

## **In Place of a Rejoinder: Embracing Factors A, B, C, and D**

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The term *rejoinder* carries the connotation of coming back at an opponent with rebuttals and counter-arguments, but this seems out of place given that authors and commentators are all Q-methodological well-wishers who differ, if at all, in strategy preferences while no doubt recognizing value in alternative strategies. These differences are *complementarities*, and were referred to by Stephenson (1987) as *decision structures* pointing to alternative courses of action, all of which were viable. Rather than ripostes and repartees, therefore, let us conclude these exchanges by emphasizing the strengths of their convergence.

Factor A reminds us of important past achievements and of the need to preserve our understandings of William Stephenson's revolutionary ideas, and where possible to institutionalize them through curricular development and leadership so that they do not slip away. Whereas the danger in following this path is that we could end up merely defending an increasingly irrelevant scholasticism, the opposite side of the fine line would be gradually to forget Q's *raison d'être* and to witness the gradual deterioration of intellectual and procedural coherence.<sup>1</sup> Q conferences in the past have often hosted panels focused on one or another of Stephenson's writings as a reminder of the key principles that it contains, and the Q-Method discussion list often carries similar reminders. Now that *The Study of Behavior* has gone out of print and the University of Chicago Press has relinquished the copyright, it will be important to preserve it in electronic form and make it available to the widening Q community. Worthwhile initiatives such as these will find a sympathetic ear among those comprising Factor A, and we would expect representatives of this point of view to take the lead in such projects for the benefit of all.

If there is any tension among the four factors it is likely between the orthodoxy of Factor A and those comprising Factor D who wish to go beyond that orthodoxy. Anecdotal comments reported in the lead article indicated that Factor D would be disinterested in an association whose members dwelled on the past and reified foundational ideas while ignoring opportunities to explore

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<sup>1</sup> A recent example of the latter is provided by Billard (1999), who has valiantly endeavored to help Q methodology out of what she regards as its undemocratic past by recommending that statements be obtained from participants, that participants be informed of the purposes of the study and be encouraged to ask questions about the Q sorting, and that their views be taken into consideration in factor interpretation. It does not take a defender of orthodoxy to recognize these recommendations as routine components of a typical Q study that only someone out of touch with conventional practices could fail to notice.

new perspectives and pursue innovative applications;<sup>2</sup> however, it is hard to believe that any of the other factors (Factor A included) would desire an association of this kind either. An obvious strategy from the Factor D vantage point would be to promote applications not only in public policy, as the Factor D spokesman explicitly suggested, but in any and all fields as energy and interest permit. In recent years, Q has been increasingly applied in environmental and health studies, areas in which it had not been applied previously, but has not yet been discovered in areas such as literature, economics, sociology, business, engineering, art, and the natural sciences. Education, too, has been slow to warm to Q methodology except in select academic centers. Factor D also expresses a wish for more practitioner-oriented and how-to-do-it books, manuals, and articles, which can obviously have great impact on legitimizing the methodology, especially in the eyes of doctoral committees.

“Consolidate, coordinate, and promote” might express the operational principle of Factor B, whose representatives have provided a list of suggestions for taking the movement to “a new level.” Some of these suggestions are new and some of them overlap with suggestions from other factors—e.g., bring Q-related publications and electronic activities under one roof, expand applications, facilitate intellectual evolution, recruit new scholars, create new learning opportunities at the annual meetings, etc.<sup>3</sup> Factor B is interested in marshaling and streamlining resources so as to enhance offensive capabilities. In this spirit, due acknowledgement is given to the so-called orthodoxy—a “Council of Elders” is even recommended—but not at the expense of intellectual evolution and embracing new developments. In dialectical terms, exponents of Factor B are the synthesizers who are interested in taking stock of diverse strands and mobilizing them into a more effective and coordinated thrust.

Factor C, like B, emphasizes promotion, but more in the way of outreach and with emphasis on strengthening the academic and scientific infrastructure. C seems particularly concerned with Q’s lack of visibility and recognition at university and disciplinary levels; and, even more than Factor D, endorses new book-length treatments to jump-start the momentum that has flagged with the passing of *The Study of Behavior* and *Political Subjectivity*, now long out-of-print and generally unavailable. Factor C is especially sensitive to the fact that much long-term enthusiasm for Q is sponsored by freshly-minted Ph.D.s whereas many advocates are in institutions whose primary mission is teaching

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<sup>2</sup> Factor D would find itself in agreement with Alfred North Whitehead’s famous aphorism: “A science which hesitates to forget its founders is lost.”

<sup>3</sup> It is not difficult to conceive of a Q sample comprised of such recommendations, as well as others that might be systematically gathered, which could then be submitted to willing participants who could Q sort them in terms of their likely positive impact on the future of the Q methodology movement. Such a project is one for which we would expect the greatest degree of enthusiasm from Factor B.

(or are in the private sector where studies are proprietary). Factor C, in turn, shares A's concern with philosophical grounding and shows a self-confident willingness to take on the scientific community and its prevailing paradigms insofar as these privilege R methodology and exclude the study of subjectivity. Factor C also demonstrates a willingness to take on the growing qualitative community and to offer Q as an alternative to the quantitative-qualitative orthodoxy. Like Factor B, Factor C offers specific recommendations for moving things along.

As noted initially, there's hardly an assertion above—all paraphrased from the factor spokesmen—that individuals in the other factors would not find congenial. Factor A, for instance, for all of its presumed devotion to orthodoxy, would not be opposed to the kind of promotional and outreach schemes advocated by Factors B and C, nor to D's recommendation that Q remain open to the newer developments—only that they be evaluated in relationship to the basic principles of Q methodology. Nor, presumably, is there any overt or latent hostility toward Stephenson's ideas on the part of those comprising Factor D. There are, of course, bound to be some points of contention between and among all of the factors—this is an intrinsic feature of orthogonality—but there are no polarities. Pending evidence to the contrary, therefore, we hope that we are not concluding this fruitful dialogue in an overly optimistic way by suggesting that the outcome of this exercise has been to render (with a degree of clarity attributable to Q methodology itself) the different avenues available along with an obvious division of labor to which tasks can be assigned and from which leadership can be expected. Equally important, this exercise has resulted in a viable list of potential projects that, if realized, could not but help strengthen Q methodology to the benefit of those who utilize it. All that remains is implementation. So, as Stephenson was fond of saying, "Get on with it!"

## References

- Billard, S. (1999). How Q methodology can be democratized. *Feminism & Psychology, 9*, 357-366.
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