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The following are examples of how attending therapy helped to facilitate meaningful changes in people's lives. Julie's experience of depression Read how Julie's low mood and lack of motivation meant that she risked losing her job and friends and how a focused course of treatment helped turn things around. Joe's experience of pain Read how Joe's panic attacks led him to avoid things that might trigger another one and how therapy helped him reduce his anxiety and get his life back on track. Gerry's experience of bipolar disorder Read how Gerry learned to recognise and manage signs and symptoms of relapse in bipolar disorder. Anna and Brian's experience of relationship difficulties Read how Couples Therapy helped Brian and Anna to build a happier future together. Full PDF PackageDownload Full PDF PackageThis PaperA short summary of this paper14 Full PDF's related to this paperDownloadPDF Pack By Dr. Saul McLeod, updated 2019What is a case study research method?Case studies are in-depth investigations of a single person, group, event or community. Typically, data are gathered from a variety of sources and by using several different methods (e.g. observations & interviews).The case study research method originated in clinical medicine (the case history, i.e. the patient's personal history). In psychology, case studies are often confined to the study of a particular individual.The information is mainly biographical and relates to events in the individual's past (i.e. retrospective), as well as to significant events which are currently occurring in his or her everyday life.The case study is not itself a research method, but researchers select methods of data collection and analysis that will generate material suitable for case studies.What is an example of a case study in psychology?Case studies are widely used in psychology and amongst the best known were the ones carried out by Sigmund Freud, including Anna O and Little Hans.Freud (1909a, 1909b) conducted very detailed investigations into the private lives of his patients in an attempt to both understand and help them overcome their illnesses. Even today case histories are one of the main methods of investigation in abnormal psychology and psychiatry.This makes it clear that the case study is a method that should only be used by a psychologist, therapist or psychiatrist, i.e. someone with a professional qualification.There is an ethical issue of competence. Only someone qualified to diagnose and treat a person can conduct a formal case study relating to atypical (i.e. abnormal) behavior or atypical development.How is a case study conducted?The procedure used in a case study means that the researcher provides a description of the behavior. This comes from interviews and other sources, such as observation.The client also reports detail of events from his or her point of view. The researcher then writes up the information from both sources above as the case study, and interprets the information.The research may also continue for an extended period of time, so processes and developments can be studied as they happen.Amongst the sources of data the psychologist is likely to turn to when carrying out a case study are observations of a person's daily routine, unstructured interviews with the participant herself (and with people who know her), diaries, personal notes (e.g. letters, photographs, notes) or official document (e.g. case notes, clinical notes, appraisal reports).The case study method often involves simply observing what happens to, or reconstructing 'the case history' of a single participant or group of individuals (such as a school class or a specific social group), i.e. the idiographic approach.The interview is also an extremely effective procedure for obtaining information about an individual, and it may be used to collect comments from the person's friends, parents, employer, workmates and others who have a good knowledge of the person, as well as to obtain facts from the person him or herself.Most of this information is likely to be qualitative (i.e. verbal description rather than measurement) but the psychologist might collect numerical data as well.How to analyze case study dataThe data collected can be analyzed using different theories (e.g. grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, text interpretation, e.g. thematic coding).All the approaches mentioned here use preconceived categories in the analysis and they are ideographic in their approach, i.e. they focus on the individual case without reference to a comparison group.Interpreting the information means the researcher decides what to include or leave out. A good case study should always make clear which information is the factual description and which is an inference or the opinion of the researcher.Strengths of Case StudiesProvides detailed (rich qualitative) information.Provides insight for further research.Permitting investigation of otherwise impractical (or unethical) situations.Case studies allow a researcher to investigate a topic in far more detail than might be possible if they were trying to deal with a large number of research participants (nomothetic approach) with the aim of 'averaging'.Because of their in-depth, multi-sided approach case studies often shed light on aspects of human thinking and behavior that would be unethical or impractical to study in other ways.Research which only looks into the measurable aspects of human behavior is not likely to give us insights into the subjective dimension to experience which is so important to psychoanalytic and humanistic psychologists.Case studies are often used in exploratory research. They can help us generate new ideas (that might be tested by other methods). They are an important way of illustrating theories and can help show how different aspects of a person's life are related to each other.The method is therefore important for psychologists who adopt a holistic point of view (i.e. humanistic psychologists).Limitations of Case StudiesLacking scientific rigour and providing little basis for generalization of results to the wider population.Researchers' own subjective feeling may influence the case study (researcher bias).Difficult to replicate.Time-consuming and expensive.The volume of data, together with the time restrictions in place, impacted on the depth of analysis that was possible within the available resources.Because a case study deals with only one person/event/group we can never be sure if the case study investigated is representative of the wider body of "similar" instances. This means the conclusions drawn from a particular case may not be transferable to other settings.Because case studies are based on the analysis of qualitative (i.e. descriptive) data a lot depends on the interpretation the psychologist places on the information she has acquired. This means that there is a lot of scope for observer bias and it could be that the subjective opinions of the psychologist intrude in the assessment of what the data means.For example, Freud has been criticized for producing case studies in which the information was sometimes distorted to fit the particular theories about behavior (e.g. Little Hans).This is also true of Money's interpretation of the Bruce/Brenda case study (Diamond, 1997) when he ignored evidence that went against his theory. Download this article as a PDFHow to reference this article:McLeod, S. A. (2019, August 03). Case study method. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/case-study.htmlAPA Style ReferencesDiamond, M., & Sigmondson, K. (1997). Sex Reassignment at Birth: Long-term Review and Clinical Implications. Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine, 151(3), 298-304.Freud, S. (1909a). Analysis of a phobia of a five year old boy. In The Pelican Freud Library (1977). Vol 6, Case Histories 1, pages 169-306.Freud, S. (1909b). Bemerkungen über einen Fall von Zwangsneurose (Der "Rattenmann"). Jb. psychoanal. psychopathol. Forsch., 1, p. 357-421; GW, VII, p. 379-463. Notes upon a case of obsessional neurosis. SE, 10, 151-318. Download this article as a PDFHow to reference this article:McLeod, S. A. (2019, August 03). Case study method. Simply Psychology. www.simplypsychology.org/case-study.htmlHome | About Us | Privacy Policy | Advertise | Contact USSimply Psychology's content is for informational and educational purposes only. Our website is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. © Simply Scholar Ltd. All rights reserved A case study is an in-depth study of one person, group, or event. In a case study, nearly every aspect of the subject's life and history is analyzed to seek patterns and causes of behavior. Case studies can be used in various fields, including psychology, medicine, education, anthropology, political science, and social work. The purpose of a case study is to learn as much as possible about an individual or group so that the information can be generalized to many others. Unfortunately, case studies tend to be highly subjective, and it is sometimes difficult to generalize results to a larger population. While case studies focus on a single individual or group, they follow a format similar to other types of psychology writing. If you are writing a case study, it is important to follow the rules of APA format. A case study can have both strengths and weaknesses. Researchers must consider these pros and cons before deciding if this type of study is appropriate for their needs. One of the greatest advantages of a case study is that it allows researchers to investigate things that are often difficult to impossible to replicate in a lab. Some other benefits of a case study: Allows researchers to collect a great deal of informationGives researchers the chance to collect information on rare or unusual casesPermits researchers to develop hypotheses that can be explored in experimental research On the negative side, a case study: Cannot necessarily be generalized to the larger populationCannot demonstrate cause and effectMay not be scientifically rigorousCan lead to bias Researchers may choose to perform a case study if they are interested in exploring a unique or recently discovered phenomenon. The insights gained from such research can help the researchers develop additional ideas and study questions that might be explored in future studies. However, it is important to remember that the insights gained from case studies cannot be used to determine cause and effect relationships between variables. However, case studies may be used to develop hypotheses that can then be addressed in experimental research. There have been a number of notable case studies in the history of psychology. Much of Freud's work and theories were developed through the use of individual case studies. Some great examples of case studies in psychology include: Anna O: Anna O. was a pseudonym of a woman named Bertha Pappenheim, a patient of a physician named Josef Breuer. While she was never a patient of Freud's, Freud and Breuer discussed her case extensively. The woman was experiencing symptoms of a condition that was then known as hysteria and found that talking about her problems helped relieve her symptoms. Her case played an important part in the development of talk therapy as an approach to mental health treatment. Phineas Gage: Phineas Gage was a railroad employee who experienced a terrible accident in which an explosion sent a metal rod through his skull, damaging important portions of his brain. Gage recovered from his accident but was left with serious changes in both personality and behavior. Genie: Genie was a young girl subjected to horrific abuse and isolation. The case study of Genie allowed researchers to study whether language could be taught even after critical periods for language development had been missed. Her case also served as an example of how scientific research may interfere with treatment and lead to further abuse of vulnerable individuals. Such cases demonstrate how case research can be used to study things that researchers could not replicate in experimental settings. In Genie's case, her horrific abuse had denied her the opportunity to learn language at critical points in her development. This is clearly not something that researchers could ethically replicate, but conducting a case study on Genie allowed researchers the chance to study phenomena that are otherwise impossible to reproduce. There are a few different types of case studies that psychologists and other researchers might utilize: Collective case studies: These involve studying a group of individuals. Researchers might study a group of people in a certain setting or look at an entire community. For example, psychologists might explore how access to resources in a community has affected the collective mental well-being of those living there. Descriptive case studies: These involve starting with a descriptive theory. The subjects are then observed, and the information gathered is compared to the pre-existing theory. Explanatory case studies: These are often used to do causal investigations. In other words, researchers are interested in looking at factors that may have caused certain things to occur. Exploratory case studies: These are sometimes used as a prelude to further, more in-depth research. This allows researchers to gather more information before developing their research questions and hypotheses. Instrumental case studies: These occur when the individual or group allows researchers to understand more than what is initially obvious to observers. Intrinsic case studies: This type of case study is when the researcher has a personal interest in the case. Jean Piaget's observations of his own children are good examples of how an intrinsic case study can contribute to the development of a psychological theory. The three main case study types often used are intrinsic, instrumental, and collective. Intrinsic case studies are useful for learning about unique cases. Instrumental case studies help look at an individual to learn more about a broader issue. A collective case study can be useful for looking at several cases simultaneously. The type of case study that psychology researchers utilize depends on the unique characteristics of the situation as well as the case itself. There are also different methods that can be used to conduct a case study, including prospective and retrospective case study methods. Prospective case study methods are those in which an individual or group of people is observed in order to determine outcomes. For example, a group of individuals might be watched over an extended period of time to observe the progression of a particular disease. Retrospective case study methods involve looking at historical information. For example, researchers might start with an outcome, such as a disease, and then work their way backward to look at information about the individual's life to determine risk factors that may have contributed to the onset of the illness. There are a number of different sources and methods that researchers can use to gather information about an individual or group. Six major sources that have been identified by researchers are: Archival records: Census records, survey records, and name lists are examples of archival records. Direct observation: This strategy involves observing the subject, often in a natural setting. While an individual observer is sometimes used, it is more common to utilize a group of observers. Documents: Letters, newspaper articles, administrative records, etc., are the types of documents often used as sources. Interviews: Interviews are one of the most important methods for gathering information in case studies. An interview can involve structured survey questions or more open-ended questions. Participant observation: When the researcher serves as a participant in events and observes the actions and outcomes, it is called participant observation. Physical artifacts: Tools, objects, instruments, and other artifacts are often observed during a direct observation of the subject. This section will have the following structure and content: Background information: The first section of your paper will present your client's background. Include factors such as age, gender, work, health status, family mental health history, family and social relationships, drug and alcohol history, life difficulties, goals, and coping skills and weaknesses. Description of the presenting problem: In the next section of your case study, you will describe the problem or symptoms that the client presented with. Describe any physical, emotional, or sensory symptoms reported by the client. Thoughts, feelings, and perceptions related to the symptoms should also be noted. Any screening or diagnostic assessments that are used should also be described in detail and all scores reported. Your diagnosis: Provide your diagnosis and give the appropriate Diagnostic and Statistical Manual code. Explain how you reached your diagnosis, how the client's symptoms fit the diagnostic criteria for the disorder(s), or any possible difficulties in reaching a diagnosis. This portion of the paper will address the chosen treatment for the condition. This might also include the theoretical basis for the chosen treatment or any other evidence that might exist to support why this approach was chosen. Cognitive behavioral approach: Explain how a cognitive behavioral therapist would approach treatment. Offer background information on cognitive behavioral therapy and describe the treatment sessions, client response, and outcome of this type of treatment. Make note of any difficulties or successes encountered by your client during treatment. Humanistic approach: Describe a humanistic approach that could be used to treat your client, such as client-centered therapy. Provide information on the type of treatment you chose, the client's reaction to the treatment, and the end result of this approach. Explain why the treatment was successful or unsuccessful. Psychoanalytic approach: Describe how a psychoanalytic therapist would view the client's problem. Provide some background on the psychoanalytic approach and cite relevant references. Explain how psychoanalytic therapy would be used to treat the client, how the client would respond to therapy, and the effectiveness of this treatment approach. Pharmacological approach: If treatment primarily involves the use of medications, explain which medications were used and why. Provide background on the effectiveness of these medications and how monotherapy may compare with an approach that combines medications with therapy or other treatments. This section of a case study should also include information about the treatment goals, process, and outcomes. When you are writing a case study, you should also include a section where you discuss the case study itself, including the strengths and limitations of the study. You should note how the findings of your case study might support previous research. In your discussion section, you should also describe some of the implications of your case study. What ideas or findings might require further exploration? How might researchers go about exploring some of these questions in additional studies? Here are a few additional pointers to keep in mind when formatting your case study: Never refer to the subject of your case study as "the client." Instead, their name or a pseudonym. Read examples of case studies to gain an idea about the style and format. Remember to use APA format when citing references. Case studies can be a useful research tool, but they need to be used wisely. In many cases, they are best utilized in situations where conducting an experiment would be difficult or impossible. They are helpful for looking at unique situations and allow researchers to gather a great deal of information about a specific individual or group of people. If you have been directed to write a case study for a psychology course, be sure to check with your instructor for any specific guidelines that you are required to follow. If you are writing your case study for professional publication, be sure to check with the publisher for their specific guidelines for submitting a case study.

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