

Money and mimicry

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(Medical Xpress) -- We rely on money in our day-to-day life and it is constantly in our minds. After all, money makes the world go round, doesn't it? Now, a new study, which will be published in an upcoming issue of *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, tries to better understand the psychological effect of money and how it affects our behavior, feelings and emotions.

[Money](#), money, money
Must be funny
Money, money, money
Always sunny
In the rich man's world."
-ABBA, 1976

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Jia Liu, at the University of Groningen, co-wrote the article along with Kathleen Vohs at the Carlson School of Management, University of Minnesota and Dirk Smeesters at the Rotterdam School of Management to explore the relationship between money and mimicry. "The idea of money can activate two motives: autonomous goal striving (being independent and autonomous) and interpersonal insensitivity (indifferent

to others). We were interested in which of them dominates when the idea of money is activated,” says Liu.

Behavioral mimicry involves taking on the postures, mannerisms, gestures, and motor movements of other people without conscious awareness. Another term for it is non-conscious imitation. It is intimately tied to relationships, liking, and empathy, functioning both as a signal of rapport and as a tool to generate rapport.

According to Liu and her colleagues, previous research in the area of mimicry discovered that if a person is mimicked by someone, they end up liking the other person more than when they are not mimicked. However, Liu and her colleagues were not entirely convinced about the positive effects of mimicry and theorized that mimicry might actually result in negative effects when a person is threatened, especially if they were reminded about something such as money.

To test their theory, 72 students were asked to complete several unrelated tasks. First, they did a filler task on the computer in which the screen’s background depicted either pictures of money or shells. Then, in another task, each participant interacted with a colleague and discussed a product. During the conversation, the colleague either unobtrusively mimicked participants’ nonverbal behaviors (i.e., matching their postures and gestures after approximately 2 seconds) or did not mimic at all. Finally, participants’ feelings of threat were measured and they were asked how much they liked the colleague they had interacted with.

“This study demonstrates money’s ability to stimulate a longing for freedom, as money-reminded people perceive the affiliation intention expressed by mimicry to be a threat to their personal freedom, leading them to respond antagonistically in defense. This could have important implications for social bonding and forming interpersonal relationships, as affiliation attempts by others can backfire,” states Liu and her

colleagues.

Simply put – people tend to feel threatened and end up disliking those who are trying to bond with them when reminded about money.

Provided by Association for Psychological Science

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