



# Understanding the Role of Mattering in the Aftermath of Interpersonal Violence Victimization

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## Abstract

• **Intro.** Mattering is our subjective perception that others acknowledge our presence, are invested in us, and depend on us. Only one study that examined mattering in the aftermath of violence found that victims who reported high community mattering experienced less depression and better academic outcomes. The current study aimed to better understand the role of mattering in the aftermath of interpersonal violence.

• **Method.** Participants consisted of 5 college students who indicated that they had experienced an act of sexual and/or dating violence. Participants were asked to describe their feelings of mattering and in what ways they are shown they matter to specific others and their college community. Thematic analysis was used to describe patterns that emerged from victim responses.

• **Results.** Analyses revealed that victims of interpersonal violence experience mattering in various ways to both specific others and their university community.

• **Discussion.** Implications for future research directions are discussed.

## Introduction

- Sexual and dating violence are nationwide health problems<sup>1</sup>
- There are a series of negative outcomes of victimization, such as academic failure, substance abuse, and mental health issues<sup>2</sup>
- Studies suggest that social support is important for buffering against negative outcomes and for serving as a protective factor against revictimization<sup>3</sup>.
- A related construct, mattering, may also play a role
- Mattering is our perception that others are aware of our presence, care about us, and rely on us, and keeps us from feeling depressed and isolated<sup>4,5</sup>
- Mattering consists of 3 different elements: awareness, importance, & reliance
- Feelings of mattering emerge at the interpersonal (e.g., family, friends) and societal (e.g., community, school) level
- One study that examined mattering in the aftermath of dating violence found that victims who believed they mattered to their community reported less depression and better academic outcomes<sup>6</sup>
- We aimed to understand how victims of sexual and dating violence experience mattering to others and their community

## Method

### Participants:

- Mid-size northeastern university sample:
  - 5 women
  - Mean age – 21.2 years
  - 60% were seniors, 40% were freshman or sophomores at university
- Victimization history (since the age of 18):
  - 60% experienced unwanted touching or fondling
  - 40% experienced unwanted penetration
  - 40% experienced emotional relationship abuse
  - 20% experienced physical relationship abuse

### Procedures:

- Fliers were used to recruit participants (e.g., dormitories, student union)
- Participants completed an in-person 20-40 minutes interview
- Participants were compensated with \$20 Visa gift cards
- Content analysis was used to describe feelings of mattering (Braun & Clarke, 2006)

## Results

• As shown in Table 1, all 3 subscales of interpersonal mattering emerged from victim responses

**Table 1.** Experiences of interpersonal mattering for victims of sexual and dating violence

THEME	EXAMPLES
<b>AWARENESS</b>	
<b>Initiating contact</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I have one friend who checks in every couple weeks just making sure that I’m mentally okay from it [victimization]”</li> <li>• “If I’m not in a class, you know, my friends will probably text me and be like ‘hey are you okay?’”</li> </ul>
<b>IMPORTANCE</b>	
<b>Listening/supporting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “That’s really important to me, to feel listened to”</li> <li>• “Just kind of being there is the most I think important way that they show me that I matter to them”</li> </ul>
<b>Mindful about triggering topics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If something on the TV... they will check up on me and ask if it’s, they’re like are you okay, do you need me to change the channel?”</li> <li>• “They take that [victimization] into consideration sometimes, like if we’re having a conversation”</li> </ul>
<b>Validation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[Friends] acknowledging it, that like it happened, instead of just like never talking about it”</li> <li>• “When I started to go back to school and stuff, they have made it a point to say that they are proud of me...so that feels really nice”</li> </ul>
<b>Take sides against perpetrator</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “[Friends] are on my side when I explain those things [about victimization]”</li> <li>• “[Friends] cut him out”</li> </ul>
<b>RELIANCE</b>	
<b>Talk about personal issues</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “They [Friends] come to me before other people”</li> <li>• “[Friends come to them with] similar experience(s) because then you can like talk about it in a way that’s not like you have to introduce it to someone who doesn’t know or understand”</li> </ul>

- As shown in Table 2, 2 of the 3 subscales of community mattering emerged from victim responses
- The reliance component did not emerge as a theme

**Table 2.** Experiences of community mattering for victims of sexual and dating violence

THEME	EXAMPLES
<b>AWARENESS</b>	
<b>Staff &amp; agency relations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “They [SHARPP] worked with me and the professor to get an academic intervention in place...I went to talk to the professor...and he was super helpful”</li> <li>• “I’ve actually received a lot of support from faculty, which has been incredible. I started falling behind in my schoolwork because of the PTSD...even outside of class they’ve been more than happy to check on me...As far as the leaders in this community go, I’ve had an incredibly positive experience”</li> </ul>

**Table 2 (continued).**

THEME	EXAMPLES
<b>IMPORTANCE</b>	
<b>Campus resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “They [SHARPP] are always present at like tabling events and their number is on the back of student IDs”</li> <li>• “I know that they have the resources there, which is good, it’s a good way of showing that the UNH community cares”</li> </ul>
<b>Campus events</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “They [SHARPP] have a lot of stuff that they do in April [for sexual assault awareness month]”</li> <li>• “They [UNH] have events specifically about those topics [relationship abuse] that you can attend”</li> </ul>
<b>Validation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “I do like to see that they’re [UNH] like sticking up for survivors like me”</li> <li>• “Not having those voices saying ... ‘it’s all your fault’, it definitely helps and UNH is definitely a place where I feel like they don’t do that”</li> </ul>
<b>Inclusivity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “This past Fall they did a whole bunch of cultural appropriation lectures”</li> <li>• “I think they could be better at responding to things...but you can tell that they are trying... they are trying to make a space for people that feel like they don’t have a space”</li> </ul>

## Implications & Conclusions

- Results suggest that victims are shown they matter in ways that are more specific to their victimization experiences, such as when others are mindful about triggering topics and take sides against the perpetrator
- Victims’ responses mapped onto the facets of mattering identified by previous research<sup>4,5</sup>, but incorporated nuances related to victims’ experiences
- All 3 elements emerged for interpersonal mattering
- Only awareness and importance emerged for community mattering
- Findings will be used to create new victim-specific measures of interpersonal and community mattering to capture the perspectives of victims of sexual and dating violence
- Future research should assess how the nuances of mattering for victims of sexual and dating violence relate to victims’ recovery, such as well-being

## References

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