
Operant Subjectivity

The International Journal of Q Methodology

Foreword to the Special Issue: Q Methodology and the Single Case

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Because of the dominance of sampling doctrine, upheld as it is by all the statisticians and professors in the academies, the case for the single case has barely made a dent in current psychology or in social science. Yet it makes science possible, in the place of scientism.

(Stephenson, 1961, p. 18)

As his writings attest, William Stephenson devoted a great deal of attention to the role of Q methodology in studying a single-case. “Our object has been to make it possible for studies to be undertaken on single cases. We shall show how any person, in principle, can be made the subject of detailed factor and variance analysis” (Stephenson, 1953, p.2). The study of subjectivity is perhaps most clearly represented within the context of individual case studies, and this issue is devoted to a sample of such scholarship.

Stephenson’s own study of Martre makes a powerful case as to how such investigations can be of use in a clinical setting. Using Stephenson’s self-study upon the occasion of his retirement at the University of Missouri, Thomas undertakes a similar self-study shortly after his own retirement. Mauldin conducts life histories with two subjects, and has each sort statements to describe self in various situations drawn from the interviews. In addition to the substantive results he presents, Mauldin’s article also is instructive in that he allows us to see the learning process he went through, methodologically, as he moved from one case to the next. Rhoads also investigates two case studies, which are tied to Lasswell’s theories of political role. Brown examines the role of prior life experiences as they bear on problem selection in the policy process. Finally, a bibliography of single-case studies is appended at the end of this issue.

As Good reminded us: “For Stephenson, the use of Q-methodology with a single subject under multiple conditions of instruction met the requisite conditions for a scientific study of subjectivity, equivalent to the physicist’s manipulation of experimental conditions in the laboratory” (2010, p. 226). It is hoped that this issue will help renew interest in this important aspect of Stephenson’s legacy.

I would like to express my deep appreciation to James Good, Editor of *Operant Subjectivity: The International Journal of Q Methodology*, the contributors, and those who provided helpful and timely reviews. My thanks are also due to April Nauman for her excellent copy editing of this special issue.

References

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