facilitate the significance of money. This is confirmed by Shields (1996) in declaring that the teaching is focused on the work of psychotherapy while excluding exploration of the business of doing psychotherapy. In conducting research with psychotherapists, Power and Pilgrim (1990) discovered that money was generally not discussed in training, while Trachtman (1999) aligns the poor training in fee dynamics with fuelling the money taboo. Pasternack (1988) proposes that training in psychotherapy should include learning and familiarity about fee setting and collection just as much as it does the promotion of other boundaries in the therapy.

Therapeutic process

From a negative viewpoint, money may be a contributory factor in the disruption of the therapeutic relationship (Chodoff, 1996; Holmes, 1998; Lanza 200; Dimen, 2012). One example offered by Power and Pilgrim (1990), is through failure to respond to a client’s economic circumstances. However, on a more positive note, Power and Pilgrim (1990) suggest issues of money in therapy (payment of the fee) may become pivotal in the therapeutic process by introducing areas of shame, vulnerability, dependence and self-worth. Zur (2007) believes the fee is essential to the therapeutic boundary separating the relationship in the therapy room from other types of non-professional relationships (friendships or romantic relationships). It is accepted that transference and countertransference are common elements of the therapeutic encounter and when issues of money are being explored or

ignored, these unconscious aspects of relating can be heightened. Holmes (1998) outlines the importance of attending to countertransferential emotions and to use them in the service of therapy.

Fee setting

A common belief among members of the mental health community is that paying for services is a positive element of psychological treatments (Aubry, Hunsley, Josephson & Vito, 2000). Certain authors believe that the fee is a crucial element for effective psychotherapy (Freud, 1913; Power & Pilgrim, 1990) inviting the client to value the process (Herron & Sitowski, 1986). Fee setting invites the therapist to acknowledge the role of the unconscious and any existing emotional factors that may be relevant (Pasternack, 1988).

Newman (2005) outlines possible feelings on behalf of the client that may include guilt, contempt, hostility, seduction and anxiety. Pasternack (1988) reminds us that the modern-day flexible fee policy employed by many therapists originated from a more rigid system proposed by Freud who obeyed a policy of leasing by the hour. His insistence on fee-paying arose from a belief that it reduced the resistances (unnecessary gratitude and obligation) of the patient in therapy (Freud, 1913). He invoked a cancellation policy and believed it was ethical to acknowledge the business aspects of therapy. Separating the psychological meanings from the business aspects of therapy was a strong theme for Freud, but in the present-day, Barth (2001) believes that the two are solidly connected.

Schonbar (1967) outlines a therapeutic attitude toward fee setting and the avoidance of a

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rigid fee policy. A flexible approach encourages the client to engage in the treatment process and invite unconscious conflicts to the fore. Schonbar (1967) proposes invitation of an open discussion regarding missed appointments and aspects of non-payment rather than invoking an automatic charge on an administrative basis. A flexible approach aids productive therapeutic exploration and assists the therapist in meeting their own countertransferential issues, should they arise (Schonbar, 1967). A study conducted by Clark and Kimberly (2014) found that the fee paid for therapy has no impact on a client's attendance. While conducting a review of the literature on the effect of fees on psychotherapy, Herron and Sitowski (2014) discovered that the therapeutic value of fee-paying has not been theoretically proven.

Fee concessions

Pasternack (1988) suggests that a reduced fee may represent collusion on behalf of the therapist in an attempt to foster dependency. This may result in the client feeling “special” or, alternatively, it may generate feelings of indebtedness to the therapist. Unconsciously, this may encourage a lack of progression within therapy and could lead to the client perceiving the reduced fee as a form of seduction. Pasternack (1988)

believes this is difficult to detect but is essential to uncover in order to promote a positive therapeutic environment. If fees are modified during the course of therapy, the therapist should remain alert to transference and countertransferential elements of the therapeutic process (Pasternack, 1988). Newly qualified therapists can often feel conflicted about charging for therapy, occasionally accompanied by feelings of guilt about the quality of the service they provide. The introduction of a reduced fee can often assist in lowering performance pressure on the fledgling therapist (Myers, 2008).

Discomfort charging a fee

Knapp and VandeCreek (2008) state “Most psychotherapists are reluctant businesspersons. They consider the business side of their profession to be a necessary evil that allows them to do what they really love: psychotherapy” (p.613). Lanza (2001) proposes that many clients and therapists feel a discomfort discussing fees and suggests this may emanate from the Protestant ethic of praising hard work but never enjoying the fruits of the labour. However, according to Geistwhite (2000) the process of fee setting, despite its discomfort, is a precursor for all future discussion of challenging topics in therapy.

Ethics

From an ethical values viewpoint, focusing on the business element of a therapeutic practice (including setting fees) is essential (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2008). In its 2016 Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct, the American Psychological Association (APA) expects therapists to accurately represent their fees (APA, 2016). The British Association for

Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2018) suggests that when contracting with clients, therapists should inform them of the terms on which their services will be provided. The Irish Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Code of Ethics and Practice (2018) refers to making a contract with a client and to “include issues such as availability, fees, and cancelled appointments” (Section 2.3(b)). This encourages the therapist to be open about fees and any extra costs that may arise. However, Shapiro and Ginzberg (2006) suggest that limited guidelines in codes of ethics result in fee setting being left to the discretion of the therapist.

Considerations for change

Informed by the research outlined above, as therapists, I suggest we consider changes in how we reflect on and approach money in private practice.

One of the gaps identified in the research is the lack of business training for therapists (Tudor, 1998; Power & Pilgrim, 1990; Monger, 1998; Newman, 2005; Shapiro, 2007). Considering the therapists’ beginnings is at the training stage, I suggest the provision of enhanced training in the area of the business of therapy. The identified research highlights the need for solid, financial arrangements to be put in place for all therapists. If this is undertaken the therapist provides the “safe therapeutic frame that reinforces professionalism and predictability” (Apostolopoulou, 2013, p. 315). This could begin in training colleges and institutions.

Fee setting (along with fee concessions and discomfort charging a fee) has been identified as a strong theme in the literature and every therapist who begins in private practice faces this task.

“Discussion with peers, supervision, personal therapy, training or workshops are fora that may be useful while simultaneously helping to dispel the taboo of filthy money”

(Tudor, 1998).

Therapists who may be hesitant about setting a fair fee structure or who feel unsure about the therapy they provide may undermine the value of the therapeutic offering (Pasternack, 1988). As has been outlined, private practice is a business. I would suggest that prior to beginning this process, the therapist reflect on their own personal relationship with money. This may highlight values held by the therapist about money and invite reflection on the place of money in their life, past and present. Unconscious sabotaging beliefs may be uncovered. Insight into the role their personality style plays in their relationship with money may be achieved. A tool similar to the money genogram may be useful in this regard. (See Appendix A). I would strongly recommend that therapists avail of any platform that may provide an opportunity to discuss or explore money issues. Discussion with peers, supervision, personal therapy, training or workshops are fora that may be useful while simultaneously helping to dispel the taboo of filthy money (Tudor, 1998).

An ethical stance suggests that a solid payment policy should be considered, supplying clients with accurate information about the costs of starting or continuing therapy. Bearing in mind that a money taboo has a

negative effect on the therapeutic encounter, the research identified the importance of exploring the meaning of money and its impact on both transference and countertransference. Inviting space and time for the client to openly discuss their thoughts, feelings, attitudes and behaviours about money may be a helpful offering. A tool to explore the historical and emotional significance of money in the life of the client may be useful. Once such tool is the Family Financial Questionnaire (Shapiro, 2007) (See Appendix B).

Therapists should be wary of unusual fee arrangements suggested by clients, noting that comments and behaviour related to payments are often not just administrative details. Broadening a focus that incorporates all money matters as “royal roads” to insight, may alert the therapist to consider this as material for processing in therapy. This may open a view to the client’s internal dynamics and perhaps unconscious material and pave the way for exploration of negative adaptations and wider impacts on life.

Conclusion

Money is needed for everyday life and is also “a metaphorical currency for power, control, acknowledgement, self-worth, competence, caring, security, commitment, and feeling loved and accepted” (Shapiro, 2007, p. 290). As outlined, money has an emotional as well as a financial component to it. Miller (2007) suggests that the therapist never underestimate the complexity of setting a fee that is comfortable, achievable, reasonable and ethical. Lanza (2001) proposes that it is not greedy to seek compensation for the provision of therapeutic services, but rather a form of self-respect.

As a business, it is helpful for practitioners to acknowledge the tension between being a therapist and a businessperson, between altruism and professionalism (Knapp & VandeCreek, 2008). By acknowledging that tension, we offer our clients an opportunity to explore their underlying values, beliefs, thoughts and feelings as well (Shapiro & Ginzberg, 2006). Cooper (2017) asserts that movement within therapy can be

facilitated by working creatively and therapeutically with money. Who knows, in the process, we may even “uncover buried treasure – a richer understanding of the self” (Shapiro & Ginzberg, 2006, p. 493).

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Appendices

Appendix A – The Money Genogram

Meaning and function of money

1. What does money mean to you?
2. What does it mean to have financial self-discipline? What is positive about it? What is negative about it? How do you feel when you exercise financial self-discipline?
3. What does it mean to overspend?
4. What does it mean to underspend?
5. On what terms do you tend to over or underspend money?
6. How do you feel when you overspend and underspend? Identify all feelings, those on the surface and underneath.
7. What are your overt and covert motivations for over- or under- spending or being self-disciplined?
8. What are your financial priorities?
9. In what ways do you agree or disagree on your financial priorities?
10. Who has control over the money in your relationship? What are the rules you have about how to manage your money?
11. How would you like to change some of the rules about the two items above?

Money genogram

1. What was your mother's role concerning finances? What was your father's role? How is your role like either of your parent's role?
2. As a child, did you think you were rich, poor, or middle-class? How did that feeling affect your perception of money now?
3. What were the money concerns or worries you experienced in your family? What lessons did you learn from them? Have those lessons altered how you deal with money now?
4. What big financial successes occurred in your family? What lessons did you learn? How have those lessons altered the way you deal with money now?
5. What was your family's greatest money fear or worry? Why?
6. In thinking about what your family did with money or could have done with money, what makes you the most uncomfortable? What gives you the greatest pleasure?
7. Were your parents well matched in money values? On what did they have different values?
8. Did your parents maintain separate checking and saving accounts? How did they decide which bills were to be paid out of which account?
9. How often did your parents talk about money? What were their conversations like?
10. Who paid most of the common household bills? How was it decided which parent should have the duty?
11. When there was a conflict about money, how was it resolved? Was there a pattern in either the conflict or who won?

Adapted from -

Mumford, D. J., & Weeks, G. R. (2003). The money genogram. *Journal of Family Psychotherapy*, 14(3), 33-44.

Appendix B – Family Financial Questionnaire

The following questions can serve as a guide to exploring the history and emotional significance of money for a client.

- (1) What are your earliest memories of money in your family? What is your best and worst memory regarding money? What feelings do these memories generate? Was money viewed as good, bad, scary, dirty, or neutral for you as a child? Did anyone help you to understand these feelings as a child? Were there any family stories about money?
- (2) How did your parents talk about money between themselves and with the children? Was it easy to talk about, or was it treated as a secret? What kind of tone was used in the discussions? Did your parents fight about money, and if so, how?
- (3) Did your parents agree about how to deal with money? Who was in charge of spending, and who was in charge of saving? Did working, or earning the bigger portion of the income, connect to control over money?
- (4) How did your mother think and feel about, and deal with, money? How did her parents think and feel about, and deal with, money? Did your mother enjoy working (or staying home)? How did you know and what impact has this had on you? Repeat using father. How well off did you feel growing up? How did that change over the course of your growing up, if at all?
- (5) What is your first memory of having an argument or disagreement about money in your family? What were your feelings regarding arguments about money, and how has this impacted you?
- (6) If you have siblings, were different genders or different ages treated differently in regard to money? How are your attitudes and feelings about money different from or the same as those of your siblings?
- (7) What is your first memory of making money of your own? How much control did you have over any money you made or received as a gift?
- (8) Where else did you get messages or information about money while growing up? Other relatives, religion, peers, TV, culture? How did these messages influence you?
- (9) What financial expectations did your parents and grandparents have of you? How was this communicated to you? What financial expectations do you have of your parents or grandparents?
- (10) What would you like to do differently from your parents regarding money in your relationship? What would you like to do the same?

Adapted from -

Shapiro, M. (2007). Money: A therapeutic tool for couples therapy. *Family Process*, 46(3) p. 280-281.