

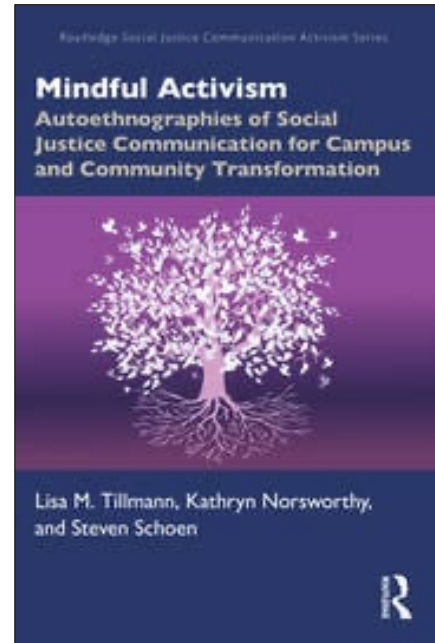
Lisa M. Tillmann, Kathryn Norsworthy, and Steven Schoen, **Mindful Activism: Autoethnographies of Social Justice Communication for Campus and Community Transformation**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2022, 204 pp., \$31.46 (paperback).

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Decades of social justice work and fighting for equity across numerous contexts culminate in Lisa M. Tillmann, Kathryn Norsworthy, and Steven Schoen's ***Mindful Activism: Autoethnographies of Social Justice Communication for Campus and Community Transformation***. Each of the essays compiled in this text reflects on practical experience with an eye toward generating wisdom for activists, particularly activists in academia. A pedagogical and demonstrative tool of the transformative learning model, *Mindful Activism* unpacks several cases wherein the authors—three professors of varying levels in the Rollins College Critical Media and Cultural Studies department—engaged in mindful activism. This concept, mindful activism, can be understood as social justice advocacy work grounded in thinking, feeling, and doing. In committing to and practicing mindful activism, the authors work together to co-construct knowledge about social justice theory and praxis while engaging the reader in theory-

building thought exercises. Using autoethnographies and dialogic conversations, the authors successfully reflect on their activist experiences and draw out lessons learned from their moments in the field.

The book takes a unique format in that each of the main chapters is structured through the transformative learning model. The model is applied through the following four steps: (1) Expressing affective experiences the authors had as they lived through the case or as they read their co-author's autoethnographic retelling; (2) organizing the authors' reflections and reactions to the story, including immediate thoughts, feelings, and opinions; (3) systematically categorizing and analyzing these reflections in order to draw generalizations from the case to develop broader lessons for activists, and (4) prompting the reader to apply the first three points of the case to other cases. Critically important to this process is the assertion that meaning comes from interaction and power sharing, and that learning and reflecting on the self must be relational rather than individualized (pp. 7, 14). Thus, each chapter includes a detailed retelling of an author's experience (e.g., advocating for LGBTQ+ students and faculty on campus) and then a "dialogic debrief" where the authors converse to develop knowledge gained from the social justice intervention. The authors draw on additional theories and frameworks to shape these conversations, most commonly revolutionary and transnational feminisms, mindfulness and engaged Buddhism, and participant action roles and methodologies. In doing so, they artfully bridge theory and praxis to develop holistic knowledge of social justice activism. As they assert and demonstrate through the reiteration of these steps for each case, the process of knowledge building and of engaging in social justice action is a never-ending recursive cycle (p. 13).



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Tillmann, Norsworthy, and Schoen draw from the following five cases, each with varying levels of participation in each action: (1) Sitting during the national anthem at an event, (2) speaking out about an anti-immigrant op-ed in the campus newspaper, (3) organizing and facilitating workshops for refugees and queer people in Southeast Asia, (4) sharing stories of the indefinitely civilly confined, and (5) speaking out about an anti-LGBTQ+ group attempting to be made exempt from a campus anti-discrimination policy. After the lead author of the chapter tells their story (or in conjunction with another activist, as in the case of civil confinement), all the authors engage in the dialogic debrief. From these conversations, the authors generalize conclusions and lessons to be learned from the experiences they had. Some of these include: Activists must act in the moment (pp. 30, 79), "activism is profoundly embodied" (p. 32), power is accessed differently at different times by different people (p. 50), pain can incite activism, but activism can be painful (p. 51), invite a cultivation of care across cultures and differences (p. 81), activists must work together to share burdens (p. 82), activists must always be strategic (pp. 50, 80, 123), activists should de-individualize and promote systemic change (p. 125), social movements have costs alongside progress (p. 155), and activists should know when to use backchannels or media tools (pp. 156–157). These lessons are offered to readers as wisdom gained from decades of experiences, and they are followed by prompts for readers to discuss these lessons with colleagues and allies. The book also closes with a transformative learning model debrief of the process of creating the book. In this conclusion, the authors examine the micro-, meso-, and macro-level themes of their case studies and put forth further generalizations concerning the relationality of work (activist and academic alike; p. 168), critical consciousness of structures and inequities (p. 172), and the importance of approaching activism as a learning process rooted in history (p. 173).

The use of autoethnographies to detail each of the five cases is essential to the lived-experience-as-knowledge model that the authors make central to the book. By providing their own perspectives—highlighting thinking, feeling, and doing—the authors demonstrate a co-construction of knowledge through their storytelling and experience sharing, followed by group conversations that unpack the experience toward a theory-building end goal. Additionally, the authors supplement their experiential stories with feedback from others and evidence from the case (e.g., emails exchanged about a case as it was unfolding). This gives the reader a full picture from which they can—and indeed are invited to—draw their own conclusions and apply to their own work. Furthermore, the use of autoethnographies gives the book a pace not often found in academic writing; for example, when mindfulness is highlighted, the pace feels slower and more deliberate, and when conversations are lively, the pace feels faster and more involved. Similarly, the methodological decision to use narrative autoethnographies and engaged conversations breaks up the somewhat formulaic feeling of the repeated usage of the transformative learning model. Any chapter of the book would certainly make an excellent example text for teaching autoethnographic methods to students.

Among its many strengths, *Mindful Activism* can boast its illustrative language, autoethnographic methodology, and pedagogical utility. Alongside these, there are a few opportunities for growth in the text. First, the structure of the book, while pedagogically useful, becomes repetitive for a cover-to-cover reader. By the final case study, many of the points made by the authors have already been made in previous case studies and the reader is left yearning for something new. This could include taking the step into application, which the authors leave as a task for the reader, or by making more connections that are clearer across cases, comparing lessons learned over time. In addition to this infusion of newer content, the text could benefit from an infusion of newer perspectives. Tillmann, Norsworthy, and Schoen have rather similar identity backgrounds, and while

this is surely not a flaw, it does leave the reader wanting to hear more. This is especially true given the emphasis the authors place on participant action methodology, which involves co-investigating with people on the ground. This is, in fact, done well in the chapter on civil confinement (chapter 4) where Jeffrey Holmgren is made a coauthor of the chapter, but the reader is left wondering why an integral voice to the story like Ouyporn Khuankaew's is not more explicitly included and elevated to the coauthor status.

Mindful Activism is an excellent text for any scholar who identifies as doing social justice work. Scholars who study identity groups or other groups impacted by social justice work (e.g., LGBTQ+, incarcerated people, refugees, etc.) should indeed read *Mindful Activism*, as it provides an excellent model for approaching the subject with principles of care, relationality, and the co-construction of knowledge. The book is also structured in a way where each chapter can serve as a stand-alone text. Individual chapters would be useful for undergraduate or graduate students taking classes on social justice and social change communication, interpersonal communication, education/pedagogy, or qualitative research methods. Furthermore, activist groups and nonprofit organizations could benefit from seeing how the transformational learning model is applied and potentially use it in their own groups to structure communication after an action. Ultimately, *Mindful Activism's* greatest contribution and utility is as a demonstrative text on how to apply the transformational learning model in numerous contexts.