

Dariusz Dolinski\*

## Two for the seesaw: requester and requested

*Research on emotion conducted so far has usually ignored situations where the person experiences a certain emotion, but where the external stimulus that evoked and upholds this emotion suddenly disappears. This kind of situation, however, is relatively common in everyday life. This article attempts to recognize certain consequences of those conditions under which the stimuli justifying our experience of such emotional states as fear or anxiety suddenly disappear. Research done to data by the author and his colleagues indicates increased compliance of the subject when addressed with various requests, commands or suggestion in the situation termed here “emotional see-saw” or “fear-then-relief”.*

**Keywords:** Social influence, fear-then-relief, emotion

### Social influence as a part of social life

A human being is a social creature. This implies not only mutual interdependence among individuals but their co-existence within a social group as well. Social life demands people's effective influence on others in order for all to function within a society. On the other hand, other people influence themselves for the very same reason. We often do not realize the fact that our mere presence or a particular gesture or action can affect the reactions or attitudes of other people. Sometimes our influence is fully intentional and we are aware of the interpersonal consequences of our actions. Social influence is a change of the behavior, opinion, attitude or feelings of individuals resulting from what other people do, think, or feel. According to this definition, an individual's awareness of the change or of the fact that other people's actions were intended is not an indispensable condition for the social influence process to take place.

By profound analysis of various social influence phenomena, R. Cialdini (2001) came to the conclusion that most of the situations in which people agree to fulfill requests, suggestions, or commands given by other people are in connection with at least one of the following mechanisms: reciprocation, social validation, consistency, liking, scarcity and authority.

The reciprocation rule is one of the most powerful and serious principles governing social contacts. According to

this rule, an individual should reciprocate the good things received from other people. This rule constitutes the norm organizing the life of individuals, social groups, and whole nations. This norm enables social links, trust, and the creation of stable social coalitions. What is important from the social influence perspective is that someone who has received a favor (even when he or she never asked for it or when the favor is unwelcome) somehow feels obliged to return the favor. It is most likely that he or she will fulfill the request formulated by someone who did something for him or her.

It has been demonstrated in numerous psychological experiments that when a subject voluntarily takes up some kind of action, or merely prepares to take it up – a number of processes are initiated which make the subject continue to fulfill the task in spite of serious personal costs. The mechanism of engagement is conditioned by a number of factors. One of them is the rise in the mental availability of the given type of behavior. The mere image or thought of some way of behaving raises the chances of its fulfillment. It is connected with the way our knowledge functions: the increase of mental availability of some kind of behavior strengthens the chances of its factual realization.

Psychological research indicates that people more eagerly engage themselves in actions that are also undertaken by other people. Psychological research demonstrated for example that when watching a comedy, people laughed more often and louder when they heard other

\* The Warsaw School of Social Sciences and Humanities, Wrocław Faculty, ul. Grunwaldzka 98, 50-357 Wrocław, Poland  
e-mail: [dariusz.dolinski@swps.edu.pl](mailto:dariusz.dolinski@swps.edu.pl)

people laughing, or that they threw litter in public places or restrained from doing so depending on the behavior of other people. A specific and at the same time tragic instance of the social proof mechanism is the statistical data indicating an increase in the number of suicides after a suicide case has been widely commented upon the public media. People who experience all sorts of existential drama more often decide to finish their own lives when they read or hear that someone else committed suicide.

The induction of personal preference is one of the most efficient ways of having an influence on other people. We are more eager to fulfill requests and wishes made by people we like. And of course we like polite and mannerly people. We buy more eagerly from such salesmen and we eagerly fulfill requests made by those of our acquaintances who are like that. Apart from politeness and good manners, personal preference can be induced by similarity of attitudes. Practitioners of social influence (e.g., car or insurance salespeople, waiters, direct marketing salespeople) are well-known for abusing this rule.

The theory of reactance (Brehm, 1966) claims that when we are deprived of some object or possibility of doing something, or if there is a potential threat that they could be taken away, such object or possibility of action becomes more valuable to us. The fact that a product of limited availability becomes much more desired among customers is widely abused by salesmen. They often try to make the impression that the product being considered by the customer is the last available item, or they limit the time when the product is available at a relatively low price. Poor availability of products is magnified by the increasing demand from other customers. It is characteristic that works of art reach very high prices during auctions when competing customers run up the bidding to the ultimate price level which would be unacceptable to them when making a private purchase.

A high degree of obedience towards an authority is an effect found in many psychological experiments (e.g. Milgram, 1974; Meeus & Raaijmakers, 1995; Gromski & Nawrat, 1984). We could easily find numerous examples of this effect in real life, the most spectacular being the blind faith in the infallibility of totalitarian leaders (Hitler, Lenin, Stalin), or the collective suicides among sect members. Why should human beings behave like this? In fact, such cases are the result of many interwoven factors. First of all, one should take into account that one characteristic of contemporary civilization is the fragmentation of human activity. It is rare for individuals to undertake a complex activity and complete it all by themselves. In the complex hierarchical organizations that we function in, the duties of each member are highly specialized and an individual usually undertakes only a small fragment of the whole complex action. In most organizations, between the person who makes the direct commands about the aim of the

action and the ways to reach that aim, and the person who becomes the direct (physical) performer of these ideas, there are a number of intermediaries – people who pass the commands along to others, usually narrowing the orders down to single tasks. People who receive clear instructions concerning what to do, cease to feel fully responsible for their deeds. In their own opinion, they are a pawn in a game or an unimportant cog in a complex machine. They assume that the superior is better oriented in the situation and carries the responsibility for what is happening. Besides, obedience towards authorities are the socialization mechanisms. In our childhood, we often hear our parents claiming that we should obey our superiors. We should not question the sense of received instructions or consider their contents. Mindless and prompt fulfillment of commands is what a child is positively rewarded for – both in the material and social sense. No wonder this behavioral model solidifies in our adult lives. Obedience towards authorities is an indispensable element of social order. On the other hand, such obedience sometimes can take the form of mindless subordination that in many cases can lead to undesirable phenomena, and in extreme situations to tragedies of individuals, social groups or entire nations.

Social influence techniques used by people are not always based on a single mechanism out of those described above. The psychological literature provides descriptions of various, and sometimes rather complicated, social influence techniques that increased the likelihood of compliance. Among the social influence techniques studied by psychologists are a series of procedures designed to increase compliance without making the person aware that he or she has been subjected to the procedure. These “compliance without pressure” techniques have been quite intensively explored by researchers, ever since the experiments by Freedman and Fraser (1966), who posed the hypothesis that if people agreed to comply with a small request, they would be subsequently more willing to comply with a more difficult request. At the present time there are many published studies on different techniques of inducing compliance with a request, including door-in-the-face (Cialdini, Vincent, Lewis, Catalan, Wheeler, & Darby, 1975), low-ball (Cialdini, Cacioppo, Bassett, & Miller, 1978), dialogue involvement (Dolinski, Nawrat, & Rudak, 2001) or that’s not all (Burger, 1986).

One of technique of this kind is “fear-then-relief”, in psychological literature originally described by Dolinski and Nawrat in 1998, but more than three decades earlier were described in belles-lettres.

### **Fear-then-relief compliance technique – roots and historical evidence**

According to Polish writer Herling-Grudzinski (1965), a very tricky procedure was applied in the USSR to those sentenced to imprisonment for ‘acting against communism’. One of the interrogators would extinguish cigarettes on the prisoner’s forehead, kick him below the belt or break his fingers one by one. Then, another officer would replace the sadist. He would offer the prisoner a comfortable seat and a cigarette, and express his deep interest in the prisoner’s health or frame of mind. Most often the prisoner, who had earlier refused to confess anything, would now testify against himself and his closest friends. Most probably many similar examples come to the Reader’s mind. Well-known from both written and filmed detective fiction is what can be labeled the ‘good cop-bad cop’ interrogation: first the subject is brutally mistreated by one policeman – threatened with death, yelled at, and humiliated. Then all of a sudden everything changes. A telephone rings and the ‘bad’ policeman disappears. Another policeman comes in – and he is calm and pleasant, suggests a coffee or tea, running a relatively normal conversation. Also in these fictional scenes, the subjects, who had so far refused to cooperate, now most often start to reveal everything and testify against everyone.

We could say that the common denominator in all the above examples is the dynamics of emotions experienced by the people subjected to the described situations. First they experience deep fear caused by an obvious source, like an inhuman interrogator; but then, quite unexpectedly, the source of fear retreats.

It should be well-noted that this dynamics of emotions is not connected exclusively with the situations of forcing the suspects to testify or confess their guilt. Let us imagine, for example, the situation of a woman returning home alone late at night. When she notices a tall man following her, she becomes anxious. But when she suddenly recognizes him as one of her good old friends, she immediately feels relieved. Similarly, when we cannot find our wallet after the last night’s bender, we are bound to experience a sudden tide of fear; which will retreat immediately after we eventually find it in another pocket.

People interrogated by the ‘good’ and the ‘bad’ policemen (or by KGB officers or ‘The Holy Office’ inquisitors) would become extremely vulnerable to suggestions, proposals, or demands presented in the moment when sudden relief replaced the former experience of fear. Would other people, exposed to totally different situations, be equally likely to fulfill requests and commands when undergoing a similar relief of emotion? Together with Richard Nawrat (Dolinski & Nawrat, 1998) we have made a positive assumption on this thesis and verified our position in a series of experiments.

### **Fear-then-relief and compliance: Experimental evidence**

Jaywalkers and people walking along the street became the participants in the first of the experiments by Dolinski and Nawrat (1998), designed to test the consequences of the sudden removal of the source of fear. In some of the cases, when the participant was in the middle of the road, a police whistle was used. The participants reflexively turned their heads toward the sound, but it turned out there were no policemen on the sidewalk behind them. The rest of participants were allowed to cross the street undisturbed. In the experimental design, there was also a third group of participants who did not cross the street but only walked along the sidewalk. All participants were next spoken to by a confederate who asked them to fill in a psychological questionnaire and announced it would take only ten minutes. It should be noted that the experiment was conducted on a cold autumn day, and it was not possible for participants to fill in the questionnaire later at home, but had to complete it on the spot.

The questionnaire that the participants were asked to fill out was the Self-Description Inventory (Spielberger, Gorsuch, & Lushene, 1970), which enabled us to measure the current level of the participant’s fear. Although the level of fear was almost identical in all experimental conditions, it turned out that the participants who experienced first fear and then relief more frequently agreed to fill out the questionnaire than did the participants in the other groups. In other words, much like the witches of middle ages and the accused of the KGB, we found that fear followed by relief increased compliance with a request.

Armed with this data, we wanted to know if the relief of fear would lead to compliance in other situations and settings. The participants in our second experiment were car drivers who had parked their vehicles in a no-parking zone. Under the wipers of their cars, we placed small leaflets that looked just like police tickets. When the drivers returned and read the leaflets, it turned out these were ads for a hair-growth stimulating shampoo; or alternatively, leaflets that appealed for a blood donation. In a different experimental condition, we used adhesive tape to stick the leaflets to the car doors, so the drivers had no reason to become frightened. There was also a control group in the experiment: owners of cars on which we did not place any pieces of paper. When the drivers were about to drive off, they were approached by the confederate who introduced himself as a student gathering material for his master’s thesis and asked whether the participant would fill out a questionnaire on how to optimize the city traffic. It has been shown that drivers under the ‘fear-then-relief’ condition were considerably more likely to fill out the questionnaire than the other drivers.

However, one could raise the question whether the increased compliance of people who first experience fear and then see its source is gone results from the specific dynamics of emotion or from the very fact of acting under fear. In other words, would it be possible to achieve similar or perhaps greater compliance if - instead of making them experience the 'fear-then-relief' sequence - people were just frightened and left in this emotional state? If the answer to this question were positive, it would imply that the key-factor of increased compliance was the fear itself and not its sudden withdrawal. We devoted another of our experiments to this problem.

The study involved high school students who were individually invited to our laboratory for "measurements of various skills and abilities". Participants were randomly allocated to one of three experimental conditions: group 1 experienced anxiety, group 2 experienced anxiety which was subsequently reduced, and group 3 (control) was not subjected to any initial procedure. Participants from groups 1 and 2 were informed that they would take part in a study concerning the effect of punishment on learning. They were told: "Your task will be to learn association of various words. However, should you make an error while learning, you will be given a mild, not very painful electric shock". Participants from group 3 were told that the experiment concerned visual-motor coordination: "Your task will be to throw darts at targets at various distances".

Subsequently, in all the conditions, the students were informed that the experiment would begin in a few minutes and asked to wait in the corridor, near the laboratory. In the case of group 2, after about two minutes an experimenter would come up to the participants to tell them the professor who supervised the laboratory had just decided to postpone the experiment to the following week - so instead of the 'electric shock' experiment the students would take part in another study in which they would have to throw darts at various distances. It was explained that this new study required some preparation in the lab, so the students were asked to wait a little longer in the corridor. During the waiting period before the experiment started, each participant was asked by a female student to join a charity action for an orphanage. She was the experimenter's confederate, but appeared to be totally unattached to the experiment. Students who complied with this request were also asked how many working hours they were willing to devote to this action. The results of the study upheld our hypothesis that it was the "fear-then-relief" sequence, and not the emotion of anxiety itself, that led to the higher degree of compliance. In fact, this experiment revealed that the participants in group 1 (induced anxiety) who felt the greatest amount of fear, complied less frequently than participants in group 3 (control).

One may say, that we have obtained a clear proof, that the increased compliance achieved in our experiments resulted from the experienced sequence of fear followed by relief.

### **Why compliance after 'fear-then-relief'? An attempt at explanation**

In the experimental research of emotion dynamics, it is nearly always assumed that an emotion appears, quickly reaches its peak intensity, and then gradually subsides. This decline of emotion is natural and undisturbed by any external factor. For example, psychologists describe widows' mourning by analyzing the long-lasting process of their adjustment to the new situation (Shontz, 1975); or they describe the dynamics of fear felt by parachutists (Epstein & Fenz, 1965). I have no doubt that this kind of research is highly valuable. It seems, however, that psychology has not paid enough attention so far to the situation in which the stimulus evoking a certain emotion is followed by another stimulus that removes the cognitive justification for having experienced the former emotion. Within the frame of the experiments conducted together with my colleagues and presented above, we managed to demonstrate that people who experience such situations are particularly susceptible to social pressure. Our latest research provides also more specific data on the effectiveness conditions of the emotional see-saw induction social influence technique and the psychological nature of the emotional see-saw state.

The experiments concerning the 'fear-then-relief' technique allowed us to make sure that the sudden and unexpected removal of the source of fear makes people who have just experienced the fear more compliant with demands and requests addressed to them. Why? We should probably start searching for the key to understanding this phenomenon by taking a closer look at the very nature of emotion. It is commonly assumed that the central core of any emotion is the change in action readiness (e.g. Frijda, 1986; Oatley & Jenkins, 1996). Every emotion we experience launches a specific action program uniquely designed for this emotion. The feeling of happiness, for example, usually appears as a result of our achievement of a partial goal within a broader action plan; this triggers the program which we follow and - if needed - modify in order to complete the rest of the plan. Anger results from the frustration at being unable to achieve our aim, and as a consequence we either intensify our attempts to reach this aim, or we become aggressive. Sorrow usually appears when an important intention has not been realized or when the current target is lost, and the action plan that starts up then is usually based on remaining passive, or making up a new plan, or seeking help.

The emotion of fear, which is the focal emotion in this paper, launches reactions aimed at stopping all current actions and at the same time increasing cautiousness toward external surroundings - standing still, or running away (e.g. Denny, 1991; Tuma & Maser, 1985). Because in most cases fear appears when the person feels endangered these kinds of reaction are usually adequate. However, in a specific 'fear-then-relief' situation, the action program launched by fear ceases to be adequate for the changed circumstances. Before a new and more adequate program is started, there is a very specific (and probably short-lasting) state of a "break between programs". The realization of one program has just been suspended because the stimulus justifying the emotion of fear disappeared, and a new program suitable to the new situation has not yet been coined. We may assume that during this moment of disorientation people function automatically and mindlessly, reacting with ready behavioral models (scripts) assimilated in the past. This interpretation is in accordance with the results of another experiment by Dolinski and Nawrat (1998), inspired by the famous field study by Langer, Blank, and Chanowitz (1978).

The participants in our study were individuals crossing the street where it was not allowed. In half of the cases, the fact was just recorded, but the remaining participants heard a police whistle (produced by the experimenter) as they crossed the street. These participants typically turned round trying to locate the whistle, realized it had just been a joke and there was no real threat of being fined, and kept on crossing the street. Next, each participant was approached by a confederate asking for a donation and carrying a moneybox. As in the original experiment by Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978), he formulated the request only ("Excuse me, would you please give us some money?"), or the request with placebic justification ("Excuse me, we are collecting money. Would you please give us some because we have to collect as much money as possible?"), or the request with real justification ("Excuse me, we are from the organization called 'Students for the Handicapped'. Would you please join our charity action because we have to collect as much money as possible to cover the cost of a holiday camp for mentally handicapped children?").

Results showed that in the emotionally neutral conditions (when participants were not disturbed by the whistle while jaywalking), people usually behaved in a rational and thoughtful manner. They hardly ever decided to drop money into the box when the request was not accompanied by any justification or when the justification was placebic, and frequently made donations when it was explained who collected the money and for what purpose. The participants who found themselves in the 'fear-then-relief' conditions reacted quite differently: It was enough to equip the request with the placebic justification to increase their inclination to reach for their purses, as compared to the situation when no justification for the request was

provided. It also turned out that under the 'fear-then-relief' condition, the participants approached with any of the weird messages (e.g. request with placebic justification or without any justification) hardly ever asked any questions about the aim of the action and the organization behind it. However, such questions were common among the neutral emotional-state participants.

When it comes to the frequency of compliance with the request, as well as to the verbal expression of the participants' doubts, this pattern of results is then quite congruent with the assumption that the 'fear-then-relief' technique - along with some other forms of social influence (see Cialdini, 2001) - induces people into a state of mindlessness, which in turn promotes compliance.

Also the results obtained in two other experiments we conducted support the above thesis. In these experiments, we assumed that if mindlessness underlies increased compliance in a 'fear-then-relief' situation, then the compliance should decrease when the person is forced back to mindful reasoning (Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski, & Zawadzki, 2002). To verify this assumption, in the first experiment we created the 'fear-then-relief' condition by suddenly grabbing people coming out of a mall by their shoulders: when they turned around in astonishment, they realized their assailant was a blind man in dark glasses and with a white walking stick. In some cases, the blind man would say only: "Oh, excuse me". In other cases, he added: "How much time is left till [...] o'clock?" specifying the time so that the correct answer was "about three-and-a-half hours". The participants in this group usually looked at their watches and calculated the time left till the stated deadline. We assumed that this action demanded certain cognitive activity, which should shift subject's functioning from the mindless to a more mindful level. Having answered the blind man's question, the participant was accosted by another confederate, who asked him or her to spare five minutes to fill out a questionnaire. This request was also addressed to participants in the control group who had not met the blind man. The proportion of participants who complied with the request was identical in the control group and the group forced to mindfulness (30%). Participants who experienced the 'fear-then-relief' sequence but were not made to return to mindfulness considerably more often agreed to fill out the questionnaire (53%). A similar pattern of results was obtained in another experiment by Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski and Zawadzki (2002), where mindfulness of participants was induced in a different way: a blind man, suddenly grabbed people coming out of a mall by their shoulders, asking them "Excuse me, is that you?" This made the participants explain that they did not know the man, and also linger on the curio of the whole situation. Hence, mindlessness connected with the experience of the 'fear-then-relief' sequence turns out to be a necessary condition for increased compliance.

Although there is common agreement among psychologists that in many social situations people react mindlessly and automatically, scientists do not agree as to whether this is caused by motivational deficits (e.g. Navon, 1984; Neisser, 1976) or by the limitation of cognitive resources (e.g. Posner & Snyder, 1975; Taylor, 1981).

Personally, I would defend the position that mindlessness can be evoked by either of these factors. In the experiments by Langer, Blank and Chanowitz (1978), the participants behaved mindlessly only when they agreed to allow a man who provided any sort of justification for his request to make five copies to cut into the line at the copier. It did not matter to the participants whether in this situation he explained: "Because I'm in a rush" or "Because I have to make some copies". However, when they heard that the man wanted to make 20 copies, the justification for the request started to matter. This time the request was granted more often when the man justified himself by saying "Because I'm in a rush" than by saying "Because I have to make some copies". So the participants remained mindless when asked to let the man make five copies, but they became mindful when asked to let him make 20 copies. Langer (1989) assumes that people start to function mindfully whenever remaining in the state of mindlessness would be too costly for them. If someone asks to make five copies without queuing, the amount of time lost is minimal and the people waiting in the line remain in the mindless state. However, when they hear 20 copies, they become cautious as prolonged mindlessness could be too costly. Does this apply to the situation when the source of fear suddenly disappears? A typical example of a 'fear-then-relief' condition would be the situation which is probably familiar to every car driver. Immediately following a very dangerous traffic commotion, drivers tend to make simple "silly" mistakes. Obviously, very often people have a lot to lose while being under impact of 'fear-then-relief'. According to Langer (1989) they should be highly motivated to avoid mindlessness and, consequently, to shift their functioning to the thoughtful level. Apparently, however, they do not do this. Why? Although I agree, that mindlessness occurring in routine and recurrent situations can result mostly from the lack of motivation to function mindfully, we think that the outcome of a sudden withdrawal of the sources of a subject's emotion is caused by a temporal deficit of cognitive resources. In that specific state, the cognitive system is busy with recovering its own balance. The cognitive resources are directed at turning off the action program activated because of experienced fear but no longer adequate, and/or at handling the physiological consequences of the sudden drop of excitement. We have obtained some empirical evidences supporting this view. It has been shown that the cognitive functioning of people experienced relief from fear is impaired. They needed more time to find a face expressing a different emotion than other faces (exp. 3) and solved fewer arithmetical equations

(exp. 4) than participants did in either the fear group or the emotionally neutral group (Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski, & Zawadzki, 2002).

In many social situations people tend to react automatically. The range of information that people are normally able to process as well as the depth of data analysis are limited (Bargh, 1997; Bargh & Chartrand, 1999). I suggest that the see-saw of emotions is one of such situations. According to our position, increased compliance of the emotionally "see-sawn" participants result from a change in the process of digesting information at the cognitive level. The fast change of the situational context and the emotions attached to it transfer the subjects into a state in which the behavioral program caused by the first emotion is not up-to-date any longer and the new one which is relevant for the next emotion hasn't been activated yet. In order to quickly close the "hole" between the two behavioral programs cognitive resources are required. If the subject faces an additional request during this "phase of turbulence" he or she cannot sufficiently analyse temporarily and at that moment he or she seizes the simplest measure by showing a well-learned, schematic behavior. Neurobiological approach may offer additional support here. From this perspective, we can talk about a distribution problem of resources of attention. In accordance to the theoretical model for situation processing through a limited processing system (see: Birnbaumer & Schmidt, 1999) a mechanism of limited capacity control system could be an explanation for the see-saw of emotions. A "limited capacity control system" (LCCS) takes over and defines the distribution of limited "resources of attention" – to which information input conscious attention is given, and to which it isn't. First, this is happening through a comparison of the input with the stored patterns of the long-time memory. If the information received from the environment does not conform to the "expected" pattern, i.e. the situation is new or unexpected, the information will have to be examined thoroughly. That means it has to be examined at the cognitive level. An automatic reaction will not be sufficient to cope with the situation. To process a situation like this at the conscious level additional input from the endogenous centres have to be mobilized from the areas responsible for attention, like the locus coeruleus (Black, 1991). Its extent is limited by physiological factors (for example glucose level and transmitter concentration). In case an organism is in a situation in which several components demand its attention there will be a distribution of resources of attention through the LCCS, due to the competition of resources of the responsible circuits which process these components. The winner will additionally be aroused, the loser will be inhibited.

The see-saw of emotions apparently presents a situation which has to be processed through expenditure of resources. These resources then are not available to enable

the participants to process the following asked requests adequately. Although there are some data concerning the problem of how see-saw state influences the basic cognitive process like for example perception, logical thinking (Dolinski, Ciszek, Godlewski, & Zawadzki, 2002) attention, processing of information in the short-term memory and the schematising of social perception, the more extensive research is needed in this area. Future experiments should possibly contribute and lead to a better understanding the cognitive and behavioral consequences of the emotional see-saw phenomena.

### Fear-then-relief-then additional argument

In 1999 Davis and Knowles described and verified empirically a new social influence technique, which they named *disrupt-then-reframe* (DTR). In a series of four experiments, they demonstrated that compliance could be increased by a subtle disruption to the sales request, followed immediately by a reframing that provided additional reasons for purchasing the goods. Each of the experiments followed the same paradigm: the experimenters rang the door of the randomly selected houses, introduced themselves as workers of a charitable organization that aids handicapped people and presented the potential buyers their products (sets of Christmas cards, sets of post-it notes or packets of biscuits), proceeds from the sales of which were to support the organization's account; then, having asked if the interlocutors were interested in the prices of the products, they quoted the prices, but the way the price information was formulated was different depending on the experimental condition: either the price was presented in the standard way: "The cards/cookies cost 3 dollars"; or in a way which to a certain extent disarranged the typical sales scheme – "The price of these notes/Christmas cards/cookies is 300 pennies", which after two seconds was followed with an explanation: "That's 3 dollars". In the odd sales-plus-argument condition, the seller would also add: "It's a bargain". In the other conditions, either just the standard quotation of the price was given (i.e. in dollars), or it was additionally followed by the remark: "It's a bargain". It turned out that the percentage of people who decided to buy the products was about two times higher in the *disrupt-then-reframe* conditions (where the price was quoted in a strange way first, then repeated in the standard way, and then supplied with the simple argument in support of the product purchase) than in any of the other conditions.

Davis and Knowles (1999), trying to explain the mechanism of the phenomenon, brought up two psychological theories, which originate from two extremely different paradigms: clinical psychology and *social cognition*. Erickson, the father of contemporary hypnosis, used a number of the so-called confusion techniques

immediately before starting to put the patient under hypnosis, e.g. he would suddenly stop shaking the patient's hand during a handshake or stand motionless for a moment (Erickson, 1964). These procedures aimed at turning the patient's attention away from the anxiety of losing his or her consciousness under hypnosis: by engaging the patient's conscious mind in processing the unexpected element of the interaction, something out of keeping with the patient's expectations. The result was the patient's submission to the hypnotic suggestion, which immediately followed the initial oddity of the situation.

Vallacher and Wegner (1987, 1989; Wegner et al., 1984), the authors of the *action identification theory*, thought it worth considering that people not only perform various actions, but also think about what they are doing. The identification of the action can be processed on different levels – from matter-of-fact reasoning up to abstract contemplation. A man painting a wall can be thinking about the way he is covering the wall with new paint, but he also can be thinking that he is redecorating his daughter's room or that he is tinkering. According to the authors of the action identification theory, people usually tend to identify their actions at the higher (abstract) level ("I'm redecorating a room", "I'm tinkering"); low-level identification of the action ("I'm putting on a new layer of paint") occurs in exceptional conditions - like the situation when something unexpected happens that disrupts their control over the current action. In our example with wall-painting, the man would shift to the low-level interpretation of his action if for instance the wall was difficult to paint evenly because of stains. Shifting to the lower, matter-of-fact level of specific details of the action allows us to regain the lost control over what we are doing. However, after regaining the control, people usually shift back to the more abstract identification of their actions, as this adds a sense of significance to their actions in a broader context.

The dynamics of shifting from one level of identification to another is the key determinant of the *disrupt-then-reframe* technique effectiveness. When it comes to the disruption of a typical, everyday action that we would normally identify on a higher level (e.g. the price is given in cents instead of dollars, or the time of a survey – in seconds instead of minutes), our attention is shifted from the abstract action identification level (e.g. "What are the seller's possible motives in trying to sell me these products?") to the level of specific details of the action (e.g. "What was it they have just said to me?"). The shift of the action identification level is the subject's attempt to regain control over what is going on. Sudden clarification of the "odd bit" (e.g. giving the price in dollars, or the duration of a telephone survey in minutes) enables the subject to recapture the sense of control and consequently, return to the higher level of action identification, which is preferred in typical, everyday conditions. The unique state of the subject's mind, resulting

from a double shift from one level of action identification to another within a very short time, makes the subject lose his or her normal orientation and disrupts to a certain extent his or her cognitive functions. In this peculiar moment of disorganisation, the subject becomes susceptible to simple and explicit argumentation (e.g. “It’s a bargain”, “The questions in the survey are really interesting”).

The *disrupt-then-reframe* technique is strictly cognitive in nature: the subject, hearing simple argumentation during the short state of their cognitive disorganization, becomes more inclined to fulfill the requests made to her or him. In the relevant literature empirical evidence can be found that compliance can be successfully induced not only during a momentary state of cognitive disorganization, but also under emotional disorganization in the ‘fear-then-relief’ state.

The similarity between the *disrupt-then-reframe* and the *fear-then-relief* techniques is based mainly on the fact that in both cases the subject is dealing with an untypical situation – the routine, familiar course of action is disrupted by introducing an “odd” element to disorganize the usual type of interaction. In the case of *disrupt-then-reframe*, the sudden change takes place at the cognitive level of functioning, while in the case of *fear-then-relief* – at the emotional level of functioning. The fundamental similarity of the *disrupt-then-reframe* and the *fear-then-relief* techniques is based on the sudden and unexpected occurrence which derails the subject from the normal way of functioning, disrupts the promptness of the subject’s reactions and in consequence, makes the subject susceptible to external requests or suggestions.

However, despite this essential similarity, there is one ingredient that differentiates the two techniques. To prove effective, apart from making a temporary mess of the cognitive activity of the subject’s mind, the *disrupt-then-reframe* technique requires also an extra argument to make the subject comply with the request. This simple additional argument plays the role of a ready-to-take instruction for what to do next. The effectiveness of the *fear-then-relief* technique does not require any external indications or arguments to make the subject compliant. The person subjected to the latter technique supplies a heuristic indication for further action from the resources of his or her own biographical memory (e.g.: “when you are asked politely to do a small favor, why shouldn’t you agree to fulfill it”).

The question then appears, how would the effectiveness of the *fear-then-relief* technique change in conditions when – following a sudden change of the experienced emotions – the person would hear some argumentation aimed at making him or her compliant with the request. In other words, it is a question about a technique analogous in its structure to *disrupt-then-reframe*; however, instead of making the subject change his or her level of cognitive functioning,

the subject would be forced to modify suddenly his or her functioning under conditions of a dynamic emotional change. Still, after the emotional disruption, a cognitive reframing in the form of a verbal argument would follow, analogously to the *disrupt-then-reframe* technique.

Because the external verbal argumentation would become an additional (aside from the subject’s own heuristics found in his or her memory) compliance-enhancing factor, we could expect that the condition “*fear-then-relief* plus extra argument” should induce still stronger compliance than obtained so far in the *fear-then-relief* studies. It seems worth noting here that in the classical situation when the person is interrogated by the bad cop-good cop duo – which is in fact a real-life prototype for the very technique described in the psychological literature as *fear-then-relief* – the “good” policeman in fact uses a verbal argument to make the person talk (he says e.g. “Your admission of guilt is your only chance.”).

In a series of studies Dolinski and Szczucka (2011) compared the effectiveness of the standard *fear-then-relief* technique with its advanced version where the person – undergoing a sudden and unexpected state of relief from fear – is provided with a verbal argument to comply. They proved that both techniques were effective (i.e. the compliance rates would be higher in both experimental conditions than in the control group) but the *fear-then-relief plus argument* condition generated higher compliance than the classical *fear-then-relief* condition.

## References

- Bargh, J.A. (1997). The automaticity of everyday life. In R.S. Wyer, Jr. (Ed.). *Advances in social cognition* (Vol. 10, pp. 1-61). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Bargh, J.A. & Chartrand, T.L. (1999). The unbearable automaticity of being. *American Psychologist*, 54, 462-479.
- Birnbaumer, N., & Schmidt, R.F. (1999). *Biologische Psychologie* [Biological Psychology] Berlin-Heidelberg: Springer-Verlag.
- Black, I.B. (1991). *Information in the brain*. The MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- Brehm, J.W. (1966). *A theory of psychological reactance*. New York: Academic Press
- Burger, J.M. (1986). Increasing compliance by improving the deal: that’s not all technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51, 277-283.
- Cialdini, R.B. (2001). *Influence. Science and practice*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Cialdini, R.B., Cacioppo, J.T., Bassett, R., & Miller, J.A. (1978). Low-ball procedure for producing compliance: Commitment then cost. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 463-476.
- Cialdini, R.B., Vincent, J.E., Lewis, S.K., Catalan, J., Wheeler, D., & Darby, B.L. (1975). Reciprocal concessions procedure for inducing compliance: The door-in-the-face technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 31, 206-215.
- Davis, B. P. & Knowles, E. S. (1999). A disrupt-then-reframe technique of social influence. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76, 192-199.
- Denny, M.R. [Ed.] (1991). *Fear, avoidance, and phobias. A fundamental*

- analysis. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum
- Dolinski, D., Ciszek, M., Godlewski, K., & Zawadzki, M. (2002). Fear-then-relief, mindlessness, and cognitive deficits. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 32, 435-447.
- Dolinski, D., Nawrat, M., & Rudak, I. (2001). Dialogue involvement as a social influence technique. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 27, 1395-1406.
- Dolinski, D. & Nawrat, R. (1998). 'Fear-then-relief' procedure for inducing compliance. Beware when the danger is over. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 34, 27-50.
- Dolinski, D. & Szczucka, K. (2011). *Emotional disrupt-then-reframe*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Epstein, S. & Fenz, W.D. (1965). Steepness of approach and avoidance gradients in humans as a function of experience: Theory and experiment. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 70, 1-12.
- Erickson, M. (1964). The confusion technique in hypnosis. *American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis*, 6, 183-207.
- Freedman, J. & Fraser, S. (1966). Compliance without pressure: the foot-in-the-door technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4, 195-202.
- Frijda, N.H. (1986). *The Emotions. Studies in emotion and social interaction*. Paris: Maison de Sciences de L'Homme: Paris and Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Gromski, W. & Nawrat, R. (1984). Some determinants of perceived responsibility and guilt in a compliance situation. *Polish Psychological Bulletin*, 15, 235-244.
- Herling-Grudzinski, G. (1965). *Inny swiat* [A different world]. Institut Literaire S.A.R.L.: Paris.
- Langer, E.J. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Langer, E.J., Blank, A., & Chanowitz, B. (1978). The mindlessness of ostensibly thoughtful action: The role of 'placebic' information in interpersonal interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 36, 635-642.
- Meeus W.H.J. & Raaijmakers, Q.A.W. (1995). Obedience in modern society: The Utrecht studies. *Journal of Social Issues*, 51, 155-175.
- Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to authority: An experimental view*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Navon, D. (1984). Resources – a theoretical soup stone? *Psychological Review*, 91, 216-234.
- Neisser, U. (1976). *Cognition and reality*. San Francisco, CA: Freeman.
- Oatley, K. & Jenkins, J.M. (1996). *Understanding emotions*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell
- Posner, M.I. & Snyder, C.R.R. (1975). Attention and cognitive control. In: R.L. Solso (Ed.), *Information processing and cognition. The Loyola symposium*. (pp. 55-85). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Shontz, F.C. (1975). *The psychological aspects of physical illness and disability*. New York: Macmillan.
- Spielberger, C.D., Gorsuch, R.R., & Lushene, R.E. (1970). *Stait-trait anxiety inventory test manual for form X*. Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press.
- Taylor, S.E. (1981). The interface of cognitive and social psychology. In: J. Harvey (Ed.) *Cognition, social behavior, and the environment*. (pp. 189-211). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Tuma, A. H. & Maser, J. D. (1985). *Anxiety and the anxiety disorder*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Vallacher, R. R. & Wegner, D. M. (1987). What do people think they're doing? Action identification and human behavior. *Psychological Review*, 94, 3-15.
- Vallacher, R. R. & Wegner, D. M. (1989). Levels of personal agency: Individual variation in action identification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57, 660-671.
- Wegner, D. M., Vallacher, R. R., Macomber, G., Wood, R., & Arps, K. (1984). The emergence of action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 46, 269-279.