

## COLLOQUIUM QUESTIONS

(Colloquium takes place at the Dept. of Psychology, Building U1 (Údolní 53, see interactive syllabus for more information), 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, corridor to the left. Please come a bit earlier to make sure you find the place in time.

Please GET READY to answer any of the 15 questions. Written notes are not allowed during the colloquium, so make sure you remember what you have to say about each vignette. There doesn't have to be a single correct answer; you only need to justify your explanation.

1. Mike lives with his dad, who has a problem with alcohol abuse. When Mike started school, his drunken dad mocked and teased him every time he saw him doing his homework, calling him “good little sissy boy”. Mike soon ceased doing his schoolwork altogether and instead started to mock and tease his hard-working classmates. Among teachers and parents, he has become to be known as “the kid with the drunken father”, and everybody knows they should not expect too much of him. His homeroom teacher once said: “Mike, I already know it is a lost cause to expect you to do your homework, but I wish you could at least once in a while come to school on time.” But Mike never does. Which are the different kinds of psychological mechanisms that shape and maintain Mike’s problem behaviour? Do you have any suggestions how Mike’s situation could be somehow improved?
2. Susan and Jack went on a walk in a forest. As they were trying to cross a stream by jumping over it, the mud on the other bank gave way, Susan’s foot slipped, and she tumbled into the icy-cold water face down, drenching her clothes completely. Jack laughed heartily; Susan, however, cried all the way home. Seeing that Susan was not talking to him, Jack tried to lighten up the situation by telling jokes and calling Susan “my little mermaid”, but this only made the situation worse. “You are always such a jerk!” Susan cried. “You care nothing about other people’s feelings, just so that you always have it your way! Obviously you must have seen that the stream was too wide to cross, but you still forced me to jump! And on top of that, you laugh your head off when I fall!” Jack, now getting vexed as well, replied: “No! It’s you who’s a total crybaby! Remember how you whimpered over the wasp sting all day? That’s just how you are! You should have seen yourself – everyone would have laughed in such a situation. Why, on earth, did you jump in that place anyway?? Everybody could have seen the bank was not safe in that part, those grasses always grow on liquid mud!” What different types of mistakes (in terms of social perception and interaction) did Susan and Jack make in this conversation? Why did they react the way they did, and what would have been a more appropriate way to react?
3. Does our memory work like a video camera - precisely records what is happening around us? Can we rely on our memories? If not, why?
4. What factors influence our willingness to conform to other people and not to do what we think is right? In what situations do you tend to conform?
5. Many companies today adopt a ‘free trial’ marketing strategy in which they let the customer ‘try out’ the product for several weeks or months for free. After that, the customer can either purchase the product or return/stop using it without any financial or other commitments. This strategy turns out to work very well: Even people who initially did not plan to buy the product often end up doing so after

the free trial period, although their general attitude to the product (its quality, usefulness, etc.) has not changed. Why do you think this happens?

6. When Andrew was little, his mother criticized him for every action that annoyed or distracted her somehow, calling him “the most annoying little brat”. By the time he started high school, Andrew believed everyone would find him annoying if he gathered courage to talk to them. When his classmates approached him, he was too anxious about what to say, and even when he started talking, he would often stop mid-sentence and finish with something like: “...but I know this is boring, don’t mind me, I’m just blabbering.” He was also very vigilant about any signs of boredom or annoyance in others. When he saw his classmate’s eyes wander during conversation, he’d immediately say: “Am I bothering you? Sorry, I’ll shut up now.” Soon enough, he was pretty sure nobody was too eager to talk to him: Indeed, his mother was right that he was extremely annoying. What is Andrew’s greatest problem? Was his mother right all along?

7. Sarah has decided to adopt a dramatically healthier lifestyle. She wakes up two hours earlier than she used to, goes running, has a cold shower and eats a super-healthy breakfast before she goes to work. In the afternoon, she plans to do some housework and study English but instead finds herself turning on the TV and switching from one channel to another until late in the night, with a pack of cookies at hand. Before going to sleep, she feels remorse and makes a promise to start anew in the morning. The “cycle” repeats itself for a few days until Sarah completely drops her fitness plans and gets more and more overweight. When her friend invites her to join a highly successful fitness programme, Sarah refuses: “I have tried so many times to no avail. I already know it just won’t work.” What do you think Sarah’s problem is?

8. To what extent do you think Stanford prison experiment simulates conditions in the real prisons? What might be similar? What might be different?

9. Debbie’s office recently hired a new hand, Gillian. Debbie met Gillian for the first time when Gillian bumped into her with a large cardboard box she carried to her desk and almost knocked her off her feet. “Oh, sorry,” she just mumbled quickly, not even looking at Debbie (who was looking forward to greeting her new colleague), and rushed away. “The new one is really odd,” Debbie said to her other colleagues later that day. “Be careful around her – she is all clumsy and not very social.” Debbie’s boss soon approached the group and said: “Gillian is supposed to take care of the new orders, but she is unfamiliar with our registration system. Becky, Lynn, could one of you give her some basic tutorial later if you have time?” “Well,” Lynn said to Debbie as their boss walked away, “now I see what you meant. I guess there’ll be more trouble coming from the new one than help. Let’s just hope boss won’t have us do her work for her.” What is going on? What kinds of bias influenced Debbie’s and her colleagues’ opinion of Gillian? How do you think the situation will develop further and why?

10. Steven works as an assistant professor and teaches a course in which students are required to submit written homework assignments on time. The essays are of variable quality, and he is often disappointed by some students’ lack of effort but tries to mark the essays fairly. Today, Steven got a pack of coffee candy from his colleague, which he previously never tasted. It was delicious, and before he knew it, it was completely gone. As he started marking essays that afternoon, he suddenly realized he had enough of his students’ sloppy work. It was inexcusable! He was very angry – he has been holding it in all this time, but now he obviously couldn’t put up with it any longer. He put together a list of names of

students whose work he considered sloppy and wrote a sarcastic email to the entire class mocking the individual students' "extraordinary ability to mess up absolutely everything". The day after sending the email, Steven suddenly felt appalled that he did what he did. He simply could not understand what got into him, and didn't know how to face the consequences. Can you explain what happened to Steven?

11. Why won't people in situations, when many other people are present, help a person in need?

12. Maggie, Lucy and Linda all should be working on their final theses. However, it is still long before the deadline, and even the slightest idea of the thesis is very stressful to all of them and puts them in a bad mood for days. The three students deal with this situation differently: Maggie avoids thinking about the thesis and uses various distractions to maintain a positive mood. Lucy tries to perceive the thesis in a matter-of-fact way as a technical problem that need to be solved as quickly as possible with as little effort as possible. Linda spends every day in front of a computer screen with an open document, telling herself to keep calm, forget about stress and maintain a positive attitude about the thesis. Which of these anti-stress strategies do you think is the most effective one and why?

13. Little Peter's dad has a bad toothache. Peter, who is of preschool age, feels bad about his daddy's situation. His mother is touched by this and with the good intent of promoting altruistic tendencies in her son even further, she tells Peter to "try to think about something that would cheer his dad up". Peter rushes away and, to her astonishment, comes back with a huge ice lolly she got him earlier that day because he wanted it so much but had to save it for after dinner. "Here, dad," Peter says, "eat this ice lolly, it will cheer you up. Mom got it for me because I wanted it but I guess you need it more than I do." The poor parents didn't know how to break it to Peter that people with toothaches cannot eat ice cream. What mistake did Peter's mom make that led to the awkward situation? Let's say that the parents explain the situation to Peter, and he understands. Next time, he'll try to cheer his dad up in a more appropriate way. This is different from a situation in which Peter would not understand even if his parents explained it to him. What is the term that psychology uses to describe the stage of development in which the child is able to complete a particular task, but will not do it without the guidance of other people?

14. Explain the change blindness phenomenon. Give an example from everyday life.

15. Bertha and Veronica attended a conference together. On the program, there was also a limited-capacity workshop with a specialist Bertha admired. However, she was too shy to go alone, so she persuaded Veronica, for whom the workshop would be even more useful, to join her. Veronica was still undecided about several other events scheduled at that time and was reluctant to go at first but she yielded after much persuasion, as Bertha was insisting she would not dare to go to the workshop alone and would feel really miserable if she missed it. At the workshop, they were told that the lecturer was sick and that his colleague would lead the workshop instead. Afterwards, when Fred asked each of the two girls about the workshop, their responses were very different. Bertha, who did not get to meet her favourite lecturer anyway, claimed that the workshop was extremely useful and exciting. Veronica, on the other hand, insisted that it was absolutely pathetic and uninteresting, despite the fact that the content of the workshop was objectively more relevant to her work than to Bertha's. What might have caused such a huge difference between the two accounts? Why was Bertha so enthusiastic about something that completely failed to meet her expectations? And why was Veronica so disgruntled about something that might have been really useful to her?