



Guest Editor's Foreword

Q Methodology and Behaviorism: Introduction to a Symposium

In May 1999, a symposium titled “The Objective Analysis of Subjective Behavior: William Stephenson’s Q Methodology” was held at the 25th annual meeting of the Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA) in Chicago, IL. The presenters included a combination of Q methodologists and behavioral psychologists: Donald M. Baer (University of Kansas), Steven R. Brown (Kent State University), Dennis J. Delprato (Eastern Michigan University), Robert M. Lipgar (University of Chicago Medical Center), Bryan D. Midgley (then, University of Kansas), and Edward K. Morris (University of Kansas). The symposium’s purpose was to introduce Q methodology to a behavior-analytic audience, and to discuss points of similarity between behavior analysis and Q methodology. This was most likely the first symposium of its kind to be held at an ABA conference.

ABA itself is an organization devoted to the field of behavior analysis — a natural science approach to behavior most often associated with the “radical behaviorism” of B. F. Skinner. Among its areas of specialization are the experimental analysis of behavior (basic research), applied behavior analysis (applied and clinical research), and the conceptual analysis of behavior (theoretical and historical research). These areas have in common the conceptualization of behavior in naturalistic terms, and the rejection of psycho-physical dualism and explanations of behavior cast in terms of hypothetical mental processes, states, and events.

The rejection of dualism emphasizes one point of commonality between behavior analysis and Q methodology, for Stephenson found no place for dualism in his system of behavior (see Smith 2001). As he wrote, “Logic...leads us to regard behavior as neither mind nor body nor physiology; it is simply behavior, whether subjective to a person or objective to others” (Stephenson 1953, 23). In addition, Stephenson argued that all behavior could be understood within the framework of behaviorism. In his words:

Psychology, for us, can know no boundaries, in principle, between what is subjective behavior and what is outwardly observable behavior. We shall use the term “behaviorism” in the future, therefore, with this conclusion in mind. (Stephenson 1953, 26)

Given Stephenson's rejection of dualism and acceptance of a behavioral framework, a symposium seemed a useful starting point for exploring these and other similarities between behavior analysis and Q methodology. (Incidentally, the specific behavioral framework that Stephenson adopted was Kantor's interbehavioral psychology; see Smith 2001.)

Three of the papers in this theme issue are based on the symposium presentations. These include the contributions by Steven Brown, Dennis Delprato and Brown, and Robert Lipgar. Two papers are new; these are the contributions by Bryan Midgley and Edward Morris and by Noel Smith (State University of New York — Plattsburgh). Midgley and Morris start off the issue by discussing the concept of subjectivity in the behaviorisms of B. F. Skinner, J. R. Kantor, and William Stephenson. Delprato and Brown then explore the construct of the operant in behavior analysis and Q methodology. Brown next discusses the application of Q methodology to subjective behavior analysis. Lipgar concludes the "presentations" proper by exploring the concept of subjective probability using Q methodology. Lastly, Smith serves as "discussant" for the issue.

Donald Baer, who served as discussant for the symposium itself, passed away unexpectedly on April 28, 2002. His many contributions to the science of behavior were in the field of behavior analysis, not Q methodology. Nonetheless, Don eagerly participated in the symposium. He had known Stephenson at the University of Chicago (where Don obtained his Ph.D.), was knowledgeable about Q methodology, and had a strong interest in all matters concerning scientific methodology. His discussant comments were scholarly, insightful, engaging, and uniquely Don. He will be greatly missed by many colleagues and generations of Human Development and Family Life students at the University of Kansas. With deep affection and respect, we dedicate this special issue to the memory of Donald M. Baer (1931-2002).

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References

- Smith, N.W. 2001. Centrisms, noncentrisms, and universal Q. *Operant Subjectivity* 24: 52-67.
- Stephenson, W. 1953. *The study of behavior: Q-technique and its methodology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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