

Script and Addiction

Script and Addiction:

Powerlessness

By

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I was first introduced to Transactional Analysis (TA) and script during my work at Connect, a therapeutic community specialising in acute mental health issues and emotional disorders. What inspired me most about this form of psychotherapy was the way in which it encouraged and enabled individuals to learn about their own psychological programming in an understandable way. Client and therapist were on the same level, talking in a language that was simple and accessible for anyone that wanted to learn more about themselves. By helping these individuals understand the logic that underlies their programming, they were able to acknowledge that their particular way of seeing themselves and the world around them had in fact made sense at a certain time in their lives.

Following my passion for life script, I moved from a clinical psychology direction towards psychotherapy. In my approach to psychotherapy I do not necessarily believe in using a fixed model, nor do I follow a pure mode of TA when exploring the concept of life script with clients. To my mind, life script includes everything about an individual that forms their framework for survival, constructed from the information that they absorbed in childhood experiences. With this there are many different models that can be applied, each one examining the content of life script in one way or another, if not using the same terminology or analytical logic. TA and life script theory essentially represents a language to convey some meaning and understanding about human behaviours. The reason I value it so highly is because it allows one to be creative and intuitive in the way that we think about the human psyche.

Upon becoming an integrative psychotherapist, I found it hugely beneficial to apply life script work to those who had been in rehabilitation for addiction. In the years to follow, I became involved with the Zandvoort family, the founders of the Bayberry Therapeutic Community. The Zandvoorts' commitment to rehabilitation was propelled by their own tragic experiences with addiction, which had left them utterly bereft. Their story of channeling such experiences of tragedy into strength of heart and dedication towards the rehabilitation of others inspired me to channel my own efforts into the field of addiction. My mind was opened to the ways in which the fields of addiction and psychotherapy could be merged

productively and how psychotherapy could be used to contribute to the Twelve Steps program.

As Mike Delaney and his team assumed the position of the Zandvoort family, the script work that we had previously introduced was given the opportunity to be further applied and developed. The benefits soon became evident as the individuals who worked with their scripts alongside the Twelve Steps program were able to learn about the psychopathology that was driving their behaviours unconsciously. As a team we could see the significance of the work in relapse prevention and the increased satisfaction in life post rehabilitation.

I am grateful to Bayberry for providing an environment that allowed the work—which I see as hugely contributory to addiction recovery—to flourish. All that we achieved during this time exemplified the fundamental importance of script to the treatment of addiction. Its potential was evident to me in my private practice. As the work reached more people through Bayberry and proved successful, its benefit and potency surpassed even what I first expected. Thus further merger and connection with those in the field of addiction is absolutely necessary; to share these findings and to foster further development in the world of recovery.

Over the past twenty years TA has been a very significant part of my life and is to me a powerful and valuable area of study. This value really came to light as I began to understand and work through my own experiences of emotional trauma. Sadly, my father lived out his own unstable, traumatic, resentful and fearful life script. Being able to understand this process benefited me immeasurably, not only by enabling me to study and make adjustments to my own script and life trajectory, but to use this knowledge to help other people do the same.

For this journey I have many to thank. First, Tony Tilney, who has sadly passed. As my trainer, Tony always encouraged my views and motivated me to do what I do. It is through Tony that I met Jenny Robinson, who owned the therapeutic community Connect. It is here that I became truly inspired—inspired by the work that she was doing—and developed a great hope in human development. Within her community people changed their life scripts. People who were previously institutionalised and regarded as unworkable—too unwell to get well—were achieving remarkable positive change in their lives. Despite moving on from Connect I have always carried with me Jenny’s words, “if people want to change they can”. In my work, this message has been proved right in many ways and I cannot display my thanks enough for the help and guidance that she has provided over the years. She has remained an oasis

of good sense and a great source of faith and hope; virtues that I have tried to pass on to the clients that I work with. Indeed, it is to these clients that I also owe an immense level of gratitude and thanks, for it is through our shared experiences that I have learned the most invaluable lessons, which have all contributed to the writing of this book.

I also extend my gratitude to another educational mentor of mine, Raymond Harris. Throughout the years Raymond has provided unwavering support in the work that I do, never failing to offer encouragement and guidance. Having specialised in engineering, by helping me he has had to grapple with a field unfamiliar to him—often, testing us both—and experience my own script playing out. Despite this, he has maintained faith in me, showed great understanding and persevered in helping me achieve my academic and professional goals.

Lastly, I would like to thank my children, Christopher and Libby. Without Christopher's analytical approach to the work that we have done together, I doubt much sense could have been made of my convoluted way of thinking. Along with contributing significantly to the writing process, he has provided insight and clarity to my ideas, helping to put them across in a way that is accessible to others. In this task, his patience and understanding has been just as essential as the input he has provided.

Indeed, both of my children have supported this process in every way; without them knowing, they have both played a significant role in the process of my own script development. The knowledge that I have gained through them remains at the centre of my work, reminding me that we never stop learning.

INTRODUCTION

At the heart of Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.) is a set of guiding principles which outline a course of action for tackling alcoholism and the various life problems that it causes. These principles are known as the Twelve Steps and have since been adapted and used as the founding principles for a variety of subsequent fellowships directed towards recovery and emotional manageability. A thorough commitment to the Twelve Steps offers an outstanding practical program for personal growth, well-being and healthy living. Through many years of practice I have seen how people can benefit from incorporating a twelve step program into their lives, whether this is to overcome a struggle with an addictive substance or to invoke change in the compulsive behaviours that are damaging their lives. Over recent years, it has been a primary aim of mine to integrate the Twelve Steps model with a framework of psychotherapy that uses Transactional Analysis (TA) as its core analytical language. In this book I intend to give an introductory insight into the fruits of this endeavour.

TA is, in short, a theory of personality and individual development that can be used to ascertain a profound understanding of the processes and dynamics that underpin human thinking and behaviour. In this it focuses on how the personality is expressed through behaviour and communication and the ways in which our present behavioural patterns originate in and can be explained by childhood experiences. Central to this is the concept of *life script*, which looks at how individuals replay childhood survival strategies in adult life, even when these strategies can cause harmful effects. When people enact these strategies, they are said to be acting out their script. This concept is held at the core of my practice—I believe that all people could benefit from knowing more about their life script and I believe that this knowledge is especially helpful in treating addiction.

Indeed, the primary aim of this project is to demonstrate just how helpful it can be. To this end, I explore two underlying themes. First, I look at how script relates to the steps and adds to the recovery process itself. An addict, perhaps more than most others, will repeatedly follow destructive patterns of behaviour that are irrational and based on certain mistaken beliefs and misconceptions about reality. A key part of recovery is forming an understanding of these behaviours so that they can be

overcome. Thus, script analysis can be invaluable in the sense that it provides a much greater depth to one's self-awareness. Most of what drives our thoughts and behaviours operates outside of our conscious awareness; TA and script analysis provides the opportunity to understand these processes which would otherwise be unavailable to us on a cognitive level.

This idea is most thoroughly explored in Step One, where I demonstrate the inherent connection between life script and addiction and explore the idea of how an individual is ultimately powerless to the dynamic unconscious. Hence, I make the case that life script therapy is thus of great benefit (or rather, *essential*) to the recovery program.¹ To my mind, for an addict to best understand their behaviours, they must understand the developmental processes behind the elements of their personality that led to addiction. In other words, in order to best understand their addiction, they must understand their script. In this sense, the incorporation of script theory offers a more person centered and tailored approach to recovery, which in itself is essential to success.

The second theme of the book is to look at how the practical guideline provided through the steps serves to bring people (not just addicts, but everyone) out of their script processes and even change their script without any prior knowledge of TA or script theory. Working the steps develops a great sense of emotional literacy and can reveal certain elements of individuals' personality to them—their difficulties with certain character traits, the possibility that they need to share intimacy and trust with other people, to be more humble in their thoughts and actions, and so on. This largely follows from the emphasis on the consistent self-appraisal and confronting of one's destructive thoughts and actions. Indeed, knowing one's script does not in itself free oneself from its power. It takes consistent affirmative action to effectively challenge and eventually change it. In this respect, the practical guideline of the steps, with this consistent confronting of thoughts and behaviours, serves to challenge the script process—it causes one to think and act in a different way, which stops script playing out.

A part of this latter aim is to demonstrate how this process is further bolstered by a knowledge of TA and one's own depth to script processes.

¹ As this is my most fundamental proposition, Step One forms the main bulk of the text. The sections that follow then elaborate on the basic premise that is laid down in this section by exploring the ways in which TA therapy can be reconciled with the Twelve Steps program, seeking to further display the importance of TA when treating addiction.

By understanding one's script and knowing how the action required in each step can stop one from acting it out, the whole process is made much more thorough and progressive. With this in mind, script therapy is in no way a replacement of any Twelve Steps program. Instead, it is a complement to what is already there. What I propose is a way of integrating both approaches in order to provide an enhanced recovery process for addicts, as well as an affirmative course of action for any individuals who need to overcome the power of their script.

CHAPTER ONE

TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS AND LIFE SCRIPT

As a way of ensuring accessibility, it has been my ambition to demonstrate the material in this book in such a way that the reader can understand it without a thorough, pre-existing knowledge of TA and the language that it uses. Despite this, because the theory in the following passages draws upon certain fundamental TA concepts, a basic understanding of these concepts will be necessary to fully grasp what is being said. In this section I briefly explain some of the key elements I draw upon. Although, due to the limitations in the scope of this project, I fear I cannot do the language of TA the justice it deserves and so I highly recommend further reading into the area to better acquire its essential ideas—ideas which I believe are so very beneficial for anyone wishing to achieve a healthy way of living.

1.1 Ego States

The Ego State model, along with Life Script, is one of the central conceptual principles of TA theory. In this model, the human personality is depicted as consisting of three parts; the Parent, the Adult, and the Child.² These ego states represent the way in which certain patterns of feeling and experiencing reality correspond to certain patterns of behaviour. Importantly, this means that, unlike the Freudian theory of personality, the ego states can be directly observed through human behaviour.

² For an in-depth explanation of ego states and transactions, see:

Berne, E. (1964) *Games People Play*. New York: Penguin Books. pp.23-32

Berne, E. (1961) *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*. New York: Grove Press. pp.29-37

Steiner, C. (1974) *Scripts People Live*. New York: Grove Press. pp.27-50

Stewart, I., Joines, V. (1987) *TA Today: A New Introduction to Transactional Analysis*. Nottingham: Lifespace Publishing. pp.11-58

The Parent ego state represents a set of thoughts, feelings and behaviours that we pick up from our immediate caretakers and significant others in early life. Fundamentally, it is the part of our personality that holds the rules, ideals, messages, values, and core beliefs, having a significant impact on how we demonstrate parts of our script.

It subdivides into the Nurturing Parent and the Critical Parent. The former holds nurturing, loving, compassionate and permissive messages whereas the latter contains the more punitive, prejudged thoughts, feelings and beliefs. The content of our Parent is heavily dependent on our developmental experiences during upbringing and, as a result of this, some might direct more energy to either the nurturing or critical side of their Parent. Some of the messages that they both contain lead to healthy living whereas others, especially when destructive or inconsistent, can lead to harmful views on life and ways of living.

An example of a controlling Parental message could be “only clever people are interesting”. This sets a bar on being intelligent as a form of getting positive recognition. Or if particularly punitive and damning, the child might internalise the view that they are not worthy, leading them to discount any goodness that comes in their direction.

The Child ego state represents the part of our personality that holds our feelings, survival strategies, and the emotions that are connected to memories from childhood. This also contains two subdivisions; the Free Child and the Adapted Child. The former is the part of us that directly experiences the world and produces spontaneous feelings and behaviour—it is our authentic self, untouched by the adaptations that come in development, such as the forming of script.

The latter is the part of us that has adapted according to the Parental script messages that we received in development. Again, our Adapted Child is heavily dependent on experiences we have in childhood. In response to a punitive mother, a child may adapt to become passive, in a sense complying with the Parental messages it receives. On the other hand, with the same experience, a child might instead decide to rebel against the script messages and act out in order to attain certain strokes, even if they were negative (this is further touched upon below). Both are a reaction to an environmental situation where strategies are required to survive emotionally.

A lot of the time, when a grown-up falls into their Child ego state, it can positively affect their lives. It can be joyous and freeing, allowing adults to express emotions, connect with their authenticity and form truly intimate relationships. However, being in the Child state can also cause us to view the past in the present, distorting the here-and-now reality and

inhibiting our ability to make rational decisions. We find that, when a situation reminds us of a past event, we actually *feel* the same emotion that we had back then, and this profoundly affects the way we experience the present situation.

The Adult ego state is the part of our personality that directly and coherently responds to the data from our external stimuli. It takes in information via the senses and processes the data accurately, allowing us to think and devise solutions to problems based on information that is true to the here-and-now reality as opposed to messages that are defined by our script. The Adult compass allows reasoning, negotiation, problem solving, grounding, balance and remaining in the present. It also applies to feelings being in the here-and-now, such as an adrenaline response to a genuine immediate threat. So, when we are acting and communicating in our Adult ego state, we are *not* in script.

This can be important for people to know so that they can recognise these aspects of their personality, allowing them to better monitor and control their behaviours and interactions. In TA we can study both the content of individuals' ego states and the process by which their ego states function. We can also examine the *transactions* between individuals, revealing the different ways in which they communicate via their ego states (this was indeed the cornerstone of Eric Berne's first hypotheses in TA). We can see, for example, how one person might issue a command from their Parent and the other might respond from their Child. Equally, two people might maintain a rational conversation about mathematics, both communicating via their Adult ego state. These are what we call complementary transactions, which take place between two parallel ego states. There are then a whole range of different kinds of transactions we can analyse, as well as a tier of second-order structure ego states, contaminations, contradictions, exclusions, and more, but, at this point, the ego state model becomes exceedingly complex for our purposes. What is presented here is sufficient for a good understanding of what is to come in the following passages.

1.2 Strokes and Stimulus Hunger

Stemming from the idea of transactions is our need for interactional stimuli. Here, Berne coined the term *stimulus hunger*, which refers to the need for physical and mental stimulation. Over recent decades, considerable research has gone into examining how we respond to this kind of stimulation. In TA, it is firmly believed that it is essential to a

person's survival. We feel deprived if we do not get it and this has a significant influence on the development of a child.

This stimulation is received through *strokes* which are defined as human units of recognition.³ These can be both physical and emotional, resulting from body language like a nod or a smile, or communicated through speech. Given our stimulus hunger and our nature as interactional and attachment animals, strokes are considered to be as important as other primal needs such as food and water in that we need them for healthy development and survival. If we become familiar with the feeling that a stroke gives us we will compulsively search it out as part of our survival instinct. It forms an emotional diet that we feed off and our need to fulfill this diet becomes a primal driver, throughout childhood and into adult life. It is a key foundation of script and contributes to the relational patterns that we form.

Strokes can be positive, negative, conditional and unconditional. A positive stroke is something that makes us feel good, like a complement or a hug. A negative stroke makes us feel bad, like hateful insults or physical abuse. Strangely, a human being will prefer to receive negative strokes to no strokes at all, and so can end up seeking negative strokes when they are unable to attain positive ones. These negative strokes can then become a part of someone's emotional diet. In later life, a person might be unconsciously driven to these strokes due to a familiarity to old relational patterns (it is what they become used to). For example, a past client of mine had developed a great emotional void, because the knowledge that her sister was being abused when she was ignored made her feel that her sister was receiving a form of attention that she was not—it made her feel rejected. Of course she didn't realise it at the time, but this made her feel incredibly unimportant and led to a variety of destructive behaviours in adult life.

An unconditional stroke is given for "just being"—it is not based on any condition. Positive unconditional strokes are crucial for intimacy and lead to a thriving development and adult life. Conditional strokes are based upon our actions or traits, according to whether someone else agrees, disagrees, likes or dislikes certain characteristics or behaviours of ours. A positive conditional stroke can let us know when our actions

³ For strokes and stimulus hunger, see:

Berne, E. *Games People Play*, pp.13-19

Stewart, I. & Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.72-86

Steiner, C. *Scripts People Live*. pp.36-41, 110-117

produce good results, say if we are doing well at work, improving at a sport or simply doing a good deed. This can fulfill our needs in a different way to an unconditional stroke. However, it can also be limiting, as it can produce messages that say we are only okay as individuals if we behave in a certain way.

Unconditional negative strokes—negative strokes that do not depend on any kind of condition, like a response to our actions—are thought to be the most damaging form of strokes, as they tell the individual that they are intrinsically not okay. That is, not that their actions or specific characteristics are bad, but that their very core self is contaminated in some way. This can have a great impact on an individual's view of themselves and how they relate to the world around them.

The concept of strokes is a fundamental aspect of TA and plays a significant role in the formation of a script. As we will see in the next chapter, understanding the strokes that people seek can give us a great insight into the nature of their addiction.

1.3 Life Script

A life script is an unconscious life plan or “blueprint” for someone's life course, put in place in early life and lived out in adulthood. It does not lay out all the specific happenings that occur but determines the general outlines that are followed and reinforced throughout. This script is directed towards an eventual climax, what we call in TA the end *pay-off*. When an individual acts out their script they are unawarely choosing the behaviours that take them closer to their script pay-off. Usually, unless an individual is made aware of their script, they will do this consistently throughout their lives and live out their script to its chosen end point.

Individuals begin writing their script at birth. Roughly by the age of seven (what is commonly regarded as the end of the developmental years) the basic blueprint should be completed. Through their teens and into adulthood this story may be refined and revised as they update it with all the information they continuously absorb, but by adolescence we generally say that whatever story has been developed in these first few years is the story that they will live out throughout the rest of their life. In life script analysis we focus on both the *content* of the plan that we form in our developmental years and the *process* by which this plan is lived out in

adulthood.⁴ In the following chapters I go through some detailed examples that show how a life script can form and how it can be lived out.

1.4 The Formation of Script

1.4.1 Script is Decisional

A key feature of life script is that it is *decisional*. This means that it is not wholly determined by external stimuli but is based on certain “decisions” that we make in early childhood about ourselves, others and the world around us.⁵ As we grow up, we are constantly trying to make sense of the world and figure out the best ways in which to survive, thrive and interact with the people around us. When we are small, the world can seem a very hostile environment. Infants are immediately dependent on others for their survival. They require certain strokes and a strong bond with their immediate caretakers in order to feel safe. A child will adapt and make certain decisions, based on their experiences of early events and interactions with their significant others, about the best ways in which to get their needs met. In this sense, script decisions represent our best available *survival strategy*, based on what made sense at that time of our lives. Because these strategies were once essential to survival, they stick with us throughout the rest of our lives.

1.4.2 Script Messages

The formation of script is contingent upon a variety of factors, one of the most significant being the *script messages* that we receive from our parents and other caretakers throughout our development.⁶ These messages can come in a variety of forms; verbally, non-verbally, directly and indirectly.

⁴ For what script contains and its development, see:

Berne, E. *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*. pp.116-127

Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.99-103, 117-146

Steiner, C. *Scripts People Live*. pp.51-75

⁵ See: Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pg.100

⁶ For script messages, see:

Berne, E. *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy*. pp.116-128

Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.125-133

Steiner, C. *Scripts People Live*. pp.76-93

Depending on how we interpret these messages, they provide fundamental definitions of the self, others and the world. They also convey how we should be able to obtain the strokes that we need. Ultimately, we use these messages to make decisions about ourselves and how to best survive in the world. Some messages can be positive and cause us to make script decisions that lead to a healthy and satisfying script. Messages that consistently affirm the parents' love for a child, for example, might lead the child to form the decision that they are lovable. With this deep rooted belief they will likely form healthy, nurturing relationships in later life. Conversely, some messages can be negative or inconsistent and can cause us to make script decisions that potentially foster destructive behaviours in adult life. If a child is neglected or made to feel unwanted, for example, they might make the decision that they are *not* lovable, and this could undermine their ability to form healthy attachments in later life.

Of course, how we interpret and respond to script messages is individualistic. Another individual receiving the same negative messages might not internalise the belief that they are not lovable, but seek the strokes from somewhere else. They might rebel against the messages and form the belief they are in fact loveable. Equally, someone might receive the same positive messages yet internalise contrasting beliefs. There are not always clear cut links between childhood experiences and the longstanding emotional effects that they have on a child. A lot of the time a negative script can be the product of what might seem at first sight a very loving childhood, but an infant absorbs all kinds of information that is not so obvious to us from the outside.

This is one reason why we can look at siblings, who would seem to have been brought up in the same environment yet have made completely different decisions about the kind of person they are and how they should relate to the world around them. Not only will they have likely received different messages from their parents (whether this was intentional or not), they would have also responded to these messages differently.

Whatever decisions we do make, they are not usually based on a single message or event (though, certain traumatic experiences can indeed contribute to script), but rather the consistent affirmation of a certain message throughout childhood. We form beliefs about ourselves, others and the world, and then these beliefs are reinforced when we consistently receive these messages from our caretakers.

1.4.3 Injunctions

One crucial kind of script messages that we pay particular attention to in this book are called injunctions. An injunction is a script message that causes a child to make a restrictive script decision which acts as a prohibition of free behaviour.⁷ It disallows certain thoughts and actions via internalised conditions, rules and core beliefs.

Injunctions cover the whole range of messages that negate a certain thought or activity, but they vary greatly in the types of things that they restrict and the intensity to which they do so. For example, a fairly direct, short-range and relatively unrestrictive injunction might be “don’t skip in the hallway”. As long as the child interprets the command that issues this message in this way, this kind of injunction simply acts as a control on the child’s behaviour, and will have limited effect on the rest of their thoughts and actions. However, if a parent consistently affirms this kind of restrictive message, a child could interpret it in a more general sense and internalise the injunction “don’t have fun”. This can have much further reaching and long lasting effects on how the child interacts with the world in later life. If this injunction is particularly intense, it can mean that the tiniest bit of fun will bring harsh repercussions.

Importantly, injunctions don’t *usually* operate as an issued command. A lot of the time they are given by the parent inadvertently. In the above scenario, the parent would not have likely said “don’t have fun” directly, but the consistent reaffirmation of certain messages of that nature can be interpreted in that way. The child concludes “to get by and be good, I must not have fun”. Equally, injunctions can often come in the form of non-verbal messages. If a mother has post-natal depression and doesn’t provide the right strokes early on, a child might form the conclusion that mother doesn’t love them, or that they are inherently unlovable. This can bring on an injunction such as “don’t be close”, which will affect the way in which they form relationships in later life. Sometimes though, people can recall specific verbal messages that relate to the injunction. For example, someone with a “don’t be close” injunction might recall their mother repeating phrases like “oh please leave me alone!”

This being so, when an individual continues to follow an injunction later in life, they are not consciously responding to a command. Rather, they are responding to the way it makes them *feel*. If an individual begins to follow a course of action that conflicts with the message of the

⁷ See: Steiner, C. *Scripts People Live*. pg.60

injunction, they will likely feel great distress and discomfort; as though they are defying some deep rooted rule and that doing so will bring certain bad consequences. It is a bodily compulsion. Their heart beat might raise, for example. Or they might get butterflies in their stomach. A deep sense that they need to avert from what they are doing and once they do, everything will be alright again.

As a result, individuals make all kinds of rationalisations to avoid certain actions that seem perfectly okay to other people. These rationalisations feel as though they are from a rational place—from the Adult ego state—but really they are a response to script. Unfortunately, individuals can put themselves under huge amounts of stress to make sure they avoid the thoughts and behaviours that conflict with their injunctions.

The general injunctions that people tend to follow are: “Don’t Be”, “Don’t Exist”, “Don’t Be a Child”, “Don’t Be Close”, “Don’t Be Sane”, “Don’t Grow Up”, “Don’t Make it”, “Don’t Do Anything”, “Don’t Be Important”, “Don’t Belong”, “Don’t Be well”, “Don’t Think”.⁸ Later on in the book we will see in greater detail how these might play out. For now we just need to understand that these injunctions can manifest in an endless variety of feelings and behaviours, all depending on the family setting, environment, varying life experiences and the be-spoke child logic (explained below).

Some examples could be: the feeling that one is never getting anywhere; always feeling regressed; feeling like you’re not good enough; a fear of being found out; feeling like you’re alienated and not a part of something; struggling to be really close but yearning for intimacy; wanting change but being stuck in passivity, and so on.

1.4.4 Child Logic

To recall, the effect of a script message heavily depends on how the child interprets the message. Script decisions are made in response to the child’s own interpretation of early experiences. This being so, we say that script decisions are based on a *child logic*, which means that they are based on the emotions that the child felt during these experiences and how they perceived the world through their early way of reality-testing.⁹

A young child naturally experiences and responds to certain events differently to how an adult would, not only because these “decisions” are

⁸ See: Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.134-140

⁹ See: Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pg.102

based on feelings rather than logic, but because a child does not have the same mental faculties as an adult. They do not think in the same way nor do they experience emotion in the same way. Because of this, the survival strategies that are based on these decisions might not make so much sense in adulthood.

This child logic corresponds to our attachments with others and the experiences we have in development. For example, if young children are consistently reprimanded by their father in everything they do and, as a result, are made to feel bad, they may make the decision that they are lacking in some way. It is not likely that they conclude, as an adult might do, that the problem is with the father—that he is just too disapproving—as they simply do not have the information available to them nor mental capacity to realise this. The immediate response will be based on how they *feel* and in this case they may feel that they will never meet approval in everything that they do. This will inevitably have quite an impact on children and how they perceive themselves and their value in relation to others. It may cause them to withdraw and make the decision to stop seeking any approval at all (not just in relation to the father, but in every aspect in life, from everyone they interact with). It becomes a part of their script and so remains a part of their approach to life throughout adulthood.

Of course, we can see that this mindset would not make sense in functional adult decisions. The ability to adapt as a child is essential and helps us get through very difficult periods of our lives but as we grow up, these readjustments might not be appropriate in adult life. Even if a child's father never offered any approval or positive recognition, most of us would think it is not logical to conclude that *no one* will; we could go elsewhere as we are able to gain this approval and recognition from other people. As adults we would usually realise this, but for people who have this child logic ingrained into their script, their thoughts and behaviours will continue to be influenced by this belief. It may have helped them survive in childhood but it is clearly counter-productive to hold that logic in adult life. This is the conundrum of script. Not all script is damaging, but some defences and survival strategies may become counter-productive to living a healthy life in adulthood; what once got us through difficult periods of our development now actually gets in the way. It is a key purpose of TA to understand the child logic that underlies the decisions we made in our development. Once we understand this, it becomes easier to explain some of our present day emotions and compulsions

1.5 Script lived out

The above example gives some illustration of script being lived out in adulthood.¹⁰ In early life we internalise messages and make decisions about ourselves, others and how to best survive in the world. These survival strategies, once being so integral to getting by, are retained in adulthood, even though they are based on information which does not reflect the here-and-now reality.

From time to time we re-enact these childhood strategies in our present lives. This is largely based on our emotions. These survival strategies were formed as a response to how we felt in certain childhood experiences. When something happens to us in the present which bears a strong resemblance to these past experiences, the emotions that are stored in our script can resurface and we experience the world in the same way we did when we were children. In other words, when the present situation causes us to experience these same emotions, we often react to the present situation as if it was this childhood experience.

When this happens we are said to be living the past in the present. We are no longer responding to the here-and-now reality from our Adult, but responding from script. We become unable to deal with the world in a rational way and, in response, our survival strategies (that once helped us through these experiences in the past) take over. This is what we mean when we say someone is “in script”, or “they are acting out their script”. We are basically saying that they are not interacting with the here-and-now reality but transferring their past experiences onto the present.

Of course, this usually takes place out of our conscious awareness. People do not usually realise they are re-living childhood experiences. Often the emotions that we feel in the present seem so real and relevant that we will not make the connection. Equally, our script decisions are (mostly) formed out of conscious awareness and, even so, the past experiences that they are based upon are so far in the past they are usually forgotten by the time we are adults (or at least they are not at the front of our minds).

Not all of our decisions are the product of script. Indeed, the extent to which script impacts people’s thoughts and behaviours varies from person to person. It is that part of us that goes into automatic pilot when stress

¹⁰ For how script is lived out, see:

Stewart, I. & Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.148-250

Steiner, C. *Scripts People Live*. pp.76-160

levels rise and we become reactive, sometimes making us feel as though our actions are driven by something greater than ourselves. When we look back at our lives we can begin to recognise that sometimes our thoughts and actions seemed out of control. That we were following reactive feelings that, upon reflection, seem exasperated, impulsive and irrational. We will then begin to see patterns in these behaviours. It is likely that these are examples of us acting out our script.

1.5.1 Discounting

There are various means by which the *process* of script plays out in adult life. Every case, to some extent, involves the distorting of our perception of reality. A key mechanism behind this process is discounting.¹¹ When we discount we are said to be unawarely ignoring certain aspects of the here-and-now reality that would help us in dealing with issues that are causing discomfort or unmanageability. When we discount, we do not use all the information available to us in order to get our needs met, but instead unawarely choose to not see certain aspects of our reality when making these decisions.

There are a great number of possible scenarios in which people discount in adult life. These discounts operate on different levels, all of which involve blanking out some aspects of reality, whilst often exaggerating other aspects (to the point where they are blown out of proportion) in the process. On one level, we might blank out our perception of certain events or feelings; we do not acknowledge anything to be happening at all. On another level, we might notice that something is happening, but we discount the significance of it; we do not acknowledge it as a problem worth bothering about. However, sometimes we can notice something happening, know that it is bothering us, but unawarely ignore the potential options available for doing something about it; we blank out the solutions to the problem.

Someone talking loudly on his phone in a library as an example. Some people might not even notice that it is happening. Some might notice it is happening but don't see it as a problem, whilst others might notice them talking loudly and be bothered by it. They will think "this is a library, I am trying to study" and they will begin to get agitated and irate. However, they might discount the possible options to deal with this problem and alleviate their discomfort. They might not think to simply go over and ask

¹¹ See: Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.173-187

them to stop, or to ask a library assistant to do the same. They exaggerate their own inability to get their needs met. Instead they sit there and hope the person stops talking of his own accord, leaving the problem unsolved.

This is an example of someone discounting themselves. They are either unawarely suppressing their own emotions or their own ability to get their immediate needs met. This kind of discounting can be particularly harmful if an individual consistently discounts their own vital needs because of their script. As we will see in the following chapter, when children are taught to discount their own needs in their development, it often leads to a destructive script and emotional unmanageability. As people are usually unaware that they are discounting, it can lead to great angst as these needs are being ignored, yet the longing to fulfil them still exists.

We can also discount others. The person on the phone, for example, would have likely been discounting how the people around him were feeling. Someone else might have discounted the librarian's ability to get the problem sorted. In the example just given, the parents of that child will have likely discounted the child's needs. This itself can operate on levels; they could have not even seen that this child had certain needs they weren't fulfilling, or they could have acknowledged them and given the message that these needs are wrong or inappropriate (e.g. "it is wrong to cry, be a man!").

Fundamentally, discounting makes us "passive" in regards to getting our needs met. Passivity is where we recognise that we have a need, but we expect someone else to know what this need is and accordingly make sure that it is met. Our passivity strongly relates to how we get into "games" in order to manipulate people into taking responsibility for whether these needs get met, which we will touch upon below. There are four kinds of passive behaviour that we can observe in people, all of which give us some insight into how these people discount. These are "Doing Nothing", "Over-adaptation", "Agitation", and "Incapacitation or Violence". In each of these we direct our energy away from solving the problem and into counterproductive behaviours. We might use all our energy to stop ourselves from doing anything, for example, so that we remain uncomfortable. Or we might act this energy out in agitated or potentially violent activities.

Discounting ultimately impacts one's ability to change and lead a progressive, healthy life. It disconnects us from the Adult resources that are necessary to accurately interpret our environment and see that we even need change (let alone bring it about). A lot of the time we don't just discount how certain needs are not being met, we discount how others might be mistreating or exploiting us, or how others might actually be

trying to help us. We will also discount how our own actions are affecting other people. All of these things are especially relevant and common to an addict's experience. To provide awareness of this discounting has the potential to then invite individuals into seeing the things that they unconsciously ignore, further inviting them to change certain parts of their lives.

1.5.2 Frame of Reference

All of us experience and react to the things that happen around us in different ways. We will all pick up on different things; we will notice different objects, colours or smells; the emotions we feel in response to certain stimuli will be different, and so on. This unique way of experiencing the world is known in TA as our frame of reference.¹² This frame of reference acts as a kind of "filter" over reality. You and I will filter out (discount) some parts of reality, exaggerate others, and see certain aspects completely differently (e.g. what I see as big you might see as small), all according to our differing frame of reference.

Our script forms a substantial part of this frame of reference. In times of development we may have had to blank out certain parts of reality that were particularly painful in order to make ourselves feel safe. We may have also had to downplay or ignore certain feelings we had, because the messages we received from our caretakers told us that these feelings were bad, or that we weren't allowed to have them. Later in life, these discounts can form a crucial part of someone's entire outlook on life; they define how people see themselves and how they relate to the world around them. Our frame of reference is made up of all these definitions that we hold.

In adult life, when something falls outside of this frame of reference, an individual will tend to ignore it. This is a process known as redefining. This basically means that an individual will (unawarely) distort reality so that it remains consistent with and reinforces the prejudged definitions that are contained in their script. In other words, when certain aspects of reality conflict with our internal beliefs, we will discount these aspects in order to maintain our frame of reference. Anything that falls outside our frame of reference is unawarely blanked out.

This is one key way in which script is lived out in adulthood. In childhood we make these decisions as our best attempt at dealing with the world. Our Child ego state clings onto these decisions because they are

¹² See: Stewart, I., Joines, V. *TA Today*. pp.188-193