



THE CASE STUDY AS USED IN THE PSYCHODYNAMIC APPROACH

The case study research method used by Freud

Psychodynamic Approach

Freud, the founding father of the Psychodynamic Approach to psychology, only ever used case studies. It is important to understand that he did not use his case studies to obtain research, but was actually trying to help the individuals being studied, who all suffered from **neurosis**. Freud believed the cure to someone's neurosis was in unlocking the unconscious, and only after accessing that area of the brain could any change be made. Note that Freud did not work with sufferers of **psychosis**.

Freud and others believed that the unconscious mind is inaccessible, so he could not use direct questions about it to the patients. Instead, he had to use special ways of reaching this part of the mind. He developed ways of tricking his patients into revealing their unconscious thoughts.

He used a variety of different research methods within each of his case studies, but none of them used the same research methods as other case studies:

● **Dream analysis**

Freud would use **dream analysis** by listening to the content of the **analysand's** dreams and apply the ideas and concepts from the approach to try and interpret and explain them. The content which is described by the dreamer (i.e. what the dream actually physically entailed) is known as the **manifest content**, and the underlying meaning which Freud would look to decipher is known as the **latent content**. Something called **symbol analysis** is also carried out when trying to access the unconscious through dream analysis, as the manifest content is symbolic of the latent content.

Analysand -
the person being analysed
in the case study

● **Free association**

Another research method Freud would use was **free association**. This is the idea of associating ideas, things and feelings by saying whatever is in the mind, without censoring your thoughts. As one thing follows another, the analyst listens to find connections which can reveal unconscious thoughts.

● **Slips of the tongue**

Also, Freud would look for **slips of the tongue** (which are often known as **Freudian slips**). This occurs when somebody says one thing but they meant to say another, such as saying "erection" rather than "rejection", or saying "orgasm" instead of "organism". Freud believed that the mistake, or slip, being made revealed repressed unconscious thoughts. They do not necessarily have to be sexual, it could be so much as calling someone by someone else's name, but Freud was focusing on underlying sexual meanings.

Freud's therapy process was called **psychoanalysis**. He had the central purpose of curing his patients of their illnesses, but he would gather data alongside to his therapies in order to improve and amend his theories.

Similarities between Freudian case studies with case studies from other approaches...

There is a strong focus on obtaining qualitative data, and all of the data is in-depth and rich about one person

Differences between Freudian case studies with case studies from other approaches...

There were different research methods found within the case studies, and he was using therapy to try and cure his patients as well as using them as analysands to help strengthen his theories

Evaluation of Freud's case studies as a research method

One strength is that the data are in-depth, detailed and rich with information. Also, his case studies use different methods to uncover unconscious wishes which are impossible to access by conventional means. Thirdly, his case studies act both as a therapy which allows the analysand to be cured, and a research method to help Freud amend his psychosexual theories.

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However, the analysis involved in his case studies is personal interpretation, so very subjective and is not scientific. They cannot be replicated to test for reliability, either, because it focuses on the unique individual, and their unique unconscious desires, and the analysis is carried out by one single therapist.

THE CREDIBILITY OF FREUD'S THEORY

Freud used these case studies, such as that of *Little Hans* (see 3.4 Freud's Case Study of Little Hans (1909)) to help improve and amend his theories. Freud's theory came together as the **psychosexual theory** (which is covered in vast detail in Unit 3) and as you will discover simply from reading Freud's ideas, they seem a little hard to believe.

The biggest criticism of Freud's theory is its **credibility** (how believable the findings of research are). Obviously most case studies have an element of doubt towards their credibility because the findings depend on the analyst's interpretation, but Freud's theory is particularly considered to be questionable and controversial.

As a therapist and analyst, Freud had many patients of whom he thought originally he was hearing stories of child abuse from. But according to **Masson** (1984), he later dismissed the idea that his patients had suffered child abuse and came up with the *Oedipus complex* (see 3.3 Psychosexual Development) to help explain their stories. Freud said that child abuse could not have been so widespread that so many of his patients had suffered it, and so thought that his idea of the *Oedipus complex* was a better explanation. However, Masson claims that the stories of abuse were real, and therefore Freud's alternative explanation (in this case, the *Oedipus complex* part of the theory) is not credible.

Masson further criticised Freud's work and thought that there were three flaws:

- Firstly, the power of the analyst interpreting the patient's thoughts and dreams could lead the patient to accept their interpretation, whether they really agreed with it or not
- Secondly, his theory shows gender bias, because Freud focused mainly on young boys with regards to his theory, saying that boys identify with their fathers more than girls identify with their mothers, so girls have less of a moral code, and so Masson said that Freud's theory had **alpha bias**
- Thirdly, his theory was overindulged with sexual matters, which was a sensitive issue for the patients (you will notice from Freud's theory that he interprets most things to have an underlying sexual meaning, which in itself can often prove not credible)

Gender bias

If a theory emphasises one gender over another, this is known as **alpha bias**. Freud's theory shows alpha bias, because it is more centrally-focused on boys, and Freud did not go into much detail about the psychosexual development of girls. Alpha bias is usually against females, and there is a feminist argument that Freud's theories were biased against women. If a theory does not emphasise gender differences at all, this is called **beta bias**