

BOOK REVIEW

Q Methodology (Quantitative Applications in the Social Sciences Series, Vol. 66). By Bruce McKeown and Dan Thomas. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. 83 pp., \$6.50 paper

There is now available an introduction to Q-method which can be recommended to social science students. The Series co-editor's "Introduction" is itself astonishingly welcome: it is a grasp of essentials, put in a few sentences, that is a joy to acknowledge. There is indeed now a "systematic and vigorously quantitative means for examining human subjectivity." That subjective points of view are communicable, and advanced from a position of self reference, is indeed the case: there is also the central thought, that "self-reference is preserved rather than compromised by or confused with an external frame of reference brought by an investigator." These sentences, in the first paragraph, are taken from the synopsis that opens the paper, and they are the sum and substance of Q-methodology.

The brief chapters introduce Q-samples, Q-sorting, and conditions of instruction; person-samples and the single case; statistical analysis; and research applications. The use of the centroid method, and reasons for its acceptance, gains attention. The details are accurate. The authors recognize that interpretations are themselves in the self-referential framework (p. 66). Q-methodology begins with empirical Q-sorts and ends with theoretical Q-sorts; and the latter are open to debate as to their meaning; there is no doubt about the quality of the data as such. All of this is exemplary.

Note, however, that I have put a hyphen between Q and Methodology, which the authors omit: it is Q-technique, Q-sort, Q-sample, but not, for the two authors, Q-methodology.

Why is this? On p. 40 they indeed put in the hyphen, when introducing "Intensive Person-Samples." Every paragraph in the brief volume of 80 pages provides exemplary thinking along what I

would describe as Q-methodological lines--except one, towards the end of the paper, that I shall discuss in a moment. One is tempted to *feel* that the authors are in some doubt about whether a *method* is at issue, rather than a *methodology*. The title of their paper, perhaps, should have been *Q Method*.

If so, they would have been in good company. There have been previous attempts to write an introductory paper for Q. I wrote one myself in 1950, entitled *Foundations of Q-Methodology*; it became so complicated, what with emphasis on specific and general propositions, that I gave it up and relied instead on the 1953 *The Study of Behavior: Q-technique and Its Methodology*. (The original 1950 chapters will be made available via the Stephenson Research Center.) Then there was a version of 200 pages by Jum Nunnally, about 1954, who was a graduate student in my seminars at Chicago. It was quite frank: Q was a mixture of testing, factor analysis, variance analysis, psychological theory and hunches--really a mix-up of *methods*, not a *methodology*. (A copy of this will also be in the Stephenson Research Center.) Kerlinger has never accepted Q as a methodology. Recently, I completed a few chapters on *Elementary Q-Methodology*, for undergraduates and graduates in experimental psychology, written for Professor Dennis Delprato of Eastern Michigan University (and also to be made available to the Center).

It is into this company of doubt and achievement that Bruce McKeown and Dan Thomas have ventured, and they can only be congratulated. The brief 80 pages will do much to introduce Q to others, like themselves, who are prepared to look at Q seriously as a life's work.

It is in this context that I would like to point to a difficulty that clearly exists for McKeown, Thomas, Kerlinger and others, as it did for Nunnally. It concerns *self reference*.

Let me explain. The authors of *Q Methodology* made a study of "polarity theory" (Tomkins, 1963), described on pp. 67-73 of their paper. Tomkins proposes that there have been two distinct modes of "thinking and valuing" in the course of Western civilization, the "humanistic" (left-wing) and "normative" (right-wing), respectively. He asks, "Are

human beings ends in themselves, creatures of values; or do we strive to realize ourselves by conforming to objective norms that precede, transcend, and are independent of our existence?" (cited in McKeown & Thomas, p. 67).

The question is important, and, as a final illustration of Q, our two authors examine it as a research problem: what, they ask, is the structure and form of ideological thinking in relation to human personality? The polarity theory is at issue. In a Q-method study they found two factors, A and B, that seemed to support the Tomkins thesis. Factor A ("humanistic") is interpreted as a "self-referent" system of values, whereas factor B embraces a much more "norm-centered" position:

In contrast to A's advocacy of self-indulgence and unbridled self-expression...Factor B recommends a restrained, disciplined route to self-realization. (p. 73)

Again, it is clear, they conclude...

Factor A subscribes to a "self-referent" system of values, whereas Factor B embraces a much more "norm-centered" position. (pp. 71-72)

The same basic themes, they add, show in studies of interpersonal relations, social control, and politics (p. 72).

What is wrong? *Self reference is not a system of values; and factor B is as much self referent as factor A.* Self reference is a technical term in Q-methodology, with reference to *James's Law*, by which some factors are *me* and some *mine*; but all are self referent. This law allows us to distinguish between two kinds of operant factors, those that are *me* (idiosyncratic, unique) and those that are *mine* (with truth-value, probably universals).

The trouble enters when the experimentalist seeks to apply *James's Law* to correlation tables for small P-sets, as in the case of our two authors. What it needs is at least two Q-sorts from each individual, one *self descriptive*, and at least one other which asks for Q-sorting about what the individual's position is about the *culture* in which he or she lives.

Factoring such a matrix would allow *James's Law* to make itself felt.

To illustrate this, I performed a simple experiment for myself as a "single case," using the 10 statements of the Q-sample for the polarity study, listed on p. 71 of the McKeown-Thomas paper. The statements constitute a miniature concourse; with this I performed a set of 8 Q-sorts, with the conditions of instruction and significant operant-factor data given in Table 1.

Table 1
OPERANT FACTOR STRUCTURE

Conditions of Instruction	Operant Factors		
	x	y	z
1 my ideo-affective position	X		
2 Tomkins' polarity position		X	
3 humanist position			
4 personality position		-X	
5 character position		X	
6 social control position		X	
7 convergent selectivity position	X		
8 paradox position			X

X=significant loadings; all others insignificant.

There are three factors. Application of *James's Law* shows at once that (x) is *me*, while (y) and (z) are *mine*.

The difference can be profound. (x) can be absolutely idiosyncratic to *me*, whereas anyone else in the same culture can, in principle, give factors (y) and (z).

There is no way by which I could consciously perform the Q-sorts to deliberately provide such operant factor structure, which was as novel to me as it would be to anyone else who performs the experiment. My factor (x) suggests that my position is somewhat "existential"--to judge by the fact that Q-sort 7 is "on" the factor.

Factor (y) is the familiar "social control" influence of my *The Play Theory of Mass Communication*

(1967), indicative of the way "we conform to objective norms that precede, transcend, and are independent of our existence." This is indeed what Tomkins was concerned about. Note that the personality Q-sort (4) is loaded negatively on the factor: it suggests *resistance to controls*--as seems highly likely if we look at the breakdown in institutional controls now under way in the United States. Factor (z) is indeed a surprise, that for so small a Q-sample a necessary quantum-theoretical influence is indicated. It has to do with the astonishing paradoxes with which man is faced, e.g., statement no. 10 of p. 71: "A government should allow freedom of expression...*even though there is some risk in permitting it*"; and no. 30: "Man must always leave himself open to his own feelings...*alien as they may sometimes seem.*"

Discoveries are made in Q-methodology, therefore, in relation to self referentiality. They point to *new* hypotheses not involved in the conditions of instruction for Q-sorts as testable hypotheses. In the present case, for example, I would want to study "resistance to controls," suggests by Q-sort 4's position on factor (y). And quantum paradox, as indicated by factor (z), is a key matter.

I am sorry that Professor Kerlinger and others, and Nunnally of so long ago, amongst my warmest friends, find it difficult to accept this *methodological* position. It is the core of Q-methodology, and self reference is its ubiquitous principle. Meanwhile, McKeown and Thomas have broken ice, and there can be hope that their paper will lead others to develop Q, whether as method, or methodology.

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REJOINDER TO WILLIAM STEPHENSON

Given our initial trepidation in accepting the assignment from Sage to write a primer on Q-methodology, we were pleasantly relieved by William Stephenson's kind remarks regarding our effort. It is our hope, as well, that the volume will "break the

ice" and lead others to "develop Q, whether as method, or methodology."

Professor Stephenson nevertheless takes issue with two points which apparently reveal our failure to fully comprehend the method/methodology distinction and to recognize that both of the Tomkins' factor types, Left and Right, are equally self-referent. These matters are not unrelated and Professor Stephenson's comments are well-taken. If we fail to appreciate the role of self-reference as the central postulate of Q-methodology, we are advancing Q essentially as a technique without due regard for the epistemology which makes it a comprehensive approach to human behavior.

However, by way of a disclaimer and in our own defense, we regret the presentation created confusion and an unfortunate misreading on these matters. In the first instance, perhaps we were not as sensitive as we should have been to the symbolic value of the missing hyphen in the monograph's title. As he notes, we include it in the text of the volume. Nonetheless, the series' editors determined the title and, to the best of our recollection, their decision on this matter came late on the publishing calendar. Thus, on the one hand, we beg ignorance for this gaffe; on the other, it should have been caught and rectified even in the press of editing the galley proofs.

Nevertheless, Professor Stephenson believes the "missing hyphen" portends something more serious and disturbing. He writes, "It is in this context that I would point to a difficulty that clearly exists for McKeown, Thomas, Kerlinger and others, as it did for Nunnally. It concerns *self-reference*." This is stated in light of our discussion of the political types identified in the study of Tomkins' polarity hypothesis. We concluded, "Factor A subscribes to a 'self-referent' system of values, whereas Factor B embraces a much more 'norm-centered' position." Professor Stephenson then asks, "What is wrong? Self reference is not a system of values; and factor B is as much self referent as factor A."

In one sense it is gratifying to be placed in the company of Fred Kerlinger and Jum Nunnally. However, in this instance, we would rather disavow the association and the apparent guilt accompanying it.

We wish to assure our readers that we do understand the self-referent nature of all factor types and we believe this recognition is evident in the whole discussion of 76 pages of text. As far as we know we did not suffer a temporary regression into R-methodological pathology that forced us to type "self-referent" for factor A and "norm-centered" for factor B. To the contrary, the data and our discussion demonstrate the essential self-referent nature of both typologies.

Given that, we, too, ask, What is the problem? The problem results from an unfortunate stylistic blunder that is misleading and misunderstood. We did not mean nor intend to suggest that factor A is any more self-referent than factor B; to do so, as Professor Stephenson reminds us, is to violate the basic tenets of Q-methodology. Rather, we meant only to describe factor A in *Tomkins'* terms, i.e., the Left's overt self-centered orientation as a style of political behavior in contrast to the Right which hides its self-reference in the language of external values and norms. To make this point we purposely placed "self-referent" and "norm-centered" (pp. 71-72) in quotation marks: these were meant to indicate a qualification given our data. Consequently, we believe Professor Stephenson misunderstood our use of the term in this case. We were employing it in its superficial manifestation. We regret if readers new to Q-method and its philosophy of science may be reinforced in their R-methodological inclinations due to this problem.

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David W. Stewart provides another favorable review of McKeown and Thomas's monograph in *Journal of Marketing Research*, May 1989, pp. 249-250.