**Research Methods and Statistics: Case Studies**

These are non-experimental methods that are in-depth, detailed investigations of one individual or a small group. They tend to include biographical details, behavioural information, and experiences that are interesting for the study of human behaviour. Case studies often investigate extraordinary phenomena. Three such cases include:

1. Clive Wearing (Blakemore, 1988)

*In March of 1985, Clive Wearing, an eminent English musician and musicologist in his mid-forties, was struck by a brain infection, herpes encephalitis, affecting especially the parts of his brain concerned with memory. He was left with a memory span of only seconds, the most devastating case of amnesia ever recorded. New events and experiences were erased almost instantly. In addition to this inability to preserve new memories, Clive had a retrograde amnesia, a deletion of virtually his entire past. He retained his music ability and skill, and as a result, challenged the notion of a single long term memory store.*

1. Genie Wiley (Curtiss, 1977): After watching the You tube clip, add some details here
2. Ernst Lanzer, known as the “The Rat Man” (Freud 1909)

*Ernst Lanzer was a lawyer in his late 20s who had an obsessional neurosis that had dated back to his childhood but that had become much worse in late 1907. He had many fears, for example that something bad was going to happen to a young lady of whom he was very fond and he had odd compulsions, for example he felt he wanted to cut his throat with a razor. He was tormented with fears that his father would die, even though his father was already dead and had been for some years. His chief fear though concerned a story that someone had told him. The story was about a punishment that was given to criminals in China: a pot is turned upside down on the buttocks of the criminal and rats in the pot then bore their way into the criminal’s anus. He was terrified that this might happen to him and became obsessed about rats. Hence “Rat Man”.*

*Freud traced his neurosis back to his childhood when Rat Man had been allowed to indulge in sexual foreplay with his governess and he feared that his father would find out and he would be punished. He therefore associated sexual pleasure with fear of punishment and hostility towards his father and he felt that he should be punished for all his feelings towards his lady friend. This made his hostility towards his father surface and he feared something bad would befall his father. So, he really fears punishment for himself for his sexual feelings but reverses this (displacement) and fears punishment for those close to him.*

Task – Which of these are advantages and which are disadvantages of case studies?

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|  | Advantage or Disadvantage? |
| Rich in detail: Case studies provide great depth and understanding about individuals and acknowledge human diversity.  |  |
| The only possible method to use: Case studies allow psychologists to study unique behaviours or experiences that could not have been studied any other way. |  |
| Not representative: As no two case studies are the same, results cannot be generalised to others, therefore generalisation to whole populations is impossible |  |
| Useful for theory contradiction: Just one case study can contradict a theory and necessitate a change in the theory. For example, the Clive Wearing case was important for challenging the idea that LTM is a single unitary store. |  |
| Researcher Bias: researchers conducting case studies may be biased in their interpretations or methods of reporting, which will question the validity of the findings |  |
| Reliance on Memory: many case studies rely on the participants own accounts of what happened, and these may not be accurate. |  |