Mattering is "the perception that, to some degree and in any variety of ways, we are a significant part of the world around us" (Elliott, 2004). Mattering is highly correlated with sociological and psychological phenomena including:

- A strong negative correlation with truancy, vandalism, theft, violence, drug use, binge drinking, and suicide (Elliott, 2006)
- A strong positive correlation with self-esteem, relationship satisfaction, and other measures of general wellness (Elliott, 2009)
- Mattering is most commonly measured using Elliott's 2004 mattering to others index.

Several authors have advocated for three-factor or four-factor models of mattering, and validates the model using confirmatory factor analysis. These factors are (1) reliance, (2) awareness, (3) importance, and (4) ego-extension. Neither study accounts for a possible method effect due to the presence of 12 negatively-worded items in the instrument. Negatively-worded items can significantly alter model specification (see Brown, 2003; Marsh, 1996).

The Problem

Researchers disagree about how many subcomponents should be included in the latent constructs of mattering.

- Elliott (2004) advocates for a three-factor structure and validates the model using confirmatory factor analysis. These factors are (1) reliance, (2) awareness, and (3) importance.
- France and Finney (2009) used data collected using the exact same instrument. Using confirmatory factor analysis, they championed a four-factor model of mattering, including (1) reliance, (2) awareness, (3) importance, and (4) ego-extension.
- Neither study accounts for a possible method effect due to the presence of 12 negatively-worded items in the instrument.
- Negatively-worded items can significantly alter model specification (see Brown, 2003; Marsh, 1996).

Research Question

Is mattering a three-factor or a four-factor construct?

Data

- Covariance matrix with standard deviations obtained from France and Finney (2009)
- Obtained from student responses to the mattering to others index
- N=593
- Students from a mid-Atlantic University

Method

- Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in MPlus
- Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation
- Model Fit Comparison Using RMSEA, SRMR, and CFI
- Method Effect Modeling Using CTCU and CTCM
- Significance test for possible method effect.

Results

- Clear evidence that a method effect is present in the results. The presence of negatively-worded items introduces measurement error.
- Modeling the method effect (see path diagrams to the left) improves the fit for the three factor model to meet recommended fit thresholds.
- In the four-factor model, the correlation between Ego-Extension and Importance increased to theoretically impossible values (see below), which indicates model misspecification and a lack of discriminant validity.
- This finding provides a clear rationale to prefer the three-factor model of mattering championed by Elliott (2004).

Future Research

- Test and validate the new model for measuring the presence of method effects
- Simulate data to explore sensitivity and implications of the new model
- Examine method effects due to item wording in measurement of other latent constructs

Discussion

- Accurately understanding mattering has important implications for counselors and clinicians (Kayle, 2005; Elliott, 2009). The construct of mattering should be important for counselors and clinicians seeking to best help their clients and patients.
- These results clarify the reason for the divergent model specification conclusions between Elliott (2004, 2009) and France and Finney (2009).
- These results provide further evidence that accounting for method effects due to item wording can affect model specification: researchers should be mindful of this and use models which account for method effects, like the CTCU or CTCM:
- This study presents a new model for ascertaining whether there is a significant method effect present in data collected given an instrument.

Inter-factor Correlations for the three factor Models

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Inter-factor Correlations for the four factor Models

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