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Madanes, Cloe with Madanes, Claudio. (1994). *The Secret Meaning of Money: How it Binds Together Families in Love, Envy, Compassion, or Anger*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers. 195 pp., \$32.50 CDN.

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*Reviewed by:* Ms. Denise Larsen, University of Alberta.

Social taboos often prevent open discussions of family finances in the therapeutic setting. In *The Secret Meaning of Money*, Madanes has chosen to explore the ways in which money can create difficulties for families. She has done so in a self-help format employing much of her previously articulated strategic family therapy theory. She maintains that difficulties are often the result of love or violence and she describes many of the ways in which money can be used within families to express love or inflict violence. In addition, she provides practical advice and strategic interventions for common family financial issues.

As the title suggests, Madanes believes that money can represent hidden or "secret" meanings within a family. She states that, while money can be an overt problem within the family, it often represents other unresolved difficulties. As a result, the underlying source of a family's problem guides Madanes towards the creation of the most appropriate intervention. Often the intervention must not only address the dysfunctional behaviour, but it also must take the underlying cause of a problem into consideration.

Though *The Secret Meaning of Money* contains little description of Madanes' theoretical position, practitioners familiar with her previous work will recognize her theoretical foundations in this latest publication. Issues that appear most salient include Madanes' focus on the importance of humour, providing hope, therapist morality, and the importance of forgiveness and reparation. Throughout her descriptions of various financial dilemmas and life stages, Madanes employs these theoretical concepts in providing solutions.

*The Secret Meaning of Money* is effectively organized using a life span approach to highlight issues that families face over time. Madanes addresses common life cycle stages such as young couples, young families, middle years and older couples. In addition, she discusses issues with direct implications for money including divorce and second marriage, impoverishment, wealth and the positive use of money. A sampling of the specific issues which she addresses includes: creating artificial needs in children, children's financial entitlements and extortion, couples' financial styles, financial crises, taking care of ageing parents, retirement money and overspending. Though no individual topics are covered in great depth, many important issues specific to money are raised.

While some may question Madanes strategic interventions, she has clearly articulated some very important issues that families must address. This is a welcome contribution, as a recent library search indicates that little has been written concerning family finance and its impact on family life. As Madanes suggests, it may be society's taboos that prevent social discussions of money,

which also makes therapists hesitant to discuss family finance issues in depth. By simply articulating many of the issues that Madanes believes interferes with family health, she has provided a valuable document for discussion and thought. This is likely the greatest strength of Madanes' latest publication, as it offers professionals an opportunity to consider important issues which may not have been addressed previously.

One criticism of Madanes' book is the focus primarily on the awkward relationships between strategic therapy and the self-help book format. It is debatable whether strategic therapy is compatible with a self-help format. Potential risks inherent in strategic therapy appear to be substantially amplified in the self-help format, where no therapist follow-up is likely. One of the greatest drawbacks to *The Secret Meaning of Money* is the lack of explanation of Madanes' theoretical approach to family therapy.

A second criticism reflects another difficulty with attempting to articulate strategic therapy in a self-help format. Unfortunately, in book format, analyses of the unique patterns and sequences of family relationships cannot be considered before a well-crafted intervention is prescribed. This ignores a hallmark of strategic therapy. As a result, the reader receives "precooked" generic solutions to commonly identified problems. While these predetermined prescriptions have appeal in their simplicity and apparently easy application, they deny the important details unique to each family's issues.

Finally, while Madanes is able to identify critical life issues and offers plenty of advice, there is a disconcerting lack of research or outside sources for her material. Virtually no evidence is given for the effectiveness of any of the treatments which Madanes shares with her audience. Throughout the book, the reader is left to assume that Madanes' knowledge is based solely on her own, albeit impressive, clinical experience. In fact, the short reference section at the end of the book contains only ten references, three of which are her previous publications and the others are as varied as Margaret Mead, Donald Trump and Stephen King.

As a resource for practitioners, *The Secret Meaning of Money* has some merit. It highlights important financial issues which families are likely to encounter and begins to open these issues to professional scrutiny. Regrettably, unless the reader has an understanding of her previous work, the limited explanation of Madanes' theoretical foundations weakens the book. Nevertheless, therapists familiar and comfortable with Madanes' strategic approach will likely enjoy further information on her techniques. With this in mind, I recommend this book as an important exploration of money issues within families.