Journal of Happiness Studies (2021) 22:667–679
https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00246-4

RESEARCH PAPER

Perceiving Social Pressure not to Feel Negative is Linked to a More Negative Self-concept

Egon Dejonckheere[1] · **Brock Bastian**[2]

Published online: 14 March 2020
© Springer Nature B.V. 2020

Abstract

The current cultural standard in western societies expects people to be happy and not sad. While the pursuit of positive emotion is strongly encouraged in modern societal discourse, occasionally feeling negative is easily considered maladaptive or abnormal. It is in our human nature to comply with social expectations, and the extent to which we are able to do so has important consequences for how we view or present ourselves, generally referred to as our self-concept. Here, we investigate how the perception of the societal norm to avoid negative emotions relates to people's self-concept. In an online survey ($n=98$), we assessed people's perceived social expectancies not to experience feelings such as anxiety or depression. We evaluated the emotional quality of participants' self-concept via an open-response 15-statements task in which they freely described themselves, and from which we extracted the positive and negative emotion words using the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software. We found that people's perceived social expectancies not to experience negative affect related to more negative and less positive self-descriptions. Furthermore, multiple linear regression revealed that this association was independent of people's desire to socially conform, but a function of their actual emotion/symptom levels. Together, these findings further support the premise that today's societal standard to avoid negative affect is unattainable, inevitably disclosing discrepancies between people's actual occasional negative feelings and the desired emotion norm. Because this process is associated with negative self-evaluations, this may lead to an ironic amplification of these unwanted negative states.

Keywords Social expectancies · Emotion norms · Cultural standards · Self-concept · Negative affect

Electronic supplementary material The online version of this article (https://doi.org/10.1007/s10902-020-00246-4) contains supplementary material, which is available to authorized users.

✉ Egon Dejonckheere
egon.dejonckheere@kuleuven.be

[1] KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium

[2] University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

1 Introduction

Social norms greatly determine the way we behave, think and feel (Sherif 1936). In the case of emotions, we have a general conception of how others around us evaluate the experience of certain kinds of emotions, and how socially appropriate it is to experience or express particular feelings (Bastian 2013). As such, our perception of these social emotion norms introduce internalized personal reference values about which emotions to pursue and which ones to avoid (Carver and Scheier 1990). Here, we examine how the pressure to live up to these social emotion standards may have implications for the way we view or present ourselves (i.e., our self-concept; e.g., Baumeister 1999; Manstead and Fischer 2001). Do these perceived social expectancies motivate us to present a self-image that nicely aligns with the societal norm, driven by the need to portray ourselves in a socially desirable way (Krumpal 2013), or do these stringent social expectations make us experience a discrepancy between our actual selves and the desired social standard, inducing negative self-reflections (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008)?

2 Literature Review

2.1 Social Norms About Appropriate Emotion

In modern Western societies, it is evident that some feelings are more socially valued and normative than others. From brand advertisements that emphasize the instant gratification associated with the purchase of their goods (e.g., Khanna 2016), or motivational speakers and self-help books that promise effective strategies to boost people's happiness (e.g., Seligman 2004), to national indexes that rank each country according to the average happiness level of its citizens (e.g., Diener 2000), it is clear that there is a strong societal emphasis on pursuing happiness and positive affect as a source of favorable outcomes (Ahmed 2010; Gruber et al. 2011; Mauss et al. 2012).

Simultaneously, the occasional and inevitable experience of negative affect is often dismissed as deviant or dysfunctional (Haslam 2005), considered bad for our own and others' mental health (Bastian et al. 2012). Although feeling sad, stressed, angry or anxious at times undeniably serves an adaptive purpose (Smith and Lazarus 1990), the functionality of these negative affective states is rarely mentioned in modern societal discourse (Dejonckheere et al. 2017).

2.2 Social Norms and Self-concept

Humans are social creatures, sensitive to interpersonal processes such as social approval and group belongingness (Baumeister and Leary 1995; Sherif 1936). As such, the extent to which we are able to meet the perceived expectancies of other people around us, but also society's standards more generally, has important consequences for our self-concept (e.g., Asch 1956; Insko et al. 1983). Our self-concept refers to the collection of beliefs we have about ourselves (Baumeister 1999), and constitutes our individual perception and evaluation of who we are as a person (Hattie 1992). It generally embodies the answer to the question "*Who am I?*" (Kuhn and Mcpartland 1954; Lewis 1990).

Adhering to social norms or standards is associated with positive self-evaluations (Pool et al. 1998). In fact, maintaining a positive self-attitude is thought to be one of the major

driving forces to conform with relevant majority groups (e.g., Chaiken et al. 1996). In contrast, social non-compliance leads to (fear of) rejection, punishment, and negative self-evaluations (e.g., Asch 1956; Kruglanski and Webster 1991; Schachter 1951).

2.3 Social Norms About Appropriate Emotion and Self-concept: Two Competing Hypotheses

A critical question is how these normative processes unfold in the case of people's perceived social expectancies to avoid negative feelings and their self-concept? Will the perceived social standard not to feel bad relate to self-evaluations that are more positive or negative?

2.3.1 Hypothesis 1: Social Desirability Process

On the one hand, the societal norm to be happy and not sad may encourage people to present themselves in an (overly) positive way, aiming to conform with the societal norm in the most favorable manner (e.g., Krumpal 2013). As such, the perception of other's expectancies not to feel negative could instigate a social desirable response in which people forsake each negative statement about themselves in order to depict a personal image that corresponds to the prevailing cultural norm (e.g., positivity bias in self-representations on social media; Reinecke and Trepte 2014; Waterloo et al. 2018). According to this rationale, perceived social expectancies not to feel negative are associated with self-representations that are (overly) positive and not negative, because people feel a compelling desire to comply with the social norm (i.e., *social desirability process*).

2.3.2 Hypothesis 2: Emotional Discrepancy Process

On the other hand, the societal norm to be happy and not sad may also be unattainable, inevitably revealing a discrepancy between our actual emotional states and the desired cultural norm (Bastian et al. 2012; Carver and Scheier 1990). Because we all feel sad or anxious sometimes, we may perceive an inability to meet the socially acceptable standard of avoiding these negative feelings, which prompts negative self-evaluations and the ironic amplification of these unwanted emotional states (Dejonckheere et al. 2017; Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008). Following this rationale, perceived social expectancies not to feel negative are associated with a self-concept that is more negative, and less positive, because we experience an incongruity between how we actually feel and how we think we should feel according to others (i.e., *emotional discrepancy process*).

3 The Present Study

With the current research, we had the aim to test which of these two processes dominates the relation between people's perceived social expectancies not to experience negative emotions and their self-concept. In an online study, we assessed participants' perceived social expectancies not to feel anxious or depressed, and evaluated the positive and negative emotional quality of their self-concept in a free-response self-description task (i.e., 15-statements test; Kuhn and Mcpartland 1954). Additionally, to contrast the relative empirical validity of the two proposed processes, we determined participants' desire to

socially conform (*social desirability process*), as well as their actual anxiety and depression levels (*emotional discrepancy process*).

3.1 Participants

We used Amazon's Mechanical Turk Services (MTurk) to recruit participants for our study. While the MTurk community represents the general population in many demographic features better than commonly employed convenience samples (e.g., first-year psychology students; Behrend et al. 2011), MTurkers are also known to experience elevated levels of depression and anxiety (Arditte et al. 2016). Given our research interest in the perceived social evaluation of these negative affective states, we believe this makes the MTurk community an opportune participant pool for the current study.

Nevertheless, research indicates that MTurkers, on average, differ in other meaningful ways from the general population (e.g., socio-economic status and education levels; Paolacci et al. 2010), taming a direct generalization of our research findings to a population level (see also our limitation section).

Based on previous research on the link between perceived social expectancies not to feel negative and psychological well-being (Bastian et al. 2012; Dejonckheere et al. 2017), we anticipated small to medium effects. A test for statistical power determined the inclusion of 100 participants to detect effect sizes of this magnitude ($r = .30$, $\alpha = .05$). A group of 101 MTurkers expressed interest in our study, upon which we sent them a link to a Qualtrics questionnaire. Three participants, however, did not complete the entire survey and were therefore excluded from our analyses. This left us with a total sample of 98 participants (57 men) ranging in age between 19 and 69 ($M = 36$, $SD = 11$). Based on the geographical coordinates in our Qualtrics data, we determined that all but two participants lived in the US.[1] All participants provided informed consent.

3.2 Procedure and Materials

Our survey consisted of various self-report questionnaires (not all relevant for this report), complemented with an open-ended 15-statements test to evaluate participants' self-concept. The order in which we presented the separate instruments was randomized across participants, as well as the items within each questionnaire. To ensure the quality of our data, we also included a bogus item (i.e., *This is a control item. Please select '6' for this item.*), which all participants correctly identified. The average completion time for the entire survey was 17 min ($SD = 8$ min).

3.2.1 Perceived Social Expectancies not to Feel Negative

To evaluate participants' perceived social expectancies not to experience negative affect, we administered the Social Expectancies about Depression and Anxiety Scale (SEDAS; Bastian et al. in preparation). This questionnaire is composed of 13 statements that assess people's trait-like beliefs about how others around them, but also society in general, perceive people who experience various negative emotional states such as depression or

[1] Replicating our analyses without the two non-US participants yielded similar conclusions.

anxiety (e.g., *I think that society generally disapproves of people who feel depressed or anxious.* or *Overall, people in society are very comfortable with those who feel depressed or anxious.* [reversed]; for an overview of the complete questionnaire see Supplemental Materials 1). Participants had to evaluate each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 9 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating that person experienced more social pressure not to feel negative. Internal consistency was high (α = .89).

3.2.2 Social Desirability

We determined participants' tendency to present themselves in a socially desirable way with a short form of the Social Desirability Scale (SDS; Crowne and Marlowe 1960). This instrument consists of 13 statements that implicitly assess both people's ambition to over-report desirable behavior (e.g., *No matter who I'm talking to, I'm always a good listener.*), as well as to under-report undesirable behavior (e.g., *There have been occasions when I took advantage of someone.* [reversed]). Participants rated each statement on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), and higher scores indicated higher levels of social desirability. Internal consistency was high (α = .87).

3.2.3 Depressive, Anxiety and Stress-Related Symptoms

We assessed participants' current depressive, anxiety and distress levels with the Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS; Lovibond and Lovibond 1995). This 21-item questionnaire consists of three 7-item subscales, and aims to distinguish between different emotion/symptom clusters that are uniquely related to, and prototypical for, depression (anhedonia and absence of positive affect; e.g., *I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything.*), anxiety (physiological hyperarousal; e.g., *I experienced trembling in the hands.*), and general distress (being upset and increased negative affect; e.g., *I tended to over-react to situations*; Brown et al. 1997). Participants rated the experience of each complaint during the last week on a scale that ranged from 1 (*never*) to 4 (*almost always*). Each subscale showed high internal consistency (depression α = .96, anxiety α = .91, general distress α = .92).

3.2.4 Self-concept

To evaluate the positive and negative emotional quality of people's self-description, we adopted an open-ended 15-statements test (e.g., Kuhn and Mcpartland 1954) in which participants were prompted to provide various personal answers to the question "*Who am I?*". Subjects were not obliged to complete the entire list of "*I am …*"—statements, but we encouraged them to spend around five minutes on the task. On average, participants provided 12 personal statements (*SD* = 2), with most responses constituting a single word (median number of words for the complete test = 15; *M* = 19, *SD* = 14). We emphasized not to bother about the logic or importance of their responses; they could write the answers as they occurred to them.

Next, we used the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count software (LIWC, version 1.17; Tausczik and Pennebaker 2010) to determine the emotional content of participants' self-evaluations. LIWC is a text analysis tool that allows researchers to quantify (among other textual parameters) the emotional quality from written samples by comparing reported target words with a validated dictionary that contains almost 4500 unique words that are

Table 1 Personal statements from two example subjects with positive versus negative self-concepts

	High LIWC positive emotion score	High LIWC negative emotion score
1.	Smart	Old
2.	Hard-working	Cranky
3.	Honest	Sarcastic
4.	Perseverant	Depressed
5.	Likable	Bored
6.	Funny	Funny
7.	Happy	Loser
8.	Easy-going	Lazy
9.	Faithful	Sorry
10.	Trusting	DJ
11.	Reliable	Promoter
12.	Strong	Friend
13.	Helpful	White
14.	Independent	Son
15.	Supportive	Broke

LIWC Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

coded for their presence among various categories (Pennebaker et al. 2001). Specifically, we were interested in the percentage of positive and negative emotion words in participants' personal statements as an indication of how positive or negative they viewed themselves. The LIWC dictionary includes 406 positive (e.g., *love, nice, sweet*) and 499 negative (e.g., *hurt, ugly, nasty*) emotion words. Table 1 provides the personal responses of two example participants that respectively had positive and negative emotion scores in the highest decile of observed LIWC emotion word scores. On average, the LIWC software could detect and categorize 85% ($SD = 11\%$) of the reported target words in one or more categories.

4 Results

All data in this article are available at the Open Science Framework for re-analysis (https://osf.io/jc453/). Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for each measure, as well as the correlations between all instruments. Focal to our research question, we observed a statistically significant association between people's SEDAS scores and the positive and negative LIWC emotion scores derived from their free-response self-descriptions on the 15-statement test. Specifically, although effect sizes were smaller than we had anticipated, subjects who experienced more social pressure to avoid negative feelings such as anxiety or depression, reported considerably less positive ($R^2 = .041$), and more negative emotion words ($R^2 = .072$) in their self-evaluations (see Fig. 1).

Second, we also observed a statistically significant correlation between participants' SDS scores and the positive and negative LIWC emotion words in their self-descriptions. That is, subjects who had the tendency to present themselves in a socially desirable way, used more positive ($R^2 = .043$), and less negative emotion words ($R^2 = .052$) to describe

Table 2 Means, standard deviations and Pearson correlations among all measures

Measures	Mean (SD)	Correlations					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
1. SEDAS	5.91 (1.32)						
2. SDS	3.44 (1.01)	− .03					
3. DASS depression	1.66 (0.92)	.43***	− .31**				
4. DASS anxiety	1.43 (0.63)	.14	− .25*	.80***			
5. DASS distress	1.68 (0.73)	.31**	− .31**	.80***	.83***		
6. LIWC % positive emotion words	28.37 (21.54)	− .20*	.21*	− .21*	− .11	− .22*	
7. LIWC % negative emotion words	8.21 (12.09)	.27**	− .23*	.54***	.38***	.43***	− .30**

SEDAS Social Expectancies about Depression and Anxiety Scale, *SDS* Social Desirability Scale, *DASS* Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale, *LIWC* Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

*$p < .050$; **$p < .010$; ***$p < .001$

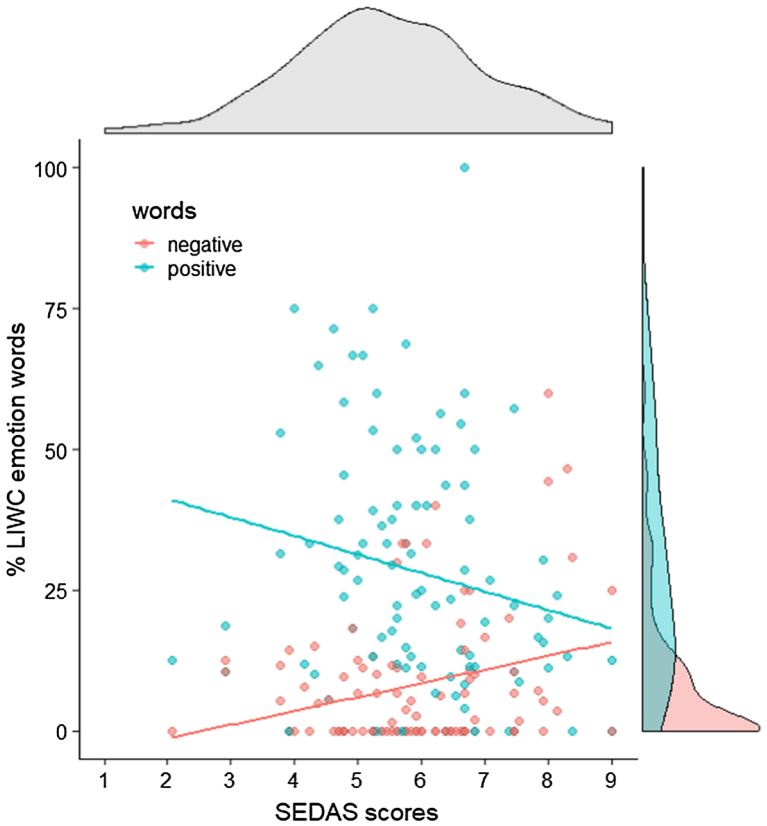

Fig. 1 The relation between participants' perceived social pressure not to feel negative (SEDAS) and the percentage positive (green) and negative (red) emotion words in observed in their self-concept (according to the LIWC software). For each variable, density distributions are visualized in the margin. The R-code for this figure can be found at the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/jc453/). (Color figure online)

themselves. Furthermore, SDS and SEDAS scores were uncorrelated, rejecting the proposition that experiencing social pressure not to feel negative and the desire to socially conform could be related processes.

Next, we found statistically significant relations between participants' depression-, anxiety-, and distress-specific complaints as measured with the DASS and the emotion words used in their self-evaluation. In each domain, higher reported symptom scores were related with the use of more negative (depression $R^2 = .288$, anxiety $R^2 = .141$, distress $R^2 = .181$), and less positive emotion words in their self-concept (depression $R^2 = .044$, distress $R^2 = .050$; except for a statistically non-significant relation between anxiety-specific complaints and positive LIWC emotion words).

Finally, SEDAS scores showed a positive link with depressive ($R^2 = .180$) and distress-related symptoms ($R^2 = .093$), replicating earlier work on the role of perceived social expectancies not to feel negative and poor psychological functioning (e.g., Bastian et al. 2015).[2]

In a next step, to gain further insight in the link between participants' perceived social expectancies not to feel negative and their self-concept, we investigated whether this association was a function of people's ambition to present themselves in a social desirable way (i.e., *social desirability process*) and their actual depression or anxiety levels (i.e., *emotional discrepancy process*), respectively. To this end, we ran 4 multiple linear regression models, in which we either predicted participants' positive or negative LIWC emotion scores by their SEDAS scores and SDS scores, or their SEDAS scores and total DASS symptom scores.[3] For ease of interpretation, all predictors were grand-mean centered, so that the intercept in each model reflected the average percentage of positive or negative emotion words observed in subjects' self-concept.

As can be seen from Table 3, in the prediction of both the positive and negative emotion words in participants' self-descriptions, the explanatory power of their SEDAS scores was statistically significant above and beyond their SDS scores (ΔR^2 in positive emotion words = .039, ΔR^2 in negative emotion words = .069). While the tendency to present oneself in a socially desirable way predicted more positive, and less negative emotion words in people's self-descriptions, the opposite was true for their perceived social pressure not to feel negative. This suggests that both predictors have an independent and different predictive effect in the prediction of people's self-concept, providing evidence against the proposed *social desirability process*.

When controlling for actual symptom levels, however, we did not find evidence for a unique predictive link between participants' SEDAS scores and the valence of their self-descriptions. In the prediction of the positive emotion words in participants' self-concept, both their actual symptom levels and the social pressure to avoid negative emotions became statistically non-significant, which suggests that these predictors explain the same variance. In the prediction of the negative words in participants' self-concept, only their

[2] Post-hoc independent-samples *t*-tests did not reveal statistically significant group differences between men and women regarding their survey data or self-concept responses (all p's $\geq .097$). Next, however, investigating whether gender moderated the present relations was not feasible. As the original study was not designed to critically test for interaction effects, we lacked the required statistical power to perform moderation analysis. Future studies with a larger sample size are needed to conclusively determine the differential impact of gender on the present results.

[3] Given that we were not interested in the differential predictive effect of specific symptom types, and the high interrelations among the different DASS subscales ($r \leq .80$), we adopted an average symptom score to operationalize participants' actual symptom severity. Using the individual subscales, however, yielded highly similar conclusions.

Table 3 Multiple linear regression models predicting the emotional quality of people's self-concept

Outcome	LIWC positive emotion words					LIWC negative emotion words				
Predictors	*β*	SE	*t*	*p*	95% CI	*β*	SE	*t*	*p*	95% CI
Model 1										
Intercept	28.37	2.11	13.46	<.001	[24.19 to 32.55]	8.21	1.16	7.10	<.001	[5.91 to 10.51]
SDS	4.31	2.10	2.05	.043	[0.13 to 8.48]	−2.66	1.16	−2.30	.024	[−4.95 to −0.37]
SEDAS	−3.20	1.60	−2.00	.048	[−6.38 to −0.03]	2.24	0.88	2.73	.008	[0.65 to 4.14]
Model 2										
Intercept	28.37	2.13	13.31	<.001	[24.14 to 32.60]	8.21	1.07	7.69	<.001	[6.09 to 10.33]
DASS total	−4.48	3.19	−1.40	.164	[−10.82 to 1.86]	7.65	1.60	4.78	<.001	[4.47 to 10.82]
SEDAS	−2.51	1.71	−1.46	.146	[−5.91 to 0.89]	1.10	0.86	1.29	.201	[−0.60 to 2.81]

All predictors were grand-mean centered

SEDAS Social Expectancies about Depression and Anxiety Scale, *SDS* Social Desirability Scale, *DASS* Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale, *LIWC* Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count

actual symptom levels had a statistically significant and positive predictive value. This suggests that the relation between their perceived social pressure not to feel negative and their negative self-concept may be driven by their actual symptom levels. Overall, these findings provide support for the proposed *emotional discrepancy process*.

5 Discussion

Occasional negative emotional experiences, such as stress, sadness, anger or anxiety are inevitable, and serve a clear adaptive purpose (Smith and Lazarus 1990). However, modern Western societies seem to be mostly preoccupied with pursuing positive affect (e.g., Cederström 2018), while regarding any negative emotionality as unwanted and dysfunctional (Dejonckheere et al. 2017). In the present research, we sought to examine the role of this perceived societal imbalance in valuing positive versus negative emotions in the way people view or describe themselves. Specifically, we investigated the link between people's perceived social pressure to avoid negative feelings, such as anxiety and depression, and the positivity and negativity of their self-concept. Extracting the positive and negative word counts from participants' free-response self-descriptions in a 15-statements test, we found that perceiving social pressure not to experience negative emotions was associated with a self-concept that was colored by more negative and less positive emotion words.

Interestingly, this relation was evident independent of people's desire to socially conform. While stronger social desirability related to self-representations that were more positive, and less negative, an unrelated and opposite pattern appeared for people's perceived social expectancies not to experience negative emotions. Although both processes played a meaningful role in people's self-concept, these findings suggest that the perception of other's expectancies not to feel negative does not trigger a social desirable response in which people wish to present themselves in an overly positive way in order to comply with the prevailing societal standard.

In contrast, the relation between people's self-concept and their perceived social expectancies not to feel negative was function of people's actual anxiety, depression and distress levels, which suggests that it is the discrepancy between how we actually feel and how we think we should feel according to the predominant normative standard that gives rise to these more negative, and less positive self-reflections (Bastian et al. 2012; Carver and Scheier 1990; Nolen-Hoeksema et al. 2008). Indeed, because we all occasionally experience negative emotions that deviate from the cultural norm, this perceived failure may lead us to respond to our own emotions with negative self-evaluations. In this way, it is possible that the societal message to pursue positive emotions at the cost of negative ones, paradoxically aggravates the experience of negative affect (i.e., *secondary disturbances*; Bastian 2013), prompting negative self-evaluations.

In sum, the current findings may further add to the literature that describes the potential detrimental effects of a one-sided valuation of positive versus negative emotions (Bastian 2013; Dejonckheere et al. 2017; Gruber et al. 2011). A cultural message that encourages a more nuanced embrace of our emotional repertoire could potentially be more advantageous for our mental health and the way we view ourselves (e.g., Burkeman 2013).

5.1 Limitations and Future Research

The current study is not without limitations. First, despite the fact that we were able to establish meaningful relations between various types of self-report (i.e., predetermined answers via rating scales versus free-response self-descriptions), our conclusions remain correlational. Although previous experimental research demonstrated a causal effect of the perceived social standard to avoid negative affect on people's psychological well-being (e.g., Bastian et al. 2012; McGuirk et al. 2018), future lab studies should investigate whether (the perception of) this norm also has direct detrimental consequences for their self-concept.

Second, individual differences may have existed in the degree to which participants appraised the online survey context as totally anonymous or not. As such, it remains uncertain whether all self-statements reflect how people actually view themselves (*personal identity*), versus how they wish to present themselves to others/the researchers (*social identity*; Turner et al. 1987). An experiment that clearly distinguishes between these two types of self-concepts by unambiguously (de)activating the perception of a social majority group could determine how the perceived social expectancies to avoid negative feelings relates differently to these two types of self-concepts. Such a design would allow us to further fine-tune the exact mechanisms through which discrepancies with a societal standard link up with more negative self-reflections. For example, in the case of people's *personal identity*, the driving force that yields negative self-evaluations may be the perceived incongruence with an internalized emotion standard. In contrast, for people's *social identity*, it could be the observed inauthenticity towards others that invokes these negative self-views.

Finally, there are important *constraints on generality* (Simons et al. 2017) regarding the sample we selected. Besides the question whether MTurkers are truly representative of the general population (Arditte et al. 2016), we emphasize that the participants in this study were predominantly located in the US, a prototype country for western civilization. The norm to pursue happiness and avoid sadness is particularly expressed in western individualistic societies (Kuppens et al. 2008), whereas eastern collectivistic cultures tend to promote a more balanced affective repertoire where positive and negative emotions may co-exist (Spencer-Rodgers et al. 2010). As such, it is possible that the self-concept of eastern individuals is less affected by this societal emotion norm (e.g., Heine et al. 1999). Future studies that investigate the cross-cultural validity of the relation between people's perceived social pressure to avoid negative feelings and their self-concept could uncover the universality of the present findings.

6 Conclusion

Perceiving social pressure not to feel anxious or depressed is associated with self-evaluations that are less positive, and more negative. This relation is independent of people's desire to socially conform, yet is function of their actual emotion/symptom levels, which suggests that it is the failure to comply with the desired societal norm that introduces these negative self-reflections.

Acknowledgments The research that led to the findings reported in this article was supported by the research fund of KU Leuven (GOA/15/003; C14/19/054), and by an Australian Research Council Discovery grant awarded to Brock Bastian (DP140103757). The authors thank Peter Kuppens for his insightful feedback during the research process and earlier versions of this manuscript.

Compliance with ethical standards

Conflict of interest The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

Ahmed, S. (2010). *The promise of happiness*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Arditte, K. A., Çek, D., Shaw, A. M., & Timpano, K. R. (2016). The importance of assessing clinical phenomena in Mechanical Turk research. *Psychological Assessment, 28,* 684–691.

Asch, S. E. (1956). Studies of independence and conformity: I. A minority of one against a unanimous majority. *Psychological Monographs: General and Applied, 70,* 1–70.

Bastian, B. (2013). Normative influences on secondary disturbance: The role of social expectancies. *Australian Psychologist, 48,* 85–93.

Bastian, B., Dejonckheere, E., & Kuppens, P. (in preparation). Social expectancies about depression and anxiety scale (SEDAS): A validation study.

Bastian, B., Koval, P., Erbas, Y., Houben, M., Pe, M., & Kuppens, P. (2015). Sad and alone: Social expectancies for experiencing negative emotions are linked to feelings of loneliness. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 6,* 496–503.

Bastian, B., Kuppens, P., Hornsey, M. J., Park, J., Koval, P., & Uchida, Y. (2012). Feeling bad about being sad: The role of social expectancies in amplifying negative mood. *Emotion, 12,* 69–80.

Baumeister, R. F. (1999). *The self in social psychology*. Philadelphia, PA: Routledge.

Baumeister, R. F., & Leary, M. R. (1995). The need to belong: Desire for interpersonal attachments as a fundamental human motivation. *Psychological Bulletin, 117,* 497–529.

Behrend, T. S., Sharek, D. J., Meade, A. W., & Wiebe, E. N. (2011). The viability of crowdsourcing for survey research. *Behavior Research Methods, 43,* 800.

Brown, T. A., Chorpita, B. F., Korotitsch, W., & Barlow, D. H. (1997). Psychometric properties of the depression anxiety stress scales (DASS) in clinical samples. *Behaviour Research and Therapy, 35,* 79–89.

Burkeman, O. (2013). *The antidote: Happiness for people who can't stand positive thinking*. Edinburgh, UK: Canongate.

Carver, C. S., & Scheier, M. F. (1990). Origins and functions of positive and negative affect: A control-process view. *Psychological Review, 97,* 19–35.

Cederström, C. (2018). *The happiness fantasy*. Medford, MA: Polity Press.

Chaiken, S., Wood, W., & Eagly, A. H. (1996). Principles of persuasion. In E. T. Higgins & A. W. Kruglanski (Eds.), *Social psychology: Handbook of basic principles* (pp. 702–742). New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Crowne, D. P., & Marlowe, D. (1960). A new scale of social desirability independent of psychopathology. *Journal of Consulting Psychology, 24,* 349–354.

Dejonckheere, E., Bastian, B., Fried, E. I., Murphy, S. C., & Kuppens, P. (2017). Perceiving social pressure not to feel negative predicts depressive symptoms in daily life. *Depression and Anxiety, 34,* 836–844.

Diener, E. (2000). Subjective well-being: The science of happiness and a proposal for a national index. *American Psychologist, 55,* 34–43.

Gruber, J., Mauss, I. B., & Tamir, M. (2011). A dark side of happiness? How, when, and why happiness is not always good. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 6,* 222–233.

Haslam, N. (2005). Dimensions of folk psychiatry. *Review of General Psychology, 9,* 35–47.

Hattie, J. (1992). *Self-concept*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Heine, S. J., Lehman, D. R., Markus, H. R., & Kitayama, S. (1999). Is there a universal need for positive self-regard? *Psycological Review, 106,* 766–794.

Insko, C. A., Drenan, S., Solomon, M. R., Smith, R., & Wade, T. J. (1983). Conformity as a function of the consistency of positive self-evaluation with being liked and being right. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 19,* 341–358.

Khanna, P. (2016). A content analysis of emotional and rational appeals in selected products advertising. *Journal of Management & Social Sciences, 4,* 568–578.
Kruglanski, A. W., & Webster, D. M. (1991). Group members' reactions to opinion deviates and conformists at varying degrees of proximity to decision deadline and of environmental noise. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 61,* 212–225.
Krumpal, I. (2013). Determinants of social desirability bias in sensitive surveys: A literature review. *Quality & Quantity, 47,* 2025–2047.
Kuhn, M. H., & Mcpartland, T. S. (1954). An empirical investigation of self-attitudes. *American Sociological Review, 19,* 68–76.
Kuppens, P., Realo, A., & Diener, E. (2008). The role of positive and negative emotions in life satisfaction judgment across nations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 95,* 66–75.
Lewis, M. (1990). Self-knowledge and social development in early life. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 277–300). New York, NY: Guilford Press.
Lovibond, S. H., & Lovibond, P. F. (1995). *Manual for the depression anxiety stress scales*. Sydney, AU: The Psychology Foundation of Australia.
Manstead, A. S. R., & Fischer, A. H. (2001). Social appraisal: The social world as object of and influence on appraisal processes. In K. R. Scherer, A. Schorr, & T. Johnstone (Eds.), *Series in affective science. Appraisal processes in emotion: Theory, methods, research* (pp. 221–232). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
Mauss, I. B., Savino, N. S., Anderson, C. L., Weisbuch, M., Tamir, M., & Laudenslager, M. L. (2012). The pursuit of happiness can be lonely. *Emotion, 12,* 908–912.
McGuirk, L., Kuppens, P., Kingston, R., & Bastian, B. (2018). Does a culture of happiness increase rumination over failure? *Emotion, 18,* 755–764.
Nolen-Hoeksema, S., Wisco, B. E., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2008). Rethinking rumination. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 3,* 400–424.
Paolacci, G., Chandler, J., & Ipeirotis, P. G. (2010). Running experiments on Amazon Mechanical Turk. *Judgment and Decision Making, 5,* 411–419.
Pennebaker, J. W., Francis, M. E., & Booth, R. J. (2001). *Linguistic inquiry and word count (LIWC): LIWC2001*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Pool, G. J., Wood, W. M., & Leck, K. M. (1998). The self-esteem motive in social influence: Agreement with valued majorities and disagreement with derogated minorities. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75,* 967–975.
Reinecke, L., & Trepte, S. (2014). Authenticity and well-being on social network sites: A two-wave longitudinal study on the effects of online authenticity and the positivity bias in SNS communication. *Computers in Human Behavior, 30,* 95–102.
Schachter, S. (1951). Deviation, rejection, and communication. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, 46,* 190–207.
Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). *Authentic happiness: Using the new positive psychology to realize your potential for lasting fulfillment*. New York, NY: Atria Books.
Sherif, M. (1936). *The psychology of social norms*. New York, NY: Harper & Brothers.
Simons, D. J., Shoda, Y., & Lindsay, S. D. (2017). Constraints on generality (COG): A proposed addition to all empirical papers. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 12,* 1123–1128.
Smith, C. A., & Lazarus, R. S. (1990). Emotion and adaptation. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research* (pp. 609–637). New York, NY: Guilford.
Spencer-Rodgers, J., Peng, K., & Wang, L. (2010). Dialecticism and the co-occurrence of positive and negative emotions across cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology, 41,* 109–115.
Tausczik, Y. R., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2010). The psychological meaning of words: LIWC and computerized text analysis methods. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology, 29,* 24–54.
Turner, J. C., Michael, H. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
Waterloo, S. F., Baumgartner, S. E., Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2018). Norms of online expressions of emotion: Comparing Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and WhatsApp. *New Media & Society, 20,* 1813–1831.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.