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Authors

Eitzel, M.V.

McCullough, Sarah

Publication Date

2025

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Exploring Values in Action using Autoethnographic Methods

Workshop Guidelines

September 2025

MV Eitzel & Sarah McCullough
Feminist Research Institute

Supported by:



Acknowledgments:

The feedback from the participants in the pilot version of our workshop was invaluable in producing this written version 2. The values exercise was adapted from [The CLEAR lab](#) run by Dr. Max Liboiron.

Funded by:



Recommended citation:

Eitzel, MV and McCullough, S. (2025) Exploring Values in Action using Autoethnographic Methods: Workshop Guidelines. Feminist Research Institute, UC Davis, and SEEKCommons Network. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.58076/C6CC77>



Background and Motivation

Examining Values in Research via Introspection and Narrative

There is a growing appreciation for the importance of values in research. Questions of values are related to but different from conversations about ethics. Whereas ethics focuses on presumed shared societal values, values focus on what is important to an individual or a community. When viewed positively, values foster group cohesion and bolster motivation and resilience. When viewed negatively, values are seen as introducing bias into science. Viewed practically, values are virtually always present in research through the questions we ask, our assumptions, chosen methodologies, analysis, how we respond to reviewer feedback, publishing practices, and outreach. Research institutions, disciplines, and fields of study all have values that they promote, whether these are stated implicitly or explicitly.

We propose that recognizing what these are and how they converge or diverge from one's own values is a crucial reflective process for researchers. When they converge, it can be easy for them to go unnoticed. Assumptions and practices based on values appear invisible or commonsensical. Conversely, when they differ or oppose, a researcher may experience feelings of alienation, discomfort, and cognitive dissonance. Since values are rarely explicitly discussed, researchers can internalize this tension, leading to dissatisfaction or conflict. Challenges within organizations or research groups often stem from differences in priorities, which are shaped by values. Making these differences apparent can help to facilitate dialogue and collaboration.

We piloted this workshop with a group of researchers to help them identify the values they bring to their work. By having an explicit conversation about this, we hoped to learn (1) what values are present in a research community dedicated to the development of "open" research commons (a value-driven project in itself), (2) the effectiveness of storytelling and group reflection in helping people to identify their values, and (3) the effectiveness of autoethnography to assess the level to which researchers successfully implement their values in practice.

Audience: This guide is intended for researchers interested in running the workshop. This workshop can be useful for improving the quality and accuracy of research and for individuals and groups who wish to further goals of equity, inclusion, justice, and other ideals. It is most effective when conducted with a group of researchers who share a topical interest, are working on collaboration, or who otherwise share commonalities. The workshop can be a meaningful way to establish camaraderie and a shared sense of purpose, especially at the beginning of group endeavors.

What follows describes the process undertaken to enact these goals. We encourage others to test these processes and provide us with their thoughts! Please reach out to us at smcc@ucdavis.edu and/or mveitzel@ucdavis.edu.

Workshop Process

Prep Work: To be done before the workshop

- Ask participants to respond to the following prompt in writing:
 - Select a project that you feel exemplifies the sort of research we need more of. It could be a project you took part in or one you have heard of. Include a link to the article/report/summary if publicly available.
 - Share why you feel this work is exemplary. What is worth replicating? What should other researchers learn from this study? What impact can this research have? Why do you value this?
- Collect the answers to this, and whatever background information you might find useful (disciplinary area/topical background of participants, job title/project role, etc) via a collective document or private survey as appropriate.

Day 1 Exercise: Identifying values via narrative

- Introductions (20 min - variable depending on number of participants)
 - Name, affiliation, how are you doing today? Tell us about your work.
 - Consider a lengthier introduction period, to encourage the building of the short-term community of the workshop environment.
 - Consider creating a shared notes file or other way for participants to share ideas during and potentially after the workshop.
- Opening (10 min)
 - Many of us are drawn to open science/the commons/socio-environmental research because we want our work to serve the greater good. Let's explore what it takes to implement this.
 - Plan of Action
 - 1) Identify your values through reflective storytelling about exemplary work/projects
 - 2) Identify a set of practices that might move your work in line with those values
 - 3) Evaluate through reflective storytelling the degree to which you enacted those practices or how you could have done so
- Identify your Values (30 min)
 - Source: <https://civiclaboratory.nl/2021/04/29/choosing-lab-values/> and <https://fri.ucdavis.edu/news/workshopping-our-values>

- Consider not specifically defining what constitutes a value, leaving it broadly-defined for the group to think in different directions and then discuss afterward.
 - For example, some folks in our pilot workshop thought about values as ‘values statements’ while others thought more about commitments e.g. to anticapitalist approaches.
 - One broad ‘definition’ was “what guides our decision making, especially when we come up against a challenging choice - how do we make a decision we feel good about that is in integrity with ourselves,” or the “I will sleep well tonight” test.
 - Tell stories you prepared in groups of 2-3 (for a virtual workshop, use breakout rooms) - use a timer and warn folks to switch between different people.
 - As one person shares their story, other group members write down the values they hear implicitly or explicitly. These may include things such as: rigor, collaboration, humility, efficacy, impactful, real-world relevance, new insight, detailed, etc.
 - After the person is done and you’ve written down all the values you can think of, share what values you heard. These will be collected on a central document.
 - Repeat for all group members.
 - Note that one can also do this exercise individually, but participants indicated the dialogue was helpful, and others helped to identify values in the story they told.
- Group reflection on how well people noticed your values (10 min)
 - Individual writing to narrow down the list of values to your top 3 values. (20 min) In a virtual meeting, we left the videoconference running but gave folks a 20 minute break.
 - Share with the group. List all of the final values in a shared document (20 min)
 - Identify Practices that Do Values-in-Action (30 min)
 - Brainstorm and show an example of identifying a practice that puts a value into action and evaluating implementation of that value (see Appendix)
 - Walk through example of how to do the exercise on the worksheet (see Appendix)

Work to be done between sessions:

- For participants:
 - Step 1: Develop a working definition for each value identified in Day 1 (at least 3).
 - Step 2: Review one or more of the below sets of best practices for research
 - Find/refine a list of practices (~3 per value developed in step 1). Write why you selected these and how they relate to your values.

- Step 3: Think of a specific project you have done or planning to do, to examine the potential for the practices that you highlighted to bring the project more in line with your values. Bring in written materials from the project, such as a paper or grant application, and fill out the worksheet listed at the end of this packet. Do the best you can to describe the project, the practices and how they might align the project with your values, and, if you can, whether they did so.
- For organizers:
 - Emphasize that the lists of practices below are only examples meant to spark ideas, participants do not need to review all of them, and can select from other lists of best practices
 - It's useful to review the values participants generated during the session, and to digest or summarize them in some visual way to be shared at the start of the next session.

Possible ideas for lists of best practices:

- 1) General
 - a) [Research Justice Worksheet](#)
 - b) Eitzel "[Modeler's Manifesto](#)"
 - c) [Financial Modeler's Manifesto](#)
 - d) [Manifest-no](#)
 - e) [Daniel Mietchen pledge](#)
- 2) Modeling
 - a) [Five ways to ensure that models serve society](#)
 - b) [Ten "commandments" for socio-environmental modeling](#)
- 3) Data governance
 - a) [CARE Data Model](#) and [applications](#)
 - b) [FAIR data principles](#)
 - c) [Data sheets for data sets](#)
- 4) To consider ability
 - a) [Principles of Disability Justice](#)
- 5) For design work
 - a) [Design Justice Principles](#)
- 6) For environmental justice research
 - a) [Principles of Environmental Justice](#)
 - b) [Principles of Working Together](#)
- 7) For community engaged research
 - a) "[Making Racial Justice in Research Real](#)"
 - b) CLEAR Lab [guidelines for working with Indigenous communities](#)
 - c) CLEAR Lab [community peer review](#)
 - d) [Participatory planning with marginalized communities](#)
- 8) For applying values in the lab setting
 - a) [Running Equitable Lab Meetings](#)
 - b) [Equity in author order](#) and [implementation](#)

- c) [Ten Simple Rules for Creating an Anti-Racist Lab](#)
- d) CLEAR Lab [handbook](#)

Day 2 Exercise: Exploring Values in Action Through Your Autoethnographic Narrative

- Check in (15 minutes)
- Look at the map of values generated from Day 1 (15 minutes)
 - This may be a word cloud
- Discuss challenges and questions from worksheets (15 minutes)
- Share worksheets in small groups, or in the whole group (30 min) - Use timer
- Discuss observations others could benefit from (20 min)
- Break to individual writing: Work on analyzing practices in your research (30 minutes)
 - Outline a vignette and analysis of the project, values, and practices that you filled out in your homework, seeing how those practices might have aligned your work with your values
 - “Write a vignette (short story) that exemplifies a time that you enacted your value in practice - or how you weren’t able to. Or how you imagine this in a project you have yet to do.”
 - The goal is to prepare this outline for your own personal/professional development, for a collection of autoethnographies, for a blog post, or for other uses e.g. opinion piece, etc
 - The idea is to create a seed, or a starter bit, so you don’t face a blank page later
- Return to group and share how it’s going. (15 min)
- (15 min) Return to discussion of values around commoning
 - We hope the writing was helpful, just as a self-enrichment process and hope that you got something out of it
 - Want to put values and justice in some context, so we’ll review some ideas of the commons (but also keep in mind alternative similar framings like care)
 - Background on Commons: **Collectively managed resource**
 - **How: process, governance**
 - **Who: relationships, who is in and who is out**
 - **What: what is being managed**
 - Nuances:
 - Describes tangible “natural” resources, but also intangible (digital) ones

- Involves collective management, but it is not state-based (i.e., a public good)
 - Involves self-organization of producers, but it is not market-based (i.e., a private good)
 - Perceived as the positive / negative source of environmental degradation
 - Preservation, tragedy of the dysfunctional/poorly-governed commons
 - Open can be predatory/enclosure, and commons is a step beyond that but also can be co-opted as well
- Discuss (1 hr):
 - From the framing of the commons, This workshop is about the “how.” You bring the who and what, but this workshop is that the how is vitally important and under-worked on. Who and what gets talked about all the time.

Conclusion

Along with doing the direct work of establishing clear research values, this workshop can also create coherency within a community of researchers. Discussion about where workshop participants' values align and where they diverge can lead to new insights around tensions between values and traditional scientific practices, while also revealing new pathways to put values into practice. Each day's activities can be done independently, though day two's activities require clarity around one's values prior to implementation. We invite you to use this workshop in whole, part, or with modification as fits each unique research community. Please contact us with feedback about implementation of this workshop so that we can expand and improve the activities. Please reach out to us at smcc@ucdavis.edu and/or mveitzel@ucdavis.edu.

Autoethnography Worksheet for Values in Practice

Identify three (or more) values from day one of the workshop, and give a short description of your project. Then choose a set of possible practices that might support those values in the implementation of the project (examples to work from are given below).

Values Identified in Day 1 of Workshop:

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)

Short Description of Project to Evaluate:

Sets of Better Practices for Research/Modeling:

These are examples and starting points. Feel free to select one or more, read as little or as much as you like, and/or bring in your own sources of possible best practices for research/modeling that might help align your processes and outcomes with your values.

- 1) General
 - a) [Autoethnographic assessment](#)
 - b) [Research Justice Worksheet](#)
 - c) Eitzel “[Modeler’s Manifesto](#)”
 - d) [Financial Modeler’s Manifesto](#)
 - e) [Manifest-no](#)
- 2) Modeling
 - a) [Five ways to ensure that models serve society](#)
 - b) [Ten “commandments” for socio-environmental modeling](#)
- 3) Data governance
 - a) [CARE Data Model](#) and [applications](#)
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- 4) To consider ability
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- 5) For design work
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- 6) For environmental justice research
 - a) [Principles of Environmental Justice](#)
 - b) [Principles of Working Together](#)
- 7) For community engaged research

- a) [“Making Racial Justice in Research Real”](#)
 - b) CLEAR Lab [guidelines for working with Indigenous communities](#)
 - c) CLEAR Lab [community peer review](#)
 - d) [Participatory planning with marginalized communities](#)
- 8) For applying values in the lab setting
- a) [Running Equitable Lab Meetings](#)
 - b) [Equity in author order](#) and [implementation](#)
 - c) [Ten Simple Rules for Creating an Anti-Racist Lab](#)
 - d) CLEAR Lab [handbook](#)

Detailed Instructions: Choose a value from your list and find one or more practices from the sources above and examine how these practices might have aligned your work with your values if you did do them or could have done them or will try to do them, in the context of your chosen project. Repeat for other values as you have time/inclination. ***See the end of the document for worked examples.***

Value #1:

Project:

Practice 1 & Source:

Why I chose this practice:

Example:

Result:

Value #2:

Project:

Practice 1 & Source:

Why I chose this practice:

Example:

Result:

Value #1:

Project:

Practice 1 & Source:

Why I chose this practice:

Example:

Result:

Worked Example #1

(From [Eitzel 2023](#))

Value:

Trustworthiness – defined as research that is believable, for me based on some kind of empiricism/ability to measure quantitatively or qualitatively what is happening in the study system, and also resonating with the idea of cross-checking work with others, being open about any biases, and building a strong track record of credibility over time.

Project:

Correcting published ecology work: I discovered an error in my published dissertation work and had to fix the error, rerun the analysis, and reach out to the editors of the journals and share the changes, asking them how they wanted to appropriately revise the published works.

Practice 1 & Source:

Modeler's Manifesto ([Eitzel 2021](#)) – Triangulation

Why I chose this practice:

This gave me a lot more confidence in my claims as a scientist/knowledge producer, like checking your work, which people teach you to do even in primary school. And the more I did complex statistical and computational modeling, the more I felt it was important to check my answers in different ways, and then make my stated conclusions (especially the high-level ones) appropriately conservative. These were all in the service of making my work more trustworthy.

Example:

In this particular project, I had done a number of different types of models, conducting a sensitivity analysis to the inclusion and exclusion of different predictor variables and other model structures, essentially exploring the extent of model validity. Though I did not use outside data sources or external models, I still felt that the variety of models I tried gave me a pretty clear picture of where the results were robust to different modeling choices, and where they were highly dependent on modeling choices that I felt were somewhat arbitrary.

Result:

Because I had made appropriately conservative claims in my publications, based on the sensitivity analysis/triangulation, the correction of published paper was accepted by the editors who did not retract either of the two papers. Therefore using a form of triangulation helped my work be more trustworthy to other scientists.

Worked Example #2

(From [Eitzel 2023](#))

Value:

Justice – equity might not call for equality, depending on the circumstances, but as a guiding principle I think of justice from a distributive angle, so I defined it as ensuring equal benefit, and avoiding unequal harm, but while keeping in mind histories of unequal benefit and harm.

Project:

Community-based modeling with the Muonde Trust: I had the great pleasure and honor of working with a community-based research team from rural Zimbabwe, who had been gathering data about their own people and place for 35 years. I had been brought in to help do novel analyses synthesizing all the data together, and it was important to me from a justice angle to think carefully about how I worked with them.

Practice 1 & Source:

Modeler's Manifesto ([Eitzel 2021](#)) – Epistemic consistency & Power dynamics

Why I chose this practice:

It was very important to me that my work wouldn't dictate to the community or overemphasize my knowledge when I wanted their knowledge and needs to be primary (power dynamics). And they knew a lot more than I did about their system and I didn't want to use a tool in an incorrect way (epistemic consistency). These were important aspects of addressing justice in my work.

Example:

One of the analyses we did together was to represent the community's agro-pastoral system in an agent-based model (ABM). This meant representing livestock, crops, and sacred forest (*rambotemwa*) and woodland, and all the relationships between them, as well as how farmers' actions intervened, and how rainfall dictated year to year system responses. One piece of advice I received from agent-based modeling experts was never to use an ABM for decision support (that is, to dictate a specific answer or optimize for a particular numerical goal). This meant I was working to stay consistent with the epistemic basis for how one can know about a system using an ABM – but it also served an important role for me in supporting a power dynamic I wanted to encourage: making sure that the community continued to feel that the decisions on land use and system management rested with them, and not a technological tool.

Result:

The Muonde Trust research team, in conversation with the larger community in Mazviwha Communal Area, used the agent-based model as a discussion tool, highlighting their own knowledge. They stated that they felt the model was their model, felt ownership over it, and used it to change local land-use policies. So, in addition to following the correct epistemic guidelines for ABMs, we were able to keep the power to use the model in the community's hands. I feel this helps to restore justice when it comes to access to technological tools.

Practice 2 & Source:

Modeler's Manifesto ([Eitzel 2021](#)) – Impacts and implications

Why I chose this practice:

I want my work to help people. I hoped in doing this work with the community that I would be able to produce something that they would actually be able to benefit from, so it was important for me to think about how it might be used. This is another element of justice – ensuring that especially where community members have been impacted in the past, it was important to think about future impacts and implications of what we were doing together.

Example:

While I and other scientists did the technical parts of programming the model and testing it, I worked closely with the community-based research team and their close allies to design it, making sure that it reflected enough of the real system's behavior that they could 'see' their system in it and use it as a discussion tool. Similarly I made sure that the model was useful for them to use as a discussion tool with other community members.

Result:

The Muonde Trust was able to show the model to local leaders and young farmers to advocate for changes in land-use policy that reduce deforestation and loss of sacred forest/*rambotemwa*, which colonialism had generally been pushing them towards over the decades. The impacts were therefore to help to restore and reinstate authority and collective management that colonialism had damaged.

Practice 3 & Source:

Modeler's Manifesto ([Eitzel 2021](#)) – Mixed methods

Why I chose this practice:

I was very conscious going into this project just how much rich and varied data the community had collected, though it was also challenging to use. As I sought modeling methods that might be appropriate, and implemented the chosen methods, I kept in mind that I wanted something that could tap into the different kinds of information they had been gathering for decades. This was a way to honor and elevate their work and make it even more useful for them, which to me also helps with restoring equity to a community who could otherwise be a 'research subject.'

Example:

Using the agent-based model was a good way to bring in quantitative and qualitative data: using qualitative information for writing the rules for how agents (livestock) behaved on the landscape, and using quantitative information e.g. for rainfall and agricultural productivity.

Result:

The rich data from the community let us make the model 'recognizable' to them, and through that work we were able to elevate their knowledge and show them a new way to use it to solve their own problems. Finding ways to honor all ways of knowing is a key piece of epistemic (knowledge) justice, and this model did a good job of bringing in those different knowledges.