

# ***Money Addiction: a Definition***

## ***Addiction à l'argent : une définition***

***Brigitte Minel***  
*Psychoanalyst*  
*Vincennes, France*

Contact [bminel@gmail.com](mailto:bminel@gmail.com)

### **Abstract**

This article proposes a definition of the concept of "money addiction" in the field of clinical psychology.

My practice of psychoanalysis has led me to consider that terms such as "greed", "greediness" and "avarice" express a moral dimension of what we must identify and define from a psychological point of view as money disorder, and specifically "money addiction" or "money dependence". Money addiction must be classified in behavioral addictions insofar as it involves activation of the reward system. What first appears as a sign of a positive adaptation from an evolutionist perspective proves to be an invasive disorder as it pervades the personality and affects ordinary life, family relationships, society and the environment. Those aspects will be further discussed in my book to be published, *La souffrance des riches, une addiction (The Suffering of the Rich, An Addiction)*.

### **Résumé**

Cet article propose une définition du concept d'« addiction à l'argent » dans le champ de la psychologie clinique.

Ma pratique de la psychanalyse m'a amenée à considérer que des termes comme « avidité », « cupidité » et « avarice » donnent une dimension morale à ce que nous devons identifier et définir d'un point de vue psychologique en tant qu'« addiction à l'argent » ou « dépendance à l'argent ». L'addiction à l'argent doit être classifiée dans les addictions comportementales dans la mesure où elle implique une activation du système de récompense. Ce qui apparaît tout d'abord comme un signe positif d'adaptation dans une perspective évolutionniste, s'avère avoir un caractère envahissant pour la personnalité, affectant la vie ordinaire, les relations avec les proches, la société et l'environnement. Ces aspects seront exposés dans mon livre à paraître, *La souffrance des riches, une addiction*.

**Keywords:** money addiction, money dependence, avarice, money hoarding, greed, greediness, stinginess, acquisitiveness, money use disorder.

**Mots-clés :** addiction à l'argent, dépendance à l'argent, avarice, thésaurisation pathologique, avidité, cupidité, instinct de possession, troubles liés à l'argent.

Alfred Adler first pointed out the pathological nature of money addiction. As an ophthalmologist and later as a general practitioner, he observed the phenomenon of compensation for organic inferiority. Adler writes: "A defective digestive apparatus will be accompanied by a greater psychic ability in all nutritional directions, as gourmandism, acquisitiveness, and where it concerns money equivalents, stinginess and greed, will be manifested to an extraordinary degree."<sup>1</sup>

In fact, therapy reveals in patients who build fortunes a need to compensate for an inferiority complex, most often a feeling of social inferiority (personal or in the family history) or traumatic self-deprecating personal experience.

Although the term "addiction" or "dependence" may be considered pejorative, they will be used to distinguish between the many identified money disorders such as gambling disorder, money hoarding disorder, financial enabling, impulsive or compulsive buying, financial denial, and others. The condition of money addiction has historically been unexplored as making money is usually associated with positive social adjustment.

Money addiction is an ongoing urge to accumulate wealth which takes two forms: the accumulation of immaterial wealth (stinginess), and the acquisition of an overabundance of material goods or an relentless expansion of one's business empires (acquisitiveness). It can also be a mix of the two forms.

### **Criteria for money addiction**

#### **1) Tolerance**

In money addiction, there is a need to increase the amount of money acquired to achieve the same amount of pleasure, and a diminished effect in case of stagnation or loss, even if the amount is sufficient to keep the same lifestyle.

Unabated escalation of needs, always revised upwards, justifies the growing voraciousness towards money. Addiction is largely justified from a strictly rational point of view: first to cover financial needs, then to access comfort, later luxury, along with a desire to invest, and secure the future for individuals and their descendants. However, the appetite for money proves to be an endless craving, which cannot be satisfied.

#### **2) Withdrawal**

When the need to accumulate is frustrated, withdrawal symptoms range from craving, irritability, insomnia, anxiety, psychomotor agitation to depression, and exacerbation of existing mood disorders. Attempts to relieve withdrawal symptoms include the use and abuse of alcohol, drugs and others, and/or behavioral addictions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Adler, A., (1917) *The Neurotic Constitution*. Translation by Bernard Glueck, M.D. and John E. Lind, M.D. Page 42.

3) The need to generate and accumulate money prevails over other considerations and needs, and fully occupies the time and energy of the affected person. Expression of self is restricted and the disorder is usually associated with workaholism and other harmful addictions.

4) The personality is emotionally crippled and personal relationships (if they exist) are damaged by the addiction. The behaviour is continued even when it impairs family relationships and social integration. In the case of acquisitiveness without stinginess, the person addicted to money will substitute money for the expression of feelings and authentic relationship. In the case of stinginess, there is usually no positive expression of feelings towards others. There are expressions of contempt towards people who do not succeed in the same manner or who do not value money as a priority.

5) The behaviour is continued and often with equal intensity even in case of health impairment.

6) Money addiction leads to isolation and shrinking of social relations outside of relationships motivated by interest.

7) Social, occupational, or recreational activities are predominately determined by the addiction.

8) There is a reluctance to contribute to the common good and repeated attempts to avoid social cooperation.

### **Prevalence**

Money addiction is highly prevalent among men. Addiction to money exists in women but is uncommon; rather, it manifests itself as codependency behaviour, and the addiction of spouse is first evaluated as positive.

### **Course**

Addiction to money usually begins in young working adults. However, it can also be observed among teenagers holding jobs who hoard for reasons other than educational expenses.

### **Familial pattern**

Money addiction usually appears in families who have experienced financial setbacks, often in previous generations, and in situations of a wounded social image. It can also develop in compensation for a personal feeling of inferiority generally linked with social rejection trauma or humiliation within the family.

### **Types of personalities**

Money addiction is frequently linked with **type A personality**: highly ambitious, competitive, achievement-driven, workaholic, aggressive, often hostile, with an unrealistic sense of urgency.

Money addiction can also be found among **narcissistic personalities** with their inflated sense of importance, hunger for power and admiration, entitlement, sense of competition and desire for perfection. Their fragile self-esteem, undermined by humiliation, leads to a vulnerability resulting in the inability to bear criticism. Self-centered, they lack empathy.

**Obsessive compulsive personalities** are also commonly found among fortune makers. They manifest perfectionism, workaholism, self and interpersonal control, and a proneness to anger when faced with frustration when self or others lack perfection, and/or when others have a different way of doing things. There is an obsessional control over money which is preferably to be spared for eventual future catastrophes. In money addiction, the observance of rules usually attached to this personality will be rooted in financial and business logic, and not commonwealth. The underlying feelings of inferiority revolve around insecurity. Lack of empathy is linked to self-centeredness and difficulties to grasp the perspective of others.

The high-functioning **antisocial personality** is common in fortune makers, high achievers and leaders. Although they can appear charming, they demonstrate self-centeredness, an urge for domination and a disregard for others' needs or feelings, and a lack of empathy and remorse. As in typical antisocial personality, there is a strong tendency towards violation of law and of right and safety of others, an impulsiveness and risk-taking behaviour, irritability and lack of control of emotions. The antisocial personality is also prone to outright lying, manipulation of others for self-interest and lack of responsibility towards society.

### **Mood disorders**

These personality disorders can be concomitant with mood disorders (bipolar or cyclothymic) and specifically manic episodes with elevated mood (euphoric or irritable) which will result in intense activity, increased self-esteem, feeling of invincibility, reduced need for sleep, possibly a strong desire to communicate, marked agitation and risk taking.

### **Conclusion**

It is important that money addiction be recognized since it negatively affects the behaviour and actions of fortune makers. Under this condition, they increase social disparities and harmful social comparison, justify their exploitation of people, encourage the consumption of unhealthy products and shamelessly destroy the environment. Even if people addicted to money rarely enter or commit to therapy, recognizing their pathology and the underlying suffering means being able to help those who are their victims: their spouses, their descendants, their employees and the larger populations they impact.