WELCOME to another special edition of *Counselling Psychology Review*. Since becoming Editor I have been keen to produce special editions around the different types of papers that the publication wishes to attract. Within this edition it is, therefore, the time for systematic case studies to stand up and be counted. For those of you who might be interested, this leaves a future special edition which will focus upon systematic reviews, an edition that will hopefully be scheduled for 2013. Do feel free to contact me if you feel you may have something to contribute to this edition.

So let’s begin this edition by considering five challenges to the case study in the world of therapy. Before, upsetting the apple cart and inciting numerous angered emails, I feel I should start with a health warning to the content below. In the five points below I am purposefully playful in the content presented and hope that it provokes some thoughtful consideration of the case study as a tool for developing counselling psychology practice.

**Challenge 1: A history of poor methodological designs**

Case studies have their place in history within counselling and psychotherapy. It would be difficult to avoid the writings of Freud which, at least in part, can be viewed as the bedrock of the development of therapy as a profession. Unfortunately, as many will now be aware, much of this thinking is now discredited, with Hans Eysenck famously proclaiming that Freud was,

‘a genius, not of science, but of propaganda, not of rigorous proof, but of persuasion, not of the design of experiments, but of literary art. His place is not, as he claimed with Copernicus and Darwin, but with Hans Christian Anderson and the Brothers Grimm, tellers of fairy tales’ (1985, p.208).

Such creative license has been central to many of the case studies that have come since and, potentially, one could assert that many of the case studies that trainees on therapeutic training courses presently complete follow suit and are of little scientific merit. Maybe take a moment and reflect upon your own training process and consider how much effort you put into the design of the case studies you completed.

**Challenge 2: They are ethically dubious**

Before moving on from the idea that case studies are commonly poorly designed, let’s also consider the ethical decision making behind them. We may easily argue for the importance of creativity in our work, but surely this should not come at a price for acting in an ethically insensitive manner. Once again, in the history of case studies (and no doubt present day case studies) we see examples of ‘interesting’ cases being reported without explicit care and attention to the person who is at the centre of the piece. Surely if case studies are to be reported as research (or practice review) then they need to be subject to the same ethical scrutiny as any other research project. With this in mind, issues of informed consent, confidentiality and the right to withdraw should be appropriately adhered to, and the design of the work should be reviewed by an independent ethics committee (see, for example, the British Psychological Society statement about research with human participants (BPS, 2009)).
Challenge 3: No one uses them anyway
The third argument against case studies I would raise is that nobody really uses them anyhow. I was at a workshop delivered by Professor John McLeod (author of *Systematic Case Studies in Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 2010) some years ago and he asked us to note down three case studies which had influenced our practice. Maybe you can also try a similar activity now. Surprisingly, given the place that case studies have in the history and training of therapists, this proved a pretty difficult challenge to the group in question. In response, many reported their own case work, others mentioned seminal work such as the writing of Yalom or the videos of ‘famous’ therapists in action (e.g. Rogers, Perls & Ellis working with Gloria), but many struggled to think of a published piece of work that really resonated and influenced their practice. Maybe in sticking with the case study as a common part of our counselling psychology curriculum we are barking up the wrong tree and they are not really the best use of our time and energy.

Challenge 4: They primarily consist of qualitative data
Authors of case studies often perpetuate their limited use by focusing so much on qualitative storylines. Although this type of data provides a rich picture of the case in question, it is open to much narrative smoothing and could be viewed as being of limited use when generalising to broader populations. Accompanying this type of report with quantitative data would at least enable the reader to compare this to other cases, and, if the data sets are strong enough, other authors could synthesise this data into a larger study.

Challenge 5: Surely they are too small
In getting to the crux of the problem, maybe case studies are just too small to be useful.

A counterpoint
The above points are provided to reflect some of the common challenges that are posed at case study research. Hopefully you will see that there is an element of tongue in cheek when presenting them, and I would hope that an audience of primarily counselling psychologists would be able to provide robust counter arguments to many of the points posed (if you are struggling, however, then the work of Fishman [1999] and McLeod [2010] provide very useful introductions for psychologists/therapists and Yin [2009] provides an excellent generic introduction to such methods). There is, however, no smoke without fire and, as indicated in the points raised, there are lots of poorly constructed case study designs being utilised in therapy training. Fundamentally these designs are often unsystematic, have limited ethical mindfulness, and the rationale behind them has not been considered in any real depth, elements that could be viewed as fundamental to good research design. The papers that follow provide a more positive side to case studies, and with that thought in mind we move to discuss the contents of this edition.

An overview of this edition
This edition can be divided up into three major parts. Firstly we have two systematic case studies which reflect upon work with clients within practice settings. Secondly, we then have two systematic case studies which reflect work completed whilst training to be a counselling psychologist. Finally, we move into our ‘Dialogues and Debates’ section. In relation to the latter, Denis O’Hara, one of our new Associate Editors for *Counselling Psychology Review*, introduces this content so I will say no more about this for now.

The first two papers present systematic case studies using two distinct approaches. The first comes from Rachel MacLeod and Robert Elliott and provides an example of a Hermeneutic Single-Case Efficacy Design in action (see Elliott, 2002, for a description of this approach). This is a mixed methods approach that has been gathering momen-
tum over recent years and provides rich data
to both measure and explain the efficacy of
therapeutic work. In particular this paper
reflects upon the use of emotion focused
therapy for an individual presenting with
social anxiety. In the second paper, Matt
Shorrock provides an example of a prag-
matic case study (see Fishman, 1999, for a
description of this approach). The prag-
matic case study approach utilises a prescrip-
tive structure to case presentations and
Shorrock uses this structure to harness his
reflections about his work with Ed, a man
who struggled with internet addiction. Both
these papers provide rich overviews of thera-
peutic work with clients but also provide
thought-provoking examples of different
systematic approaches to case studies. I hope
the methodological reflections interest you
as much as the discussions about client work.

Next up come two papers reflecting upon
the training process. Both of these use inno-
vative methods to answer questions about
therapeutic work that the authors have
encountered within their practice. The first
of these papers comes from Nadim Siddiqui
and examines his practice as he makes a
transition from being a self defined second
wave cognitive behavioural practitioner to a
third wave practitioner. In doing so Siddiqui
provides a systematic engagement with a
transcript of his own practice using Eugene
Gendlin’s technique of focusing (e.g.
Gendlin, 2003) – a method that leads to the
description of the ‘urgh moment’ which I’m
sure many will feel some resonance with
when they listen/watch their own practice.
The final case study then comes from Jasmina Frzina and enters the territory of
relational depth. Here Frzina provides a
mixed methods reflection upon the depth of
relating in a single skills training session.
Unlike Siddiqui’s personal systematic reflec-
tions, this study includes the voices of both
the therapist and client as they work
together during a training activity. Once
again, these two papers provide thought
provoking takes on developing therapeutic
practice and methodological choice.

Summing up
Case studies have the potential to be unnec-
essary voyeuristic works of fiction. They also
have the potential to enlighten and inform by
providing an in depth examination of
phenomena of interest. Although I present a
number of challenges to the use of case
studies at the outset of this chapter, I feel
many of these are directly challenged by the
papers that are presented in this special
edition. In order, these can be countered as
follows.

Challenge 1: A history of poor methodological
designs
It is true that we cannot change history but the
present day case studies are a far leap from the
origins of such work. In this instance, the
papers presented here reflect methodological
innovation and have been well thought out to
meet the needs of the tasks at hand.

Challenge 2: They are ethically dubious
Each of the papers presented has thought-
fully engaged with ethical considerations
related to the projects. All have also been
reviewed by appropriate ethics committees.

Challenge 3: No-one uses them anyway
Evidencing the usefulness is always going to
be difficult. I would, however, reflect upon
two possibilities in which this may be evident.
Firstly, the rich stories within case studies
potentially provide a real opportunity to
develop a more fitting and meaningful
evidence base for the work that therapists
undertake. Such ‘evidence’ begins to
capture some of the complexities in the work
that is entered into and, therefore, provides
an alternative to other mono-dimensional
approaches to evidence-based practice that
pay little attention to the vast variety of
dynamics that may influence outcome in
psychological therapies. Secondly, as is very
evident in the third and forth case studies,
the reflexive nature of the case study impacts
upon the authors themselves. Here the
focused reflection has thus led to develop-
ments within their own practice and hope-
fully sharing these discoveries will prove of use to others.

Challenge 4: They primarily consist of qualitative data
This is a much easier point to challenge. Three out of the four case studies presented here incorporate a quantitative element. Furthermore, where qualitative methods have been solely used, these have been thoughtfully applied and pay attention to good practice guidelines for this type of research.

Challenge 5: Surely they are too small
As with other editions of Counselling Psychology Review I feel that it’s nice to leave some of the work to you. Thus with that in mind, I will leave you to be the judge of this challenge.

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