An Empirical Investigation into the Psychology of Ideal and Actual Values.

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Declaration

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Craig Macdonald
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Contents

DECLARATION .................................................................................................................................................1
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................................................. II
CONTENTS ...................................................................................................................................................... III
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES .................................................................................................................... V
ABSTRACT ...................................................................................................................................................... VII

CHAPTER 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN AIMS OF THE
THESIS .......................................................................................................................................................... 1

SECTION 1: GENERAL INTRODUCTION .................................................................................................. 1

SECTION 2: DEFINITIONS, MEASURES AND STRUCTURAL THEORIES OF VALUES ............................................... 4
Definitions, Categorisations and Measures of Values by Milton Rokeach (1973) and Shalom Schwartz’ s
(1992) .......................................................................................................................................................... 5
Predictive validity of Schwartz’ s (1992) Measure and Theories ........................................................................... 11
The Universality of Value Hierarchies ........................................................................................................ 15
Questions Concerning the Structure of Schwartz’ s (1992) Value Types .................................................. 21

SECTION 3: THE INFLUENCE OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS ON THE FORMATION AND EXPRESSION OF
VALUES ......................................................................................................................................................... 26
Distinguishing Values from Similar Constructs ............................................................................................ 27
Differences between Actual and Ideal Values as Reflected in the Work of Other Theorists ......................... 28
Specific Factors that might Contribute to Differences between Actual and Ideal Values .......................... 32
The Influence of the Big 5 on the Expression of Values ........................................................................... 36

SECTION 4: MODEL OF ACTUAL AND IDEAL VALUES ............................................................................... 45

SECTION 5: THE EMPIRICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE THESIS .................................................................. 48
Conclusion ...................................................................................................................................................... 50

VALUES SURVEY ....................................................................................................................................... 51

METHODS ....................................................................................................................................................... 52
Participants ....................................................................................................................................................... 52
Instruments .................................................................................................................................................... 53
RESULTS ....................................................................................................................................................... 59
DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................................. 69

VALUE SURVEY .......................................................................................................................................... 75

METHODS ....................................................................................................................................................... 77
Participants ....................................................................................................................................................... 77
Instruments .................................................................................................................................................... 77
RESULTS ....................................................................................................................................................... 77
Tests of Schwartz’ s (1992) Circumplex Model of Value Types ..................................................................... 77
Alternative Structural Representations of the Values .................................................................................. 87
DISCUSSION .................................................................................................................................................. 97

CHAPTER 4: RELATIONSHIP OF THE ACTUAL AND IDEAL VALUES TO THE BIG 5 .................. 101

METHODS ....................................................................................................................................................... 102
Participants ....................................................................................................................................................... 102
Instruments .................................................................................................................................................... 103
RESULTS ....................................................................................................................................................... 104
DISCUSSION ................................................................................................................................................ 110

CHAPTER 5: RELATIONSHIP OF VALUES AND TRAITS TO OPINIONS ..................................................... 113

METHODS ....................................................................................................................................................... 116
Participants ....................................................................................................................................................... 116
Macdonald, C. Thesis

List of Tables and Figures

FIGURE 2: PROPOSED MODEL OF THE IDEAL AND ACTUAL VALUES .......................................................................................................................... 46
FIGURE 3: HISTOGRAM OF THE OVERALL MEAN RESPONSE TO THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY ........................................................................................................ 60
FIGURE 5: HISTOGRAM OF THE OVERALL MEAN RESPONSE TO THE ACTUAL VERSION OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY ........................................................................................................ 61
TABLE 1: MEANS, ANOVA AND POST HOC CONTRASTS OF THE ORIGINAL, IDEAL AND ACTUAL VERSIONS ......................................................................................................................... 64
TABLE 2: RANKED DIFFERENCE SCORES AND T-TEST RESULTS FOR DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ACTUAL AND IDEAL VALUES, (IDEAL □ ACTUAL) .................................................................................. 66
TABLE 3: RANKED MEAN SCORES FOR THE VALUES IN THE ORIGINAL, IDEAL AND ACTUAL VERSIONS OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY .......................................................................................... 68
FIGURE 7: TWO DIMENSIONAL LOADING PLOT FROM A TWO FACTOR ANALYSES OF THE ORIGINAL VERSION OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY ......................................................................................................................................................... 79
FIGURE 8: TWO DIMENSIONAL LOADING PLOT FROM A TWO FACTOR ANALYSES OF THE IDEAL VERSION OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY ......................................................................................................................................................... 82
FIGURE 9: TWO DIMENSIONAL LOADING PLOT FROM A TWO FACTOR ANALYSES OF THE ACTUAL VERSION OF THE SCHWARTZ (1992) VALUE SURVEY ......................................................................................................................................................... 83
TABLE 4: FIVE FACTOR SOLUTIONS FOR THE 2008 DATA: SCHWARTZ ORIGINAL, IDEAL AND ACTUAL ............................................................................................................................................... 90
TABLE 5: FIVE FACTOR SOLUTIONS FOR THE 2009 DATA: SCHWARTZ ORIGINAL, IDEAL AND ACTUAL ............................................................................................................................................... 91
TABLE 12: FIVE COMPONENT REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR THE 2009 IDEAL VALUES SCORES ............................................................................................................................................... 96
TABLE 13: FIVE COMPONENT REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR THE 2009 ACTUAL VALUES SCORES ............................................................................................................................................... 97
TABLE 14: ALPHA COEFFICIENTS FOR THE BIG 5 DOMAINS FROM BOTH SAMPLES ......................................................................................................................................................... 104
TABLE 15A: SIGNIFICANT REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE BIG 5 DOMAINS AND ACTUAL AND IDEAL VALUES AND SIGNIFICANT Z STATISTICS COMPARING THESE. (CONTINUED NEXT PAGE) ............................................................................................................................................... 105
TABLE 15B: SIGNIFICANT REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS BETWEEN THE BIG 5 DOMAINS AND ACTUAL AND IDEAL VALUES AND SIGNIFICANT Z STATISTICS COMPARING THESE. (CONTINUED) ............................................................................................................................................... 106
TABLE 16: SIGNIFICANT REGRESSION COEFFICIENTS FOR ACTUAL VALUES WHEN PREDICTED BY THE EQUIVALENT IDEAL VALUE AND THE BIG 5, INCLUDING TOTAL AMOUNT OF VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR .... 108
TABLE 17: QUESTIONS INCLUDED IN THE OPINIONS QUESTIONNAIRE .......................................................................................................................................................... 118
TABLE 18: STEPWISE BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS OF TRAITS, IDEAL VALUES AND ACTUAL VALUES ON OPINIONS: VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR AND NUMBER OF PREDICTORS ............................................................................................................................................... 121
TABLE 19: PREDICTORS OF OPINIONS, EXAMPLE 1: QUESTION 9. SHOULD THE INTERNET BE CENSORED? (R² = .441) ............................................................................................................................................... 124
TABLE 20: PREDICTORS OF OPINION EXAMPLE 2: QUESTION 25. SHOULD AUSTRALIA USE NUCLEAR POWER? (R² = 0.259) ............................................................................................................................................... 127
TABLE 21: PREDICTORS OF OPINION EXAMPLE 3./Q30 SHOULD THE GOVERNMENT ALLOW REFUGEES INTO THE COUNTRY? (R² = 0.165) ............................................................................................................................................... 127
TABLE 22: OPINION EXAMPLE 4. Q34 DO YOU BELIEVE IN GOD? (R² = .496) ............................................................................................................................................... 129
TABLE 23A: RESULTS OF THE BINARY LOGISTIC REGRESSIONS OF THE BEHAVIOURAL VARIABLES. (CONTINUED NEXT PAGE) ............................................................................................................................................... 142
Table 23B: Results of the Binary Logistic Regressions of the Behavioural Variables

Table 24: Behaviour Example 1. Q6 Have you attended church in the last 6 months? No/Yes? (R² = .420)

Table 25: Behaviour Example 2. Q60 Are you a member of a competitive sports team? No/Yes? (R² = .375)

Table 26: Behaviour Example 3. Q68 Do you play a musical instrument? No/Yes? (R² = .351)

Table 27: General Results of the Linear Regressions of the Behavioural Variables

Table 28: Behaviour Example 4. Q48 How many close friends do you have? (R² = .248)

Table 29: Behaviour Example 5. Q77. How many social events/gatherings have you attended in the last 4 weeks? (R² = 0.222)

Table 30: Overall Results of the Regressions Run for Voting Behaviours

Table 31 ▫ 32: Regressions Run for Voting Behaviour. Voting Liberal at the State and Federal Election

Table 33 ▫ 34: Regressions Run for Voting Behaviour. Voting Labor at the State and Federal Election

Table 35 ▫ 36: Regressions Run for Voting Behaviour. Voting Green at the State and Federal Election

Figure 11: MDS Representation of the Ideal Version of the Schwartz (1992) Value Survey. Numbers represent the following value types in Schwartz’s (1992) theory.

Figure 12: MDS Representation of the Actual Version of the Schwartz (1992) Value Survey. Numbers represent the following value types in Schwartz’s (1992) theory.


Table 44A. Correlation Matrix Between the Big 5 Domains and Actual and Ideal Values.

(Continued next page)

Table 44B. Correlation Matrix Between the Big 5 Domains and Actual and Ideal Values.

(Continued)
Abstract

By focusing on the Schwartz (1992) value tradition, the main aim of this thesis was to establish that there are meaningful differences between people’s Ideal values and their Actual behavioural expression of values. A total of 645 first and second year students from a university in Australia responded to a number of psychometric instruments designed to measure Ideal and Actual values, traits, opinions, behaviours and psychological health. These investigations show that there are distinct differences in the way people conceptualise their Ideal and Actual values. They also indicate that a person’s innate traits, which were conceptualised via the five factor model of personality (Costa & McCrae, 1992), are distinctly different from their Ideal values and that both Ideal values and traits have a unique influence on the Actual expression of values. These findings are further explored in studies that show Ideal values, traits and Actual values all have unique relationships with both opinions and behaviours.

It is also concluded that one of the most widely accepted and used measures of values, the Schwartz (1992) Value Survey, is probably assessing a combination of the Ideal and Actual aspects of values. Moreover, Schwartz’s (1992) underlying theory of values suggests that values can be conceptualised in terms of 10 Universal value types but no evidence was found to support this conceptualisation. Finally the thesis shows that differences between Ideal and Actual values are also related to poor psychological health. From these investigations it is concluded that there are very distinct differences between Ideal and Actual values and that these two aspects of values need to be considered when theorising about, or measuring, values.