

## Factor B: “Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted”

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In “The Future of the Q Methodology Movement,” Hurd and Brown found four factor types, and I was a member on one of them. My responses found kinship with those on Factor B and we were labeled by the authors as those who would apply and promote the Q orthodoxy. We are considered to be loyal to the Stephenson tradition, and we believe that Q methodology is “uniquely effective for elucidating problems of all kinds.” There is no better evidence of the potential of Q to elucidate problems than the recently published index (Popovich, 2003) to the ISSSS journal *Operant Subjectivity*. Perusal of that index instructs by showing all of the topics and problems to which Q has already been applied. From advertising to discourse analysis to human rights to policy studies to women’s studies, Q methodology has provided the most versatile and powerful way to measure the subjectivity which underlies any topic. And these are topics that appear only in the journal index. It was reported in 1985, for example, that more than 1400 papers using Q methodology had been published (50th anniversary of Q methodology, 1985), and more than 240 dissertations had used the technique. (What those numbers are today would be interesting to know.) Such versatility is the enduring strength of the methodology, and it is a strength that can and should be exploited to spread the knowledge of Q.

One of the distinguishing statements for Factor B adherents was the following:

- (34) The significance of Q methodology will be strengthened through its sophisticated application to significant social issues (which can occur in small-scale contexts) and through the publication of successful applications in high visibility books and journals.

One way to ensure the future of Q is to continue to use it. If each of us will try to publish one Q study in the journal which our respective colleagues think is the best journal in our field, then how can we not bring attention to the methodology and illustrate its value in measuring subjectivity? If you are unsure of your ability to publish in your prominent academic or trade journals, then make use of the annual Q conference to test your abilities. Prepare a paper for presentation, and be prepared to receive some constructive feedback from conference attendees that you can use to polish and strengthen your effort before submitting to that journal in which you desire to see your name listed as an author.

One value of the International Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity is the annual conference which the organization sponsors. My compatriots on Factor B believe that the annual ISSSS meeting plays a pivotal role in providing an opportunity for new Q scholars to come forward and learn about the traditions and history of Q and its creator William Stephenson. As

long as this organization devotes itself to maintaining the legacy of Stephenson as one focus, provides learning opportunities concerning the use and techniques of Q as a second focus, and nurtures the recruitment and training of young and upcoming scholars as a third, then the future of Q will be ensured in the coming years.

In another context concerning the future of mankind, O'Shea (1985, p. 22) said, ". . . those who plan for our future must know what we value, for that is where 'the future' begins." The same can be said about the future of Q. As part of that future, current ISSSS board members are contemplating the creation of a Stephenson Prize that will be given for an outstanding paper each year at the ISSSS convention. Details are still in the planning stages.

Two other statements which Factor B rated significantly were:

- (24) The role that subjectivity plays in society will always be with us and Q methodology or something like it will have to be maintained, resuscitated, or reinvented.
- (23) As long as it is perceived to add practical value (such a solving problems and resolving conflicts) to practices of scholarship, research, and policy-making, its future is assured.

As a communications researcher, I continually seek practical ways to interject the concept of subjectivity into a field that is dominated by "objectivists," or those to whom we refer as R methodologists. Saddled with their statistical blinders seeking random or stratified samples so they can produce generalizations for large populations, they fail to notice that their attempts to measure attitudes, opinions, or perceptions by means of various kinds of scales only produce composite measures that calculate averages as the representative measure of the groups they study. The concept of the individual is lost in aggregate mean scores, and so is the measure of the subjectivity expressed by that individual who is intimately involved in a psychological event to produce that subjectivity. Smith (2001, p. 65) suggests:

All systems can only study actual events, regardless of what they claim they are studying. They cannot study minds, selves, processing, brain powers, instincts, drives, or consciousness. In addition, Q taps into events of human subjective behavior that can actually be studied.

These conclusions came to fruition, for example, in a study conducted by my colleagues and me (Popovich, Massé, & Pitts, 2003) when we took a 56-statement instrument created to measure media writer apprehension and converted the statements for Q sorting. In its original form, student reaction to the apprehension measure would produce mean scores for eight dimensions which were considered to be factors underlying the construct—writer apprehension. Some factors would be more prominent than others, and interpretations of the data would center on which of the factors would be more dominant for a specific group.

The Q investigators employed the Q sort in a pre-test/post-test strategy and administered the instrument to 13 summer class writing students enrolled in a

five-week beginning media writing course. One of the more interesting findings of this study was the behavior of one student, who ended up on his own factor after the post-tests results had been analyzed. In the pre-test sort, he joined a group of students (Factor I) who began the course with optimism and enthusiasm for writing. However, by the end of the course he discovered that writing about his own ideas and reaching an audience was more important to him than the factual writing he had been engaged in during the class. He became dissatisfied with the discipline required to be a factual writer, although he never lost his desire to be a writer.

This student's transformation as a writer would have gone unnoticed if Q methodology had not been utilized. The Q sort produced richer and deeper student feelings toward the writing apprehension statements, and this manipulation of the writing apprehension instrument created a more powerful tool to help media writing teachers assess and interpret their students' feelings about media writing.

During the past few years, I have partnered with other colleagues to measure subjectivity in their respective media fields, because the literature in those fields is dominated by R methodologists. We have assessed the feelings of seniors (older adult perceptions) and how they are portrayed in print advertising (Robinson, Gustafson, Popovich, & Frazier, 2003), employed Q as a tool in creating a strategic plan for a health care organization (K. Popovich, & M.N. Popovich, 2000), and assessed in three studies the attitudes of photo editors and male and female photographers concerning the increasing numbers of women entering the photojournalism field (Heinen & Popovich, 2004). All of these studies illustrate the fact that subjectivity is alive and well in our society, that it can be measured in any context, that Q methodology is unquestionably an appropriate measure of subjectivity, and that this valuable tool can be put to use effectively in both scholarly and practical ways to help us learn about ourselves in both social and professional settings.

I feel strongly, too, that the Hurd and Brown piece has contributed some significant suggestions which can be employed to guarantee the future of the Q methodology movement. Most of them suggest a growing need for a virtual community of Q practitioners. In my mind's eye, I see us standing with one foot in the old technology and one foot in the new technology as we try to disseminate the Q story. Along with the authors and other study participants, I think those of us on Factor B are convinced about the value and importance of continuing to have an annual meeting to bring together colleagues and practitioners of Q methodology. The social aspects of such an event cannot be overestimated, while the event provides a formal and legitimate platform for our colleagues to present their own interpretations of their Q methodology interests.

It is, however, in the exploration of an expanded virtual Q community that the future of the movement will survive. Because of little interest expressed in renewing historical ties to the University of Missouri, our new "home" must be

easily and quickly accessible to a growing number and diverse range of practitioners who are and will continue to be located in many different locations throughout the world. The quicker we can communicate with each other, the better. The quicker our ISSSS officers can talk with each other and communicate to the membership, the better. The quicker our members can access Q tutorials, *Operant Subjectivity*, and other Q resource lists and materials, the better. This virtual community should incorporate, with appropriate permissions, the Korean Q society and journal, and provide a platform for the *Journal of Human Subjectivity*, so that our own practitioners will have ready access to those publications. *Operant Subjectivity*, which is coming under new editorship, should be converted into an electronic journal, as soon as possible.

All of this suggests that ISSSS should be looking for a host for our virtual community, and all of our online resources should be moved to one central location. One web address should put our colleagues in touch with each other and all of the resources that can be made available.

In order to facilitate the development of our virtual Q community, I would suggest that a “Council of Elders” be chosen to promote and organized the structure of the community, oversee it, and provide wisdom and advice for the maintenance and expansion of the community. This group would be separate from the officers of the ISSSS, who have enough responsibility and duties to fulfill as officers of that organization. The ISSSS board should be expanded to provide representation to those parts of the world where the largest numbers of Q practitioners reside. One member of the “elders” should be on the ISSSS board, and one ISSSS officer should be a member of the Council of Elders in order to facilitate communication.

Hurd and Brown have provided a valuable service by initiating discussion about the future of the Q methodology movement. We find ourselves at a crossroads in the life of this loosely-knit organization, and now it is time to plan a new path that will take us to a new level—one that will be worldwide in scope and inclusive of everyone who wishes to participate.

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## **Factor B: "Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted"**

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My perspective on the future of Q methodology most closely corresponds to that identified by Hurd and Brown as Factor B—"Orthodoxy Applied and Promoted." As I read their explication of the four perspectives, I indeed feel close affinity with the Factor B description, which advocated the need to apply Q methodology to social problems and present the results of these applications to both Q and non-Q audiences. However, I also identify in some measure with the perspective revealed by Factor D—labeled "Beyond Orthodoxy." This latter association is confirmed by a Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.34 between my sort and the common sort captured by Factor D. This brief essay will attempt to explain my view of the future of Q methodology in light of these two perspectives.

### **Importance of Stephenson's Q Orthodoxy**

I believe that it is important to honor and discuss Stephenson's theory and understanding of Q methodology. In particular, I appreciate (sometimes in awe) Steven Brown's leadership in preserving Q "orthodoxy." A shared understanding of Q sustains our community. Q researchers in particular appreciate the importance of language and meaning; when we use terms such as operantcy, subjectivity, concurrence, abduction, and representativeness we must know what these terms mean in Stephenson's theory. The "slow reading" of Stephenson's *The Study of Behavior* that Brown led about 10 years ago was particularly helpful in developing a consensus understanding of Q. I recommend that this effort be repeated every few years to remind ourselves of—and properly introduce novices to—Stephenson's conception of Q.