

Comment

Q Methodological Gleanings From the 2nd Institute for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity

My purpose in writing this brief report is to identify several methodological matters that for me were learned or reinforced during the Institute proceedings, October 17-18, 1986. These reflections will hopefully remind participants of the richness of content in this year's sessions, and whet the appetites of others for next year's conference.

First, people involved in Q studies are human beings who participate in the research rather than being subjected to a researcher. Thus these persons are more appropriately referred to as *participants* than *subjects* and *researchers*. In this spirit, the persons conducting the study might also sort the deck and report his or her position in the results (Wendy & Rex Stainton Rogers).

Second, concourses may be created from interview verbatims (Brian D'Agostino) and overheard comments and media commentary (Darcy McDonell) as well as pictures (which enhance immediacy of response) and major published works (William Stephenson).

Third, statements in Q decks may be lengthy and still produce meaningful results (Bruce McKeown & Dan Thomas) but will more commonly be shorter in order to increase the likelihood that they will be immediately meaningful to the reader. Long statements often begin as self-referenced opinions, but often end more as conditions of instruction that can be "proved" or "disproved" (Stephenson).

Fourth, diversity of results ought to be discussed less as *factors*, and more as *accounts*, *understandings*, *discourses*, or *worldviews* (Stainton Rogers), or as *viewpoints* or *profiles* (McDonell). While as many as 10 or 12 such groupings were reported when that many seemed necessary to fit the reality being described (Stainton Rogers), emphasis was placed on the discovery of smaller numbers of fundamental issues, such as caring (Stephenson). Similar three-factor solutions--e.g., conservative,

Conference also reunion for researchers

Q Methodology founder honored

By Donna Walter
Missourian staff writer

For Linda Shipley, this is not just another academic conference. It is a reunion of sorts.

The professor from the University of Nebraska came for the weekend to attend the Second Annual Institute for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity at the University.

She was joined by researchers from eight states and England, Canada and Australia, many of whom, like her, studied under William Stephenson, professor emeritus at the University.

Stephenson developed Q Methodology — a research method used to measure subjectivity — 51 years ago.

The conference, which ended Saturday, had two purposes: to honor Stephenson and his work,

and to share ideas with others who use his research method, Shipley said.

Q Methodology uses rankings to measure attitudes people hold toward certain subjects. Researchers attending the conference said they use the method for a variety of purposes.

Doran Levy, the president of a marketing company, said his company researches the attitudes of people in relation to commercial needs. The results allow the company to market products more efficiently, Levy said.

Shipley said that the people who attended the conference either studied under Stephenson or use his research method. Darcy McDonell, a political science researcher from the Australian National University, said she enjoys talking to people who understand Q Methodology because none of her colleagues in Australia use it.

Stephenson described the conference as "astonishing" and "rewarding."

Joye Patterson, a University journalism professor, said there was a feeling of a common bond among the researchers.

Many of the researchers graduated from the University, she said. "They're coming home, so to speak," she said.

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liberal, and separatist (in substance although not in name)--were observed in a discussion by several Institute participants.

Fifth, interpretation of the groupings may be enriched by application of the following principles when appropriate:

- Try to discover the feeling that runs through the factor array (Stephenson).

- Ask exemplars of a factor to interpret their own perspectives, especially if the meaning is not clear (Charles Mauldin).
- Do a case study of a grouping's most representative persons (Stephenson).
- Give a positive interpretation and not a negative one (Mauldin).
- Avoid labeling perspectives except in negotiation with exemplars (Mauldin).
- Resist the temptation to assume a statement has the same meaning to different groups because it shows up in a similar location in their statement arrays (Stainton Rogers).
- Test an interpretation by presenting it to people and asking if they know anyone like that (Stainton Rogers).
- Use Venn-like diagrams to visualize similarities and differences among factors (Mauldin).
- Rewrite the statements into a profile of a grouping's perspective (McDonell).

Sixth, comparisons among groupings may be enriched through cross-perception research, by asking either one P set subset or persons representing one factor to arrange the deck as they believe another group of persons would (G. Norman Van Tubergen, William Ascher). Further comparisons may be made by showing other statement arrays to exemplars of a factor to elicit their reaction (Stainton Rogers).

Seventh, advances in knowledge are facilitated through a "deconstructing" of "social constructions of reality" that are taken for granted, and a "reconstructing" process that is grounded in subjectivity and intersubjectivity (Stainton Rogers).

Eighth, suggestions for further consideration or future implementation included:

- Keep on asking the question, "What should we be studying?", rather than assuming that anything is amenable to Q research (Stephenson).
- Remember that R methodological categories undermine the ability to think things through clearly (Stephenson).

- Think about whether there are sets of factors concerning certain issues through which people move developmentally (D'Agostino).
- Do "internal thought experiments" as a way of anticipating kinds of response to a stimulus (Stephenson).
- Write a brief description of Q to attach to research reports in order to explain the methodology (Stainton Rogers).
- Include important people in a study to increase the likelihood that it will be published; alternatively, this can be done for a well-known person who is unavailable, such as an historical figure (Stephenson).

These insights by no means exhaust what was presented and discussed at the conference, but they do provide a sampler of its emergent ideas and practical suggestions.

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The Third Annual Institute
for the Scientific Study of Subjectivity
("the Q conference")

University of Missouri-Columbia

The 1987 Q conference has been tentatively scheduled for a weekend in October, the precise time to be selected so as to avoid conflicting with a football weekend or festivities associated with Journalism Week.

Suggestions for paper presentations, panel topics, speakers, etc., should be forwarded to Steven R. Brown (Political Science, Kent State U, Kent OH 44242) who, with Joye Patterson (School of Journal-