Interpersonal Features Associated with Feelings of Not Mattering Assessed With The Anti-Mattering Scale: An Analysis of Interpersonal Closeness, Connection, and Conflict

Taryn Nepon, PhD[1,2]*, Gordon L. Flett, PhD[1,3]

[1]York University, Canada
[2]**ORCiD**: 0000-0002-0902-2164
[3]**ORCiD**: 0000-0002-4502-6285
*Corresponding Author: Taryn Nepon, tarynn@yorku.ca

Abstract. *Objectives:* The current research sought to address the need to highlight the relational aspects of individual differences in anti-mattering with feelings of not mattering assessed with the Anti-Mattering Scale. Although anti-mattering is recognized as a risk and vulnerability factor, several issues involving anti-mattering from an interpersonal perspective remain to be investigated. *Method:* In the current study, a sample of 103 university students completed the Anti-Mattering Scale and self-report measures of personal goals, closeness, conflict, disconnection, and life hassles over the past week. *Results:* Correlational analyses yielded support for the relational correlates of anti-mattering. Elevated levels of anti-mattering were correlated with less closeness and greater interpersonal conflict, hassles, and disconnection. Anti-mattering was also correlated with greater self-image goals, suggesting an ego-oriented focus. *Conclusion and Implications:* Overall, our results attest to the validity of the Anti-Mattering Scale regarding its links with the relational component of the nomological network of the mattering construct. Our discussion includes a focus on how and why feelings of not mattering are seemingly associated with negative relationship tendencies that can amplify relationship problems and levels of loneliness, stress, and distress.

Keywords: Mattering, Relationships, Conflict, Stress, Compassion, Loneliness, Disconnection.

Introduction

Mattering has been identified as a construct that matters in terms of its links with consequential outcomes involving the individual, the community, and society in general. As it is conceptualized, mattering is a key element that ties together the self and social identity (see Elliott et al., 2004). Mattering was first introduced by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981). They focused initially on feelings of mattering as an aspect of the self-concept centered around people feeling like others are paying attention and have shown an interest in the individual, along with other people coming to depend on the individual who then gets the feeling of making a difference in other people's lives. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) proposed that we all have a need to matter and this applies across the lifespan. Moreover, this need to matter is distinguishable from self-esteem in terms of its links with various indicators of well-being and life outcomes. There has been exponential growth in mattering research and public awareness of the construct over the past decade and this is due, in part, to its apparent relevance and salience as we deal with contemporary challenges (see, for instance, Casale & Flett, 2020; Flett & Zangeneh, 2020).

Given that mattering is a psychosocial construct with a relational focus, mattering should be broadly relevant when studying interpersonal relationships and associated processes and mechanisms. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) proposed that, "mattering represents a compelling social obligation and a powerful source of social integration" (p. 165). As such, feelings of mattering ought to be reflected in close and warm interactions with others, while feelings of not mattering should reflect defensive tendencies and keeping at a distance. Existing research tends to focus on mattering and well-being and there is limited research on the interpersonal elements linked with individual differences in mattering. Some of the limited research conducted thus far is summarized below.

Given these observations, the current study focuses jointly on the psychometric features of the Anti-Mattering Scale in university students and related substantive issues from a relational perspective. Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, and associates (2022) introduced the five-item Anti-Mattering Scale. This emphasis on anti-mattering grew out of Schlossberg's (1989) distinction between mattering versus marginalization. Respondents are asked to provide self-reports to items that tap feelings of insignificance and being invisible to others. People with a high level of anti-mattering carry around a negative identity centered around the feeling of being overlooked as if they don't count to other people. Awareness of anti-mattering is limited at present, but research on anti-mattering is growing and it is a term that has now entered the public consciousness. Anti-mattering has been conceptualized by Flett (2018) as being related to, but distinguishable from, positive feelings of mattering as assessed by measures such as the General Mattering Scale (see Marcus & Rosenberg, 1987). Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, and associates (2022) argued that just as it is the case that optimism can and should be distinguished from pessimism, and hope is not simply the

opposite of hopelessness, mattering and anti-mattering are also not endpoints of the same continuum. They showed empirically that anti-mattering is indeed unique and distinct from other mattering measures and this is likely because of the unique motivational, emotional, and cognitive orientations that accompany low perceived social worth and the sense of simply not being regarded by other people.

The initial psychometric article introducing the Anti-Mattering Scale (AMS) described research evaluating its characteristics and features in four samples of university students and one sample of high school students. Confirmatory factor analyses established that this inventory has one factor that is empirically distinguishable from general positive feelings of mattering to others. Moreover, analyses showed that AMS scores predicted significant variance in key distress outcome measures beyond general mattering. Research with the adolescent sample further attested to the psychometric merits of the AMS and established positive links in high school students between anti-mattering and insecure attachment, self-criticism, dependency, and low well-being.

The psychometric properties of the Anti-Mattering Scale have been assessed in other samples of participants from Canada, China, England, and Italy (Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022; Giangrasso et al., 2022; Hill & Madigan, 2022; Liu et al., 2023). Other research has established links between anti-mattering and reduced life satisfaction (e.g., Giangrasso et al., 2022), as well as between anti-mattering and measures of depression and suicide ideation (see Deas et al., 2023; Etherson et al., 2022; Krygsman et al., 2022) and exposure to perceived stigma (e.g., Shannon et al., 2020). Other research indicates that it is meaningful to assess anti-mattering in the educational domain (see Maftei et al., 2023).

These advances notwithstanding, there are several issues pertaining to the psychometric attributes of this instrument and the characteristics of anti-mattering that are still largely unexplored. The current study considers anti-mattering in terms of its links with psychosocial characteristics and correlates. Most research with the AMS has been focused on and dominated by an emphasis on how anti-mattering relates to poor psychological adjustment. It is vital to provide a balanced view that considers anti-mattering from a relational perspective that considers specific tendencies and ways of relating to other people and interacting with them.

A recent review paper (see Flett, 2022) contains a segment that examines mattering from a relational perspective and advances the argument that mattering is associated with consequential outcomes at the relationship level. People with a view of their interpersonal world dominated by the feeling and cognition that they don't matter to other people should have characteristic interpersonal tendencies that reflect this sense of not being interpersonally valued. Evidence is limited overall but is in keeping with this conclusion. Qualitative and quantitative research conducted with young adults established that feelings of not mattering in relationships are associated with lower relationship quality and relationship

satisfaction (Mak & Marshall, 2004) and levels of mattering are higher among married people versus divorced people (Milner et al., 2016). Mattering is linked strongly with self-reported levels of liking, love, and friendship (Myers & Bechtel, 2004) and more recent research suggests that mattering and love are psychometrically linked (see Holden et al., 2018).

Initial research from a dyadic perspective indicated that wives who feel like they matter to their husbands endorse more positive views of the division of labor (see Kawamura & Brown, 2010; LaChance-Grzela, 2012; LaChance-Grzela et al., 2019). Qualitative research in couples who have experienced trauma suggested that relationship quality rests largely on beliefs, behavior, and partner interactions that convey mattering, trust, and respect (Braughton, et al., 2022). This work suggests that mattering may be central to the resiliency of the couple as they cope with and adapt to trauma.

Other recent research indicates that perceived mattering in couples is linked positively with communication quality and sexual frequency (see Park et al., 2023). Earlier work with 422 currently dating couples indicated that mattering to one's dating partner mediated the link between conflict and depressive symptoms (see Nash et al., 2015). Importantly, a broad initial study conducted by Schieman and Taylor (2001) with adults from Toronto showed that lower scores on the General Mattering Scale were associated with specific relationship outcomes including strain in terms of the relationship with one's partner, work-home conflict, and parental role strain. Subsequent research indicated that lower feelings of mattering among couples in China are associated robustly with reported levels of marital dissatisfaction (Sebastian, 2018).

It has been proposed that feelings of not mattering will be linked with avoidance tendencies in interpersonal situations (see Flett, 2018). It is also quite plausible that people who feel that others are going out of their way to make them feel unimportant will harbour resentment, anger, and hostility that should be reflected by interpersonal stress and conflict. Indeed, the feeling of not mattering, as reflected by high scores on the AMS, likely contributes to the neurotic tendency proposed by Horney (1950) that can involve simultaneously moving against, away from, and towards people. Flett (2018, 2022) also discussed people with a need to matter who wish to simultaneously approach people but also defensively avoid people.

Given these observations, we felt it was important to re-examine the validity of the AMS through further investigation of its interpersonal correlates. This work focused on five variables with an interpersonal focus – interpersonal goals, interpersonal closeness, interpersonal conflict, interpersonal connection, and daily interpersonal hassles. These various measures represent tapping a variety of issues on the interpersonal front. First, does a feeling of not mattering to others become reflected in having fewer compassionate goals and more self-image goals for other people? This possibility has not been considered thus far in the empirical literature, but it could be the case that people who feel like they are invisible and unimportant to others may become less compassionate toward others and

instead become more ego-involved and self-focused. It is possible that resentment stemming from a sense of being unimportant and invisible to others results in a cynical orientation that undermines the capacity to be benevolent and compassionate. Also, a sense of entitlement that seems to breed hostility and conflict has been linked with self-image goals (see Moeller et al., 2009). Self-image goals involve being focused on gaining or obtaining something for the self and defending desired or idealized images of the self. Examples of how they are assessed are provided below in the description of measures.

The second goal of the current study was to examine anti-mattering as a potential factor associated negatively with interpersonal closeness. Two studies thus far indicate that mattering is linked with greater reported closeness to friends and family (see Bonhag & Froese, 2022; Demir et al., 2011). Although anti-mattering has not been studied thus far in terms of reported closeness, it should be the case that anti-mattering is linked significantly with lower levels of closeness based on ratings of recent life experiences.

The third goal of the current study was to examine the association between anti-mattering and reports of interpersonal conflict in daily life. Exposure to interpersonal conflict is typically associated with stress, distress, and lower well-being (e.g., Rogers et al., 2018; Wickham et al., 2016). To our knowledge, this specific theme has not been assessed in prior work, but there are some indirect indicators suggesting that anti-mattering should be linked with reports of conflict. Specifically, research has linked mattering with less relational aggression in friendships (see Weber & Robinson Kurpius, 2011) and less aggression in general (see Karaman et al., 2023). The current study examines anti-mattering and reports of conflict experienced in the previous week.

The fourth goal of this study was to examine the link between anti-mattering and current reports of connection versus social disconnection. Past research with university students has linked anti-mattering with a greater unmet need for connection (see Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022). In addition, there is extensive work linking feelings of low mattering and loneliness, including research across several studies showing that higher scores on the AMS are associated with loneliness (see Besser et al., 2022; Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022; MacDonald et al., 2020; McComb et al., 2020). The current work came at this from a different approach and in a more specific way by having students report on their unmet needs for connection over the past week with a measure deemed to reflect threatened needs for connection in recent life experiences. Given the particular relevance of anti-mattering to perceived disconnection, we also conducted an analysis that sought to establish anti-mattering as a significant unique predictor of social disconnection after taking into account individual differences in reported levels of conflict and closeness.

Finally, the current study investigated the extent to which anti-mattering is associated with the experience of more frequent daily hassles

with an interpersonal focus. Research has established that low levels of general mattering are associated with greater perceived stress (e.g., Dixon & Kurpius, 2008; Lemon & Watson, 2011), though an association has not always been found when these variables have been examined (see Gibson & Myers, 2006). The association between anti-mattering and stress is just beginning to receive attention and initial research suggests a general link between anti-mattering and perceived stress (see Giangrasso et al., 2022; Hill & Madigan, 2022). A central focus of the current research was to evaluate the extent to which the link between anti-mattering and stress extends to the reported experience of daily interpersonal hassles.

To summarize, in the current study, we conducted an extended analysis of the relational correlates of the AMS to gain a better sense of the interpersonal worlds and tendencies of people who tend to feel invisible and overlooked. Specifically, we tested the hypotheses that anti-mattering is linked with interpersonal stress and conflict and it is also associated with less closeness and connection with other people. We also evaluated whether anti-mattering would relate to interpersonal goal orientation in terms of the pursuit of compassionate goals focused on promoting the well-being of others.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

The sample comprised 103 university students (89 women, 14 men). Their mean age was 19.4 years ($SD = 3.4$). Students were recruited through the undergraduate research participant pool at York University. Students received credit towards their final introductory psychology courses for their participation. The majority of participants (65%) were in their first year of university, with 12.6% in their second year, and 8.7% in their third year. The most commonly reported intended majors were psychology (29.1%) and kinesiology (15.5%).

This study was reviewed and approved for compliance to research ethics protocols by the Human Participants in Research Committee at York University (STU 2013-008). After providing their informed consent, participants completed the following self-report measures over the Internet:

The Anti-Mattering Scale (AMS; Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022). This 5-item measure assesses the degree to which people report that they do not matter to others (e.g., "How much do you feel like you don't matter?"). Items are rated on a scale that ranges from 1 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*), with higher scores indicating higher levels of anti-mattering. Research has shown that the AMS is unidimensional and is linked with, but distinguishable from, mattering and also possesses good reliability (Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022).

Compassionate and Self-Image Goals Scale (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). This 18-item scale assesses compassionate goals (e.g., "be supportive of others") and self-image goals (e.g., "get others to recognize or acknowledge your positive qualities"). In the current study,

these goals were assessed in terms of academic goals and respondents were asked to keep this context in mind. Compassion goals tap such themes as being supportive of others and having compassion for their mistakes. Self-image goals emphasize themes such as convincing others you are right and avoiding showing your weaknesses. There is a strong focus on avoidance (e.g., avoid being rejected by others) in the original measure, so we supplemented the items with four additional self-image goal items to increase the scale content pertaining to approach goals (i.e., "let others see that you are capable," "do things to try to earn the approval of others," "display your strengths," and "do things to establish your worth to others"). These extra items were used in prior research (Nepon et al., 2016). Both subscales possess good psychometric properties (Crocker & Canevello, 2008), and the additional items have sufficient reliability (Nepon et al., 2016).

Conflict and Closeness Reports (Crocker & Canevello, 2008). Participants were asked to consider the past week and provide single-item ratings of conflict (i.e., "Have conflicts with people?") and closeness (i.e., "Feel close to others?") over the past week on a scale from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Always*). These items were developed and used by Crocker and colleagues (2009). They showed that greater closeness was associated with chronic compassionate goals, while greater conflict was associated with chronic self-focused goals, presumably due to the excessive ego orientation and defensiveness that accompanies a self-focused ego orientation. These measures have been used broadly in other research (e.g., Duarte & Pinto-Gouveia, 2015). Greater interpersonal conflict as assessed with this measure has been linked with narcissistic entitlement (see Moeller et al., 2009).

Need-Threat Scale Assessing Social Connection (Eisenberger et al., 2007). Evaluations of the past week included responding to three items tapping social disconnection and the unmet need for connection and relatedness over the previous seven days. We used the same time interval used to assess levels of conflict and closeness. The three items were adapted from Williams et al. (2000). They were as follows: "This week, I generally felt isolated from others," "This week, I generally felt connected to others (reversed)," and "This week, I generally felt accepted by others (reversed)." Items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*). In the present study, this measure possessed good internal consistency, with an alpha of .83.

Brief College Student Hassles Scale (Blankstein et al., 1991). We used 13 items from this scale, which each represent a specific hassle that college students may experience (e.g., "Future job prospects"). We also added another six items from Kohn et al. (1990), including "Lower grades than you hoped for" and "Dissatisfaction with school." We computed a total hassles score, but also separate subscales for interpersonal hassles (e.g., "Family expectations") and achievement hassles (e.g., "Academic deadlines"). The following definition of hassles was provided to respondents: "Hassles are irritants that can range from minor annoyances to

fairly major pressures, problems, or difficulties. They can occur few or many times." Respondents were then asked to rate each hassle on a scale ranging from 1 (*No hassle; Not at all persistent*) to 7 *(Extremely persistent; high frequency)*. Respondents were asked to indicate the persistence of each hassle over the past week. The psychometric properties of the original version of this scale have been well-established (see Blankstein et al., 1991).

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and alpha coefficients for all of the measures in the current study. All of the alpha coefficients were .71 or higher. The mean score on the AMS is comparable to the score obtained with other student samples (see Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022).

Table 1

Means, Standard Deviations, and Alpha Coefficients for All Measures

Variables	M	SD	Alphas
1. Anti-Mattering	10.57	4.19	.90
2. Self-Image Goals	3.13	0.68	.87
3. Compassionate Goals	3.45	0.75	.81
4. Closeness	3.40	1.05	–
5. Conflict	2.10	1.04	–
6. Total Hassles	68.53	18.85	.86
7. Achievement Hassles	27.66	8.50	.80
8. Interpersonal Hassles	12.07	5.36	.71
9. Social Disconnection	10.04	3.91	.83

Note: $N = 103$.

Correlational Analyses

Table 2 displays the correlations among anti-mattering, self-image and compassionate goals for academics, closeness and conflict, hassles, and social disconnection. The results indicated that anti-mattering was positively correlated with self-image goals, but in contrast to expectations, it was not significantly correlated with compassionate goals.

Analyses of the one-item relational measures indicated that anti-mattering was negatively correlated with closeness. In addition, anti-mattering was positively correlated with conflict.

The results are also shown in Table 2 for interpersonal hassles, achievement hassles, and total hassles. The correlational analyses showed that anti-mattering was positively linked with interpersonal hassles, as expected. However, anti-mattering was also associated significantly with achievement hassles and total hassles.

Finally, anti-mattering was positively associated with social disconnection as was expected. Notably, this correlation of .47 with anti-mattering was the strongest correlation with the AMS.

As seen in Table 2, self-image goals were positively associated with compassionate goals. Self-image goals were also positively linked with total hassles as well as the interpersonal hassles subscale. Compassionate goals were negatively correlated with social disconnection. Closeness was also negatively linked with social disconnection. Moreover, conflict was positively correlated with total hassles, interpersonal hassles, as well as social disconnection.

Lastly, interpersonal hassles were associated significantly with social disconnection. However, achievement hassles and social disconnection were not significantly associated.

Table 2

Correlations Among Anti-Mattering, Self-Image and Compassionate Goals, Closeness and Conflict, Total Hassles, Achievement and Interpersonal Hassles, and Social Disconnection

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Anti-Mattering	–								
2. Self-Image	.23*	–							
3. Compassionate	.14	.53**	–						
4. Closeness	-.36**	-.01	.17	–					
5. Conflict	.21*	.09	-.03	-.08	–				
6. Total Hassles	.27**	.33**	.18	-.14	.21*	–			
7. Achievement	.22*	.18	.03	-.13	.17	.81**	–		
8. Interpersonal	.30**	.35**	.13	-.10	.23*	.71**	.40**	–	
9. Disconnection	.47**	-.08	-.24*	-.67**	.28**	.17	.11	.26**	–

Note. $N = 103$. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, two-tailed. The abbreviations are: Self-Image = Self-Image Goals; Compassionate = Compassionate Goals; Achievement = Achievement Hassles; Interpersonal = Interpersonal Hassles; and Disconnection = Social Disconnection.

Regression Analysis

Finally, a hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine if anti-mattering predicts social disconnection, above and beyond interpersonal hassles, closeness, conflicts, as well as gender. First, we screened for normality of the outcome variable (i.e., social disconnection) and the distribution did not differ significantly from normal. This analysis controlled for gender. This regression was performed with gender entered into the first predictor block, with interpersonal hassles, closeness, and conflict entered into the second predictor block, followed by anti-mattering in the third predictor block, and with social disconnection as the outcome (see Table 3). The block with gender did not significantly predict variance in social disconnection, $F(1, 101) = 0.48$, $p = .489$. The block with interpersonal hassles, closeness, and conflict significantly predicted an additional 51.3% of the variance in social disconnection, $F(4, 98) = 26.29$, $p < .001$. Lastly, the block with anti-mattering significantly predicted an additional 3.6% of the variance in social disconnection, $F(5, 97) = 24.02$, p

$< .01$. Thus, anti-mattering predicted social disconnection, above and beyond interpersonal hassles, closeness, conflict, as well as gender. Regarding individual predictors, interpersonal hassles, closeness, and conflict all uniquely contributed to social disconnection in the expected directions. Moreover, anti-mattering emerged as a significant unique predictor of social disconnection.

Table 3

Summary of Hierarchical Multiple Regression for Variables Predicting Social Disconnection

Variable	R^2	ΔR^2	B	SE B	ß
Step 1	.005				
Gender			-.78	1.13	-.07
Step 2	.518***	.513***			
Interpersonal Hassles			.11	.05	.15*
Closeness			-2.35	.26	-.63***
Conflict			.73	.27	.19**
Step 3	.553***	.036**			
Anti-Mattering			.20	.07	.22**

Note. *$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$.

Discussion and Implications

In the current article, we provided a summary and update of key developments thus far in the study of mattering and interpersonal phenomena. It is evident thus far that mattering to others as a core and unique element of the self-concept relates to many key elements in the interpersonal worlds of most people, but there is a need for an expanded focus in order to enhance the understanding of individual differences in feeling important versus feeling unimportant to other people. Our current work reflects the view that the feelings of anti-mattering is a vital element

that provides a window into how relationships are going, but also how people see themselves in terms of the social basis of a sense of self-worth.

On one level, the current research was designed to evaluate the characteristics and correlates of a relatively new measure known as the Anti-Mattering Scale with a particular emphasis on how individual differences in anti-mattering relate to various relational indices and the processes and tendencies they represent. Our results provided additional support of the reliability and validity of this measure. The main unique aspect of this research was our focus on examining the AMS in terms of the interpersonal side of its nomological network. Our analyses showed that anti-mattering was associated significantly with reports of social disconnection based on responses to a brief measure of the degree of connection or lack of connection with people over the past week. Moreover, the AMS was linked with less closeness with others based on an assessment of the closeness to other people over the past week. This pattern of results is consistent with previous evidence linking lower AMS scores with higher levels of loneliness and an unmet need for connection (e.g., Flett, Nepon, Goldberg, et al., 2022)

Other results showed uniquely that students with higher AMS scores also reported more conflict with other people. This finding is in keeping with research indicating that lower perceived levels of mattering are linked to reports of greater conflict (see Nash et al., 2015). People engaged in conflict who carry around a feeling of not mattering and being unimportant to others likely have ways of responding that will not effectively address and may even maintain or escalate any existing conflicts. In addition, emerging adults who feel like they don't matter will, in all likelihood, have heightened stress reactivity in line with documented responses to exposure to interpersonal conflict (Laurent & Powers, 2006). These tendencies would be in keeping with other evidence suggesting that people with lower levels of mattering tend to have emotion regulation deficits (e.g., Giangrasso et al., 2022). However, the current results also point more specifically to likely deficits in terms of interpersonal emotion regulation (see Niven, 2017; Zaki & Williams, 2013).

Additionally, our analyses confirmed that students with higher AMS scores also reported greater interpersonal hassles, which reflects a more general tendency for anti-mattering to be associated with daily hassles. This qualifies past research linking anti-mattering with perceived stress by showing that there are links with daily interpersonal stressors of a minor nature. There was also a smaller positive association with achievement-related hassles. While this may seem of limited practical importance, there is a wealth of evidence that links daily hassles not only with psychological distress, but also with physical health issues (see DeLongis et al., 1982; Tran et al., 2021). It does not bode well for the longevity of those people consumed by feelings of anti-mattering if this is a chronic experience, given other links that exist between health issues and mortality issues and elevated levels of disconnection and loneliness (see Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015).

The links obtained with anti-mattering were strongest with social disconnection and lack of closeness and there was a robust association between lack of closeness and social disconnection based on assessments of how students fared during the previous week. Collectively, these results paint a picture of students with high anti-mattering as young people who feel isolated. They seem to have a tendency to distance themselves from others and are prone to have difficult interactions marked by a failure to establish or maintain a sense of emotional closeness with others. Overall, levels of conflict reported by our participants were relatively small, but these reports were also associated with being a student who feels a sense of not mattering to others. Perhaps for some students, the distance from others is a form of conflict avoidance. These tendencies fit well with the description provided by Horney (1950) of people who simultaneously want to be with others but also move away and against them.

We also evaluated whether anti-mattering would still be associated significantly with levels of social disconnection after taking into account other predictors of the presence versus absence of social connection. Not surprisingly, our hierarchical regression analysis showed that after controlling for gender, lower levels of connection were predicted significantly by reported levels of conflict, closeness, and daily hassles. Importantly, it was still the case that anti-mattering predicted unique variance in levels of connection versus disconnection, over and above the variance attributable to these other interpersonally-based constructs. We believe this finding is quite important in terms of symbolizing the unique role that feelings of not mattering can play in terms of the life dissatisfaction and distress that people will typically experience when the core need for connection and relatedness with others is not being met.

Additional analyses indicated that these tendencies involving anti-mattering did not extend to a tendency to endorse fewer compassionate goals. It would be reasonable for feelings of anti-mattering to result in less compassion toward others and less empathy, but this was not reflected in the goals of the students in this investigation. Perhaps this association was not found because there is indeed still a desire to have positive relationships with other people and be supportive and kind when interacting with them. However, we did find a small but statistically significant link between anti-mattering and self-image goals. This association fits with recent evidence that links anti-mattering with vulnerable narcissism (Flett, Nepon, & Scott, 2023) and how narcissistic students are prone to feelings of not mattering. As noted earlier, self-image goals have been linked with a sense of entitlement and creating hostility and conflict (see Moeller et al., 2009), and this seems antithetical to establishing a sense of mutual mattering and interconnectedness in relationships. Given the apparent sensitivity of narcissistic people to anti-mattering experiences, it is not very surprising to learn that at least some people who report being made to feel like they don't matter to others can develop an ego focus and self-preoccupation with how they are appearing to other people.

Research is needed to explore these associations in people of various backgrounds, and ideally, future research will include a longitudinal component. It is also essential for future research to consider actual interpersonal tendencies in terms of daily assessments. What is especially needed is research that considers whether the reports of less closeness and social disconnection have a veridical element and whether this is reflected in their behavioural patterns and tendencies.

An emphasis on behaviour is useful from another perspective. Many young people experiencing interpersonal conflict and acting in oppositional ways and who distance themselves from others may be struggling with their feelings of not mattering to others. However, perhaps due to anticipated shame, they may be hiding these feelings behind a façade and on the surface, these young people may seem well-adjusted when, in fact, this is not actually the case. Overt behavioural tendencies that reflect distancing and conflict may be vital clues that signal the need to proactively reach out to these young people in ways that show that someone cares and they do indeed matter to at least one other person. Such overtures may be resisted at first by the young person who is anticipating being made to feel insignificant and unimportant, but such attempts should still be appreciated given the core need that young people have to matter to others.

In summary, the current study evaluated the relational correlates of the AMS and found extensive evidence that further supports the validity of the AMS and the construct validity of the mattering construct, but also highlights the potential consequential interpersonal outcomes and processes linked with feelings of not mattering to other people. We found evidence that students with elevated feelings of not mattering to others also report more social disconnection and less closeness to others, as well as more interpersonal conflict and daily hassles. Moreover, the association found between anti-mattering and social disconnection was still evident when these other interpersonal factors were statistically taken into account. It is anticipated that future research will continue to advance our understanding of the interpersonal side of the individual differences in feelings of anti-mattering among emerging adults. Research that focuses on specific relationship contexts is needed, and it is vital that such work injects a dyadic perspective that furthers our understanding of how feelings of not mattering are expressed and experienced in unique ways in relational contexts.

Funding

Conflict of Interest
None.

Informed Consent

All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation (institutional and national) and with the Helsinki Declaration of 1975, as revised in 2000 (5). Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

Authors' contributions

Both authors significantly contributed to the research and preparation of the manuscript.

References

Besser, A., Flett, G. L., Nepon, T., & Zeigler-Hill, V. (2022). Personality, cognition, and adaptability to the COVID-19 pandemic: Associations with loneliness, distress, and positive and negative mood states. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 20(2)*, 971-995. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00421-x

Blankstein, K. R., Flett, G. L., & Koledin, S. (1991). The Brief College Student Hassles Scale: Development, validation, and relation with pessimism. *Journal of College Student Development*, *32*(3), 258–264.

Bonhag, R., & Froese, P. (2022). Sources of mattering for women and men: Gender differences and similarities in feelings of social significance. *Sociological Perspectives*, 65(4) 748–767. https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214211057119

Braughton, J., Mendenhall, T., & Kazlauskaite, V. (2022). Identification of resiliency processes in dual-trauma couples: An exploration of self-reported relational strengths and weaknesses. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy, 14*(S1), S109–S118. https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0001112

Casale, S., & Flett, G. L. (2020). Interpersonally-based fears during the COVID-19 pandemic: Reflections on the fear of missing out and the fear of not mattering constructs. *Clinical Neuropsychiatry: Journal of Treatment Evaluation, 17(2)*, 88–93. https://doi.org/10.36131/CN20200211

Crocker, J., & Canevello, A. (2008). Creating and undermining social support in communal relationships: The role of compassionate and self-image goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *95*, 555–575. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.95.3.555

Crocker, J., Olivier, M.-A., & Nuer, N. (2009). Self-image goals and compassionate goals: Costs and benefits. *Self and Identity, 8*(2-3), 251–269. https://doi.org/10.1080/15298860802505160

Deas, N., Kowalski, R., Finnell, S., Radovic, E., Carroll, H., Robbins, C., Cook, A., Hurley, K., Cote, N., Evans, K., Lorenzo, I., Kiser, K., Mochizuki, G., Mock, M., & Brewer, L. (2023). I just want to matter: Examining the role of anti-mattering in online suicide support communities using natural language processing. *Computers in Human Behavior*, *139*, 107499. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2022.107499

DeLongis, A., Coyne, J. C., Dakof, G., Folkman, S., & Lazarus, R. S. (1982). Relationship of daily hassles, uplifts, and major life events to health status. *Health Psychology, 1*(2), 119–136. https://doi.org/10.1037/0278-6133.1.2.119

Demir, M., Özen, A., Doğan, A., Bilyk, N. A., & Tyrell, F. A. (2011). I matter to my friend, therefore I am happy: Friendship, mattering, and happiness. *Journal of Happiness Studies, 12*(6), 983-1005. doi:10.1007/s10902-010-9240-8

Dixon, S. K., & Kurpius, S. E. R. (2008). Depression and college stress among university undergraduates: Do mattering and self-esteem make a difference? *Journal of College Student Development*, *49*, 412–424.

Duarte, J., & Pinto-Gouveia, J. (2015). Focusing on self or others has different consequences for psychological well-being: A longitudinal study of the effects of distinct interpersonal goals. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology, 34*(9), 809–825. https://doi.org/10.1521/jscp.2015.34.9.809

Eisenberger, N. I., Gable, S. L., & Liberman, M. D. (2007). Functional magnetic resonance

imaging responses relate to differences in real-world social experience. *Emotion*, *7*(4), 745–754. doi:10.1037/1528-3542.7.4.745

Elliott, G. C., Kao, S., & Grant, A. (2004). Mattering: Empirical validation of a social-psychological concept. *Self and Identity*, *3*, 339–354.

Etherson, M.E., Smith, M.M., Hill, A.P., & Flett, G.L. (2022). Feelings of not mattering and depressive symptoms from a temporal perspective: A comparison of the cross-lagged panel model and random-intercept cross-lagged panel model. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment, 40*(1), 60–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211049686

Flett, G. L. (2018). *The psychology of mattering: Understanding the human need to be significant*. Cambridge, MA: Academic Press/Elsevier.

Flett, G. L. (2022). An introduction, review, and conceptual analysis of mattering as an essential construct and an essential way of life. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *40*, 3–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211057640

Flett, G. L., Nepon, T., Goldberg, J. O., Rose, A. L., Atkey, S. K., & Zaki-Azat, J. (2022). The Anti-Mattering Scale: Development, psychometric properties, and associations with well-being and distress measures in adolescents and emerging adults. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *40*(1), 37-59 https://doi.org/10/1177/07342829211050544.

Flett, G. L., Nepon, T., & Scott, X. (2023). The Anti-Mattering Scale versus the General Mattering Scale in pathological narcissism: How an excessive need to matter informs the narcissism and mattering constructs. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *41*(6), 619-633.https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829221136352

Flett, G. L., & Zangeneh, M. (2020). Mattering as a vital support for people during the COVID-19 pandemic: The benefits of feeling and knowing that someone cares during times of crisis. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*, *2(1),* 106–123.

Giangrasso, B., Casale, S., Fioravanti, G., Flett, G. L., & Nepon, T. (2022). Mattering and anti-mattering in emotion regulation and life satisfaction: A mediational analysis of stress and distress during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *40* (1), 125-141. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211056725

Gibson, D. M., & Myers, J. E. (2006). Perceived stress, wellness, and mattering: A profile of first-year citadel cadets. Journal of College Student Development, 47, 647–660. doi:10.1353/csd.2006.0065

Hill, A.P., & Madigan, D.J. (2022): Perfectionism, mattering, stress, and self-regulation of home learning of UK gifted and talented students during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Gifted and Talented International*, *37*(1), 56-63. doi:10.1080/15332276.2022.2033649

Holden, R. R., Lambert, C. E., Bianchini, G., Wong, R. E., Towheed, S., Yeung, C., & Fekken, G. C. (2018). Response surface modeling of how love mitigates the association between a need to belong and suicidality. Personality and Individual Differences, 134, 210-213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2018.06.025

Holt-Lunstad, J., Smith, T. B., Baker, M., Harris, T., & Stephenson, D. (2015). Loneliness and social isolation as risk factors for mortality: A meta-analytic review. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 10*(2), 227–237. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691614568352

Horney, K. (1950). *Neurosis and human growth*. New York: Norton.

Karaman, M. A., Sari, H. I., Vela, J. C., & Balkin, R. S. (2023). Exploring the mediating role of

depression and positive orientation in the relationship between positive psychological factors and aggression among Turkish college students. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 45*, 385-402. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10447-023-09513-4

Kawamura, S., & Brown, S. L. (2010). Mattering and wives' perceived fairness of the division of household labor. *Social Science Research*, *39*, 976–986.

Kohn, P. M., Lafreniere, K., & Gurevich, M. (1990). The Inventory of College Student's Recent Life Experiences: A decontaminated hassles scale for a special population. *Journal of Behavioral Medicine, 13*(6), 619–630. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00844738

Krygsman, A., Farrell, A.H., Brittain, H., & Vaillancourt, T. (2022). Depression symptoms, mattering, and anti-mattering: Longitudinal associations in young adulthood. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, *40*(1), 77–94. https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211050519

LaChance-Grzela, M. (2012). Mattering moderates the link between gender ideology and perceived fairness of the division of household labor. *Interpersona*, *6*, 163–175. doi:10.5964/ijpr.v6i2.98

LaChance-Grzela, M., McGee, S., & Ross-Plourde, M. (2021). Division of family labour and perceived unfairness among mothers: The role of mattering to family members. *Journal of Family Studies*, *27*, 321–335. https://doi.org/10.1080/13229400.2018.1564350

Laurent, H. K., & Powers, S. I. (2006). Social-cognitive predictors of hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal reactivity to interpersonal conflict in emerging adult couples. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *23*(5), 703–720. https://doi.org/10.1177/0265407506065991

Lemon, J. C., & Watson, J. C. (2011). Early identification of potential high school dropouts: An investigation of the relationship among at-risk status, wellness, perceived stress, and mattering. The Journal of At-Risk Issues, 16, 17–23.

Liu, W., Gamble, J. H., Cao, C. H., Liao, X. L., Chen, I. H., & Flett, G. L. (2023). The General Mattering Scale, the Anti-Mattering Scale, and the Fear of Not Mattering Inventory: Psychometric properties and links with distress and hope among Chinese university students. Psychology Research and Behavior Management, 16, 4445–4459. https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S430455

MacDonald, K. B., Kumar, A., & Schermer, J. A. (2020). No laughing matter: How humor styles relate to feelings of loneliness and mot mattering. *Behavioral Sciences*, *10*(11): 165. doi:10.3390/bs10110165

Maftei, A., Opariuc-Dan, C., & Vrabie T. (2023). Moral disengagement and academic engagement: The moderating roles of educational anti-mattering and psychological distress. *Ethics and Behavior*. DOI: 10.1080/10508422.2023.2225203

Mak, L., & Marshall, S. K. (2004). Perceived mattering in young adults' romantic relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, *21*, 469–486. doi:10.1177/0265407504044842

Marcus, F. M., & Rosenberg, M. (1987, March). *Mattering: Its measurement and significance in everyday life*. Paper presented at the 57th annual Eastern Sociological Society Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts.

McComb, S. E., Goldberg, J. O., Flett, G. L., & Rose, A. L. (2020). The double jeopardy of Feeling lonely and unimportant: State and trait loneliness and feelings and fears of not mattering. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *11*, 3543. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.563420

Milner, A., Page, K. M., & LaMontagne, A. D. (2016). Perception of mattering and suicide

ideation in the Australian working population: Evidence from a cross-sectional survey. *Community Mental Health Journal*, *52*(5), 615-621. doi:10.1007/s10597-016-0002-x

Moeller, S. J., Crocker, J., & Bushman, B. J. (2009). Creating hostility and conflict: Effects of entitlement and self-image goals. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 45*(2), 448–452. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2008.11.005

Myers, J. E., & Bechtel, A. (2004). Stress, wellness, and mattering among cadets at West Point: Factors affecting a fit and healthy force. *Military Medicine*, *169*, 475–482.

Nash, S. P., Longmore, M. A., Manning, W. D., & Giordano, P. C. (2015). Strained dating relationships, a sense of mattering and emerging adults' depressive symptoms. *Journal of Depression and Anxiety*, *Supplement 1*:013. doi: 10.4172/2167-1044.S1-013.

Nepon, T., Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2016). Self-image goals in trait perfectionism and perfectionistic self-presentation: Toward a broader understanding of the drives and motives of perfectionists. *Self and Identity*, *15*, 683–706. doi:0.1080/15298868.2016.1197847

Niven, K. (2017). The four key characteristics of interpersonal emotion regulation. *Current Opinion in Psychology, 17,* 89–93. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2017.06.015

Park, H. G., Suk, H. W., Cheon, J. E., & Kim, Y-H. (2023) Darling, come lay with me or talk with me: Perceived mattering and the complementary association between sex and communication within marital relationships, *The Journal of Sex Research*, *60*(3), 336-348. DOI: 10.1080/00224499.2021.2018393

Rogers, A. A., Updegraff, K. A., Iida, M., Dishion, T. J., Doane, L. D., Corbin, W. C., Van Lenten, S. A., & Ha, T. (2018). Trajectories of positive and negative affect across the transition to college: The role of daily interactions with parents and friends. *Developmental Psychology, 54*(11), 2181–2192. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000598

Rosenberg, M., & McCullough, C. B. (1981). Mattering: Inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in Community and Mental Health, 2*, 163–182.

Schieman, S., & Taylor, J. (2001). Statuses, roles, and the sense of mattering. *Sociological Perspectives*, *44*, 469–484.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services*, *48*, 5-15.

Sebastian, P. (2018). Mattering and self-compassion as mediators of the relationship between attachment style and marital satisfaction among young spouses in Kerala: A mixed method study. *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*, *9*, 387–392.

Shannon, A., Flett, G. L., & Goldberg, J. O. (2020). Feelings of not mattering, perceived stigmatization for seeking help, and help-seeking attitudes among university students. *International Journal of Mental Health & Addiction*, *18*, 1294–1303. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-019-00138-6

Tran, S. T., Grotkowski, K., Miller, S.A., Reed, B. W., et al. (2021). Hassles predict physical health complaints in undergraduate students: a dynamic structural equation model analysis of daily diary data. *Psychology & Health*. 36(7), 828-846. doi:10.1080/08870446.2020.1800010

Weber, D., & Robinson Kurpuis, S. (2011). The importance of self-beliefs on relational aggression of college students. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, *26*, 2735–2743. doi:10.1177/0886260510388287

Wickham, R. E., Williamson, R. E., Beard, C. L., Kobayashi, C. L.B., & Hirst, T. W. (2016).

Authenticity attenuates the negative effects of interpersonal conflict on daily well-being. *Journal of Research in Personality, 60,* 56–62. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2015.11.006

Williams, K. D., Cheung, C. K. T., & Choi, W. (2000). Cyberostracism: Effects of being ignored over the Internet. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 79*(5), 748–762. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.79.5.748

Zaki, J., & Williams, W. C. (2013). Interpersonal emotion regulation. *Emotion, 13*(5), 803–810. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0033839