Personal Values in HCI Research

Abstract
This paper describes a broad overview of the core values underpinning my research agenda for more than a decade. It draws from value research, research values, and values in HCI, and concludes with some insights on the challenges and opportunities of developing a value-driven personal research agenda.

Author Keywords
Values, emotions, HCI research

ACM Classification Keywords
H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Miscellaneous.

Related Work
This section outlines key perspectives from value research in social sciences, research values, and values in HCI.

Value Research
Social science scholars have had a long standing interest in value research particularly in sociology of religion, politics [23] and human action [7], where values are deemed essential for structuring and understanding attitudes and behaviors. Values are hierarchically organized desirable goal beliefs which consistently guide individuals and groups across situations supporting the selection and evaluation of events and behaviors [22].
While the relationship between values and behaviors is indirect [6], the relationship between attitudes and values has been also explored, with findings indicating that values are more abstract than attitudes, and that attitudes could express goals or values relevant to the self [6]. The importance of values, particular social and cultural ones for the sense of self has been captured by Gecas [4]'s concept of value-identities. The latter are constructed as people identify themselves in terms of their deeply meaningful core values.

Drawing from Schwartz [22] and Gecas [4] work, Hitlin [6] has emphasized value-identity in terms of "wider social and symbolic sphere rather than to one's self and one's other values" [p.122]. He also highlighted its significance for authenticity as a motivational component of the self which is activated when people behave consistently to their core values. When reflected upon, such behaviors allow people to better understand and prioritize their core values.

Research Values
The role of researchers' values, particularly in social sciences, has received a great deal of interest. This has been explored especially with respect to value bias on normative research questions exploring how things ought to be (rather than how they are) [1].

Blau [1] also discussed the tension brought up by researchers' values, and how they strongly impact scholarly work from the selection of research problems, to the selection of research methods, and interpretation of findings. She also mentioned that such unavoidable value bias could be in fact valuable, given the values are made explicit upfront in academic writing, alongside the raw data and the reasoning for their interpretation.

For example, self-identity audit proposed by Tracy [24] provides a useful guide to reflect on one’s values and their impact on research.

Another strand of research on scholarly values has focused on academic freedom and research ethics. The former deals mostly with the selection of research problem and interpretation of findings, while the latter with the research methods. Eisenberg [3] described academic freedom as the value of critical objectivity in scientific inquiry and knowledge dissemination able to challenge the status-quo with limited repercussions. However, high quality research is often expensive particularly as competitive HCI research outcomes increasingly require larger user samples, and robust systems tested through longitudinal studies in the wild. This brings forward the issue of external research funding and its impact on academic freedom conflicting with other interests such as economic development. Within the current economic context of scarce research funding, the value of academic freedom is seriously challenged.

Values in HCI
HCI focus on values is not a new and landmark works include value sensitive design [5] as a theoretical and methodological approach accounting for values in design. This has been later critiqued to for its focus on universal and decontextualized values, and lack of clarity of the participants’ and researchers’ voices in design [2]. In a seminal workshop focused on the future of HCI in 2020, Sellen and colleagues [21] reflected on the future goals of HCI research. They identified the renewed importance of accounting for human values in design in the light of five key transformations, i.e., multiple interfaces, increased reliance on technologies and the challenges of hyperconnectivity, enduring digital footprint and stronger opportunities for creative engagement.
In this context, one of the major design challenges is to decide what problem to focus on, given that design choices support some values while hindering others [21]. Authors also propose an additional pre-stage of design process, i.e., understand, aimed to identify the human value that the technology to be design will address.

Other relevant HCI work has looked at designers’ personal experiences [25] and emotions [19,20] in order to understand their impact on design, while an extensive body of work has explored the design of interactive systems for values underpinning social change such as sustainable behaviour.

**Autoenthography: Self-identity audit**

In this section I reflect on my own values and how they have shaped my research agenda after the completion of my PhD [9,10,15,16], and as an academic over the last thirteen years. I highly value academic freedom and the privilege of shaping my own research projects. This however comes at the cost of strong responsibility in selecting specific research problems to focus on.

I tend to spend considerable time on identifying pertinent and timely research questions. Major such choices are usually made after in depth introspection in order to align my research goals with the goals of my value-identity. My core value is making the world a better place while leveraging my specific skills and expertise. In particular, I value helping people reach their potential to become more self-aware [17], reflective [12], and creative [8]. These have shaped my work on developing MeditAid [11], a tool to support meditation training, and the AffecTech project focused on developing personal technologies for affective health. I am also strongly attracted to the value of social justice, poverty alleviation, and women empowerment. For example I have explored the practices of democratizing technology production [14], and unregulating financial transactions [13], while the Digital Threads project focuses on financially empowering rural women in developing context.

Unsurprisingly, a major obstacle in working towards these values, is earning research funds. Useful in this respect is identifying funding opportunities whose goals align with my values. For example, H2020 framework funded by European Commission highlights current societal challenges, some of which match well my own values. Global Challenges Research Fund from UK Research Council is another good match. Unfortunately, with increasingly limited research fund, bidding for research grants is a disheartening endeavor. Having the research project strongly aligned with one’s value-identity is crucial in developing resilience for refining the bids. Another key component is working with people who share the same values, although as a community, we lack effective mechanisms for communicating such personal values.

The questions which I would like to explore in this workshop are how can we better communicate personal values in academic writing, who are the beneficiaries of our research outcomes, how we can make our design knowledge more actionable [18] and measure impact.

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