

Orthodoxy Reinforced—because the actions I believe are required now by our community are of greatest importance, especially those related to improving our intellectual and institutional infrastructure.

Yet, one must keep in mind that while the tasks indicated by Factor C are essential to keeping the community going, they are something like rebuilding a sewer system: the dirty work lies largely out of public view.

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Factor C: “Orthodoxy Reinforced”

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Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was the originator of the phrase “knowledge is power,” which, in the advancement of Q in the scientific community, one might construe to mean to disperse sound research, combined with education, as the primary way to gain credibility within the walls of higher education, where Q has yet to earn its rightful place as a research methodology. Since its introduction to the science community in 1935 (Stephenson, 1935), Q has struggled to gain that acceptance as evidenced by the number of universities that offer, even require, traditional R-methodological courses compared to those few that offer a course on Q methodology. Further support on the lack of acceptance of Q in the scientific research community can be found when one examines interest in either topic via attendance at professional conferences. Thousands hold membership and will annually participate in traditional research methodological conferences (with, sadly, few presentations on Q methodology). In comparison, there are approximately 130 members of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity (ISSSS), which is devoted to the support of Q research (Hurd & Brown, 2005), and less than that number typically attend the international conference sponsored by ISSSS.

Gaining recognition within the scientific community, and thereby assuring the stability and advancement of the movement, does not appear to be as simple as stating that Q is an important methodology in science’s attempt to further knowledge of the world and individuals. The study of subjectivity is not that simple, nor has the study of human nature been so easy to analyze. Some in the scientific community of higher education have erroneously defaulted to the belief that subjectivity can only be studied within the qualitative paradigm, typically considered to be an arduous and oftentimes singular effort, in contrast to quantitative research where numbers of participants are significantly larger. Stephenson, and subsequently ISSSS, have discovered and advanced a valid third alternative.

So why has Q not caught hold within the scientific community? There are at least three plausible explanations. First, Q's research methodology is flawed and therefore invalid in the scientific community's systematic paradigms to collect, interpret, and understand data. Second, while Q may be a valid way to study subjectivity, the scientific community is already entrenched in its paradigm (qualitative research) as the best way to study subjectivity. This view, at best, might incorrectly place Q methodology into this camp. Finally, Q is, indeed, a valid research paradigm that simply has not yet found its place within the walls of the scientific community: it is just a matter of time. While much has been written on the first two points of consideration, I would nominate the final explanation is the most plausible, and would further assert that Q should be more widely taught within the scientific community as a valid research design. While positive strides have been noted, and Q is beginning to emerge in certain statistical books, thanks in part to the tireless efforts of Steven Brown and others, the methodology is still not widely known or accepted.

In an effort to further explore Q methodology's future, Hurd and Brown designed a 40-item Q sample that was made available to the current ISSSS membership, and 42 sorts were subsequently received and analyzed. That research produced four factors that the authors felt were best interpreted under the rubric of orthodoxy: Orthodoxy Upheld, Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted, Orthodoxy Reinforced, and Beyond Orthodoxy.

Orthodoxy Reinforced (Factor C), similar to Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted (Factor B), accurately presents the importance of strengthening Q's position within the academy by advancing its fundamental postulates. This is no easy task as changing the paradigm of the scientific community has always been a daunting task. However, it is the only way. To secure the future of Q will require a shift in the paradigm within higher education: it must become more widely accepted across all of higher education. According to Kuhn (1970), it is awareness of anomaly that plays a role in the emergence and acceptance of new theory and new ways to study behavior. Q methodology is a unique way of looking at behavior, and the more diligent ISSSS can be in its mission, via text books, training and enlisting new scholars, and the advancement of sound research, the greater will be the acceptance of Q in the academy. Knowledge is power. The best way to position Q is to develop a consistent, systematic approach to educate the scientific community.

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Factor D: “Beyond Orthodoxy”

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If I remember correctly, it was an afternoon in early May. I had failed my first attempt to defend my dissertation proposal about a month earlier, and sat in a meeting with my advisor. The major concern of my committee was that I did not have an adequate methodology for conducting my research and answering my research questions. There had been at least four meetings before this one, and I could not find any method that would work for me. I felt hopeless and frustrated, and was beginning to wonder whether I could ever complete my proposal. The discussion with my advisor went on, and at one point he asked whether I had ever considered using Q methodology. I remembered having read about Q methodology in Kerlinger’s (1986) book, but beyond that I knew nothing more. However, I promised my advisor that I would look into it and see if it would work for me. This is how I came to use Q methodology and began to learn more about it.

My personal experience has influenced my view about how Q methodology should progress from this point. I had difficulty finding a methodology for my dissertation, which was aimed at understanding why a policy consensus could not be reached in Taiwan on the issue of fiscal decentralization. It seemed to me in retrospect that there was a perfect match between my research topic and Q methodology. Had I been better informed about Q methodology from my methodology classes, from articles applying it, or from my colleagues using it, I would have been more familiar with it and more readily drawn to it as my research methodology. Unfortunately, I knew little about Q methodology and it did not even occur to me as a possible solution to my problem until my advisor asked me if I had considered it.

As a student of public policy analysis, I quickly discovered that Q methodology is a powerful methodological tool for helping researchers explore and understand the views held by stakeholders. Moreover, by comparing, contrasting, and evaluating the different opinions at issue through the statement arrays identified by factor analysis, information revealed through Q methodology enables researchers to find the issues at stake, the differences in stakeholders’ views, and issues that have the potential for providing a basis for reaching a policy consensus. Based on my limited experience of using Q methodology, I find that it also provides a unique opportunity for researchers to interact with participants while doing Q sorting. When conducting the Q sorting on a face-to-face and one-on-one basis, researchers not only learn