

## **Avoidance - avoidance conflict and obedience in the Milgram paradigm.**

### Description for the general public

The experiments on obedience to authority conducted in 1960s by Stanley Milgram were undoubtedly a milestone for social psychology. What is more, they have become an important point of reference for a number of other disciplines – philosophy, political and ethical sciences, theology and historical studies. The phenomenon described by Milgram, highlighting the power of an arranged situation and its effect on urging a person to do despicable and morally contemptible things, pointed to a very important fact. According to Milgram, it suffices to create appropriate circumstances to make the so-called “ordinary people” electrocute (sometimes lethally) a completely innocent person. A person who, just like they, agreed to participate in a psychological experiment, whose only fault was that he/she was unable to memorise a set of bizarre words or syllables.

It must be emphasised though, that Milgram's experiments as well as the entire trend of studies of obedience cannot be summarised by stating that “people are bad”. “People are capable of doing bad things if urged by the circumstances of the situation” would be a more suitable conclusion. Yet, if their behaviour is to a large extent a result of the situation, the following question could be formulated: is it possible to arrange a situation, which would make people disobedient? Or, at least, less obedient?

This is what our project is about. We are looking for factors, which would make people in the Milgram paradigm consider the “learner” a member of their ingroup – in other words, which would make them empathize more with the learner and by the same token feel a greater need to object to the harm being done to the learner.

Within the project, we propose four vital questions:

Issue 1: How does manipulating the physical closeness of the teacher, the learner and the experimentator affect the level of obedience to the authority?

Issue 2: To what extent indicating similarities between the two subjects in the course of the procedure (their common history or shared interests) can reduce the willingness to electrocute the learner when instructed to do so by the experimentator?

Issue 3: To what extent putting the subjects in a situation of forced cooperation (at the initial procedure stage, prior to the actual experiment) reduces obedience to the experimentator during the primary stage of the experiment?

Issue 4: The role of the “foot in the door” technique and that of the reverse “door in the face” effect, known in the social influence psychology, in reducing the level of obedience.

Firstly, finding the answers to the above-mentioned questions will allow us to better understand the underlying mechanism of thoughtless obedience observed by Milgram and his followers. Secondly, and even more importantly, we will learn what to do, in order to reduce the level of obedience. This seems to be an extremely important problem in the contemporary world threatened with extremisms.