

Some Contextualizing Notes on William Stephenson's "Old Age Research"

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"Old Age Research" was written initially as a response to the annual Myers lecture, given in December 1987 by Professor Patrick Rabbitt of the Age and Cognitive Performance Centre of the University of Manchester (Rabbitt, 1988). Prior to his work at Manchester, Rabbitt had for many years (1968–1982) been on the faculty of the Department of Experimental Psychology, University of Oxford. Stephenson had helped establish its precursor, The Institute of Experimental Psychology, in 1936, serving as Associate Director, then Director (succeeding William Brown in 1945). It is clear that Stephenson was motivated to write the piece not just as a corrective to what he regarded as Rabbitt's poorly conceived statement of the potential contribution of psychology to gerontological research but also as an attempt to revisit his own research on ageing, conducted at the outset of his career as a psychologist (Stephenson, 1950). Correspondence between Stephenson and Rabbitt suggests that Stephenson was excited by this reminder of both his research on ageing before he moved to Oxford and his time on the Oxford faculty (see Good, 2010, for an account of Stephenson's career in the United Kingdom prior to his move to the United States in 1948). Although it seems likely that he intended to submit the paper to a British Psychological Society journal (there is an entry in his work log book for late 1988 to that effect), he died before he was able to do so.

Stephenson prepared the paper for what was in effect the first British Q conference, held in Reading in April 1989, and titled "Subjectivity, Representation & Communication: A Workshop in Q Methodology and the Interpretational Disciplines". The paper appears on the conference programme occupying a double slot together with a paper on "The Profundity of Subjectivity". According to some of those present at the Reading meeting, it seems clear that he did not formally present the "Old Age Research" paper and devoted all of the time available for his invited address to talking about the profundity of subjectivity.

The manuscript which is the basis of the text published in this issue was found in Stephenson's study in Columbia, Missouri after his death in

June 1989. As in so many of Stephenson's late writings, Stephenson not only addresses some specific issues, in this case Pat Rabbitt's approach to 'old age research', but he also uses the paper as an opportunity to present a more general case for the importance of Q methodology. He focusses especially on its emphasis on the centrality of 'self in everyday life', situating his account first in the work of Erving Goffman (1959, 1975), one of his favourite social theorists. He then revisits his early approach to self psychology (Stephenson, 1953, Ch. XI). Chapter XI, he suggests, provides an example of the kind of work that should be drawn to 'the attention of any who, like Pat Rabbitt, wants to study the *feeling* of old age' (this issue, p. 219, emphasis in original). "Old Age Research" is noteworthy as an example of one of Stephenson's 'self studies' where he applies his single-case methodology to himself (Stephenson, 1983, 1990, 1992). The paper provides valuable reflections by Stephenson on some of the vicissitudes of his professional life (Good, forthcoming).

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