

42d Annual Q Conference in Kent, Ohio (September 16-18, 2026) - Abstract Book

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Abstract 1**Nurses' Subjective Viewpoints on Empathy in Patient Care: A Q-Methodology Study in Saudi Arabia****Abdullah Al Motairi, Adel Saeed Bashatah, Saudi Arabia**

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Abstract

Background: Empathy is a fundamental component of holistic and patient-centered nursing care. It supports therapeutic communication, patient trust, treatment adherence, and overall care experiences. However, nurses working in complex hospital environments may experience workload pressure, emotional fatigue, and organizational constraints that influence how empathy is understood and practiced. In the Saudi healthcare context, there remains a need to better understand nurses' subjective viewpoints on empathy and the factors that shape empathic engagement in daily clinical practice.

Aim: This study aimed to explore nurses' subjective perspectives on empathy toward patient care and to identify key issues influencing empathic nursing practice and patients' healthcare experiences at King Abdullah Medical Complex in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Methods: A Q-methodology design was employed, guided by Jean Watson's Theory of Human Caring. A concourse related to empathy in nursing was developed from the literature and nurses' experiential accounts, then refined into a 34-statement Q-set reflecting cognitive, affective, behavioral, and contextual dimensions of empathy. Using purposive sampling, nurses from outpatient, catheterization laboratory, day surgery, medical, surgical, and combined medical-surgical units completed paper-based Q-sorts. Twenty-one valid Q-sorts were analyzed using KADE software version 1.3.1. By-person factor analysis was conducted using Brown's centroid method, followed by Varimax rotation.

Results: The analysis produced a three-factor solution representing distinct viewpoints on empathy. Factor 1, Emotion-Centered Empathic Connection, emphasized communication, emotional attunement, patient trust, and the role of empathy in recovery. Factor 2, Duty-Driven but Emotionally Strained Practice, reflected task focus, time pressure, emotional fatigue, and the perception that clinical outcomes may still be achieved with limited empathic engagement. Factor 3, Pragmatic Balancing of Empathy and Workload, combined recognition of empathy's value with prioritization of clinical responsibilities and awareness of time constraints. Across the factors, empathy was influenced by workload, staffing, emotional exhaustion, organizational climate, and access to empathy-focused education.

Conclusion: The findings demonstrate that nurses hold diverse yet overlapping perspectives on empathy, ranging from deeply relational to task-oriented and self-protective. This study highlights the value of Q methodology in revealing nuanced patterns of subjectivity among nurses. The findings may inform nursing education, leadership strategies, and organizational initiatives aimed at sustaining empathic, patient-centered care while addressing workload-related strain.

Abstract 2**Using Q Methodology to Track Changes in Student Admission Characteristics for an Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)****Elizabeth Albright, Diane Montgomery, Kelly O'Bryan**

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Abstract

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 established the Land Grant Universities and the Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the United States. Since the time of their establishment, HBCUs have been noted for their support of students, particularly students who are at risk for higher education degrees (Williams et al., 2022). Throughout the years, special programs at HBCUs have been established for those students who need remedial assistance. The participants of this study were admitted to such a specialized program as they did not meet entrance requirements based on exam scores or grade point average. Furthermore, many students were at risk because of such traits as low socioeconomic status and being part of a minority population. Admittance to the program was based on an expressed desire to complete a college degree. The program is entering its second year with little understanding of the emotion, motivation, and resilience of students who are on their path to successful graduation.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe the ways that a group of Freshmen students who were admitted in a special cohort and were considered at risk for college graduation describe their personal experience of their emotional development and resiliency. Using Q methodology and the same Q set, the three viewpoints/factors that emerged from the Year I group of students will be entered for the Year II students with a second order analysis of the two groups. The analyses of Year II will be finalized, and the second order will be conducted to determine if another viewpoint is evident. Although it likely the groups present similarly experiences, Q methodology offers a strategy to understand why some groups may differ from others.

Abstract 3**Viewpoints of Volunteers and Educators Working with Prisoners****Elizabeth Albright, Diane Montgomery, Kelly O'Bryan, Lawrence Murray**

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Abstract

The United States government and several American institutions of higher education have been involved for decades in developing and implementing academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate level for individuals who are incarcerated. Other programs involve institutions of faith and social justice programs. People who are incarcerated may have the opportunity to voluntarily participate in programs that encourage personal development or enroll in and subsequently complete degrees while serving time in prison. Incarcerated students who completed degree programs were given incentives such as time off their sentences or other benefits within the facility. There are a variety of reasons volunteers work in the prison system and responses they have to their experiences. Some believe these programs are essential to rehabilitation; some working in the programs feel rewarded, frustrated, or worried about its efficacy. The purpose of this study is to discover the viewpoints of prison volunteers and educators regarding perceptions of their work in prison systems and settings. Results from this study will be used to better inform the legislators, higher education administrators, and the public about the value of prison programs. The concourse was developed through informal interviews and a review of literature and sampled according to four areas of the ways that prison workers might describe their experience (emotional, cognitive, physical, and spiritual) to result in a Q sample of 44 statements. To date the data collection continues with the P set of educators, pastors and religious lay leaders, lawyers, and others who have experience with the prisoners. Analysis is expected to show three groups of ideas exist within the P set. These various perspectives and philosophies are conflicting and may support future work in prison programs by addressing the needs of those who work with prisoners.

Abstract 4

Marine-Coastal Conservation Policies: Perceptions of Different Tourism Stakeholders in Northeastern Brazil

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Abstract

What are the perceptions of different tourism sectors regarding marine-coastal conservation policies in the municipality of Maragogi (Alagoas, Brazil)? Understanding how different actors perceive and interpret public policies is a central field of inquiry in contemporary political science. This issue is particularly complex within the context of environmental conservation in protected marine and coastal areas, since these territories bring together actors with distinct interests, rationalities, and belief systems (artisanal fishers, tourism operators, public managers, researchers, and non-governmental organizations, etc.), whose interactions directly shape the outcomes of conservation policies. Moreover, there are significant disparities in levels of information asymmetry among these sectors. In Maragogi, a municipality located within the Costa dos Corais Environmental Protection Area (APACC) and one of the main sun-and-sea tourism destinations in Northeastern Brazil, this tension is especially acute due to the pressure on coral reefs and the local economy's dependence on visitor flows. Thus, Q-methodology is a particularly relevant methodological tool for studying the perceptions of different actors regarding public policies. By combining the qualitative depth of interviews with the quantitative systematization of factor analysis, Q methodology makes it possible to identify perception typologies—referred to as factors or types—that reflect shared subjective patterns of thought among respondents. This theoretical-methodological combination can be highly productive, as it allows individual perceptions to be situated within an analytical framework that connects beliefs to political action. Thus, this study uses Q-methodology to identify and compare perspectives on marine conservation among two tourism sectors: the nautical and the hotel sectors. Fifteen subjects from each sector will rank the Q-statements, based on documents and interviews carried out previously in a related study. Factorial analysis will be carried out to analyze the data.

Abstract 5

Wellness Perceptions of Master's Level Counselors-in-Training

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Abstract

The present study seeks to understand the various viewpoints of clinical mental health counseling students in relation to personal wellness throughout their training. The participants for this study are master's level clinical mental health counseling students engaged in various lengths of time within the program. The program is typically completed in two years and nine months and has a first-year, second year, and third-year cohort. Students within the first-year cohort completed the requirements of the study prior to any training on wellness, whereas the second-year cohort had completed a seven-hour Wellness Day in their first semester of the program as well as receiving wellness-related training and journal reflection prompts throughout their first year, and the third-year cohort had completed a Wellness Day and training/journal prompts their first year, as well as continued training, journaling/reflection, and application of wellness-related concepts throughout their second year in the program.

The concourse was developed through the lens of the SAMHSA model in addition to literature on wellness-related topics from various disciplines. The statement set was derived by removing duplicate concepts and combining related statements through

the lens of nine dimensions: the 8 dimensions of wellness, and general wellness-related concepts. The prompt for the Q sort asked participants to sort the statements as they relate to their personal viewpoint on what wellness means to them. A post-sort interview included questions about the statements most like, most unlike, and neutral to participants' perspectives as well as statements that were difficult to place or were especially important in understanding their perspectives on wellness.

Abstract 6 AI in Graduate Coursework: It's Complicated

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly reshaping higher education, yet how online graduate students subjectively interpret and experience AI in their coursework remains underexplored. This study employed Q methodology to identify distinct, shared viewpoints among 31 online graduate students regarding the role of AI in their academic work. Grounded in Stephenson's principle of operant subjectivity and informed by Expectancy-Value Theory and Human-AI Collaboration frameworks, Q methodology was selected for its capacity to systematically reveal and interpret shared subjective viewpoints on complex social phenomena.

Participants completed a Q sort of 20 statements drawn from scholarly literature, student focus groups, and relevant online discussions across four thematic blocks: AI in Graduate Research and Learning, Enhancing Student Engagement and Support, Productivity and Efficiency in Academia, and Challenges and Ethical Concerns. Sorts were completed using a quasi-normal distribution grid ranging from most agree (+4) to most not agree (4) via an online data collection platform. Factor analysis conducted in KADE using varimax rotation yielded a three-factor solution accounting for 48% of total study variance. The analysis identified three distinct viewpoints. Factor 1, AI Skeptics Focused on Critical Thinking and Student Autonomy, reflects participants who view overreliance on AI as a threat to authentic intellectual development and emphasize preserving foundational academic skills. Factor 2, AI Enthusiasts Prioritizing Academic Efficiency and Skill Enhancement, characterizes students who embrace AI as an indispensable tool for improving writing quality, streamlining research tasks, and reducing workload, with comparatively little concern for ethical risks. Factor 3, Instructional Pragmatists Leveraging AI for Academic Support, represents a moderate utilitarian stance in which participants value AI for organizational tasks and feedback but remain cautious about its broader pedagogical claims.

Low inter-factor correlations ($r < .32$) indicate clear differentiation among viewpoints. The findings reveal that graduate student perspectives on AI cluster around distinct tensions, including critical thinking, writing efficiency, and ethical risk. These configurations highlight implications for instructional design, AI literacy, and institutional policy, while offering a subjectivity-centered account of how students negotiate AI in graduate coursework.

Abstract 7 Viewpoints on Doctoral Program Selection: A Q Methodology Study of Incoming Ph.D. Students in Workforce and Organizational Development

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Abstract

Doctoral program selection among adult learners is a consequential decision shaped by competing priorities, constraints, and perceived returns on investment. As online and hybrid doctoral models expand, understanding how incoming students interpret and prioritize program attributes becomes increasingly important. Existing research on doctoral choice is dominated by variable-centered approaches that isolate predictors such as cost, reputation, or flexibility. These approaches assume independence among factors and do not account for how individuals integrate multiple considerations into coherent decision-making logics. For a specific Ph.D. in Workforce and Organizational Development (WOD), structured elements such as summer residencies exist; however, there is limited understanding of how incoming students subjectively perceive the value of these features. This creates a gap in both theory and program design, as institutions lack empirically grounded insight into the patterned viewpoints that shape enrollment decisions and, in turn, influence marketing strategies.

The purpose of this study is to identify and interpret shared viewpoints among incoming Ph.D. students regarding their selection of a program in WOD. The condition of instruction guiding the study is: "Sort these statements according to how strongly they reflect your views on why you selected this Ph.D. program in Workforce and Organizational Development." The goal is to reveal distinct configurations of perspectives that represent different ways of understanding doctoral program selection.

This study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and Signaling Theory. Human Capital Theory (Gary Becker) posits that individuals invest in education based on expected returns such as career advancement and earnings. Signaling Theory (Michael Spence) extends this perspective by emphasizing how educational credentials communicate value to employers. Together, these frameworks provide a lens for understanding how students evaluate program features such as modality, institutional affiliation, and residency components as both investments and signals. Data will be collected from 20 (P-set) students in person. A concourse of statements will be developed from literature on doctoral education, workforce development, and adult learning, supplemented by program materials and student communications. Drawing on this concourse, as well as one previously developed for a community college leadership program, key domains such as flexibility, cost, reputation, cohort experience, career advancement, and program structure will guide statement selection for a Q-set. Incoming Ph.D. students will complete a

Q-sort of the statements along a quasi-normal distribution based on the condition of instruction. Data will be analyzed using KADE software to conduct factor analysis and identify shared patterns of viewpoints. Additionally, open-ended data will be collected, and each factor describing a distinct perspective on doctoral program selection will be interpreted. Factor interpretation will involve both statistical outputs and qualitative examination of distinguishing statements.

This study contributes to Workforce and Organizational Development by advancing a person-centered, theory-informed understanding of doctoral program selection. Rather than identifying isolated predictors, it reveals how students synthesize multiple considerations into coherent decision frameworks. This addresses a methodological gap in the literature and extends applications of Q methodology within HRD and WOD contexts. Findings will be used to refine recruitment strategies, messaging, and program design. By identifying dominant viewpoints, institutions can align program features with student priorities, differentiate program offerings, and communicate more effectively.

Abstract 8 Assess Teachers' Perceptions in West Virginia (WV) of Student Mental Health Status and Substance Use Behavior: Q-Methodology

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Abstract

Background: Adolescent substance use remains a significant public health concern, especially in rural Appalachia, where access to mental health resources is limited, and teachers often serve as frontline gatekeepers for student well-being. While the relationship between mental health and substance use is well-documented, little is known about how teachers perceive and interpret the well-being, mental health, and substance use behavior among their students. Understanding educators' perspectives is important for designing effective, ecologically grounded, and contextually relevant school-based prevention strategies. **Methods:** This observational study used Q-Methodology to examine the subjective viewpoints of middle school teachers in West Virginia regarding student mental health and substance use risk. A purposeful sample of 12 teachers from five counties that participated in the Young Mountaineer Health Study (YMHS) completed a 41-statement Q-sort instrument. Statements were drawn from a structured concourse informed by the group classification of the Dual-Factor Model (DFM) of mental health. Data were analyzed using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation in Kade software, generating factor loadings, distinguishing, and consensus statements. **Results:** Four distinct teacher-viewpoint factors emerged, collectively explaining a large portion of the variance (67%) in Q-sort rankings. Factor 1 (Strong family support system; 25% of participants) emphasized parental guidance as the primary protective factor and was uncertain about peer-based interventions. Factor 2 (Multiple risk factors and uncertainty; 16.7%) reflected a sense of perceived powerlessness, acknowledging widespread risk while expressing doubt about the effectiveness of protective factors. Factor 3 (Importance of the environment; 41.7%) was the largest group and endorsed a comprehensive, multi-sphere ecological view in which positive classroom climate, peer relationships, and family support collectively reduce the risk of substance use. Factor 4 (The importance of mental health; 16.7%) highlighted teachers' roles in identifying substance use and emphasized individual-level mental health dynamics. Across all factors, teachers reached consensus that neighborhood context, family dynamics, and mental health status collectively shape substance use vulnerability. **Conclusion:** This study is among the first to apply Q-Methodology to explore teachers' perspectives on the intersection of student mental health and substance use in rural Appalachia. Findings reveal both shared beliefs and meaningful differences in how teachers conceptualize prevention, with implications for the design of professional development and multi-level prevention programs. Integrating diverse teacher viewpoints into school-based approaches may strengthen the ecological alignment of prevention efforts in underserved communities.

Abstract 9 Negotiating Professional Identity in Context: Female Pre-nursing Students' Perspectives on Nursing in Saudi Arabia — A Q Methodology Study

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the subjective perspectives of female pre-nursing students regarding the professional identity of nursing and their decision to choose nursing as a major, using Q methodology. A concourse was developed based on a literature review and informal discussions, resulting in a Q-set of 40 statements that cover motivations, societal influences, and perceptions of the nursing profession. A total of 31 female pre-nursing students from a Saudi university completed the Q-sort using a quasi-normal distribution grid.

The by-person factor analysis revealed two main viewpoints, with 20 participants loading significantly on the extracted factors. Factor 1 represents a perspective mainly driven by internal motivation, where students show strong personal interest in nursing, respect for the profession, and belief in its value in society. Factor 2 reflects a perspective more influenced by external and sociocultural factors, particularly negative societal perceptions and misunderstandings about the nursing profession, which may affect students' identification with it.

The findings indicate an important interaction between personal motivation and sociocultural context in shaping the professional identity of female pre-nursing students. The results also suggest a clear distinction between the two viewpoints, where students tend to align either with internally motivated or externally influenced perspectives. This study contributes to the use of Q methodology in health professions education and provides insights that may support student recruitment, reduce stereotypes, and enhance early professional socialization in the Saudi context.

Abstract 10 How Can ‘Good Farmers’ Become ‘Good Environmental Stewards’?- Exploring hill farmers’ situated ‘good farmer’ identity in the context of prescriptive and results-based agri-environmental schemes in the west of Ireland

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Abstract

It has been argued that the struggle to halt biodiversity loss will be won or lost in farmland ecosystems (McIntyre et al., 1992; cited in O'Rourke & Finn, 2020). To date, action-oriented Agri-Environmental Schemes (AESs) that pay farmers for adopting centrally prescribed environmental measures have been the most prevalent form of AESs. In contrast, locally adapted and results-based schemes provide financial rewards that reflect farmers' ability to apply their local knowledge and skills in ways that support biodiversity conservation (Byrne et al., 2018a; Moran et al., 2021; McLoughlin et al., 2020; O'Rourke & Finn, 2020). This paper addresses hill farmers' perceptions of 'good farmer' identity in the context of the prescriptive Green Low-carbon Agri-environmental Scheme and the locally led and results-based Hen Harrier and Pearl Mussel Project. The study deployed Q methodology as a mixed-method approach to critically examine the divergence and convergence of hill farmers' perceptions of 'good farming'. It utilized Q methodology alongside the Bourdieusian-inspired analysis to address gaps in our understanding of the dynamic formation of 'good farmer' identity, in two specific case studies areas located in the west of Ireland. In this way, the paper provides a comparative analysis of how alternative models of AESs can support hill farmers' environmentally sensitive views on 'good farming'. The study revealed hill farmers' competing and contested viewpoints on 'good' and 'bad' farming practices in the Irish uplands. In contrast to previous research, this study indicated that prescriptive AESs limit farmers' ability to utilize and display their local environmental knowledge and extensive hill-farming practices in an upland context. The findings revealed that locally adapted results-based schemes provided economic, cultural and social capital gains that increase the 'visibility' of biodiversity on farmland and in turn can help to highlight hill farmers' roles in nature conservation. Therefore, AESs need to promote the display of skillful conservation practices, based on farmers' local environmental knowledge, to promote a shared interest in 'good environmental stewardship' of the farmed landscape. However, the effectiveness of these schemes depends on building trust between farmers and experts, which can be facilitated through increased knowledge-sharing processes that acknowledge farmers' marginalized voices. Overall, the study demonstrated that beside economic capital gains AESs need to provide additional socio-cultural capital gains that help to foster pro-environmental views on 'good farmland conservation'. In this way, agri-policies that provide both results-based and action-oriented measures which take into consideration farmers' situated and environmentally sensitive views 'good farming', have the potential to provide social cues that highlight the symbolic value of biodiversity conservation.

Abstract 11 Beyond Q Methodology Data Collection and Analysis: Assessing the Influence of Data Beyond the Sort

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Abstract

The purpose of our study was to engage teacher preparation leaders in the review and use of results from teacher candidate Q sorts to enhance technology infusion in educator preparation programs (EPPs). Our research team coordinated efforts to interview leaders at five different EPPs across the U.S. Participants included leaders serving as assistant/associate dean (n=3), director of accreditation/assessment (n=1), program director (n=6), and field/clinical practice director (n=2).

We used a summary of results from a previous Q study (Authors, 2024) that examined teacher candidates' perspectives of their self efficacy and their program's design to prepare them to use and integrate technology as a starting point. The Q sort included 43 statements aligned with the Four Pillar Framework to a Technology-Infused Teacher Preparation Program (Foulger, 2020; Graziano et al., 2023). We shared a summary of the results with the EPP leaders prior to their interviews. The summary was based on Q sorts (n=90) completed by participants from seven institutions across the US, and included data from their own institution.

Leader interviews revealed interest in Q methodology use as a mechanism for a more nuanced understanding of stakeholder perspectives about preparation to use technology. One participant noted the content validity of the set of statements used in our study, noting its alignment with the four pillars. They wondered if we might share it with other universities as a "tactic for programs on how to help infuse ... technology" (ACRED2). Other comments related to institutional use of the results of such a Q sort suggested it could be "helpful" (PDIR3) and "really beneficial" (PDIR4).

Leaders also described how Q data might be used as a gap analysis tool. Several participants commented on the “opportunity to go back and look at what we’re doing related to those [Q sort] items. And what ... more we could be doing if we value those items” (AD3). Another participant reflected: Sometimes it’s awareness raising. ... [It] would certainly give us data to work with that would highlight areas for consideration for growth, but even having the faculty engage in that would be really powerful. ... It can serve as ... a pathway or provide some direction. ... Where are we strong, and where do we really need to build? So it’s a good starting point for our conversations. I think highlighting an issue and starting conversations. (PDIR11).

Overall, interviews with program leaders conveyed that Q sort data highlighted subtle differences in perspectives compared to traditional likert scale survey data, enhancing in-depth assessment for continuous improvement of candidate outcomes in the area of educational technology. Leaders were also able to understand candidate perspectives of how their program prepared, or didn’t prepare them, to integrate technology, and how the program aligned with the four pillars of technology infusion (curriculum, modeling, clinical experiences, and development of teacher self-efficacy in technology integration (TSEinTI). They also reflected on the status of programmatic assessment efforts to make informed decisions as instructional leaders.

Abstract 12 Online Word-of-Mouth and Anticipated Emotions in Consumer Purchase Intentions: A Q Methodology Approach!

Hind BOUHLAL

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Abstract

The increasing influence of online word-of-mouth (eWOM) has significantly transformed consumer decision-making processes, particularly in digital purchasing environments. Consumers are constantly exposed to reviews, recommendations, ratings, and online opinions that shape not only their cognitive evaluations but also their anticipated emotions before making purchase decisions. Despite the growing literature on eWOM and consumer behavior, limited research has explored how consumers subjectively perceive and emotionally interpret online word-of-mouth messages, especially in relation to anticipated emotions and purchase intention.

This study aims to explore how online word-of-mouth influences consumers’ anticipated emotions and how these emotions affect their purchase intentions. More specifically, the research seeks to identify different subjective viewpoints regarding trust in online reviews, emotional anticipation, and online buying behavior.

The study applies Q methodology to investigate consumers’ subjective perceptions. A concourse of statements will be developed from previous literature, online consumer comments, and exploratory interviews related to eWOM, anticipated emotions, and purchase intention. Participants will be asked to rank these statements according to their level of agreement using a Q-sort grid ranging from strong disagreement to strong agreement. The collected Q-sorts will then be analyzed through factor analysis in order to identify shared patterns of subjectivity among consumers.

The use of Q methodology is particularly relevant for this study because it allows the exploration of emotional and subjective dimensions of consumer behavior that are often difficult to capture through traditional quantitative approaches. Rather than measuring variables independently, Q methodology helps reveal distinct consumer profiles and perspectives concerning the emotional impact of online word-of-mouth.

The expected findings may contribute to a better understanding of how anticipated emotions mediate the relationship between eWOM and purchase intention. The study may also provide practical implications for digital marketers and online platforms seeking to better manage consumer engagement and emotional influence in online environments.

Keywords: online word-of-mouth, anticipated emotions, purchase intention, consumer behavior, Q methodology.

Abstract 13 Q Methodology and the Policy Sciences

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Abstract

Most Q studies elect not to employ structured Q samples and P sets, and those that do typically organize statements and invite participants based on ad hoc categories rather than theoretically or conceptually, resulting in atheoretic conclusions with implications that go little farther than the studies that produced them. The intellectual architecture of the policy sciences is recommended as a conceptual framework with universal breadth similar to that of Q methodology and with a variety of categories for use on the a priori side of Q studies. Q researchers can use this conceptual framework to map the broader socio-political context of their research, to orient themselves to the problem(s) at hand, and to target their work to increase its influence.

Innovated by Harold Lasswell and Myres McDougal, the policy sciences is contextual, problem-oriented, and multi-method, and it conceives of the social process in terms of persons pursuing values through institutions and impacting resources. Its approach to social problems calls on researchers to be explicit about their own perspectives (their “standpoints”) and to address five key intellectual tasks — value clarification, examination of trends, analysis of conditions, projection of developments, and the invention of alternatives. The value orientation of the policy sciences seeks to account for configurations of power,

enlightenment, wealth, well-being, skill, affection, respect, and rectitude. The policy sciences also explicitly sides with functionalism, as when it unpacks decision-making, revealing its complexity to be comprised of the following functions:

1. Intelligence: assembling and sharing information.
2. Promotion: endorsing one or more alternatives rather than others.
3. Prescription: consenting to accept one alternative as authoritative.
4. Invocation: asserting that a prescription applies to specific instances.
5. Application: making a final determination about whether the prescription applies.
6. Appraisal: assessing whether an arrangement continues to be serviceable.
7. Termination: ending a practice.

Q methodology and the policy sciences framework have already appeared conjointly in several studies focused on real world problems (e.g., Brown, 2002; Mattson et al., 2006; Rutherford et al., 2009; Steelman & McGuire 1999), and several applications have been prize-winning; in addition, the policy sciences infrastructure has been featured in a publication by ISSSS's Honorary Chair, the late Charles Stephenson (2008).

However, the intent of this proposal is not just to introduce a multitude of new categories, but to propose a meta-language designed to enhance precision in thinking about social problems that can extend into the design of instrumentation aimed at providing intellectual leverage. Authors of Q studies routinely assert that their Q sorts enable participants to express their perspectives (occasionally including the author's own perspective), but structuring Q samples into demands, identifications, and expectations — which are the policy science components of perspective — and taking into account the diverse roles that perspectives play in social interactions and decision making adds an extra theoretical layer both to the design as well as the explanation of an inquiry's outcome, while enriching the representativeness of the Q sample.

Abstract 14

Is it Cheating or Just Changing? Understanding Undergraduate Students' Perceptions of Generative Artificial Intelligence in Written Communications Courses

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Abstract

Students bring varying levels of writing apprehension, self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and ethical standards to written communications courses. As generative AI continues to become more entwined with the workforce and higher education, there is an increasing need to understand students' perceptions regarding the use of generative AI technology. The purpose of this study was to explore undergraduate students' perceptions toward the use of generative AI in written communications courses. In this Q methodology study, 40 university students sorted 36 opinion-based statements regarding the use of generative AI in the classroom. Ken-Q Analysis Desktop Edition was used to analyze the data, which resulted in three distinct perspectives of students' perceptions that were interpreted in this research. The three perspectives were named AI is My Frenemy, AI is My Assistant and AI is My Friend. The AI is My Frenemy perspective includes very strong opinions about the ethical use of generative AI. The AI is My Assistant perspective views AI as a tool that helps increase writing confidence. The AI is My Friend perspective views AI as a partner in writing. All three perspectives displayed similar viewpoints regarding a need for better instruction on responsible generative AI use in the classroom. Also, all perspectives have ethical concerns with generative AI use and note feeling pressured to use generative AI in the classroom for varying reasons. Understanding students' perceptions of generative AI use within the classroom can help course instructors/professors update their curriculum and generative AI policies in a quickly changing technology environment.

Abstract 15 Understanding the True Crime Fascination: a Q Methodology Study

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Abstract

Over the last forty years, the popularity of the true crime genre has exploded in the literary and entertainment industries. This growing popularity is associated with the publication of books in the 1980s, such as *Helter Skelter*, *In Cold Blood*, *Zodiac*, and *Fatal Vision*. Murley (2008) suggests that "true crime is a way of making sense of the senseless, but it has also become a worldview, an outlook, and a perspective on contemporary American life, one that is suspicious and cynical, narrowly focused on the worst kinds of crimes, and preoccupied with safety, order, and justice" (p. 2). Beyond the basic entertainment value of true crime, some scholars and criminal justice practitioners warn of the 'CSI effect', or the potential for jury members to wrongfully acquit guilty defendants in the absence of scientific evidence (Roane and colleagues 2005; Shelton 2008), essentially connecting their entertainment preferences with changes in their behavior. The popularity of true crime combined with the potential negative psychological, social, and practical consequences of its popularity have inspired this study investigating the motivations for individuals to consume true crime material. The current "in process" project uses Q Methodology to explore subjective motivations for people to consume true crime material. This project intends to recruit 30-40 participants over the age of 18 to complete Q sorts that include thematically organized statements related to individual motivations to indulge, consume and interact with true crime material. Following the completion of data collection through Q sort completion, the researcher will utilize the program PQMethod to assist with analysis. Overall, this project represents a new topic of investigation within Q Methodology, as well as has the potential to contextualize our understanding of what motivates individuals to rapidly consume

Abstract 16 “Use Your Platform”: Young Women's Expectations of Lifestyle Influencers to Share Political Information (Research-in-Progress)

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Abstract

Social media influencers are an increasingly important source of news and political information, particularly for young adults. As a result, recent scholarship has examined who “counts” as a political influencer, considering factors such as content type, style, and frequency. This line of inquiry is especially relevant for understanding lifestyle influencers, whose content typically focuses on beauty, fashion, travel, and health, but who occasionally engage with political issues and maintain large followings among young women.

Recent cases illustrate that audiences hold divergent expectations regarding whether lifestyle influencers should engage in political communication. For example, during major political and global events, online discussions have debated whether lifestyle influencers have a responsibility to address such issues. Similarly, in recent elections, some influencers have endorsed candidates and faced backlash either for doing so or for remaining silent. These examples suggest that while some audiences prefer lifestyle content to remain apolitical, others expect influencers to use their platforms to share political information, endorsements, or stances. Although emerging research suggests that influencers themselves perceive pressure to engage politically, audience expectations remain under-explored.

This exploratory, research-in-progress study asks: What are young women's expectations for lifestyle influencers to share political information? To address this question, the study employs Q methodology to systematically examine the diversity of subjective viewpoints surrounding this issue. Q methodology is particularly well suited for identifying shared patterns of perspective in contexts characterized by complexity and disagreement.

A preliminary concourse has been collected from online influencer discussion forums, social media content and comments, and informal peer conversations. Ongoing interviews with young women who follow lifestyle influencers are being used to refine the concourse and guide the selection of a Q sample of approximately 30-40 statements reflecting a range of normative expectations. A purposive sample of approximately 20-30 young women who follow lifestyle influencers will complete Q-sorts by ranking these statements according to the degree to which they reflect their views on whether influencers should engage in political communication. Resulting Q-sorts will be correlated and factor analysis to identify distinct viewpoints.

By identifying and interpreting these shared perspectives, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how political expectations emerge in spaces not traditionally associated with political discourse. In doing so, it extends research on influencers and political communication while demonstrating the value of Q methodology for examining evolving forms of political influence within digitally mediated, young women-centered spaces.

Abstract 17 A Single-Institution Study of Students' Sense of Belonging (a 4-S I Q study)

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Abstract

This paper, currently in the earliest of planning stages, will describe a very applied, very necessary project occurring at a large public university in the Midwestern United States. Sense of belonging—a phenomenon experienced by individuals (in this case, students)—is given much attention in scholarship about higher education, but is framed in many ways (Allen et al., 2021; Dost & Mazzoli Smith, 2023). One hallmark of sense of belonging is that it is both context-specific and widely-regarded as crucial to student retention and success.

The author of this paper is working with the student affairs unit at their institution to design a study to define what sense of belonging is at their institution. By defining what sense of belonging means, as Fischer and Stenner (2026) suggest, institutions can discern “cultures of belonging” (para. 1) and serve their students better, which may inspire better student outcomes.

At the time of writing this abstract, the author is planning to create a concourse from literature (and is currently working on that literature review). The presentation at the I4S conference (if accepted) would focus on that process and plans for collecting the Q-sort data from an estimated 48-64 students in January-March 2027. By presenting this session, the author/presenter hopes to inspire dialogue about the opportunities and challenges of concourse development, working on a single-institution study essentially for-hire, and request feedback/insights on their plans for data collection in 2027.

Abstract 18 Speaking Science: How Faculty and Students Define Their Role in Communicating Science

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Abstract

Science communication is increasingly essential for strengthening public trust in scientific knowledge and ensuring research meaningfully informs decision-making. Land grant universities are uniquely positioned to advance this work; However, little is known about how faculty and student researchers at these institutions perceive their roles as science communicators. This two-study Q methodology research project explored these perspectives within a land grant university. Data was analyzed using Ken-Q Analysis Desktop Edition, which resulted in two perspectives that were interpreted for each study. The first study investigated faculty members' views of science communication in relation to their professional responsibilities. Thirty faculty participants sorted 40 statements reflecting a range of ideas surrounding science communication according to the condition of instruction, "How do you feel about the role of science communication in your work?" In this study, two perspectives were interpreted: Scholarly Stewards, which emphasized relational, empathetic, and teaching centered communication, viewing science communication as an extension of their commitment to student development and lifelong learning; and Land Grant Legacies, which prioritized accuracy, responsibility, and proactive dissemination of research, reflecting traditional Extension values and a more top down communication approach. In the second study, 25 student researchers sorted 40 statements regarding their roles as science communicators according to the condition of instruction, "What are your thoughts about your role as a science communicator?" Two perspectives emerged in this second study: Advocates for Accessible Science, which valued engagement, accessibility, and the use of social media to reach diverse publics, emphasizing conversational approaches and audience centered communication; and Emerging Science Communicators, which recognized the importance of sharing research but expressed low confidence, discomfort with public facing platforms, and a desire for additional training and safe practice opportunities. Across both studies, the perspectives indicated a strong value of science communication but identified gaps in confidence and varying communication styles. Findings underscore the need for integrated communication training, expanded professional development, and intentional opportunities for practice within academic and research settings. Strengthening communication capacity among faculty and students will enhance the ability of land grant institutions to extend research based knowledge to the public and uphold the mission in an evolving information landscape.

Abstract 19 Applying Q to Estimative Political Analysis: The Rise and Fall of Great Powers

Charles Gaukel

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Abstract

This presentation will provide an overview of a study examining the potential for Q Methodology assist experts in such fields as strategic intelligence analysis, international relations, and relevant area studies as they face the challenging task of anticipating the long-term outlook for major world powers. The goal of such efforts is to look beyond current events and the daily onslaught of information and assess the long-range, strategic prospects of major world players through an examination of key variables that are expected—or assumed—to heavily influence the relative power standings of those powers. Such experts in the academic arena typically focus on seeking to better understand these driving factors in order to develop and refine theoretic approaches that provide explanatory and predictive power regarding the phenomena. For those in government, the purpose is perhaps more prosaic but still consequential. That is, to provide assessments that narrow the uncertainty facing policymakers who have to make near-term decisions about economic policies, military investments, and diplomatic initiatives that can have long lasting effects. Only publicly available information will be used in the study.

The study will be based on a Q-sample drawn from historian Paul Kennedy's *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* (1989), in which Kennedy explores a wide range of case studies drawn from the preindustrial and industrial eras and posits that states gain power relative to their counterparts because of superior economic growth, often triggered by a technological innovation that at least temporarily favors them over their rivals. Furthermore, and notwithstanding such factors as military strategy and diplomatic maneuvering, Kennedy argues that the decline of great powers is almost always the result of their leadership having made and refusing to scale back excessive military commitments that the power's economic base can no longer support.

- The P-set for the study will be drawn from a range of experts in the fields of intelligence analysis, political science, and international relations.
- Participants will be asked to perform three distinct sorts of the Q-sample, applying it, in turn, to their assessment of the long-term outlook for China, Russia, and the United States.
- The author anticipates that most, if not nearly all participants will conduct their Q sorts remotely via an online application, followed by interviews by the author.

Abstract 20 Mediating Agency: How Humans Experience Augmentation in Interaction with Generative AI

Stephanie Gauttier

Abstract

This study examines how students experience and negotiate their sense of agency when engaging with Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). Drawing on Verbeek's theory of technological mediation, augmentation is approached not as a technical property of AI systems but as a relational and experiential configuration of human–AI interaction. Using Q-methodology, fourteen international MSc students sorted thirty-one statements concerning agency, responsibility, and AI use. The analysis identifies three factors comprising five interrelated viewpoints, ranging from reflexive responsibility and ethical uncertainty to pragmatic collaboration, delegation, and partial reliance on AI systems. Across these configurations, agency is experienced through different combinations of behavioral engagement, interpretive understanding of AI mediation, and moral–affective involvement. The findings show that augmented agency is not an automatic outcome of GenAI use, but a situated

accomplishment that depends on how individuals perceive, interpret, and manage technological mediation in practice. By foregrounding the experiential dimensions of agency in AI-mediated work, this study contributes to research on human–technology relations and offers insight into how future knowledge workers make sense of responsibility, authorship, and control in contexts shaped by generative systems.

Abstract 21 William Stephenson and the Notion of the Self

James Good

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Abstract

In his “Ten Pillars of Q-Methodological Wisdom”, an outline and assessment of the significance of his unpublished manuscripts, William Stephenson included *Intimations of Self* (1950), one of three manuscripts written while he was Visiting Professor of Psychology at the University of Chicago (Stephenson, 1985). Stephenson noted that *Intimations of Self* remained incomplete and that he had a constant itch to expand upon it, as the most significant of his writings and studies. Regrettably, the manuscript was never completed. There are, however, a few draft versions which provide some evidence about the aims and content of the manuscript. The notion of the “centrality of the self” is a key element of Q methodology: the sorting of items involving a process of self-reference. Chapter 11 of *The Study of Behavior: Q-Technique and its Methodology*, provides a brief account of Stephenson’s early views about Q-methodology and self-psychology. Additionally, Stephenson wrote a number of articles elaborating his views on the self (e.g., Stephenson, 1979, 1982, 2011). These importantly include a couple of single-case studies of himself. In this presentation I attempt to trace the development and significance of Stephenson’s writings on the self. I describe the contents of the extant drafts of *Intimations of Self* and relate them to his subsequent work on the important role of the self in Q methodology. I also identify some of the key sources of influence on his views about self. The presentation concludes with a brief assessment of the current status of Stephenson’s self-psychology.

Abstract 22 A Conversation with AI about Q

Paul Grosswiler

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Abstract

When I was introduced to Q method as a journalism Ph.D. student at the University of Missouri in the 1980s, we learned how to compute correlation matrixes and factors by hand. As antiquated as it seemed even at the time, for decades after Q was invented in the 1930s, manual computation was the only option until mainframe computers made machine-assisted Q studies possible in the 1960s. In 2017, Byung Lee argued for the use of software programs to help develop Q concourses. A recent thread on the Q-listserv briefly debated the value of using AI to assist in conducting Q studies. Viewing this historical trajectory of the advancing use of computers and machine learning in Q-method, this essay conducts conversations with Chat-GPT centered on the potential benefits and costs of using AI in Q-studies. Questions will be raised regarding the nature of subjectivity, concourse and statement sample selection, factor analysis and interpretation in the researcher-AI relationship, including the continuum of the growing human-machine interface in society as a whole. A simulated Q-study on the use of AI in Q-research will offer an example of the researcher-AI relationship through conversations that guided all steps of the process.

Abstract 23 The Ghost of the Golden Toad: Exploring Agency and Economic Futures in Costa Rica's Cloud Forest

Eileen Joseph

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Abstract

When global forces seem to determine local realities and futures, it can be easy for a rural community to feel powerless or dejected. Despite this, hope persists.

In Monteverde, an ecotourist destination in Costa Rica's cloud forest, the COVID-19 pandemic created space to reflect on the community's dependence on tourism. Now, the Monteverde community is trying to carry those lessons forward as it defines its sustainable future. This research asks how Monteverde locals construct, contest, and understand agency in relation to its economic development and futures. Through futures visioning workshops with youth, Q methodology, and semi-structured interviews with Monteverde residents, diverse perspectives on challenges, opportunities, and visions for Monteverde's economic future emerge.

Q methodology was piloted in the summer of 2026 to understand diverse perspectives on individual and collective agency regarding Monteverde's economic futures. The concourse comprises 300 statements centered on emerging themes from previous interviews: individual agency, collective agency, actor roles, temporal dimensions, and structural constraints. 100 were based on interview transcripts, where themes of agency were teased out of responses to questions about the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the community; 200 were composed by AI (Google Gemini and Microsoft CoPilot wrote 100 each) based on publicly accessible information about Monteverde. Ultimately, understanding the different local perspectives on community agency will inform subsequent workshops in which community members will define Monteverde's long-term economic vision.

As Monteverde defines its future, it will need to reckon with the complex interrelations between its cloud forest and tourism industry, which are central to its identity. Preliminary results from interviews and youth creative workshops show that, while

there is a strong desire to lessen Monteverde's dependence on tourism, realities such as debt and the need to garner majority community buy-in make the search for and implementation of alternatives more difficult. Many opportunities for economic diversification were shared, including a return to or reimagining of local agricultural practices and identities. A looming threat to Monteverde's future is climate change, the effects of which are already being felt.

The interpretation of these results is framed by the scholarship of Gibson-Graham, who found that research can aid in reframing local economies to see a world of economic difference, thereby contributing to local perceptions of agency. Through this research, there is an opportunity to draw on local understandings of agency and facilitate dialogue that contributes to optimistic visions, defined pathways, and more inclusive futures.

Abstract 24

A Study of Students' and Professors' Perceptions of a Good University: Focusing on Chonnam National University

Minuk Kim

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the subjective perceptions of a "good university" held by students and professors in the context of South Korea, where higher education has reached the stage of universal access. Using Chonnam National University (CNU) as a case, this study aims to classify the structures of these perceptions and examine their characteristics. The research addresses the following questions. First, what are the perception types of students regarding a "good university"? Second, what are the perception types of professors regarding a "good university"? Third, what similarities and differences exist between students' and professors' perception types of a "good university"?

This study adopts the Input-Process-Output model as its analytical framework. Specifically, it examines how each group prioritizes and evaluates various elements of university education, including human/physical resources (input), teaching-learning activities/student support and welfare/community engagement (process), as well as graduate employment rates/research outcomes/social contributions (output). In particular, this study focuses on CNU, a large flagship regional national university where the challenges of regional and demographic decline coexist with efforts toward educational innovation. Through this case, the study seeks to identify the values and characteristics that university stakeholders expect from a "good university" amid ongoing social/economic/technological changes in South Korea.

This study uses Q methodology. The participants consist of 40 individuals, including 20 undergraduate students and 20 faculty members from CNU. The research procedure is as follows. First, Q statements are developed through literature analysis and preliminary interviews with participants, and data are collected until the range of opinions and statements about a good university reaches saturation. Ultimately, 40-60 representative statements are selected. Second, the P-set is constructed through recruitment via the university website and email. Third, participants individually conduct Q sorting by arranging the statements within a forced distribution grid (-5 to +5) following a normal distribution. Follow-up interviews are conducted to explore the reasons behind participants' sorting decisions. In the data analysis stage, participants' sorting results are coded into scores and analyzed using PQMethod, applying principal component analysis and Varimax rotation. In addition, interview data are analyzed using qualitative analysis methods. Finally, perception types are identified and interpreted.

This study's expected contributions are in theoretical, practical, and policy dimensions. First, from a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to expanding discussions about the roles and values of universities by identifying the subjective perception types of students and professors using Q methodology. It addresses limitations of previous studies that have focused primarily on quantitative indicators of university quality or on the perceptions of a single stakeholder group. Second, from a practical perspective, by analyzing similarities/differences between students' and professors' perceptions, this study may serve as a practical guide for reducing perception gaps among university members in institutional governance and decision-making processes. Finally, from a policy perspective, the findings may suggest directions for developing evaluation indicators that more balancedly reflect the perspectives of students and professors, and may provide foundational evidence for university policy decisions as well as government higher education support policies.

Abstract 25

Made by Machine, Heard by Humans: Mapping Fan Perspectives on AI-Generated Music

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Abstract

What makes music meaningful, the sound itself, or the humanity behind it? This question has taken on new urgency as artificial intelligence moves from the margins to the center of creative production. AI systems can now compose, perform, and stylistically mimic human musicians with a sophistication that challenges long-held assumptions about authorship and artistic value. Yet how listeners actually make sense of this shift remains poorly understood. This study investigates the subjective viewpoints of music fans toward AI-generated music using Q methodology.

A 25-statement Q sample was constructed to capture the range of discourse across five thematic domains: creativity and authenticity, industry and economics, fan identity, ethics and ownership, and the future of music culture. Forty participants ranging in age from 20 to 69, including both musicians and non-musicians, most with some prior exposure to AI-generated music, completed Q sorts using a forced quasi-normal distribution. Centroid factor analysis with varimax rotation produced four factors, each representing a coherent and distinct way of understanding AI's role in music.

The first factor, Ethical Guardians, reflects a conditionally accepting orientation: AI use in music is not inherently objectionable, but demands transparency. Participants defining this factor ranked statements about disclosure obligations and the economic

vulnerability of working musicians especially high.

The second factor, Pragmatic Progressives, situates AI within a longer arc of technological change in music production. For these participants, AI represents continuity rather than rupture a democratizing force that extends, rather than undermines, musical creativity.

The third factor, Aesthetic Consequentialists, sets aside questions of origin to questions of effect. What matters to these participants is whether music moves the listener; the process by which it was created is treated as largely incidental to its value.

The fourth factor, Human Authenticity Purists, takes the opposite position. For this group, music is fundamentally an act of human expression, and AI-generated work, however polished, is understood as lacking the experiential depth that underlies genuine artistry.

Factors three and four define the poles of a bipolar dimension that cuts to the heart of an unresolved cultural question: is musical value located in the listening experience or in the creative act? Together, the four viewpoints suggest that responses to AI-generated music run deeper than simple enthusiasm for or resistance to new technology. Instead, they reflect deeper, structurally distinct positions on creativity, authenticity, and what it means for music to matter. Findings point toward productive directions for Q methodology research at the intersection of emerging technology and popular culture.

Abstract 26 How Educators Make Meaning of Equity: A Q Methodological Exploration of Beliefs, Advocacy, and Motivation

Eden Langston

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Abstract

Title: How Educators Make Meaning of Equity: A Q Methodological Exploration of Beliefs, Advocacy, and Motivation

Abstract

This study examines how elementary educators conceptualize equity, advocacy, and professional motivation through a Q methodological lens, building on prior mixed methods findings that identified distinct belief profiles across Virginia educators. As sociopolitical contexts surrounding education continue to shift, there is an increasing need to revisit how teacher beliefs about equity are understood, measured, and enacted in practice. This study addresses that need by centering educators' subjectivity and exploring how their perspectives organize into shared, yet distinct, viewpoints that shape instructional and professional decision-making.

Grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT), Social Justice Theory (SJT), and Quantitative Critical Race Theory (QuantCrit), this research positions teacher beliefs as socially constructed and situated within broader systems of power and inequity. Q methodology is particularly well-suited to this inquiry, as it connects qualitative and quantitative traditions by systematically studying subjectivity. Rather than reducing beliefs to discrete variables, Q methodology identifies patterned viewpoints, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how educators make meaning of equity, advocacy, and their professional roles.

Using Q methodology, participants complete three Q-sorts focused on (1) beliefs about teaching for social justice, (2) orientations toward advocacy, and (3) professional motivations. Statement sets are refined from prior mixed methods findings and existing instruments to reflect contemporary educational contexts. Factor analysis is used to identify shared perspectives (factors), with each factor representing a coherent configuration of beliefs. These factors are then interpreted through both statistical outputs and qualitative meaning-making to construct narrative accounts of each viewpoint.

Findings reveal that educators' beliefs organize into individual yet overlapping perspectives that guide practice. Across Q-sorts, educators share commitments to high expectations for all students, reflective practice, and a rejection of "fairness as sameness." However, they diverge in how equity is enacted. Some educators emphasize critical dialogue and systemic critique, others prioritize relational care and individual responsibility, and still others embed equity through instructional design and professional practice. Similarly, advocacy orientations range from direct resistance to unjust policies to more collaborative, institutionally embedded approaches. Differences in professional motivation further reflect whether educators view teaching as a moral commitment to justice or as a professional craft grounded in organization and mentorship.

These findings highlight both convergence and productive tension, illustrating that equity-oriented teaching is negotiated within complex and evolving educational environments. Importantly, this study demonstrates how Q methodology can make visible the ideological diversity within a small group, offering insights that might be obscured in traditional survey-based research.

This research contributes to the field by advancing methodological and conceptual understandings of teacher beliefs. Through a QuantCrit lens, it calls for a critical reexamination of existing measurement tools, emphasizing the need for instruments that more accurately capture the complexity of educators' equity orientations. By leveraging Q methodology, this study provides a nuanced approach to studying subjectivity while laying the groundwork for future research that connects belief patterns to broader educational outcomes. Ultimately, it positions teacher belief systems as dynamic and evolving, requiring continuous methodological reflection to support equitable and justice-oriented practice.

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Abstract 27 Public trust in urban planning: a dual-process approach using Q-methodology

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Abstract

Low levels of trust have been reported across public institutions for years, and urban planning is no exception. The broad consensus in planning trust literature is an ongoing crisis of public trust in the planning system. While trust is recognised as a multidimensional concept involving both rational and affective components, planning literature to-date has failed to explicitly explore the relationship between emotional and rational cognitive drivers of trust in planning. A review of trust literature in allied fields reveals that dual-process theories of cognition are a promising avenue for addressing the gaps noted above.

Dual-process models suggest that human cognition operates through two systems: System 1, which is fast, intuitive, and automatic, and System 2, which is slow, deliberate, and analytical. Each of the two cognitive systems can influence the other, with intuitive perceptions informing deliberate perceptions, and deliberate cognition revising intuitive associations. As urban planning often involves emotionally charged decisions with high stakes for communities, dual-process theory provides a framework for understanding how public trust in planning systems is formed and maintained.

The present study (in progress) utilises a dual-process lens to investigate the cognitive mechanisms of public trust in the planning system. Q-methodology is applied to explore System 2 thinking, particularly how different signals of trustworthiness influence overall trust perceptions. Following the example of several studies, the concourse for the present study was developed from an extensive literature review of academic and news articles about trust in the planning system. Statements in the concourse were sorted thematically based on the principle of homogeneity, and a representative sample of statements was selected based on the principle of heterogeneity. This Q-set was piloted with planning experts (n=3) and members of the public (n=3) to add, remove, and refine statements. The final Q-set comprised 55 statements across seven categories.

This study had two P-sets: members of the public (n=24), and professional urban planners (n=24). Members of the public were asked to sort the statements between “most likely to increase my trust” to “most likely to increase my distrust”. Using the same Q-set and anchor statements, planners were asked to sort statements based on how they believed the public would rank the statements. This provided three points of analysis: public trust perceptions, planner perception of public trust, and an exploration of alignment/divergence between the two. Future analysis will synthesise the findings from the Q-methodology with findings from another component of this study that investigated implicit trust (Type 1 thinking).

A semi-structured interview schedule was developed for the post-sort interview. In addition to shedding light on the Q-sorts, interview questions were designed to surface perspectives and reflections on “characteristics of the trustor, trustee, interactions and relationships between them, the particular set of actions in question, and the context in which trust/distrust is developed,” described by Stern and Coleman as the key components of trust theory.

Abstract 28 Utilizing Q Methodology to Understand the Shared Variety of Viewpoints of K-12 Administration regarding Artificial Intelligence Governance

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Abstract

Artificial Intelligence (AI) continues to rapidly reshape pedagogical practices related to efficiency gains, academic integrity, and instruction that cannot be ignored. However, much less attention has been given to how competing interpretations of AI and its development may reshape assumptions about the purpose of education making the creation of sustainable governance for educational systems difficult. In this presentation, we will discuss construction of a Q set concourse for use in a Q methodology study (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Stephenson, 1935) to examine the perspectives of school leaders regarding the impact of AI on educational goals and policy development. The study will examine a large Midwestern K-12 school district's journey to create adaptable AI governance. Participants will consist of 35-40 administrators who will complete their first Q Sort in August of 2026 followed by post sort interviews in August and September. Following initial analysis, administrators will participate in six months of professional development on Critical AI Literacy. A second Q sort, interviews, and analysis will occur in April of 2027 leading to an AI Governance system for the district.

Theoretical Frameworks for Concourse and Q Set Development:

To understand PK12 leadership perspectives toward AI governance, the authors considered a broad body of literature to develop the concourse of statements for inclusion in the study. The structure of the Q set will be designed “...to provide a set of statements that is ‘representative’ of the phenomenon in question” (Brown, 1980, p. 30). Thus, statements were based on existing literature on AI leadership and governance within educational contexts, literature examining the tensions of AI adoption, as well as theoretical frameworks for systems change. Some of these perspectives include the work from David Labaree, Andy Mills, and others.

David Labaree's (1997) three purposes for education coexist in tension with one another and shifts in instructional practices, policy, politics, and technology (like AI) will often alter the balance of the triad.

1. Democratic equality – Preparing citizens for participation in democratic society
2. Social efficiency – preparing individuals for productive roles in the economy
3. Social mobility – enabling individuals to gain advantage via educational credentials

Public discourse regarding AI is reflecting the varied interpretation of AI's societal impact. This variation is captured by Ben Buchanan and Andrew Imbrie's book, *The New Fire: War, Peace, and Democracy in the Age of AI* and the Podcast, *The Last Invention* produced by Andy Mills. These works lay out the differing sentiments of the public discourse.

1. Cassandras/Doomsdayers – risk and societal disruption
2. Scouts – Understand AI is inevitable and focus on preparation and safety
3. Evangelist/Accelerationists – highlight transformative opportunities

By integrating sociological theories, philosophical goals of education and technology adoption models, this study offers a new

combined framework for the development of the Concourse of statements that will allow critical examination the perceptions of decision makers into how AI may reshape the foundational goals of education and help develop future governance to maintain balance.

Abstract 29 Making Best Interest Decisions under Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards: A Q Methodological study

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Abstract

Background

The Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS) are part of the Mental Capacity Act 2005. Care homes and hospitals apply them where a person aged 18 or over does not have the mental capacity to consent to their care arrangements, and they need to be deprived of their liberty. In 2023/34 there were 332,455 applications for DoLS authorisations. This was an 11% increase on the previous year, and the number has increased year-on-year since April 2020. Best Interest Assessors are the decision makers in deciding if being deprived is in a person's best interests.

Aims

My thesis will analyse the factors affecting best interest decision making concerning care and treatment arrangements which amount to a deprivation of liberty with adults in England and Wales. In doing so the following research questions will be investigated:

1. To what extent are decision-making frameworks used to determine best interests?
2. What is the function and implications of hierarchy in best interest decision-making?
3. How do best interest assessors place weight on the components of a best interest decision?
4. What tacit factors affect how best interests' assessors make best interests decisions?
5. What implications can be drawn from the judgements for current decision making in practice for social work and other key stakeholders?

Methods

A Q Methodology will be used with participants who are best interest assessors being asked to complete an online Q sort based on a set of statements relating to decision making. They will sort the statements from most to least important in decision making. These statements will be derived from a concourse that will have been developed using both a literature review, case law analysis, review of published blogs and expert panel.

Analysis

The results will be analysed using both factor analysis of the Q sort and a qualitative follow up questionnaire post Q-sort. These results will then be discussed both with the expert panel and participants before interpretation is carried out.

Conclusion

This results of this study aims to add to the growing body of knowledge related to best interest decision making as well as inform best practice on how these decisions are made. This study is currently in progress and at the time of writing is at the participant recruitment stage. I will be able to present the methodology in full as well as some preliminary results.

Abstract 30 Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives in an Emerging Market: A Q Methodology Study of the Organic Edible Rose Supply Chain

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Abstract

The market for edible flowers has been growing in recent years, driven by increasing consumer interest in gastronomy, natural ingredients, and visually appealing foods. Among these products, edible roses represent a niche yet promising category, particularly when cultivated under organic farming systems that meet the rising demand for sustainable and high-quality food products. Despite this growing interest, the development of a structured supply chain for organic edible roses remains limited and fragmented. Production is often small-scale, market channels are not fully consolidated, and coordination among actors along the value chain is weak. Moreover, limited research has explored how different stakeholders perceive the opportunities and challenges associated with this emerging sector. Investigating these perspectives can provide insight into the factors shaping the evolution of the organic edible rose market and its potential development pathways.

This study examines stakeholders' viewpoints on the current conditions and future prospects of the organic edible rose supply chain using Q methodology, an approach designed to systematically analyse subjectivity and identify shared viewpoints. Q methodology combines qualitative and quantitative techniques and is well suited for exploring complex topics where multiple narratives coexist. The research begins with the construction of a concourse of statements capturing the diversity of opinions regarding the development of the organic edible rose supply chain. To build this concourse, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key actors along the supply chain, including organic farmers, researchers, chefs, and restaurant professionals. These primary data were complemented by additional statements gathered through an online review of publicly available sources, such as sector reports, professional websites, blogs, and social media discussions. This process enabled the identification of a broad spectrum of narratives concerning the opportunities and bottlenecks affecting the sector.

A set of representative statements was then selected and refined into the Q sample. Participants ranked these statements according to their level of agreement using a quasi-normal distribution grid in an online Q-sorting exercise. Factor analysis identified clusters of shared viewpoints, revealing distinct stakeholder perspectives on the development of the organic edible rose supply chain. By highlighting how actors interpret the sector's evolution, this study contributes to the broader discussion on emerging horticultural markets and the dynamics of innovative agri-food value chains.

Abstract 31

The Role of Research Experiences in Shaping Undergraduate STEM Identities: A Q Methodology Approach

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Abstract

Due to the projected growth of STEM occupations over the next decade, significant research has examined student attrition from these disciplines. A critical factor in retention is the student's ability to identify as a scientist - a concept known as "science identity." Participation in undergraduate student research experiences, such as the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates (NSF REU) program, is a primary strategy for fostering this identity. However, students perceive and internalize these experiences in diverse ways.

In this study, we employed Q methodology to investigate students' subjective perspectives on their science identities following an NSF REU program in chemistry and materials science at a Midwest research university. Q methodology is uniquely suited for this inquiry as it provides a systematic way to measure human subjectivity by combining qualitative depth with quantitative analytical power. We utilized items from the Undergraduate Research Student Self-Assessment (URSSA) instrument to develop a Q-set of statements. Participants then performed a Q-sort, rank-ordering these statements into a distribution based on their personal agreement or disagreement regarding their identity as scientists.

The resulting data were analyzed to identify shared patterns of thought, leading to an alpha bipolar factor solution. Three distinct perspectives emerged from this analysis: the Analysts, the Connectors, and the Community Seekers.

- The Analysts identified most strongly with technical mastery and the objective rigors of the scientific process.
- The Connectors focused on the integration of classroom theory with practical application.
- The Community Seekers viewed their identity through the lens of social belonging and collaborative professional networks.

These findings suggest that designers of undergraduate research programs should incorporate multiple forms of support tailored to these different student perspectives. Because no single program component is experienced uniformly, a diversified approach to mentorship and program activities is essential to supporting the science identity development of all students.

Abstract 32

Perceptions of Interpersonal Connections with GC-AI

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Abstract

This mixed methods study seeks to explore emotional relationships with generative conversational artificial intelligence (GC-AI) and relationship to attachment style. Existing literature surrounding GC-AI has focused on numerous areas of emotion-focused exploration; however, no literature was found to explore attachment styles and perspectives on GC-AI use. Similarly, existing healthcare studies utilizing Q methodology have focused on a wide range of topics, yet the GC-AI-related literature was found to be lacking. Within the relevant research available on these topics, variable-centered approaches have been emphasized to quantify attitudes, and little is known about viewpoints that exist about GC-AI use. The present study aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how individuals experience and interpret their interactions with GC-AI, offering important implications for both research and counseling practice, placing particular attention to the diversity of perspectives about comfort level and behaviors while engaging in GC-AI conversations. Q methodology will be employed to answer the research question: What types of attachment-related experiences do people form with GC-AI systems?

Participants in this study will be GC-AI users (age 18+) who report experiencing emotional connection, support, or other interpersonal feelings while interacting with GC-AI. Participants will be selected using inclusion criteria of feelings toward GC-AI use. A word bank of feelings-related terms will be provided and if any term on the list is selected by the potential participant, they become eligible to share their perspective, and they will be invited to continue participation.

The concourse for this study was developed through review of relevant literature, web searches, and everyday conversations about GC-AI. The final Q set was developed by removing duplicate concepts and combining related concepts into single statements. The prompt for sorters will ask them to sort statements in relation to their perspective on the social uses of GC-AI. After completing the Q sort, participants will be asked semi-structured questions related to their sorting of the statements based on their unique perspectives.

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Abstract

News organizations are rapidly integrating artificial intelligence into reporting and production workflows, from drafting stories to analyzing audience behavior. While these tools promise efficiency gains and expanded coverage—potentially addressing gaps in local journalism—they also raise concerns about transparency, authorship, and credibility. This study uses Q methodology to systematically examine how news readers perceive the credibility implications of specific AI-assisted practices in journalism.

A concourse will be developed from documented and emerging newsroom applications of AI, drawing on publicly reported use cases (e.g., Business Insider's use of AI-assisted drafting and editing tools; cleveland.com's experiments with automated content generation). Concourse items will reflect discrete, recognizable practices across the reporting and production pipeline, including: generating first drafts from reporter notes; copyediting for grammar and style; summarizing lengthy documents; identifying patterns or themes in large datasets; producing headlines optimized for search and social platforms; converting stories across formats (e.g., article to newsletter or social post); generating data visualizations or interactive tools; assisting with transcription and translation; structuring and analyzing reader comments; recommending story angles based on audience data; creating synthetic images or illustrations in the absence of original photography; and flagging potential misinformation or factual inconsistencies.

Participants will complete a Q sort, ranking these items along a quasi-normal distribution from “most negatively affects credibility” to “most positively affects credibility.” By-person factor analysis will be used to identify shared viewpoints, revealing distinct audience typologies.

This study is motivated by a central tension: AI may enhance journalistic capacity and help address “news deserts,” yet it may also erode trust if audiences perceive a loss of human judgment, accountability, or authenticity. Rather than treating “AI in journalism” as a monolith, Q methodology allows for a granular, audience-centered mapping of how specific applications shape credibility judgments.

Abstract 34 Investigating AI Use in Concourse and Q-set Creation: Beyond Simple Pros and Cons

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Abstract

Q researchers continue to raise questions about how or whether to use generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in the design of Q studies, including in the construction of a concourse (e.g., qmethod listserv, March 16, 2026). In her 2024 paper published in the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, Ramlo describes how ChatGPT can be usefully employed in constructing a concourse and Q-set. Nonetheless, a healthy debate persists.

We conducted a critical inquiry into uses of generative AI in concourse construction by comparing four pairs of concourse constructions and Q-sets on the same topic. Two of the sets were completed in 2021 for our study of anti-racist literacy instruction, in which we asked participants to rank their priorities for implementing anti-racist literacy instruction. These concourses were derived from two different sources: (1) the academic literature and (2) open responses elicited from K-12 teachers, as persons in the population studied. These are the two most common sources used in concourse construction (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). The two resulting Q-sets in 2021 were analyzed for emergent categories and compared for a presentation at an ISSSS annual meeting (Nauman, Ramlo, & Stirling, 2021), which underscored the differences between the concerns of the two discourse communities—academics, as expressed through their theory and research, and K-12 teachers, expressed in their open responses.

The existence of these data has provided us with an opportunity to compare AI-generated concourses and Q-sets with those derived both from our human literature search and the teachers' statements. We used Claude Sonnet 4.6 (Anthropic) and one other large language model (LLM) to generate teacher-approximated statements as well as reference lists (using the same key words and year range as our human literature review), article summaries, themes, categorization, and Q-sets. We plan to present our human-generated conclusions and, importantly, to invite continued discussion that goes beyond simple pros-and-cons lists of LLM use. Our use of comparisons in this study will complement previous work contributed by Ramlo and other Q researchers.

Abstract 35 Counsellors for marine protection: identifying priorities in northeastern Brazil

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Abstract

The Costa dos Corais Environmental Protection Area (APACC) is the largest coastal-marine protected area in Brazil. Established in 1997, it covers 406,301 hectares of sea and mangroves across 12 municipalities in the states of Pernambuco and Alagoas. It has

five main objectives: (1) the protection of coral reefs; (2) the maintenance of habitat and populations of the manatee; (3) the protection of mangroves; (4) the coordination of sustainable tourism and other economic activities compatible with environmental protection; and (5) the promotion of regional culture. Within this context, it is important to highlight that environmental protection areas in Brazil provide for the existence of management councils, which promote shared governance between the area's administration and civil society. The APACC Management Council is an advisory body established in 2011 and updated in 2016; it currently comprises 40 representatives, including individuals linked to public administration, users of the territory, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community associations, and researchers. Based on this, this study asks: what are the priorities of council members in terms of public policies related to marine protection in APACC? Drawing on 18 in-depth interviews conducted in a previous study and documentary materials, we will construct a set of 50 to 60 Q-statements on three topics (environment, culture, and economic activity in APACC) for the formulation of the Q-sort. Q-participants will be former and current council members from six sectors (six participants from each sector, totaling 36 participants): public administration, fisheries and aquaculture, academia, tourism, culture, and environment. Participants will be asked to rank statements about coastal and marine conservation policies, culture, and the economy according to their opinions. The ranking will range from statements they least identify with to those they most identify with. Additionally, participants will be able to adjust their rankings until they are satisfied. Participants will be subjected to a quasi-normal distribution of Q-sorts, as this encourages careful consideration of the statements and helps reveal their true preferences. The objective is to identify the priorities of each group regarding marine conservation in the region, in order to inform public policies in the municipalities within the area. The results will be analyzed using factor analysis, which groups variables to explain differences among them; in other words, it will generate generalizations of shared attitudes, allowing for direct comparison of group priorities.

Abstract 36 Unheard Perspectives: A Q Methodology Study of Subjective Viewpoints on Nicotine Use Across the Ability Spectrum

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Abstract

Nicotine use remains a major public health concern in the United States. Although the overall adult cigarette smoking rate recently fell below 10% for the first time, disparities persist across various demographics. Adults with disabilities, approximately one quarter of the U.S. population, experience disproportionately higher rates of nicotine use, and dependence compared to adults without disabilities. The 2024 U.S. Surgeon General's report on tobacco-related health disparities explicitly identifies disability status as an area where inequities persist. Despite this, people with disabilities are frequently excluded from health research, and their subjective perspectives on nicotine use remain largely unexplored. Existing instruments for assessing nicotine dependence primarily classify individuals into predetermined categories for intervention purposes but do not capture how people themselves understand and relate to their nicotine use.

This study applies Q to explore subjective perspectives on nicotine consumption among adults across the ability spectrum who currently engage in nicotine use. A 50-item Q set was developed from a concourse of opinions about nicotine use, drawn from nicotine dependence instruments and published academic and non-academic sources. Participants completed a Q sort under the condition of instruction: "What are your thoughts about YOU using nicotine?" followed by demographic and nicotine consumption surveys. Disability status was identified during prescreening using the American Community Survey 6-item set on disability questions supplemented by an item on long-term health conditions or disabilities. Sessions were offered online or in person for accessibility.

Nineteen participants (11 without disability, 8 with disability) produced three clearly differentiated opinions. Eyes-Open Enjoyment reflects sensory pleasure in nicotine use alongside an informed acknowledgment of health risks; nicotine is experienced as a freely chosen element of life, though the door to quitting remains open. Functional Comfort frames nicotine as a tool for managing emotional and stressful aspects of daily life; consumption feels settled and permanent, yet the substance is not perceived as controlling the user, and it remains a free choice to be protected against any form of societal control. The Permanent Companion shares elements of the previous two — sensory pleasure and emotional support — but distinctively frames nicotine as the only affordable luxury, accompanied by regret and a sense that continued use is not a free choice. Three consensus points emerged, although for different reasons: nicotine is not experienced as a social identity marker; it is replaceable and separate from the self; and its use is recognized as a medical addiction.

Only one person with disability defined the first opinion, while people with disability composed roughly half of the definers in the other two. The absence of a perspective tied to disability status suggests that interventions can be built around shared and distinct viewpoints. An intervention matrix derived from the opinion profiles reveals that some strategies apply across all three perspectives — such as avoiding health-harm messaging alone — while others are opinion-specific, such as addressing shame for Eyes-Open Enjoyment or providing alternative emotional coping pathways for Functional Comfort, with delivery adaptations for specific functional needs.

Abstract 37 Stepping Into Q: Divergent Orientations Among Novice Researchers

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Abstract

Q methodology (Q) has its own research procedures, traditions, and philosophy for understanding opinions and attitudes of a group of people toward a topic that would benefit by researching what people think of the circumstances. Q has been described in seminal professional books and monographs since Stephenson (1953). Yet, more than likely, researchers who need to learn more about the subjectivity of those whose opinions help define the boundaries of the research problem have had to search for the educational and technical support to conduct a Q study with the highest standards. This study has as its aim to understand what it means to learn Q methodology for researchers new to this unique research methodology. Often finding isolation in any research setting with few who know, support, or understand Q methodology coupled with the complexity of the research procedures and philosophy, learning this methodology may lead to an avoidance of its use or a haphazard use that goes beyond what is authentically Q. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore subjective reactions from those researchers who are new to Q methodology. The concourse was developed drawing on the novice researcher literature, the reflection journal of the first author regarding the multiple self-interviews, and informal interviews with new Q researchers. Fisher Block Design (FBD) was used to gain a representative sample for sorting with Researcher Community, Publications, and Emotional responses as a 1 x 3 design. Approximately 12-16 statements were sampled as differently representative of the FBD. The Q sample of 42 statements were sorted by 17 participants as of early 2026. Although data collection and analyses continue, initial data analyses show the promise of two factors to be interpreted as: Authenticity to the Roots of Q and Creativity over Traditions. The Authenticity researchers strive for maintaining high standards according to the veteran users and teachers to serve as mentors. Whereas the Creativity researchers appear eager to complete a study using the resources available to them.

Abstract 38

From Living Ecology to Legal Personhood: A Q Methodological Study of the Rights of Rivers in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The Rights of Nature and Legal personhood approaches recognise river ecosystems as living entities with rights for their intrinsic values. Yet several key questions, including which specific rights should be prioritised and granted to rivers, and how legal ecologies can map the complex, intertwined relationships between river and society through the lens of the rights of rivers, remain empirically underexplored. This study, hence, attempts to address this question using empirical evidence from Sri Lanka, employing a Q-methodology approach. It examines how 24 water experts assessed the 25 statements on river rights. The analysis rendered three distinct perspectives on the Rights of Rivers framework. Firstly, Fluvial/Ecological Rights support granting rights primarily based on rivers' ecological nature, such as maintaining water flow and providing essential ecosystem functions and services. Secondly, Biocultural Rights emphasise rivers as integrated socio-ecological and cultural entities. Rights are supported not only for ecological protection but also to legally recognise the historical, cultural, and livelihood connections communities have with rivers. Finally, Personhood Rights prioritise the ethical and moral recognition and conservation of rivers as living entities with intrinsic rights, independent of instrumental values to humans. They advocate for legal personhood (River Personhood) and representation through appointed guardians. Overall, this study contributes to emerging debates on granting rights to river ecosystems by foregrounding place- based and relational ontologies that emphasise interconnected relationships among rivers, societies, and the more-than-human entities, while examining evolving rights-based approaches to river governance that promote harmony between nature and society.

Abstract 39

A Kuhnian Moment in Q Methodology: Exploring Perspectives on Tradition, Innovation, and Technological Change

Susan Ramlo

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Abstract

Recent discussions within the Q methodology community have raised questions about how Q should be practiced in contemporary research contexts. In particular, debates surrounding online versus in-person Q sorting, the role of researcher-participant interaction during the sorting process, and the increasing use of digital tools have prompted broader reflection on the defining characteristics of Q methodology. While these discussions often begin with practical questions about data collection, they frequently extend to deeper issues concerning methodological identity, fidelity to foundational ideas, and the evolving boundaries of legitimate Q practice.

Such debates can be understood as a form of methodological self-reflection within a scholarly community. As Thomas Kuhn suggested, scientific communities periodically revisit their assumptions and practices when new tools or perspectives emerge, prompting discussions about continuity, change, and the interpretation of established traditions. Within the Q community, conversations about digital sorting platforms and researcher presence during sorting appear to reflect a similar moment of reflection about what elements of Q methodology are essential and which may adapt as research contexts evolve.

Despite the frequency of these conversations in conferences, workshops, and informal scholarly networks, little empirical research has examined how members of the Q community themselves understand the nature and future direction of the method. The present study addresses this gap by using Q methodology reflexively to explore perspectives among Q researchers

regarding methodological tradition, innovation, researcher–participant interaction, and technological mediation in Q studies. A concourse reflecting viewpoints expressed in scholarly literature and contemporary discussions within the Q community was developed and used to construct a structured 48-item Q sample. Participants consisting of experienced and emerging Q researchers will be asked to sort these statements according to how well they reflected their own thinking about Q methodology and its practice. The statements address issues including fidelity to foundational principles, the perceived value of in-person versus online sorting, the role of researcher observation during the sorting process, and broader questions about methodological boundaries and evolution.

By-person factor analysis will be used to identify shared viewpoints within the Q research community. The resulting factors are expected to illuminate differing perspectives on the relationship between methodological tradition and innovation, the role of technology in Q research, and how researchers interpret the defining features of the method. By mapping patterns of perspective within the Q community itself, this study demonstrates how Q methodology can be applied reflexively to explore debates about its own development and future direction.

Abstract 40 Faculty sense-making of student evaluations of teaching

Susan Ramlo

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Abstract

Student evaluations of teaching (SETs) occupy a persistently contested position in higher education. While they are widely used to inform high-stakes decisions such as merit, promotion, and tenure, longstanding concerns remain regarding their validity, susceptibility to bias, and alignment with meaningful indicators of teaching effectiveness. Recent policy shifts have further intensified their role, elevating the stakes associated with how SET data are interpreted and used. Despite this, much of the existing research relies on variable-centered approaches that isolate individual attitudes while obscuring the holistic viewpoints through which faculty make sense of SETs in practice.

This study employs Q methodology to examine faculty perspectives on the validity and use of SETs, with particular attention to how these perspectives reflect broader tensions between professional judgment, institutional expectations, and accountability pressures. Participants sorted a structured Q-sample representing diverse communications on SETs, including issues of validity, bias, student voice, and evaluative use. Factor analysis revealed two distinct, internally coherent viewpoints.

The first perspective can be understood as reform-oriented. Faculty associated with this view acknowledge significant limitations in SETs, particularly their use as high-stakes, quantitative metrics. However, they maintain that SETs can play a meaningful role when used formatively, especially when emphasis is placed on qualitative feedback and when results are interpreted alongside other sources of evidence such as peer review and teaching portfolios. For this group, the primary concern is not the existence of SETs, but their reduction to simplified numerical indicators and their overextension into decision-making contexts for which they were not designed.

The second perspective reflects a more fundamental critique. Here, SETs are viewed as fundamentally invalid instruments embedded within evaluative systems that privilege convenience, quantification, and student satisfaction over meaningful assessment of teaching. Faculty associated with this viewpoint reject not only the high-stakes use of SETs but also their value for instructional improvement. Concerns about bias, including the influence of grading practices, course difficulty, and broader social factors, are central to this perspective. From this standpoint, efforts to refine SET instruments or processes are insufficient to address the underlying problems.

Despite these differences, a strong area of consensus emerges. Across both perspectives, faculty reject the notion that SETs provide valid measures of teaching effectiveness and express concern about the influence of non-instructional factors on student responses. This shared skepticism suggests that the central debate has shifted. The issue is no longer whether SETs are valid measures, but whether their continued use—particularly in high-stakes evaluation—is justified.

This study contributes to Q methodological scholarship by demonstrating the value of a viewpoint-centered approach for examining contested evaluative practices. Rather than reducing faculty perspectives to isolated variables, Q methodology reveals the structured ways in which individuals integrate concerns about validity, bias, and institutional use into coherent positions. In doing so, the study also raises broader questions about the role of quantification in higher education and the extent to which complex practices such as teaching can be meaningfully captured through standardized instruments.

Abstract 41 Concourse, Patterns, and People: AI, Q Methodology, and Human Subjectivity

Susan Ramlo

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Abstract

Artificial intelligence and large language models (LLMs) are increasingly discussed within the Q methodology community, often framed as tools for improving efficiency in concourse development, Q-sample construction, or even as substitutes for human data generation through simulated Q-sorts. This presentation challenges that trajectory by drawing a critical distinction between pattern detection and subjectivity, using an analogy from physics to clarify what is—and is not—at stake.

In fields such as gravitational wave detection, systems like the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) rely on artificial intelligence to identify weak signals embedded in complex, noisy data. Work highlighted in Quanta Magazine shows that AI can even design unconventional and highly effective experimental configurations, sometimes outperforming human-designed approaches. These systems excel at recognizing patterns that would be difficult for humans to detect directly. However, they do not generate meaning or replace the interpretive role of scientists. AI identifies signals; humans determine what those signals mean. This provides a useful comparison for Q methodology, where factor analysis reveals structure across Q-sorts.

The analogy, however, breaks down at a crucial point. In physics, signals exist independently of observers. In Q methodology, the “signal” is the structured expression of human subjectivity. Q-sorts are not simply data points, but communicable configurations of feeling grounded in lived experience. This distinction has significant implications for how AI can and cannot be used in Q studies.

To clarify these implications, the presentation briefly explains how LLMs function. These systems are trained on large corpora of text to predict the next word in a sequence, learning patterns in language that enable them to generate coherent text. While effective for identifying themes or generating subjective statements, they do not possess experience, intention, or subjectivity. Hence, LLMs generate human-like text by predicting the most statistically probable next word based on patterns in vast datasets. This process allows them to mimic the style and structure of communication without possessing genuine comprehension or intent. Consequently, their output is a result of mathematical probability rather than a true understanding of the subject matter. Building on this foundation, the presentation examines appropriate uses of AI in Q methodology. AI can support concourse exploration by scanning large datasets, assist in generating and refining Q-sample statements, and aid in organizing or summarizing post-sort results. It may also enhance digital platforms for remote Q-sorting. In these roles, AI helps researchers manage complexity and engage more broadly with the concourse.

However, the presentation explicitly rejects the use of AI-generated Q-sorts as a substitute for human participants, whether framed as simulation, augmentation, or Monte Carlo-style data generation. Such applications conflict with the epistemological foundations of Q methodology. If subjectivity is the phenomenon under study, it cannot be approximated by systems that lack subjective experience.

The presentation concludes by proposing a principled approach: AI can assist in pattern detection and managing complexity, but human participants and researchers must remain central to the production and interpretation of meaning. This balance allows Q methodology to engage with emerging technologies while preserving its conceptual integrity.

Abstract 42 Perspectives of Westminster College Students on Social Theories of Justice and Crime

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Abstract

Public attitudes toward crime and punishment influence criminal justice policy and reflect broader social beliefs about responsibility, justice, and rehabilitation. This study uses Q-methodology to examine how Westminster College students interpret major social theories of crime and punishment. Forty students completed a Q-sort in which they ranked thirty statements drawn from influential criminological and sociological texts, including works by Cesare Beccaria, Cesare Lombroso, Émile Durkheim, Howard Becker, Travis Hirschi, Michel Foucault, and Michael Gottfredson. Factor analysis revealed three distinct perspectives among participants. The first factor emphasized social and structural explanations of crime, viewing criminal behavior as a product of inequality, environment, and labeling processes. The second factor reflected a more traditional and retributive perspective, emphasizing personal responsibility and the necessity of punishment to maintain social order. The third factor combined recognition of structural causes with support for proportionate and humane punishment, framing crime as a societal consequence while maintaining the importance of justice. Across factors, participants widely rejected biological determinism and dehumanizing explanations of criminal behavior. These findings demonstrate that student perspectives on crime and justice often mirror established theoretical frameworks in criminology and sociology. The study highlights how underlying beliefs about the causes of crime shape attitudes toward punishment, responsibility, and criminal justice policy.

Abstract 43 America at 250: Perspectives on the United States

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Abstract

The study described is in progress. A concourse is currently being gathered and Q-sorts will be gathered over the summer.

On July 4, 2026 the United States will celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. It seems an appropriate time to investigate the various perspectives on what it means to be an American at this point in history, as well as the status and health of the American experiment in democracy.

Sorters will be presented with a set of statements gathered from secondary sources (essays, interviews, etc.) that reflect a balanced design of commentary on the state of contemporary political life in the United States, e.g., "I think any truthful commemoration of the American story will be celebratory, because that's accurate, because this is a good country that has contributed a lot and has moved towards human freedom."; "It's all a reminder that, as we approach 250, this debate over our past will continue into our future."; "Being an American means being able to pursue life liberty and happiness unimpeded."; "Slavery is a blight on our history, and that racism, despite all the progress, still exists today.", etc.

The data will be factor-analyzed and the results described in the paper. The study should provide insight into how sorters view American democracy at a challenging time in US political history.

Abstract 44 Title: Financial Advisors' Fiduciary Duty under Pressure: The Impact of Institutional Logics on Self-Determination

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Abstract

Title: Financial Advisors' Fiduciary Duty under Pressure: The Impact of Institutional Logics on Self-Determination

Abstract:

In the retail financial services sector, advisors navigate a persistent tension between their legal fiduciary duty to act in a client's best interest and core business imperatives such as sales targets and profit maximization. While traditional research often utilizes R-methodological surveys to measure ethical perceptions, such methods often overlook the nuanced "operant subjectivity" of professionals navigating competing intra-institutional logics. This investigation employs a mixed-methods approach—combining Q Methodology with semi-structured interviews—to identify the structural and psychological factors that lead advisors to compromise their intrinsic desire to act in their clients' best interests.

Methodology

The study utilized a structured design to develop a concourse of 36 statements (the Q-set) representing the intersection of three intra-institutional logics (Sales, Service, and Fiduciary) and the three core psychological needs of Self-Determination Theory (Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness). A P-set of 21 seasoned advisors with a median average of 18 years of experience) performed a forced-distribution sort across a quasi-normal 11-point scale. To augment these findings, 14 semi-structured interviews were conducted and analyzed using NVivo software to match patterns observed in the data with "Ideal Types" associated with particular institutional logics.

Findings

Data were analyzed using Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Varimax rotation. Three distinct factor profiles emerged, accounting for 63% of the study's variance:

1. Numerical Targets Undermine Intrinsic Motivation (Factor 1): These participants are intrinsically motivated but feel structurally paralyzed. A defining consensus on statement #31 (+5) reveals that advisors feel they have "too many clients to serve them well," hindering their capacity for moral attentiveness.
2. Advisors Lean Toward Altruism (Factor 2): This group identifies with a professional signature anchored in client success. Interviews confirm a deep sense of "Relatedness," where gratification is derived from alleviating client anxiety rather than extrinsic financial rewards.
3. Sales Pressures Compete with Fiduciary Duty (Factor 3): This factor reveals an acute conflict. These advisors perceive their role as primarily sales-oriented and admit that numerical targets facilitate a "check-the-box" mentality. Interview data supports this, with one participant likening the pressure to "a rat getting the cheese," leading to perfunctory task completion over qualitative fiduciary care.

Significance

The findings demonstrate that when institutional logics emphasize sales targets, they create pressures that undermine the autonomy and competence necessary for ethical agency. This research contributes to Self-Determination Theory by proposing a modified model tailored for fiduciary work, illustrating how misalignment between institutional logics and psychological needs disrupts ethical behavior. The study concludes that for professionals to maintain fiduciary standards, organizational architecture must shift toward "Care-Centered" models that prioritize autonomy and relational motivation over impersonal, transaction-based metrics.

Abstract 45

Building a Q Team: Promises, Potential and Pitfalls of Implementing Q Methodology across Multiple Institutions

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Abstract

In this presentation, members of a collaborative research team from seven university teacher educator preparation programs (EPPs) explain the ways they developed a large-scale Q study. This research team comprises faculty in the field of technology and teacher education. Members of the team built on prior Q methodology studies related to technology infusion in EPPs. The activities of his research team helped us recognize the importance of long-term collaboration and the organization needed to develop, and implement a Q methodology study across several institutions. This continuing process in facilitating a comprehensive study revealed the promises, potential, and pitfalls to extending Q methodology research.

Broadening the scope of our teammates' awareness and knowledge about Q methodology required deep levels of coordination. At the outset, the lead researchers facilitated discussions about the foundations of Q methodology, the data collection process, and the data analysis process. After establishing a beginning foundation of Q research with colleagues, a series of online tutorials moved the research plan into data acquisition. As a research team, we had practice exercises that related to answering our research question about how technology can be infused in EPPs.

The initial step was informing new Q methodology researchers about the process of the approach and how it works as an analysis of subjectivity related to our topic of teacher preparation for technology integration in teaching and learning. This initial preparation step was the promise phase of Q methodology research and what findings from Q methodology offer beyond more

traditional basic survey research. Next, as a group, the research team members were able to upscale their Q methodology skills and changes were made to the Q statements as a way to better represent the needs of the entire team. Additionally, the potential to revise the Q statements allowed for better alignment with an existing framework within learning technology in education. This potential for broadening the scope of methodology across multiple institutions seemed boundless. The last phase enhanced our awareness of possible pitfalls to consistency/fidelity of the research process related to the time and distance between researchers and opportunities to coordinate activities. Moving beyond collecting Q sort data and interviewing participants, the research team members needed to refine data analysis and interpretation of findings. As leads for our research team, we realized there are many developmental stages in the life of a Q research team. Even we, as leads, are always learning about the complexities of Q methodology. The complexities included managing IRB protocols across institutions/people; investigating new software possibilities; and teaching & learning from our peer Q methodologists. Over time, we learned more about how to balance the needs of individuals with their respective research agendas, institutional demands, and professional/personal expectations. The value of our more extensive and intensive engagement in leading a group during data collection, presentations, and preparation of publications has enabled fruitful long-term collegial collaboration.

Abstract 46 Building Successful Applied Science Transfer Pathways: A Q Method Study

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Abstract

Expanding access to high-quality, structured, and workforce-aligned applied science transfer pathways is one strategy for supporting workforce development and individual success in rural communities. In Fall of 2024, 19% of North Carolina's community college transfer students transferred to four-year institutions after earning an associate in applied science degree. Despite representing a substantial and growing share of transfer activity, these students remain structurally underserved by existing statewide articulation policies, as the state's comprehensive articulation agreement does not account for this large number of students seeking to earn bachelor's degrees, earn family-sustaining wages, and contribute to workforce needs in North Carolina. The purpose of this Q method study is to identify and understand the primary perspectives of community college and four-year university administrators on the organizational design features and relationships needed for successful applied science transfer pathways for students from rural community colleges in North Carolina.

Utilizing Q methodology, this study will answer the following research question: What distinct perspectives exist among community college and four-year university administrators regarding the organizational design features and relationships needed to support applied science transfer pathways for students from rural community colleges? By utilizing Q methodology as the research design, I can identify dominant viewpoints that exist within groups of institutional administrators across both institutional contexts. Q methodology enables the systematic identification of shared and competing administrative logics, revealing points of alignment and tension across institutional roles and sectors. By understanding these viewpoints, institutions may be able to identify key factors that are beneficial in the formation of applied science transfer pathways within rural-serving institutions. Findings from this study are expected to inform policy design, strengthen cross-institutional partnerships, and support the development of more coherent, scalable, and equitable transfer pathways aligned to rural workforce needs.

Abstract 47 Humanizing Change Management in Higher Education

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Abstract

This session will present the research design and results of a Q methodology study about the impact of change management in student affairs functional areas in higher education institutions in the United States. The Q set was derived using Kezar's (2018) schools of thought related to change management. All statements were framed positively using a scale of least effective to most effective following the condition of instruction, "Please sort the following organizational actions in accordance with how effective they are in producing successful organizational change."

The data for this study were collected during a live workshop conducted at an in-person conference session during which the presenters provided an overview of Q and its use in building consensus. We analyzed the data using KADE, which resulted in a three-factor solution that will be helpful to higher education administrators as they implement change at their institutions. Twenty of the 25 participants loaded across three factors. The factors are still being interpreted at the time of abstract submission, but will be fully articulated and named by the time of the 42nd Q Conference.

Upon completion of the factor descriptions, characteristics will be mapped back to approaches to change management. The discussion and implications will be helpful for administrators and change leaders who are considering introducing a change by understanding some of the perspectives that may be held by employees and subordinates. Ultimately, we hope that administrators use this information to better prepare for change, generate buy-in from their constituents, and leverage strengths of others for a positive change management experience.

Andrea Steiner, Nathaly Lohane de Oliveira, Maria Livânia Dantas de Vasconcelos

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Abstract

Although not considered mainstream in political science, Q-methodology is being used increasingly in the field. The goal of this study is to analyze the use and potential applications of Q-methodology in environmental policy research. We begin by carrying out a systematic review of the environmental policy literature that applies Q-methodology. We focus on peer reviewed articles in English in the Scopus and Web of Science databases that use political science theoretical frameworks. To select the sample of articles to be analyzed, we apply the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses) flow diagram, which includes the following steps: 1) identification of studies, 2) screening, and 3) inclusion of studies. The articles selected for the review are then classified by theme, theoretical approach, political institutions and/or actors studied, and other methods applied in addition to Q-methodology (if applicable). Based on the findings, we then discuss the contributions, advantages, challenges and limitations of Q-methodology in environmental policy studies, and propose a future research agenda.

Abstract 49 Scaling Up Deliberative Experiences Using Q Sort Apps

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Abstract

This paper investigates whether the Q sort can be used to facilitate intra-deliberative experiences within the context of Deliberative Democracy theory, and, if so, how it can be used to increase or “scale-up” the reach of deliberative minipublics like citizen assemblies. This is a democratic body of randomly selected individuals who, with the help of a facilitator, deliberate towards a set of policy recommendations. Citizen Assemblies are the focus of most “scale-up” research, which now tends to emphasize the use of AI chatbots to facilitate online deliberative experiences. I take a different approach. I ask, can the Q sort, as part of an App, be used to provide anyone who wishes digital access to explore subjectivity and one’s personal political views in relation to others’ views? The Q sort is the ideal tool, as it guides the participant to read and reflect on the array of issue statements and, in one’s head, then, as forced by the sort, rationalize which statements they most and least agree with. In this way, I argue that the Q sort facilitates an individualized deliberative or intra-deliberation experience. For this research, I rely on those who argue that the intra-deliberative experience is a function of one’s imagination, used to reflect on and rationalize differing political views. I experimentally test whether an intra-deliberative experience can result from Q-sort, as determined by political attitude measures commonly used in inter-deliberative or person-to-person studies. The experiment involves comparing pre- and post-attitude changes between treatment groups (Q-sort) and the control group (Likert survey). The results indicate that 1 of 5 dependent variables produced significant results for the treatment group (Q sort users). That is Q sort users were significantly more likely to be willing to participate in future civic and political activities, while opinions and political internal efficacy did not change. I conclude the paper by reflecting on how this experimental study, and its results, now inform my work to build a prototype deliberative minipublic App that uses a Q-sort. How does the App responsibly “scale up” the deliberative experience in support of democratic values? And while I did not use AI for the experimental process, I am using it to code the App and to help generate the concourse and Q samples. As such, I will note my observations and concerns regarding AI use in the Q sort process and how this relates to the deliberative experience.

Abstract 50 Viewpoints on the Future of Nursing Education in Kyrgyzstan: A Q Methodology Study

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Abstract

Nursing in Kyrgyzstan is shaped by Soviet-era hierarchies that positioned nurses as subordinate to physicians, limited their professional autonomy, and produced a workforce educated primarily through three-year diploma programs in physician-dominated academic settings. Nursing is not yet recognized as a scientific discipline in Kyrgyzstan, and qualified nurses migrate to foreign countries in search of better salaries and working conditions. Understanding how healthcare professionals and other stakeholders perceive the current state of nursing education and the pathways forward for nursing is essential to guide meaningful reform.

This study used Q methodology to identify shared and divergent viewpoints on nursing education and practice reform among healthcare professionals, academicians, and students in Kyrgyzstan. Q methodology is well-suited for exploratory healthcare research, where the goal is to reveal stakeholders’ perspectives rather than measure the prevalence of predetermined attitudes. The Q-sample consisted of 37 statements developed from a review of the literature, online media, and expert input, covering all conceivable viewpoints on the study topic. Statements were translated into Russian and Kyrgyz, back-translated, and verified by a professional interpreter.

Using Fisher's experimental design, researchers determined that 36–54 participants were required (Brown & Montgomery, 2025); however, the response to study invitations was far greater than anticipated, yielding 171 submissions, of which 163 were valid and complete. Participants completed an online Q-sort using a forced distribution grid ranging from -5 (Least like how I think) to +5 (Most like how I think), followed by open-ended questions in which they explained their most extreme rankings. Of 163 participants, 88% were nurses, 7% physicians, and 5% other healthcare professionals. Principal component analysis with varimax rotation yielded a statistically sound, theoretically coherent three-factor solution.

Ninety-two participants loaded on one of three factors, each reflecting a viewpoint differentiated mainly by professional discipline. Factor 1, the Pragmatic, Practical Transformers (n = 40, all nurses), prioritized salary increases, improved working conditions, and enhanced clinical training as the primary pathways forward, largely within the existing healthcare hierarchy. Factor 2, the Scientific, Academic Transformers (n = 36, including a comparatively high proportion of physicians and academicians), endorsed recognition of nursing as a scientific discipline, advancement of bachelor's and graduate nursing degrees, and adoption of evidence-based practice as catalysts for professional transformation. Factor 3, the Hierarchical Power Transformers (n = 16, predominantly working nurses), centered professional advancement on dismantling the subordinate nurse role, increasing autonomy, and improving social status, with less emphasis on advanced education or salary as primary drivers of change.

Only two consensus statements emerged across all three factors, reflecting minimal but meaningful shared perspective. All three factors rejected the notion that nurses are excluded from patient care decision-making, suggesting that despite hierarchical relationships between healthcare disciplines, nurses are broadly viewed as genuine contributors to patient care coordination. These findings provide empirical evidence to inform nursing education policy, workforce development, and interprofessional collaboration strategies in Kyrgyzstan and other low-resource post-Soviet healthcare systems.

Abstract 51 Beliefs about collective victimization in contexts of ongoing and historical oppression: A Q methodology study among Kurds from Turkey and Northern Kurdistan in Germany

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Abstract

The scarce political and social psychological research on the Kurdish–Turkish context primarily addresses intergroup relations and general perceptions of the conflict. Conversely, Kurds' experiences of and beliefs about collective victimization in this context have not been examined

much to date. The present study examines how diaspora Kurds (from Turkey and Northern Kurdistan) who came to Germany as refugees or immigrants make sense of their group's experiences of collective victimization. Using Q methodology, an underutilized method that captures holistic, shared viewpoints on a given issue, we aimed to uncover the distinct viewpoints on Kurdish collective victimization in this community and contribute to the literature on collective victimization beliefs. Through purposive sampling, we recruited a diverse sample (N = 50). We identified three distinct viewpoints concerning the ingroup's victimization: (1) a focus on the importance of ingroup cohesion rather than centering intergroup relations; (2) promoting positive intergroup relations through solidarity with other oppressed groups and structural attributions for the ingroup's victimization; and (3) upholding the victimized ingroup's honor by demanding justice and apology and supporting self-defense. Our findings indicate that Kurds' understanding of their collective victimization goes beyond commonly studied collective victimization beliefs and that intergroup attitudes were less central than often assumed.

Abstract 52 Distinguishing Physical Discipline from Abuse: An Exploration of Parental Perceptions Using Q factor Analysis

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Abstract

Distinguishing physical discipline from physical abuse remains a persistent challenge in child maltreatment research and practice, particularly given substantial variation in cultural norms, personal experiences, and professional training. Although epidemiological evidence consistently links physical punishment to adverse developmental outcomes, many caregivers continue to endorse or engage in such practices. This disconnect suggests that differences in underlying perceptions—rather than knowledge deficits alone—shape how individuals interpret and justify disciplinary behaviors. The present study uses components from Q methodology to systematically examine subjective classifications of physical discipline and abuse.

Participants with caregiving experience (N=150) were invited to complete a forced-distribution Q sort, ranking statements along a continuum from “closest to my idea of abuse” to “closest to my idea of good discipline.” The concourse of statements for the Q sort was developed from existing child maltreatment instruments and refined to capture key dimensions of disciplinary practices, including modality (e.g., physical, verbal), severity (e.g., injury), mechanism (e.g., hand vs. object), and contextual factors (e.g., intent, emotional state). From this concourse, a Q set of 39 statements was constructed to represent a broad spectrum of disciplinary behaviors.

Participants also complete an online survey capturing their childhood experiences, parental decision-making, parental stress levels, and experience with material need. Q factor analysis will be used to explore variability in perceptions of disciplinary behaviors and how that variability relates to childhood and parental experiences.

This study aims to (1) identify dominant and alternative viewpoints regarding the distinction between disciplinary and abusive

behaviors, and (2) examine how contextual and demographic factors relate to these perspectives. By revealing the structure of subjective beliefs rather than assuming uniformity, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how disciplinary practices are interpreted and the factors that shape these interpretations. Findings have implications for public health education and messaging, clinical guidance, and policy development. Identifying areas of consensus and divergence may help refine interventions aimed at reducing harmful disciplinary practices while remaining responsive to lived experiences. More broadly, this study demonstrates the utility of Q methodology for examining complex, value-laden constructs in child maltreatment research, where subjective meaning plays a central role in shaping behavior and decision-making.

Abstract 53 Integrating Q Methodology into Design Thinking for Participatory Product Innovation

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Abstract

The development of new products increasingly relies on participatory and user-centered approaches that capture diverse stakeholder perspectives. Design Thinking provides a structured framework for innovation, guiding teams through the stages of empathize, define, ideate, prototype, and test. While traditionally rooted in qualitative observation and user interviews, the process can benefit from systematic methods to map and interpret stakeholder subjectivity. Q methodology, a research approach designed to identify and structure shared viewpoints among individuals, offers a promising complement to Design Thinking, particularly in the early stages of product ideation.

This conceptual study explores how Q methodology can be integrated into the Design Thinking process to inform the creation of innovative products. In the empathize stage, Q methodology can serve as a tool to transform heterogeneous opinions and attitudes into distinct factors, each representing a coherent perspective. These factors function as “virtual personas” that embody the diversity of stakeholders’ views, providing a structured input for further design activities. By capturing the nuances of subjective experience and highlighting points of convergence and divergence, Q methodology allows design teams to base their decisions on a comprehensive understanding of user perspectives rather than anecdotal observations alone.

Once the factors are identified, the define stage can leverage them to select a target profile for product development. The chosen factor serves as a lens through which the design challenge is reframed, focusing attention on the specific needs, preferences, and values of the target user type. This approach facilitates the ideate and prototype stages by grounding creativity in empirically derived stakeholder perspectives, increasing the likelihood that solutions will resonate with real users. Furthermore, incorporating Q methodology into Design Thinking promotes a participatory process, as it systematically integrates diverse voices and makes subjectivity explicit throughout the workflow.

By combining Q methodology with Design Thinking, this framework offers a methodologically robust yet flexible approach to participatory innovation. It bridges academic and business contexts, supporting both rigorous analysis of stakeholder subjectivity and iterative, user-centered product design. This integration illustrates how structured social research techniques can enrich creative problem-solving, enhancing the capacity to generate products that are both innovative and closely aligned with the needs and expectations of intended users.

Abstract 54 To Q or not to Q: a beginner's guide to avoiding the inappropriate use of Q methodology

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Abstract

Q methodology is a valuable approach for studying subjectivity: how people organize meanings, values, priorities, perceptions, and contested interpretations around a topic. Its strength lies in revealing shared viewpoints, not in measuring the prevalence of opinions or testing empirical claims. For this reason, Q methodology is not appropriate for every research question, nor for every type of concourse. A crucial limitation concerns the nature of the statements included in the Q-set. If the concourse is dominated by statements that are objectively measurable, empirically verifiable, or classifiable as true or false, Q methodology becomes methodologically weak and potentially misleading.

Q is most appropriate when statements invite participants to express a viewpoint: whether a policy is fair, a risk acceptable, a practice legitimate, a future desirable, or a trade-off tolerable. These are matters of interpretation, value, lived experience, and meaning. By contrast, statements such as “the unemployment rate increased by 2%,” “this food contains 10 grams of sugar,” or “the programme reduced emissions by 15%” are not primarily subjective claims. They require evidence, measurement, or verification. Asking participants to sort such statements risks transforming facts into opinions. The resulting factors may reflect knowledge gaps, misinformation, trust in sources, or access to evidence rather than coherent subjective perspectives.

This is especially important in policy evaluation, health research, environmental assessment, and food systems studies, where factual, technical, and normative claims often coexist. Q can be useful for exploring how stakeholders interpret evidence, frame problems, or prioritize policy goals. It is much less suitable when the central task is to determine whether an intervention worked, whether an indicator changed, or whether a measurable claim is true. In those cases, statistical analysis, experiments, surveys, systematic reviews, expert assessment, or document analysis may be more appropriate.

Q methodology should also not be treated as a substitute for cluster analysis, segmentation, or other R-method statistical procedures. Although Q factor analysis may appear superficially similar to clustering respondents, its logic is different. Cluster analysis groups cases according to measured variables; Q methodology identifies shared patterns of subjective ranking across a structured set of statements. Its purpose is interpretive, abductive, and configurational, not classificatory in the conventional statistical sense. A Q factor is not simply a market segment, respondent type, or statistically generalizable group. It is a reconstructed viewpoint, interpreted through factor arrays, distinguishing statements, consensus statements, and participants' qualitative explanations.

For the same reason, demands for additional statistical tests can misunderstand the method. Reviewers sometimes ask for larger samples, significance testing, representativeness, regression models, or external validation as if Q were a conventional quantitative survey. Such requests are not always appropriate. The quality of a Q-study depends less on inferential statistical testing and more on the adequacy of the concourse, the theoretical and empirical construction of the Q-set, the purposive selection of participants, the transparency of factor extraction and rotation, and the interpretive plausibility of the resulting viewpoints.

In short, Q methodology should be used when the research object is subjectivity itself. It should not be used when the concourse is primarily factual, when the aim is causal testing or prevalence estimation, or when researchers merely want a small-sample substitute for cluster analysis. To Q or not to Q depends on whether the study seeks to understand perspectives, rather than prove facts or classify populations.
