

**Fee Fie Oh URHUMMM**  
**Money, psychoanalysis, and the smell of blood**

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Although it is a medium of exchange, few subjects in the United States are more private than money. People want others to know they have a lot of it, but nobody is supposed to know precisely how much. And asking about how much people have produces shame, embarrassment, anger and the experience of boundaries crossed inappropriately. It is a subject everybody is supposed to know about, since it can be assumed to define value (money speaks). Yet in essential ways money is mute, since it can never ascribe value; it is inert, a mere shadow of what it is supposed to be. Curiously, on the dollar bill is the insignia of the masons: a pyramid and an eye, even though money is blind.

These contradictory and problematic mixed messages cannot but find their ways into the psychoanalytic consulting room. Money is public tender, yet few analysts know exactly what their analysands make, and fewer analysands know exactly what their analysts make.

## Money and privacy

Few and far between are the psychoanalytic papers dealing with links between money and privacy,<sup>1</sup> how money is thought to define privacy. Yet when one comes to look at this more closely, how confusing it is. Psychoanalysis puts a value on privacy, but has difficulties including money in the transactions over value; it often overlooks the analysis of feelings of privacy (and their counterpart, feelings of infringement or intrusion) that seem to me a necessary part of the intimacy required for analytic work. It has thus become a truism that patients speak of their sex lives more readily than they do about money, and the associations between money and secrecy seldom attract the analytic attention they deserve.

Years ago as the Program Chair of the Los Angeles Psychoanalytic Institute and Society I decided to beef up participation in programs by asking six analysts (three senior analysts and three candidates) to write a ten minute piece on money, and to bring with them eight friends. The result was instant attendance but not instant comprehension. Both explicitly and implicitly the papers raised so

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<sup>1</sup> Freud focuses on the links between money and anality, which while perhaps overlapping the matter of privacy is not quite the same thing.

many thorny questions that the audience was hard pressed to enter into discussion. Matters were further complicated by the fact that three of the presenters were candidates, who did not wish to be seen in public to contradict senior analysts. As for the senior analysts, they seemed publicly so secure in what they presented that there was little room for questions, and appeared as though they were quite at ease doing what they had done for decades. Nobody could comment on the privacy of the topic, and how hard it is to broach the subject in public. One reason for this has to do with shame, a subject to which I will return shortly. Although other people's privacy is our stock and trade, when we come to the matter of money, we go quiet. It would appear that as long as privacy means the only privacy of our patients (and does not include our own needs for privacy, or the counter-transference meanings of our patient's needs for secrecy around money), many are the money matters that will go unattended to. Our privacy as analysts would need to be available for scrutiny and not assumed to be off the table and not for negotiation. Recent work on self-disclosure has not been able to go far enough beyond the content of what is disclosed to the interpersonal dynamics of continually shifting definitions and conflicts around privacy. And the interpersonal dimensions of secrecy dynamics until now have been avoided. Whatever feelings we as analysts have about privacy include shame dynamics (including shame over greed exposed), and these directly affect the analytic process. As analysts how can we more

effectively broach the subject of our own shame? Under what circumstances is it “analytic” to speak of these matters honestly with patients?

### **Money and ethics**

All this leads us back to how we feel about money ourselves, how private and personal these feelings seem to us to be. There are countless examples of the most esteemed analysts who have been less than scrupulous about their handling of fees, especially when dealing with extremely wealthy patients.

Adam Smith notes in The Wealth of Nations (1776) “People of the same trade seldom meet together, even for merriment and diversion, but the conversation ends in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices.” It would be interesting to note what effect our bi-annual meetings have on raising fees, and how frequently discussions of raising fees have been the subjects for discussion groups and program activities. The various surveys sponsored by the American Psychoanalytic ask how many patients in analysis we have, but not how much money they pay us or how we handle the question of fees and insurance. Also, the fees of analysts in the 1950’s and 60’s were, proportionately, significantly higher than those today. The effects of changing economic circumstances on psychoanalytic practice, psychoanalytic education, and

psychoanalytic communities has rarely received the attention it deserves. These considerations have a direct effect on what “real psychoanalysis” can be defined to include, on the elasticity of psychoanalytic technique, and on the pragmatic requirements for survival.

Since we are dependent on fees for our livelihood, it is remarkable that the subject has not received the attention that it deserves. The reasons for this neglect must lie in powerful resistances. It is clearly very difficult to raise the subject of money at all. Perhaps because money and its handling feel private to us as analysts, we are reluctant to express the complexity of our feelings about it, and more reluctant still since we are dependant on money for our livelihood and are ashamed of admitting such dependency on our patients. Better to assume that the patients are resisting when they cannot pay our full fees.

For example, we know that because Masud Kahn was extremely wealthy, it seems likely that Winnicott profited from his wealth. After all, it was Kahn who wrote many of Winnicott’s papers, without ever being paid or even recognized for having done so. Winnicott explicitly ordered Kahn to put aside his enormous wealth and live only on his fees, which Kahn did – for a time. We can only imagine what motivated Winnicott to take advantage of his former patient in such a flagrantly un-analytic manner. And we know, for example, that Greenson,

whose ethics in the treatment of Marilyn Monroe were, to say the least, dubious, arranged for an Annenberg to give a large sum to Anna Freud for her foundation. Freud's own correspondence is disconcertingly full of references to money and payment, often inappropriately. One of the reasons that Jones achieved the prominence he did was because he was a reliable source of patients who paid Freud in dollars. When Freud accepted an enormous donation from his analysand Anton von Freund to establish the International Psychoanalytic Press, he presented the matter as unproblematic, although he was quick to accuse others (e.g., Ferenczi) of internal conflicts in confusion over bank transfers.

Which is not to say that we are better than our forebears. Rather, that these matters need to be wrestled with honestly and openly if we are to avoid the ethical compromises that fill our history. Shame over poverty in childhood, and shame over having been devalued as a child ("this boy will come to nothing") casts its shadow over monetary transactions, as it did in the case of Freud.

Yet, even in the light of such numerous examples of questionable practice, it is rare that supervisors broach the difficulty of the subject of money with supervisees. When I was in training, low fees were presented as suspect, since patients could make use of them in the service of resistance. While this is certainly true, nobody mentioned the other side of the hill: that patients can

equally easily make use of full fee in the service of resistance. The point here, I think, is that any fee can be used in the service of resistance, just as any fee can be used by the analyst in the service of greed, self-aggrandisement and narcissistic omnipotence.

Greed is human, but becomes shameful if it is not acknowledged; shame over greed can hide the shame over omnipotence, driving the two into secrecy, a yet more difficult dynamic to analyze, particularly in a society in which money is often the mark of success, and is presumed to indicate superiority. But the difficulty need not deter us from struggling to make these dynamics accessible to the analytic process, and to include them as part of psychoanalytic education and integral to all analyses.

### **Shame, omnipotence, and the worth of money**

One of the most powerful shame dynamics is the shame over omnipotence.

When we feel omnipotent, we wish others to find us as powerful as we would like to feel. However, if we doubt the legitimacy or reality of our powers, that pretense is likely to subject us to anxiety over being shamed when we are found out to be other than we seemed. The result is a little like Oz the Magnificent, behind his curtain. However, Oz was not ashamed, since nobody was supposed

to take the land of Oz seriously in the first place; the very absence of any shame places the plot firmly in the realm of wish-fulfillment and fantasy, and distances it from our living experiences.<sup>2</sup>

In my Disappearing Persons: shame and appearance, I speak about the shame of being seen to be other than we wish others to believe we are. The experience of needing to protect omnipotent illusions often produces a reliance on appearance; such reliance then exposes us to the shame of being found out. This shame is all the more intense because it entails our need for others to see us as we wish to be seen because we fear we are not like that. If only we can rely on what others see, we can be free of our own conflict over the need to safeguard our omnipotence while needing to evaluate ourselves with respect to our effectiveness in the world. The more frightened we are of the results of our evaluation, the more prone we will be to resurrect infantile omnipotence as a defense. And then the less able we will be to deal realistically with relationships and the world around us. Unless, of course, we can bend others to our own illusions: if they see us as powerful, then we can contradict our fears that we may not be what we seem.

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<sup>2</sup> Like Tolkein or the Harry Potter books, the Oz books present a world essentially free of shame because it cannot be taken seriously, and because there is no threat to the omnipotence of thought and fantasy. And, presumably, this is one of its appeals. Yet such dynamics present a marked contrast with the world of Greek tragedy, Shakespeare, Goethe, or Dickens, authors for whom shame and its seriousness is the warp and woof of narrative.

These considerations are directly pertinent to money. Money can never hide our shame, although many people rely upon it to do that. And in that reliance, there are assumptions about how we appear in the eyes of others. If we are wealthy in their eyes, then we can hide any sense of our own inadequacy and defectiveness by relying on what they see (and thereby denying our own experience). Such reliance breeds identity confusion and severe difficulties with Object Relations.

And, of course, poverty is felt to be shameful, particularly in the United States where wealth has traditionally been seen to be a sign of divine election (and, implicitly in the Protestant ethic, natural selection). Poverty thus means weakness, a message driven home by the powerlessness that squalor, inadequate education, and financial hardship produce. What is worse, this powerlessness is often taken advantage of by those whose greed and know-how allow them to profit from the suffering and confusion of others. So it is not money that determines the equation between poverty and helplessness but rather social values. Our collective indifference to poverty and hardship serves to stoke the self-sufficiency of the wealthy, and our unresponsiveness to suffering isolates the poor even more. It would seem, then, that in the United States human suffering and misfortune have become (if indeed they were not always) the source of unbearable humiliation. This situation is worse still because those who are

unfortunate are seen to be “failures.” And those who are failures in the eyes of others have a difficult time holding on to a semblance of dignity.

Which leads me to the subject of shame, money and superego conflicts through which we will loop back to money in the analytic setting. If not having money (or not having enough money) is experienced as a recipe for failure, and if fear of failure produces generalized anxiety, then money will be tied up with ego ideals. To be poor with such superego demands is to be anxious. Such anxiety over poverty is thus not directly about money, but rather about the shame of being poor and the anxiety that generates, and then the shame over that anxiety, yet another indication that the bulwark of omnipotence cannot hold. One of the themes of patients in my practice in Los Angeles was the amount of money they needed to retire. I had patients in their twenties who had little or no insight into their own anxieties, but could name a figure needed to retire: three million, seven million, etc. They felt little anxiety, but knew exactly how much money they would need not to feel anxious.

What about negotiations around money with “low fee patients?” When I began looking for an analyst, I was earning very little and had to contend with the subject of money, which I found to be a source of terrible shame. Some of the analysts I consulted said bluntly that they would not take me into analysis

because I could not pay their fees. While some were sensitive to my shame, some were not, and presented the subject of money as though it were a hurdle for a horse to jump. If the horse did not make it, he failed. The problem I now see in their reaction is not so much the setting of the fee as how the subject of money was handled. If they felt that they preferred analysands who could pay more, then that certainly was their prerogative. But money did not need to be presented as though it was a reality external to the beings of the analysts, who were there simply to collect their due. Moreover, their fee need not have been used to make prospective analysands feel like failures when they could not pay the fee.

Then there is the argument that patients need to pay in order to feel the worth of analysis. It is assumed that one needs a quantum of financial effort in order to motivate patients. But is the effort in payment the same for those of varying resources? The effort for millionaires of paying whatever full fee might be is not the same as the effort required of those earning twenty thousand dollars. If this is the case, then just how money is a motivator needs to be explained in the context of all dimensions of financial dynamics.

How analytic then is the assumption that it is good (i.e., analytic) for patients to pay for their treatment? If analysts assume that the fee is to be set independently

of the means of the patient, then they may avoid engaging their own responsibilities in negotiating a the most appropriate fee under the circumstances. What about the personal needs of the analyst, the financial dynamics of the patient, and an assessment of what fee might best further analytic treatment? For these considerations to become part of analytic practice (and training), analysts would need to speak to each other in public about the relation between their own sense of value as practitioners and the fees they are paid, and that is something they are loathe to do. The feelings (and realities) of sacrifice required of analysands to pay for their analysis too seldom enter into the analytic process, since for these to do so would require the analyst to examine the relation between personal value and financial worth both for himself/herself and for his/her analysand. Alas, the non-response of analysts to analysands' feelings of financial struggle is part of the inheritance of psychoanalysis and goes as far back as Freud. If these feelings automatically require "interpretation" what becomes of that reality implicitly being ascribed to money?

What does one do with patients who lie about their resources? The subject of how one deals with lying is, curiously, sparsely treated in the literature. As far as I can remember, the subject never came up in either my supervision or my classes while I was in training. This is perhaps because the subject of deceit entails both a deceiver and a deceived, and we as analysts are loathe to admit to

having been deceived. Yet if we view money as a transference phenomenon, to be interpreted, does this not set us up to be deceived? Inasmuch as it is viewed as a transference phenomenon, it can be handled technically. But here is the rub. To handle money as though it were a transference phenomenon only leaves us as warm blooded analysts out of the equation, and removes us from the confusion and emotional negotiations required to be able adequately to analyze financial dynamics.

We are then faced with a paradox: many analysts treat money as though it were real, since they need their fees to live in the style to which they are accustomed. Yet the more real money is presumed to be, the less able they are honestly to interpret monetary negotiations as a resistance. Which raises the question: under what circumstances is it possible honestly to treat money as a resistance on the part of the analysand? Those who would reply hastily that in those instances "reality" is being used as a defense would be on shaky ground, since the "reality as a defense" argument would seem to go counter to the "it's resistance" argument. There is the Ferenczi's story of the patient who says to his analyst, "Doctor I will give you every penny I have if you help me." "How is one hundred dollars an hour?" suggests the analyst. To which the patient replies, "But isn't that rather excessive?" And then there is the corresponding story of the analyst who says to his patient, "Tell me what fee you think fair." The patient

says, "How about one hundred dollars?" to which the analyst replies, "That won't do at all. Surely you can do better than that."

Finally, money (particularly in the wealthy) can support omnipotence, such that the analysand may well not want the analyst to puncture the illusion of power, even in the service of the relationship. Under such circumstances, it is easy for the analyst to take wealth as the paramount reality and to miss the underlying anxiety over poverty together with the superego conflicts these entail. This is particularly true when the analysand is paying full fee.

Paying full fee can also be a defense against being seen to be defective. It does not necessarily mean that the analysand values the analyst. In fact, it can be the very opposite. So as not to discuss fee, the analysand pays full fee. That way the dynamics around money do not have to be exposed, and the illusions of omnipotence (and the shame of anxieties) can go unnoticed. In such cases, it is the analyst who is hoodwinked and the analysand who manages to avoid an essential part of the analysis by acting out what cannot be spoken.

### **Money and the blood and guts of analysis**

Fee Fie Fo Fum/I smell the blood of an Englishman. So said the ogre in the tale. The line is appropriate to ponder in conclusion, since I have used it to link the subject of money (fee) with blood. Analysis is about the blood and guts of human experience. There is a serious problem if, on the one hand the money paid by the analysand is treated as though it was real (and not symbolic) and had been given through some sort of immaculate conception to the divinely selected few. Or, conversely, if the analysand is implicitly devalued because he or she cannot pay full fee. If either analysand or analyst avoids the blood and guts of the analysis of money, then an essential dimension of the analysis will go missing. We as analysts are responsible to our patients, to ourselves, and to our profession to give the matter of money its due.

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