Reply to Gourlay

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Stephen Gourlay's comments about our article "Q Methodology and Its Position in the Mixed-Methods Continuum" (this issue, pp. 172–191) are greatly appreciated and we are delighted that he agrees with us that Q methodology is a mixed method. We have had discussions similar to what Gourlay presents as the qualification of aspects of what is typically considered highly quantitative—for example, R-factor analysis where the naming of the factors requires a qualitative and often subjective interpretation of the numerical results. Simply, we cannot agree more with Gourlay as well as those he references, for example, Michell (1999). The truth is that when Stephenson first developed Q technique, there was no separation of the qualitative and quantitative in the research venue like there is today. Perhaps this is why Q, as Gourlay describes, consists of the quantification that is at the heart of factor analysis but also the quantification of that which is inherently qualitative (the concourse). In this way, Q consists of a meshing of qualitative and quantitative. Some may distinguish the two major aspects of Q methodology: Q sort and Q factor analysis. The Q factor analysis appears purely quantitative to some but the interpretation of the factors, like the factors determined within R factor analysis, must be interpreted and this involves qualitative aspects. Similarly, the Q sort is an act that follows the determination of the concourse and the selection of the Q sample—something inherently qualitative. Yet, as Gourlay describes, we then "quantify" this concourse by allowing sorters to determine where each of the Q-sample items is placed within the grid. In this way, we could use the phrase "interactive continuum" (Newman & Benz, 1998; Ridenour & Newman, 2008) to better describe how the qualitative and quantitative aspects of Q methodology work together such that each piece informs the other. We hope others join Gourlay in embracing this mixture as representative of Q as a mixed method and allow us all to help extend the use of Q methodology.

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References

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