The Truman Show Experiment Ekaterine Giorgadze

The Truman Show is a movie about the man, Truman Burbank, who lives on an island that is fully controlled by the media. One can say that the island is the stage on which everyone plays its role; Truman has no real wife or friends, he lives a huge lie and the rest of the world just observes him in TV.

This film embodies a huge experiment that, in my opinion, can never been done in real life because of the existence of ethic. I think that this particular research is absolutely unethical due to several reasons: 1) “researchers” in this case violate one’s free will, the object of research has no ANY idea about what’s literally happening around him, there is no respect of privacy and confidentiality, deception of the participant and, also, impact on the main participant of the research cannot be determined as number of other participants is increasing time by time. Before discussing all these ethical challenges one can find in this research, I want to underline basic aspects this research is about.

If I was a researcher, I would say that The Truman Show can be considered as an embodiment of many researchers’ “dream” because this experiment gives an ability to observe different objects in different aspects. In this case, researchers could observe the changes of Truman’s personality, impact of the surrender world on him, his social identity, the way he obeyed everything or, vice versa, the way Truman “resigned” - and here comes new aspects: his memory and attention he started to pay to things he did not care about before. Another object of this experiment is the society watching Truman’s life in totally manufactured world: What do they think about this direct intervention of media in Truman’s life? How they react? Who tries to change something and on which stage of the experiment? How can media intervention affect people’s lives? Or what would Truman do after escaping of his transparent life.

Ethical challenges were imposed both in the beginning and in the middle of the experiment. At first, one should mention that the main participant knew nothing about this experiment so the principle of informed constant was violated. Secondly, all the personal information of participant was revealed which means that confidentiality was also violated – there was no respect of privacy, as I’ve mentioned above. Thirdly, there were no open and honest interactions because everything was just false performed by actors. The number of these ethical challenges increased when the number of actors playing roles on the island increased. More participants meant less controlled environment that is very dangerous for the research. On the other hand, in my opinion, increasing the amount of participants increases the possibility of intrusion in the autonomy of study main objects of the research. Disagreement among participants can be fatal for the research. That’s what happened particularly in The Truman Show. Characters faced ethical challenges and they reacted in different ways. It is very interesting how media blinds society and how individuals try to make people see the reality as it is; to broke down those unethical actions the research “required”. I think that the main characteristics of individual, society and media and their dependence on different factors are very well-highlighted but in a very unethical way.