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FINDING VALUE IN THE MUNDANE:
CAN INTRINSIC MOTIVATION UNDERMINE EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION?

A Thesis Presented

by

MICHAEL B. BERG

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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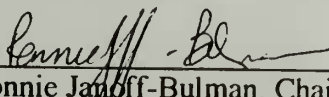
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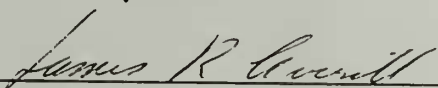
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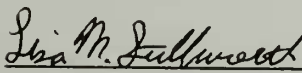
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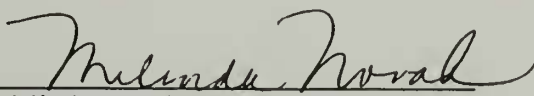
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ABSTRACT

FINDING VALUE IN THE MUNDANE:
CAN INTRINSIC MOTIVATION UNDERMINE EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION?

MAY 1997

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People often have difficulty in their lives reconciling the things that they want to do with the things they feel they should do. This research examined the possibility that people can perceive both intrinsic and extrinsic value in predominantly extrinsic behaviors. Specifically, people's ability to perceive intrinsic motivation in predominantly extrinsic behaviors was examined to test the extent to which people are able to perform this task and the degree to which this ability is related to psychological well-being. College undergraduates completed a survey asking them about their goals and strivings, dispositional openness, their psychological well-being in terms of positive and negative affect and life satisfaction, and the degree to which they perceive intrinsic motivation in predominantly extrinsic behavior both spontaneously and when explicitly asked to do so. Hypotheses regarding a positive relationship between perceiving intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction were confirmed. The implications of the research findings are discussed in terms of psychological well-being and motivation.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In an ideal world, perhaps, behaviors that are “shoulds” and “oughts” would also be the ones that people would choose. In the real world made up of compromises, sacrifices of both wants (e.g., putting down the book and driving the kids) and shoulds (e.g., leaving the bills unpaid until tomorrow and going out to dinner instead) exist. It is the wants that seem like the true sacrifices of course, because it is these behaviors that we truly want to do. Rarely does one hear, “Yes, I really should go to the jazz concert, but I really want to stay home and pay the bills.”

One effective compromise might be to try to see value in the shoulds and oughts. Giving oughts value might bring personal satisfaction to externally driven behaviors. Finding value in externally motivated, mundane activities might bring people one step closer to that ideal world. How can behaviors be shifted from oughts to wants? How can people create value in otherwise empty shoulds and oughts? What are the psychological benefits, if any, of this kind of flexible perception? The present research was conducted to explore preliminary answers to these questions.

Throughout the research “oughts” and “shoulds” were considered any behaviors that are perceived to be extrinsically motivated, i.e., behaviors that are perceived to be driven from pressures external to the actors (e.g., social norms; pressures from those with outcome control over the actors; internalized beliefs of right and wrong). Also, “wants” were regarded as any behaviors that people perceive that they would want or choose to do (i.e., behaviors that hold perceived intrinsic value and meaning and bring satisfaction through the actual activity itself rather than the avoidance of the consequences of not doing the behavior, or specific instrumental gains attained through the behavior). As will hopefully become evident, perceptions of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be quite independent from the more “objective” motivational nature.

A. The World of Approach and Avoidance

One body of social psychological research has directly examined the consequences of sacrificing oughts and wants in our lives. Higgins (1987) first proposed the theory of self-discrepancy, describing the effects of discrepancies between people’s ideal selves and

actual selves (ideal-actual discrepancies) and between people's ought selves and actual selves (ought-actual discrepancies). Ideals selves and ought selves are types of possible selves, ways that people have of thinking of themselves hypothetically (Markus, 1986). Higgins described people's ideal selves as how they would actually like to be, and their ought selves as how they think others believe they should be. Higgins' major finding was that larger ideal-actual discrepancies lead to higher levels of depression, while larger ought-actual discrepancies lead to higher levels of anxiety.

In a number of studies, Higgins went on to show that these discrepancies were related to the way that people frame their goals (Brendl, Higgins, & Lemm, 1995; Higgins, Roney, Crowe, & Hymes, 1994; Higgins, 1996). Specifically, this research found that self-regulation of these discrepancies is related to the percentage of approach and avoidance goals that people hold, ideals being more positively related to approach goals, and oughts being more positively related to avoidance goals. Approach goals are end-states that a person tries to attain (e.g., trying to be a good friend). Avoidance goals are end-states that people try to avoid attaining (e.g., trying to avoid being a bad friend). While the distinction between approach goals and avoidance goals may seem like a simple semantic difference on the surface, the research on the distinctions between these two types of goal frames suggests important differences in terms of potential outcomes. Various research studies have shown that approach goals lead to longer striving and persistence, greater actual achievement, greater perceived achievement, more positive emotions relating to the goal striving, and greater memories of positive achievements, while avoidance goals lead to less of and often the opposites of these outcome variables (Higgins et al., 1994; Moffit & Singer, 1994; Roney, Higgins, & Shah, 1995; Wicker, Brown, Wiehe, Hagen, & Boring, 1991). It seems clear that one way to make the best of any goal or behavior is to place it into an approach frame.

In fact psychological well-being, in terms of greater optimism, less depression, greater life satisfaction, greater self-fulfillment, and so on, has been linked to people who hold higher percentages of approach goals than avoidance ones (Coats, Janoff-Bulman, & Alpert, 1996; Emmons, 1996; Emmons & Kaiser, in press). Striving towards goals is an

essential piece of the search for meaning in one's life, a superordinate goal in itself. As Emmons writes:

It is equally evident that [subjective well-being] involves more than the presence of positive feelings and the absence of negative feelings. It involves the search for meaningfulness in one's life. Meaning comes from involvement in personally fulfilling goals, the integration of these goals into a coherent self-system, and the integration of these goals into a broader social system. (p.333, 1996).

Emmons therefore sees subjective well-being as deriving from an integration of people's goals with their search for meaning in their lives.

The relation of goals and meaning in people's lives has been further studied by Sheldon and Kasser (1995; see also Sheldon and Emmons, 1995). Sheldon and Kasser describe the concepts of coherence and congruence in relation to meaningful goals. Coherence exists when goals are integrated so that they work to achieve both same-level and higher level aims. Congruence exists when people's strivings emanate from intrinsic motivations rather than extrinsic motivations. In their research, Sheldon and Kasser found that higher levels of coherence and congruence are related to positive mood, vitality, and the pursuit of valued, rather than meaningless behaviors. Coherence and congruence of goals then may be effective tools for obtaining perceived meaning in behaviors.

So, if people pursue approach goals rather than avoidance goals, and do so in an integrative way, does this help them find value in the extrinsic behaviors of everyday life? There does seem to be evidence that people can change their motives for the better. For example, Kunda (1990) found that people are capable of various forms of motivated reasoning when not constrained by outside forces. More directly, other research has shown various ways that people may move from introjection to integration (Deci, Eghrarl, Patrick, & Leone, 1994), two forms of motivation that are inherently related to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

In their self-determination theory, Deci and Ryan (1985) describe these two types of internalized, self-regulated goals: introjection stemming from external forces and integration stemming from internal reasons. Deci et al. (1994) demonstrated that giving a meaningful rationale, acknowledging a person's predicament, and giving a feeling of choice all aid in replacing introjection with integration, which is essentially the same as

creating wants from oughts. Having integrated goals as opposed to introjected goals has been shown to have a number of benefits for psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 1993; Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993; Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser, & Deci, 1996). All of the studies described above have one theme in common: creating perceived intrinsic value in people's goals and behaviors leads to all-around better psychological health. These are just a few of the positive consequences of changing oughts to wants, creating perceived value in the extrinsic behaviors people are faced with on a daily basis.

How, then, can people begin to perceive their oughts as wants, unlocking the potential satisfaction and well-being that may be lying dormant in the mundane oughts of everyday life? Carver (1996) proposed that approach goals are more intrinsically motivated, and avoidance goals are more extrinsically motivated. This proposal was tested recently in the domain of achievement goals, goals in which competence is the main outcome measure. Elliot and Harackiewicz (1996) demonstrated that goals presented with avoidance frames undermined intrinsic motivation, while those goals presented with approach frames left the intrinsic motivation intact. This is an important finding in light of known findings that external motivation can, and often does, undermine intrinsic motivation (see Deci et al., 1991 for a brief discussion). If people can maintain approach goals, they may be able to better preserve the meaning behind the oughts that they face and preserve intrinsic value.

Unfortunately, in all of the research discussed above, oughts and wants are always treated as a dichotomy. Research has looked at approach versus avoidance goals, introjection versus integration, intrinsic versus extrinsic, ideals versus oughts. None of the research described so far has given serious consideration to the possible coexistence of some of these concepts in the same behavior. For example, what happens when a woman both wants to stay home and raise her children and is taught through social norms that she should do the same? Does the extrinsic pressure override the intrinsic pressure as commonly thought? Furthermore, what if the same woman chooses instead to have a full-time career, but is also told that that is something she should do? The present research examined some possible ways in which oughts and wants may coexist in the same behavior, and how people might maintain or establish perceived intrinsic motivation even in

the face of extrinsic pressures. This research explored the possibility that people can take oughts and turn them into wants, by first seeing the possibility of value in the behavior, and then letting that value override the extrinsic motivation with drives that are more intrinsically based.

B. The Scarcity of the Commonplace

Frankl (1984) described one way of creating value in life as through one's attitude taken towards "unavoidable suffering". According to Frankl, the attitude that people take towards unavoidable suffering allows them to willfully overcome tragedy by changing their focus toward such tragedies. For example, he describes a husband who was suffering because the man's wife had died. Frankl explained to the man that if his wife did not die first, that she would then have had to grieve for him instead, and that the unfortunate circumstance had thereby allowed the husband to save his wife the pain of grieving for him; this unique interpretation demonstrated how the man's loss could be perceived as meaningful. Although this perspective does not necessarily change the man's need to grieve, it provides him with an additional way of viewing the tragedy, one which he would likely choose-- that of saving his wife the pain of grieving.

In relation to Frankl's work, other researchers who study victims of trauma have found that many victims find this meaning themselves. Janoff-Bulman (1992) describes her work with survivors of various tragedies:

In our own work with survivors of life-threatening diseases, crimes, and accidents, men and women frequently reported that only now can they truly enjoy life because they no longer take it for granted, as they had done before. (p.136)

These survivors describe how they see the meaningfulness of life through their tragedies, far from the possibly expected reaction of seeing life as meaningless because of their needless suffering. While the world may seem uncontrollable and meaningless to the victims, they learn how to overcome this tragic view by refocusing their trauma in a meaningful way. It allows them to appreciate the mundane and commonplace. Tragedy has the power to transform everyday oughts to wants, simply by showing that even the oughts of life can become scarce and therefore valuable. As Frankl (1994) portrays life's transitory nature, every moment of our lives is meaningful from the right attitude toward unavoidable suffering.

Hopefully there are easier, less painful ways to discover meaning in one's life than undergoing a traumatic experience. In fact, just being able to see the "what if's" may lead to the recognition of meaning. Research on counterfactuals, the hypothetical situations people raise when they focus on the things that could have been, brings new light to the question of meaning. First described by Kahneman & Tversky (1982a, cited in Gilovich & Medvec, 1995) omission and commission are two types of regretful counterfactuals. Gilovich and Medvec (1995) describe omission as regretting not having done something, and commission as regretting having done some specific thing. Their research found that while regrets of commission are more frequent in the present (usually just after the regretted action), regrets of omission usually are greater when people look back on the past and wish they had done something that they did not do. This specific work on omission and commission may make for a suitable (and arguably more adaptive) form of creating meaning. In light of the research on commission and omission, one possible route to appreciation for people may be to try to preempt these feelings of regret by recognizing future loss before it occurs. While omission and commission are two types of regret, if they were turned into foresight of future possible regrets, they could be used to prevent such regrets in the future. While it may not be easy for people in general to see situations, especially oughts, in future states where they are no longer available, it seems that this mental flexibility would be very useful in changing oughts to wants. For example, if parents recognize that the time with their children is scarce, seen in terms of future loss as their children grow and move on in their lives, driving them from place to place seems less of a sacrifice and more of a pleasure, something one would actively choose. Hence people might gladly put down their books to go to their soccer practices and prevent future regret of not spending more time with their kids, even if it is not something intrinsically motivating on the surface.

Making people aware of omission and commission might be useful in creating meaning in their lives. For instance, if people were told to think of things in the past that they did not do, that they now regret, they might be able to use the resulting emotion as motivation for realizing what they may or may not be doing, or valuing, in the present. As Frankl states, "Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had

acted as wrongly as you are about to act now” (p. 114, 1994). For example, Roese and Olson (1995; see also Landman 1987) found in their research that people make downward counterfactuals when an unfortunate outcome is unavoidable, looking at the possibilities for how the situation could have been worse, seemingly to lessen the unavoidable blow. By learning to appreciate the mundane extrinsic behaviors in life one may learn to make the best of all situations, as well as make more satisfactory choices of behaviors in the future. Counterfactuals might be an adaptive way to gain the perspective of many trauma victims, seeing the scarcity and therefore value in everyday occurrences.

One way to bring perceived value to the mundane oughts that people must do each day may be to see the potential gains associated with each behavior by recognizing the possibility of loss. Maybe driving one’s kids all over town, or commuting to work each day might be frustrating events if thought about from the perspective of what else one could be doing, but when thought about from the perspective of the opportunities that are inevitably finite in life, they may become intrinsically valuable. Parents will not have their children around to drive from place to place forever. Even commuters stuck in traffic might not realize it, but have one of the few opportunities all day to stop and think and relax, rather than become more tense and anxious. In each case, the “ought” of the behavior remains, but it can be replaced with a perspective that gives the behavior inherent value, intrinsic motivation. Oughts may then coexist with wants, as people learn to see the reasons that they might choose the behavior, regardless of the social pressures that force them to perform it; people may create intrinsic value.

It is important here to emphasize that being able to see oughts as wants is not a simple matter of seeing “the cloud’s silver lining”. While this ability to turn oughts into wants is assumed to be related in some ways to this more common type of optimism, it is the perceived possibility of loss, the recognition that everything can be seen as scarce, that may drive this flexibility of perception, not a simple focus on the positive. While naive optimism may be characterized by the phrase “ignorance is bliss,” it seems that optimism through seeing the possibility of loss may be characterized as more of a bittersweet perspective. As many survivors learn to see the value of the mundane, they are forced to live seeing it against a backdrop that at times is both random and somber. This sobering

effect may be what drives survivors to see value in every facet of their lives, but it is far from the happy-go-lucky naive optimism that may be a product of innocence, but not experience. Also, perceiving intrinsic motivation does not just mean seeing the positive aspects, but rather it is the recognition that positive aspects can exist in even ultimately extrinsically motivated activities. This research will look at ways in which people can use their experiences as tools for increasing their satisfaction with life, seeing intrinsic value in their extrinsic behaviors.

C. The Present Research

How can people learn to see intrinsic value in their extrinsic behaviors? As described above, suffering, and more favorably counterfactuals, may provide that perspective in some cases. Also, the recognition of loss through contrast and comparison processes seems to be an important factor in this process of transformation. All of these factors seem part of becoming engaged in the task or behavior, an essential ingredient for intrinsic motivation according to Csikszentmihalyi (1978). In fact, it is likely that people who see their behaviors as oughts rather than wants are the same ones who are focused on themselves and the consequences (or rewards) of the task rather than the value of the task itself. They focus on what will happen to them if they do not complete the behavior (e.g., anxiety, frustration, loss of self-esteem). On the other hand, people who are able to perceive positive aspects of their oughts have most likely shifted the focus from themselves to the actual task. For example, think about people attending a party. Those people who are there enjoying themselves are the ones who are engaged and at the end of the night wonder where the time went. Those people who are focused on themselves, how they appear to others, and how they would rather be somewhere else, count the minutes until the party is over. Self-focused people are usually tense, uncomfortable, and have lost the entire evening to anxiety. One major element in transformation, then, is the sheer will to do so, to make the best out of an ought, by engaging in the task and bringing value to it.

As Csikszentmihalyi (1978) describes, people who stay focused on their tasks rather than the end-states or goals of those tasks are the most intrinsically motivated and the most creative too. Concentrating on the consequences may cause anxiety, frustration, blows to self-esteem, guilt, shame, or any combination of these stressors. If people could

instead focus on the intrinsic aspects of their tasks, whether through adaptive counterfactuals or other ways of flexible thinking that allow them to see why they might “choose” the oughts in their life, they might be able to alleviate these stressors, gaining positive self-esteem and optimism while avoiding stressors and depression. This possible relationship between seeing oughts as wants and psychological well-being seems related to the similar relationship that has been found between people who hold predominantly approach goals and psychological well-being (Coats et al., 1996).

There seem to be many parallels between the ways of oughts and wants, and the ways of approach and avoidance goals. It seems that people with avoidance goals are focused more on the consequences of their failure, and people with approach goals are more engaged and focused on the behavior, actually enjoying the behavior. While people with approach goals are boosted by their intrinsic motivation, those with avoidance goals allow themselves to be subject to the external motivation surrounding the behavior. Engagement seems to be a key part of this process. It is possible that these parallels between goal framing (i.e., the degree to which people hold approach or avoidance goals) and seeing oughts as wants are not merely theoretical and that in fact, people actually may use approach goals as a tool for seeing value in behaviors as opposed to the consequences of not performing them.

The first question addressed in the present research, then, is whether people can create perceived value in behaviors predominantly driven by extrinsic forces. This question will be addressed in the following study. A second question asked whether being able to shift oughts to wants would lead to the psychological health benefits suggested here and in previous literatures. It was hypothesized that people who are better able to perceive oughts as wants would have better psychological health in terms of life satisfaction and positive affect. Openness also was explored, in order to determine whether it is related to people’s ability to perceive wants in oughts. Given that mental flexibility may be required to perceive intrinsic motivation in oughts, openness might be expected to be positively related to this ability.

CHAPTER II

METHOD

A. Participants and Procedure

One-hundred and fifty students at the University of Massachusetts and enrolled in a Social Psychology class completed a survey for extra credit. They were allowed to take the survey home and given one week in which to return it. Participating students were asked not to discuss the surveys or their answers with other classmates. Seventeen participants were dropped from the study for either failing to follow the directions explicitly, or for failing to complete the entire survey, leaving 105 female and 28 male participants in the final sample. There were no significant gender differences on any measures in the survey, and so gender will not be further discussed.

All participants were given the same instructions and measures in a self-contained survey with three parts. The first part asked the participants to list at least ten personal goals or strivings. The second section asked the participants to complete psychological measures of openness and psychological well-being. The third section asked the participants to list three "ought" behaviors from the past week, to give their reasons for the behaviors, and to list reasons why they might have wanted to engage in each behavior. The order of the three sections remained constant: strivings, psychological measures, perceived intrinsic motivation (PIM) exercise, because it was felt that while the strivings measures and the scales measuring well-being would have little if any effect on the responses to the PIM exercise, the exercise might influence participants' responses on the various measures of psychological well-being and strivings. One month after the data collection all students in the Social Psychology class were debriefed as to the nature of the experiment, including the results of the study and directions for future research.

B. Materials

A copy of the full survey, including all instructions, questions, and measures, is contained in the appendix.

1. Personal Strivings Measure

The first part of the survey asked subjects to generate a list of at least ten personal strivings, using a procedure adapted from Emmons (1991) and Coats et al. (1996).

Participants were asked to list “goals” or “strivings” that they are typically trying to accomplish or attain in their everyday behavior. Participants were encouraged to think about their goals and strivings in various domains of their lives. They also were encouraged to begin each sentence with one of these sentence starters: “It is important for me to...,” “It is important for me not to...,” “It is important for me to avoid...,” “It is important for me to obtain...”. Participants’ responses were used to determine the degree to which they hold approach versus avoidance strivings.

2. Psychological Scales: Openness

Respondents were asked to complete a sub-section of the NEO personality inventory measuring openness (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Specifically, the sections measuring the subscales relating to openness to feelings, actions, and ideas were used. Twenty-four items were provided and responded to on a five-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Openness was measured in order to assess the degree to which it plays a part in the ability to perceive intrinsic motivation in predominantly extrinsic behaviors, as this task is thought to require a fair amount of flexible thinking.

3. Psychological Scales: Well-Being

Participants completed the Positive Affect / Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988). Twenty emotional states (e.g., enthusiastic, guilty, nervous, etc.) were presented. Accompanying each emotional state was a space in which participants responded on a four-point scale ranging from “very slightly or not at all” to “extremely,” indicating the extent to which they “generally feel this way”. From this measure both a positive and negative affect score were calculated, as are they considered separate scales by the scale developers, and past research has demonstrated that they have very distinct properties (Watson, Tellegen, & Clark, 1988).

The final scale was the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985). Five questions were accompanied by a seven-point scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree”. Each question addressed the participants’ subjective, general assessments of life satisfaction. This measure has been shown to have

high internal consistency and high temporal reliability, and has been found to correlate moderately with other measures of subjective well-being (Diener et al, 1985).

4. Perceived Intrinsic Motivation (PIM) Exercise

The perceived intrinsic motivation exercise was developed to explore and record people's ability to perceive predominantly extrinsic behaviors, i.e., "oughts," as activities they would want to do, or at least see some positive aspects within it, i.e., a "want." Participants first were asked to describe (on page a) three situations from their past week in which they did something because they felt they should or ought to have acted so. On the next page (page b), they were asked to describe specifically the reason or reasons that they felt they should have done what they did. On the last page (page c), participants were asked to consider and write about a reason or reasons that they might want to participate in the same behavior that they felt they should or ought to have done (and written about on the first two pages).

Two different types of perceived intrinsic motivation scores were assessed-- those that were spontaneously listed and those that were elicited specifically. On page b, where participants explained their "should" behaviors, any intrinsic reasons listed were spontaneously generated. Two measures were scored regarding these spontaneous measures: the total number of intrinsic reasons and the percent of intrinsic reasons (intrinsic reasons to the total number of reasons). These scores reflected the combined reasons across the three "should" behaviors listed. The spontaneous generation of intrinsic responses for extrinsic "should" behaviors was expected to be associated with psychological well-being, for here participants were, in effect, presenting what they "naturally" thought.

On the last page (c), participants specifically were asked to generate intrinsic reasons for each of their three "should" behaviors. Again, two measures were scored across the three behaviors: the total number of intrinsic reasons and the percent of intrinsic reasons (intrinsic reasons to the total number of reasons). These were the "elicited" measures of perceived intrinsic motivation presumably tapping participants' ability to generate intrinsic reasons for the behaviors. In addition, the total number of extrinsic reasons were counted, as they could be used as a measure of "error" in the elicited section.

As this section only asked participants to give “wants” as reasons for their behaviors, “oughts” that were given could be used to signify an inability to generate intrinsic reasons and would therefore be expected to be a negative correlate of life satisfaction.

For all scoring, two experimenters coded the data together, and any disagreements or discrepancies were discussed until a mutually satisfying score was decided upon. The total number of reasons was counted as the total number of independent reasons given, with the participant’s phrasing taken into account. For example, if the participant responded, “I love my parents. I enjoy their company. I have fun with them.” this would be counted as a total of three responses, even though the last two seem similar in nature. However, if two reasons given for the same behavior were confidently deemed synonymous (e.g., “I went out of peer pressure, if my friends had not pressured me to go I probably would not have.”), they were only counted once. In the first case, “I enjoy their company. I have fun with them,” credit was given for those responses because the participant specifically separated the responses, and because enjoying someone’s company can be considered to cover more than just having fun with them. In the second case, the second response seemed redundant, for it did not add more information, and credit was given for only one response.

The criteria for being counted as intrinsically motivated were: specific mentions of perceived free choice; specific mentions of non-instrumentality of the behaviors (e.g., altruistic intentions, the pure enjoyment of the activity itself, etc.); other positive aspects of the behavior itself (e.g., feeling good, etc.); specific mentions of participating in the behavior out of positive emotion (e.g., caring, love, etc.); other mentions of aesthetic or personal value inherent in the behaviors. Examples of reasons that were counted as extrinsic reasons were: out of reciprocation; out of negative feelings such as guilt, shame, etc.; purely instrumental gains (e.g., to get good grades, to make money, to be liked). Sometimes the difference between an intrinsic response and an extrinsic response could be subtle, yet remained distinct, as in: as “I wanted to show that I appreciate them.” versus “I wanted them to like me,” or “They are my friends, and I like to help my friends” versus, “I gave them a ride because I might need one from them in the future.” In all cases, the raters were unaware of the participants’ responses to the other sections of the surveys.

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

A. Perceived Intrinsic Motivation and Well-Being

1. Overview

The foremost finding of this study was the consistent positive correlation between people perceiving intrinsic value in their “should” behaviors and psychological well-being, as predicted. In addition, for each measure, the participants were divided into three groups (high, medium, and low) based on the distribution of their scores on the PIM exercise. As predicted, the people who had the highest on scores on perceiving intrinsic value had greater levels of life satisfaction than did people who scored lowest on the perceived intrinsic value measures. It also was demonstrated clearly that most participants had the ability to perceive intrinsic value in the oughts, even if they only occasionally perceived such value when explicitly asked to do so.

2. Reliabilities

The reliability coefficients for the life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect scales were all satisfactory, alphas coefficients equal to .85, .85, and .83 respectively. The reliabilities for the openness subscales for ideas, feelings, and actions were .82, .75, and .50 respectively. Due to the low alpha coefficient for the actions subsection, it was dropped from the analysis and the remaining two subscales were combined into a single openness score, alpha coefficient = .79.

3. Spontaneous Perceptions of Value

The total number of reasons listed, both intrinsic and extrinsic in nature, when participants were asked to list the reason or reasons for why they performed their three ought behaviors ranged from three to twelve reasons across the three behaviors ($M=4.97$). Of the total number of reasons, the number of spontaneously mentioned intrinsic reasons ranged from zero to eight reasons ($M=1.46$) across the three behaviors. The percent of intrinsic reasons to the total number of reasons ranged from 0.0 to 1.0 ($M=.27$) across the three behaviors.

Correlations between the spontaneous generation of intrinsic reasons for ought behaviors were positively correlated with life satisfaction (see Table 1, page 19).

Specifically, the correlation between the total number of spontaneous intrinsic responses and life satisfaction was .23, $p < .01$. In addition, the correlation between the percentage of intrinsic reasons spontaneously generated out of the total number of reasons was .21, $p < .02$. As shown in Table 2, contrasts revealed significant differences between the high (3 or more intrinsic reasons, .33 to 1.0 percent intrinsic reasons) and low (zero intrinsic reasons, zero percent intrinsic reasons) groups for both the total number of intrinsic reasons and the ratio of intrinsic to total number of reasons, $t(133)=2.20$, $p < .05$, and $t(132)=2.16$, $p < .05$, respectively (see Table 2, page 20). No differences were found between the middle group and either the high or low groups. There were no significant correlations between the total number of reasons generated or the total number of extrinsic reasons generated with life satisfaction. No direct relationships were demonstrated between positive affect, negative affect, and perceived intrinsic motivation, although both positive and negative affect were highly correlated with life satisfaction .43 and -.44, $ps < .001$ respectively, indicating a possible indirect relationship between emotion and perceived intrinsic motivation through life satisfaction.

4. Elicited Perceptions of Value

The total number of reasons, intrinsic and extrinsic, listed when participants were asked specifically to think of reasons why they might have wanted to perform their behaviors ranged from three to twelve reasons across the three behaviors ($M=5.35$). Of the total number of reasons, the number of elicited intrinsic reasons ranged from zero to ten reasons ($M=3.75$) across the three behaviors. The percentage of intrinsic reasons to the total number of reasons ranged from 0.0 to 1.0 ($M=.69$) across the three behaviors.

Correlations between the elicited generation of intrinsic reasons for ought behaviors were positively correlated with life satisfaction as well (see Table 1). Specifically, the correlation between the total number of elicited intrinsic responses and life satisfaction was .19, $p < .05$. Similarly, the correlation between the percentage of intrinsic reasons listed out of the total number of reasons was .20, $p < .05$. There also was a negative relationship between the number of extrinsic reasons given and life satisfaction, $-.18$, $p < .05$. There were no significant correlations between the total number of reasons generated and life satisfaction.

These same significant relationships were demonstrated with significant contrast effects (see Table 2). The medium (3-4 reasons) and high (5 or more reasons) groups on total number of intrinsic reasons scored statistically higher on life satisfaction than the low group, $t(133)=2.34, p < .05$. The high (.88 to 1.0 percent intrinsic reasons) group scored statistically higher on life satisfaction than the low (.00 to .58 percent intrinsic reasons) group in terms of the percent of the number of intrinsic reasons as well, $t(132)=2.45, p < .05$. Finally, the high (3 or more extrinsic reasons) and low (zero extrinsic reasons) groups for the total number of extrinsic reasons listed scored significantly lower on life satisfaction between $t(133)=-2.01, p < .05$. The percentage of extrinsic reasons naturally represents the same relationship as the percent of perceived intrinsic motivation, as the two scores are mathematically equivalent. There was no relationship between the total number of elicited responses and life satisfaction.

5. Perceptions of Value and Openness

Openness, specifically in terms of openness to ideas and feelings, was somewhat related to the ability to see oughts as wants, but not the spontaneous nature to do so. Openness was marginally positively correlated with the total number of elicited intrinsic reasons as well as the percentage of elicited intrinsic reasons to the total number of reasons, $.16, p < .08$ for each measure.

B. Approach and Avoidance Measures

Participants scored between 0.3 and 1.0 on the percent of approach to total number of goals ($M=.77$). The range of avoidance goals to total number of goals was 0.0 to 0.7 ($M=.23$). This study failed to replicate the previously demonstrated relationship between people's approach and avoidance goals and well-being. No significant correlations were found between strivings and any of the measures of well-being. Furthermore, no relationships were found between people's strivings and perceived intrinsic motivation.

C. A Closer Look at the Open-Ended Responses

There were many different situations that people felt they did in the last week because they felt that they should have done so. There were also a few common themes due to the somewhat homogeneous nature of the student population. For example, studying for tests, going to work, and calling or visiting a parent were all frequently

mentioned. More interesting, though, were the varied ways participants phrased their reasons for the same behaviors.

For their descriptions of why they performed the various behaviors, there was an interesting mix of intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. For example, among the many different reasons participants gave for going to class were the following extrinsic reasons: to avoid feeling guilty; to get good grades; because their parents pay a lot of money for them to go to school; to get into graduate school or further their careers; to get the work for class; to get their professor to like them better. Among the intrinsic reasons for going to class were: to learn; because the class was interesting; to feel good about going; because school is important to them.

An example of a complete and typical response reads as follows across the three sections (description of the behavior, spontaneous measures, elicited measures):

- a: "I went to lunch with my family."
- b: "It was my mother's birthday. And even though I needed to study for an exam I would have felt guilty if I didn't go."
- c: "I want to go to lunch with my family because I enjoy spending time with them."

It is clear from this example that this participant performed this behavior out of extrinsic motivation, specifically guilt. However, this person did have the ability to perceive intrinsic value, namely that she enjoyed the activity or at least a part of it.

Some participants were able to perceive value both spontaneously and when it was elicited. For example, one participant wrote:

- a: "I had to drop off some items to my aunt even though I was pressed for time, and she talks for hours on end sometimes and never makes a person leave on time."
- b: "My mother was unable to see my aunt and asked if I wouldn't mind dropping off certain items to her. Since I want to be helpful, I agreed to see my aunt."
- c: "It's a way of being courteous and caring towards a family member. Plus, it's a distraction to visit someone from one's daily prescribed schedule."

In this example, there is evidence of intrinsic motivation being perceived even in the simple explanation of the reasons for the behavior. The participant mentions that she wanted to be helpful, even though the directions only ask for the reasons she felt she "should" or "ought" to have done the behavior. Also, it should be noted that there is already a sensed distinction between this response type and the previous example in terms of satisfaction. In

the first example, the person clearly does not want to study or do homework, but in this example there is sense that the participant sees both obligatory and positive reasons for the behavior.

Other participants had difficulty perceiving value in their behaviors, even when explicitly asked to do so. For example one participant wrote:

- a: "This past week I went to class because I felt I should have."
- b: "Because I would have felt guilty."
- c: "I want to go to class because I don't want to waste my parent's money on my education."

The same participant also wrote of another behavior:

- a: "This week I went to work because I felt I should."
- b: "Because I would have felt guilty."
- c: "So I can make some money and have something to put on my resume."

None of these explanations include reasons suggesting that the participant perceived any value in the behavior itself. She felt coerced by the situation and only performed the behaviors out of guilt. Even when asked to think of why she would want to have performed the behaviors, she only came up with other extrinsic reasons that do not show her finding enjoyment or pleasure in the behaviors.

Participants did create many interesting ways of perceiving value in their should behaviors. They focused on positive aspects. They focused on their own values and goals. Some indicated how even the less pleasant activities in life can be positive distractions or chances to change their scenery. They saw how the situations could have been even worse off, or how they should be lucky to even have the chance, for example, to attend college. All in all participants were generally quite good at finding reasons for why they may have wanted to perform the behaviors-- at least when asked to do so.

Table 1

Correlations Between Perceived Intrinsic Value and Psychological Well-Being Measures

Perceived Intrinsic Measures	Life Sat.	Pos. Aff.	Neg. Aff.	Openness
Spontaneous Measures				
Total # of Intrinsic Reasons	.23***	.15*	-.10	.06
Total Number of Reasons	.08	.15*	-.02	.16*
Percentage of Intrinsic Reasons	.21**	.08	-.11	-.002
Total Number of Extrinsic Reasons	-.12	.03	.07	.14
Elicited Measures				
Total Number of Intrinsic Reasons	.18**	-.05	-.07	.16*
Total Number of Reasons	.05	-.07	-.05	.08
Percentage of Intrinsic Reasons	.20**	-.04	-.05	.16*
Total Number of Extrinsic Reasons	-.18**	-.02	.04	-.11

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Means, Standard Deviations, and Contrasts for Life Satisfaction by Group

Perceived Intrinsic Measures	<u>n</u>	Life Satisfaction
Spontaneous Measures		
Total Number of Intrinsic Reasons		
Group1 (0 reasons)	48	21.65 (5.95)a
Group2 (1-2 reasons)	60	22.90 (5.84)a,b
Group3 (3 or more reasons)	28	24.79 (6.48)b
Ratio of Intrinsic Reasons to Total Reasons		
Group1 (.00)	48	21.65 (5.95)a
Group2 (.01-.29)	46	22.96 (5.94)a,b
Group3 (.33-1.0)	41	24.39 (6.00)b
Elicited Measures		
Total Number of Intrinsic Reasons		
Group1 (2 or fewer reasons)	42	20.95 (5.92)a
Group2 (3-4 reasons)	51	23.86 (5.18)b
Group3 (5 or more reasons)	43	23.49 (6.86)b
Ratio of Intrinsic Reasons to Total Reasons		
Group1 (.00-.58)	42	21.60 (5.73)a
Group2 (.60-78)	39	22.56 (5.83)a,b
Group3 (.80-1.0)	54	24.11 (6.39)b
Total Number of Extrinsic Reasons		
Group1 (0 reasons)	34	24.12 (6.49)a
Group2 (1-2 reasons)	76	22.92 (5.78)a,b
Group3 (3 or more reasons)	26	20.96 (6.13)b

Note: Different subscript letters represent significant differences between comparison groups $p < .05$.

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

As predicted, in this study, there was a consistent relationship between perceiving intrinsic value in predominantly extrinsically motivated behavior and psychological well-being in terms of life satisfaction. The more that people spontaneously perceived this intrinsic value, the more they tended to have higher scores on life satisfaction, and the people who do this the most were clearly more satisfied than the people who did not do this at all. In addition, when people were asked explicitly to try to perceive intrinsic value in these otherwise extrinsic behaviors, there was a similarly consistent relationship between the ability to do so and life satisfaction. In this case, which tests the ability more so than the act itself, those who had difficulty with the task-- by coming up with less than even one intrinsic reason per behavior or by generating extrinsic reasons for why they might "want" to perform the behavior that they did-- were least satisfied with life. Furthermore, both the total number and percent of intrinsic reasons listed for the spontaneous and elicited conditions were correlated, .35 and .33, $ps < .001$ respectively, supporting the notion that people with the ability to perceive intrinsic motivation also do so more spontaneously and vice versa.

Although the positive and negative affect well-being measures did not yield this positive relationship with perceiving intrinsic motivation, it is possible that the relationship still is worthy of discussion. It should be noted that the Positive Affect / Negative Affect scale is not a simple measure of happiness or depression. It measures a wide range of different emotions, including being interested, alert, inspired, active, proud, nervous, scared, afraid, and ashamed. Perceiving intrinsic value may not affect the degree to which people experience the wide range of emotions covered by this scale. There is no reason to expect that perceiving one's shoulds as wants has any influence on whether people feel scared or inspired or ashamed. However, these two scales were strongly related to life satisfaction. In fact, the measures of life satisfaction, positive affect, and negative affect were strongly associated, perhaps supporting an indirect relationship.

Openness seems only to have a marginal relationship with perceived intrinsic motivation, specifically when elicited. This marginal relationship between openness and

elicited intrinsic motivation adds some support to the argument that the elicited measure of perceived intrinsic motivation served primarily as a measure of ability, as only the elicited condition yielded this marginal relationship. Although openness was not considered a true dependent variable, there was cause to believe that openness should contribute more strongly to the ability to perceive intrinsic motivation. One possible explanation for the lack of a stronger effect is simply that openness is only a small part in a larger factor that is the ability to perceive intrinsic motivation. Perhaps a different measure of "openness," including not only flexible perceptions, but also the ability or the motivation to make positive counterfactuals and other beneficial perceptions, might be more strongly associated with the ability to perceive intrinsic value in otherwise extrinsic behaviors.

There appeared to be no consistent or strong relationship between the approach and avoidance measure and any of the other psychological measures in the study. Most surprising is the failure of this study to replicate the number of prior studies demonstrating a strong relationship between people's strivings and their psychological well-being. Previous research has shown people's strivings to be related to measures of greater optimism, less depression, greater life satisfaction, greater self-fulfillment, and so on (Coats et al., 1996; Emmons, 1996; Emmons & Kaiser, in press). The failure here to replicate this relationship with life satisfaction, positive affect, negative affect and openness, calls into question the generalizability and strength of the relationship between strivings and psychological well-being. It also makes any interpretation of the relationship between people's strivings and the degree to which they perceive intrinsic motivation in their "should" behaviors difficult. This study found no relationship between people's strivings and perceived intrinsic motivation, and this lack of any significant finding is impossible to pull apart from its failure to replicate previous findings of a relationship between strivings and psychological well-being.

The most striking finding is that people can see very similar behaviors in very different ways, and this seems to have important implications for their personal life satisfaction. This is to say that not all extrinsic behaviors come with the same perceived motivational forces. People do have the ability to perceive intrinsic value-- "wants"-- even

in their more mundane, predominantly extrinsic behaviors. Still others see their extrinsic behaviors as just that-- "shoulds".

However, an important question remains unanswered, and that is the causal nature of the relationship between perceived intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction. If it just the case that satisfied people find ways to maintain their satisfaction, or even just have a more positive outlook reflected in the perceived intrinsic motivation task, then the implications are somewhat less striking. If, though, people's perceptions of value in their behaviors can aid in increasing life satisfaction, then these findings are of particular importance. For example, in the domain of health psychology, and specifically the research on loss and coping, it seems particularly relevant to know whether people can rebuild their psychological well-being by focusing on issues pertaining to their own perceived intrinsic motivation. Further study must be conducted to separate out the casual nature of the relationship between perceived intrinsic motivation and life satisfaction. It does seem logical that the causal link between these two variables works in both directions and that, in fact, both directional relationships are probably true at some level. Ideally, people first might be able to learn to perceive value in their intrinsic behaviors until their life satisfaction increases. Then they might learn to perform this task more spontaneously, with their increased life satisfaction aiding in their seeing value in their behaviors. It is at least possible that such a circular momentum could be sustained until people actually gain solid benefits to their psychological well-being.

One specific aspect of the PIM task was that the participants were able to select their own three behaviors from their past week. Although they were limited to their past week and were required to discuss three separate behaviors, there might be something to the nature of the types of behaviors that people recall. If certain behaviors are easier to see intrinsically than others, what does it mean psychologically that people might differentially recall certain types of behaviors? Future studies might examine the use of this exercise with the same behaviors for each participant held constant, or might examine the specific types of behaviors that people generated. It should be emphasized, though, that one of the advantages of using a fairly homogeneous group of college students, in terms of their daily

activities, was that for the most part behaviors were fairly similar in nature, even if their perceptions of those behaviors varied.

Another interesting set of questions and potential criticisms falls around the general nature of appreciation. For example, how does appreciation for aspects of life other than behaviors affect life satisfaction? When other aspects can be appreciated in life, are there even greater implications for learning to perceive value in these things? Also, can the ability to perceive intrinsic value be learned or taught or is it just something that might be equivalent to specific personality factors? How may the different strategies for perceiving value be categorized, and how do these different categories compare to one another in effectiveness for increasing psychological well-being?

Finally, future research might examine explicitly which tools best aid in perceiving oughts as wants. This research suggests that there are indeed a number of different aids, including the perception of scarcity and loss. Even more so were a number of different ways people were able to focus on positive aspects of the task itself and away from their own evaluation and anxieties. Why are some people better able to remove their focus from themselves and onto the task? Task involvement has been demonstrated clearly to be related to intrinsic motivation (Elliot & Harackiewicz, 1996). Perhaps there are methods or strategies that help people become more involved with the aspects of the task and less with the evaluation of themselves. Maybe the key to greater life satisfaction lies with, as one participant put it, seeing even the most mundane extrinsic behaviors as “positive distractions”.

One thing that is certain from this research is that there are still many questions left to be answered and the pursuit of their answers seems a meritorious one. Although this research only skims the surface of a much larger contextual paradigm examining people's behaviors and the effects of how they perceive them, it is a solid place from which to begin an in-depth examination of this phenomenon. Although people may not always have a sense of personal value in all of their pursuits, they still may find the joy of rediscovering even some of life's more simple pleasures.

APPENDIX
INSTRUCTIONS, QUESTIONS, AND MEASURES

One way to describe a person's personality is to consider his or her goals and strivings. We are interested in the things that you typically or characteristically are trying to do in your everyday behavior. We are going to ask you to list your goals and strivings on the following pages. Here are a few examples:

Trying to be more outgoing. or Trying to not be overly shy.

Trying to avoid forcing my ideas on others. or Trying to be patient with others.

Notice that these strivings are phrased in terms of "trying to..." regardless of whether the person is actually successful. For example, a person might "try to get others to like them" without necessarily being successful.

These strivings may be fairly broad such as "Help the environment" or more specific, such as "Do well in school." Also note that the strivings can be positive or negative. That is, they may be about something you want to obtain, or something that you would rather avoid. Also, the strivings must refer to a repeating, recurring goal, not a one-time goal. For example, "trying to sell fifty items today" is only a one-time goal, but "trying to distribute my crafts widely" is a recurring goal.

Please do not mentally compare your answers with those that you think others might give. We want to know what you think. Be as honest and objective as possible. Do not just simply give socially desirable strivings or strivings that you think you "ought" to have. Remember, your name will not be on this form, and no one in this study will see your list.

You might find it useful to think about goals in different domains such as work, school, with your family, with your friends, or with your health. Think about all of your desires, goals, wants and hopes in these different areas. When writing your list of strivings, you might want you use one or more of the following sentence-starters to help to get a feel for the type of responses we are looking for.

It is important to me to _____

It is important to me not to _____

It is important to me to try to _____

It is important to me to try not to _____

It is important to me to avoid _____

It is important to me to obtain _____

On the following page you will find room to write your strivings for yourself. Write as many goals for each as you wish, but we ask that you try to write down at least 10. Take your time, and make sure to think before you begin writing.

Read each of the 24 statements. Then decide how much you agree or disagree with each using the following scale. Fill in each blank with the number that corresponds to your response.

Strongly
disagree
1

disagree
2

neutral
3

agree
4

Strongly
agree
5

1. ____ Without strong emotions, life would be uninteresting to me.
2. ____ I'm pretty set in my ways.
3. ____ I rarely experience strong emotions.
4. ____ How I feel about things is important to me.
5. ____ I enjoy working on "mind-twister"-type puzzles.
6. ____ I experience a wide range of feelings or emotions.
7. ____ I seldom pay attention to my feelings of the moment.
8. ____ I often enjoy playing with theories or abstract ideas.
9. ____ I find it easy to empathize-- to feel myself what others are feeling.
10. ____ I think it's interesting to learn and develop new hobbies.
11. ____ Once I find the right way to do something, I stick to it.
12. ____ I enjoy solving problems or puzzles.
13. ____ I often try new or foreign foods.
14. ____ I find philosophical arguments boring.
15. ____ I prefer to spend my time in familiar surroundings.
16. ____ I sometimes lose interest when people talk about very abstract, theoretical matters.
17. ____ Sometimes I make changes around the house just to try something different.
18. ____ I have little interest in speculating on the nature of the universe or the human condition.
19. ____ On vacation, I prefer going back to a tried and true spot.
20. ____ I have a lot of intellectual curiosity.
21. ____ I follow the same route when I go someplace.
22. ____ Odd things-- like certain scents or the names of distant places-- can evoke strong moods in me.
23. ____ I have a wide range of intellectual interests.
24. ____ I seldom notice the moods or feelings that different environments produce.

This scale consists of a number of words that describe certain feelings and emotions. Read each item and then mark the appropriate answer in the space next to that word. Please, indicate to what extent you generally feel this way, that is, how you feel on average. Use the following scale to record your answers.

very slightly or not at all	a little	moderately	quite a bit	extremely
1	2	3	4	5

- | | |
|--------------------|------------------|
| _____ interested | _____ irritable |
| _____ distressed | _____ alert |
| _____ excited | _____ ashamed |
| _____ upset | _____ inspired |
| _____ strong | _____ nervous |
| _____ guilty | _____ determined |
| _____ scared | _____ attentive |
| _____ hostile | _____ jittery |
| _____ enthusiastic | _____ active |
| _____ proud | _____ afraid |

Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate number on the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Slightly disagree	Neutral	Slightly agree	agree	Strongly agree
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

1. _____ In most ways my life is close to my ideal.
2. _____ The conditions of my life are excellent.
3. _____ I am satisfied with my life.
4. _____ So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.
5. _____ If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

We would like you to think about things you did during this past week. There are generally a number of things we do because we really feel we should or ought to do them, and not truly because we want to. **Please review your behaviors during this past week and choose three things you did primarily because you felt you should have rather than because you really wanted to at the time.**

In each of the three spaces below, please describe each situation or event and the behavior you engaged in because you felt you should have done so. (Please provide as much detail as you think necessary to allow another person to understand what you did. If you need more writing space, you may continue on the back of the page.)

Situation #1. This past week **I did the following** because it was something I felt I **should** or **ought** to have done:

Situation #2. This past week **I did the following** because it was something I felt I **should** or **ought** to have done:

Situation #3. This past week **I did the following** because it was something I felt I **should** or **ought** to have done:

We are interested in learning more about your thoughts regarding why you engaged in each of the behaviors described on the previous page. In other words, in each case, why do you think you engaged in the behavior?

In the spaces below, please explain the reason or reasons for doing each of the three behaviors previously described.

Situation #1 (as described on the previous page). I feel that I engaged in this behavior for the following reason(s):

Situation #2 (as described on the previous page). I feel that I engaged in this behavior for the following reason(s):

Situation #3 (as described on the previous page). I feel that I engaged in this behavior for the following reason(s):

Now we would like to ask you to try a mental exercise in which you think somewhat differently about the same behaviors that you described on page one. Please imagine that you are about to engage in the same behaviors in the exact same situations that you described earlier. This time, however, instead of feeling you should have done what you did, we want you to think about the situations in ways that lead you to want to do what you did. In other words, **imagine how you could think about the same situations so that you are more likely to want to engage in the behavior than feel you should or ought to do so.** In each case, please provide as many new interpretations as you can think of for the situations you presented earlier.

Situation #1 (as described on the previous pages). I want to engage in this behavior because I now think of the situation in the following way(s):

Situation #2 (as described on the previous pages). I want to engage in this behavior because I now think of the situation in the following way(s):

Situation #3 (as described on the previous pages). I want to engage in this behavior because I now think of the situation in the following way(s):

Background Information

Please provide the following general information about your background. This information will be used only for statistical purposes.

1. Sex: _____ Female _____ Male

2. Age: _____

3. Year in school: _____

4. Race/Ethnicity: _____

5. Religion: _____

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