

COLLOQUIUM QUESTIONS

Colloquium (official date) takes place in room C12, Building C, Faculty of Arts, 1st floor.

Please GET READY to answer any of the 15 questions. There won't be enough time to re-read the vignettes during the colloquium thoroughly. Extensive written notes are NOT allowed during the colloquium, so make sure you know what you have to say about each vignette. To help you remember, you can bring a printout of the questions with highlighted passages and very BRIEF notes. There don't have to be a single correct answer, but you need to be able 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! You just got what you deserved." Which biasing tendencies that we covered throughout the course can be potentially detected in Susan and Jack's conversation? Why did they react the way they did?

3. During the main break, somebody took the teacher's glasses from the desk. After a brief search, they were found broken in the opposite corner of the classroom. Several well-known troublemakers were under suspicion as similar incidents – though not as serious – had happened before. However, there was no direct evidence. The teacher decided to interrogate the students one by one. The first few students claimed there was a lot of commotion in the room during the break, and they couldn't be sure who took the glasses or what they did with them. To help the students remember, the teacher asked questions like: "Did you see who took the glasses? Didn't you hear the noise when he smashed them against the wall? Did you also hear the boys laughing? Whose laugh was it? Come on, I'm sure you can remember, you just have to try harder! Any detail may be important. When exactly did you hear the noise?" What is the

most likely result of this kind of interrogation? What does the teacher assume, and which problems does she not take into consideration?

4. During office meetings, Eve's boss often reprimands everyone for not taking care of "important issues" she claims to have pointed out at previous meetings. Eve feels uncomfortable – she really does not remember being given any of those assignments. While listening to the boss's complaints, everyone just sits silently with downcast eyes and says nothing. After the meeting, Eve usually asks around about the assignments, but nobody seems to remember. "I guess Boss is either just misremembering things, or she wants us to take the blame for something she's messed up. I'm pretty sure she's never told us to do those things," one colleague tells Eve. A similar situation occurs in the following meeting, with similar results. "I guess boss is a total moron," Eve concludes. What are the most likely psychological phenomena that gave rise to this situation? What do you think would help to overcome this problem?

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. Think about the Stanford Prison Experiment, Milgram's obedience experiments, and Jane Elliott's "blue eyes – brown eyes exercise" (from *Class Divided*). What do all of these "demonstrations" have in common? In general, what do we know about human behaviour based on this research? Which conclusions can we draw from these studies about social influence on human behaviour? Which conclusions that the authors drew, on the other hand, cannot be unequivocally drawn from the data,

based on the recently uncovered evidence? Discuss how students should go about interpreting this kind of research – how can we differentiate between the actual evidence and misconceptions?

9. Imagine you are tutoring a child who has moved with her parents to your town from a faraway country. You are trying to teach the child to solve different kinds of problems and complete tasks as expected from any pupil of that age. However, despite your efforts, the child keeps falling behind and is making virtually no progress. What are the different things you should consider as you try to find the reason for this lack of success? What are the potential different sources of underachievement in the child?

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. You hear an elderly couple talking in a group of people:

SHE: "I had no idea he was taken to the hospital!"

HE: "Oh, yes, you did. We heard he was sick. On Friday his daughter came to ask us help with the corn because he was taken to the hospital."

SHE: "What are you saying? She never said anything about hospital. She asked for help because it started raining and the corn was still out."

HE: "Raining! We haven't seen any rain since May! It's parched!"

SHE: "Yes, but it started raining on Friday afternoon! Don't you remember? You were out chasing the chicken that got out of the coop. It was just a little but it looked like a storm was coming. I even told you I needed to get the laundry in so it didn't get wet but you just kept grumbling to me about Brandon never fixing the coop. Then Betty came and asked us to help bring in the corn."

HE: "She asked us because Tom was sick. Don't tease me, woman! I'd surely had known if there had been any rain! I clearly remember she said daddy was sick in the hospital so could Brandon and us come and help with the corn."

What do you think might be going on? Why do the two recollections differ? Do you find any of the two versions more plausible? Why (not)?

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. Mr. Harrison's students are – like all third year students – preparing invitations for the celebration of the school's 100th anniversary. Invitations will be sent out to thousands of people, and each of them needs to be individually hand-folded, signed and wrapped, with an address written on the top. The students meet every afternoon in their classroom and prepare the invitations together while sitting in a circle around a giant box where the invitations are thrown. There's still a lot of work to do, but Mr. Harrison's students are still not done with the invitations. To his dismay, Mr. Harrison finds out that Mrs. Richards's class is almost done with theirs! After visiting Mrs. Richards's classroom, he discovers that her students are silent while working individually at their desks. Indeed, Mrs. Richards is much stricter than Mr. Harrison, but desperate times require desperate measures – so Mr. Harrison forbids his students to talk while they are working on the invitations to increase productivity. He is, however, disappointed to find that his class has never become as productive as Mrs. Richards's. What do you think is the main cause of the difference in productivity between Mrs. Richards's and Mr. Harrison's classes? What could you recommend to Mr. Harrison to increase his class's productivity?

15. A salesman is promoting a set of "high-quality kitchenware." He claims the new set of products is very popular, and to celebrate the company's successful startup, they have issued scratch tickets with which potential customers can win a prize. First, he hands you a ticket. After scratching, it reads that you won 10,000 crowns. "Congratulations! Now you can use this ticket as a coupon for one of our exclusive products. With the coupon, you can have the basic set of four pots and two pans ONLY for 8,000 – as you can see, the original prize was 18,000! Now you can save the 10,000 for a nice dinner with your family. However, the premium set with three additional pots and a set of high-quality knives only costs – for you, that is – 9,000 crowns! The other company sells an almost identical set without knives for 22,000. And that's not everything! If you buy now, you'll get this exclusive knife sharpener for free! Otherwise, it would cost additional 1,500. Isn't it amazing?" Which techniques, based on the knowledge of human psychology, does the salesman use to attract customers? What kind of person, do you think, is most and least likely to yield to the salesman's promotion efforts and buy the offered product?