

Commentaries on “The Future of the Q Methodology Movement”

In response to the preceding article on “The Future of the Q Methodology Movement,” the following seven participants waived confidentiality and agreed to comment on the article from the vantage point of their own factors. As the loadings in Table 1 indicate, the factors are well represented by their strongest factor-analytic exponents, who were invited to comment based on the magnitude of their factor loadings. Due to the fact that Factor D was more critical of traditional Q practices than were the other factors, three Factor D representatives were invited to comment; however, only one of them ultimately took advantage of the opportunity.

Table 1: Factor Representatives

No.	Responder	A	B	C	D
10	James C. Rhoads	80	-16	29	-03
5	Dennis F. Kinsey	78	12	03	22
2	Mark N. Popovich	11	71	15	09
3	Will Focht	14	67	15	34
33	Michael Stricklin	-08	56	73	-05
23	Philip Christman	11	36	63	19
21	Kai-Hung Fang	-06	18	29	72
19	Russell C. Hurd	28	72	08	28
39	Steven R. Brown	42	55	-31	39

From “The Future of the Q Methodology Movement” (Appendix A).

Factor A: “Orthodoxy Upheld”

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I would like to begin by thanking Russ Hurd and Steven Brown for focusing our attention on the very important issue of the future of Q methodology. I believe that this is a most appropriate moment to consider these matters for we find ourselves at a time of great strength in the Q community (as demonstrated by the growing acceptance of the methodology, the expanding literature, the involvement of more scholars from an ever-widening global pool, etc.). At the same time, I fear we are inching toward some important crossroads that could pose serious challenges for Q.

I am strongly associated with Factor A in Hurd and Brown's study, labeled "Orthodoxy Upheld" by the authors. This may be the first time in my life I have been accused of being orthodox with regard to anything, but in this case it is true. Hurd and Brown were correct, at least as far as this Q sorter is concerned, when they identified the two major strains in Factor A as expressing a "desire to maintain Stephenson's original conception of Q methodology" and a concern "about intellectual leadership." For me, these constituted the most salient themes in the Q sample.

I believe strongly that Q must remain bound to Stephenson's ideas. What is of prime importance, for me, is that Stephenson provided more than a technique—he provided a science of subjectivity. There were some sentiments expressed in the statements in the Hurd-Brown Q sample of the kind that implied "moving beyond" Stephenson, or that Q should be subsumed by other intellectual movements, e.g., "feminism, behaviorism, psychoanalysis, or social constructionism." I think we need to maintain Q's separate identity, and while certainly Q has been applied to the study of these movements (as well as others), Q should not be seen as fundamentally a "feminist methodology," or a "social constructionist methodology," etc. We need to pay careful attention to all aspects of Stephenson's ideas in order to see the synthetic whole, e.g., concourse theory, the significance of the single-case, his preference for centroid factor analysis and judgmental rotation, etc. Staying connected to these ideas (and many others) is, after all, the main purpose of both the Society for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity and the journal that the Society sponsors, *Operant Subjectivity*.

Critics of this approach see a certain level of cultism involved here, that this respect for Stephenson blinds Factor A types to exciting new intellectual possibilities as well as expanding the number of people who might be exposed to the methodology. Our healthy respect for Stephenson's contributions is a starting point, a recognition of the tradition within which our work is carried out. As Steven Brown said in remarks to the 1997 gathering of ISSSS:

Every science needs its geniuses—its Galileos, Newtons, and Einsteins; its Freuds, Skinners, and Spemanns. These unusual individuals are somehow able to see through surface impressions to deeper realities beyond, but they only come around once in a great while, and the insights with which they provide us are invariably troubling to the world. And these troubling ideas would remain abnormal and generally unacceptable were it not for those who are capable of understanding the insights and making them comprehensible to others. Stephenson was of course the genius of our science: How subjectivity could be rescued from the realm of speculation and placed on a scientific footing was his insight, and I daresay that none of us in this room could have innovated Q methodology in a way even remotely approaching the way in which Stephenson did. By the same token, his idea of a subjective science

would likely have remained largely stillborn had it not been for the precious few in this room who were fast learners, who grasped the insights even though they could not have come up with these insights on their own, and then were able to explain these central and oftentimes difficult ideas to others. It is this ability of ours to recognize something important in advance of everybody else that serves to constitute us as the kind of community which Kuhn said was indispensable for a normal science (Brown, 1998, p. 99).

A second issue, related to the first, will arise when the generation of scholars who were Stephenson's graduate students conclude their careers. Many are still active, yet at some point, they will no longer be there to mentor countless numbers of Q practitioners (both novice and advanced), be the most effective spokespersons on behalf of Q, be willing to defend Q on all grounds (theoretical, factor-analytic, etc.), and serve as a direct tie to Stephenson's ideas. In short, our community will suffer a huge loss. I am particularly concerned about the leadership vacuum that will exist with the retirement of Steven Brown, who has been the primary heir of the Stephenson legacy and whose tireless work on behalf of Q will be missed beyond measure. I would hazard to guess that almost everyone reading this essay has at one time (or more!) sought his counsel while working on a Q project.

This potential crisis in leadership is, of course, an inevitable consequence of time. However, it will be all the more severe because of the significant contributions to the Q cause made by these scholars who learned directly from Stephenson. Although I am confident that new leaders will emerge, I worry that as direct contact with Stephenson's ideas become more remote, so will our commitment to advancing a true science of subjectivity.

Despite these concerns, I remain optimistic about the future of Q methodology. Our ranks are growing, and Q is making inroads in virtually every area of academic inquiry. It has been 70 years since William Stephenson penned his famous letter to *Nature*, spelling out his innovation, and his work continues to live on in the pages of this journal, and many other venues. To guarantee the future success of Q, we need only remember what attracted us to this methodology in the first place: its remarkable utility in exploring subjectivity in all its forms.

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References

- Brown, S.R. (1998). Subjective science: normal and abnormal (continued). *Operant Subjectivity*, 21, 92-111.