

**Lemon, L. L. (2024). *The mindful qualitative researcher*. SAGE.**

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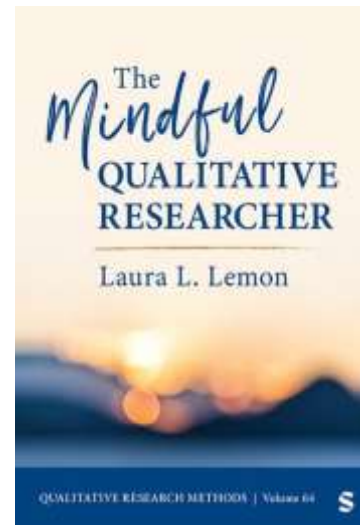
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*The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* by Laura L. Lemon is a practical resource for anyone new to qualitative research, mindfulness meditation, or both. Written as a “training guide” for incorporating mindfulness in qualitative inquiry, it offers a complement to introductory qualitative courses and texts, particularly for instructors and learners attracted to contemplative (Janesick, 2016a; Konecki, 2021) and mindfully reflexive (Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Janesick, 2016b; Orellana, 2019) approaches to knowing and generating knowledge.

Chapter 1: Introduction begins by making the case that mindful practices provide the all-important *space-silence-time* trifecta vital for reflective qualitative research. The following eight chapters develop connections between mindfulness and qualitative research practices. Chapter 3, for example, enjoins the Zen Buddhist concept of the “beginner’s mind” to conducting interviews with a curious, open, and “neutral” attitude. Other links include listening meditation and researcher reflexivity (Chapter 2), loving-kindness and focus groups (Chapter 4), mindful walking and participant observation (Chapter 5), noting meditation and data management (Chapter 6), open awareness and data analysis (Chapter 7), and slowing down and writing (Chapter 8).

What differentiates *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* from other texts that promote the value of contemplation (Janesick, 2016a; Konecki, 2021), mindfulness (e.g., Bentz & Shapiro, 1998; Janesick, 2016b; Orellana, 2019) and mindful practices (Grajzel, 2025; Trinh, 2024) in qualitative research is its commitment to training and skill development. Lemon clearly positions the book as a practice guide. Consequently, each chapter ends with workbook-style practices, including directions for engaging in mindful exercises, accompanied by a blank lined page to record “mindful memos” meant to foster “deeper connection to the physical meditation practices” (p. 7). As teachers of introductory methods ourselves, we appreciated the book’s respect for the temporal arrangements of the typical semester-based class. Readers are directed to practice each chapter’s mindfulness exercise over a 2-week period, which ensures completion of the text within a standard 16-week semester.



Lemon emphasizes accessibility, applicability, and practice, drawing on the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction's (Kabat-Zinn, 2003) conceptualization of mindfulness to support novice qualitative researchers' practice and development. While the book intentionally shortcuts complex theoretical and historical treatments of mindfulness and related concepts found in texts such as Purser and colleagues' (2016) *Handbook of Mindfulness: Culture, Context, and Social Engagement*, it does so to provide clear description and actionable advice ensuring the book's accomplishment as a starting-point and well-scaffolded source for skill building.

In her Preface, under the question, "Is this book for you?" Lemon is clear that she has written the book "with the novice researcher in mind," and to those, "being introduced to qualitative methods for the first time" (p. xiii). It is this intentional practice focus and novice framing that directs the remainder of our review. As qualitative research faculty members who teach doctoral level qualitative research courses, not all students in our introductory qualitative research courses are novices, although all can probably benefit from opportunities to practice. Others may be new to the field, but come in with extensive backgrounds in humanities, literature, philosophy, quantitative research, spirituality, and more.



**Laura L. Lemon**

Some students fall in love with qualitative research, learn quickly, and read avidly. Others are less interested. Regardless, we encourage thoughtful and close engagement with readings in constructivist classrooms characterized by open dialogue and questioning. If we adopted *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* in our classrooms with our students, we wonder what readings we might pair with the chapters to encourage further exploration and practice, to expand and deepen knowledge, and to foster reflection and critique? Below we discuss three classroom conversations the text and paired readings might provoke.

### **Conversation 1: What's the history of "mindfulness"? What other possibilities might arise in adopting mindfulness as a part of Western-oriented social science?**

The origin of mindfulness is complex and diverse, complicating efforts to establish a categorical definition (Brazier, 2016). This complexity is deepened by debates over its secularization (Brown, 2016) and the distinction between "traditional" and "utilitarian" orientations (Brazier, 2016). As we contemplate incorporating the lessons from Lemon's book into our classes, we also consider engaging students in discussions about the lineage of mindfulness and other possibilities for mindful qualitative research.

Mindfulness, as Lemon presents, aligns with common secularized U.S. practice, which originated from various Buddhist traditions (Purser et al., 2016). Buddhist "traditional" mindfulness, among other principles, cultivates a deep, introspective practice that dissolves the notion of the "self" as distinct from others and the world. Through this dissolution of self, ethical awareness of the fleeting nature of sensory

and mental impressions across time serves as a conscious memory that bridges past, present, and future, to uphold one's values and generate tension to propel one into action. In contrast, the "mindfulness revolution" in the United States, which has gained substantial traction in the medical and wellness communities, emphasizes "utilitarian" mindful practices. These practices focus primarily on capturing the immediate moment without altering one's perception of that moment (e.g., non-judgment), leading to decreased stress. The tension between traditional and utilitarian mindfulness has raised critical questions regarding how adaptations risk cultural appropriation, decontextualization, and commodification of Buddhist principles (Purser et al., 2016).

The practices outlined in Lemon's text are grounded in Kabat-Zinn's (2003) Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR), a secular, therapeutic approach focused on enhancing well-being and managing stress, pain, and illness. Although Kabat-Zinn was trained as a Dharma teacher and viewed the development of MBSR as his "karmic assignment," the program and similar others are intentionally utilitarian and secular, making them more accessible to a wider, U.S.-based audience (Brown, 2016, p. 80). MBSR exercises are primarily adapted from a form of Vipassanā and frame Buddhism more as a philosophy and a science than a religion (Brown, 2016). The infusion of scientific knowledge with meditative practice is seen in the body scan, a core Vipassanā exercise (Anālayo, 2020). The body scan highlights and allows us to experience the rapid emergence and dissolution of kalāpas, the subatomic matter of the world. This experience of kalāpas enhances our understanding of our connection to all other matter. While the body scan offers an intentional method to develop insight into our interbeing—the interconnectedness and interdependence of all elements of existence—in MBSR, it is primarily used as a method to increase awareness and attunement with body and mind (Anālayo, 2020).

The exercises in Lemon's text provide a jumping off point to develop a mindful self-of-the-researcher. Practicing these meditations gave us pause, a space to mindfully consider the transition from a traditional mindfulness emphasis on interconnectedness through the dissolution of self, to the utilitarian focus on stress relief and non-judgmental awareness. What additional possibilities might mindfulness offer to qualitative research and researchers if we extend our focus beyond individual outcomes to explore its social aspects and deepen our understanding of the self within the broader social fabric (Kabat-Zinn, 2019)? How might a mindful approach to ethics transform our perceptions of the communal, cultural, and environmental contexts in which both researchers and participants are embedded? Finally, how could this holistic integration promote a stronger commitment to compassion and social engagement as essential components for justice-oriented inquiry (Orellana, 2019)?

### **Conversation 2: Can you give me some examples of what mindfulness looks like in qualitative research?**

Lemon rightfully claims *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* is "the first of its kind" (p. xiii) in the sense that it is the first text—at least to our knowledge—to make explicit connections between mindfulness practices and specific qualitative methods and to give practical instruction on developing qualitative skills through those practices. This is what makes Lemon's book particularly helpful. As we noted in the

introduction to this review, however, the idea that qualitative researchers can make good use of mindfulness, mindfulness practices (e.g., meditation), and contemplation in their inquiries is not new. If we were to adopt Lemon's text in our qualitative classes, we would do so by pairing it with conceptual discussions and empirical examples of mindfulness in qualitative research. For example, we might ask students to read Trinh's (2018) reflection on shared survival of domestic violence through *meditative walks* in the forest. Trinh (2024) later described these walks as "doing something different to my body, allowing me to engage with and return to the past, see brutal memories that happened to me and my mother, and guide me to think about forgiveness for my father and his actions" (p. 29). Other complementary readings could include Salvo's (2025) chapter on meditation as thematic analysis, Haberlin's (2019) dissertation in which he analyzed data through meditative writing and mindful coding, Grajzel's (2025) discussion of meditation for bracketing, Janesick's (2016a) contemplative qualitative inquiry, Orellana's (2019) mindful ethnography, and more.

We expect that pairing these readings with Lemon's text would deepen our students' engagements with mindfulness and further support any attempts they might make to develop their own skills via Lemon's helpful instructions. How might clear instructions alongside published examples inspire students to consider mindfulness practices? What new mindful methods might these pairings inspire? How could different understandings of mindfulness invite students to think more expansively about their own qualitative inquiry projects and relationships within them?

### **Conversation 3: Is mindful qualitative research a "paradigm?" Or can any approach incorporate mindful practices?**

Likely due to its practical approach and utilitarian or secular framing of mindfulness, Lemon's text does not explicitly attach mindful qualitative research to one or more social science paradigms (e.g., Lincoln et al., 2017). Lemon's brief discussion of epistemology and ontology bears this out as she advises readers to, "pursue additional reading to uncover your epistemological alignments" and directs them to Tracy's (2020) textbook on qualitative research. The implication of not yoking mindfulness to a research epistemology is the stance that mindfulness can be used as productively in postpositivist-oriented inquiries as in critical or even posthumanist ones. While some argue that contemplative or spiritual inquiry represents its own paradigm (Linh et al., 2016), Lemon's text and the examples we considered in the previous section support the contention that mindfulness can be flexible in its alignment with varying philosophies of inquiry.

Despite suggesting paradigmatic flexibility, *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* might be read by some of our students as leaning toward a postpositivist account of qualitative inquiry. For example, Lemon draws on Merriam and Tisdell (2016) to argue that "the researcher should remain *neutral*" during interviews (p. 28, emphasis added). Neutrality makes good sense if a qualitative researcher is conducting what Roulston (2010) describes as "neo-positivist" interviewing—carefully avoiding influencing the respondent to generate unbiased answers. Striving for neutrality is less desirable in interpretivist, constructivist, and some critical qualitative interview studies where researchers might, for example, seek to build strong and trusting

relationships with participants, often revealing aspects of their lives and perspectives on the interview topics (Roulston, 2021). Certainly, Lemon's book is an excellent starting point for becoming a mindful qualitative researcher, or at least a qualitative researcher who practices mindfulness. It also serves as an excellent prompt for reflecting or perhaps meditating on the nature of qualitative inquiry. Is qualitative inquiry singular or multiple? How does the way we conceptualize inquiry reveal itself in our writing? Does mindfulness imply its own philosophy of inquiry and therefore methodology, or is it more of a method that can be used across multiple inquiry approaches?

### Concluding Thoughts

Through the *Mindful Qualitative Researcher*, Lemon's goal is to encourage "playfulness and foster creativity;" risk-taking, "even if risks are outside of one's comfort zone;" and being "open to emergent design" (p. 101). For those new to qualitative research or mindfulness practices—and who faithfully engage all nine chapters—we have no doubt those goals will be realized. The well described, practical, and supportive chapters extend an encouraging hand while providing a gentle nudge to try new techniques and to be open to what they reveal. Paired with further readings, both conceptual and empirical, we expect *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher's* impact to be even more profound, serving as a springboard to the lively, multiplicitous, and dynamic field of qualitative inquiry. We are excited for conversations, ideas, projects, and collaborations *The Mindful Qualitative Researcher* opens in our field!

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