

The Single Case Study Approach as a Bridge between Clinicians and Researchers

Horst Kächele

Department Psychotherapy and Psychosomatic Medicine,
University of Ulm

Center for Psychotherapy Research Stuttgart

*Charles Fisher Memorial Lecture am
Psychoanalytic Institute New York Nov 2002*

The Discovery of a Narrative Science

“the talking cure”

"Studies on Hysteria" (1895)

“case histories should read like short stories and that they lack the serious stamp of science“ (p.160)

The Value of Archived Clinical Notes

Ratman (Freud 1909)
and E. Zetzel's "Additional
notes" from 1966

Psa as a Narrative Science

Psychoanalysis became a
narrative science using
narration aspiring to
narrative truth

(Forrester 1980; Spence 1982).

An Oral Tradition Combined with Loosely Written Case Studies

- instead of a systematic effort
to adequately sample cases
which could then lead to a
representative corpus of
studies

"Analysts of established prestige and seniority produce papers advancing a new theoretical or clinical viewpoint or discovery. If others corroborate they tend to report that; but if others feel reason to reject it, this scientific 'negative' does not get reported. So ultimately it is canonized as 'so-and-so has shown it'"

Glover (1952)

Wallerstein & Sampson's Classic Paper

1

"The whole corpus of psychoanalysis . . . comprehending the phenomena of both normal and abnormal personality development and functioning, attests brilliantly to the explanatory power of the theory derived from data of the consulting room," (1971, p.11).

Wallerstein & Sampson's Classic Paper

2

"but we need at least to be equally cognizant of the limitations of the case study method as a source of prospective continuing knowledge." (p. 12).

Oral History Research

The brothers Grimm, the two professors from Göttingen, systematically started out to collect orally transmitted fairy tales. They started a well developed field of fairy tale research with highly sophisticated methods to analyze the available large collections from all over the world.

(Propp 1928/1958).

Conclusion 1

There is nothing wrong with clinical notes, as long as they are available for public scrutiny - this constitutes the essence of any scientific enterprise.

Extensive Treatment Reports

"Up to 1980 I found only 36 publications at least 20 pages in length in the psychoanalytic literature after Freud"

(Kächele, 1981).

Examples

Meltzer (1978) spelling out "The Kleinian development" re-analyzed M. Klein (1961) "narrative of a child analysis" week-by-week.

Treatment reports as comprehensive as Dewald's (1972) voluminous 600 page long description - based on careful in-session notes - demonstrate the research value of clinical carefully reported single cases

The Battle for Tape Recording

Paul Bergman's "experiment in filmed psychotherapy" at the National Institute of Mental Health instigated by David Shakow (1966)

By now it has been accepted that some analysts feel comfortable with tape recording the analytic sessions and that we do not have strong evidence of detrimental aspects.

Luborsky & Spence's Complaint about the Paucity of Primary Data

- data accumulated during actual analytic sessions.

"Ideally, two conditions should be met: the case should be clearly defined as analytic ... and the data should be recorded, transcribed, and indexed so as to maximize accessibility and visibility" (1971, p.426).

Computer Storage Devices

The times started changing

Not only far/sighted historians,
sociologists and others

But also Hartvig Dahl from Downstate
a rare example in the psychoanalytic
species (see Dahl 1974)

(for more details go to J. Malcolm “The Impossible Profession”)

Ulm Textbank starting 1981

A computer based archive with
built- in tools for retrieval and
text analysis

By now more than 7 mill words
(Mergenthaler & Kächele 1988).

More Archives

The Psychoanalytic Research Consortium
(Waldron 1989)

**The Penn Psychoanalytic Treatment
Collection: A set of complete and recorded
psychoanalyses as a research resource**
(Luborsky et al. 2001).

From soft to hard methods

literary criticism

ethnomethodology

conversational & discourse analysis

qualitative versus quantitative methods

content analysis

manual based coding of clinical concepts

computer assisted text analysis

Single Case Research

Single case research
repeatedly has been called the
most suitable approach for
evaluating psychoanalytic
treatments

(Wallerstein & Sampson 1971; Edelson 1988;
Hilliard 1993)

The need for Specimen Cases or is $N = 1$ enough?

"Information gained from an experiment mounts more or less in proportion to factorial n where n is the number of uncorrelated response variables. By this estimate five tests can report 120 times as much knowledge as a single test in the same investigation! . . . Efforts to refine measurement has the same beneficial effect on the power of an investigation as adding to the number of cases"

(Edwards & Cronbach 1952)

Individual Case Studies

"The observation of variability across time within a single case combines a clinical interest to respond appropriately to changes within the patient and a research interest to find support for a causal relationship between intervention and changes in variables of theoretical interest." Fonagy & Moran (1993).

6 Requirements for Empirical Case Studies

- 1) There is a clear statement of the hypothesis
- 2) The phenomena are made intersubjectively accessible
- 3) Negative instances of the generalization are clearly specified
- 4) Evidence that the hypothesis has not contaminated the data
- 5) Formulations alternative to the hypothesis are offered
- 6) The range of individuals and situations to which the hypothesis applies is made explicit

Edelson (1986)

Positive Features of Case Studies

A case study may **cast doubt on a general theory**

A case study may provide a valuable **heuristic to subsequent and better controlled research**

A case study may permit the **investigation**, although poorly controlled, **of rare but important phenomena**

A case study can provide an opportunity to **apply new principles and notions in entirely new ways**

A case study, under circumstances, can **provide enough experimenter control** over an phenomenon to furnish "scientifically acceptable" information.

A case study can assist in **placing "meat" on the "theoretical skeleton"**

Examples of Qualitative Case Studies

The Wallerstein (1986) final report on the 42 case studies from the Menninger Treatment Project approaches such stringent qualitative features.

Another example is the Hampstead Child Psychoanalytic Index containing the complete analytic treatment records of over 140 cases (Sandler et al. 1962; Sandler et al. 1980).

Quantitative Case Studies

- a) Replication by Segmentation
- b) Time-Series Analysis

a) Replication by Segmentation

- The work of the Mount Zion Group (Weiss & Sampson 1986) or of Luborsky on the Symptom-Context Method (1996) are good illustrations of the experimental use of textual material.

b) Time-Series Analysis

- If one wants to study phenomena that are contingent of their position during treatment - as the process features of long-term psychoanalytic treatments extending over several hundreds of sessions are - one has to use time-series analysis.

Convincing Examples

A very convincing example of the use of time series have been provided by Moran & Fonagy (1987) in their study on "psychoanalysis and brittle diabetes" and by Graff & Luborsky (1977) in their study on the relationship of transference and resistance.

The Ulm Models of Single Case Research

- I Clinical case study
- II Systematic clinical description
- III Guided clinical judgment procedure
- IV Linguistic and computer-assisted text analysis

(Kächele, Thomä & Schaumburg, 1975)

I - Clinical Case Study

In the second volume of our textbook on psychoanalytic therapy (Thomä & Kaechele 1992) the patient Amalie X is discussed in five chapters.

II - Systematic Clinical Description

- Based on a systematic time sample of the analysis (sessions 1-5, 26-30, 51-55 until the end of the analysis 513-517) two medical students under supervision have extracted systematic descriptions of important contents of the treatment. This report spells out for each block of five sessions the following topics: external circumstances, symptomatology, state of transference and countertransference, family relations, non-familiar relations, dreams, etc.

Systematic Description of Amalia X's Transference Themes part 1

01-05: The analysis as confession

26-30: The analysis as an examination

51-55: The bad, cold mother

76-80: Submission and secret defiance

101-105: Searching her own rule

116-120: The disappointing father and the helpless daughter

151-155: The cold father and her desire for identification

176-180: Ambivalence in the father relationship

201-205: The father as seducer or judge of moral standards

Systematic Description of Amalia

X's transference themes part 2

226-230: Does he love me - or not ?

251-255: Even my father cannot change me into a boy

276-280: The Cinderella feeling

301-305: The poor girl and the rich king-

326-330: If you reject me I'll reject you

351-355: The powerless love to the mighty father and
jealousy

376-380: Separation for not being deserted

Systematic description of Amalia X's Transference Themes part 3

- 401-405: Discovery of her capacity to criticize
- 426-430: I'm only second to my mother, first born are preferred
- 451-455: Hate for the giving therapist
- 476-480: The art of loving consists in tolerating love and hate
- 501-505: Be first in saying good-by
- 513-517: Departure-Symphony

III - Guided Clinical Judgment Procedure

- Emotional insight (*Hohage 1988*)
- Change of self-esteem (*Neudart et al. 1987*)
- Types of suffering (*Neudert & Hohage 1988*)
- Reaction to tape-recording (*Kächele et al. 1988*)
- Changes of dreams (*Kächele et al. 1997; Leuzinger-Bohleber*
 - *1989; Leuzinger-Bohleber & Kächele 1990*)
- Reaction to breaks (*Jimenez 1992, 2001*)
- Transference - Structural aspects (CCRT) (*Albani et al. 2001*)
- Allusions to the transference (PERT) (*Gill & Hofman 1985*)

IV - Discourse Analysis

- Everyday discourse and psychoanalytic discourse (*Koerfer & Neumann 1982*)
- Action language (*Beermann 1983*)
- Metaphors (*Kasanskaja & Kächele 2002*)

Computer-Assisted Text Analysis

- Verbal activity level (*Kächele 1993*)
- The analyst's vocabulary (*Kächele et al. 1999*)
- Latent meaning structures (*Mergenthaler & Kächele*)
- Emotional vocabulary (*Hölzer et al. 2002*)
- Therapeutic cycles (*Mergenthaler & Kalmykova 1997*)
- Personal pronouns (*Schaumburg 1980*)
- Body concept (*Schors et al. 1982*)

Conclusions

Research findings have to be replicated in order to prove their value. The core idea of having a specimen case allows not only testing hypotheses for single case, but allows testing the fruitfulness of methods.

e-mail:

kaechele@sip.medizin.uni-ulm.de

home page

<http://sip.medizin.uni-ulm.de>

<http://psyres-stuttgart.de>