

## **Combining Q with Interbehavioral Concepts for Clinical Application**

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In an effort to demonstrate the concrete and scientifically analyzable characteristics of subjective behaviors, Stephenson (1987) presents Q factors for two clinical cases together with concepts from Kantor's (1959) interbehavioral psychology. One case is of a man obsessed with tea rituals and the other of a psychoanalyst and the analysand.

The presentation is primarily an introduction to the way Q methodology and interbehavioral psychology can be used jointly to scientific advantage. Both Stephenson and Kantor had long histories of interest in dysfunctional behavior and contributed to its understanding, Stephenson largely in reference to Q methodology and psychoanalysis (Parloff, Stephenson, & Perlin, 1963; Stephenson, 1984) and Kantor in working out a behavioral description and classification system (Kantor, 1926; Lundin, 1987). The means by which Stephenson attempted to effect a merger bears examination.

The behavior segment, also known as the interbehavioral or the psychological event, is central to Kantor's (1959) system. He used both diagrammatic and formulistic representations of it. Because Stephenson referred to the latter, it will be used here:

$$PE = C(k, sf, rf, hi, st, md)$$

Every interaction comprising the PE (psychological event) involves a stimulus and a response as interdependent components: if there is a response it is a response to something, a stimulus; and if the organism is stimulated it is responding. Further, every stimulus object has a stimulus function, sf. For example, an object such as coffee mug may have the stimulus function of a drinking vessel, a display in a cabinet, or a paperweight. And it has reciprocal response functions: one can respond to it as a vessel to drink from, an item to put in a cabinet for display, or a weight to hold down papers. Whether one refers to a stimulus function or a response function depends only on which side of the interaction one wishes to emphasize. The sf and rf are distinctly subjective; for they are what a thing means, that is, how one responds to it. The particular sf-rf interaction occurs in a setting, st. If a wind is blowing papers around, the mug could take on the stimulus function of a

paperweight. If one desires coffee it could become a drinking vessel. Because any one object can have any number of stimulus functions/response functions, it is important to know what one is operating and under what setting conditions. The visual perception of the mug requires light as a medium of contact, *md*, as a condition for the interaction. One's past interactional history with the mug, *hi*, is an inseparable part of what *sf-rf* interaction occurs. *C* is the interdependence, as these examples illustrate, of all components; and *k* is the uniqueness of every PE.

As indicated by the "inter" in interbehavior and *C* in the formula, as well as by character of the components of the behavior segment, the system insists that one cannot understand any interbehavior by examining only the organism (biocentrism) or the surrounding conditions (envirocentrism) (Smith 2001). One must take account of the entire psychological event. If a clinician is trying to understand a patient's problems or determine a course of treatment, it is necessary to understand the object (such as another person) with which the person is interacting, the setting (such as the work place or the effect of drugs consumed) in which it takes place, and the history leading up to the problem. By taking account of the components, a concourse of *Q* sort statements will reflect this interdependence as will conditions of instruction. *Q* methodology, in turn, provides a means of "eliciting selves and to enter into discussion about them systematically" (p. 99). These "selves," response modes, could not have been identified by either the therapist or the patient.

For Stephenson the behavior segment is "the beginning of *Q* and of subjective (self) science" (1987, p. 99). Stephenson acknowledges that Kantor's "stimulus-response foundation . . . has no such implication for *Q*, serving only to 'set the stage' for probing into the segment" (p. 101). He uses the segment for a larger unit of analysis than does Kantor, and his unit is directly applicable to *Q* sorting for the self-reference of behaviors that are of interest to the clinician.

*C* and *k* remain the same as Kantor used them. In the case of the obsessed man, *sf*, the stimulus function, becomes the acquisition of yet another fancy tea set and the man's concern over upsetting his wife; *rf*, the response function, becomes his feeling of need for treatment; *hi*, the interactional history, becomes such past events as his mother's stylish tea parties; *st*, the setting events, becomes his wife's agitation over his obsession; and *md*, the medium of contact, becomes the bright light used to better see his tea set. Each of these is a concrete behavior of the patient whose abundant statements provide the concourse. This yields a formula,

$$PE = C(k, Q\text{-sort } 1, 2, 3 \dots),$$

where *PE* is behavioral communication by *Q*-sorting. This formulation using the behavior segment, Stephenson notes, provides a source for conditions of instructions. When factored, Stephenson indicates elsewhere (1982), the formula becomes,

$$PE = C(k, f_1, f_2, f_3 \dots),$$

where *f* refers to each factor.

Thus, Stephenson finds in interbehavioral psychology both grounds for the concreteness of subjectivity and a source for conditions of instruction. Accordingly, the components of the behavior segment provide clinical practice with some guidelines for using *Q* as a scientific tool for diagnosis, and the *Q* factors, as Stephenson notes, serve as a basis for discussion in therapy.

Similarly, Kantor's meaning of the components could equally well serve as guidelines. Using Kantor's referent for each term, *sf*, is a prospective tea set as a desired acquisition; *rf* is the desire to obtain the set; *st* is the wife's dissatisfaction (or it could be the context in which the conflict between the man and his wife occurs); and, because the perception of a particular object is not involved (unless looking at the tea set), *md* is not a relevant condition in this behavior segment although tactile, visual, and auditory media could be quite important in some instances. In another behavior segment the *sf-rf* interaction could consist of the desire to obtain treatment, and one could identify other relevant behavior segments and their components. The same procedures and formulae can be used as in Stephenson's illustration. The same statements by the man would be of use for the concourse of items to be sorted and the same conditions of instruction. If the man's statements had not been so abundant, the concourse could have been developed by reference to the behavior segment components of which the person's history would almost always be important. With the use of either Stephenson's broader interpretation of the behavior segment or of Kantor's original, the application of *Q* methodology would be much the same.

For interbehaviorists, what is implicit in the application of interbehavioral psychology to *Q* method is that interbehaviorism, in turn, can use *Q* to study clinical cases (Ruben & Delprato, 1987) and also to objectively and systematically study any subjective behavior such as desiring, feeling, imagining, perceiving, etc., which the interbehaviorists have always insisted are not mind-body or mind-brain interactions but object-organism interactions. Kantor (1959) replaced mind or consciousness with the behavior segment or interbehavioral field. Stephenson (1968) replaced these same constructs with communicability and used the behavior segment for it. Both Stephenson and Kantor recognized the objectivity of subjectivity, often regarded as private or mental, while using somewhat different terminology (Brown, 2006). For Kantor, the reference to "privacy" is only the specificity or uniqueness of occurrence, and uniqueness characterizes every event in nature (Kantor, 1982; Observer, 1981). Desiring and weight lifting are equally specific events in nature. Privacy can only be the standpoint from which one makes observations. For Stephenson, privacy becomes self-observation manifested by self-reference in *Q*-sorts as the

vantage point of observation. Even “the psychoanalytic unconscious is merely Q’s factorial space” (Stephenson, 1982, p. 104).

Lichtenstein (1988) observed that interbehavioral psychology had rejected introspection but had no means of rigorously studying “inapparent” or subjective interbehaviors despite holding them to be objective events. He suggested the use of Q for that purpose because of its power to render these events apparent or objective through self-reference. He noted that the upsurge of cognitivism with its return of mentalism was abetted by behaviorism’s failure to handle subjectivity. To date, despite 60 years of interbehavioral research (Smith, 2006) there is yet to be an interbehavioral research program using Q. One could, for example, study problem solvers’ strategies by using a Q sort to determine what the various stimulus functions were seen to be of a key item in the solution and under what settings conditions (instructions, surroundings, etc.) those stimulus functions occur. In research on dysfunctional behaviors one could, as exemplified by the tea set obsession, study such cases as dissociative identify disorder, panic behaviors, and others by drawing a concourse and/or conditions of instruction from sf-rf, st, and possibly md.

In a larger sense, however, as Kantor often said, all behaviors are interbehaviors. The researcher or clinician is interbehaving with the subject and the subject is interbehaving with the Q set, and their reports are interbehavioral findings of subjective events, which are fully objective and scientific. It is Stephenson’s great insight, both in inventing Q method and in recognizing the supporting role interbehavioral psychology’s behavior segment could provide, that showed the way to clinical application and to the potential for research. Discoveries through self-reference in conjunction with the behavior segment is a powerful tool for the behavioral sciences.

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