



Money and relationships: When and why thinking about money leads people to approach others[☆]



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ABSTRACT

Monetary reminders have been shown to discourage people from affiliating with others. We proposed such an effect can be reversed when others are instrumental to people's goals. Results from four experiments converged to support our proposition. We found that thinking about money increased people's focus on the instrumentality aspects of others (Experiment 1). In a goal pursuit context, monetary reminders increased people's tendency to approach others who were instrumental to achieving their goals (Experiment 2). The effect of money prime on approaching others was dismissed or reversed when people were highly competent in achieving the goal themselves (Experiment 3) and when the instrumentality of others was ambiguous (Experiment 4). Moreover, these effects were driven by the perceived instrumentality of others (Experiments 2–4). Taken together, our findings suggest that thinking about money leads to an instrumentality orientation in social interactions, which changes how people view relationships and how they interact with others.

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1. Introduction

Money has a ubiquitous presence in modern commercial societies, shaping the way people view themselves and influencing how they behave. It is unsurprising that money is linked to various positive psychological outcomes. Having more money is found to be associated with more frequent positive emotions and less frequent negative emotions than having less money (Kahneman, Krueger, Schkade, Schwarz, & Stone, 2006), and spending money on others can promote people's happiness (Dunn, Aknin, & Norton, 2008). However, many recent studies have been in line with the notion that "money is the root of all evil." The desire for

money can be in conflict with communal values (Burroughs & Rindfleisch, 2002) and relates negatively to relationship quality (Kasser & Ryan, 2001). Disagreement on how to spend money is a predictor of diminished marital well-being (Rick, Small, & Finkel, 2010).

More relevant to this research, even the mere thought of money can cause sweeping changes in interpersonal beliefs and behaviors (Vohs, Mead, & Goode, 2006, 2008). For instance, thinking about money decreases helping behaviors (Pfeffer & DeVoe, 2009; Vohs et al., 2006, 2008), interferes with empathy toward others (Molinsky, Grant, & Margolis, 2012), and increases unethical behaviors (Kouchaki, Smith-Crowe, Brief, & Sousa, 2013). To explain the effects of money at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, researchers have proposed that money acts as a universal medium of exchange in a global economy. The mere reminder of money will activate a market-pricing mode, which is a relational mode wherein people use calculations of costs and benefits to organize social interactions such that people consider what they may receive from a given relationship (Vohs et al., 2006, 2008).

Relationships can be demanding. To maintain a relationship, people need to continually invest their time, energy, and resources into it (Rusbult, Olsen, Davis, & Hannon, 2004). However, interpersonal relationships can also be beneficial to people and critical for

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their personal goal pursuits. For example, affiliating with others has been seen as an innate biological drive, a basic human need, along with sustenance and shelter (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Social support benefits individuals in their goal pursuits (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988) by providing emotional, material, and informational aids. Further, interpersonal relationships enhance self-regulation, which is essential for goal attainment (Fitzsimons & Finkel, 2011). Clearly, interpersonal relationships could facilitate goal pursuit in many situations.

Therefore, it is puzzling that previous research has repeatedly found that people restrain themselves from approaching others when thinking about money. For instance, compared to participants primed with the concept of time, participants primed with the concept of money spent more time working (e.g., reading or working on a computer) than socializing (e.g., chatting on the phone; see Mogilner, 2010). Similarly, Vohs et al. (2006, 2008) found that reminders of the concept of money cause a preference for solitary activities (e.g., taking four cooking lessons by oneself) over social activities (e.g., having dinner with four friends) and increase physical distances between people.

If money activates a peculiar market-pricing mode of relating to others based on cost–benefit calculations (Vohs et al., 2006, 2008), money-primed people should focus more on the calculation of the inputs and outputs of a relationship and be more strategic in interpersonal interactions rather than continuing to push people away. Thus, the present investigation aimed to further address the effect of monetary reminders on people's strategies for interacting with others. We proposed that perceived instrumentality regarding goal pursuits would influence whether or not money-primed individuals would approach a social target. In particular, we hypothesized that thoughts of money would enhance people's tendency to approach individuals whom they perceived as instrumental for achieving their goals.

2. Instrumentality and goal pursuit

Instrumentality refers to the usefulness vis-à-vis an active goal. Human beings have evolved to use tools to facilitate the completion of their goals. Accordingly, a tool is valued when it is useful for the completion of a certain goal and devalued when not. In many cases people tend to evaluate and approach an object based on its instrumentality. For example, instrumental (goal-relevant) objects were rated as more positive than less useful (goal-irrelevant) ones, and the same objects were evaluated more positively when they were useful than when useless (Ferguson & Bargh, 2004; Ferguson, Hassin, & Bargh, 2007; Fishbach, Shah, & Kruglanski, 2004).

Similarly, people's responses to a social target vary as a function of the target's instrumentality. In fulfilling one's goal, other people could be regarded as instrumental or not depending on whether they foster or hinder goal pursuit. For example, for a person striving to lose weight, a friend who talks the person into exercising is instrumental in terms of his or her action in facilitating goal attainment, whereas another friend who interferes with a diet plan (e.g., by persuading the person to eat high-calorie foods) would be non-instrumental. In fact, instrumentality is found to be one fundamental dimension of people's perceptions (Fitzsimons & Shah, 2009), which has important implications for people's actions in interpersonal contexts. Generally speaking, people are more willing to approach an instrumental social target when their personal goal is made salient. For example, in an instrumental relationship (compared to a communal relationship, which values relationships with others as “an end in itself”), people are more attracted to a target who could reciprocate their benefits (Clark & Mills, 1979). Moreover, people adjust their cognition and behavior in close relationships according to the close others' instrumentality; specifically,

people value close others more positively and approach them more readily when the close others are instrumental to an active goal (Fitzsimons & Fishbach, 2010; Fitzsimons & Shah, 2008). From this line of research, it is obvious that people are inclined to approach others who are instrumental to their goals.

3. Money and people's affiliation with others

It is reasonable to expect money to foster a person's tendency to approach others, as long as others are instrumental to the person's active goals. Capitalism is rooted deeply in modern materialistic culture, and in order to maintain the system, it relies on consumption behaviors to make profits. Specifically, a capitalist system encompasses three active parts: consumer, labor, and producer, making concerted efforts to profit to the maximum extent (Kasser, Cohn, Kanner, & Ryan, 2007). Therefore, money, as the most conspicuous form of capital, should heighten people's inclination to make the most profit from investments. For example, when people invest money rather than time in a purchase, they demand unambiguous satisfaction from the consumption (Okada & Hoch, 2004), indicating a focus on maximizing utility.

With this heightened striving for value maximization, people who are primed with the construct of money endorse a particular mindset on interpersonal relationships, which is the market-pricing mindset (Vohs et al., 2006, 2008). According to Fiske (1991, 1992), one of the fundamental ways of relating to others socially is the market-pricing mode. People in this market-pricing mode emphasize cost–benefit analyses in their social relationships, and they usually reduce all the relevant relationship features under consideration to simple utility metrics so that diverse factors can be compared with each other directly. Therefore, people in a market-pricing mode tend to view relationships in transaction terms with inputs and expected outputs (Vohs et al., 2008). It is thus predictable that money would make people build relationships with others mainly on the basis of the calculation of what they could get from a relationship for a given amount of cost. Instrumental people would be more desirable in transaction terms since they could provide more outputs with a given amount of inputs than noninstrumental people. Therefore, it should be expected that money-primed people would value and approach those who could help them to accomplish their personal goals.

Past research has provided indirect evidence for our hypothesis. For example, Liu and Aaker (2008) compared people's donations to a charity after being primed with money or time and found that money-primed participants donated less money than time-primed participants. They argued that monetary reminders highlight utility and the need for pursuing the maximization of values; therefore, the reminder of money decreased donations because the utility of donating was ambiguous (Liu & Aaker, 2008). This is consistent with our proposal that money would highlight utility calculations in interpersonal relationships such that people would form relationships based on the calculation of others' usefulness for their personal goals (i.e., instrumentality).

Therefore, a reminder of money activates a market-pricing mode, which facilitates approaching instrumental targets. Drawing on Fiske's (1991, 1992) interpersonal relationship theory and recent research findings on money, we predicted that money would lead people to approach others who would be useful for their personal goals.

4. Predictions and overview of the present research

What consequences would follow if money increases the approaching of instrumental targets? We made three predictions concerning this question. First, a reminder of the construct of money would make people focus more on the instrumental aspects

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