

1 **Nicole Basel**

2 **Money that doesn't talk**

3 original at:

4 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2011/mar/17/germanys-sex-money-salaries-social-hierarchies>

5 If you share an office with someone long enough, you're bound to know  
6 almost all their secrets before too much time has passed. You get to hear  
7 one worry about his teenage kids and another unload about her messy  
8 divorce. But, in Germany at least, there's one thing that you won't ever  
9 hear about: how much money they make.

10 Money creates social hierarchies – something distinctly unwelcome in  
11 Germany. Indeed, a person bragging about being able to afford a top-of-  
12 the-line Mercedes rarely makes a positive impression. But someone who  
13 says that they have a car with a little star in a circle on its hood already  
14 seems a bit nicer because, as psychologists explain, such person has at  
15 least verbally downplayed the difference.

16 In other countries, people wouldn't dream of hiding either their wealth or  
17 lack thereof. Here, questions regarding the height of someone's salary  
18 seem to naturally pop up right after small talk about the weather.

19 The reasons behind how people feel about money questions have a lot to  
20 do with religion. In Asia, there are religions that aren't as influenced by  
21 concerns for equality. The German set of values, however, is based on  
22 Christianity, and it applies regardless of whether you are a church-goer or  
23 not. One of these values is 'All men are equal in the eyes of God'.

24 From this point of view, talking about what you make can only sow one of  
25 two bad things: jealousy or pity.

## Questions

- 1) Paraphrase 'you're bound to know almost all their secrets before too much time has passed' (line 6).
- 2) Give synonyms for 'distinctly' (line 10).
- 3) Why are Germans reluctant to talk about their salaries?
- 4) Why is it more appropriate to refer to your Mercedes as 'a car with a little star in a circle on its hood' (line 13) rather than simply Mercedes?
- 5) According to the text, does it take a long conversation before questions about people's incomes pop up (= *appear*) in countries other than Germany?
- 6) What does the pronoun 'thereof' refer to in line 17?
- 7) According to the text, are Christian values in Germany limited to practising Christians?
- 8) What is your attitude to talking about one's salary? Is it something you would be ready to discuss with a casual acquaintance? Or does it take a close friendship to talk about it? What do you think are the advantages/disadvantages of the German/Asian approach?

## Vocabulary

**brag** (line 11) – to talk too proudly about what you have done, what you own, etc. boast

**downplay** (line 15) – to make something seem less important than it really is

**lack** (line 17) – deficiency or absence of something needed, desirable or customary

**sow** (20) – to do something that will effect a situation in the future; note that the original meaning is *to plant or scatter seeds on a piece of ground*

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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