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›Affirmation essays from 9 studies (published and unpublished) over the last decade.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

›8,554 essays

›Inclusion criteria:
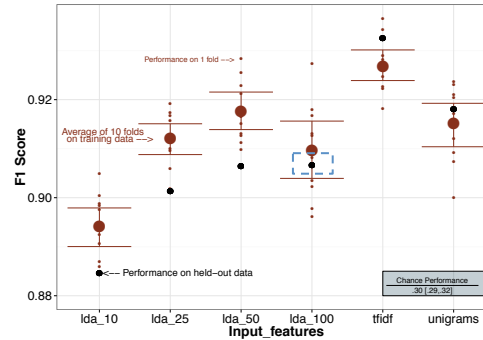> ›Essay was a typical affirmation essay
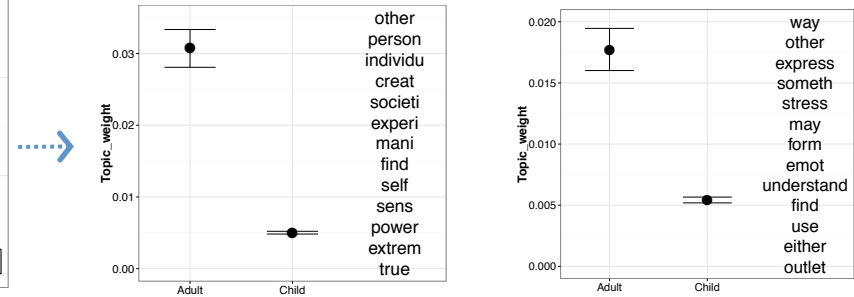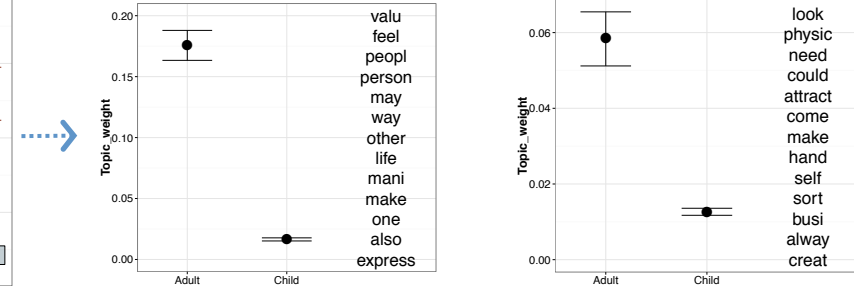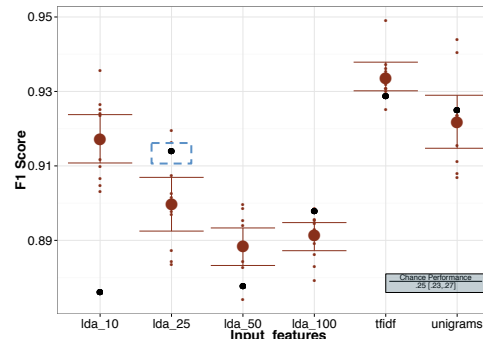
The Tools

Machine Learning Classifier

Figure from [3]
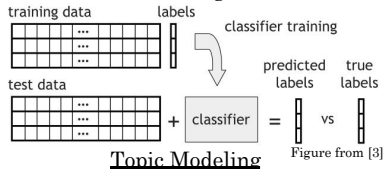
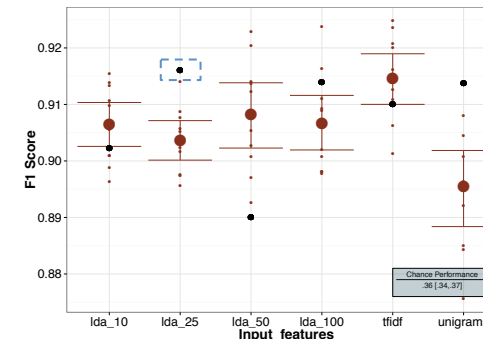### Topic Modeling

All Essays

Control Essays
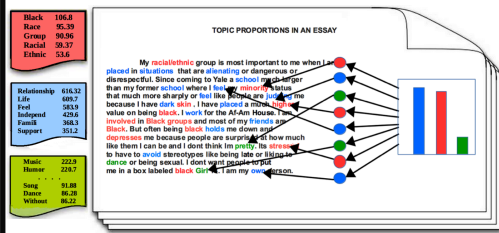
Treatment Essays

Most Discriminative Features

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: