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## Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: A Review

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## Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: A Review

### Abstract

The following is a review of the book *Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: Practicing the Zen of Research* by Valerie J. Janesick and published in 2015. This review aims to highlight the book's unique features, primarily focusing on the ways in which Janesick appropriately weaves essential aspects of qualitative research and Zen alongside one another. Janesick offers readers, novice or experienced researchers, a unique way of understanding and approaching the practice of qualitative inquiry. The review highlights features of each chapter and concludes with how instructors of qualitative research methods may benefit from Janesick's many suggestions for pedagogy and practice.

### Keywords

Qualitative Research, Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry, Qualitative Practice

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## Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: A Review

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### **Go to the center sutra**

In Zen, the answer always lies in being more centered.

That is where everything blossoms.

The more we stay at the periphery,

The more we are spun out as the wheel of life turns.

But when we go to the center,

We ride the turn of the wheel without tension. (Janesick, 2015, p. 102)

To my fellow qualitative research colleagues, in what ways does this sutra resonate with you, particularly in reflection of your experiences engaging in qualitative data analysis and interpretation? Is it not when we get familiar, close, intimate with our data that we begin to enter a flowlike stage of analysis and interpretation? What essence of your experience does this sutra capture? Published in 2015, Janesick's book *Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry: Practicing the Zen of Research* is a methods source book unlike any other qualitative research text I have in my library. Ideas presented in the text challenged me to see my own ventures in qualitative inquiry in new ways. Considering my own background in both qualitative research and practicing, teaching, and training in meditation and yoga, I was curious about Janesick's connections between qualitative research and essential aspects of Zen (e.g., impermanence, non-self, and nirvana). Thus, I decided reviewing this book a fitting endeavor.

Janesick introduces the text with a description of how the book came to be, including how her evolving love for Zen mantra-meditation and yoga ultimately inspired an invitation for readers to experience the book, not just read it. Through an assortment of storytelling, step-by-step guidelines, and suggestions for teaching and learning qualitative research, Janesick gently invites readers to carry essential Zen teachings alongside them in order to engage in qualitative inquiry more mindfully. As human beings serving as the primary research instrument, Janesick reminds us to walk carefully in the midst of qualitative inquiry by considering how the threads of impermanence, non-self, and nirvana influence our present moment experiences with participants and our data.

The common thread among qualitative research and Zen is that both disciplines value storytelling. Each chapter is introduced with a *koan*, a riddle-like story, that prompts the reader to see the topic of qualitative research through a new perspective. Each chapter in the book attends to foundational and essential topics of qualitative research—including topics of ethics of social research, methods of data collection, approaches to data analysis, and strategies for writing up findings—through the lenses of both eminent qualitative research scholars and

traditional teachings of Zen. *Sutras*, or threadlike stories, are appropriately situated in each chapter and serve as gentle reminders of the essential aspects of a mindful approach to living and researching. Janesick concludes each chapter with a list of mindful activities, proposed as opportunities for increased engagement with the chapter's concepts, and suggested resources for further understanding that includes sources for both qualitative research and the study of Zen and mindfulness.

Overall, Janesick succeeds in inviting readers, novice or experienced qualitative researchers, to adopt a more contemplative approach to qualitative research. Janesick's tone is not one of a "sage on the stage" but instead one of a careful mentor with a wealth of knowledge and resources at hand ready to share. A strength of Janesick's approach is the ability to acknowledge both the complexity and simplicity that is qualitative research and Zen, as demonstrated in the introductory sutra above.

This book would be a helpful resource to both novice and experienced qualitative researchers, especially those who feel drawn to mindful living. For instructors of qualitative research methods, this text would complement other foundational methods sourcebooks. Or for instructional purposes, the text contains a springboard of ideas for pedagogical considerations for orienting novice researchers to the vast field of qualitative research. After reading *Contemplative Qualitative Inquiry*, I felt as if I could take a deep breath—I had been invited to reconnect with a mindful state of being and bringing the essence of mindfulness with me in my work as a qualitative researcher.

### References

Janesick, V. J. (2015). *Contemplative qualitative inquiry: Practicing the Zen of research*. Left Coast Press.

### Author Note

Kate H. Guthrie (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2837-5950>) earned her Ph.D. in Educational Psychology with a certificate in Interdisciplinary Qualitative Research Studies from the University of Georgia. Her research focuses on qualitative inquiry and the social and emotional needs of gifted adolescent females, of which her dissertation earned her the Owen Scott Emerging Scholar Award. She currently serves as an Assistant Professor and Director of Doctoral Research at Piedmont College where she teaches qualitative research methods courses. She is an experienced high school math teacher and has worked with diverse populations of adolescents in an array of environments. Correspondence regarding this article can be addressed directly to: Kate H. Guthrie, 525 Prince Avenue, Athens, GA 30602. Email: [kguthrie@piedmont.edu](mailto:kguthrie@piedmont.edu)

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