

DISCOUNTING*

Ken Mellor, Dip. Soc. Studs.

Eric Schiff

Since the publication of Aaron and Jacqui Schiff's "Passivity"¹ several significant developments have been made in the understanding and confrontation of discounting in treatment. The purpose of this article is to present these developments.

The person who discounts believes or acts as though some aspect of the self, other people, or reality is less significant than it actually is. Impact is reduced, usually purposefully, to maintain a frame of reference, to play games, to further script, and to attempt to enforce or confirm symbiotic relationships with others.

Discounting is an internal mechanism which is recognized through transactional and behavioral cues such as the four passive behaviors, the ulterior nature of the transactions in games, and/or the person acting from one of the three positions in the Karpman Triangle.² Such factors are the external manifestations of discounting; they involve discounts but are not, in themselves, discounts. This distinction is important in treatment.

Treatment of discounting follows four general steps. They start with the external, move to the internal, and finish with an integration of both. The first is to help the

person identify the transactions and behaviors that result from the discounting. The focus here is on the external manifestations. The second is to help the person identify the areas, types and modes of the discounting. Here the focus is on what happens inside the person's head. The third step is for the person to get in touch with his or her investment in the discounting, so that investment can be re-directed and the person become aware of things as they are. The focus is internal and on what is motivating the person's use of the mechanism. The final step is for the individual to develop an investment in non-discounting behavior and to obtain positive reinforcement from the consequences of his behavior.

In practice these steps are taken more or less in order and the order appears to be important. However, treatment consists of a sequential emphasis on each step rather than a strict order because there is often the need to move back and forth as the person's awareness deepens and he or she changes behaviorally.

AREAS, TYPES, AND MODES

At Cathexis Institute we have identified three areas in which people discount, three types of discounting, and four modes of discounting for each type.

A person may discount in any one of three areas: some aspect of the *self*, *others*, or the reality *situation*. More

*A fuller presentation of this material will appear in Schiff, J., et. al. *The Cathexis Reader: Transactional Analysis Treatment of Psychosis*. Harper and Row, New York, in press.

specifically, a person may discount: his or her own feelings, perceptions, thoughts, or actions; other people's feelings, perceptions, thoughts, or actions; or some factors in the reality situation surrounding them.

Examples of each of these are given in tables 1, 2 and 3.

The three types of discounting are

discounts of *stimuli*, *problems* or *options*. Each may be discounted in four different modes: *existence*; *significance*; *change possibilities*; and people's *personal abilities* in relation to the above types.

Stimuli. Any internal stimuli — such as feelings or perceptions — or external stimuli — such as a sign of another person's distress — can be discounted.

Type and mode	Area	Example
Stimuli	Self	"I don't feel angry (hungry, pain)," said by an angry (hungry, injured) person.
	Other	"You didn't stroke me," said by someone who was just stroked.
	Situation	"I can see perfectly," said by a driver in a thick fog.
Significance of stimuli	Self	"Don't take any notice; I'm always angry," said in response to a specific provocation.
	Others	"You didn't want to stroke me; you thought you had to."
	Situation	"I always drive at 50 mph in thick fog."
Variability of	Self	"I'm always angry; my father and grandfather were too. It's genetic."
	Others	"It doesn't matter what happens, you'll always stroke me that way."
	Situation	"I know the fog's thick, but I've got an appointment."
Ability to react differently	Self	"I know people change, but I'll always be angry."
	Others	"I don't like what you do, but you won't change."
	Situation	"I can't (they won't) change the appointment because of the fog."

Table 1. Discounting stimuli by area and mode.

They can be discounted in four modes:

The person discounts the existence of the stimuli themselves. He or she has no awareness of them.

The significance of the stimuli are discounted. The person is aware of them but misinterprets their significance to him

or herself, others, or the situation.

The changeability of the stimuli are discounted. The person is aware of them, understands their significance, but sees them as unchanging or unchangeable.

A person's ability to react differently to the stimuli is discounted. While being

Type and level	Area	Example
Problems	Self	Someone is sick or injured and proceeds as if nothing is wrong. "I'm OK."
	Others	People ignoring another person's distress. "He or she is OK."
	Situation	A person driving a car with bad brakes as if they were OK.
Significance of problems	Self	"There's nothing seriously wrong with me, I've always been in pain (sick) since"
	Others	"He or she is always crying (sick, angry) . . . ," said in response to another's distress.
	Situation	"The brakes are usually bad after 30,000 miles."
Solvability of problems	Self	"No one can do anything for my pain (sickness)."
	Others	"Nothing can be done for (about) him/her."
	Situation	"The brakes always wear out, nothing can stop that."
Ability to solve problems	Self	"I can't do anything about my pain (sickness)."
	Others	"I (he/she) can't do anything about my (his/her) distress."
	Situation	"I can't do anything about the brakes, I'm no mechanic."

Table 2. Discounting problems by area and mode.

aware of the stimuli, their significance, and their changeability, the person discounts his or her or another's ability to change the stimuli.

Examples are given in table 1. Discounting stimuli is intimately related to a person's awareness, what he or she thinks about the awareness, and what he or she does with it.

Problems. People define problems using information (stimuli) about themselves, others and situations. If, therefore, they discount any stimuli relevant to the definition of a problem, they are likely to discount the problem or some aspect of it. So there is a connection between discounting stimuli and discounting problems. The four modes of discounting problems are:

The existence of the problem is discounted completely. Available information (stimuli) is not used or is not used appropriately to define the existence of the problem.

The significance of a problem is discounted. The problem is identified, but its significance to the person, another, or the situation is mis-defined.

The solvability of the problem is discounted. Having identified a problem and its significance, the person thinks that nothing can be done by anyone.

A person's ability to solve a problem is discounted. There is a problem, it is significant, it can be solved, but not by me, him, or her.

People's use of their awareness in defining problems, thinking about solutions, and their conception of what they or others can do to solve problems, are all affected by these discounts. Examples are given in table 2.

Options. Options are relevant to problem solving; they can also be significant in themselves. When they are related to the solution to problems, the identification of the options will be affected both by the information (stimuli)

used and the way the problem is defined. Discounting stimuli relevant to a problem's definition — or discounting the problem in any way — is likely to lead to some mode of discounting options. Given a particular situation or event, therefore, discounting of stimuli, problems and options will go hand in hand. The four modes of discounting options are:

The existence of options is discounted completely. People think that there are no other ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving or acting than those they are already aware of.

The significance of options for solving problems or for reaching objectives is discounted. The person is aware of the options but discounts their relevance to his or her problem or goal.

The viability of options is discounted. The person is aware of the options and their significance, but discounts their viability from the position, "No one has this as a viable choice."

A person's ability to act on his or her options is discounted. The options are there, they are significant and viable, but not for the self or another.

Discounts of options affect a person's thinking about problem solutions and ways of reaching objectives, and thinking about the action the self or others can take in relation to problems and objectives. Examples of these discounts are given in table 3.

HIERARCHIES OF DISCOUNTING

Each type of discounting can at times be the single focus of attention in treatment. However, at Cathexis Institute the focus is usually on all three because they are so closely related. Table 4 is a summary statement of the three types and modes of discounting highlighting three important hierarchical relationships between them. The first is a vertical hierarchy of discounting (vertical arrow on the table): For each type of

discounting on the table a discount in any mode generally involves discounts in all modes below it. For example, if significance is discounted, change possibilities and personal abilities will also be discounted. Second is a horizontal hierarchy (horizontal arrow on the table): Along a particular mode on the table, a discount of any type involves discounts of

all types to the right. This is because stimuli have prior significance to problems, and stimuli and problems have prior significance to options. Problems cannot be defined and solved if the necessary stimuli have been discounted, and options which would solve the problems cannot be defined or acted on unless the problems have been adequately defined and the

Type and level	Area	Example
Options	Self	"I have to keep my anger (thoughts) to myself."
	Others	"He was going to hit me; the only thing I could do was hit him first."
	Situation	"We need money for carpets; we can't afford a vacation."
Significance of options	Self	"It won't make any difference to talk about my anger (thoughts)."
	Others	"If I'd talked to him, he'd still have hit me."
	Situation	"I'll still be tired, even if I have a vacation."
Viability of options	Self	"No one can talk about their anger (thoughts) if they've never done it."
	Others	"No one can just talk when they are going to get hit."
	Situation	"People in our position can't take vacations."
Ability to act on options	Self	"Others may get something from talking about their anger (thoughts) but not me (him/her)."
	Others	"A person who is going to hit someone isn't going to talk."
	Situation	"I'm (he's/she's) not the type of person who takes holidays."

Table 3. Discounting options by area and mode.

stimuli necessary for defining the options appropriately included.

The third hierarchy is diagonal (diagonal arrows): Discounting at any point on the table involves a discount in the mode below it of the type to the left and in the mode above it of the type to the right. There is some equivalence between the discounts that occur on the diagonals. Generally these are connected as follows: First, if the significance of a stimulus is discounted it will not be defined as a problem itself nor included in a problem definition; conversely, if a problem is discounted the significance of some stimulus must be discounted. The mother who ignores a crying baby (discounts the problem), for example, discounts the cry (stimulus) or its significance. Second, if stimuli are seen as fixed, this will influence problem definition around significance, and while changeability of stimuli and/or significance of problems are discounted, options are irrelevant. On the other hand, when options are discounted, the significance of a problem is discounted at least to the extent that the problem is not seen as significant enough to look for options, and the possibility of change is also discounted. For example, the mother who responds to her baby's cry with "He always cries at the same time of day" (discounting problem significance), does not look for any different reason for the baby crying on each day (discounts changeability of stimuli), and so does not think about different ways of acting (discounts options). Third, when people's ability to react differently to stimuli is discounted, nothing seems solvable (except by chance) so the solvability of problems and, therefore, the significance of any options that may help solve the problem are discounted. Conversely, a person who discounts the significance of options often from a "what's the point" position, will discount solvability and people's ability to change. Finally, people who discount the person's

ability to solve problems discount that real options exist (are viable), and if a person discounts that there are viable options for him or her or others, the person's ability to solve problems is also discounted.

Generally it appears that children raised in families where discounting consistently occurs in or near the top left-hand corner of the table develop the most pathology.

TREATMENT

By being aware of the diagonal in table 4 along which the person is discounting, intervention can be planned so it will not fall on or below the diagonal. If the discount is not above the diagonal, the intervention itself is likely to be discounted. The focus of treatment needs to move from the top left-hand corner to the bottom right-hand corner of the table. The treatment phases are indicated by the T's shown in table 4. Each phase involves different though related issues.

Treatment Issues. T₁, awareness (internal, external); T₂, significance of awareness, problem definition; T₃, awareness of change, defining problem significance, option definition; T₄, awareness of personal change, defining problem solutions, defining relevant action options; T₅, awareness of personal abilities, selecting viable options; T₆, awareness of ability to act, action.

There is a gradual transition in the issues that need attention from awareness, to different aspects of thinking about awareness, to acting on it. A potential issue throughout is the use by the person of thinking disorders.³

Finally, it is often important to distinguish between two different causes of discounting. The first is a person's investment in playing games and furthering his or her script. However, people also discount at times when they do not have information or experience necessary to determine significance, to know the change possibilities, or to know their own

Mode	Type		
Existence	T ₁ Stimuli	T ₂ Problems	T ₃ Options
Significance	T ₂ Significance of stimuli	T ₃ Significance of problems	T ₄ Significance of options
Change possibilities	T ₃ Changeability of stimuli	T ₄ Solvability of problems	T ₅ Viability of options
Personal abilities	T ₄ Person's ability to react differently	T ₅ Person's ability to solve problems	T ₆ Person's ability to act on options

*Our thanks to Joel Fishman for his help in naming the modes.

Table 4. Discounting: Types, modes, and hierarchies.

and other people's potential for change. Giving information or structuring situations which will provide the necessary experience is often sufficient in these situations, while more is needed to deal with the script-based causes.

TREATMENT EXAMPLE

Mary, aged 25, did not feel anger although she was frequently violent (discount: stimuli, self, existence mode) and she was not aware of anger in others (discount: stimuli, others, existence mode). The first phase (T₁) in treatment was to help her get in touch with the relevant stimuli. She was shown pictures

of angry people and told to adopt angry postures while saying she was angry. These and other programs helped her begin to feel anger and be aware when others were angry.

The next phase (T₂) was to work with her on the significance of her own and other's anger. As situations arose, the causes of anger were discussed and the problems that arise from not recognizing her own or other people's anger defined. For example, "People get angry for reasons, and if you know the reasons you can do something about them. This led to the next phase (T₃). The focus was on how people's feelings changed in different situations, how this changed the nature

(significance) of the anger (problem) for her and others, and how there are options (such as talking instead of violence) for dealing with her anger in different situations.

This was followed by a phase (T₄) in which the focus was on people's ability to change their reactions to anger with a view to solving the problems causing it by using a number of different (significant) options related to them. At this stage she was able to feel angry and was beginning to identify the reasons for her anger and recognize her relevant options. For example, "If I tell him I am angry, he might stop being nasty to me."

Next she learned that she could deal with her anger (people could solve problems), though she still relied on other people's energy to motivate her. In this phase (T₅) she found that the options she had acquired for her dealing with anger were viable. Talking about the reasons for her anger and doing something effective meant that she and others stopped feeling angry.

The final phase (T₆) was completed when she acted from her own initiative to do something about her own anger, or the anger she had provoked in others. She was no longer discounting her ability to act on her options.

SUMMARY

Discounting can be categorized in terms of three *areas* (self, others, and situation),

three *types* (stimuli, problems, and options) and each of these may be discounted in four *modes* (existence, significance, change possibilities, and personal abilities). Seen as a whole, this categorization of discounting reveals three discounting hierarchies which enable patient and therapist to work on an ordered sequence of issues in treatment without the treatment itself being discounted.

Ken Mellor, Dip. Soc. Studs., is a Provisional Teaching Member of the ITAA and Director of Services, Cathexis Institute North, in Alamo, California. Eric Schiff is a Provisional Teaching Member of the ITAA, and a predoctoral student at the California School of Professional Psychology, Los Angeles.

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