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[HOME](#)
[ABOUT](#)
[LOG IN](#)
[REGISTER](#)
[SEARCH](#)
[CURRENT](#)
[BACK ISSUES](#)
[ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)
[BOOKS FOR REVIEW](#)
[THESES](#)
[AUDIO/VIDEO](#)
[SURVEY](#)
[Home](#) > [Vol 16, No 1 \(1991\)](#) > [Goldman](#)

 Font Size:   

Communication and Canadian Identity: A Q-Methodological Study

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This study is an empirical investigation of communication and Canadian identity through the application of subjective scientific principles as constituted by Q-methodology. Fundamental to our approach is the use of the single case study whereby the individual's core of subjective feeling states are central to the procedure (Stephenson, 1953). Q technique is a method whereby a person models attitudes of mind in relation to topics, issues or situations, the focus being the individual's subjectivity as he/she describes it, not as others infer it. Succinctly stated, the concern is with a person's inner experience, as one observes the self from within. Our understanding of communication is thus contained not in relation to the power or functions it enjoys, to borrow a phrase from Carey (1975), but rather in the meanings and elaborations it affords.

We find Stephenson's (1967) conceptualization of national identity useful in this project in that he both locates and engages communication and subjectivity as fundamental social forms in national identity formation, production and reproduction. Stephenson (1967) argues that national character is anchored in and subject to the social controls of church, school, home, work, and the like, but identity formation is also constituted in what a nation thinks of itself, the myths it lives by, the common talk it generates as a forum for sustaining social life in general and its national identity in particular. The contemporary debate on free trade is indeed exemplary of this discourse, a fundamental platform from which to debate Canadian identity, all played out in the mass media of communication, in bars, laundromats, and so on. As Stephenson puts it:

National character is what a nation is prepared to talk to itself and others about--it is essentially communication pleasure, a conversation piece....As such it is important enough, in all conscience, and offers basic directions to media writers, to propagandists, and to national leaders. (Stephenson, 1967, p. 93)

Hence, as an initial step to the study of national identity and communication we tapped into the mass media in that it provides the grist for the everyday conversational possibilities of Canadians about their country. More specifically, we engaged the discourse in *Maclean's* magazine which much like the daily newspaper roughly approximates the communication in Canadian culture. Week after week opinions are expressed and facticities reported, covering selected spheres of social life such as "Science," "Economy," "Arts," and so on. Thirty back issues from *Maclean's* were randomly chosen (1978 through 1985) and approximately 160 statements were culled from the various

sections and inspected with special attention given to those items which did not refer to specific events or people, nor would anyone require special knowledge or expertise to understand them. In Q-methodology such statements constitute a Q-sample. Q-samples are usually constructed along Fisherian lines which permits the researcher to be rather explicit about his/her theoretical position, but this also allows for the replication of Q-samples in a systematic manner. Our 12 by 2 design replicated twice ultimately yielded a Q-sample of 48 statements. The Fisherian design is given in Table I. We note that although the statements are conceptualized theoretically, our central concern is not with the logical properties of the Q-sample itself, but rather with the ways in which meanings are projected during the Q-sorting procedure. Statement I for example "Powerful friends can sometimes be more dangerous than enemies," is in the ao category (International Relations-- Negative), but indeed its meaningfulness will ultimately arise in relation to the other statements in a given factor array. These matters will all unfold when we discuss our results.

Table 1 Fisherian Design from Maclean's Magazine

Identity (a) International Relations; (b) Religion; (c) Ethics; (d) Law
 (e) Media; (f) Society; (g) Nationalism; (h) Economy; (i) Science
 (j) Politics; (k) Arts; (l) Miscellaneous A; (m) Miscellaneous B
 Valence (n) Positive; (o) Negative

Eight individuals were selected and each Q-sorted the 48 statements along a forced choice frequency distribution as given in Table 2. The Q-sorting technique is a modified rank ordering procedure whereby each person places the stimuli in the order that is significant from his/her standpoint under a specified condition of instruction. As such, every measurement made is explicitly central-to-self and subjective.

Table 2 Forced Choice Frequency Distribution

Valence	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	+1	+2	+3	+4	+5	
Number of												
Statements	2	3	4	5	6		8	6	5	4	3	2

The Q-sort data were then collected and factor analyzed using the Censort program for centroid factor analysis. One then arrives at a table of factors and their loadings as well as tables of factor scores (arrays), the latter being the scores gained by each statement of the Q-sample. Due to space considerations, in this paper we will discuss our findings in relation to only one of the cases, Case A, but any one of the eight persons could have served our purposes equally as well. First however, we will turn to a brief discussion of the conditions of instruction selected, that is, the theoretical probes which constituted an essential component of the research design.

The literature abounds with depictions of the Canadian social character, in historical contexts, sociologically, through economic analysis, in fictional forms, poetically and so on. In Q methodology one engages this literary theoretical discourse by way of conditions of instruction. That is, certain "general theoretic" propositions are derived and in turn variates are chosen as probes to induce

"lawful" behaviour in single case studies. We note that the conditions of experimentation are the same for each individual, but it would be foolish to assume that the same factor structure would be found for all or even some of the subjects of the study. Moreover, our purpose here is clearly not to explore idiosyncratic structures, but rather the subjectivity of individual cases as manifested in the inherent lawful nature of human behaviour (Stephenson, 1953). In this study 10 induced experimental conditions are used to shed light on Canadian identity.

The 10 conditions of instruction are as follows:

1. 1 What's important for you now in the way you live? (+5 most important to 5 least important).
2. 2 What (for you) would represent a tolerant point of view? (+5 tolerant to 5 not tolerant).
3. 3 What for you would be most representative of the French-Canadian media? (+5 representative to 5 not representative).
4. 4 What are the ideals in life for you? (+5 ideals to 5 not ideals).
5. 5 What for you would represent an authoritative point of view? (+5 authoritative to 5 not authoritative).
6. 6 What for you would be most representative of the U.S. media? (+5 representative to 5 not representative).
7. 7 What would you feel playful about? (+5 most playful to 5 least playful).
8. 8 What for you would be most representative of the English-Canadian media?
9. 9 What for you would represent the public good? (+5 public good to 5 lack of public good).
10. 10 What represents you/yourself? (+5 me to 5 not me).

The first condition of instruction is of general significance, the concern being with what is on anyone's mind about Canadian identity. Conditions 3, 6 and 8 relate directly to media, embracing the critical importance of the media environment for Canadian unity and identity, an issue addressed by various Royal Commissions and Parliamentary Committees. The role of media in Canadian society in general and identity formation in particular has generated an extensive literature. For example, Elkin (1971, 1983) has examined the relationship between French-English media content and identity formation; Beattie (1967), Tate and Trach (1980) studied the acculturating impact of U.S. media on Canadians; Audley (1983) has concerned himself with the pervasiveness of U.S. media as well as American content carried in Canadian media; Singer (1972) has suggested a greater U.S. media emphasis on violence, while Tate (1978) has pointed to a strong American inclination towards individualism, and the list goes on.

Conditions 2, 5 and 9 concern themselves with matters of tolerance, authority and public good. Robertson (1985) argues that language, religion and geography have in part fostered a tolerant attitude in the Canadian psyche, an inclination towards compromise and accommodation, the price we pay as it were for our national existence. Morton (1961) points out that the Canadian character is fundamentally compliant and accepting of authority, a reflection of our colonial experience in that nationhood came about through obedience not rebellion. In a similar vein, Lipset (1965) suggests that Canada is a truly "counter-revolutionary" country and as opposed to the United States was founded on allegiance rather than revolution, resulting in tradition and convention as her final governing force. Thus, in contrast to the strong "self-orientation" of the United States Canada tends to be much more collectively oriented, a public enterprise country which favours and is inclined to support government intervention (Arnold and Tigert, 1974; Hardin, 1974; Lipset, 1965, 1985).

Of fundamental concern in Q studies is where one places oneself (condition 10) in relation to other experimentally induced conditions of instruction. Our present interest is where matters such as

tolerance, public good and the like locate themselves in relation to self identity. Moreover, idealizations (fourth condition) are considered as manifestations of ego-ideals, this condition being specifically designed to tap into psychologist Carl Rogers' notion of self-ideal congruity. The idea here is that behavioural adjustment rests in part on a concordance between one's self-concept or identity and one's ideal conceptions of one's self (Stephenson, 1980).

Finally, the play condition was enjoined to give expression to Johan Huizinga's (1955) thesis concerning the play element in culture and its further elaboration by William Stephenson (1967) who touches on the play elements in mass communication and national character formation. Cultures form in play, avers Huizinga, and "genuine, pure play is one of the main bases of civilization" (Huizinga, 1955, p. 5); and so too is play constituted in the genesis of the social character of a nation "the way it dreams, has its myths and develops its loyalties..." (Stephenson, 1967, p. 48).

As indicated earlier eight individuals participated in the study, we report here the understandings arrived in relation to one of the cases, namely Case A. Case A is male in his mid-twenties. He is actively involved in academics and lives in a large urban area in central Canada. Case A performed 10 Q sorts for the given conditions of instruction, which were then duly correlated and factored with varimax rotation to achieve simple structure. His 10 Q sorts rendered four operant factors as given in Table 3.

Table 3 Factors

	A	B	C	D
1. Important now	(.68)	(.38)	.03	.22
2. Tolerant	.23	.13	(.62)	.12
3. F-C Media	.18	(.64)	.11	.32
4. Ideals	(.79)	.23	.29	.11
5. Authoritative	.08	.15	.08	(.41)
6. U.S. Media	.06	.01	.13	(.49)
7. Play	.10	.09	(.48)	.15
8. E-C Media	(.39)	(.79)	.24	.02
9. Public Good	(.43)	.02	.34	.20
10. Self	(.71)	.33	(.47)	.00

The factor structure itself in essence represents the actual approximations of one's real life communicability, each factor in turn being suggestive of a given attitude of mind, a fundamental feeling state. The factor structure is intrinsically implicit and the individual is scarcely aware of the factors that result from the Q sorting technique. Factors are considered acceptable if they have two significant loadings on them (McKeown and Thomas, 1988; Brown, 1980; Stephenson, 1967). The standard error for a zero factor loading is given by the expression $1 / n$ where n = the number of statements in the Q sample. For 48 statements the $SE = 1 / 48 = .14$, and thus loadings in excess of $2.58(SE) = .37$ are significant at the 0.01 level and indicated by the use of parentheses.

On examination of the factor structure we note that seven of the variables are in simple structure, that is, they appear only once (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9), while the other three are confounded and load with another factor (1, 8 and 10). Case A's self as indicated on factor A, expresses the significance that public communication (English-Canadian media) has in relation to his self identity.

Moreover, the notion that media should serve collective interests in relation to the public good, is also situated in his ego-ideals (self-ideal congruence), pointing to an "adjusted" self in regards to factor A. The self that situates itself on factor C however, presents us with a rather conflicted and problematic identity structure. Rather interestingly, while play and tolerance are self referential, they clearly are not ideals for Case A, nor for that matter do these conditions locate themselves in relation to public institutional forms for the common good as might have been expected. Case A's "split" self appears to capture the general confusion that has arisen between public and private life in the modern world. Sennett (1976) for example, has argued that the problematic nature of selfhood in contemporary social life has resulted in the erosion of civility from the public sphere, creating a situation whereby social reality is inappropriately gauged in psychic terms rather than impersonal codes of meaning.

How is the self injured by estrangement from a meaningful impersonal life? It is robbed of the expression of certain creative powers--the powers of play--but which require a milieu at a distance from the self for their realization. (Sennett, 1967, p. 264)

Moreover, the factor structure serve as a cautionary reminder of the imminent intolerance which arises in public life when the play element is gradually eradicated (Huizinga, 1955).

There is still, nevertheless, the publicly conscious self of factor A and the factor is indeed suggestive of a Canadian sensibility which on some level places strong emphasis on central authority, upholds law and order, and favours state intervention into the economy. Case A's factor D is for U.S. media, and authority on the other hand is distinct from factor A in its recognition of the profound loss of authority and self orientation in American culture, indicative of a society where fundamental truths and values are violated on a massive scale. Commenting on American social life Lasch (1978) amongst others has observed that with the collapse of authority prior self-restraint has been replaced by self indulgence and pathological narcissism.

Factor B conjoins the French-Canadian media and English-Canadian media. Case A is an English-speaking Canadian who pays little or no attention to the French networks yet the two media forms apparently play quite a significant role in his ordinary day to day living. The factor it would appear displays the significance of regional divisiveness in the Canadian social fabric, and yet on another level is suggestive of the accommodating and compromising nature of the Canadian national character, of a society which in principle was willing to accept the rights of another province to vote on whether or not to separate from the rest of Canada. Robertson put it rather well when he suggested that, "compromise produces muddy second bests that logic can find repugnant. However, it is unlikely to drive citizens to the barricades" (Robertson, 1985, p. 25).

We mentioned earlier that in Q methodology interpretations are not only based on the matrix of factor loadings, but more importantly on the factor arrays, that is the scores gained by each of the 48 statements (+5 to -5) in each of the four factors. Theoretically, one stream of feeling runs through all 48 items in the factor arrays from one extreme to the other. Generally, one reports these statements, however, due to space considerations we will only report several statements per factor which will give us some flavour of the sentiments at hand. Following is a brief analysis of the four factors.

Factor A expresses a profound public consciousness and includes concerns for the environment, technology and the need for a socially responsible institution such as the media. Statements 4, 45 and 4I, for example, reflect the nature of these feelings (parenthetical scores following each statement are for factors A, B, C and D respectively)

- (4) People expect far too much from science and must turn to other schools of thought in order to find their way out of the problems technology has created. (+ 5 0 0 2)
- (45) Environmental laws should not be relaxed, and environmental protection is even more important than keeping consumer prices down. (+ 4 + 1 2 1)
- (41) The media are not businesses like other businesses but they have special responsibilities to the public, the proper discharge of which may require some degree of regulation. (+ 3 + 5 + 1 + 5)

Factor B as we noted includes Canadian media, French-Canadian media and important now. The factor points to the significance of the media in shaping and maintaining culture and identity in Canadian society. Given the linguistic and regional divisions, the factor among other things recognizes that accommodation, and understanding are fundamental in sustaining the Canadian nation character. Statements 19, 6 and 29 gives us some of the feeling tone of the factor.

- (19) This whole emphasis on profit completely misses the contribution artists are making to the culture. (+ 2 + 4 0 5)
- (6) There is a dimension of tenderness which characterizes Canadian society. (0 + 2 0 0)
- (29) It's not the number of people watching (a TV show) that matters, but the importance of the program and the cultural situation of the people watching it. (1 + 3 2 2)

Factor C (variates 2, 7 and 10) as indicated earlier is suggestive of the problematic nature of selfhood in the modern world in general as well as the Canadian social character in particular. While play and tolerance are indeed part of Case A's self they are not idealized functions nor do they incorporate themselves directly into the public sphere. In a broader sense the factor reflects the erosion of Huizinga's (1955) play elements of risk, daring and uncertainty in social life. The rationalization of the public sphere has eclipsed the fundamental significance of the notion that communication as a negotiated process contains a certain element of uncertainty, and can only be played within the confines of what Bronowski (1973) has termed the Principle of Tolerance.

All knowledge, all information between human beings can only be exchanged within a play of tolerance. And that is true whether the exchange is in science, or in literature, or in religion, or in politics, or even in any form of thought that aspires to dogma.
(Bronowski, 1973, p. 365)

The feeling tone of the factor is suggestive of self-absorption, and identity confusion. Statements 33, 2 and 39 are suggestive of the feeling state underlying factor C.

- (33) Maybe no one is worth that much money for playing sports alone and maybe this country has a perverse understanding of what sports mean. (1 0 + 5 1)
- (2) A child's knowledge of grammar is important, but not as much as his feeling good inside. (2 1 + 4 1)
- (39) When a person forgets his humanity he loses all reason. (0 + 1 + 3 3)

Factor D (U.S. media and the authoritative condition) is in fact a description of the American social character structure as implicitly understood by Case A. Manifestly, the factor points to the strong individualistic, militaristic and private enterprise culture of the United States, which is in sharp distinction in relation to the collective mindedness and public enterprise sensibility of factor A. Implicitly, the factor addresses the underlying decline of the socially mediating forces in American life and points to the alienation and cultural collapse contained in this development. What bedevils the American culture is not the narcissism that Lasch (1978) so aptly describes, but perhaps a loss

of purpose, and indeed a profound loss of social character. The following statements are exemplary of the factor.

- (38) Peace and friendship are best maintained through strength. (5 2 5 +5)
- (42) We should rely more on individual initiatives and ability, and not so much on government. (1 1 0 +4)
- (15) Tampering with the family and marriage is one of the main reasons for the decline of our civilization. (4 3 3 +4)

Using the single case methodology we were able to touch on the underlying subjectivity inherent in Canadian identity formation. The factor structures supported the collective orientation of Canadian identity but yet there was clearly a conflictual element in all of this. Significantly, tolerance and play were not included in the self/public good configuration and we concluded that the structures reflected the general identity confusion of the post modern world in which Canadian social life is of course so deeply embedded. We could see the role of media in identity formation and indeed the part it plays for Canadian unity. The role of U.S. media and its implications for Canadian culture and identity appeared on a non-self factor as a cautionary reminder of the profound influence that our southern neighbor exercises on our consciousness and social institutions.

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