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The Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit: A Decision Aid for Ethical Practice

Scott W. H. Young

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CHAPTER TWO

The Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit:

A Decision Aid for Ethical Practice

Scott W. H. Young

Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit*. The toolkit is a decision aid that supports making values-based decisions in the practice of library assessment. The toolkit is the practical result of a research study into library assessment ethics. As a part of that research study, I surveyed and interviewed practitioners working in the field of library assessment. I asked questions about ethics and values applied in real-world scenarios of library assessment practice. I was motivated to conduct this research out of an interest in values and, especially, values in conflict. This project and the toolkit are based on an underlying question—what do we do when values conflict?

As a library assessment practitioner, I often encountered a range of competing values and priorities in my work. For any given situation, many possible paths forward were available to me, and I found myself asking the question: What is the right thing to do? This ethical consideration informed a research question that framed a larger research project: How can library assessment be practiced ethically? To help answer

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this question, I conducted a research study that examined values and ethics in library assessment (Young, 2023, 2024). This chapter provides a description of the major outcome from that research study: the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit*, a values-based decision aid for library assessment practitioners.

The toolkit supports a values-based practice by orienting the practitioner toward values, and by providing a direction for ethical reflection and action. As a flexible framework, the toolkit can be used by practitioners in two key ways: as a planning tool when designing a new assessment, and as an evaluation tool when in the middle of an assessment or when looking back on a completed assessment. The aim of the toolkit is to center values in library assessment, in support of an ethical practice. The toolkit takes the form of a participatory design card deck. The main feature of the card set is the enumeration of values, with the values each appearing on their own card. The card deck additionally includes three exercises to guide practitioners through a process of working with the value cards. When the exercises are completed in sequence, the final result of the toolkit is a ranked set of values relevant for a given assessment project.

This chapter is structured into two main sections. In the first section, I describe a set of values for library assessment and the research process that produced the values. In the second section, I focus on the toolkit, its development process, and its application for making values-based decisions about library assessment.

Values in Library Assessment

This project began with a question: How can library assessment be practiced ethically? This initial question arose from a conversation with a colleague at another institution. The topic of our discussion was assessment data and student privacy. On the one hand, institutions can better serve students with more data about students' activity on campus, and the library can show how it contributes to student success efforts by reporting student activity such as card swipes and research consultations to a central data warehouse. On the other hand, student privacy may be compromised in this situation, and thus the library might consider not reporting or even collecting student activity data. In reflecting on this common assessment situation, I prioritized the privacy value and expressed hesitation at library involvement in a central data warehouse. But my colleague prioritized the service value and had no reservations about contributing library data to a central warehouse. This tension and resolution between values fascinated me. Both my colleague and I were correct. We were both making the right decision for our specific contexts. Yet we both discerned that multiple values were operating at the same time in this single situation. We each chose to apply a different value, thereby producing different decisions and results. From this conversation, I wanted to know more about values-based decisions in library assessment. I wanted

to know more about how library assessment practitioners named and enacted values in practice. Which values are identified? How are they implemented?

The answer to these questions could help practitioners like me know what the right thing is to do for a given situation. To give shape and direction to this inquiry, I applied a values-based lens: the right thing can become apparent when we apply the right values at the right time. This approach is based on a framework of practical ethics. Practical ethics applies ethical theory to real-world scenarios, examining how one should behave in a particular situation (Singer, 1993). Practical ethics is a useful and apt approach for LIS (Budd, 2006, 2008). LIS practitioners can follow a practical ethics approach to conduct values-based reflections that clarify assumptions, alternatives, and actions (Smith, 1992). Values then become a critical component of an ethical practice: identifying and applying values helps improve a practitioner's ability to recognize ethically challenging situations and to make values-based decisions that balance competing pressures and priorities. (Rubin & Froehlich, 2018). Informed by practical ethics, my next step was to find out which values were relevant for library assessment.

Research Overview

To answer my main question—how can library assessment be practiced ethically?—I followed a three-step research process: 1) an analysis of the literature, 2) a survey of the library assessment practitioner community, and 3) in-depth interviews with a subset of library assessment practitioners. For the literature review, I read and analyzed all of the published resources I could find on the topic of ethics and values in library and information science. I charted the extent and frequency of values named in the literature, all the way from the most named value, *service*, to the more obscure, such as *beauty* and *survival*. This literature analysis brought into focus the broad universe of values in libraries, helping me to understand all of the possible values that could be relevant for library decision-making. My next step was to focus down on library assessment—which values were relevant for the specific practices and decisions of library assessment?

To answer this question of library assessment values and ethical decision-making, I sent out a survey across three relevant library email lists: ARL-Assess, DLF-Announce, and Code4Lib. The survey was designed to prompt ethical reflection. I asked library assessment practitioners about the values that are relevant to their ethical decision-making, and I asked practitioners to respond to scenarios that depicted ethical dilemmas. I analyzed the survey responses by following a grounded theory approach. As a research methodology, grounded theory aims to generate a theory for a process that is informed by participants engaged in that process (Creswell, 2009, p. 83). For this project, the process in question is library assessment, the participants included

library assessment practitioners in North America, and the theory related to the values that are relevant to library assessment.

I also wanted to recognize the highly subjective and contextual nature of values, and so I further applied a Constructivist Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). This approach acknowledges the role of interpretation and context, striving not to present an objective or fixed view of the data but rather a subjective construction of the data. In this sense, I am constructing a theory of library assessment values from my own unique perspective. The theory that I develop is grounded in the research data, while at the same time my viewpoint and values as the researcher will necessarily be reflected in the theory that I produce. Constructivist Grounded Theory recognizes that the data does not speak for itself, but is given voice through the researcher.

To produce the theory of library assessment values, I coded survey responses as outlined by Charmaz (2006, p. 43): "coding means categorizing segments of data with a short name that simultaneously summarizes and accounts for each piece of data." The process of categorization involved analyzing pieces of data in relation to each other and to the themes that emerged through the process, with an overall view to a cohesive whole. From the data that I collected via the survey, I distilled the practitioner responses into 10 representative values that are relevant for the practice of library assessment. These values form the basis of an ethical assessment practice, helping to inform values-based decisions. I discuss these values in the next section.

A complete discussion of my research study is out of scope for this chapter, but I've made a detailed description of my research methods and full presentation of the research data available in *Qualitative Data Repository* with the following title and URL: "Practitioner Perspectives on the Values and Ethics of Library Assessment." https://doi.org/10.5064/F6ORSLQF.

Assessment Values

In this section, I provide an overview of the values that are relevant for library assessment. These values were developed from the research data—following a constructivist grounded theory, I generated coded themes for the values as described by the survey respondents. From that coding process, I constructed a theory of library assessment values. Through this analysis, 10 values emerged, along with reflective prompts for enacting the values. These values give shape to what an ethical library assessment practice can look like. The 10 values for library assessment are: Alignment, Care, Collaboration, Communication, Imagining Otherwise, Justice, Positionality, Stewardship, Transparency, and Validity. In the subsections below, I present the description of each value along with reflective prompts for thinking through the meaning and application of the value in practice.

Alignment

Description: Connecting assessment work to existing plans or statements, including organizational mission statements, strategic priorities, or professional values.
Reflective Prompts: How can shared values help bring together collaborators and stakeholders? How can an assessment project advance strategic priorities of the library, or how does the project enact relevant values?

Care

Description: Maximizing well-being, while minimizing harm.
Reflective Prompts: How would you describe your responsibility to the different stakeholders of the assessment, especially the participants? How will you know that you've fulfilled your responsibility? How does the assessment account for the well-being of participants and collaborators? What kinds of harms could result from this work? How could those harms be mitigated?

Collaboration

Description: Building and sustaining mutually beneficial relationships.
Reflective Prompts: How does the project involve collaborators and partnerships? How does your approach to collaboration and relationship-building support mutual benefit and trust among stakeholders? Stakeholders can include students, campus collaborators, community members, or other assessment participants.

Communication

Description: "Closing the loop" of assessment by communicating an assessment and its results to relevant audiences.
Reflective Prompts: How will project results be shared out to others, such as administrators, collaborators, and the wider professional community? Are you communicating the assessment in a way that your different audiences can each understand? What story are you telling with the data? What is the most readily available reading of the assessment, or the most dominant narrative driving interpretation? What other readings are available? Would the project report benefit from including a fuller landscape of measures, activities, and impacts, including a risk/benefit analysis, social impacts, or any other contextual factor that helps explain or situate the assessment?

Imagining Otherwise

Description: Imagining and embracing different approaches to assessment, and ensuring that results support change.

Reflective Prompts: How will the assessment project generate improvement or change? Who is responsible for leading that change, and who benefits from that change? Can the assessment project be made stronger by introducing alternative or complementary methods? If a third-party vendor is involved, can you work with the vendor for terms more reflective of library values, or can you change vendors?

Justice

Description: Diversity, inclusion, equity, and allyship.
Reflective Prompts: Do stakeholders and participants have a voice in determining research questions, methods, interpretation of data, and the application of results? Does the project result in social or material benefits for participants and collaborators? How does the project engage with structural social inequalities? Does the project support social justice outcomes?

Positionality

Description: Acknowledging perspectives, positions, and power.
Reflective Prompts: Is the project guided or supported by explicit values? Does the project assess the achievement of those values? In the context of this assessment, over whom do you have power? Who has power over you? How do those power dynamics affect your ability to articulate and enact values? Based on your relative positions, what assumptions are you and others bringing to the project? Does the assessment project include dedicated time for self-reflection?

Stewardship

Description: Ensuring that an assessment reflects organizational capacities—including staffing models, budgetary considerations, and data management and retention.
Reflective Prompts: Does the project account for longer-term impacts in budget, staffing needs, and community relationship-building? If there are resource constraints, how can the project be scoped so that the assessment is completable? What policies or practices govern the collection, retention, usage, and sharing of assessment-related data?

Transparency

Description: Clear communication to participants about how data is collected, analyzed, and applied, with choices for participation.
Reflective Prompts: Does your assessment practice include documentation, including process, result, application, and decision-making? How will project documentation

and results be shared back with participants? Are participants able to opt in or out, and are they able to provide informed consent?

Validity

Description: Ensuring that an assessment is valid, especially focusing on a right fit between research question and research method.
Reflective Prompts: Is there a strong match among the research question, assessment method, the assessment population or service, and the intended result? Can the research question be answered by the method(s) that you are applying? Could a different method answer the question in a better way?

This set of values represents one possible model for value in assessment. Knowing our values is fundamental for ethical practice, as described by Rubin (2016): "the professional foundation of LIS is not its knowledge or techniques, but its fundamental values. The significance of LIS lies not in mastery of sources, organizational skills, or technological competence, but in why LIS professionals perform the functions they do" (pp. 283–284). In articulating a value model for library assessment, these values and their corresponding reflective prompts establish a piece of a foundation for an ethical practice of library assessment.

The Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit

The first part of this project was to develop a set of values that are relevant for library assessment. With a set of values in place, I wanted to bring those values into the day-to-day operations of library assessment and to make the values useful in actual practice. With this in mind, I developed a toolkit to aid library assessment practitioners in naming and implementing the values that are relevant in their contexts. The toolkit is named the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit*. The toolkit takes the shape of a card deck, with values enumerated and described on individual cards, along with a set of exercises for working with the values. In the subsections below, I describe the concept and structure of the toolkit, along with its use cases and limitations.

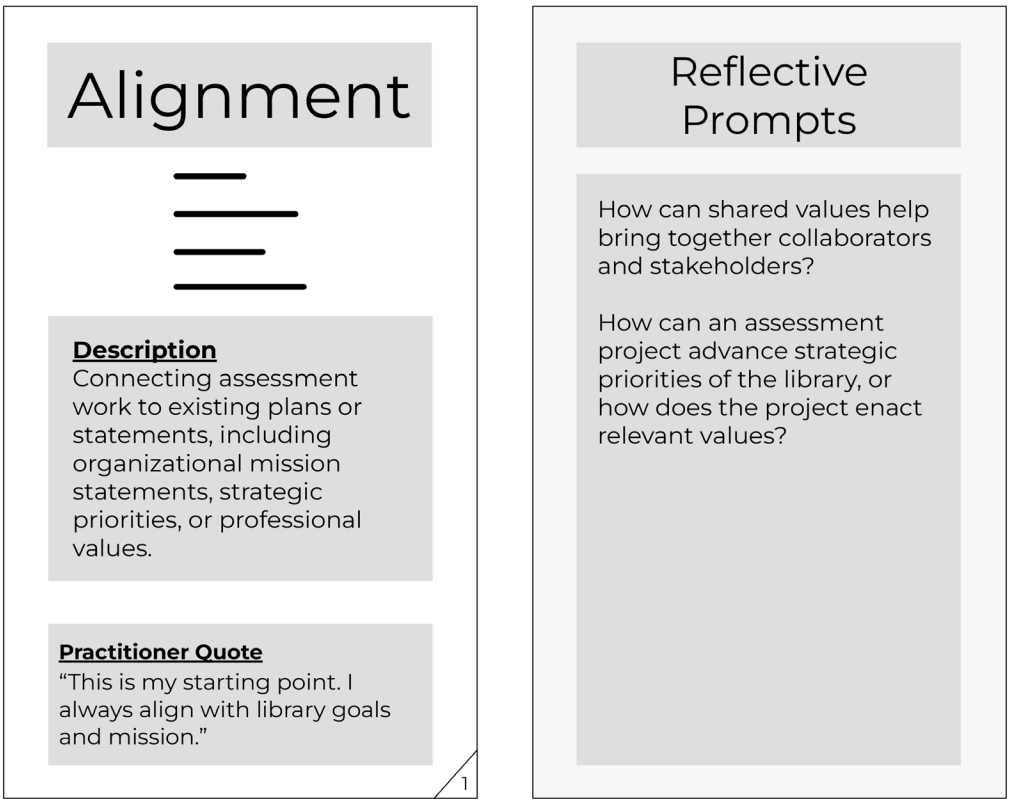
Toolkit Concept and Structure

The survey data and analysis revealed that for assessment practitioners, many different values could be in play at different times, and that not every available value will be relevant in every situation. For most practitioners, a known set of values was available from which to choose, such as values drawn from a local values statement or a professional ethics code. In this way, values can be characterized as containing a balance

of stability and flexibility. Stability may be found in a pre-defined set of values. This pre-defined set can form a reliable ethical foundation of values. From there, flexibility is achieved in that the practitioner can choose which values to apply for a given situation.

In developing an ethical toolkit, I have attempted to apply this key characteristic—a mix of stability and flexibility. To achieve this, the toolkit takes the shape of a card set. The card set contains 15 cards. There are 11 "value cards" and three "exercise cards," in addition to an instruction card. The value cards each describe the 10 different assessment values produced through the research process described in the section above. The eleventh value card is blank, intended as an expansion to accommodate unique local factors. The three exercise cards each describe a different activity meant to help a practitioner articulate, prioritize, and apply relevant assessment values. Figure 2.1 shows the value card for the value of alignment, with the layout on the left representing the front of the card and the layout on the right representing the back of the card.

FIGURE 2.1
The value card for alignment



Each value card in the deck presents a different value. The deck as a whole is a controlled set of values, and thereby establishes a sense of stability. At the same time, the cards may be shuffled and selected in different ways. A certain value can be selected from the deck as relevant for a certain assessment project, affording a degree of flexibility. A card deck offers affordances that suit both stability and flexibility. And a card deck can be "played" individually or in small groups or teams. This also reflects the real-world decision-making, as practitioners may work alone to identify personal values, or collaborate with others to identify and implement shared values.

Design Background

To develop the toolkit, I drew inspiration from participatory design, with its rich disciplinary tradition of applying creative tools and techniques to facilitate collaboration and to generate new ideas (Kensing & Greenbaum, 2013; Robertson & Simonsen, 2013). Importantly, participatory design explicitly seeks to name and enact values in its practice. Through the participatory design process, practitioners are prompted to attune themselves to values, and then to consider which values are applied in different situations to produce mutually beneficial outcomes for professionals and participants (Robertson & Wagner, 2013; Raman et al., 2017). The tradition of participatory design offers a compelling foundation upon which to build a tool for ethical library assessment practice. The *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit* aims to activate assessment values in actual practice, in support of an ethical practice that produces mutually beneficial outcomes for practitioners, library users, and institutions.

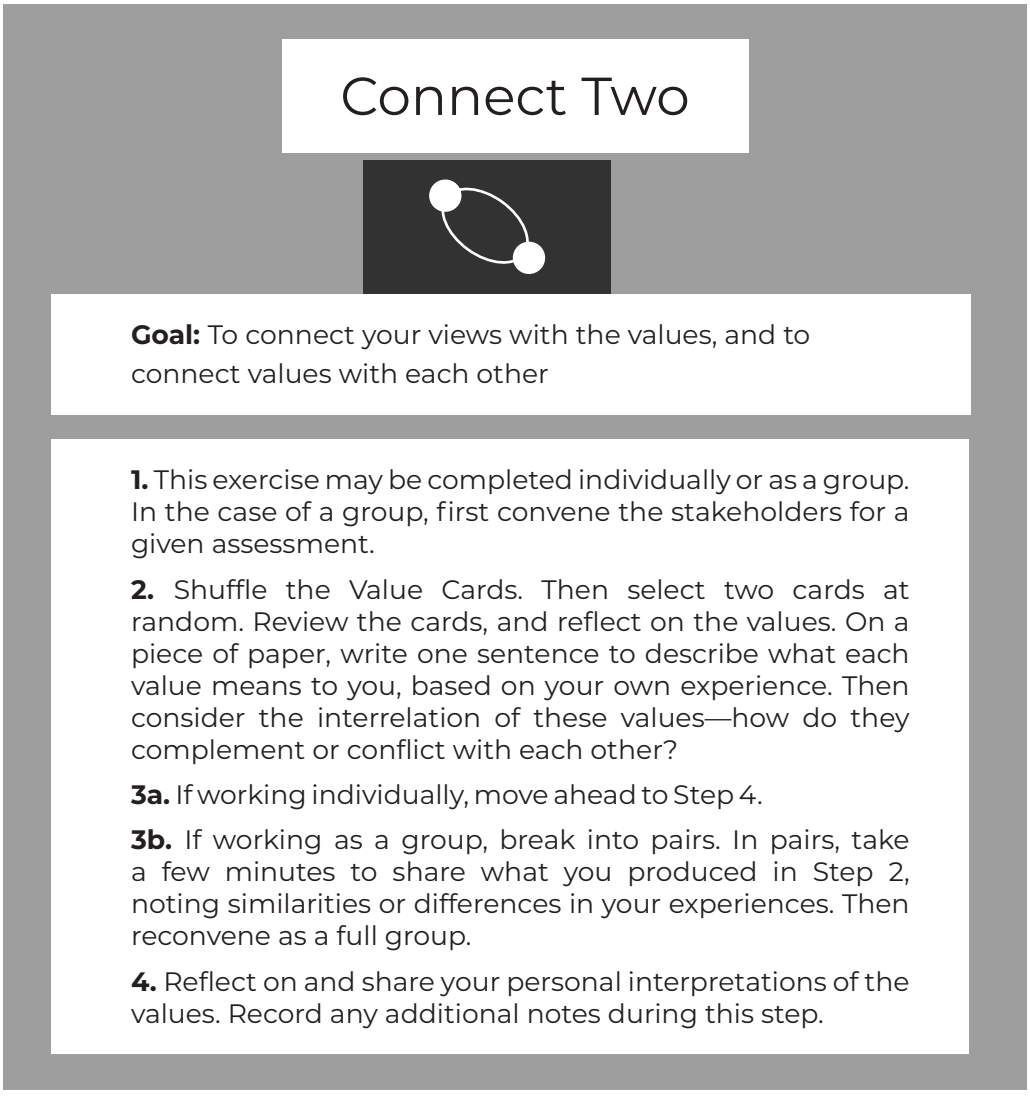
The toolkit also applies a "research-through-design" approach (Gaver, 2012; Godin & Zahedi, 2014; Isley & Rider, 2018). In the context of libraries, Clarke (2017, 2018) advances a research-through-design approach as a way of understanding and practicing library and information science. Clark (2018) describes how a design artifact can be applied to solve a problem in a specific library context. From this perspective, the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit* is a design artifact that is being applied to solve the problem of professional values and ethical decision-making in the context of academic library assessment. Clarke (2019) encourages librarians to embrace design in our practice, allowing us to "harness the creative power inherent in design" (p. 29). The toolkit serves as a creative instrument, prompting practitioners to research their own values and determine the meaning of ethics as suitable for their local contexts. The research-through-design paradigm finds expression through the toolkit: by "playing cards," the practitioner researches their own ethical context and determines their own set of relevant values. In the next section, I share more details about how this process works in practice.

Toolkit Exercises

The toolkit includes three exercises for working with the values. The three exercises can be completed individually, and they also work in a sequence. When completed in a sequence, the exercises represent a cycle of values-sensitive library assessment. The first exercise focuses on *naming values*, the second exercise is all about *ranking values*, and the third exercise highlights ways of *implementing values*.

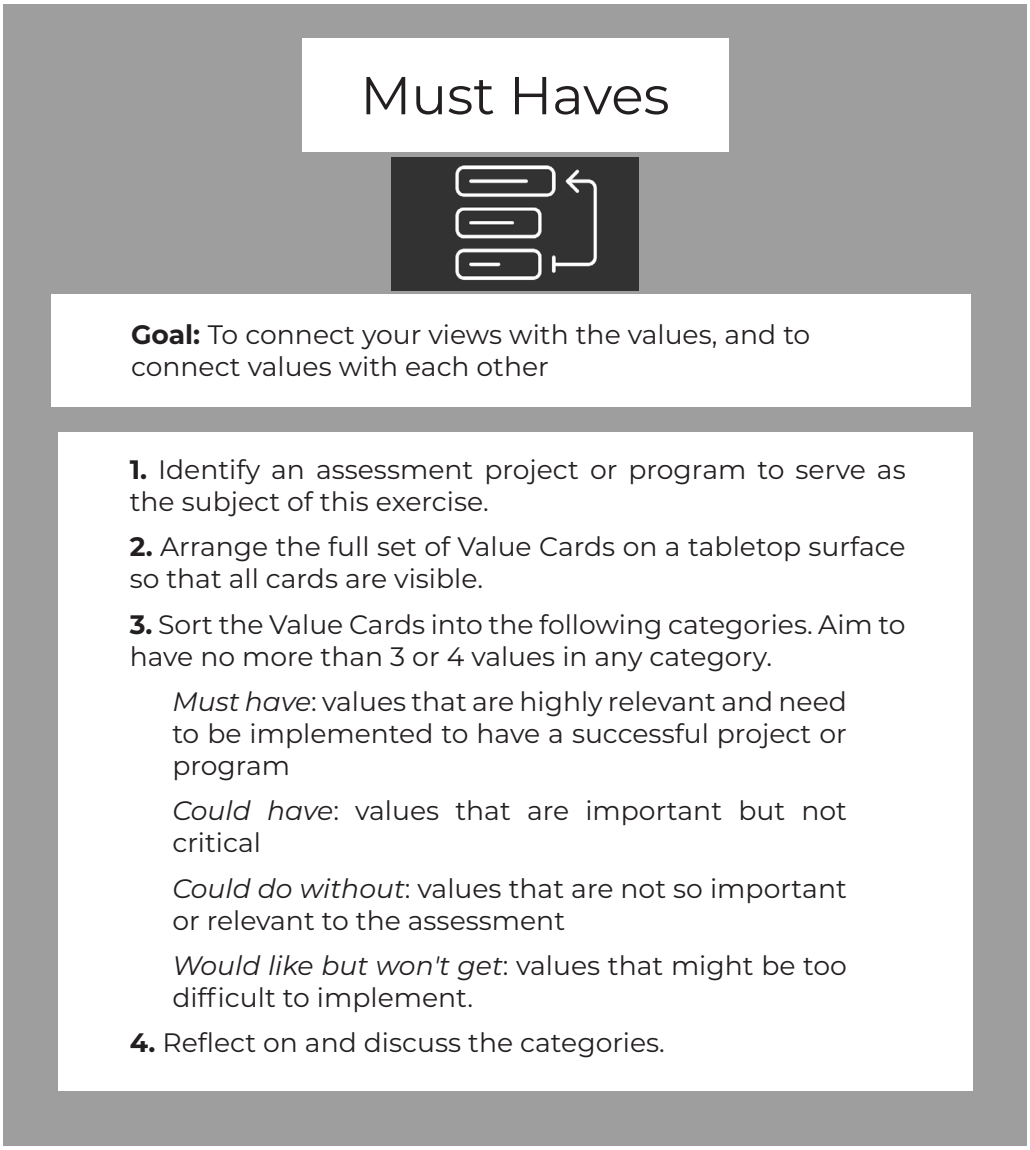
First, *Connect Two* defines the values. In this exercise, the practitioner becomes familiar with the values and is asked to apply their own perspective to the value descriptions and reflective prompts. Figure 2.2 shows the card for *Connect Two*.

FIGURE 2.2
Toolkit card for the exercise Connect Two



This initial exercise allows the practitioner to develop a sense for the values and create connections among the values that suit their local setting. *Must-Haves* operates then as a sorting exercise. Figure 2.3 shows the card for *Must-Haves*.

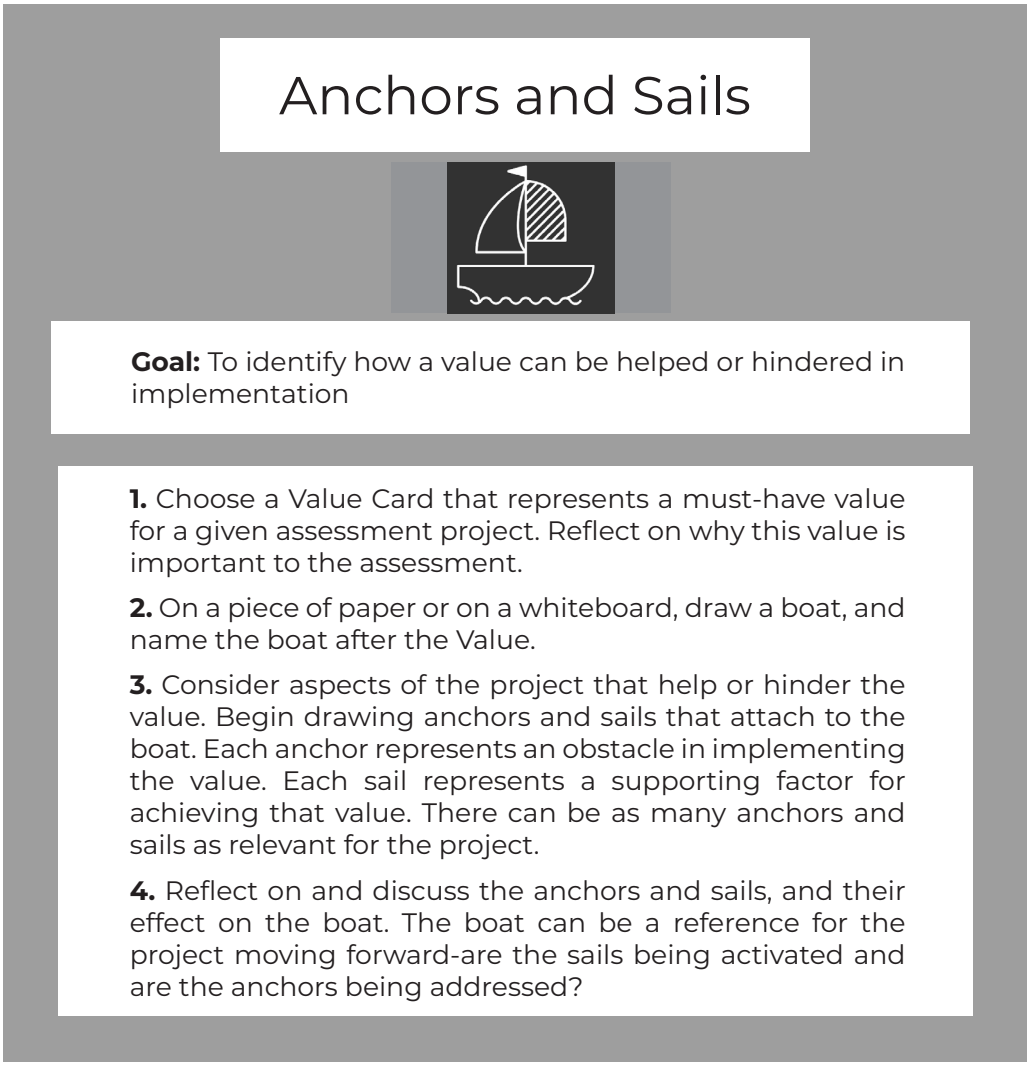
FIGURE 2.3
Toolkit card for the exercise Must-Haves



This activity asks the practitioner to consider a specific assessment project and to prioritize all of the values within the context of that assessment. This exercise provides a ranking view that can help the practitioner understand which values are most relevant for a given project. Finally, *Anchors and Sails* prompts consideration of

the constraints and opportunities related to values implementation. Figure 2.4 shows the card for *Anchors and Sails*.

FIGURE 2.4
Toolkit card for the exercise Anchors and Sails



By applying the metaphor of a boat, practitioners are asked to create "sails" that represent opportunities and "anchors" that represent constraints. This exercise reveals practical insights for putting values into action (in the next section, I show a sample result from the *Anchors and Sails* exercise). The exercises are adapted from related sources: *Connect Two* is based on *Show Me Your Values* (Gray et al., 2010); *Must-Haves* is based on *MoSCoW* [Must have, Should have, Could have, Would like but won't get]

(Digital Society School, Amsterdam University, 2020); and *Anchors and Sails* is based on *Speedboat* (Hohmann, 2006).

These three exercises represent a three-step process for practicing values-based assessment. First, through the *Connect Two* activity, practitioners identify the values that matter to their overall practice or to a particular assessment project. Then, through *Must-Haves*, the values are sorted and prioritized so that the most relevant values can be identified. Finally, through *Anchors and Sails*, practitioners develop approaches for implementing those values within the context of their particular situation.

Use Cases for the Toolkit

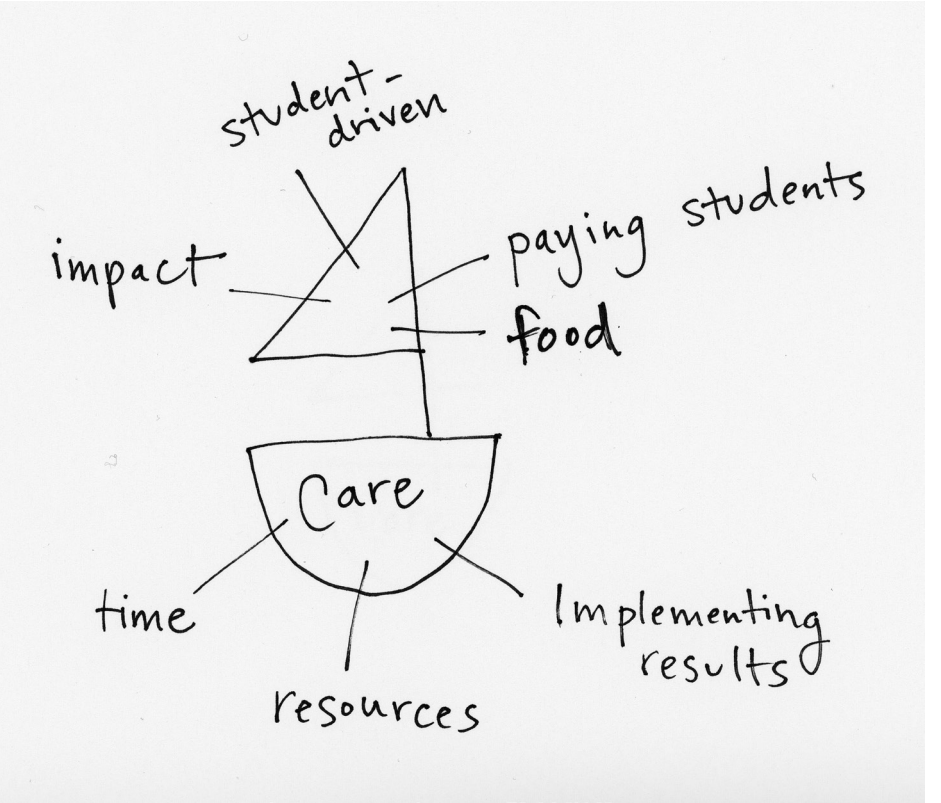
As a part of my larger research project, I conducted a series of interviews with library assessment practitioners about the toolkit. Through these interviews, I checked in with members of our practitioner community to make sure that the toolkit worked as intended. This validation step ensured that the toolkit could be useful in real-world settings where library professionals are making values-based decisions about their work. In the paragraphs below, I discuss interview excerpts where practitioners shared use cases for the toolkit. In instances where I cite directly from the research data, I include an alphanumeric code that corresponds to the Interview Participant (IP) code in the interview data.

One practitioner described the core purpose of the toolkit: "Being able to clarify and classify the values of a particular project is something I'd be able to do" (IP8). With the toolkit as an ethical decision-making aid, this practitioner will be able to articulate and apply the values that are relevant for different assessment projects. Likewise, another practitioner commented on the usefulness of the toolkit: "I will be able to use this toolkit to identify guiding relevant values in an assessment project" (IP5). Those values can be co-determined with collaborators, as pointed out by another practitioner: "There's enough information contained within the toolkit to… actually facilitate group discussions" (IP12). Along these lines, another practitioner remarked that with the toolkit, "I will be able to have more productive conversations with an assessment team about how to do this [stuff] that we want to do" (IP10). As a team-building or organizational development tool, the toolkit can help provide a creative launching pad for discussions and decisions related to ethics and values.

The toolkit can provide a common language, a useful point of reference, and an intention about values-based practice. This intention can be introduced early in an assessment project, as expressed by another practitioner, who noted that with the toolkit they will be "able to be intentional about having values-driven assessment, and having the values straight out there at the beginning, and not as an afterthought" (IP6). Another practitioner commented how the toolkit can support self-reflection and critical inquiry, "challenging biases of how I think a project or an assessment project should go" (IP4).

Looking closer at the *Anchors and Sails* activity, practitioners are asked to apply the metaphor of a boat to discuss constraints and opportunities in implementing values that were identified through the prior two activities. Figure 2.5 shows one example of a design artifact that can be produced through this exercise.

FIGURE 2.5
Anchors and Sails exercise for the care value



In this example, a practitioner from my research interviews has chosen the care value as the focus on this activity, naming their boat, "Care." The anchors on the boat represent the constraints in implementing the value. The anchors identified by the practitioner include time, resources, and implementing results. The sails represent the supporting factors for the value. The sails identified by the practitioner include impact, student-driven culture, and funds available to pay and to provide food for student participants. The drawing aspect of *Anchors and Sails* may be an initial impediment to producing insight, but as this practitioner commented regarding this exercise: "I see a lot of value in [this activity]. To be honest, when I first read it, my first gut reaction is—oh, I'm going to have to draw a boat?! That's just not in my skill set. But I got over that pretty quick. And just dove in" (IP9). Another practitioner in the interviews

remarked, "[This activity] did do the piece of identifying ways that the project does and does not support the value, or things to be aware of, that—if we're saying this is really important—things to be aware of that we need to actually make sure that we're addressing, or this is not going to be achieved" (IP11).

In sum, the toolkit can be practically applied in two primary settings: as a planning tool when designing a new assessment and as an evaluation tool when in the middle of an assessment or when looking back on a completed assessment. Across these two settings, the toolkit is designed to encourage ethical reflection by prompting practitioners to articulate the values that matter for their practice. When values are explicitly named, then they can be intentionally applied. With its sequence of exercises, the toolkit functions as a tool for articulating and applying values. The use cases offered by interview participants demonstrate the potential applications of the toolkit, and indicate that the toolkit is capable of achieving its goal of aiding an ethical assessment practice.

Limitations of the Toolkit

The practice of naming and applying values requires sensitivity and thoughtfulness. The toolkit presented in this chapter helps support that practice. I also want to apply a degree of sensitivity and thoughtfulness to the toolkit itself by acknowledging its limitations and constraints: communication and collaboration, practitioner empowerment, ethical resolution, and values-in-conflict.

Communication and Collaboration

Library assessment is collaborative. Assessment practitioners work alongside others in their organizations to set goals, measure progress, apply methods, interpret data, and communicate results. The toolkit can be accommodated at any place within this cycle of activity. Reflecting the collaborative nature of assessment, the reach and impact of the toolkit will be enhanced when multiple practitioners or stakeholders are involved in the work of articulating and applying values, but collaboration isn't always a given. In the research interviews that I conducted, assessment practitioners emphasized how many different and potentially competing stakeholder interests come together around assessment. As one practitioner commented, "Feedback can be hard to share" (IP4). When discussing the core values that drive our work, open and honest communication and collaboration become even more important and yet even more potentially vulnerable. On this point, another practitioner expressed: "This may be just a professional hazard, getting into definitions and arguing about definitions" (IP8). And yet shared definitions of values are an important step for building a practice of organizational values-based decision-making.

The toolkit can help bridge across different stakeholder viewpoints. For the toolkit to fully function for this purpose, an organizational culture of trust and communication may be a necessary precondition. As practitioners in the interviews recognized the potential for the toolkit to bring stakeholders together around shared values, there was an equal recognition that barriers can stand in the way, in terms of interpersonal dynamics or organizational culture that prevent those stakeholders from communicating and collaborating.

The toolkit may not operate well in an environment that is not supportive of discussion, reflection, and team building. The toolkit assumes that the practitioner and their organization have a built-in motivation to investigate values and implement values. As one participant said of using the toolkit: "A lot of these prompts [in the toolkit] are going to be things that you need to discuss with stakeholders…The development of those conversations is another kind of skill set that needs to be acknowledged…Conversations can be tough, especially if you're telling someone, 'Hey, I need you to challenge your beliefs or potential biases you might have.' They might not be as open to doing that. The art of giving and receiving feedback can be difficult…this is something the toolkit doesn't necessarily address" (IP4). This comment is crucial in understanding the functions and the constraints of the toolkit. The toolkit is designed to elicit dialogue about values. And the toolkit, via the exercises, provides a structure for facilitating that dialogue. But the toolkit assumes that dialogue is possible in the first place. The toolkit is not equipped to solve culture issues or interpersonal tensions within the workplace. Some practitioners may find themselves in a library setting where there is resistance to ethical reflection and ethical action. Such a setting will limit the applicability of the toolkit. Despite this potential limitation, any individual practitioner can use the toolkit to build and attune their own values-based practice.

Empowerment

This leads to a related limitation that was revealed in conversation with interview participants. The toolkit assumes that a practitioner has power within their organization to enact values, but practitioners pointed out that this is not a given. There may be circumstances where values are imposed upon a project or a practitioner, or where a practitioner is not able to introduce values into an assessment environment. Observed one participant: "We have more or less power, depending on who is in relationship to whom. Librarians aren't the most powerful individuals. We have a lot of power over our users bureaucratically, but we're not able to just do whatever we want" (IP3). This factor of empowerment warrants special attention, as it directly affects the practitioner and their ability to practice values-based assessment. One participant captured this with the following: "A lot of assessment librarians…don't feel empowered to say, 'This isn't going to work…this isn't going to meet the values that we want to get to'" (IP5). The concept of power and empowerment is inherent to

the functionality of the toolkit, in that the assessment practitioner needs to be able to actually activate a value in practice.

Furthermore, the question of when to introduce values is important to consider, as one practitioner observed: "At what point do you bring that in as a value conversation? And that may very much depend on your specific institution" (IP5). Even more fundamentally, the toolkit assumes that values can be introduced, discussed, and applied within an institutional setting. The toolkit assumes that it is possible to cultivate a values-based practice within a workplace. A workplace that values neutrality may present barriers to the toolkit. As one participant asserted: "[The toolkit] itself can't be a neutral tool" (IP7). This participant spoke to the neutralizing effect of neutrality as value: that the toolkit would be rendered ineffective if collaborators—especially those with greater power or authority—were to assert neutrality over any or all of the other values.

Indeed, the toolkit is designed to counteract neutrality. The values-based exercises in the toolkit activate a process of naming and enacting values. When we invoke our values and intentionally apply them in our practice, we are acting from a place of values sensitivity. We are making decisions based on values. We are operating with a values-driven viewpoint. This can be seen most clearly through the positionality value. This value is foundational to the toolkit, and it can be considered as a counterbalance to neutrality. Positionality recognizes that we each have our own unique perspectives and priorities that inform our decision-making. If we name and enact positionality as a value in our professional practice, then we acknowledge the subjectivities that shape our practice. Contrast positionality with neutrality. Where positionality sees subjectivity, neutrality sees objectivity. From a place of neutrality, we would be asked to suppress our unique values and viewpoints from our practice, making decisions that are unbiased and impartial. The aims of neutrality are based on good intent—to provide consistent and reliable service to our library users. In the pursuit of this professional consistency, however, neutrality also asks for something impossible—to erase the values and viewpoints that each individual professional brings to their practice. But neutrality can't erase values, it can only make them implicit. Our values are present with us wherever we go, whether we name them or not. As the counterbalance, positionality seeks to make explicit the values that we each apply in our practice. The toolkit as a whole seeks to develop a practice of identifying and implementing values with intention. In this way, the toolkit can be an aid for values-based decision-making in library assessment.

Values-in-Conflict

The 10 values produced through this research project are just one possible universe of values. One of the main findings from the research showed that values are complex and multifaceted, with practitioners choosing from a multitude of available values and

value sets. While there are many values and value sets from which to choose, absent from those choices is a profession-wide statement of values tuned specifically to the practice of library assessment. Such a statement could unify the values perspective of assessment practitioners. But in our current decentralized professional situation where values can be drawn from any number of sources, the toolkit adds even more values to an already competitive and complex landscape of values, resulting in even greater potential for values to be in conflict. While it is possible that the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit* could grow to become a useful and desirable point of reference for values in assessment, this new model of values could contribute to the already noisy and complex landscape of values and assessment, and not receive attention or implementation by the wider practitioner community. Still, while the toolkit offers additional values for our practitioner community to consider, it also offers exercises aimed at resolving ethical tensions related to values-in-conflict.

Ethical Resolutions

The final limitation surfaced in the interviews involves the toolkit's ability to resolve ethical dilemmas. As designed, the cards don't seek to provide answers on their own. The values in the toolkit are not positioned as the authoritative set of values for library assessment, nor do the descriptions of those values seek to be comprehensive or definitive. Rather, the toolkit serves to orient practitioners toward values, and to model for practitioners one possible universe of values that can be relevant for their work. The toolkit then prompts the participants to find the definitions and resolutions that are suitable for their own local context. One participant discerned this aspect of the toolkit, saying, "The discussion and the reflection is part of the point. You may understand some of these values differently, but part of that discussion is what we're trying to do with this toolkit" (IP8). The toolkit doesn't contain resolutions to ethical dilemmas, but the toolkit will help enhance a practitioner's sensitivity to dilemmas, which the practitioner then resolves based on the values that are relevant in that particular situation, as identified by working with the toolkit.

The toolkit's best purpose is in providing a structure to ask the questions about values and ethics. When stakeholder conflicts or values-in-tension arise, the real-life resolutions are far from clear or straight-forward. One participant described this challenge when discussing the care value: "These are really big, complicated, thorny issues around this value…It's one thing to identify these issues, and a whole other thing to actually solve them" (IP11). Values-in-conflict are difficult to resolve, but discerning those values and those conflicts is an essential first condition toward resolution. The toolkit can be useful by prompting practitioners to consider values in their practice and to confront the thorny issues related to implementing those values. As an ethical decision-aid, the toolkit helps practitioners ask the question, "What is the right thing to do?" Each practitioner will answer that question in their own way.

Toolkit Access

The toolkit can be accessed both physically and digitally. The toolkit is designed first to function in the physical environment. As a card deck, the toolkit can be played on a table-top surface. The toolkit also works as a digital object, with interaction occurring through a screen. The toolkit is available to print and is also available as a digital download through the Open Science Framework (OSF): http://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/ZS5C8.

Conclusion

This chapter describes a set of values and a new tool for practicing values-based library assessment. The chapter was presented in two main parts: a set of research-derived values that are relevant for library assessment, and an accompanying *Values-Sensitive Toolkit for Library Assessment*. The values set is rooted in the grounded theory approach of coding and model-making. The values represent one possible universe of values relevant to library assessment, along with reflective prompts for enacting the values. The toolkit then serves as an operational aid to support a practice of values-based assessment. The toolkit serves as an example for what a values-based library assessment practice could look like. Through the naming of values, the toolkit first orients the practitioner toward values. From that values-based perspective, the toolkit then provides a direction for ethical inquiry through a sequence of 3 activities. The activity sequence is designed to guide the practitioner through a three-part cycle of values-sensitivity: 1) naming the values that are relevant to their practice, 2) prioritizing the values, and 3) putting the values into practice. This three-part sequence presented in the toolkit helps answer three important questions for an ethical practice:

1. Which values are relevant for a given assessment project?
2. Once those relevant values have been identified, how are they prioritized?
3. Once the values have been prioritized, how can they be implemented?

More broadly for assessment, the toolkit can be considered as a decision-making guide when planning, conducting, or evaluating an assessment program or project. The toolkit is flexible and extensible according to contextual factors and local conditions. Together, the values and the toolkit represent an answer to the research question that frames this project: "How can library assessment be practiced ethically?" The toolkit represents a practical answer to this research question: an ethical practice can be achieved by naming and enacting relevant values.

Related Resources

Book Project

This chapter is adapted from a larger work on this topic:

> Young, S. W. H. (2024). *Knowing our value and our values: Toward an ethical practice of library assessment*. Library Juice Press.

The book offers an in-depth discussion of the literature on ethics and values in libraries, as well as a deeper dive into the research process and results that produced the assessment values and the toolkit discussed in this chapter.

Research Dataset

Research data and analysis are available through the Qualitative Data Repository:

> Young, S. W. H. (2023). *Practitioner perspectives on the values and ethics of library assessmen*t [data set]. QDR Main Collection. https://doi.org/10.5064/F6ORSLQF

Accessing the Toolkit

To access the *Values-Sensitive Library Assessment Toolkit*, please visit the project page on the Open Science Framework (OSF): http://doi.org/10.17605/osf.io/ZS5C8.

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