Content Analysis of Values-Affirmation Essays

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The Questions

›Values affirmation interventions have been shown to be effective at improving outcomes in a number of domains.
›Less is known about the content of the writing produced as part of the affirmation.
›Integrating tools from computer science & psychology, we answer the questions:
›**Q1:** *What do people write about in values affirmation essays?*
›**Q2:** *What linguistic features distinguish younger and older writers?*

The Data

›Affirmation essays from 9 studies (published and unpublished) over the last decade.
›Classifier features:
  ›Unigram language model
  ›TF-IDF language model
  ›Within-essay topic distribution from topic model
›Classifier labels:
  ›Essay written by an adult vs by a child
›8,554 essays
›Inclusion criteria:
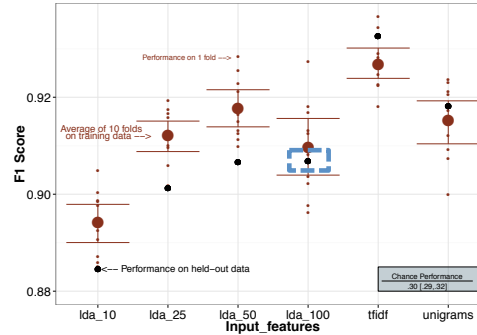 ›Prompts did not dramatically depart from standard affirmation prompt
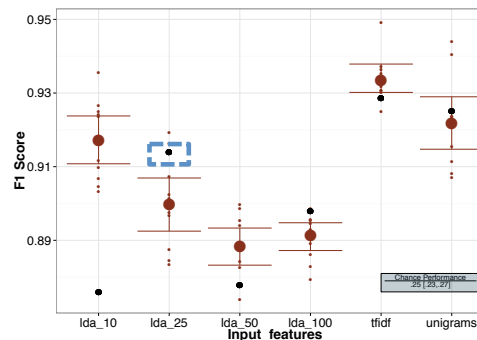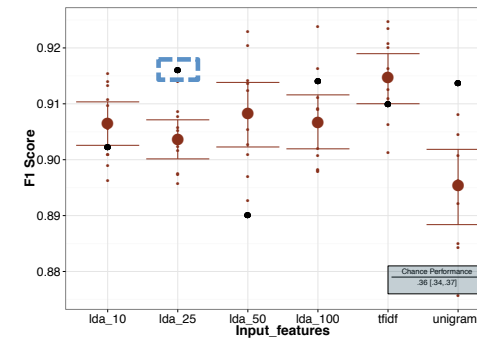
The Tools

Machine Learning Classifier

Figure from [3]

Topic Modeling

TOPIC PROPORTIONS IN AN ESSAY
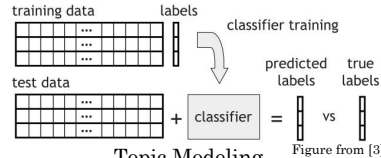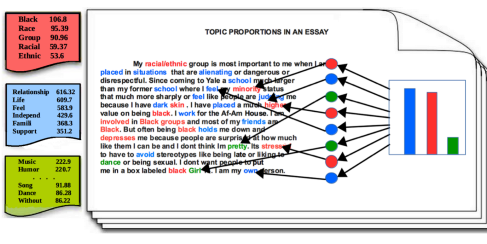
All Essays

Control Essays

Treatment Essays

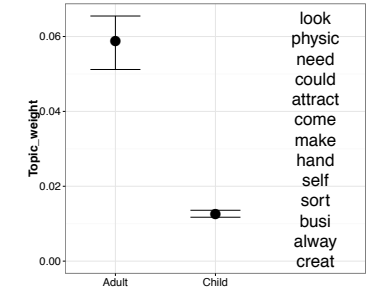## Top 2 most discriminative features from best-performing classifier
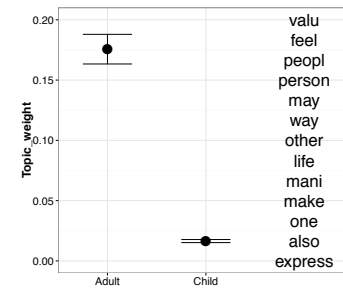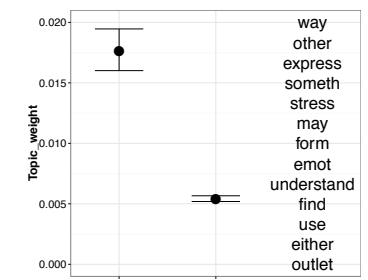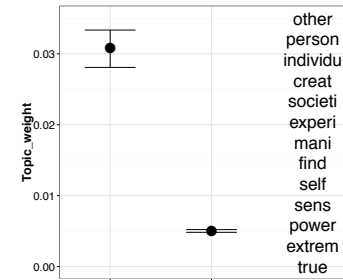

Conclusions

›Adults and children have very different approaches when writing values-affirmation essays

›Children spend more language writing about the value itself (not shown)
›Adults spend more language connecting the value to reasons for its importance

Digital version: