

A Promising Strategy for Critically Evaluating Case Studies: Introduction to an Issue on the Adjudicated Case Study Method

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ABSTRACT

This introduction is designed to orient the reader to the 11 articles that comprise this issue of *PCSP*. The theme of the articles is an exploration of the adjudicated case study method. The rationale for this approach is first outlined below. This is followed by a brief description of the three different types of adjudicated case study methods presented and illustrated by specific case studies in this issue. These include: Ronald B. Miller's "Panels of Psychological Inquiry" model; Arthur C. Bohart's "Research Jury Method"; and Robert Elliott's "Hermeneutic Single Case Design" model. This article series ends with a commentary by Susan Stephen and Robert Elliott on issues that cross cut the three models, with the implications of these issues for improving the overall adjudication method.

Key words: adjudicated case study method; Panel of Psychological Inquiry; Research Jury Method; Hermeneutic Single Case Efficacy Design (HSCED); psychotherapy research; evidence; burden of proof; cross-examination; case studies; clinical case studies

This *PCSP* journal has promoted the development and publication of systematic, single case studies of psychotherapy typically written by the therapist him- or herself. In this design, there is a need for a critical evaluation of the therapist's selection, interpretation, and narrative integration of the "raw data" interactions between the therapist and client, as represented, for example, by videotapes of all the therapy sessions (Messer, 2007; McLeod, 2010). This critical evaluation includes the therapist's own critical perspective, frequently facilitated by clinical case supervision, which should be clear in the case narrative. In addition, there should be provided perspectives that are independent of the therapist's interpretations. Typically, in past *PCSP* case studies, these independent perspectives include: (a) extensive quotes from therapy transcripts; (b) standardized, quantitative process and outcome data; (c) standardized qualitative measures, such as Llewelns's (1988) "Helpful Aspects of Therapy" (HAT) form; and (d) critical discussions of the final case study by outside commentators that are published simultaneously with the case study.

The current issue of the *PCSP* journal presents an additional method to critically evaluate the knowledge claims in a target case study via informed, independent perspectives. This method, whose concepts and procedures are drawn from the legal system, has been called the

"quasi-judicial method" (Bromley, 1986) and the "adjudicated case study method" (Stephen & Elliott, 2011). These concepts and procedures include an adversarial model of truth with (a) its systematic use of advocates (such as prosecutors) and critics (such as defense lawyers); (b) its use of the cross-examination of relevant actors and witnesses; and (c) its use of panels of jurors or judges, who come to a final decision on the truth of knowledge claims, taking into account the views of the advocates, critics, and witnesses.

In the present issue, two models of adjudicated case studies are fully presented. First Ronald Miller presents a case example of his "Panels of Psychological Inquiry" model (Miller, 2004, 2011), which parallels the process of a court hearing in detail. Specifically, the case of "Anna," a client seen and written up by Tracy Podetz (2008, 2011a), one of Miller's graduate students, is evaluated on a number of truth claims by a day-long trial. Anna, an 18-year-old, first-year college student, presented with "a six year history of anxiety, panic, depression, and persistent self-cutting" (Podetz, 2011a, p. 37). Podetz's case study is based on 25 sessions of therapy in which she employed what she describes as a humanistic and psychodynamically informed theoretical orientation. The five judges in the judicial trial were asked to evaluate the truth value of five knowledge claims about "the severity of psychopathology; relationship of the symptom to defenses; therapeutic orientation; outcome; and role of counter-transference in the case" (Miller, 2011, p. 6). In creating the structure for the trial, Miller (2011, p. 6) includes seven elements:

- (1) standards of evidence for anecdotal data; (2) participants (judges, advocate, critic, witnesses); (3) pre-hearing review of the written case study and specific advocate claims and critic counterclaims; (4) collecting physical evidence and interviewing potential witnesses related to the case; (5) a sixteen step hearing procedure; (6) the judges' opinion; and (7) appeal (p. 1).

There are six papers associated with the Miller project: (a) Miller's introduction (Miller, 2011); (b) Podetz's case study of Anna (Podetz, 2011a); (c) the arguments of an advocate for the truth claims associated with Anna's case study (Altman, 2011); (d) the arguments of a critic against these truth claims (DiGiorganni, 2011); (e) Podetz's (2011b) experience as the therapist going through the judicial trial; and (f) the findings of the trial's five judges (Miller et al, 2011).

The second model presented is one developed by Arthur Bohart and his colleagues (Bohart & Boyd, 1997; Bohart & Humphreys, 2000). Bohart et al. call this model the "Research Jury Method." In contrast to Miller's model, in Bohart's model the focus is on the role of jurors in evaluating truth claims. Specifically, in the first article by Bohart et al. in the present issue (Bohart, Tallman, Byock, & Mackrill, 2011), the richly detailed case study of "Jane" by Thomas Mackrill (2008; 2011) is analyzed by Bohart and two other "jurors" (co-authors Tallman and Byock), who present their individual analyses and describe their approach of reaching consensus. The two truth claims they focus on are: "(a) did Jane change, and (b) if so, did therapy contribute?" (Bohart, Tallman, et al., 2011, p. 101). In the process of this research, Bohart and his colleagues developed a systematic set of 56 criteria for aiding jurors in analyzing a case study. In a follow-up study, Bohart and his colleagues (Bohart, Berry, & Wicks, 2011) tested out

the efficacy of the 56 criteria as employed by two graduate students new to the case of Jane in evaluating her case on the same two truth claims as in the first study.

The Mackrill (2008) case of Jane employed in the Bohart analysis is of great interest in itself since it is based on a detailed, thematic interweaving of diary entries by the therapist and client about the therapy, and in addition for the client, diary entries about her life outside the therapy. The diary entries were completed after each therapy session. The case itself is presented in this issue (Mackrill, 2011b), along with a conceptual and methodological background to Mackrill's diary method (Mackrill, 2011a). It should be noted that Jane's therapist, "Joe," employed a combined humanistic and existential orientation. The therapy covers 10 sessions, and addresses the following presenting problems that Jane brought in: "(1) memories that bother her on a daily basis, and Jane's sense of vulnerability in relation to these; (2) Jane's experience of being very sensitive; (3) Jane's low self-esteem; and (4) Jane's insecurity with regard to close relationships with men" (Mackrill, 2011a, p. 174).

Finally, in their commentary on the various papers in this issue, Susan Stephen and Robert Elliott (2011) include a summary of a third model of an adjudicated case study: Elliott's (2002, 2009) "Hermeneutic Single Case Efficacy Design" (HSCED). The HSCED approach includes the adversarial component of Miller's Panels of Psychological Inquiry model, although not the jury trial component. Also, the HSCED approach has a judging focus, like Bohart's Research Jury Method. Thirdly, the HSCED model adds standardized, quantitative and qualitative self-report data to the evidence base considered in the adjudication process. After outlining the HSCED model, Stephen and Elliott (2011) discuss a number of issues that cross cut the Miller, Bohart, and their HSCED models, including "the sources of the evidence used; ways in which that evidence is tested; claims, burden, and standard of proof; and the handling of the adjudication process itself" (p. 230). Encouragingly, they end their commentary with the implications of these issues for improving the overall adjudication method.

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Note: After the Panel of Inquiry described in Miller (2011) was completed, Podetz's masters thesis was reformatted and copyedited to meet the guidelines of a *PCSP* case study, and some of the broader literature review was shortened. Aside from these two differences, the substance of Podetz's 2008 and 2011a versions of the case study of Anna are identical.

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