

**THE POWER OF MATTERING:  
Generating & Distributing It's Transformative Energy  
To Youth & Their Communities**

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# GOALS FOR TODAY

- Enhance understanding of mattering
- Explain why it is so powerful
- Draw attention to some alarming data on how many young people feel like they don't matter
- Describe ways to harness & distribute the power of mattering

# WHY FOCUS ON MATTERING?

It has multiple benefits for everyone:

- Students and their families
- Communities
- You

# WHAT IS MATTERING?

- Rosenberg & McCullough (1981)
- Feeling important, significant to others
- “The person low on mattering feels irrelevant, unimportant, or peripheral in the minds of others”

# MORRIS (MANNY) ROSENBERG



CREATOR OF  
THE MATTERING CONSTRUCT

# SOCIETAL MATTERING

Fromm (1941), introduced mattering, who described feeling insignificant at a societal level

A key point from Fromm – A person can respond poorly or adaptively to feeling insignificant

Intervention targets – increase mattering levels & adaptive responses to feelings of not mattering

# ROSENBERG'S COMPONENTS

## ATTENTION:

- You command the interest of another
- Feeling noticed and heard vs. not noticed



# COMPONENT #2

## IMPORTANCE

- Someone cares about you; makes you feel special
- Feeling valued, cherished, wanted vs. insignificant, no one cares



# COMPONENT #3

## DEPENDENCE

- Someone needs you and relies on you
- You have a role, a niche that matters to other people because you make their lives better (e.g., caregiver role, mentor role)

# COMPONENT #4

## APPRECIATION

- Feeling that people are grateful and appreciate you in their lives vs. unappreciated
- This dimension came from interviews of adults in a caregiving role

# YOU ARE OUR SYMPHONY: MR. HOLLAND'S OPUS



# WHAT MATTERING IS NOT:

- It is not simply meaning and purpose in life
- Not just a sense of “belongingness”
- Cannot be equated with self-esteem  
(as shown by Rosenberg & McCullough)

# POLL QUESTION #1

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO YOU TO MATTER TO OTHER PEOPLE?

# 2 ROUTES TO MATTERING (RECIPROCITY ROAD)

Isaac Prilleltensky (2020)

Having Value To Others

Giving Value To Others  
(Volunteering, Mentoring, Activism)

But giving value must be well-received & appreciated (sense of reciprocity, mutuality)

# SOMERS, FLETT, ET AL. (2022) MATTERING BY GIVING TO OTHERS

206 high school students from rural Michigan

Mattering in terms of **GIVING TO OTHERS** (4 Items)

“People count on me in times of need”

“People trust me with things that are important to them”

Higher scores linked with less loneliness, greater hope, mastery and self-efficacy approach to learning, higher executive functioning, and higher grades



IF YOU FEEL LIKE YOU MATTER,

FEEL SEEN & HEARD

FEEL BELIEVED IN & VALUED

FEEL CARED FOR & CARED ABOUT

KNOW YOU WOULD BE MISSED

FEEL WANTED



# MEASURING MATTERING: THE GENERAL MATTERING SCALE

How important are you to others?

How much do other people pay attention to you?

How much would you be missed if you went away?

How interested are others in what you have to say?

How much do other people depend on you?

# MATTERING DOMAINS IN LIFE:

- Mattering at home
- Mattering at work
- Mattering in the community

# POLL QUESTION #2

HOW IMPORTANT IS IT FOR PARENTS TO  
FEEL LIKE THEY MATTER TO THEIR KIDS?

# THE FLIP SIDE: ANTI-MATTERING

- The feeling of not mattering to others who seem intent on making us feel insignificant, small, perhaps even invisible
- Mattering and anti-mattering are not polar opposites (Flett et al., 2022)



THE BREAKFAST CLUB -- THE BASKET CASE

“IF IT’S BAD AT HOME, WHAT DO YOUR PARENTS DO?”  
ANSWER: “THEY IGNORE ME”

# THE ANTI-MATTERING SCALE (FLETT ET AL., 2020)

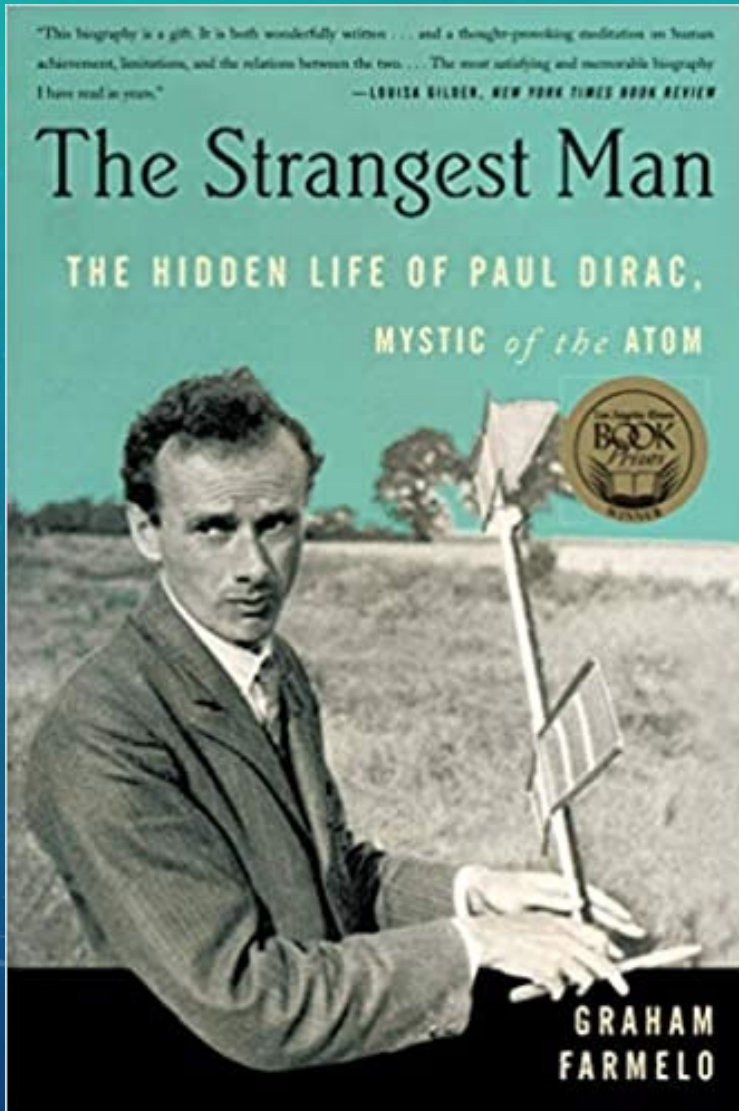
- How much do you feel like you don't matter?
- How often have you been treated in a way that makes you feel like you are insignificant?
- To what extent have you been made to feel like you are invisible?

# Paul Dirac: Introduced anti-matter

Second most famous scientist of 20<sup>th</sup> century

1933 – Nobel Prize for Physics, 31 years old (youngest at the time)

Proposed concept of anti-matter & had a father who treated him that way



# MATTERING AND MARGINALIZATION:

- Marginalization concept introduced by Nancy Schlossberg (1989)
- Must build community to combat being marginalized and the feeling of not mattering
- Her focus was on ADULT LEARNERS at college & on RETIREES





# SCHLOSSBERG (1989)

“The polar themes of marginality and mattering connect all of us – rich and poor, young and old, male and female.

Are we part of things; do we belong; are we central or marginal? Do we make a difference; do others care about us and make us feel like we matter?”

# FEELINGS OF NOT MATTERING & MARGINALIZED GROUPS/SOCIETIES

Example -- Residential Schools in Canada

Orange Shirt Day School survivor Phyllis Webstad:

“It’s a colour for all these years of not mattering.”



# OTHER WAYS TO VIEW MATTERING

LOSS OF MATTERING

FEAR OF NOT MATTERING

(Birdman – Emma Stone to Michael Keaton)

# POLL QUESTION #3

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOU AFRAID OF NOT MATTERING TO OTHER PEOPLE SOMEDAY?

# WHY IS MATTERING SO POWERFUL???

Because it's about ....

- The self and identity
- Relationships (making & breaking)
- Satisfies need for connection
- Life transitions & challenges (resilience)

# POWER OF MATTERING

Has moderate to strong links with:

HOPE

A SENSE OF PERSONAL AGENCY

RESILIENCE, GRIT, ADAPTABILITY

# POWER OF MATTERING

A source of social integration and connection. It provides interpersonal protection and safety from:

Negative social interactions (e.g., bullying)

Negative social influences (peers)

Loneliness

# THE POWER OF MATTERING: IT CHANGES LIVES!!

With children, the intervention of a caring adult has helped transform their lives

Emmy Werner – “The most optimistic thing we have seen in our study is that, even under adverse circumstances, change is possible if the older child or adolescent encounters new experiences with people who give meaning to his life and who tell him that he matters.”



# OPRAH WINFREY

Oprah says she owes it all to her 4th grade teacher, Mrs. Mary Duncan. Why? She was the first person in her life to make her feel like she mattered. Winfrey paid tribute to Mrs. Duncan in May 2011 during her penultimate show.



# OPRAH ON MATTERING:

“The yearning to feel heard, needed, & important is so strong in all of us that we seek that validation in whatever form we can get it”

(Winfrey, 2014)



# THE BLIND SIDE: MICHAEL OHER & LEIGH ANNE TUOHY



# MICHAEL OHER'S 2<sup>ND</sup> FAMILY

“Moving in with the Tuohys was the thing that made it all come true. They treated me like a member of the family... I wasn't just a special project to them. I was a kid who wanted to feel loved and supported and to know that my dreams and my future were just as important as anyone else's.”

# POWER TO PREVENT ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

WELLCOME, global charitable foundation based in London, England (October 2021 report)

27 active ingredients for active intervention to address child & adolescent depression & anxiety

Ingredients include building self-compassion, perfectionism reduction

**#7 – BUILDING A SENSE OF MATTERING**

# REASONS TO PROMOTE MATTERING: A KEY TO POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The National Research Council (U.S.) has listed support for mattering as essential in developing youth-based empowerment and youth development (Eccles & Gootman, 2002)

Communities must provide resources and opportunities to develop a sense of mattering

**BUT THERE'S A BIG PROBLEM .....**

# HOW PREVALENT IS MATTERING/NOT MATTERING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?

% Agreement with “I feel like I matter to other people”:

23,700+ Ontario students      65%

But 1 in 5 students say they don't matter.

Another 1 in 7 students aren't sure.

# HOW PREVALENT IS MATTERING/NOT MATTERING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?

% Agreement with “I matter to people at school”:

13,523 Ontario students

Male students 65%

Female students 54%

Gender diverse 34%

Note. Terms used by school board, 2020 data



# ROSENBERG (1985) – PREVALENCE OF NOT MATTERING TO PARENTS

% disagreement with “I matter to my parents”:

8-11 YEAR OLDS                      26%

12-13 YEAR OLDS                    29%

14-18 YEAR OLDS                    26%

Note. Based on 1,988 adolescents (Baltimore)

# ANTI-MATTERING & PERFECTIONISM IN GIFTED UK ADOLESCENTS (HILL & MADIGAN, 2022)

311 GIFTED ADOLESCENTS

Feelings of not mattering in 25% (1 in 4 students)

4 adolescent girls had perfect anti-mattering scores

# ANTI-MATTERING & PERFECTIONISM IN GIFTED UK ADOLESCENTS (HILL & MADIGAN, 2022)

Higher anti-mattering in this study correlated with:

Perfectionism & emotional reactivity to being imperfect

Higher stress

Poorer self-regulation of home learning during the pandemic

# FEELINGS OF NOT MATTERING IN THE COMMUNITY ARE NORMATIVE

% Agreement with “I feel like I matter in my community”:

Santa Clara, CA, 2011  
(38,000 students) 35%

Vermont, 2015  
(21,013 students) 50%

New Brunswick, Canada  
(1,902 students) 47%

# FEELINGS OF NOT MATTERING IN THE COMMUNITY ARE NORMATIVE

% Agreement with “I feel like I matter in my community”:

Maine, 2019

15,147 middle school students	56.6%
28,538 high school students	59.4%

Vermont, 2019

13,998 middle school students	58.0%
18,613 high school students	59.0%

# BENSON ET AL. 1999

## COMMUNITY VALUES YOUTH

Felt fully by only 20% of youth in America  
Based on 99,642 youth, grades 6-12,  
from 213 US cities

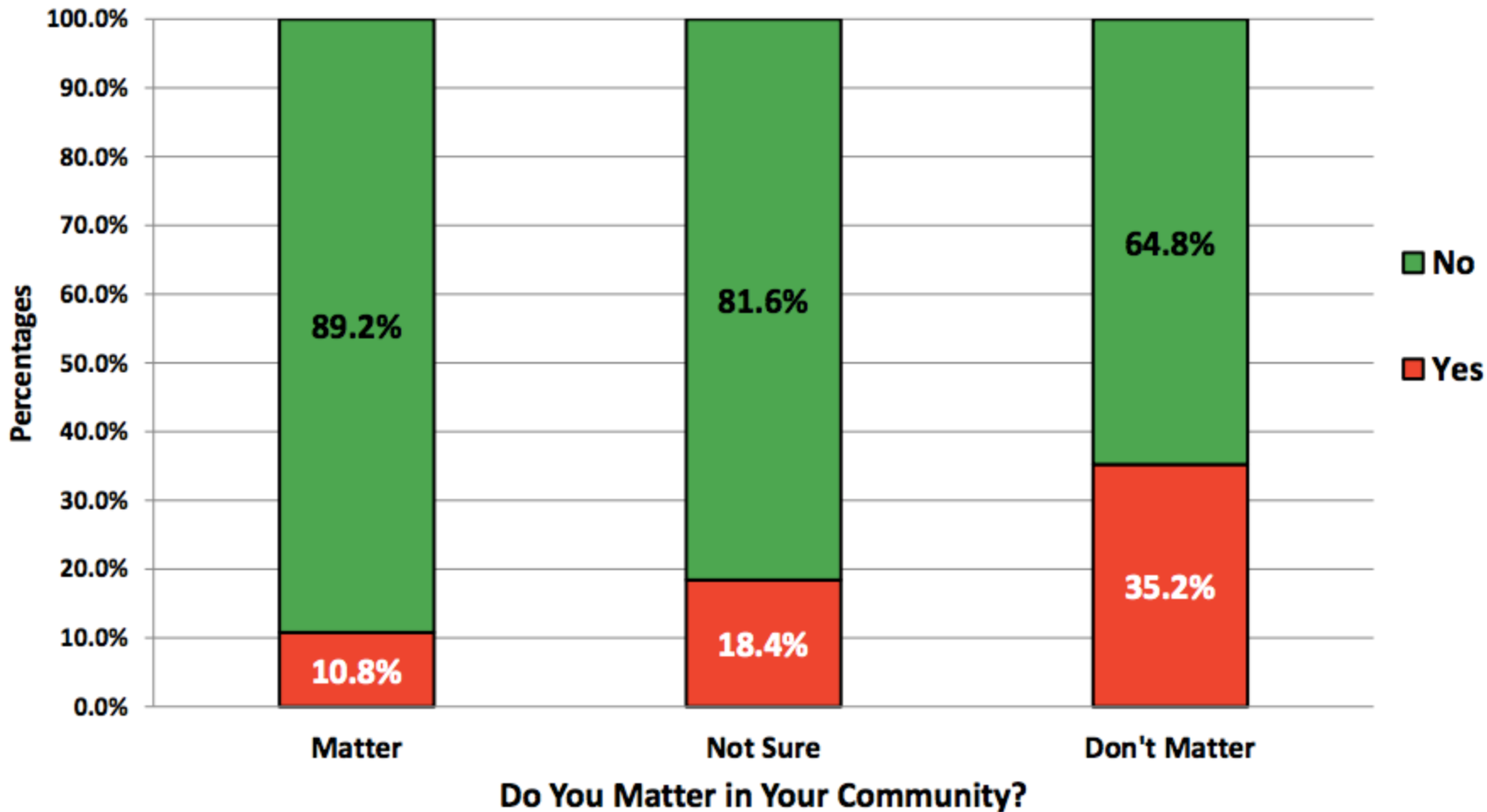
- In my town or city,
  - I feel like I matter
  - People make me feel important
  - People listen to what I have to say
  - People don't care about me

# WHY SHOULD WE BE CONCERNED?

Feelings of not mattering predict:

- Academic difficulties (less success)
- Physical health problems
- Depression & suicidal tendencies

## Students Reporting About Whether They Think They are Valued in Their Community by How They Answered The Question: Did you consider suicide in the past year?



**Source:** State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Chronic Disease & Health Promotion. *Youth Risk Behavior Survey* [YRBS] 2011 & 2013 data, <http://dhss.alaska.gov/dph/Chronic/Pages/yrbs/yrbs.aspx>. These results are from 13,256 Alaska High School Students responses to the YRBS. This slide was prepared by the Alaska Mental Health Board and Advisory Board on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse.

Advisory Board on Alcoholism  
and Drug Abuse



Alaska Mental Health Board



# DARK MATTERING

Feeling like you don't matter can fuel deep anger

Rosenberg (1985) cited correlations in a sample of almost 2000 grade 10 boys between feelings of not mattering to parents and:

Irritability

Resentment

Impulse To Be Aggressive

Anomie (e.g., no one really cares about me)

# IF YOUTH FEEL LIKE THEY MATTER, HAVE A POSITIVE FUTURE ORIENTATION & ..

Less likely to abuse substances

Less likely to bully, be violent

Tend to have higher grades, less dropout

# WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

Use research knowledge and put it into action

Mattering is modifiable, so let's promote it;  
and limit exposure to anti-mattering

But also we need to spread and model HOPE

# KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION: MATTERING IN ACTION

SCHOOL BOARDS (TORONTO AREA)

PROGRAMS TO REDUCE:

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

YOUTH SUICIDE (NUNAVUT)

# KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION: “YOU MATTER”



- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline program in the U.S.
- “You matter in good and tough times. We all matter. And if you need support during those tough times, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) can help you through.”

# MATTERING INITIATIVES: “WE MATTER CAMPAIGN”



National multi-media campaign in which Indigenous role models and allies from across Canada submit short videos, written and artistic messages about being resilient to their own hardships and spreading a message of hope to combat suicidality.

Started in October 2016 by Tunchai Redvers and Kelvin Redvers from the NWT

Endorsed by PM Trudeau

# MATTERING PROMOTION PRACTICES

**Mattering is reciprocal – when you make others feel like they matter, they do the same for you.**

**Activities:**

**PEER TO PEER MENTORING**

**OPPORTUNITIES FOR VOLUNTEERING**

**CREATE MATTERING-PROMOTION SETTINGS  
(COMMITMENT OF KEY RESOURCES SENDS A MESSAGE)**

# MATTERING PROMOTION PRACTICES FOR PARENTS, EDUCATIONS, COMMUNITY LEADERS

- **SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE (Any time is quality time)**
- **BE A GREAT LISTENER; LET THEM HAVE A VOICE**
- **ACKNOWLEDGE WHEN THEY HAVE BEEN MISSED**
- **REMEMBER THINGS IMPORTANT TO THEM (KEY DATES, INTERESTS, EVENTS, ETC)**
- **MODEL & ENCOURAGE GIVING TO OTHERS**



# MATTERING MICRO-PRACTICES

MICRO-PRACTICES SUCH AS:

KNOWING THEIR NAMES

ACKNOWLEDGING THEM (GIVE A NOD)

REACHING OUT TO SEE IF EVERYTHING IS OKAY

BEING DEMOCRATIC --NOT PLAYING FAVORITES

ANSWERING EMAILS

CHECKING IN WITH “THE PERSON”

# OTHER PRACTICES

- **LOST ART OF NOTE-WRITING**
- **UNEXPECTED FAVORS & CONSIDERATIONS**
- **EXPRESS APPRECIATION (OF THE PERSON)**
- **HOLD THEM TO ACCOUNT WHEN NECESSARY**

# LIMIT ANTI-MATTERING

- (1) Don't criticize (especially fixed attributes)**
- (2) Get rid of harsh or sarcastic tone of voice & don't talk over someone**
- (3) No phubbing – looking at your phone & not them**
- (4) No social comparisons**
- (5) Don't be so busy you have no time for them**

# FLETT (2018)

- United Nations 1999 Convention of the Rights of the Child resulted in 54 stated rights of children
- #55 should be the child's right to have a feeling of mattering to the people in her or his life and in the child's community
- We have an obligation to provide each child with this positive sense of self and the psychological security that comes with knowing that he or she matters

young a paleontologist dancer I am a Cook  
 kind similar incredible - a sister  
 Joker Daring ...A Artist  
 A Benelli Flyer ...a Consider ...a ... Mistake Maker  
 Slime master a unicorn heroic Swear  
 Soccer player a Scientist cool  
 batman dancer awesome I am short  
 brave and a mechanic I am thankful I am a ... I am ... always happy  
 Strong  
 a Soccer player  
 SISIER

# YOU



# MATTER

Singer AWESOME Artist Unique  
 Pinoy a soccer player funny  
 brother a soccer player KIND radical  
 a dinosaur a dinosaur  
 sister BFF Kind  
 Artist. Awesome Artist Iron man  
 I am a braniac f. awesome unique COOL  
 big sister ... Hilarious ... ATHLETE a Superhero Detective  
 kind MA  
 SISIER  
 SISIER

**You are loved!**  
**You are not alone!**  
**You make a difference!**  
**You are someone's reason to smile!**  
**You are important!**  
**You matter in this world!**  
**You are valued!**  
**You bring happiness to this space!**  
**You are appreciated!**  
**You shine brightly!**  
**You are the reason we are here!**  
**You are missed when you are not here!**  
**Your smile is contagious!**  
**You inspire!**



I feel like I matter at school when...

Someone really listens to me.

I CAN TRUST SOMEONE

Someone says something positive like "good job".

Someone helps me (with work, solving a problem, when I am hurt).

I feel like I matter when someone...

when I help someone out

I feel like I matter when you respect my space

I feel like I matter when someone says good words.

When people respect my stuff

I make someone smile or laugh

# The Psychology of Mattering

*Understanding the Human  
Need to be Significant*

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