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Personal standards and evaluative concerns perfectionism on mattering among Gen-Z

Zoe Lee[1], Kususanto Ditto Prihadi[2], Eva Nur Rachma[3]
[1]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Behavioral Science, HELP University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[2]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Science and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
[3]Department of Psychology, Faculty of Psychology, UNTAG, Surabaya, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate whether a personality disposition called perfectionism plays a significant role in predicting the sense of mattering. The role of two major elements of perfectionism, namely evaluative concern perfectionism (ECP) and personal standard perfectionism (PSP) was investigated. ECP was considered as the predictor due to the nature of its contingency upon one's perception of others' standard of acceptance, while PSP was included as a moderator because the level of personal standard might determine how ECP predicts the sense of mattering. Participants were purposively recruited to make sure that they were members of Generation-Z (Gen-Z). As many as 130 undergraduate students aged 18 to 24 years old were asked to respond to the subscales of the Frost multidimensional perfectionism scale and the interpersonal mattering scale through an online survey. The data was analyzed with a help of the software of PROCESS Macro for bootstrapping method with 95% confidence interval and 5,000 samplings. The results revealed that when PSP is at its highest levels, the link between ECP and mattering is no longer significant. Thus, a perfectionist individual tends to feel they matter more when their concern about others' opinions is higher, but not when they have higher levels of personal standards.

Corresponding Author:

Kususanto Ditto Prihadi
Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social Science and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur
CSI Highest 1, Jalan Puncak Menara Gading, Taman Connaught, 56000 Cheras, Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
Email: prihadi@ucsiuniversity.com

1. INTRODUCTION

This study aimed to investigate whether individuals with perfectionism can develop perception that they matter to others, knowing that they might have extra concern for others' opinions and certain personal standards. Perfectionism has been considered a significant mental health issues among the youth at the moment [1], apart from depression [2], anxiety [3], and suicidal ideation [4]. Especially because studies have linked it with problems among young adults who are undertaking their studies in higher education, such as procrastination [5], academic performance [6] and academic burnout [7]. Meta-analysis and systematic reviews have found increasing levels of perfectionism over time [8], [9] as well as its influence upon general mental health upon the Generation Z (Gen-Z) [10]. Gen-Z refers to any individual born from 1997 onwards [11]; with the eldest Gen-Z being 24 years old at the time of writing, it can be concluded that in the urban population, most of the Gen-Z members are current university or college students. Moreover, Gen-Z is reported to be the generation with the highest likelihood of being enrolled in college [12]. Furthermore, Gen-

Z is also considered as the generation that relies more on the social media than any of their predecessors, including the millennials [13]. Their high reliance on the social media gave them the illusion that they are always being watched by each other [14]; an illusion that led them to unhealthy self-comparison [15], [16], difficulties to accept themselves unconditionally [17], and perceived cyber-victimization [18]. Most of these constructs would likely to lead them to develop unnecessarily high concern over mistakes, doubts about action, and sometimes, unnecessarily high personal standards; which can be summarized as maladaptive perfectionism [19], that might lead to worse mental health issues. The interplay between the personal standards that sometimes are different than others and the concern towards others' feedback have not been thoroughly studied and reported, especially when it comes the development of the sense of mattering.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Mattering

Mattering refers to the sense that one's importance is acknowledged by others [20], [21]. Mattering holds a significant role in social interactions; individuals with higher levels of mattering tend to evaluate themselves better and be satisfied with the way they live [15]. In the context of young adults' mental health, mattering was reported to be a protective factor against depression and suicidal tendencies [22]. In general, mattering is reported to be a significant predictor of psychological well-being [23], happiness [24]–[27], because when one believes that they matter to others around them, they will subjectively feel that are well. Still, in the context of young adults, mattering is considered an important factor that predicts unconditional self-acceptance [17], an important construct that protects Gen-Z from irrational beliefs [28], perfectionism on interpersonal competence [29], and promotes mindfulness [30].

Knowing the importance of mattering to protect the mental health of the Gen-Z members, it is imperative to discuss the factors that might improve the sense of mattering among them. Two decades ago, Schieman and Taylor [31] stated that mattering to family members or significant others is contingent upon the constant and significant personal relationships, as operationalized through marriage, being in a relationship, and parenthood; their study indicated that individuals can only sense that they matter to others whom they are familiar with. Elliot *et al.* [24] postulated that mattering consisted of three major elements namely awareness, importance, and reliance. The significance of these three elements relied on their socio-cognitive nature; for instance, awareness involves a cognitive process of 'we matter because others realize', reliance is another socio-cognitive process of 'we matter because others need us', while importance has an affective element where we feel we matter when others share the same feeling or attitude towards an object.

Further studies on factors of mattering tend to follow the notions of Elliot *et al.* [24], for instance, a study on mattering in digital labor indicated that mattering among gig workers is mainly predicted by its reliance element rather than the other two because gig workers seldom meet each other in-person [32]. Perceived social support (PSS) is considered a significant predictor of mattering [33] based on the notion that others tend to support individuals whom they considered important to them; therefore, the way PSS predicts mattering could be explained through the importance element of mattering. Another recent study by Casale and Flett [34] reported that mattering might significantly be reduced by the fear of missing out on the information of significant others during the pandemic; this study shows the implication of the awareness element of mattering.

The aforementioned studies in the previous paragraph highlighted that mattering is contingent upon how one socializes with others, and it is supported by the symbolic interactionist theory [35], [36], which explained that we evaluate ourselves based on how we perceive others would evaluate us. Nevertheless, we believe that individual differences should be taken into account when studying how social interaction develops our sense of mattering. A study in the Malaysian context during the pandemic reported that a personality trait called extraversion moderated the effect of mattering on life satisfaction, where only individuals with low levels of extraversion would have their life satisfaction significantly predicted by mattering without any mediator [37]. This aforementioned study indicated that individual differences, such as personality factors might interfere with how mattering plays its role and/or is being developed within an individual.

2.2. Perfectionism, evaluative concerns, and personal standards

In the context of this study, we proposed that perfectionism, a personality disposition, might predict the sense of mattering among individuals. Perfectionism was once thought to be unidimensional [38], nevertheless, studies in the past three decades such as the ones by Frost and colleagues [39], Hewitt and associates [40] as well as others have come to an agreement that perfectionism is a multidimensional construct [38], [41]. As the knowledge on perfectionism developed, various scales of measurement have been developed, with the most commonly used being frost's multidimensional perfectionism scale (FMPS) [39], hewitt and flett's multidimensional perfectionism scale (HFMPS) [40], and the almost perfect scale-revised

(APS-R) [42]. Although these scales have different conceptualizations of perfectionism and its dimensions, there is a consensus that perfectionism has two core aspects: adaptive (beneficial) or maladaptive (detrimental) [41], [43], which blankstein and dunkley [44], under the dimensions of perfectionism on Frost and colleagues' [39] FMPS, have categorized to be personal standards perfectionism (PSP) and evaluative concerns perfectionism (ECP).

Perfectionism can be considered problematic because according to the stress-generation hypothesis, perfectionists tend to create stress from their own high personal standards and critical judgment of their actions [45]. In the context of Gen-Z, it is also considered a significant determinant of academic burnout in adolescent students [7]. Even in times of distress or when facing a challenge in academic contexts, perfectionists strive hard to prove themselves to their self (personal standards) or others (evaluative concerns), as they fear others' negative perception of their incompetence, and try to be more resilient in trying times to protect their reputation of being unflawed [6]. This is supported by the self-discrepancy theory [46], where an individual's ideal-self does not match their actual self, creating a sense of discomfort; it is posited that perfectionists experience such discrepancies, which may or may not serve as motivation to achieve a match between the two selves and alleviate the feelings of discomfort [47], depending on the type of perfectionist they are.

Adaptive and maladaptive perfectionists are believed to handle stress and adversity in different ways. Individuals with high PSP who are suggested to be more adaptive [48], would be theoretically more resilient compared to their maladaptive counterparts, as they perceive adversities to be something they should overcome to achieve their ideal standard of "perfect", in efforts to align their idealized self and actual self. They tend to adopt the task-oriented coping style in times of adversity [7] and would thus perceive lower stress levels than that of evaluative concerns perfectionists [43]. On the flip side, individuals with higher ECP which is thought to be maladaptive due to the trait of high self-criticism and negative evaluations of themselves [43], [48], has been linked to depression, psychological maladjustments and higher perceived stress [49]. Tending to take on emotion and avoidant coping styles [7], it has been asserted that evaluative concerns perfectionists have a fear of failure [5] and maybe less resilient than those high in PSP.

2.3. PSP, ECP, and mattering

As discussed previously, mattering held an important role in one's life. Recent studies in mattering reported that it is a robust predictor of life satisfaction [15], [37], unconditional self-acceptance [17], happiness [26], [27], workplace satisfaction [50], [51] and mental health [22], [23] and many other important mental health-protective benefits, such as mitigation of psychological distress [49], management of academic stress [52], [53] and stress-buffering in general [19].

Nevertheless, the perfectionism social disconnection model [54] suggested that perfectionists tend to generate social disconnection through complex interpersonal behavior as a result of perfectionism that they compel themselves with, leading to them experiencing lower perceived social support [55], which has been directly linked to the 'importance' element of mattering [24], [56]. The model posits that perfectionists (individuals with ECP in particular) are prone to interpersonal difficulties, causing disconnection with people around them, further adding to their stress. The aforementioned studies led us to believe that when individuals tend to seek validation of others to feel perfect, a tendency that has been found more prevalent among Gen-Z [10], they would likely have lower levels of mattering, and might be vulnerable to the aforementioned potential of mental health issues. Thus, we hypothesized that when individuals possess high levels of ECP, they would likely have lower levels of mattering.

On the other hand, perfectionist individuals with higher levels of PSP tend to be different from their counterparts with higher levels of ECP. They tend to hold themselves to extremely high personal standards and performance, as well as demand nothing less than perfection [43], [57], [58]. These individuals tend to portray self-oriented perfectionism, order, and high personal standards [59], [60]. Stoeber and Corr [61] described PSP as the less adaptive aspect of perfectionism which brings benefit to the individuals who possess it; it is also associated with positive psychological constructs [60], such as a better level of self-esteem, self-efficacy, satisfaction with life, and general psychological well-being [62], [63]. In workplace settings, individuals with higher PSP are likely to have a positive effect of workaholism, individual achievement, work enjoyment, work involvement, and work engagement [64]. Having a high PSP allows individuals to employ approaching behavior in an attempt to pursuit of ideal self [58], [65]. They would likely pursue and achieve performance satisfaction and follow their achievements, as well as remain optimistic about future endeavors [65].

Because most of the variables predicted by higher levels of PSP tend to have a positive relationship with mattering, such as life satisfaction, workplace positivity, and the employment of approaching behavior, we hypothesized that the PSP might interact with ECP in predicting mattering. In other words, the negative

link between ECP and mattering would be weaker when the PSP level is higher because the individuals would less likely to be dependent upon other people's validation to believe that they matter to others.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1. Participants

According to G*Power 3.1 software [66] calculations with a small effect size of .08 [which was obtained by squaring the correlation coefficient (r =.27) from a past study [67], the statistical power of .80 and an alpha level of .05, it was suggested that a minimum sample size of 126 participants be used for this study. Hence, we aimed for the recruitment of at least 135 participants to account for potential attrition and spoiled data but was able to surpass this target, recording a total of 148 responses (105 females, 42 males). However, only responses from 130 Malaysian undergraduate students (94 females, 36 males) aged 18 to 24 years old (M =20.72, SD =1.15) currently studying at a university were included in the final sample as participants for this study due to one participant's repeated submission of the Google form and 17 participants' failure to meet the inclusion criteria. The sampling criteria for this study included having to be a current undergraduate student, Malaysian, and be aged between 18 to 24 years old.

Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were recruited via non-probability convenience sampling and snowball sampling. Two main methods of recruitment were used: firstly, the study was shared through our personal social media platforms, which included WhatsApp, Instagram, and LinkedIn. Secondly, it was also shared through a university's Psychology Student Union's Telegram group chat which is used to disseminate information to the students. Participants were also asked to share the study with their acquaintances who met the criteria upon completion of the study.

3.2. Materials

Subscales of the frost multidimensional perfectionism scale (FMPS) [39] were used to measure PSP and ECP. Based on the frost's theory perfectionism, the PSP was measured using the personal standard (PS) subscale of the FMPS, whereas ECP was measured using the concern over mistakes (CM) and doubt about action (D) subscales of the FMPS. The compilation of FMPS subscales used in the study consisted of a total of 20 items (PS, CM, D). Meanwhile, the subscale for PS (7 items) was used to measure PSP, and the subscales for CM and D (13 items) were used to measure ECP. Items on the FMPS were phrased as statements on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree. Examples of items from the scale include "I have extremely high goals" (PS subscale), "If I fail at work/school, I am a failure as a person" (CM), and "I usually have doubts about the simple everyday things I do" (D). The cronbach alpha values for FMPS were .83 for PS, .88 for CM, and .77 for D, indicating that it is internally reliable [39].

Mattering was measured by employing the interpersonal mattering scale (IMS) [24], a scale consisting of 24 items in a 5-point Likert scale, in which 1 stood for strongly disagree and 5 stood for Strongly agree. "People do not care what happens to me" and "when I have a problem, people usually do not want to hear about it" are some examples of the items on the scale. The internal consistency for this scale was also impressive, with a Cronbach's alpha value of .904, .922, and .886 from three samples, indicating that it is reliable [24].

An informed consent form explaining the details of the study and a demographic form requesting participants to state their age, gender, nationality, whether they were an undergraduate student ("Are you currently an undergraduate student?"), and field of study was also used in the study. All materials were collated into Google Forms.

3.3. Procedures and data analysis

The data collection of this current study has been scrutinized and given an ethical clearance by the ethics review board of the Department of Psychology, HELP University, Kuala Lumpur, with the clearance code of E202108/028. The link to the study on Google Forms was shared via the recruitment processes mentioned above and interested individuals could click on the link to complete it. Participants were first required to read and indicate their consent to take part in the study on the informed consent form presented to them on the first page of google forms. Participants were then required to fill in a demographic questionnaire and the three scales measuring the variables of the study in the following order: the PS, CM, and D subscales of the FMPS, and the full IMS. Upon completion of the full IMS scale, participants were asked to confirm the submission of their answers by clicking "submit" on the last page of the google forms. The entire process of completing the study was approximated to take no less than 30 minutes. The data was analyzed by multiple linear regression in SPSS because we are looking into a multivariate design without any mediation or moderation that requires other methods, such as bootstrapping or the sobel test.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive statistics

Results showed that female participants, who made up 72.31% of the final sample (n=130), had slightly higher general perfectionism (M=63.11, SD=13.20) than male participants, who made up 27.69% of the final sample (M=59.78, SD=11.29). This difference was found to be not significant, t (128) =1.34, p=.184, 95% CI [-1.60, 8.26], indicating that there were no gender differences in general perfectionism between female and male participants. This was similar for well as ECP, whereby female participants reported higher levels of ECP (M =39.65, SD =10.03) than male participants (M=26.78) which were not significant, t(128) =1.52, p=.132, 95% CI [-0.87, 6.62]. Meanwhile, scores between female participants (M=23.46, SD=4.85) and male participants (M =23.00, SD =4.61) for PSP had little to no difference, t (128) =0.49, p=.626, 95% CI [-1.40, 2.31]. Overall, participants had average scores of perfectionisms (M=62.18, SD =12.75), scoring in the middle range from a possible total score range of 20 to 100. This was also the case for PSP (M=23.33, SD=4.77) (total score ranging between 7 to 35) and ECP (M=38.85, SD=9.71) (total score ranging between 13 to 65). Participants' mattering scores were higher than average, (M=72.26, SD =8.05) with the possible range for total scores between 24 to 120.

Partial regression plots between predictors and the outcome were used to test for the assumptions of linearity. The assumptions of linearity were met for the relationship between ECP and mattering, as well as the relationship between PSP and mattering. According to the scatterplot of regression standardized residuals against regression standardized predicted residuals, the data points were evenly spread with no funnelling pattern, which indicates that the assumption of homoscedasticity was met. The assumption of normality was also met, as seen on the P-P plot of standardized residuals where the data points were relatively close to the line as shown in Figure 1, showing that the data was normally distributed. Even so, process macro is a robust test that assumes non-normality [68].

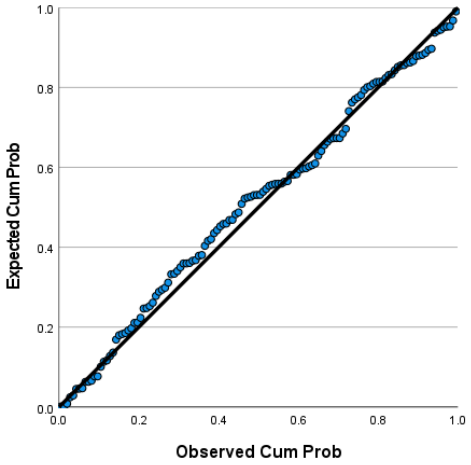

Figure 1. Assumption testing of normality

Results from the analysis of collinearity showed that the assumptions of no multicollinearity were met for PSP (tolerance =0.70, VIF =1.42) and ECP (tolerance =0.61, VIF =1.62), as tolerance scores were more than 0.2 and VIF values were below 10. As the initial analysis showed extreme tolerance and VIF values for the predictor and moderator variables, mean-centering was used to transform the data by subtracting the mean value from the original value of the predictor and moderator and addressing the violation [69]. Lastly, the durbin-watson statistic obtained was close to 2 (durbin-watson value =1.84), showing that the assumption of independence of errors was met.

4.2. Inferential statistics

In this section, the results of the bootstrapping analyses are presented and briefly discussed. As a model, the predictor significantly predicted the criterion [F (3,126) =15.14, p<.001] and it predicts 26% of the variance in mattering (R^2=.26). Table 1 depicted that the ECP and PSP are the significant predictors of mattering, as well as their interaction with one another.

Table 1. The coefficient of the models

Model	Coefficient	se	t	p	Lower Limit CI	Upper Limit CI
ECP	1.21	.28	4.30	.00	.65	1.77
PSP	1.40	.46	3.00	.00	.48	2.31
Int X*W	-.04	.01	-3.09	.00	-.06	-.01

Additionally, the interaction between the predictor and the moderator was significant and prevalent [F (1, 126) =9.54, p<.001] with a small change of prevalence (R^2-Chng =.06). It is valuable to observe from Table 1 that despite both ECP and PSP being positive significant predictors of mattering, their interaction term was negative; which means that the increment of the moderator predicts the weaker link between the predictor and the criterion variables. Table 2 confirms the negative interaction effect between ECP and PSP on mattering. The results in Table 2 confirmed the negative interaction term between the predictor and the moderator in our study; the higher the score of the moderator, the weaker the link between the predictor and the criterion variables.

Table 2. Conditional effect of focal predictor at values of the moderator

PSP	Effect	se	t	P	LLCI	ULCI
11.00	.83	.16	5.02	.00	.50	1.15
12.20	.78	.15	5.14	.00	.48	1.09
13.40	.74	.14	5.28	.00	.46	1.02
14.60	.70	.13	5.42	.00	.44	.96
15.80	.66	.12	5.57	.00	.42	.89
17.00	.62	.11	5.72	.00	.40	.83
18.20	.57	.10	5.85	.00	.38	.77
19.40	.53	.09	5.94	.00	.35	.71
20.60	.49	.08	5.94	.00	.33	.65
21.80	.45	.08	5.81	.00	.29	.60
23.00	.40	.07	5.49	.00	.26	.55
24.20	.36	.07	4.97	.00	.22	.51
25.40	.32	.07	4.29	.00	.17	.47
26.60	.28	.08	3.53	.00	.12	.43
27.80	.24	.08	2.78	.01	.07	.40
29.00	.19	.09	2.09	.04	.01	.38
29.21	.19	.09	1.98	.04	.00	.37
30.20	.15	.10	1.49	.14	-0.5	.35
31.40	.11	.11	.98	.33	-.11	.33
32.60	.07	.12	.55	.58	-.17	.31
33.80.	.02	.13	.19	.85	-.24	.29
35.00	-.02	.15	-.12	.90	-.30	.27

4.3. Discussion

While we hypothesized that individuals with higher ECP would likely to have lower mattering, our findings did not support it; the results suggested that ECP is a significant positive predictor of mattering. Our second hypothesis that PSP is a significant positive predictor of mattering was supported. However, despite both of the perfectionism types are positive predictors of mattering, their effect became negative when they interact with each other. The results suggested that when the PSP is at its higher levels, the link between PSP and mattering became negative.

Our finding was not in line with the perfectionism social disconnection model [54], which implied that individuals with high ECP tend to be disconnected with the people around them, especially among Gen-Z [10]. The only possible explanation regarding this insignificance is that we might have interpreted the theory differently; when one is striving to fulfill the standards of others (possessing higher levels of ECP), they believe that everyone else is watching them and taking note of their errors. Their unnecessary high concern about other people's validation made them feel that others are always paying attention to them, and would show negative affect when they made mistakes. This sense of getting much attention is in line with the awareness element of mattering [24], which might have elevated their mattering score in general. Thus, the participants in this study might have experienced the same situation with the participants of the study by Bucher *et al.* [32] on gig workers who elevated their general mattering only through the reliance element; in our study, the Gen-Z with higher ECP elevated their general mattering through awareness element alone.

Our finding that PSP is a positive significant predictor of mattering is in line with some previous studies, such as Lo and Abbott [65], Sirois *et al.* [58], as well as Stoeber and Gaudreu [60]. We confirmed that individuals with higher personal standard would like to have positive behavior towards others in their attempt to pursue their ideal self. It is also suggested that PSP was a stronger positive predictor of mattering

than ECP, because one point increment of PSP predicted 1.4 points increment of mattering as presented in Table 1. Nevertheless, despite both ECP and PSP are significant positive predictors of mattering, the interaction term between them was negative; stronger ECP would predict weaker effect of PSP on mattering as shown in Table 2. It can be explained that when we rely more on our personal standards to evaluate our own perfection, we would likely to require validation from other people. Our hypothesis is supported by this finding.

Knowing that the most of the Gen-Z members tend to be perfectionist due to their reliance over social comparison through social media [13], [16], it is important to make sure that the educational stakeholders, including parents, peers, educators, and even social media content designers to pay some effort to reduce the encouragement of social comparison and replace it with more personal-standard and self-acceptance messages in their works. It is prevalent nowadays to see the tendency to show-off among the younger millennials and Gen-Z in social media; for instance, in Instagram, they showed off their filtered contents of fashion, diets, trips, and exercises while in more serious social media, such as LinkedIn, they showcased their minuscule achievements and narrated it to make it envious and larger than life. Such contents, while could be claim as inspiring tend to trigger unhealthy social comparison that led individuals to low sense of mattering and mental health issues. One of the most significant implication of this current study is the awareness to reduce or to stop envious contents in the social media that justified as inspirational, while meant to showcase filtered content to gain attention.

This study is not without limits. First of all, the scales are self-report, and they were given to Gen-Z members, who are well-known in filtering their own pictures and contents to achieve positive attention from others. Thus, there was a possibility that our participants might be biased towards wanting to be known as more perfectionists or had been developed higher mattering than they really are. While the normality of data distribution was achieved, and all the perfectionism scores tend to be close to the average, the mattering score was considered higher than the average. The second limitation of this current study is the generalizability of the results; we focused on the Gen-Z members in the urban area of Kuala Lumpur and Selangor, which were not a good representative of the majority of Gen-Z members in Malaysia or any South East Asian country. Our participants tend to be westernized, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic (WEIRD), and therefore, more various location should be included to recruit more participants in future research.

5. CONCLUSION

The study revealed that when PSP is at its highest levels, the link between ECP and mattering is no longer significant. Thus, a perfectionist individual tends to feel they matter more when their concern about others' opinions is higher, but not when they have higher levels of personal standards. Our results indicated that members of the Gen-Z in Malaysian urban area tend to have their sense of mattering affected by the way they became perfectionists. In other words, mattering set the condition for the interplay between the personal standards that sometimes are different than others and the concern towards others' feedback was conditional on mattering.

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BIOGRAPHIES OF AUTHORS

Zoe Lee Zoe psychology graduate from the largest psychology department in Southeast Asia, HELP University, Subang 2. Her research interest lies on perfectionism and personality factors. She can be contacted through fosslaresearch@gmail.com.

Kususanto Ditto Prihadi Ditto is the head of research and postgraduate studies in the Faculty of Social Science and Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Kuala Lumpur. His research interest lies on mattering, self, and interpersonal relationship. He can be reached through fosslaresearch@gmail.com.

Eva Nur Rachma Eva is the head of the department of psychology in Universitas 45, Surabaya. She's finishing her doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology soon, and she can be reached through fosslaresearch@gmail.com.