Identifying the Values that Shape HCI and CSCW Research with Latin American Communities: A Collaborative Autoethnography

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Abstract

Over the past decade, community collaborations have come into focus within the HCI and CSCW fields. Largely the result of increased concern for social and contextual dimensions of practice, these partnerships facilitate a pathway for researchers and practitioners to foreground the nuances of technology as it takes place in the real world. How these collaborations are engaged, what values mediate them, and how practices might vary across geographies remain active research questions. In this paper, we contribute by zooming into the experience of four HCI and CSCW researchers engaging in community collaborations in Latin America (LATAM). Through a collaborative autoethnography (CAE), we identify three main value tensions impacting HCI practices and methods in research collaborations with LATAM communities: camaraderie vs. cautiousness, informality vs. formality and hopefulness vs. transparency. Building on our findings, we provide three recommendations for researchers interested in engaging in community-based research in similar contexts.

*These authors contributed equally to this research and share first authorship.

CCS Concepts

• **Human-centered computing → HCI theory, concepts and models**.

Keywords

HCI; Latin America; Social Justice; Autoethnography; Critical Computing; Critical HCI

1 Introduction

Community collaborations have emerged as an important theme within the Human-Computer Interaction (HCI) and Computer-Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) fields over the past couple of decades, partly under the umbrella of what has been referred to as the "third wave of HCI" [12]. Largely a recognition of the role played by context against a backdrop of ubiquitous and pervasive computing, community-collaborations have helped to inform the changing nature of designing and deploying technologies globally. This has led to an increase in scholarship centering research

collaborations with historically excluded communities across the globe [11, 13, 26–28, 31, 38, 41, 42, 46]. As both research communities grapple with the complex realities of marginalized populations, calls for more socially responsible research and design practice have emerged [17, 19, 21, 23, 29, 32, 33]. To that end, a growing number of scholars have analyzed the colonial systems of power that computing can reproduce [3, 9, 10, 32, 37], engaged in reflections on the harm that their practice could entail for vulnerable populations [20, 24, 25], and drawn from existing work outside of the field to propose transformative research approaches. For example, postcolonial computing [31], feminist HCI [8], intersectionality [22, 23], anarchist HCI [33], and social justice-oriented interaction design [17, 21].

While diverse, these efforts agree that careful understanding of the values that emerge from and shape these partnerships is a critical step towards more socially responsible community-researcher collaborations [17, 22, 29, 33]. A focus on these emerging values can help to reveal other sources of harm for communities [17], inform new methods that acknowledge complex forms of oppression [22, 31], and overall, "radically alter the ways we enact these values in our relationships with each other and the world" [33].

This paper expands on these existing efforts by exploring a Collaborative Autoethnography-based (CAE) methodology to foreground values emerging and shaping research/community collaborations [16]. CAE, the social version of autoethnography, involves researchers pooling their stories about a particular socio-cultural context to find similarities and differences across them [16]. In particular, CAE has been explored in the context of "plural heritages" [6, 40], showing that, by engaging in mutual learning, participants can increase their self-awareness and reflection [6].

As a context for eliciting reflections that can inform a socially responsible HCI practice, Latin America (LATAM)'s [1] unique complexities can contribute important insights. Populations across this region are highly diverse along many dimensions, including ethnicity, language, and economic indicators. However, due to their common history of Iberian colonialism, they all share similar experiences of racialization, classism, social inequalities, widespread corruption affecting public institutions, distrust towards the government, and political or economic instability. Such commonalities across many forms of oppression allow for a rich exploration of the relation of technology with issues of power, privilege, and forms of resistance. Various groups of LATAM researchers have put forward efforts to incorporate the region's remarkably grounded knowledge and richness into the HCI and CSCW fields through special groups of interest and/or workshops [2, 36, 43] and studies about HCI practice in the region (e.g., [39, 45]). However, the knowledge that the region produces—including the reflections and lessons that local researchers can offer to efforts towards more responsible community collaborations—remains under-discussed [18].

In this paper, we present a CAE by four LATAM researchers working with different communities to identify the values that shape HCI and CSCW research in LATAM. We discuss 1) how the values

present in their research collaborations with communities shaped their methodological approaches and 2) the suitability of CAE for eliciting value-based collective reflections on HCI community-research work. This paper contributes to existing conversations about a responsible HCI practice by offering 1) a preliminary understanding of the values and tensions that shape HCI and CSWC community-based research in LATAM and 2) lessons learned about a CAE-based methodology for engaging in critical conversations about what the particularities of HCI/CSCW community-based research in a specific context.

2 Method

We (the authors), are a group of LATAM HCI researchers working in different institutions, countries, time zones, and areas within HCI. We have been collaborating over the last five years to open up spaces within the larger, global HCI community for the HCI/CSCW knowledge that LATAM can offer. Inspired by previous work on research reflections from the Global South [4], we set out to unpack the particularities of some of the community-based HCI approaches used in LATAM, focusing on identifying the values that emerge from and shape researcher-community partnerships.

To this end, we wanted to find a way of structuring a collective reflection that could allow us to find patterns across our individual experiences practicing HCI/CSCW research in the region.

We determined that a collaborative auto-ethnography (CAE) was adequate for our goal once adapted to our case. Our main requirements were a) an asynchronous, virtual format so that we could accommodate the participation of researchers writing auto-ethnographies from different countries and time zones, and b) centering our reflections on identifying the values in HCI/CSCW research partnerships with communities in LATAM. The study was exempt from formal IRB approval by University of Notre Dame for not being considered as a study with participants.

2.1 Auto-ethnographers

Four authors volunteered to reflect on their community-based research experience. All auto-ethnographers were women, were born in LATAM, and spoke Spanish and English. Following past work on CAE that discusses ethical issues about auto-ethnography [34], we will not disclose their identity and refer to them as A1, A2, A3, and A4.

A1, A2, and A3 worked in the academic sector and A4 worked in the industry. A1 and A2 were affiliated with LATAM academic institutions, and A3 and A4 were affiliated with institutions outside LATAM. All had over seven years of experience conducting HCI research with communities and using qualitative research methods, including interviews, surveys, and participatory design, in their collaborations with these communities. A1 partnered with educational communities, A2 with immigrant groups, A3 with marginalized youth, and A4 with non-profits in the humanitarian sector. Finally, all auto-ethnographers submit their work to international and regional conferences.

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[1]LATAM is a term used to describe territories within North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean where countries share a history of Iberian colonialism and where Spanish and Portuguese are the dominant languages. According to [1], it includes 34 countries: Mexico, Haiti, and Puerto Rico. In 2021, the region's population was around 656 million people, living in an area of approximately 19,197,000 km2 [44]

Figure 1: Figures used in the prompts, prompt 1 (left; examples of values: worry, tolerance, care, flexibility, leadership, honesty, empathy, dialogue, joy, responsibility, solidarity, generosity, respect, politeness, discretion, industriousness, authenticity, active listening, motivation, loyalty, effort, dignity, validation) and prompt 4 (right; from left to right, top to bottom -not a literal translation, Every cloud has its silver lining; The early bird catches the worm; A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush; Misery loves company; Never say never; The sun shines for everyone; The remedy was worse than the disease).

2.2 Collaborative Auto-Ethnography: Proposed Methodology

We collaborated over a month via online meetings and asynchronous interactions (including a Slack channel and Google Docs comments) to design the proposed CAE-based approach. The proposed method involves engaging researchers across four stages of reflection, inviting them to develop a rich, value-based reflection on their collaboration with communities and produce community-based methodological advice. In each stage, auto-ethnographers were presented with at least one prompt asking them to reflect on their individual experiences or to contrast their experiences to others'.

The stages guided researchers' reflections, first motivating them to identify values, then driving researchers to analyze the possible impact of these values on their methodological decisions, and finally asking them to think about the future and propose a particular value-based advice for the research community. Some prompts provided explicit examples of values and culturally sensitive value-based advice to give researchers a starting point. The prompts scaffold researchers' ability to self-critique, allowing for the reflection on values to emerge by intentionally avoiding explicitly asking researchers about their values or the values of the communities they work with. Instead, the focus remained on analyzing the values present during the collaboration.

2.2.1 Stage 1: Reflection on Values in Personal Experiences. This stage sought to support auto-ethnographers in beginning to think about values. This stage's prompt provided auto-ethnographers with examples of values that could be present in a collaborative working relation (Figure 1). Prompt 1 then asked them to identify up to three values whose presence in their relationship with communities in LATAM was surprising to them. Then, it tasked auto-ethnographers to share a story in which the presence of some

or all of the values they identified had been particularly salient. They also had the option to include an image or photo they felt appropriately represented aspects of their story.

2.2.2 Stage 2: Contrasting Values Across Experiences. Stage 2 motivated auto-ethnographers to connect their insights with the insights of their peers. Prompt 2 requested auto-ethnographers to read another ethnographer's answer to Prompt 1: A1 read A3's answer and vice versa, and A2 read A4's answer and vice versa. Then, the prompt asked auto-ethnographers to share a story where the values in their peer's story resembled the ones they had previously identified and a story where these values differed.

2.2.3 Stage 3: Analyzing the Impact of Values in Methods. This stage guided auto-ethnographers as they transitioned from an awareness of values to a deeper analysis of how values impacted the collaboration. The stage presented two prompts to auto-ethnographers (Prompts 3 and 4). Based on their past answers, auto-ethnographers had to first reflect on how the values present in their interaction with the community might have affected the planning and execution of the study (Prompt 3). For Prompt 4, they had to identify how their methodological decisions depended on the values they identified, the LATAM context, and the particular community they worked with.

2.2.4 Stage 4: Deriving Methodological Lessons for the Collective. Stage 4 supported auto-ethnographers in enunciating critical methodological advice for the HCI community to be considered in research-community collaborations. To that end, the stage entailed two prompts (Prompts 4 and 5). Prompt 4 asked auto-ethnographers to share a piece of advice with other researchers conducting research with communities in LATAM. This elicited a series of LATAM-themed advice and informal sayings as a form of inspiration. The

second prompt (Prompt 5) asked researchers to read other auto-ethnographers' answers to Prompt 4 and, based on these and their own experience, derive some final advice for working with communities in LATAM. The purpose of this stage was to help auto-ethnographers move from an individual reflection to a collective one.

2.3 Data Collection

The data collection process took place from April 16 to May 19. One of the co-authors, who was not participating as an auto-ethnographer, coordinated the process (e.g., sending instructions via email and verifying that the ethnographers followed them). The moderator first released five prompts (one prompt at a time), each lasting between four to seven days, to give the ethnographers enough time to answer them. After that, the moderator released one final prompt (six) to ask the ethnographers to reflect on the CAE methodology. We wrote all prompts in Spanish. Ethnographers could answer in English or Spanish by audio-recording or writing their answers. All chose to write answers down and submitted them in Spanish.

2.4 Data Analysis

The analysis of the prompts happened in two waves. By reading each other's responses to the prompts in Stages 2 and 4, auto-ethnographers conducted the first data analysis, identifying commonalities and differences in the values present in their experiences. After all prompts were answered, the rest of the co-authors conducted the second analysis of the entire dataset following a top-down thematic analysis [14]. The goal was to identify overarching values and patterns and their impact on HCI/CSCW practice/methods. This thematic analysis happened in a word processing application, where all co-authors had editing rights. The themes were refined via asynchronous discussion on Slack.

Additionally, the group assessed the effectiveness of the CAE for this research. After the second data analysis, the auto-ethnographers reflected on the ability of the proposed stages and prompts to guide a value-centered reflection on HCI methods. Specifically, they wrote reflections about the aspects of the experience that worked well to build a shared understanding of the values that characterize research with communities in LATAM, possible challenges they faced while responding to the prompts, and the impact that reading other participants' responses had on their perspectives. The rest of the authors completed this analysis by synthesizing the main strengths and potential improvements to the CAE.

3 Findings

While the focus of the methodology we applied was on values, its collaborative nature allowed for the surfacing of value tensions between communities, researchers, and the social context where the research took place. Three main value tensions emerged from our analysis, deeply impacting the manner in which HCI practices and methods are implemented with LATAM communities. We discuss each of them in detail to follow.

3.1 Camaraderie vs. Cautiousness

In their stories, all auto-ethnographers recognized how the communities they collaborated with—which all shared a high level of

vulnerability—were often eager to foster a sense of *camaraderie* towards them, which they described in terms of values such as *care*, *joy*, *service*, *empathy* and *generosity*. Most stories shared how members of the communities quickly positioned themselves as a form of support for researchers, sometimes engaging even their family members in research-related tasks (e.g., "asking children to help carrying workshop materials" - A2). A1's stories further demonstrated how support for researchers was enacted to foster camaraderie.

> (*Service* as a value) was sometimes present when complications emerged or when we needed support related to finding a place where we could conduct the workshop, being flexible about time, among other things; it is something very noticeable. I think there's a kind of willingness or desire to help, and at the same time, a desire to make things work. (A1)

Auto-ethnographers also shared a common sense of surprise towards how quickly and organically community members opened up to them not only as a way to help the project but on a more personal, generous, and kind level. A3, for example, shared how two days after community members found out it was her birthday they "quickly got a cake and sang *las mañanitas* to me." A2 was also surprised of the caring actions that community members showed to her when she was leaving the research location: "they came to my place by surprise and brought a lot of really delicious food for us to enjoy as a farewell gift."

The sense of closeness that camaraderie elicited often led to auto-ethnographers to gain an in-depth knowledge of the community, albeit faster than expected. In cases such as A4's, this learning process helped her to grow a high "sense of solidarity and empathy" for the community. In other cases, such as A2's it drove her to be cautious in regards to appropriate data collection commitments: "To respect the community, I tried to be careful to not take those personal and highly relational moments for social integration as data collection instances."

Camaraderie, as the data analysis suggests, thus, may lead to blurring the lines between "socializing" and working on the research, demanding cautiousness to emerge as a value on the side of the researchers, impacting their methodological decisions: they need to carefully differentiate between disclosures that can be treated as data or should be kept as personal conversations. To that end, auto-ethnographers particularly valued seeing research-community interactions as an opportunity for "supporting their experiences and needs" (A3), practicing care and tact to "build a space of mutual trust and dialogue (A4), and "always allowing community members the opportunity to say no" (A2).

3.2 Informality vs. Formality

Informality was a value that the auto-ethnographers also identified as quite present in their interactions with LATAM communities. Specifically, informality often forced researchers to view research activities that are typically framed within formal boundaries, from a different, more complicated perspective (e.g., reporting back to funders, communicating requirements, or issuing informed consent forms to participants). Our analysis suggests that knowing how to navigate formal demands within a context plagued with informal

practices is often confusing for researchers and may add extra burdens to the execution of research activities for both researchers and communities.

A1 for example, experienced the impact of informality when working projects either funded or guided by governmental agencies. In her case, the informality emerged within the very formal context of the governmental agency. In A1's case, the funding agency had formal requirements for financing and reporting of activities. However, due to ingrained local informal practices, the agency struggled to follow through their protocol to enact those requirements:

> There were several changes of staff, many requests of paperwork we had already sent, and even though they had requested X during the meetings, in the end they required Y. So that was indeed a challenge coming from this informality and lack of clarity in what they expected of us. (A1)

In A4's case, the tension between following formal guidelines and the informality of the context emerged when using the informed consent form for engaging community members in the research she was conducting. The formality of the document and the practice as it is required by U.S. research institutions, often inspired distrust in participants, driving A4 to resort to rather informal practices.

> A lot of people assumed that I was a foreigner because I was studying in the US, and others doubted my identity or asked me for evidence that I was a local and I was familiar with the neighborhood [...] Everything changed when a participant made me realize that the protocol felt very impersonal. He suggested that instead of explaining which university I came from, that I explain why I wanted to chat with them, and instead of talking about my PhD research, that it'd be better to describe why I wanted to research these topics and what I was trying to understand by talking with potential participants. (A4)

A4's case suggests that, when navigating a context that values informality, researchers might have to engage in methodological decisions that open up for that informality. A2's experience illustrates that researchers might even have to find ways for their methodological decisions to leverage informality. When working with a governmental agency as a stakeholder, she used informality as an asset to advocate for the communities that were to use the final design product they were creating:

> The top authorities in the governmental agency insisted that the system we were creating needed to ask users for their citizen IDs before they could access important information despite us (the research team) continuously advising against this idea. Many immigrants within the community were still undocumented and this decision was going to leave them out. However, the close relationship we had been able to foster with some of the lower-level officers in the agency (who were the ones who were working day to day with us in the project) helped us to avoid the requirement. (A2)

While making methodological decisions for opening up and/or leveraging informality can be useful for researchers and communities, it can also be problematic. It demands of the research collaboration to carefully mind the possible consequences of bending the rules; navigating informality may cause extra workload and confusion when there are "more exceptions" than "rules".

3.3 Hopefulness vs. Transparency

The dialogue among ethnographers throughout all prompts converged on discussing the central role that hope, trust, and transparency had in their work with communities. Many reflections highlighted that, given the high levels of hope that communities had in the collaboration with researchers, trust was often easily given to researchers. As A2's reflection stressed, however, meeting those high expectations can be a challenge:

> All that glitters is not gold. It's important that we, researchers, are very well aware that to communities, we and our institutions are like gold. We glitter with potential for them. But all that glitters isn't actually gold and we can't always give them what they expect. (A2)

A1's story illustrates how the mishandling of high expectations can negatively impact communities: "the community felt enthusiastic about collaborating with us, but at the same time, they had some reservations and incredulity due to previous experiences that had left them feeling used or abandoned." As such, a critical tension for research-community collaborations in LATAM lies in fostering trust while navigating hope with enough transparency.

Auto-ethnographers agreed that, methodologically, facing communities' high hopes requires to foster trust through transparency. A4, for example, explained that it is key to set clear expectations about researchers' involvement in the project and the possible outcomes of the engagement.

> I think that avoiding expectations that we cannot meet is a real challenge. But an ethical stance that we as researchers should take is to be honest with the communities, not only regarding the scope of the projects we seek to develop with them, but also about the actual potential and limitations of technology itself. (A4)

To elicit a transparency that shows care for the hopes of the community, A2 advocates for methodological decisions that foster in researchers and communities a degree of *distrust* and caution:

> I would recommend others to distrust the protocols, distrust your own good intentions, be a bit more cautious when you are about to suggest something [...] And also, embrace and even encourage distrust from the community towards yourself. Don't let them believe that because you have more resources, you won't fail, let them doubt you and your good intentions a bit to protect them from mistakes. (A2)

Our analysis suggests that trust based on hopes can be vulnerable; researchers might not be able to meet expectations. It is thus, critical for researchers to engage in methods that instill a bit of

distrust and maintain a transparent dialogue about the potential consequences of "trusting too much".

4 Discussion and Conclusion

Following the CAE methodology helped the auto-ethnographers to consciously take a step back not only to identify the value tensions that shape how they implemented HCI methods with LATAM communities but to also become aware of the fact that they navigate those tensions by making ad hoc, individual, and in many cases isolated, quick decisions. We recognize that the value tensions we identify from community-based research in LATAM are not exclusive to the communities of this region. In fact, previous research has reported similar values across other geographies (see [5] and [30]). However, the values we present in this research are at least prevalent in the region. Therefore, examining them in future studies would provide a deeper understanding of HCI method strategies when conducting community-based research in LATAM. To follow, we discuss the major takeaways of these reflections as well as the lessons we learned in implementing the CAE methodology.

4.1 Navigating Value Tensions in HCI Work with LATAM Communities

HCI and CSCW scholars have examined the role of reflexivity in researchers' relationships with community partners and the research they generate [7, 15, 23, 30, 35, 47]. Our findings contribute to this research stream stressing that, to manage accountability in the face of tensions such as camaraderie vs. cautiousness, informality vs. formality, and hopefulness vs. transparency, auto-ethnographers need to develop high reflection in-action skills [39]. Specifically, they need to have strategies at hand to make culturally situated, on-the-fly methodological decisions such as knowing when to switch off data collection in favor of fostering camaraderie, whether (and to what extent) to open up and even leverage informality, and when and how to instill distrust in the collaboration so as to build long-term trust. Taking into consideration the challenges of developing such complex strategies, we provide three recommendations for researchers interested in engaging in community-based research in contexts similar to LATAM:

To remain sensitive and aware of the situated and culturally-dependent values and practices of partner communities. Reflexivity is critical in developing our field relationships, and these relationships can also be methodologically challenging for those considered as insiders: the role of insider provides researchers the possibility to gain deeper engagement in participants' accounts [5]. However, as our findings illustrate, in being insiders (e.g., sharing the same ethnicity, language and socio-economic background with community members) does not ensure researchers always understand the values of the community. Researchers, thus, must specifically reflect on the ways that they reshape methodological decisions to align with the context's demands, their values and their partner's values.

To be aware of the implications of acting as a translator between communities and other worlds. Our findings resonate with [39]'s in regards to the nature of the translation work that researchers working in LATAM often do: it is "laborious, artful human-to-human work" for it entails moving across informality and formality while reading and managing power differences. In our findings, we saw that to effectively translate formal institutional processes (e.g., Institutional Review Boards (IRB)) to community members, researchers take on the responsibility of going against the protocol.

To be ready to challenge their formal research training. Our findings demonstrate that much of the decisions and practices researchers employ in the field do not reflect their training. Formal research training can be centered around traditional formal research methodologies while lacking exposure to actual community partnerships. As [46] argued, training provided to emerging HCI research scholars needs to expose them to other forms of thinking and doing. Providing experiential opportunities in the classroom for emerging researchers to directly engage with communities of different cultural values and global perspectives is important in training them to navigate value tensions such as the ones that are prevalent in LATAM.

4.2 Lessons Learned Working with CAE

We identified several strengths and challenges of employing CAE. We found that friendship and previous collaboration between the ethnographers played a key role in understanding and empathizing with each other's experiences in a CAE format. The auto-ethnographers also appreciated prompts for sharing advice, not just stories, as well as getting inspiration from LATAM proverbs. These proverbs acted as shortcuts to contextualize their experiences and advice in the broader cultural context of LATAM, helping to understand the implications of LATAM culture on conducting HCI research in the region. Beyond reflecting on CAE's fit with the goals of this research, the auto-ethnographers found that sharing background and values (being and/or working in LATAM) prevailed over differences in language and whether they studied HCI in LATAM or elsewhere. They saw themselves enacting the same kind of *camaraderie* as they observed in their participants while conducting this work, which contributed to experiencing this research as a way to strengthening their relationship with and sense of belonging to the LATAM community.

On the other hand, we also identified aspects of the CAE design to improve in future rounds of data collection. We believe that adding a final synchronous meeting with all auto-ethnographers, even if remote, could help further develop conclusions and takeaways from the reflections nurtured throughout the asynchronous stages. The asynchronous format conveniently accommodated the time constraints and geographical differences among the auto-ethnographers, and the prompts generated insights about a first set of values that characterize the particularities of conducting research with communities in LATAM. However, it also caused some uncertainty about the expected output from each Prompt and it limited the interaction between auto-ethnographers to a couple of instances. An extra synchronous stage could compensate for these shortcommings.

Lastly, authors who did not participate as auto-ethnographers contributed to the design of the CAE and the analysis of the data. This role could be better defined in the CAE while leveraging their perspectives as researchers with a common cultural background and common interests, learning about conducting HCI and CSCW

research with LATAM communities from the outside the fields implicit norms.

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