

## Operant Subjectivity

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### Autobiography and Problem Selection<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** The proposition that “participants pursue values through institutions utilizing resources” finds expression in the problems with which participants become concerned and which they choose to address, and these choices in turn are a function of prior life experiences as revealed in policy-related autobiographies. As part of a pedagogical exercise focused on the policy process, university students in a senior seminar were invited to nominate possible problems (for development as seminar papers) and to reflect on those events in their lives that they would identify as having been significant in developing their interests in these particular problems. The 23 seminar members then Q-sorted the set of 27 problems, and factor analysis revealed six patterns of problem preference (from four Q factors, two of which were bipolar). These were in turn associated with common themes and experiences contained in the autobiographical narratives, as examined in cases from each of the factors. Conclusions are drawn about the role of previous experiences in autobiographical memory and about the implications for goal clarification in the policy process.

**Keywords:** autobiography, decision-making, life course, policy sciences, Q methodology, single case

#### *Establishing Vantage Point*

It is accepted as axiomatic that participants pursue values through institutions within a resource environment (Lasswell & McDougal, 1992, p. 336), and that part of this pursuit consists of making choices from among diverse possibilities. How those choices are made depends in part on the array of choices available, on the participant’s capacity to discern when choice is present, on the participant’s decisional history, and on the contingencies of the moment, including the medium through which the participant is brought into contact with options. Modifying Kantor’s (1959, pp. 15-16) notation for a psychological event, we can specify the main features of a decisional event as  $DE = C(k, cf, df, h, s)$ , where  $cf$  is the choice function (i.e., those features of the situation that admit of judgment, whether or not the participant can discern these possibilities);  $df$  is the participant’s decision function, or capacity to choose;  $h$  is the participant’s history of

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past decisional interactions; *s* is the immediate setting (e.g., a council meeting, a petition at a website, etc.) that brings deciders and decisional possibilities together; *k* denotes the uniqueness of each decision-making situation; and *C* indicates that each aspect of *DE* interacts with all others under field conditions.

In the study to follow, attention will focus mainly on the ways in which participants' experiences (*h*) impinge on problem selection (*cf*) within the context of all other interacting features of *DE*; that is, we want to know how a person's life history conditions choices made in the immediate present. In this connection, Lasswell (1930) once remarked that "political science without biography is a form of taxidermy" (p. 1), and that the task of the hour was "to discover what developmental experiences are significant for the political traits and interests [of those] who play on the public stage" (p. 8). By incorporating Freud's methods into the social observer's armamentarium, Lasswell led the advance "toward the intensive study of the individual's account of himself" (p. 9) and in the process amassed impressive evidence concerning "the prime importance of hitherto-neglected motives in the determination of political traits and beliefs" (p. 173). Dollard (1935) promptly seconded Lasswell's initiative by noting that "as soon as we take the post of observer on the cultural level the individual is lost in a crowd and our concepts never lead us back to him" (p. 5), which Dollard regarded as justification for zooming in on the individual life so as to clarify what, from the more distant vantage point, was ambiguous and indistinct. The study below seeks to complement the biographical approach by incorporating the participant's own story, not as relayed by an intermediary, but autobiographically from within the participant's own frame of reference.

The role of Q methodology in this enterprise is limited to revealing the *decision structures* at issue (Brown, 2013; Stephenson, 1987) and to providing guidance for the selection of those decision makers whose life histories are most apt to illuminate the connections between life course and choice. The decision structures are revealed and explained as usual in terms of the form and content of the factor-score arrays, and the magnitudes of the Q factor loadings highlight those *specimens* (i.e., factor representatives) whose autobiographies are expected to show the clearest links between experience and problem selection. The Q factors, in short, can be likened to X-ray plates (Stephenson, 1985) that clearly reveal the subjective structures within the more overt preferences and policy choices. Unlike post-sorting interviews that are used to aid in factor interpretation, the policy-oriented autobiographies are designed to reveal the antecedents of choice and to show how Q sorts and the choices they document are embedded in ongoing lives and life histories.

### ***Declarations of Interest***

Values are always present in the initial selection  
of a problem. (Lynd, 1939, p. 184)

The results to be presented emanated from a conventional university seminar focused on the policy sciences in which prominence was given to major tenets of the New Haven School of policy-oriented jurisprudence (Lasswell & McDougal, 1992; Nagan, 2013). The centerpiece of the seminar involved members each selecting a problem for semester-long examination, culminating in the usual term paper and oral presentation. As an illustration of principles introduced through reading and discussion, students were asked not only to select a problem, but also eventually to justify their choice (goal

clarification) and to reflect on those events in their past that had led them to this particular interest (trend analysis).

Before turning to specifics, it is important to acknowledge that an academic focus such as this pales in comparison to rough-and-tumble real-world policy problems such as health, hunger and war, but the difference is more one of scale and consequence than principle. From a scientific standpoint, the role of personal interest in problem selection is of general importance, and much can be learned about it in laboratory settings that can then be carried over into contexts with graver implications. Moreover, the choices that the students made in this instance were not without practical consequences in terms of the time and energy commitments of student life.

**Table 1. Population of Problems**

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1.	Role of military in assisting the disadvantaged
2.	US policy toward the former USSR, East Europe
3.	Poverty and hunger
4.	Reform of the criminal justice system, e.g., repeat offenders
5.	Social Security and alternatives
6.	Welfare system
7.	Public opinion in the European Union (EU), effect on Bosnia policy
8.	Environmental policy – US, East Europe, Russia compared
9.	Impact of societal change on women’s employment
10.	Forced busing (to effect racial equality in the schools)
11.	Problems of illegal immigration
12.	US environmental policies
13.	Effect of democracy on policy making
14.	Antitrust policy
15.	Impact of drug traffic on Latin American societies
16.	Animal rights – e.g., testing
17.	Changes in the intelligence community
18.	Effects of deregulation on telecommunications
19.	Health care
20.	Crackdown on “deadbeat dads”
21.	Future of NASA
22.	Campaign finance reform
23.	Policy toward drugs
24.	Future role of the UN
25.	Flat-rate tax
26.	Full employment
27.	Gun control

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The process in this particular instance began in a modified nominal group setting in which 23 participants in an undergraduate senior seminar in political science jotted down topics they might be interested in pursuing as term papers during the course of the seminar. As shown in Table 1, the 27 problem areas eventually nominated were all of substantial social importance and ran the gamut. In typical Q-technique fashion (e.g., Durning & Brown, 2007), the entire set of research topics that were nominated was presented to the seminar members for Q sorting. (Due to the relatively small number of

items, it was deemed unnecessary to structure or otherwise limit the Q sample; see Paige & Morin, 2015.) Specifically, participants were instructed to rank the topics from most interested in studying (+4) to least interested in studying (-4). The Q sorts were then correlated and factor analyzed. The four principal axis factors that resulted were rotated by varimax criteria to a position in simple structure (Tables 2 and 3). Factor scores were then estimated for each of the statements in each of the factors.

The Q sorts were supplemented by a "policy-related autobiography," in which the students reflected on their life histories and provided narratives of events that had been influential in the development of personal interest in the topics assigned scores of +4. These autobiographies, which were to be in the neighborhood of five double-spaced pages, constituted a collateral assignment and were to be included as addenda to the term papers, which otherwise focused on the problem area selected. The autobiographical task was introduced as a matter of value clarification in the policy process, with attention to matters of *content* (principles and beliefs associated with the policy area under consideration) and *procedure*, the latter divisible into (1) *configurative thinking*, involving the elaboration of the policy arena in terms of goals, past trends, current conditions, projections into the future of current tendencies and alternative courses of action, and (2) *representative exposure*, which emphasizes context by taking into account policy-related events in terms of the reactions of the broader society (culture), the more immediate geographic neighborhood (class), membership groups (special interests), personal responses (personality) and salient destabilizing occurrences (crisis level).<sup>2</sup>

Before proceeding to an interpretation of the four factors, it is useful to take stock of what they represent substantively as well as their status in methodological respects. Each participant, confronted with an array of possible projects on which to expend time and energy, selects certain ones of them for special regard and places them in a preferred order, and both the selecting and preferential treatment are in keeping with preexisting interests; that is, those project topics are given prominence that the participant ostensibly values. The measurement procedure involved is inescapably subjective in that the choices made during the Q sorting are one's own, and no one person's preferences can be judged as in any sense superior to some other person's preferences; this is as true in the war room or boardroom as in the classroom. As Ascher (1987) has said, subjectivity is important in the policy process because it is subjectivity that presides over choice. Subjectivity is not equivalent to idiosyncrasy, however, for whereas it is true that no two Q sorts are ever identical in all respects, it is likewise true that they tend to fall into a limited number of classes that their factor analysis reveals. In the instant case, analysis has revealed four such factors (Tables 2 and 3), which indicates at minimum that there are at least four classes of interest.

Reliance upon only 23 participants raises questions about the scientific adequacy of this inquiry. At least two points are relevant in this regard. First, whereas most social research relies upon large numbers of cases drawn randomly from a population, in this instance both the collection of persons ( $n=23$ ) and of stimuli ( $N=27$ ) constitute entire universes: concern is with these particular students and their particular preferences.

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<sup>2</sup> For details concerning value clarification within the policy sciences framework, consult Lasswell (1958), Lasswell and McDougal (1992, pp. 725-737) and McDougal (1952). The term papers constituted the sole focus of a fourth-year, writing-intensive undergraduate course for political science majors and eventuated in submissions to a hypothetical journal and then anonymous evaluations by the members of the seminar reconstituted as a hypothetical editorial board.

There is no expectation that the facts obtained here will appear as invariants elsewhere. What is invariant, however, as Herbst (1970) long ago suggested, are not the findings as such, but the rules and procedures required to reveal comparable structures in other settings and involving other universes. Second, whereas most social research aspires to nomothetic laws that hold across populations, Q methodology produces findings that are more *idiographic* in character (in a qualified sense); that is, that are based on *intra*- rather than *inter*-individual variability (Molenaar, 2004).

**Table 2. Patterns of Selectivity**

Sorts	Factors			
	A	B	C	D
12.	<b>84</b>	-02	-14	25
8.	<b>82</b>	25	-13	00
1.	<b>80</b>	-02	-24	43
4.	<b>67</b>	31	29	16
2.	<b>63</b>	18	-12	-38
17.	<b>-68</b>	33	-12	06
23.	<b>-53</b>	14	28	-11
21.	17	<b>84</b>	--26	-12
10.	05	<b>71</b>	-07	-13
11.	45	<b>54</b>	-25	-10

This latter point requires clarification. Molenaar's (2004) idiography, as with Barlow and Nock's (2009), is based on individual-based variations in *objective* variables repeatedly assessed through time, whereas Q's idiography is based on the measurement of *subjectivity*; that is, on action that is meaningful to the person (Mantzavinos, 2012). (By emphasizing "first-person" accounts but jettisoning subjectivity, Watts [2011] blurs this important distinction.) Otherwise, we can agree in a general way with Molenaar — that "scientific psychology can only become complete if it includes the idiographic point of view, alongside the nomothetic point of view" (p. 216) — while disagreeing that nomothetic and idiographic define end-points of a common continuum. An idiographic approach can also be nomothetic in intent: subjectivity, for example, also has its laws (Stephenson, 1974).

It remains to elucidate the character of these patterns of interest through examination of the factor scores and then to inspect the context of these interests through examination of participants' autobiographical essays. Table 2 focuses on the significant loadings for factors A and B. Factor A is bipolar — the loadings for participants 1, 2, 4, 8 and 12 are opposite of persons 17 and 23 — which means that the latter two's interests were the reverse of the others' (i.e., the two subgroups sorted the items in reverse order, the one group, A+, assigning scores of +4 to those items that the other group, A-, assigned scores of -4, and vice versa). Access is initially gained into the positions represented by A+ and A- by examining those items in which each expressed most interest:

*Factor A+*: Health care • Welfare system • Poverty and hunger • Social Security and alternatives • US environmental policies • Problems of illegal immigration • Gun control • Animal rights – e.g., testing • Policy toward drugs.

*Factor A-*: Public opinion in the EU and the effect on Bosnia policy • US policy toward the former Soviet Union and East European countries • Antitrust policy • Impact of drug traffic on Latin American societies • Flat-rate tax • Future of NASA • Future role of the UN.

Factor A turns mainly on a national/international axis, with those participants defining the positive pole of the factor being concerned with such significant domestic issues as health care, poverty, Social Security reform and the environment, and those defining the negative pole with strategic defense and international matters such as Bosnia (a lively issue at the time of the study), the former USSR, Latin American drug traffic, the future of the UN and the space program.

Factor B implicates participants 10, 11 and 21 (see Table 2), who, like factor A-, have international interests, but also, like A+, have interest in major domestic issues:

*Factor B*: U.S. policy toward the former Soviet Union and East European countries • Future role of the UN • Public opinion in the EU and the effect on Bosnia policy • Gun control • Welfare system • Poverty and hunger.

This cluster of interests is not as coherent as was the case with factor A in that no obvious organizing principle (such as national/international) appears to be mediating the choices made, and yet there must be some such principle since the factor is comprised of three separate Q-sort responses provided by decision makers acting independently of one another. The initial opacity of factor B will be revisited momentarily.

**Table 3. Patterns of Selectivity (cont'd)**

Sorts	A	B	C	D
16.	-30	-05	<b>57</b>	-04
5.	42	-25	<b>53</b>	37
20.	-04	-14	<b>-74</b>	19
9.	-04	11	<b>-54</b>	-04
6.	08	-07	13	<b>74</b>
18.	03	-08	-19	<b>69</b>

Table 3 displays the final two factors, C and D, the former (like factor A) also being bipolar. As shown in the topics that factors C+ and C- regard as most important, this factor coalesces around issues of social control vs. change:

*Factor C+*: Impact of drug traffic on Latin American societies • Policy toward drugs • Social Security and alternatives • US environmental policies • Problems of illegal immigration • Campaign finance reform.

*Factor C-*: Full employment • Impact of societal change on women's employment  
 • Crackdown on "deadbeat dads" • Role of military in assisting the disadvantaged  
 • Poverty and hunger • Animal rights – e.g., testing.

Hence, the participants defining factor C+ are concerned about drugs (in particular) and illegal immigration, as well as other socially destabilizing influences. Factor C-, on the other hand, sees drugs and illegal immigration as consequences of more fundamental causes, such as poverty and unemployment, gender inequity and irresponsible fathers. In general, it can be said that the two poles of factor C are in sharp disagreement about causes and effects.

Table 3 also shows unipolar factor D to be defined by only two individuals, 6 and 18, who might be regarded as unlikely factor mates because one is a conservative female, the other a leftist male. Their interests nevertheless converge, as follows:

*Factor D*: Effect of democracy on policy making • Social Security and alternatives  
 • Welfare system • Problems of illegal immigration • Full employment • Campaign finance reform.

This convergence likely emanates from diverse motivations. Both persons have interest in democracy, and an uncertain Social Security system is a problem for them both. However, the leftist is concerned with welfare, immigration, and employment because of an identification with the less well-off, whereas the conservative sees these as problematic and sapping the nation's strength. Behind the convergence of interest in common topics, therefore, lies a diversity in reason and sentiment.

The above factors do not exhaust the patterned responses of these 23 young policy scientists. Some of their responses were hybrid (e.g., significantly associated with both factors A and D) and others were sufficiently idiosyncratic as to relate substantially to no one else in the group. Moreover, the factors are sufficiently ambiguous as to invite closer scrutiny.

### **Autobiographies as Personal Trends and Conditions**

[Memory traces]...live with our interests and with them they change. (Bartlett, 1932, p. 212)

As noted previously, the Q sorts rendered by the participants were accompanied by problem-centered autobiographies in which the authors related their policy interests to significant events in their lives, and it is these narratives that reveal the tie between interests and the problem selectivity manifested in the Q factors. These autobiographical accounts complement the post-sorting interviews (Wolf, 2014) in that they provide the occasion for participants to continue to display the perspectives and values that gave rise to the factors in the first place; in addition, they supplement the post-sort interviews by helping to explain how the factors came about in the first place and how they are entrenched in an ongoing life course.

#### ***Factor C: Social Control and Change***

Of those four segments, the main focus for illustrative purposes will be on two of them (factors B and C). The simplest to grasp is bipolar factor C (Table 3), which, it will be recalled, was characterized as divided over interests in *social control* (drugs, illegal

immigration) vs. *social change* (full employment, deadbeat dads, poverty, use of the military in assisting the disadvantaged). The social-control pole of factor C was defined by participants 5 and 16, whose autobiographies fit hand-in-glove with the interests that their factor proclaimed.

Respondent 16 (Curtis) eventually wrote his term paper on changes in the Central Intelligence Agency, and in his autobiography, he acknowledged, "I have always been interested in this type of work since I was young." He then went on to relate that his interest in the CIA was fostered by his father, to whom he referred glowingly as "my mentor, because he has been there to give me guidance, not only as a parent and teacher, but as a friend; I have had teachers and professors I liked and respected, but none as valuable." Prior to retirement, Curtis's father had been a military and civilian police officer with occasional close ties to employees in the old Office of Strategic Services (OSS), the CIA's precursor, and at the time of his writing Curtis himself was in the early stages of applying for career employment in the Agency. Like father, like son: Curtis was interested in events, processes and institutions that defend society and hold it together rather than challenge it.

Respondent 5 (Mike) initially expressed an interest in health care and gun control. His avowed reason for being interested in the former stemmed from the medical situation of a family member who holds three jobs and, in the process, "makes too much money to get any aid from the government, but not enough money to afford his own insurance." Mike was irritated by a system that was about to force his relative to go on welfare, but what really rankled him was another family member "who does nothing, is on welfare, and lives off the government," and who continues to have "children for profit" as a kind of business to keep the welfare checks flowing. Mike also expressed interest in the topic of gun control, and in his autobiography related experiences of campaigning for a congressional candidate opposed to gun control, concluding his essay with, "if someone breaks into your house with a gun and plans to hurt you or your family, then you as a home owner should have the right to have a weapon and protect yourself." Mike eventually elected to co-author a paper on a topic of interest to another classmate.

In terms of the decisional event specified at the outset, individuals clustering around the positive pole of factor C related tales about social order and the ills of social decay, and they have ostensibly had experiences (*h*) to which they respond *in the present* and upon which they now draw in explaining their current interest in these matters.<sup>3</sup> Their memories inform their problem choices (*df*), and the convergence is both dynamic (*C*) and to some extent unique (*k*).

Unlike Curtis's and Mike's concern with social control, the individuals defining the negative pole of factor C (Table 3) were preoccupied with social change. Respondent 20 (Cindy) eventually wrote her term paper on "The Impact of Gender on the Policy Process," and she served notice of her position in the first line of her autobiography: "First of all, I am a woman who comes from a family of very strong and independent women." Reared by a working single parent, assisted by equally strong-willed aunts and grandmothers, Cindy expressed the view that her mother "has given me the strength to

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<sup>3</sup> From an interbehavioral standpoint (Fryling & Hayes, 2010, p. 58), it is important to stress that the past is past, hence is a construct (rather than an actual event) in the present and has a substitute stimulating function to which we can respond. This is not to deny that events have occurred in the past, only that time's arrow goes in one direction so that we cannot go backward to be restimulated by events that occurred then, however much we may be stimulated in the present by our recollections of them.



be able to deal with all the harassment I will endure for being a woman in a powerful job." In addition to policies affecting women, Cindy also expressed interest in the issue of deadbeat dads and in those state laws that make it possible for irresponsible fathers to "be brought up on charges and taken to court." Her interest in animal rights was attributed to a female high school teacher ("my favorite teacher") who was an active opponent of the use of animals in experimental tests. Cindy ended her essay with the wish that "one day I want to be powerful and change people's views on what women can and cannot do in this world."

Respondent 9 (John) eventually wrote about the intelligence community and its excesses, but he initially expressed interest in the role of the military in aiding the disadvantaged and in societal changes attributable to women's employment. Having served four years in the Navy, John saw a use for the military "that goes beyond the defense of the state." With the US role in Somalia at the time fresh on the nation's mind, John wrote of a project he witnessed in which members of the Seabee Corps assisted in constructing housing for those without shelter, and he had visions of extending this to include immunization, sick calls and other health-related roles for the military. Like Cindy, John was reared in a household in which the mother had to work. He asserted what he characterized as the "politically-incorrect" view that the mother should be able to remain home to care for children, and that fathers should be more responsible and help "reinvent" the wife's role as mother. Also like Cindy, therefore, John is committed to making changes in the status quo.

Bipolar factor C draws a line between maintaining and altering existing operations, and Curtis's and Mike's membership in the maintenance stream has led them to seek in-class projects that extend those interests. By way of contrast, Cindy and John have contrary imaginations that take the form of interest in topics the knowledge of which would better equip them to alter society in desired directions.

### ***Factor B: Combining Domestic and Foreign***

Factor B was previously characterized as opaque, especially in relation to factor A, which was more obviously influenced by national vs. international interests; factor B, however, displayed interest in both. Consider, for example, the interest scores assigned the following policy areas by factors A+ (national), factor A- (international) and factor B, respectively:

+4	-4	+3	(3)	Poverty and hunger
+4	-4	+3	(6)	Welfare system
-4	+4	+4	(7)	Public opinion in the EU and the effect on Bosnia policy
-4	+4	+4	(2)	US policy toward the former USSR and East European countries
-2	+2	+4	(24)	Future role of the UN

Factor B's interests are an unusual mix, and one of the advantages of the autobiographical narratives in instances such as this is that they provide not only verification for the interests at issue, but also help to clarify the initially hazy motivations that seem to have influenced problem selection. The three persons defining

factor B (Table 2) were all women with similar stories, and these stories help account for what might initially appear to be their anomalous policy interests.

Respondent 21 (Becky) eventually withdrew from the seminar due to an over-extension in obligations, but she was initially scheduled to write and report on inner-city school reform. In her autobiography, Becky related that her parents divorced when she was quite young and her mother then had to “struggle through a court system and a job market that was blatantly geared to the advantage of men.” The family’s deprivations ended and Becky’s social status changed for the better when the mother remarried. The stepfather had a positive impact on her due to his social conscience and political involvement. Also influential was a high school teacher who introduced her to Marx, but also drew in the importance of religion and economic incentives. She became actively involved in an urban social welfare organization that helped the economically disadvantaged and has focused her college studies in directions that would help make a difference in others’ lives: “I am not naive enough to believe that I can change the world,” she acknowledges, “but I do think that I can at least make a positive contribution.”

Respondent 10 (Michelle), like Becky, was heavily influenced by a high school teacher who opened the world of politics to her through a world history class and by involving her in a Model UN group (which she also joined because her boyfriend belonged). She elected to represent Germany, since her father had been stationed there during his Army service; later, her family hosted two German foreign exchange students. She briefly considered becoming a marine biologist, but finally settled on political science due to her interest in international matters. Her seminar topic was the Bosnian situation.

Respondent 11 (Arlene) was also strongly influenced by a male high school teacher who introduced her to politics through courses on civil liberties and extracurricular activities such as Model UN and Model Congress. Arlene’s teacher gave her “a sense that I could do and be anything that I wanted to...I owe my interest in politics and policy issues to this man.” Like Becky, Arlene was reared in a single-parent home, which had to struggle economically due to a father who refused to provide support. This has influenced her to go into law, and it is her desire “to be an attorney for the ACLU.” She feels wronged by the criminal justice system and intends to set things right: “I am very interested in revamping the juvenile criminal justice system.” This seminar gave Arlene the opportunity to zero in on her personal interest in deadbeat dads.

These narratives inject light into the opacity of factor B, which can now be seen to be the home of various commonalities: the three defining Q sorts all come from women; all three were strongly influenced by males mainly outside the family; two of the three experienced harsh lives (due primarily to irresponsible fathers) that made them aware of defects in domestic institutions (criminal justice, welfare); and all three were introduced to *world* politics by teachers.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> One male student was significantly associated with this factor but also with factor D, making his case *mixed* rather than *pure*. However, he shared many characteristics with the women defining factor B: reared and strongly influenced by a determined, educated mother after a divorce, he was later introduced to international issues by a stepfather with a graduate degree in political science, which eventually led to joining a Model UN club. This student’s interest in domestic politics arose in part due to close encounters with drugs, including the drug-related suicide of an uncle. Incidentally, one of the reviewers of this manuscript suggested an alternative explanation for factor B, that these students were drawn to macro-level issues due to their wide horizons. Though this is possible, the narratives suggest life courses that had

A psychoanalyst would have much to contemplate with case studies such as these: abandoned young women, unfulfilled desires for an absent father, messianic salvation by a father-substitute who introduces them to the *Realpolitik* among nations, the accompanying eroticization of this knowledge and subsequent pursuit of a degree in political science or international relations, all of which would serve as fodder for a reconsideration of Allport's (1937) theory of the functional autonomy of motives — that is, of whether motives are *functionally* or only *historically* related to the antecedents of a person's current pursuits. However, it is unnecessary to plow this field too deeply in order to see how factor B's unusual mix of policy interests are explicable once the narrative record is examined. Factor B's interest in *domestic* affairs has arisen primarily from real-life experiences – of economic insecurity (born of divided homes), of economic irresponsibility (of fathers in these specific cases) and of unresponsive social agencies (social and legal services). Interest in *international* matters, by way of contrast, has been mainly an *intellectual* import and one that has been sponsored primarily by a male (or males) from outside the family (stepfathers, teachers).

The policy-related autobiographical narratives, in short, are essential for revealing the life-history context in which interests have naturally developed and for showing how vectors of experience – better yet, *trajectories* – have entered into the selection of policy problems as documented by the Q factor analysis.<sup>5</sup> And it is of methodological importance to emphasize the subjective character of these trajectories, as de Saint-Laurent (2017) has recently noted: “...the notion of trajectories...does not refer to the objective track outlined by socially recognised milestones (e.g., graduating from school, getting married, retiring) or periods of life (e.g., adolescence, adulthood), but to the subjective path constructed by the interaction between the discourses of the self and the unfolding course of one's life” (p. 267).

### ***Additional Life Courses***

The policy-focused life sketches above (of factors B and C) were intended as illustrations of an overarching generalization – that participants will be drawn to problems in light of their personal interests as molded by the specific events of their life courses. The briefer summaries that follow (from factors A and D) do not add substantially to this generalization but may lend it greater credibility.

#### ***National/international polarity (Factor A).***

As will be recalled from above, bipolar factor A was defined at the positive pole by students (e.g., participant 12) interested in domestic issues (health care, welfare, poverty, Social Security, immigration, gun control, etc.) and less so with matters at the international level. As of her writing, participant 12 was less than a month away from a

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suffered *ruptures* (Zittoun, 2012) in otherwise progressive adaptations and transitions helped later by males from (at least initially) outside the family.

<sup>5</sup> Research on autobiographical memory is in general agreement that recollections are subject to construction (which is not to say sheer fabrication) so as to align them with current conditions; that is, memories are not simply stored and then later retrieved from the mind in unadulterated form (Bartlett, 1932; for recent discussions, see Herlihy, Jobson, & Turner, 2012; Nelson & Fivush, 2004; Wagoner, 2013, 2017), but are modified in interaction with emotions, subsequent events, and other disturbances. A Q-methodological study involving memory, for instance, suggested that persons who were apprehensive going into the Gulf War were afterwards less successful in reconstructing their prewar Q sorts than were persons who went to war without ambivalence at the outset (Brown, Kim, & Wang, 1991).

birthday that would disqualify her to continue on her parents' health insurance and so this issue had become personal. She also reported vivid memories of the financial difficulties and Medicare-related bureaucratic frustrations her grandparents had to endure upon retirement. The situation for her was dire: "It scares me to think what will happen in the future if our health care system is not rearranged," a prescient apprehension given the current controversy in the U.S. concerning the Affordable Care Act (Obamacare). The prospect of parenthood is also on participant 12's mind: she is already weighing being on welfare versus getting a job and the implications these alternatives would have for her future children, and she feels resentful toward a cousin who continues to bear children so as to receive larger welfare checks. True to form, this student elected to spend her semester researching the topic of welfare reform. Participant 8, who also defined factor A+, approached these same issues from the opposite ideological direction. The daughter of a dentist who worked for her father, she was opposed to government involvement in health care, welfare and related arenas. While drawn to similar topics, therefore, participants 8 and 12 had contrasting ideological motivations.

In the same way that factor A+ was drawn to domestic issues, those students defining factor A- were attracted to international and global affairs, and their autobiographical accounts helped show why. Participant 17, for instance, ended up writing about Russian post-Cold War economic policy, which would not have been predicted based solely on foreknowledge of his blue-collar upbringing by first-generation Italian parents and conditions of regional economic decline and out-migration. Disillusioned with attending a small college out in the middle of nowhere, he eventually left home to find himself, only to return, still disillusioned, three years later. But when he listlessly returned to school and wandered into a course in international relations, his world suddenly expanded under the guidance of an inspiring teacher who paved the way for a more cosmopolitan outlook. Several international- and comparative-politics semesters later, participant 17 had become an avid consumer of news about the wider world, especially the disaggregation of the Soviet Union and its satellite countries. In the same vein, participant 23's cosmopolitanism started earlier and more by way of fantasy and imagination than direct experience, as he monitored the flights of the space shuttle Columbia, watched the TV series *Star Trek* and enjoyed science fiction cartoons. His term paper on the US space program rode in on the momentum of these prior interests.

### ***Domestic issues (Factor D).***

As previously noted, factor A+ was focused on domestic matters as is factor D, but there is a difference in emphasis between them as shown in the following factor scores (for A+ and D, respectively):

+4	-1	Health care
+4	+1	Poverty and hunger
+2	-3	Animal rights--e.g., testing
-2	+4	Effect of democracy on policy making
-2	+3	Campaign finance reform
-4	+2	Anti-trust policy
+4	+4	Welfare system

Inspection of factor A+ suggests that the feeling permeating it is one of sympathy - for the unhealthy, the hungry, the poverty-stricken, for animals, etc. Factor A+'s heart goes

out to the powerless and downtrodden, and these students' intellectual pursuits follow their hearts. Factor D, on the other hand, appears more analytic, systemic and policy related: assure democracy, reform campaign financing and rein in monopolies. Take care of structural causes like these, factor D seems to be saying, and effects like hunger, poverty and animal abuse will go away. Put another way, while factors A+ and D are both focused on the domestic arena, the former is reacting to symptoms whereas the latter is drawn to root causes.

The topic of the welfare system is included in the above list to show its appeal to factor D (as well as A+) since this was the issue selected by participant 6, who titled her term paper, "The Welfare Problem." As noted previously, participant 6 is a conservative who, in her autobiography, confessed to having been tutored by her conservative grandfather, a successful executive, and then reinforced by other equally conservative relatives and peers. Her interest in welfare as well as the Social Security system did not arise so much from her future role as recipient, but as someone who was going to have to pay for these services, which, in her mind, were being squandered through abuses of the system. By contrast, participant 18 is a card-carrying member of the Democratic Socialist Party who is drawn to the same issues for quite different reasons. The son of a millwright and union member, he was accustomed to a life without comforts and the luxury of money and had developed a sensitivity to class differences that had been reinforced by his Catholic schooling. In his autobiography, he recalls feelings of outrage in a high school course on civil liberties and civil rights and later the alienating and mind-numbing atmosphere when he worked several years in a foundry before returning to college. His decision to write on workplace democracy fits hand-in-glove with his prior experiences and deepening sentiments.

### ***Discussion and Conclusions***

What would a policy analysis look like  
if it started with stories...? (Roe, 1994, p. x)

This study can be considered at least a partial answer to Roe's invitation, but stories alone are insufficient. Had a beginning been made with the stories supplied by Curtis, Mike, Cindy and the other participants, as is common in discourse and narrative analyses, it is questionable whether the overarching bipolarities of national/international (factor A), social control vs. change (factor C), plus the other two factors could have been divined. Surface reality is often messy, in the physical as well as the human sciences, and requires X-rays, microscopes, mathematics (such as factor analysis) or other clarifying procedures to reveal underlying structures.

Autobiographies, like literary interpretation, necessarily rest on the analysis of single cases, which are undergoing renewed scrutiny (e.g., Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2004; Simons, 2015; Stern, Andersen, & Hansen, 2013; Taylor, 2013; Vannoni, 2015). Ruzzene (2012), for instance, devotes sustained attention to the issue of external validity in case studies, arguing that "external validity is *not*...essentially a problem of representativeness but rather one of inference" (p. 106) and proposing that *comparability* be considered a more general alternative to *representativeness* (or *typicality*), with the latter potentially serving as a solution to the former in certain instances. The results above are in keeping with Ruzzene's suggestion – for example, the three persons who define factor B (participants 10, 11 and 21 in Table 2) are to varying degrees typical of the factor (with participant 21 being the most typical) as well as comparable to *others of*

*the same type* – but they go farther than Ruzzene by achieving representativeness in the population of stimuli as well.

Moreover, the issue of replication in Q-methodological case studies is solved once it is recognized that participants 10, 11, and 21 are all replicates of the same underlying factor; therefore, factor B is itself a generalization of the individual viewpoints of the three persons who define it, which brings it and the other factors into conformity with Mantzavino's (2012) dictum that "generalizations can...function in exactly the same way as traditional laws, helping us to explain and predict the world and to intervene in it" (p. 232). This, then, justifiably leads to what might be termed the *corollary of selectivity* – that problems will be selected that are in keeping with interests.<sup>6</sup>

In conclusion, the results of this small-scale classroom experiment bring into prominence the importance of perspective in decision-making and serve to validate Brewer and deLeon's (1983) assertion that "human values are the crux of the policy sciences" (p. 6). They also serve to validate once again that subjectivity is the crux of Q methodology. Due perhaps to Lasswell's thorough understanding of psychoanalysis, the policy sciences have been more attentive than other intellectual initiatives to the impact of personal history on current outlooks and intentions for the future.<sup>7</sup> And more than other intellectual enterprises, the policy sciences have given sustained thought not only to the existence of values, but also to methods and conceptual frameworks designed to transform value analysis into a tool for enhancing enlightenment (e.g., Lasswell, 1958; McDougal, 1952). As has been suggested on previous occasions, there is an affinity between the conceptual apparatus of the policy sciences and the technical achievements of Q methodology, which touches all aspects of human endeavor, from the most private of self-reflections to the most public of political pronouncements and policy decisions. As shown above, Q is capable of revealing the tributaries of thought and sentiment surrounding problem identification and selection, as well as the image-maps that impinge on the clarification of goal commitments. Its applications in policy-related fields have included examination of organizational climate and roles, strategic planning, public involvement in policy initiatives, work motivation, agenda-setting, budgetary decisions, program evaluation, bureaucracy, personnel selection, public relations and many other domains. Enterprises, of course, have their formal, and in this sense "objective" sides, but alongside objective conditions are the subjective perspectives of individuals within those conditions, and to the extent such perspectives are salient features of the policy process, Q methodology is equipped to elucidate their main contours and in this way to provide more leverage to the policy scientist.

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<sup>6</sup> This understanding of law is in fact comparable to the view that "laws of nature ... are prescriptions, rather, rules of procedure that direct the scientist to orient himself in reality," which was expressed by Moritz Schlick (1979, p. 197), the founder of the Vienna Circle of logical positivists. The *selectivity corollary* follows from *Parloff's Law* (Stephenson, 1974), which states that "self-referred operants are homologous with lived (objective) experience" (p. 14).

<sup>7</sup> This also helps explain the receptivity of the policy sciences to studies using Q methodology, four of which have received the Harold Lasswell award during the past two decades (Pelletier, Kraak, McCullum, Uusitalo, & Rich, 1999; Ockwell, 2008; Rutherford, Gibeau, Clark, & Chamberlain, 2009; and Cuppen, 2012).

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