

Study 2: Charlton et al. (2002) Observation of the introduction of television in a remote community (St. Helena)

Aim To investigate whether children in St. Helena would exhibit more aggressive behaviour after the introduction of television to the island in 1995.

Procedure

- The study was a natural experiment. Children (aged three to eight years) were observed before and after the introduction of television through cameras set up in the playgrounds of two primary schools on the island. The level of aggression in television matched what children in the UK were exposed to.
- The researchers also conducted interviews with teachers, parents, and some of the older children.

Results There was no increase in aggressive or antisocial behaviour. This was also the case after five years.

Discussion of results

- The data showed that children did not change their behaviour after television had arrived although they saw the same amount of violent television as British children.
- The parents and teachers said that antisocial behaviour was not accepted on the island and that there was a high degree of social control in the community. It shows that people may learn aggressive behaviour but they may not exhibit it for several reasons.
- Social and cultural factors also play a role in what behaviours are acceptable, so even though the children had no doubt learned aggressive behaviour, they did not show it.

Evaluation The study investigated a real-life event and is high in ecological validity. It does not question SLT but rather the results of **Bandura and Ross (1961)**. The results also confirm the idea that people must be motivated to imitate behaviour.

Research in psychology

Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter (1956)

One famous case study using covert participant observation was the investigation of a cult by Festinger, Riecken, and Schachter. The researchers wanted to find out how people in a cult would cope with the situation when their prophecies failed. They joined a cult that believed the world was scheduled to end on a specific date, and they got to know the cult members. Because of this, they were able to talk with the members and see how their beliefs changed when the world did not end.

The social psychologist Leon Festinger read a newspaper article about a religious cult that claimed to be receiving messages from outer space, predicting that a great flood would end the world. Festinger and some co-workers joined the group and pretended they were converts to the beliefs of the cult. The members of the cult believed they were going to be rescued by a flying saucer when the

rest of the world was destroyed. The cult members had publicized the prophecies, and some of the members had sold their houses and given up their jobs. The researchers wanted to see what happened to the cult members when the world did not go under. The theory of cognitive dissonance predicted that the cult members would either change their beliefs to restore balance in their cognitions, or that they would change their behaviour to fit their beliefs. When the date arrived and there was no flood, some of the group members coped with it by saying that their prayers had saved the city. In this way, they created meaning from what had happened and there was balance in their cognitions. Other members simply left the cult. This indicated that they had changed their beliefs. The study confirmed the theory of cognitive dissonance.

A qualitative research study on relationships (Grigoriou 2004)

Grigoriou (2004) examined close friendships between gay men and heterosexual women. The participants were eight pairs of gay men and heterosexual women who were close friends. The sample consisted of British men and women. She used face-to-face semi-structured interviews to gather data. The interview schedule started with demographic questions, which were followed by questions regarding initiation, maintenance, and qualities of their friendships. Participants were then asked questions about the roles of their friends and families, as well as their feelings towards them. The schedule asked questions about the perception of others in their social network about their friendship. The participants who were single were asked to reflect on their previous partner's conception of this friendship. Finally, the participants were asked to compare friendships between gay men and heterosexual women with other forms of friendship they might have.

The transcripts were verbatim and were submitted to IPA analysis because this was considered to be the most appropriate way to gain an insight into the individual participant's own understanding of his or her friendship. The analytic strategy in this study followed the description outlined in the section on IPA in this chapter.

In terms of *reflexivity*, the researcher revealed that her interest in the topic came from being a heterosexual woman herself involved in a friendship with a gay man. She also considered whether she might have influenced the participants' accounts in that they were aware of her motivation to conduct the study—for example, the fact that the gay men described their female friends very positively.

The same could be the case for the heterosexual women, who *did not* report any negative feelings towards gay men or heterosexual women in any respect. The researcher reported that some gay men did report drawbacks and problems in relation to friendships with other gay men in a way that they probably would not have done if they had been interviewed by a gay man.

As for a credibility check, the researcher checked with other researchers to confirm that her analysis was grounded in the data.

Data analysis eventually revealed the following predominant themes and subthemes.

1 Defining the friendship between gay men and heterosexual women with the following subthemes:

- a *a close friendship, a different friendship, a complete friendship, a friendship for sad and happy times, a friendship free from pressure, a friendship that is defined with kinship terms.*

2 Friends as family

- a *subthemes for gay men*
 - i functions of family choice
 - a fun family
 - a supportive family
 - ii she is like a sister bud
 - iii friends or family as friends?
- b *subthemes for heterosexual women*
 - i different use of kinship terminology for gay men and heterosexual women.

3 Valued characteristics of the friendship between gay men and heterosexual women, with the following subthemes for both:

- a openness
- b trust
- c social support
- d having fun
- e *subtheme for gay men*
 - i feeling more rounded
- f *subthemes for heterosexual women*
 - i being valued for their personality and not their sexuality
 - ii gay male friends as substitutes for heterosexual men.

4 Comparing this friendship to other friendships, with the following subthemes:

- a gay men: compare this friendship with gay male friends and with heterosexual men.
- b heterosexual women: compare this friendship with heterosexual women and with heterosexual men.

5 Participants' understanding of their social network's perception of the friendship between them, with the following subthemes:

- a the family's perception of friends
- b partner's perception of the friendship

The report consists of the analysis supported by quotes from the transcripts (e.g. page 14).

Similarly, when male participants were asked to draw similarities between their friendships with heterosexual women and other forms of friendship they had, their reaction was often a quite strong assertion that their friendship with heterosexual women was a different sort of friendship. For example, when Mike was asked if his friendship with Lucy was similar to his friendships with other gay men, he replied:

"Erm, how is it similar? I think it is different because I would rather talk to Lucy and ask her advice on really very-very personal things that I wouldn't actually ask gay men for."

(Grigoriou 2004: 14)

In conclusion, the research found that the participants were satisfied with their friendships for a number of reasons. For women, the lack of an underlying sexual agenda contributed to positive self-esteem, because they were valued for their personality and not their sexuality. The men expressed disappointment and lack of trust with the gay community and said that they trusted their female friends because they could rely on them. This last conclusion is contrary to previous research on the issue, but the researcher says her sample was small and only represents the people in the sample.