



Open Access Original Research 

Aligning the Facets of Mattering With Descriptions of the Experiences of Adolescents: Support for the Validity of the Mattering Construct

Gordon L. Flett^{1,2*}

Citation: Flett, G.L. (2026). Aligning the Facets of Mattering With Descriptions of the Experiences of Adolescents: Support for the Validity of the Mattering Construct. *Journal of Concurrent Disorders*.

Editor: Fayeze Mahamid, Ph.D.

Received: 07/20/2025

Accepted: 02/13/2026

Published: 05/06/2026



Copyright: ©2026 Flett, G.L. Licensee CDS Press, Toronto, Canada. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

¹Department of Psychology, LaMarsh Centre for Child and Youth Research, York University, Canada

²**ORCID:** 0000-0002-4502-6285

*Corresponding author: Gordon L. Flett, gflett@yorku.ca

Abstract. Objectives: The current study further examined how mattering is reflected in the descriptions of adolescents' experiences. It evaluated the degree to which feelings correspond to hypothesized facets of the mattering construct. Beliefs about mattering were also examined. **Methods:** Open-ended descriptions of the nature of mattering were provided by 363 adolescents and analyzed according to descriptions of mattering facets. **Results:** Adolescents' insights about mattering reflected their belief in its importance and protective power. Regarding the main focus, adolescents' descriptions yielded strong evidence of the presence of the mattering facets proposed by Rosenberg as well as facets proposed by other authors. Analyses underscored the need for individualized attention and feeling cared about in ways that heighten a sense of being personally valued. Many adolescents also introduced the need for internalization by having the capacity to matter to oneself. **Conclusions and Implications:** The current study yielded unique evidence that supports the construct validity of the mattering construct and highlights themes that can be considered when seeking to establish the nature of what mattering means and how it is experienced by unique individuals. The results attest the multifaceted complexity of the mattering construct and point to core themes to consider when implement approaches designed to build a sense of mattering.

Keywords: Mattering, Caring, Relationships, Well-being, Self-care, Adolescents.

Introduction

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) introduced the mattering concept in an attempt to capture how and why significant others in our lives are significant. Mattering reflects our need to feel important to other people and have people in our lives who value us. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) described various facets of the mattering construct and then described the results of research conducted with four large samples of adolescents. Initially, they focused on three components (i.e., a need to feel important to others, a need to get attention, and a need to matter by being depended on by others). They also showed how the feeling of mattering to parents was highly protective in terms being linked with relatively low levels of depression among adolescents. They also emphasized that mattering is a source of worth that is distinct from individual differences in self-esteem.

Research on mattering in people of various ages continues to illustrate that mattering is a highly beneficial factor and it predicts consequential outcomes (see Flett, 2022, 2025). Most research focuses on this theme or related themes (e.g., Paradisi et al., 2024), and there is much less inquiry focused on the nature of mattering itself in terms of the facets or components that have been proposed as part of the mattering construct. However, further developments and advances in theory and research rest on having a much better understanding of the mattering construct than what we currently have attained.

Accordingly, the current article revisits the nature of the mattering construct and the proposed facets by analyzing information arising from a unique source. Recently, the *New York Times* published two articles on mattering (see Cornwall, 2023; Proulx, 2023). Cornwall (2023) introduced mattering and its facets in the first article. A subsequent article by Proulx (2023) two months later was written for student readers. This article included an invitation to adolescent students to share their experiences with mattering in the comments section.

This is the second of two articles based on what young readers shared online to the *New York Times*. The companion article, which is also by the current author, focused on the adolescents' responses in order to gain a better understanding of the nature of mattering and how it is experienced in certain contexts. This analysis established that mattering is felt by many young people as an intense positive affect and this link is highly beneficial in that the feeling and experiences involved in having a sense of mattering result in considerable growth and feelings of strength and efficacy according to youth reports. However, several respondents spontaneously expressed intense feelings of not mattering and associated adjustment problems as a reminder that when the need to matter is not met, it can involve substantial pain and internal disquiet.

Why is this work needed and how does it contribute to the existing base of knowledge? Unfortunately, regarding the current state of the research literature, there has been little to no attempt thus far to gain an

understanding of what mattering means to young people and how it is experienced and expressed. There is an urgent need for qualitative research focused on what does it mean to matter and how young people define mattering. This article and the companion article seek to fill some of the void until this programmatic, qualitative research is conducted.

The current article revisits the responses that adolescent readers shared and focuses directly on the components of the mattering construct that have been hypothesized. Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) introduced the concept of mattering over three decades ago as an extension of Morris Rosenberg's (1965) seminal work on self-esteem and some of the initial musings on mattering that are found in the Rosenberg's (1979) classic *Conceiving the Self*. As indicated above, mattering reflects a person's need to feel significant in the eyes of other people. The person with a deep feeling of mattering that is unconditional is secure in the knowledge that he or she has meaningful connections with other people and close social bonds have been forged.

Research and theory has extended the description of mattering so that it now includes other facets. To reiterate, Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) described mattering as having three components or facets: (1) Importance -- the perception that other people regard us as significant and value us; (2) Attention -- the realization that other people are actively noticing us and keeping track of what is going on with us; and (3) Dependence -- the perception of mattering because other people have come to rely on us. The first theme examined in the results below is whether these three facets are reflected in the responses that were provided by adolescent readers.

Rosenberg's (1985) elaborated on the mattering construct and it is here that he formally introduced ego extension as a fourth component. Ego extension emerges when a person knows that he or she matters because emotions seem shared and are felt by people we are closely connected with. France and Finney (2009) provided evidence of this facet through a factor analysis of a scale under development that ego extension represents a distinct facet of the mattering construct

Rosenberg (1985) also introduced another component of mattering that seems to strike at the core of the mattering construct. Specifically, he suggested that people who feel like they matter also develop the sense that other people would miss them if they were no longer around. The person who is facing the end of his or her life who must ask "Will you miss me when I am gone?" has not developed a sense of certainty about mattering in comparison to the person who is convinced that they will be missed.

A sixth facet was introduced by Schlossberg (1989) following interviews with people about their mattering experiences -- feeling appreciated by someone -- after she conducted interviews focused on what it means to matter to other people. The people who were interviewed kept making spontaneous references to knowing they mattered when they felt

appreciated. This facet is highly relevant to people who have invested themselves in roles in an effort to enhance the lives of other people.

Two additional facets have been proposed. Flett (2018b) introduced the facet of individualization to underscore that mattering to others takes on a new quality when someone is made to feel uniquely special. In other words, mattering is most evident when a significant other sees and regards someone as uniquely significant. This facet reflects a need for uniqueness and having an identity that is distinct and not shared by others.

Another facet was introduced recently when Flett and Nepon (2024) made the case for feeling cared about as a facet of the mattering construct. It was suggested previously by Rosenberg (1985) that caring is an element of the importance facet. However, the need for a separate focus on mattering in the form of caring was demonstrated empirically by adding a caring-specific item to the General Mattering Scale by Marcus and Rosenberg (1987). Mattering as caring accounted for unique variance in levels of loneliness, and this attested to a distinct role for being cared about. This focus on mattering as being cared about aligns well with other observations from Rosenberg (1985). He observed that, “To believe that the other person cares about what we want, think, or do, or is concerned with our fate, is to matter” (Rosenberg, 1985, p. 216).

More broadly, Prilleltensky (2020) has refined the conceptualization of mattering by drawing the important distinction between mattering to others by having value to others versus mattering to matters by giving value or adding value to others. The concept of adding value to others aligns with feeling a sense of mattering when people have let it be known that they have come to depend and rely on us.

Parenthetically, regarding the initial three facets of the mattering construct, Elliott and associates (Elliott, Kao, & Grant, 2004; Elliott, 2009) created a self-report mattering that supports these facets as reflections of meaningful individual differences. The three subscales with eight items each were labeled as tapping importance, awareness (i.e., attention), and reliance (i.e., being depended on)

As indicated above, the current study examined how the facets of mattering are reflected in the descriptions of times felt like they mattered. In addition, a second key objective of the current study was to examine beliefs about mattering expressed by adolescents in their accounts of times when they felt like they matter. It was evident in reviewing the overall set of responses that many young readers felt a need to express their views on whether mattering matters.

It will be seen below that, for the most part, the mattering descriptions provided by the adolescents aligned closely with the facets of mattering outlined above despite each reader providing unique accounts. The general sense that emerged from the descriptions is that mattering had great resonance among these young people, but as shown in the companion article based on the personal reports of adolescents (see Flett, 2024), there are substantial differences among young people in terms of their own

feelings of mattering and these differences have important implications for well-being stemming from a sense of worth.

Methods

The data for this study were obtained through analyzing the online response section that accompanied an article in *the New York Times*. In this instance, in essence, *the New York Times* asked students to “Tell Us About Yourself” in terms of when you felt like you mattered. There were 363 individual responses in total. One response was eliminated because it came from a teacher who wished to acknowledge the lifespan relevance of mattering to others. The focus on adolescent readers is fortuitous given that Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) underscored the adolescence period as a time in life when mattering to others is highly salient. Young readers who presumably had a clear understanding of mattering based on reading the article were given the chance to share their views and experiences in an open-edited format with no restrictions. The vast majority of responses shared their personal thoughts and experiences, but a small subset of students simply provided a summary of what they learned from the article and they did not provide an account of their own experiences.

In most instances, when it comes to the responses provided, no attempt was made to correct the response in terms of writing, grammar, or punctuation. Also, for the most part, each statement found in the tables in the results section were from unique individuals. Typically, readers were anonymous and did not provide identifying demographic information, though physical location was provided. At present, the original responses are still online in the *New York Times* archive. The current author reviewed the responses multiple times over a lengthy period of time to gain a broader sense of how to interpret the responses, but of course, it is noted from the outset that this was a subjective process.

Results and Discussion

Beliefs About the Importance of Mattering

The analysis begins by focusing more generally on the beliefs and attitudes as espoused by the young people who replied to the request for personal accounts. That is, did adolescent readers see mattering as mattering? Table 1 contained statements that were received about the importance of mattering and the need there is to matter to others. It is clear that the value of mattering was indeed recognized and affirmed. It is also clear some young people provided insights indicating exceptional wisdom.

Key themes here include the sense that everyone has the need to matter (i.e., it’s universal) and the development of other positive attributes and characteristics were seen by some readers as stemming from having the sense of mattering to others. Some adolescents shared astute insights about

how mattering should be experienced in order for it to be most beneficial. For instance, it was noted that mattering is not something that should be rooted in a need for validation (i.e., trying to prove you matter). One respondent noted that while mattering reflects being socially influenced by the views of others, the standards for what constitutes mattering should be under self-control and not socially determined. In other words, people should not rely on others so much that it spreads into what has to take place or be in place in order to matter to others.

References were also made to the role of mattering in terms of its mental impact and its need for those who are struggling with sadness and depression. Several young people acknowledged mattering as a need with highly salient motivational elements. One adolescent was very astute in introducing the intriguing theme of “striving to matter” and this notion of striving for significance underscores how the need to matter can account for behaviors and actions.

Some adolescents acknowledged how mattering greatly impacts them or people in general. Notably, one adolescent referred to the double-sided nature in terms of the comfort inherent in the feeling of mattering but also being potentially overwhelmed by realizing that the feeling of mattering to someone is not authentic, as would be the case if someone was taking advantage of the need for people to feel important and providing them with false feedback about their significance.

Table 1
Reflections on Why Mattering Matters and Why Mattering is Needed

#	Participant Statement
1	“Mattering for me is something I believe is important. If you don’t believe you matter you might not have any faith or courage to do anything. You might perhaps lose hope within yourself and even within your friends.”
2	“Mattering is definitely an essential need for everyone, and shouldn't be overlooked.”
3	“I think it is very important to feel like you 'matter' in society or even in your family because it can boost the way you think about yourself and others around you.”
4	“Everyone should feel like they matter and should try to help others when they’re struggling. Nobody should ever feel like they don’t matter and if you are you should seek help from family and friends.”
5	“Trying to prove that you matter defeats the purpose that you’re enough as you are. Everyone matters without having to do anything, and it’s most important to realize that you matter at your best and at your worst.”
6	“I agree that to feel like you matter you must feel valued and add value to what you are doing, but the standards that apply to such a concept are not to be determined by others. If you want to matter in any situation you are in, do what you think you can do that adds value.”
7	“I recognize that feeling that you matter is very good, it's good for the mental mind.”
8	“A big cause to people being depressed or sad is feeling like they don't matter. So it is extremely important that we help people feel that they matter.”
9	“To me, truly mattering is typically a sense of need. This is caused by being needed by others to successfully perform a task, or by being needed by someone who cares for you.”
10	“Mentally, I think one of the most essential things is to feel like you matter. Everyone deserves to be told that they are important, even if just subtly.”
11	“I have known for a long time that feeling like you matter is crucial, because I've been on both ends of this experience.”
12	“I believe we all matter to someone. Could be a small feeling or a huge one that resonates with you.”
13	“Everyone around you is impacted by your presence. Community is all around us. You go through school, seven hours a day, fifty-five minutes per class and you are surrounded by classmates, peers, and friends. You impact <u>each and every</u> one of their lives whether you choose to believe it or not.”
14	“I am not surprised that feeling like you matter is a key part of human happiness. I feel like it’s something that every person strives for in their life. Every mother strives to matter in their kids’ lives, and every employee (most at least) strives to matter in their position of work. Without it, we wouldn’t have the drive to be able to do the things we do.”
15	“I believe that everyone matters in one way or another. I understand that this can be challenging for some people to accept. Even when there are people who love and care about you, it can be difficult to believe that it's true.”

16	“I believe the sense of mattering affects me greatly, if I didn’t have great friendships and felt like I mattered like I do now I would not be the same person as I am right now.”
17	“ <u>But</u> , I believe that feeling mattered can be both comforting and overwhelming. I think the overwhelming part comes from the fear that people who make you feel like you matter might be fake. I’ve had my fair share of friendships and relationships in which the other person made me feel like I mattered so much, but then did something to hurt me so bad.”
18	“You can matter if you feel like you do, and you can feel like you don’t if you tell yourself that you don’t. I believe it is one of the things that we can control in the sense of controlling our mindset and the way that we think.”
19	“I think that if you want to feel like you matter, you need to make people feel comfortable to talk to you.”

Importance

Regarding the main focus of the current work on the facets of mattering, Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) observed that mattering is most strongly expressed and experienced in the form of feeling we are important to others. If so, when it comes to adolescents, the intense feelings of joy that tend to accompany mattering (see Flett, 2024) are likely due, at least, to some extent, to a palpable perception of being important to other people. Elliott (2009) stated that importance lead to feelings of mattering when someone seems invest something in us, such as their interest, time, energy, or material resources.

Not surprisingly, there were many accounts of mattering by feeling quite important to other people. Some representative accounts are displayed in Table 2. Several adolescents couched importance in terms of significant others “making them feel important” in a manner that almost makes it seem like emotion is entirely reactive and there is no self-control or self-regulation. This phenomenon of being made to feel an emotion is, of course, high problematic if others are doing something that makes young people feel unimportant.

Table 2
Feeling Important

#	Participant Statement
1	“My family and friends are always there for <u>me</u> and they make me feel important. When someone listens to my problems and doesn’t make me feel stupid for having them, I feel mattered.”
2	“I don’t always think about how important I am in people’s lives or how I affect others. But some days I find myself with a breath of fresh air knowing I am wanted and heard.”
3	“They make me feel like I’m important, and they understand me and who I am. I can also be myself around them. Everyone wants to feel good inside and know that they are important.”
4	“Mattering is something that, in a perfect world, everyone would experience every day... it’s the most heart-warming feeling one can have because I have felt the feeling of being valued and being important to other people.”
5	“But when have I felt like I mattered the most? Everywhere I go. With my family, friends, and teammates. I matter to my family because they love me more than anything in the world and it makes me feel important in the world. On my sports team I have a certain role that I <u>have to accomplish</u> and succeed in and that is another way where I feel like I matter to something. Even just talking to my friends makes me feel like I matter as I have someone who appreciates me.”
6	“I feel the most important with my family. ‘A group of one or more parents and their children living together as a unit.’ My parents make me feel like I am loved and cared about. I believe that families make anything and everything better.”
7	“The time I feel the most important is on my football team when the coach puts me in to go do my job and get the team going. It’s just an amazing feeling to be part of the team. Other times I feel important is just from family and friends just being there for me. Just being loved is something very special that everyone should feel and that you should spread yourself.”
8	“When I feel like I matter the most, I always find myself with my family. Even if I am doing nothing and just sitting down and talking to them, I always feel important and belonging. I think it’s from the love and the close connection with the family members. I feel like the way I perceive them is the manner they perceive me, and I love them very much, so I feel like I matter.”
9	“I feel more important when I’m needed by an individual rather than society. For example, contributing to the school community as the school president feels like an obvious task to me, while on the other hand, when I bring my younger brother a piece of candy I received from school and see his thanking smile, I feel <u>really important</u> . Often, this is what drives me forward over the course of the day.”
10	“I’ve always been more comfortable drifting across the background, but there are those rare moments when I’ve experienced the truly heartwarming feeling of being cared about and recognized. I’ve come to realize that feeling important doesn’t always come with a red carpet.”

Attention

Table 3 lists statements from adolescents reflecting the attention facet of the mattering construct. The initial views on mattering included the claim that the attention of others is the most elementary form of mattering to others (see Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). Attention is felt when adolescents perceive they are being recognized or considered by others (i.e., they are seen). The power of being recognized is represented in a few of the statements listed in Table 3.

Overall, in terms of direct references, there was comparatively less evidence that the attention element was highly salient for adolescents, but it was still quite apparent. Elliott (2009) couched this facet in terms of others having an awareness of the self as reflected by being noticed or recognized. He also observed that even a little attention can convey a sense of mattering to a young person. As noted by one adolescent, when it comes to feeling insignificant, not being noticed can also be noticed right away.

Table 3
Personal Attention

#	Response
1	A time I felt like I mattered was when someone relatively close to me mentioned something I had told them a long time ago. When I heard them say this specific detail it quickly highlighted my day for many reasons. It made me feel extremely important because it showed they actually pay attention to what I say and care enough to remember small details about me. It meant a lot like I truly mattered to them.
2	But there are days in which it gets insanely bad and my mood would drastically change and I would get these bad thoughts in my mind. One of them, which I experienced a lot, is that I will sometimes tell myself that I don't matter and no one will miss me if I was gone. My best friend has seen me in this place before and every single time without fail she would reassure me that I do matter, that she will miss me if I was gone. I sometimes disagree with her because I feel like she's just saying that to pity or comfort me in my sorrows, but she will literally drill it into my head until I could finally believe her.
3	I feel that I matter the most in my house and with my mom because she always tells me that she loves me and really shows that she cares. I think I matter to her mostly because she takes care of me when I am sick, and when I take too long to get home she calls me to know where I'm at.
4	Feeling like I matter the most happens whenever I am with my boyfriend. He treats me with such kindness and respect, making me feel incredibly valued and significant. His caring demeanor and the way he understands and supports me creates a strong sense of belonging and importance within our relationship. It is in these moments that I truly feel recognized and appreciated for who I am, which really impacts how I perceive my worth and significance.

#	Response
5	I like to be acknowledged when I want to say something. When someone says my name, they recognize that I am there and I at least matter to them at that moment. My friends may just be saying my name to ask for a math question, but they chose me to ask instead of anyone.
6	But once we notice that someone isn't "caring" for us, we notice immediately. To discard that feeling for others, we should pay more attention to how we treat people.
7	When people acknowledge and recognize your efforts by telling you that you did a good or even a great job on something and that you matter, it can be incredibly motivating, boosting your confidence and making you believe in yourself even more. It gives you more determination and potential to achieve bigger and better goals for yourself.
8	There have been times where I felt like I mattered to people, but it's not many. I mean I'm sure I matter to my friends but sometimes it doesn't feel like it. There's only really been like a few of my friends that have made it clear that I matter to them. They make me feel appreciated, valued, cared for, and heard. They listen to what I have to say and not talk over me, they care about me and my feelings and they appreciate my work and what I do for them.
9	Every time I go to my friend Lucy's house I feel as if I matter. It's not that I feel I don't matter at my house. But not just her but her family makes me feel heard. They treat me as if I am part of their family. Then when I'm at my house, I feel as if I'm missing something. Or perhaps craving something.
10	When someone throws me a high-five, it's not just slapping my palm. It's a message saying, "Hey there, you're part of this team, and we are having a blast!" Or the friendly "Hi, Natalie" during attendance that says "You made it! You dragged yourself out of bed and into class, and we are thrilled to see you here!" That one second of recognition makes my day, every day.
11	The time I felt like I mattered was when it was time for me to go home early at my elementary school. When I left, all the kids in my class said, "Bye, Jahyden". I couldn't tell how I felt but it felt good and it felt like I mattered. It felt so wholesome that I was on top of the world and nobody could knock me down.

Being Depended On By Others and Being Needed

The third facet is mattering arising from filling a valued role that results in being depended on by others. As highlighted earlier, Prilleltensky's (2020) made a key distinction between mattering by having value to others versus an outward orientation in terms of mattering by adding value or giving value to other people. Somers et al. (2022) showed that when it comes to adolescents, mattering by adding values to others is linked with hope, fewer risky actions, and a highly positive motivational orientation. Elliott (2009) couched this facet in terms of being relied on, especially when people are in need. This facet was one of the subscales in

the mattering measure he created (see Elliott et al., 2005). The notion of making a difference in the lives of others is a key theme when promoting positive youth development by providing roles and opportunities for young people to gain a sense of mattering and efficacy (see Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

The statements listed in Table 4 illustrate how very positive feelings and a strong sense of worth come from filling roles and by engaging in activities such as volunteering. Roles that can result in feeling essential and making a difference can substantially enhance a sense of worth. Overall, this facet was the one most evident in the responses in terms of the sheer volume of relevant mentions. Themes represented in Table 4 fit well with the Somers et al. (2022) brief subscale with items that measure the perception of giving value to others. The items assess being relied on a resource and source of support when people require help of some sort. The sense of being trusted and counted on is clearly evident in the descriptions provided by adolescents

References were also made to having tendencies that result in a sense of mutually mattering to each other (e.g., becoming a very good listener and helping solve problems). These examples are very useful reminders of how a focus on adding value to others can be a source of generate feelings of self-worth in way that is more under self-control rather than solely relying on how others react to the adolescent.

A key theme represented in several accounts was that the need to matter was satisfied after feeling needed by others. It seems evident from these accounts and others that were expressed that they need to matter is closely aligned with the need to be needed. There is a growing literature on the protective benefits of adolescents feeling like they are needed (see Fuligni et al., 2025) and given the numerous accounts of times when young people when asked to recount a time when they mattered and how they felt, this points to mattering as not only being depended on, but also on knowing and realizing a personal sense of being needed.

Table 4
Being Depended On and Being Needed and Useful

#	Participant Statement
1	“I feel important when I can help my dad and brother work on things and i get a bolt or something that they can't get. It makes me feel like i'm on top of the world cause they're both way stronger than me. But they make me feel like i matter everyday.”
2	“I feel like I truly matter when I volunteer at the Salvation Army with my mom and sister. I volunteer to help my community through the National Charity League Organization, not because it looks good on college applications, but because it makes me feel happy and important to those who need help. At the Salvation Army, I help prepare and serve food for those who can't provide it for themselves.”
3	“At school and at home are the places I feel like I matter the most. Helping friends and my family makes me feel mattered and important. I think that it's important for people to feel like they matter so they don't feel useless.”
4	“I think that telling someone that they matter might make their day because no one knows what other people are going through.”
5	“I feel like I matter when my friends have problems and they know they can come to me. When they are sad or mad about something that happens at home or at school and they need someone to talk to, they come to me and tell me things that they don't tell other people. It makes me feel like I matter when people come to me cause people do that”
6	I "grew" into a sense of belonging. Over the years, I gained a reputation of being a "listener" and giving good advice/comfort. I finally realized that I mattered to my friends and family. They will come to me when they need comfort after a long day or guidance for making a big decision ... It's always nice to matter to someone and be useful. Without that, life would be so monochrome!”
7	“A moment where I felt I mattered is most definitely when seeing my younger siblings and or cousins and them coming over to me ... to greet me with a warm embrace. I am the oldest daughter and granddaughter on both my parent's sides of the family. I feel obligated to always be there for them and care for them to the best of my ability. Nothing makes me happier than to see them with the biggest smiles on their faces while running around playing together. I aspire to continue being a role model for each and every one of them and being a rock to lean on whenever they need it”
8	“I feel like I matter when I'm around my friends and helping them with their problems makes me feel important to them. I sit there and listen to what they have to say and give them advice on how to deal with they're problems if I can think of something to help them, and they do the same thing with me, so were at a mutual agreement when it comes to venting about our problems to each other.”
9	“Think I can maybe increase my sense of mattering by volunteering my time to help people because some people can be going through a tough time and need help. By having a shelter or need food or even having support by someone to help them be successful”
10	“I feel like I matter when I help people. I help my parents take care of my little brothers and my sister I take care of her kids. My family trusts me taking care of their kids. It makes me happy to feel helpful. I also took care of my aunt when my cousin was busy and my aunt was at the hospital. I like to be there for people when they need me.”

11	“When I think it's important, it's when I comfort my friends and figure out how to solve a problem. When something happens, my friends often come to me and ask for help. At times like that, I feel proud that my friends respect me, but I also always feel grateful.”
12	“When someone tells me that I "matter" I think of it as someone depending on me and they need me for something, or something as simple as just needing to talk to me. Something as simple as just listening to them and seeing what they need from me”
13	“There was a time that I felt that I mattered in seventh grade because there was an international student from Japan. I know the language and I was able to speak to him. With this alone, I wouldn't have felt like I mattered that much, but he wanted to talk about a specific video game that was big in Japan at one point called Yo-Kai Watch ... I knew about this game series well and it was one of my favorites. So when I explained it to my friend, I felt like I was one of the few people that could explain something like this to my friend. This conversation sparked a new friendship with the Japanese kid and my friend because when my friend tried the game, he really liked it. At that moment, I felt like I mattered and made a difference because I helped spark that friendship, and founded an awesome friend trio or me, the new kid, and my friend.”
14	“I felt needed when i was riding motorcycles with my cousin and he had wrecked down the road and broke his leg and I had to take him the hospital. The reason that made me feel needed is because if I wasn't there to help him, he might have been hit by a car and been killed.”
15	“I think I matter most to friends and family because most of the time also my cousins or siblings will talk to me and trust me talking about stuff and stuff related to that about their lives and how everything has been or if they have a trouble at school.”
16	“Personally, I have had many encounters with mattering that really boosted my mood and happiness for the day. It makes you feel good about yourself, helping someone when they might or might not know they need it. For example, before my grandmother passed, she had undergone sight loss. This made her really fragile, so she needed a lot of help. I believed that I mattered a lot in her life, not just being her granddaughter but also helping her throughout her last days.”
17	“I feel I matter most when I'm taking care of others. Being needed by them to perform acts of service makes me feel like I matter. Whether it's from helping a friend with their homework or taking part in community service, I believe I matter most when helping others. I matter to myself because I put good out in the world and it comes back to me... When I volunteered for park program, a program our town does to entertain kids during summer, it was the most I've felt I've mattered ever.”
18	Volunteer! Big or small, taking time to do something for someone in need is incredibly valuable.
19	I can relate to this with moments from my life where I felt like I mattered, whether it's being on sports teams, helping with family, and talking with my friends when they need me. Everyone should feel like they matter and should try to help others when they're struggling.

Knowing You Matter by Being Missed

It was emphasized above that Rosenberg (1985) added a focus on being missed as additional element. He observed that just as much as we want our presence noticed, we also want our absence to register with people and be noticed as well. Table 5 included adolescents' accounts of times when others checked in on someone or conveyed that they had indeed been missed. There not many references to be missed, but it is evident from the relevant responses that direct expressions of being missed are unambiguous indicators of mattering to others.

Table 5
Being Missed

#	Participant Statement
1	“When I don't show up to my first class my friends text me asking where I am. When I tell them I am sick they immediately text back with ‘Omg I hope you feel better!!’ Now that's what everyone says. But it's when you get back to school and everyone is so happy to see you because you have been out. That's when it really feels like you matter because they all say they missed you so much.”
2	“‘Mattering’ is something vital to us, for it is a reminder of our own purpose in life. It is knowing that there are people who love you, miss you, worry for you, and who feel a sudden surge of joy when you walk through a door. It is a feeling which is irreplaceable, and most importantly, it belongs to us all.”
3	“The time that I felt like I mattered was when I played sports. I was the captain of the basketball team and everyone knew me and would ask where I was if I missed a day.”
4	“I feel like I matter because I feel that I have a purpose on this world and there is a plan for me. I know that if I didn't exist my parents, siblings, and friends would miss me a lot. Also, my dogs and cats would be lonely without me. Overall, I love life and I want to live life to the fullest.”
5	“Whenever I volunteer, there is a group of people who always say ‘we missed you, I'm glad you're back.’”
6	“Violet on the other hand, always compliments you when she sees you're down. She makes sure you know that she misses you and that she's always happy to see you. Overall, my friends are so important to me, and they make me feel better about myself every single day. I go to school every day, excited to see them.”

Appreciation

Schlossberg (1989) observed that the adults she interviewed reiterated time and again how important it was to them to feel that their efforts were appreciated. But this need to feel appreciated was also evident among the adolescents who replied to the *New York Times* article. This can be a facet that accompanies being relied on because doing something for others will lead to increased self-worth when efforts on behalf of others are appreciated. But as can be seen in Table 6, appreciation as a form of mattering was most often felt when there was an expression on people having an appreciation of adolescents as people with particular positive qualities.

Table 6
Being Appreciated

#	Participant Statement
1	“I feel like I do matter because I have people in my life who love and care for me, and friends who appreciate and respect me.”
2	“A time I feel like I've mattered most was when my parents needed someone to look after my brother and make dinner. <u>So</u> when they came home to dinner being finished and my brother being ok, they really appreciated me and it made me feel great.”
3	“Whether it’s a math question or an ELA prompt. I’m asked to speak or say something out loud to other people. I feel as though people respect me and appreciate me.”
4	“One statement in particular made by Dr. Flett stood out—‘you still won’t be a happy person if no one notices you when you enter a room.’ To fit in is one thing, but to be appreciated and wanted is another thing entirely. And that other thing is incredibly important.”
5	“A specific time when I felt that I had mattered was when I received a heartfelt appreciation from close family members and friends during a challenging time in my life. Their words of support, encouragement and acknowledgement of my importance in their lives made me feel valued and significant.”
6	“On the first Thursday of every month, along with my dad, a monolingual doctor, I translate at a free, outreach clinic with my Church for him and his Spanish-speaking patients... Unknowing I have been following this procedure laid out by Dr. Prillelensky. In adjusting my relationships, me and my dad <u>are able</u> to help each other and appreciate each other more with each patient and visit.”
7	“I feel like I matter the most when I’m with my friends Izzy and Sofia. They are twins and I feel so safe and loved when I’m with them. They told me that their dad talks very highly of me which makes me feel so appreciated. I’ve also hung out with their family. I can be myself with them and if they aren't going to be at an event, then I’m not going.”
8	“There's only really been like a few of my friends that have made it clear that I matter to them. They make me feel appreciated, valued, cared for, and heard. They listen to what I have to say and not talk over me, they care about <u>me</u> and my feelings and they appreciate my work and what I do for them.”
9	“Many people don't realize that you can have plenty of social interaction and still be lonely. <u>In order</u> to feel truly valued, you must be appreciated.”

Individualization

To reiterate, Flett (2018b) proposed that the mattering construct should also include an emphasis on the sense of being important to others in ways that provide a sense of being uniquely focused on and valued by others. This aspect of the construct is often overlooked and has seldom been evaluated. This facet was described specifically as, “Being made to feel unique, special, and centered on by someone based on how they regard your true self” (Flett, 2018b, p. 32). This facet is a reflection of the need for uniqueness and to be seen as a distinct person by others.

The descriptions in Table 7 reflect the sense of being uniquely seen, understood, or encouraged by one or more people. The feeling of mattering in these instances seems to reflect a depth of being significant to someone who truly knows the young person. It should also be noted that several accounts listed above in Table 6 show that the appreciation felt by adolescents was often highly individualized and unique to each adolescent.

Table 7
Individualization

#	Participant Statement
1	“It’s the little things that make me feel mattered. Those little things that aren’t noticeable to others but noticeable to you because that person knows you so well and doesn’t do those things expecting something in return.”
2	“I would even say that <u>actually mattering</u> to at least one person is one of the most vital things to one’s existence. And although it may have already come or may not have come yet; someday, someone will notice you and know that you matter to them.”
3	“I think I matter most when I am with those who encourage me and push me. Everybody matters in life but I feel like just telling them really doesn’t mean much but showing them that they <u>actually do matter</u> .”
4	“I feel that I matter honestly each time I’m with my girlfriend. The difference between her and any other person is that she understands me. She understands what I want, need, and knows how to get me in a good mood. She won’t judge me for anything I do and if anything loves for me to be myself. I feel free when with her like I can be myself, I feel comfortable. The first time I’ve ever felt this way was when she told me how much I really meant to her in a message she sent.”
5	“I feel as though I matter whenever I hear someone saying my name. I like to be acknowledged when I want to say something. When someone says my name, they recognize that I am there and I at least matter to them at that moment.”
6	“My sister makes me feel like I matter so much because when we are hanging out I can almost see it in her eyes when she looks up at me and how much she admires me. I would literally take a bullet for her I love her so much.”
7	“I’m the one who always takes care of my dog. My family members are always busy attending important meetings, or going somewhere for educational purposes. I relatively have less work to be done, since I am the youngest one. When I am alone with my dog, I always walk him, feed him, and engage him. I feel like I am an important presence for my dog, and it makes me feel good.”
8	“My mom makes me feel very important. She asks me everyday how I felt that day, how school was, what I did, etc. She does so much for me and makes me the happiest daughter in the world. I love her so much. My mom is the reason I feel so important.”
9	“For me, mattering is something I always crave. Knowing that I mean something to someone is amazing. For me as a kid my grandma was a teacher so I was treated differently by other teachers and I always felt on top of the world.”

Caring

The feeling of mattering that comes from feeling cared about was evident in many responses. These mentions did overlap considerably with importance but they clearly merit being focused on as a unique facet. Overall, adolescent respondents provided many responses about mattering experiences with explicit references to being cared about (see Table 8). There were some key subthemes within some responses. Caring is ideally reciprocated and mutual (i.e., people you care about care about you).

One respondent underscored the need to feel cared about unconditionally in a manner that fits with how Rogers (1961) stipulated that regard from others should be unconditional. Flett (2026) proposed that mattering is strongest as a personal resource when the person has a deep feeling of unconditional mattering and is certain about mattering unconditionally to other people. To my knowledge, the notion of unconditional mattering has not been discussed broadly thus far; an important exception is the work by Carey (2020). The presence of unconditional mattering in some but not all people who have a sense of mattering is a way of considering the heterogeneity that exists among people with a feeling of mattering to others.

Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) stipulated that feelings of mattering are subjective and based on perceptions of being regarded or not being regarded by other people. Some individuals provided responses suggesting that they had seemingly lost sight of being cared about by others so they did indeed matter and they realized it once others showed them once again that they are cared about.

One way to view mattering as caring is that it is an element that is used by adolescents to get a quick sense of whether they are being valued. It seems for some respondents that whether they felt cared about was integral to their determination of whether they did indeed matter.

Table 8
Being Cared About

#	Participant Statement
1	“The feeling of mattering to others is vital to your emotional health. Not only do you want to feel loved and cared for, but knowing that you truly matter to someone is what can make you valued.”
2	“The moment I feel when I matter is whenever I am absent from school and I feel like no one really cares, until the next day when two of my best friends hug me and say ‘we missed you yesterday,’ that is when I felt like I mattered. Feeling valued and cared about.”
3	“I’m not sure if my mom means to make me feel this way, but she always greets me with a hug when she comes back from work or a trip and always makes sure I have what I need. Just these small, consistent gestures show how much she cares for me.”
4	“A time I felt mattered was when I was sick back in 2020 with covid. I felt mattered because my mom and dad would always check on me especially my dad because he didn't care about getting sick all he cared about was making sure I had enough food, water, medicine, really anything.”
5	“My dog makes me happy because I know that she <u>actually cares</u> . But most people judge and it hurts a lot.”
6	“My family, friends, brothers, and sisters all care about me. I matter to them, and they matter to me. Everyone wants to be mattered by someone or something because it makes them feel better about themselves.”
7	“It just seemed to me that if you want to be happy and be on good terms with others then you should feel like you matter and that people care about you and you care about others. A full circle kind of situation.”
8	“The time that I felt like I mattered was when I played sports. I was the captain of the basketball team and everyone knew me and would ask where I was if I missed a day. I was always with my friends and I felt that they were the people who cared most about me and that made me feel like I mattered.”
9	“Finally, with my friends I feel that they all care about me and enjoy themselves when I am around which makes me feel not only like I fit in but that I matter to them.”
10	“It’s the importance of knowing people care for you unconditionally.”
11	“They listen to what I have to say and not talk over me, they care about me, and my feelings and they appreciate my work and what I do for them. There's one time where I truly felt like I mattered and it was in March. I was going through a really rough point of my life and I didn't feel like anyone cared for me, until I realized that some of the friends I had <u>did</u> care and they felt terrible about what happened. They listened to me rant to them about things.”
12	“I feel like I matter. When I receive this message, I believe that they care for my well-being. I feel like I have created a strong friendship and that we really do care about each other.”

Unique Facets

Some additional categories seemed clearly evident and represent potential ways of broadening the mattering construct. Alternatively, these facets can be seen as unique individual expressions of mattering when viewed through the eyes of adolescents with varying life experiences.

One category was formulated after it was decided to examine to evaluate the responses in terms of whether there is a temporal element that includes a future focus. As discussed below, this category reflects the hopes specific to the feeling of mattering to others.

The concept of striving to matter mentioned earlier raises the possibility that young people may seek to matter through their accomplishments and performances. The feeling of mattering to others can often be tied to the reactions of other people following a successful performance. To my knowledge, this potential route to a feeling of mattering has not been identified thus far by theorists, so the accounts shared by adolescents point to another pathway to achieve a feeling of significance to others. These accounts reflect an emphasis on individualization in terms of the reactions that accompany a unique accomplishment that makes someone stand out from others. This achievement-based type of worth is an orientation that seems to operate when children and adolescents strive to be perfect (for a discussion, see Flett & Hewitt, 2022).

While achievement-based mattering was clearly evident in the responses of adolescents, this type of mattering can become problematic for anyone who becomes too invested in this route to feeling important. As alluded to above, Carey (2020) identified conditional mattering or partial mattering. This type of mattering involves being valued for an achievement or skill but not necessarily being valued more broadly as a person. Indeed, it is human nature for someone with a remarkable achievement to feel a strong pressure to follow-up with another remarkable achievement as a way of proving that achievement reflects enduring positive qualities.

Table 9
Performance and Achievement-Based Mattering

#	Participant Statement
1	“So after the game, my coach told me that it was a good shot and told me how I matter on this team, that’s a time I really felt like I mattered.”
2	“The time I think that people really notice that I am not there and it makes a big difference is in my soccer games. I am a <u>pretty solid</u> midfielder and help my team so much with assists, and getting to goal.”
3	“The time that I felt mattered a lot was a baseball game. I was with my friends and coach. I was a pitcher and I pitched a perfect 7 inning little league game with a no hit no run. I also came out as a cleanup in number 4 as a batter. I hit a grand slam and a cycling hit. I led our team to victory and that was a time that I felt like I mattered a lot.”
4	“I feel like I’m mattered when I go to cadets and then have a big ceremony because I feel like it would’ve been different without me.”
5	“Last Saturday, I went to a soccer tournament with my soccer team. We were able to win the whole tournament, but it wouldn’t have been possible without me.”
6	“A specific time when I felt mattered was when I scored a goal in basketball with my team and friends. I felt valued because I helped score a goal for the team.”

Mattering to the Self

The final category is a unique facet that was evident in several adolescents’ accounts of their mattering experiences. These young people spontaneously noted the need to matter to oneself in ways that reflect remarkable wisdom and self-insight. This facet of internalized mattering fits with descriptions of how mattering must be reflected in the relationship that the self has with the self and how it is vital to value oneself and have it reflected in choices and behavior and how the self is defined.

The accounts involving mattering to oneself displayed in Table 10 reflect key themes in the positive psychology literature such as the need to be kind and compassionate to oneself. Some accounts reflect a link with facets of mattering outlined above, such as a reference to learning to appreciate the self (i.e., appreciate myself to the best of my ability).

Some respondents made reference to the feeling of mattering reflecting internal elements of themselves. Indeed, one adolescent said despite having caring people in their lives, they can still have a sense of not mattering and this is “an internal feel I need to resolve.”

Table 10
Mattering to The Self

#	Participant Statement
1	“We all want to matter in the world. Because we’re human we’re born with a drive for human connection. But even though it’s great to matter to others, we <u>have to</u> feel like we matter on our own. Human society is so dependent on validation from others that we forget that we are most successful when we have self-validation. To learn that we matter without people telling us will make human society better as a whole.”
2	“Whether it's from helping a friend with their homework or taking part in community service, I believe I matter most when helping others. I matter to myself because I put good out in the world and it comes back to me.”
3	“People from marginalized groups or people who don’t feel valued often blame themselves because of the systemic structures in our society that make it so difficult to really feel valued, it’s so important to remind oneself you are not alone and you are seen, and you matter.”
4	“Mattering for me is something I believe is important. If you don’t believe you matter you might not have any faith or courage to do anything. You might perhaps lose hope within yourself and even within your friends. When Cornwall stated the importance of matter and its importance within our human life. I realized I needed to feel positive within myself. Feel like I do matter within a society and be more like me.”
5	“I think that it's important to practice increasing your sense of mattering, it's <u>really important</u> to express self-compassion. It's true, lots of people feel as though they don't matter or aren't important to anyone. It's important to realize that there are always people who value you, even if they don't always seem to show it. And mattering is more than mattering to other people, it's also mattering to yourself.”
6	“A lack of self-worth will cause you to shove yourself into a box and condense yourself <u>in order to</u> conform to what somebody else wants you to be, since you're so desperate for someone to like you. Then, you realize that you matter as you are. This realization helps you destroy the box, love yourself, and have relationships with people who you are truly comfortable with.”
7	“It's important to acknowledge that feeling undervalued is common and it's important to practice self-compassion. It's also important to challenge negative thoughts by finding value in everyday things or actions.”
8	“While I am still working on myself and have other battles I’m fighting in my life at the moment, the people I care about give me the motivation I need to live my life to the fullest, and appreciate myself to the best of my ability.”
9	“The surrounding people who make you feel like you matter may not always be there. You must act as your center and your building block. You must value yourself, before you can add value to others.”
10	“And I always make sure to surround myself with people like Lucy that make me feel part of the family. Yet I still feel as if I don't matter sometimes. But I feel that's an inner feeling I need to resolve.”
11	“While I am still working on myself and have other battles I’m fighting in my life at the moment, the people I care about give me the motivation I need to live my life to the fullest, and appreciate myself to the best of my ability.”
12	“If you don’t feel like you matter then you will keep the mentality of not caring about yourself, which will keep you unmotivated, unproductive, and moody. Additionally if you care too much about what others think you're letting them control your feelings, you're letting their actions get into your productivity, you're letting them affect you. In conclusion, feeling that you matter is <u>really important</u> , but you should be the one controlling the feelings of you <u>feeling mattered</u> .”

Going Forward: The Hope of Mattering

There is a growing body of research showing that feelings of mattering are linked robustly with dispositional hope. These links have been established in children and adolescents (Cao et al., 2025; Somers et al., 2022), but also in university students (Liu et al., 2023), and in adults from the community (Castro et al., 2021). Examination of the descriptions in *the New York Times* did not yield many direction expressions of hope, but it did instead yield multiple illustrations of young people expressing their hope of mattering in the future.

There was an other-oriented aspect to this for some young people who stated their hopes for other people. They expressed their hope of others having the experience of mattering to others and the feelings that accompany it.

This focus on the hope of mattering is an important alternative to having a fear of not mattering in the future. This fear of not mattering has been evaluated with the Fear of Not Mattering Inventory (see Flett, 2025). This fear of not mattering is likely when someone has a sense of mattering but is more on the surface than deeply felt due to the person having an insecure attachment style. This points to the need to have a sense of mattering that is not only unconditional, but it is deeply experienced. The mattering that is deep mattering will be unwavering and will be a form of mattering that facilitates the mattering to oneself that is described above.

Table 11
The Hope of Mattering

#	Participant Statement
1	"I hope that this year I can get to know a lot more people and matter as much to them as their friends."
2	"In general, I feel like I do matter to myself and others because everyone is important, no matter who a person is, you are important, and I hope everyone knows that even if they're in a rough spot."
3	"Also, when I try to help the classmates who aren't participating so well, I believe, and hope it makes them feel mattered, and related. Because of this achievement, I think I feel much more mattered."
4	"Sometimes, it can be challenging to recognize our own worth and believe that we truly matter in the grand scheme of things. However, I hope that I will find moments where I genuinely feel like I matter."
5	"I never knew what it felt like to be important now, truly knowing that feeling is something I hope I never lose. Some things to increase your feeling of being important: 'Identify your strengths' — for me that means knowing that I can make my friends laugh and will always be there for them."
6	"I feel like I matter because I know I do and I hope I matter to other people as well because it's kinda sad if I don't?"
7	"If you don't believe you matter you might not have any faith or courage to do anything. You might perhaps lose hope within yourself and even within your friends."
8	"Life is ten times better when you have friends whom you can talk <u>to</u> and I hope everyone has someone in their life that makes you feel like you matter."
9	"I always feel like I matter but there will be some moments where I don't really feel like I don't matter — I just feel like my mattering percentage is lower. It doesn't get really bad and I hope it stays that way. It would surprise me and a lot of people if it got worse."
10	"Sometimes, it can be challenging to recognize our own worth and believe that we truly matter in the grand scheme of things. However, I hope that I will find moments where I genuinely feel like I matter."

Summary and Conclusions

The current article revisited the responses that adolescents provided when prompted by the New York Times to discuss a time or times when they felt like they mattered. A companion article, also by the current author, outline the intense feelings that young people reported when they felt like they mattered and when they felt like they didn't matter. The current article provided support for how mattering has been conceptualized and defined in terms of hypothesized facets that, in essence, reflect pathways or routes to

matter. When it comes to these facets, overall, clear evidence was found for the components proposed by Rosenberg and McCullough (1981) and Rosenberg (1985). Adolescents' responses reflected the themes of importance, attention, being depended on and being missed. The one facet that was not clearly evident was ego extension, which is the sense that positive feelings and experiences as are negative feelings and experiences (i.e., my problems are your problems).

Unique facets were also evident to the author in terms of the overall responses shared by adolescents. Many young people felt a sense of mattering as a result of a key achievement that set them apart. This was seen as a reflection of references to "striving to matter." Clearly, goal accomplishments that elicit recognition from others can result in feeling valued, but there is a need to qualify this by noting how feelings of mattering can be ephemeral and can produce a sense that being valued depends on continuing to achieve and have remarkable accomplishments

Another key theme that emerged was the importance of mattering to oneself. While this was not mentioned often, it was certainly evident and it was clear that some young people have become mindful of mattering to the point that they have recognized how essential it is to value oneself. This facet of mattering was accompanied by other tendencies highlighted in the positive psychology field such as being self-compassionate, both in general and in terms of being self-compassionate and having social self-compassion following adverse social feedback (see Rose & Kocovski, 2021).

A third theme was the hope of mattering going forward. This was typically expressed in terms of one's own mattering, but there were also hopes expressed for other people. Some observations reflected an awareness that mattering could be lost and the hope was that the feeling and experience of mattering would last.

A related goal of the current work was to gain an initial sense of what attitudes, beliefs, and views are held by young people when it comes to how they regard mattering to others. As indicated in Table 1, many adolescent respondents recognized the importance of mattering and shared the view that mattering does indeed matter. However, some readers stipulated that there must be a sense of agency and self-determination when it comes to deciding what constitutes mattering.

The overarching purpose of this article was to evaluate the construct validity of mattering by determining whether hypothesized themes could be identified in the responses from adolescents, and by and large, this was indeed the case. However, one practical implication is that the current analysis has identified themes that can be put into practice by various people (i.e., parents, educators, counselors) when seeking to engage with young people in ways that will enhance their feeling of being valued and cherished by other people. For instance, the hope of mattering is a theme that can lend itself well to classroom activities and discussions about how to gain a sense of mattering. More broadly, these themes can be incorporated into settings designed to facilitate the development of young people such as schools with

environments that reflect the need for children and adolescents to feel a sense of mattering (see Flett, 2018a). Along similar lines, one way to begin key conversations about the need to matter is to share some of the accounts listed in the tables in this article and invite children and adolescents to share their feelings and experiences.

Clearly, there are limitations inherent in the subjective nature of the analyses that were conducted and summarized in the current article, and these limitations include issues related to generalizability. Also, of course, the themes focused on reflect the subjective perspective of the current author, so some additional themes may have been missed. Ideally, future research will be programmatic and include more extensive analyses of the nature of mattering and how it is experienced in the lives of young people.

In closing, one overarching conclusion is that the young people who commented on mattering have some remarkable insights to share and that it is imperative that we hear and respect their voices and views. It is also evident that mattering “struck a chord” with many young people and it has great potential for enhancing their learning and inspiring a relational perspective that can yield many benefits.

Funding

No financial support was received for this study.

Availability of Data and Material

Data are available online through the NY Times website.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

Ethics Approval

N/A

Acknowledgment

Gordon Flett was supported by the Canada Research Chair Program and funding provided by the Faculty of Health, York University. Address correspondence to Gordon Flett, LaMarsh Centre for Child and Youth Research, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3, Canada; E-mail: gflett@yorku.ca

References

- Carey, R. L. (2020). Making Black boys and young men matter: Radical relationships, future-oriented imaginaries and other evolving insights for educational research and practice. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 33(7), 729–744. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2020.1753255>
- Cornwall, G (2023, September 27th). *Want to believe in yourself? Mattering is key*. New York Times. (<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/27/well/mind/mental-health-mattering-self-esteem.html>)
- Eccles, J. S., & Gootman, J.A. (2002). *Community programs to promote youth development*. Washington, DC: National Academies Press.
- Elliott, G. C. (2009). *Family matters: The importance of mattering to family in adolescence*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- Elliott, G. C., Kao, S., & Grant, A. (2004). Mattering: Empirical validation of a social-psychological concept. *Self and Identity*, 3, 339-354. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13576500444000119>
- Flett, G. L. (2018a). Resilience to interpersonal stress: Why mattering matters when building the foundation of mentally healthy schools. In A. Leschied, D. H. Saklofske, & G.L. Flett (Eds.), *The handbook of school-based mental health promotion: An evidence informed framework for implementation* (pp. 383-410). New York: Springer.
- Flett, G. L. (2018b). *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(1), 3-36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211057640>
- Flett, G. L. (2025). *Mattering as a core need in children and adolescents: Theoretical, clinical, and research perspectives*. American Psychological Association.
- Flett, G. L. (2026). The healing power and potential of mattering. *Canadian Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cap0000467>
- Flett, G. L., & Hewitt, P. L. (2022). *Perfectionism in childhood and adolescence: A developmental analysis*. American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000289-000>
- Flett, G. L., & Nepon, T. (2024). When adding one questionnaire item makes a difference: Representing the theme of feeling cared about in the Expanded General Mattering Scale (The GMS-6). *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 42(7), 785-797. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829241255232>
- Fulgini, A. J., Trimble, A., & Smola, X. A. (2025). The significance of feeling needed and useful to family and friends for psychological well-being during adolescence. *Journal of Adolescence*, 97(1), 292–300. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jad.12403>
- Marcus, F. M., & Rosenberg, M. (1987, March). *Mattering: It's measurement and significance in everyday life*. Paper presented at the 57th annual Eastern Sociological Society Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts.
- Paradisi, M., Matera, C., & Nerini, A. (2024). Feeling important, feeling well. The association between mattering and well-being: A meta-analysis study. *Journal of Happiness Studies*, 25(4). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-024-00720-3>
- Prilleltensky, I. (2020). Mattering at the intersection of psychology, philosophy, and politics.

- American Journal of Community Psychology*, 65(1-2), 16–34. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12368>
- Proulx, N. (2023 November 3rd). *When have you felt you mattered?* *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/03/learning/when-have-you-felt-you-mattered.html>
- Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Houghton Mifflin.
- Rose, A. L., & Kocovski, N. L. (2021). The Social Self-Compassion Scale (SSCS): Development, validity, and associations with indices of well-being, distress, and social anxiety. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 19(6), 2091–2109. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-020-00302-3>
- Rosenberg, M. (1965). *Society and the adolescent self-image*. Princeton University Press.
- Rosenberg, M. (1979). *Conceiving the self*. Basic Books.
- Rosenberg, M. (1985). Self-concept and psychological well-being in adolescence. In R. L. Leahy (Ed.), *The development of the self* (pp. 205-246). Academic Press.
- Rosenberg, M., & McCullough, B. C. (1981). Mattering: Inferred significance and mental health among adolescents. *Research in Community and Mental Health*, 2, 163-182.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). Marginality and mattering: Key issues in building community. *New Directions for Student Services*, 48, 5-15.
- Somers, C. L., Gill-Scalcucci, S., Flett, G. L., & Nepon, T. (2022). The utility of brief mattering subscales for adolescents: Associations with learning motivations, achievement, executive function, hope, loneliness, and risk behavior. *Journal of Psychoeducational Assessment*, 40, 108-124. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07342829211055342>.

Article Submission: <https://jcd.manuscriptmanager.net/>