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Pressure to not feel bad among (different-sex) romantic partners: prevalence, and correlates

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ABSTRACT

Western society generally highly values happiness. As a result, people sometimes experience pressure not to feel negative emotions. In this study, we comprehensively investigated this pressure, and how it manifests itself, in adult romantic relationships. Specifically, we first examined when, how often and how intensely people experience pressure not to feel bad from their romantic partners (94 different-sex couples). Additionally, we investigated (both between- and within-person) how this pressure is related to context (presence of, contact and or conflict with a partner), emotional processes (i.e. experienced sadness and anxiety, emotion suppression, and how their partner perceived their affect), and relationship well-being. Using experience sampling methodology data (6/14 reports per day over one week) we found that although participants generally did not experience strong pressure from their partner, they experienced some feelings of pressure about 50% of the time. Furthermore, within-person predictors associated with negative processes/emotions (i.e. negative emotions, conflict, emotion suppression) were related to the momentary frequency (odds) and/or intensity of perceived pressure not to feel bad. At the between-person level, individuals who experience more sadness, anxiety and reported suppressing their emotions more often tended to experience more and/or stronger pressure. Only weak associations with relationship well-being were found.

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Pressure to not feel bad; Romantic relationships; Negative emotions; Cultural norms; Experience sampling

In contemporary (western) society, being happy is a goal many strive for in itself. While being happy certainly bears a considerable amount of benefits (Myers & Diener, 2018), research has indicated that this "pursuit of happiness" might also come with a potential cost. As it turns out, individuals who greatly value happiness seem to exhibit more depressive symptoms (Ford et al., 2014), higher loneliness (Mauss et al., 2012) and paradoxically, lower happiness (Mauss et al., 2011).

It is argued that the aforementioned societal fixation on happiness creates pressure on individuals to refrain from experiencing or expressing negative emotions (Humphrey et al., 2022). Such perceived pressure has repeatedly been shown to negatively impact various aspects of individuals' well-being. For instance, people who experience higher pressure not to feel bad actually report an increase in negative emotions (Bastian et al., 2012), and momentary elevated levels of experienced pressure are related to subsequent increases in depressive feelings (Dejonckheere et al., 2017). This positive relationship between perceived pressure not to experience or express negative feelings, and experiencing intense

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and frequent negative emotions might seem paradoxical at first. However, the pressure causes a larger discrepancy between how one thinks one *should* be feeling according to social standards (socially expected affect), and how one actually feels (inevitably feeling bad from time to time). The larger this discrepancy grows, the more likely one is to become aware of how they want to feel but currently do not, possibly resulting in negative affect. This discrepancy can exist both momentarily, or for a prolonged period of time. Within-person, temporary discrepancies between socially expected and actual states can become noticeable (someone feels worse than they would prefer at that moment) and lead to momentary negative affect (Dejonckheere et al., 2017). Between-person, overall discrepancies can also become observable (someone generally feels worse than they would prefer) and lead to more negative emotions in general (Dejonckheere et al., 2022).

Social standards of which emotions are desirable and should be displayed are inevitably shaped in the context of social interactions, where most emotional experiences originate (Boiger & Mesquita, 2012). Starting in infancy, we implicitly learn in interaction with parents, peers and others what emotions are deemed appropriate to experience and display in what specific contexts (Malatesta & Haviland, 1982). Afterwards, we can expect that these norms are generally experienced and enforced when interacting with others. However, as discussed above, we know that a perceived norm or pressure to refrain from negative emotions (i.e. not feeling sad or anxious) can be detrimental to people's wellbeing. As a consequence, it is important to study how this social pressure takes shape in the context of the proximal social relationships one is most often part of in life. Here, we examine how this social pressure to not feel bad (i.e. sad or anxious) takes shape in one of the most salient relationships in life, namely in adult romantic relationships. Do people experience pressure from their partners not to feel or express sadness or anxiety and, if so, when and in relation to what does this perceived partner pressure occur? Determining how (and if) this societal pressure occurs in our intimate interactions, in what contexts and with what emotional and relationship correlates, is important to better understand its relevance for individual and relational well-being. In particular, in this study we will examine how the pressure not to *feel* negative feelings (specifically sadness and anxiety) takes shape in romantic relationships, in what context it occurs within these relationships, and if it is related to experiencing negative emotions and relationship well-being in the context of daily life, using experience sampling methods.

Pressure not to feel bad within- and between-individuals

Cultural emotional norms to not feel sad or anxious and the associated perceived pressure have typically been studied as a stable characteristic (Bastian et al., 2012). Yet, in the context of specific social interactions such pressure may become more or less salient or (de-)emphasised, creating large contextual fluctuations in the experienced pressure as well (Dejonckheere et al., 2017).

As outlined earlier, the pressure to avoid feeling sad or anxious is believed to arise from a disparity between socially expected affect and one's actual emotional state. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that during moments of greater deviation from this norm, individuals may encounter heightened levels of momentary perceived pressure. Moreover, within the specific context of romantic relationships, it is plausible that the pressure which people experience may change in accordance with context, or their partner's momentary behaviour or mood. For example, as we will discuss in more detail below, one can expect that people might perceive more pressure not to experience negative emotions during or following emotionally charged moments, such as conflicts with a romantic partner. Furthermore, on moments where partners' affect is closer to the socially expected or desired state, they might be less likely to become aware of a discrepancy or social norms. Thus, perceived pressure from others can be expected to vary considerably across different contexts and moments within daily life, especially within romantic relationships.

Yet, in the background of such fluctuations, people may show relatively stable differences in their average levels of experienced pressure. For instance, some individuals may generally experience more or less emotionally charged moments (such as conflict) and therefore perceive more or less overall pressure from their partner. Such dynamics can lead to individuals perceiving not only momentary but sustained pressure from their partners. This persistent pressure could, in turn, have enduring negative consequences (Dejonckheere et al., 2022). In this study, we therefore examine multiple questions regarding the pressure

which people experience from their partner and potential correlates, both within and between individuals.

Prevalence and intensity

At first, descriptive question pertains to what extent the pressure to avoid feeling bad is actually experienced in the context of a romantic relationship. No previous research, of which the authors are aware, has studied the prevalence with which people experience pressure from their partner (or from any other *specific* person for that matter) to avoid feeling sad or anxious. Therefore we propose to start by examining the distribution of this variable, allowing us to determine how often, and how strongly, people experience this social pressure from their partner in the context of romantic relationships. Besides the *overall* distribution, we also propose examining the distribution of participants' average level of experienced pressure to see if some people on average experience stronger levels of negative affect than others, or whether experienced pressure is similar for different people. Due to the absence of prior literature, we had no clear expectations regarding the frequency or distribution of the outcome variable.

Context: presence, contact and conflict

After mapping the prevalence and intensity, it is important to determine *in what contexts* this pressure is more likely to occur. We will focus on three contextual variables, namely presence of, contact, and conflict with the partner. We expect to observe an increase in the perceived pressure when people report having contact (i.e. social interaction) with their partner, and/or report their partner being present, as opposed to when they had no contact or their partner was not present. This can be expected since the presence of a partner, and more direct or close contact renders it more difficult for one to conceal their experienced negative emotions, and more likely for (dis)approval of it being noticed. Specifically, we expect the least amount of experienced pressure when partners are not physically with each other and did not have any recent contact, and more pressure when they have had contact through either text messages, a phone- or video-call, in person or when their partner is physically present. We extend this reasoning to the between-person level, and expect that people who are generally more in contact or physically together with their partner will report perceiving more intense and frequent pressure from their partner.

Moreover, we expect to observe an increased sense of pressure not to experience negative emotions following recent conflict. According to the "social risk hypothesis" individuals perceive, and act upon, the ratio of their social value over their social burden (Allen & Badcock, 2003). When perceived burden increases, people ought to steer clear from socially risky behaviour to avoid exclusion. Furthermore, romantic partners feel the need to suppress their emotions more when they feel insecure about their partner's regard and fear rejection (Thomson et al., 2018). We therefore expect that, after conflict, individuals' perceived social burden will increase, causing them to report more pressure not to feel sad or anxious from their partner. Furthermore, we also expect that individuals who generally report more conflicts with their partner perceive themselves as more burdensome, and therefore experience pressure more frequently and intensely.

Emotional processes

Further, when people report feelings of pressure from their partner not to feel bad, an important question is how this pressure relates to their own emotional states and how these emotional states are perceived by their partner. As mentioned before, societal pressure not to feel bad has been found to be associated with increased negative affect (Bastian et al., 2012) and depressive symptoms (Dejonckheere et al., 2017). Perceived partner disapproval of negative emotions may also lead individuals to suppress these emotions, which has been shown to elicit even more intense emotions (Patel & Patel, 2019). It is therefore likely that momentary pressure from one's partner to not feel bad is in itself associated with an increase in negative affect such as sadness and anxiety, and that people who perceive more intense and frequent pressure from their romantic partner generally experience higher levels of sadness and anxiety. Additionally, the way in which emotional states are perceived by partners might be related to the pressure not to feel bad. Again, according to the "social risk hypothesis", individuals might suppress or try to alter their emotions after experiencing pressure not to feel sad or anxious in order to reduce their social burden and to avoid exclusion (Allen & Badcock, 2003). Research shows that feeling less positively regarded by your partner might lead

one to feel as if they should suppress their emotions (Thomson et al., 2018). We hypothesise that when individuals report perceived pressure from their partner, they will attempt to and therefore appear to their partner as being in a lesser negative affective state compared to how they actually feel. The question is to what extent this is achieved. Therefore we examined to what extent reported pressure not to feel sad or anxious is indeed associated with a decrease in perceived negative affect by their partner, both between- and within-individuals.

Relationship well-being

Finally, we will examine to what extent increased feelings of pressure are related to relationship well-being and quality. We propose that feeling emotionally restricted by a partner (i.e. feeling as if one should conceal their emotions for their partner) could lead to people feeling unsupported. Adequacy of support has been shown to predict relational well-being (Lawrence et al., 2008), and when one feels as if they cannot share their negative emotions with their partner and therefore cannot elicit their support, it seems reasonable that they might feel unsupported. This, in turn, could negatively influence relational well-being. Furthermore, sharing negative emotions such as sadness has been shown to be associated with more relationship satisfaction (Sanford & Rowatt, 2004). At the same time, emotional suppression is related to greater depressive mood and less relationship satisfaction (Cameron & Overall, 2018), meaning that if people feel pressured to suppress their feelings, this might negatively impact their relationships. This leads us to believe that feeling pressured not to experience or express these emotions might be detrimental to relationship well-being.

This study

Given the absence of previous research on this specific topic, it is important to assess if, how often, and how intensely people actually experience this pressure. Therefore, we exploratively investigate the prevalence of perceived pressure first. Then, we make several predictions[1] about associations of perceived pressure not to feel bad and context, emotional processes, and relational wellbeing:

(1) Concerning context, we expect the momentary pressure not to feel negative emotions (specifically anxiety and sadness) to be more frequently and intensely experienced on moments when partners are present, report contact and conflict (within-person). We also expect that people who more frequently report conflict, contact, or being with their partner generally experience more frequent and stronger pressure (between-person).
(2) Concerning emotional processes, we expect the pressure not to feel negative emotions to be associated with negative emotions (specifically sadness and anxiety), both within and between individuals. Furthermore, we anticipate that when individuals feel pressured by their partners to avoid feelings of sadness or anxiety that their partner will perceive them as experiencing less negative emotions (i.e. when partner A feels pressured, partner B will perceive less negative emotions in partner A). Furthermore, given that this post-registered research question and hypothesis suggest that pressure not to feel sad or anxious is related to the suppression of negative emotions, we also conduct additional exploratory analyses to verify this assumption.
(3) Concerning relational wellbeing, we expect the pressure not to feel negative emotions to relate with general indicators of relationship satisfaction and quality. Specifically, we expect that less satisfaction with the relationship and lower levels of relationship quality will be associated with increased levels of pressure.

Lastly, we want to verify that the found (within-person) relations between the above variables and perceived pressure to not feel bad are not merely due to poor momentary relationship sentiment experienced at a given moment. Low levels of momentary relationship sentiment may motivate people to in general report negative events or experiences related to their partner (such as experiencing pressure, conflict, etc.) creating correlations between perceived pressure and these variables. In order to ensure that we are actually examining the phenomenon we intend to examine (i.e. experienced pressure not to feel bad from a partner), and not merely momentary relationship sentiment (i.e. thoughts about the relationship), an additional set of analyses was conducted where positive thoughts about participants' relationship are included as a control variable.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from one hundred and one couples who had been in a different-sex relationship for at least 2 months ($M = 4.5$ years, $SD = 2.80$), were at least 18 years old ($M = 26.04$, $SD = 5.27$), and both willing to participate in the study. Most participants carried the Belgian nationality (173; 92%), although some participants reported being from the Netherlands (9; 4.8%), Germany (3; 1.6%), Ukraine (1; 0.53%), China (1; 0.0.53%), or Armenia (1; 0.53%). No data were collected on the SES and the racial or ethnic identity of participants. Participants who were unable to answer more than 50% of all prompts were excluded from analyses, with one exception: a single participant who had responded to only 46% of the prompts, but whose partner had responded to more than 50%, was retained. This was done to ensure that no individual was included without their partner. This left us with 94 couples ($n = 188$). Missing observations were removed from consecutive analyses.

Procedure

Informed consents were acquired from all participants. In the current study, we use experience sampling and questionnaire data from a larger data-collection procedure (Sels et al., 2020). Both partners of each couple began with filling in online questionnaires that asked about various individual and relational variables. Later, couples were prompted six times a day during weekdays (between 5 and 10 PM), and fourteen times a day during weekends (between 10 AM and 10 PM), for the duration of one week. On average couples received 62 beeps ($SD = 4$, Min = 47, Max = 71) and compliance was high (88%). Within the aforementioned time spans, equal intervals were created in which participants were prompted randomly. Participants always received beeps simultaneously with their partner, and had to answer the prompt within five minutes for it to be valid.

Materials

Experience sampling

Perceived pressure. The main variable of interest for this study is the reported pressure not to feel sad or anxious ("*Do you have the feeling that you should not feel sad or anxious according to your partner?*"). The question was phrased and explained as to reflect non-acceptance of emotion, or pressure not to experience an emotion by a partner. Participants were asked to answer this question on a 0 ("not at all") to 100 ("very") scale. Similarly phrased items inquiring into more abstract feelings of pressure (i.e. social/environmental) have been used in the past (Dejonckheere et al., 2017), where pressure has been shown to instigate depressive feelings.

Context. We also asked participants about presence of, contact and conflicts with their partner, with the items "*Are you with your partner at the moment?*" (Presence, with answer options "yes" or "no"), "*Did you have a conflict with your partner since the last beep?*" (Conflict, with answer options "yes" or "no"). Participants were also asked the following question: "*Did you and your partner have contact since the last beep?*". Originally this question provided five different possible answer options indicating different degrees of contact. We re-coded the answers to this question to a binary variable indicating whether or not *any* form of contact (i.e. physical, by phone, text message) had taken place or not.

Emotional processes. Participants reported on emotions such as "Anxiety" ("*How anxious do you feel at this moment?*") and "Sadness" ("*How sad do you feel at this moment?*"), using a 0 ("not at all") to 100 ("very") scale. They were also asked to rate how they perceived their partner's affect using the affect grid (Russell et al., 1989). The affect grid is a single-item self-report measure to assess (experienced or perceived) affect on a 1–9 scale along two dimensions: valence (displeasure-pleasure) and arousal (sleepiness-arousal). Lastly, participants were asked whether they expressed their emotions ("*Have you expressed your emotions towards your partner since the last beep?*"; with answer options "*Yes*", "*No*", "*I suppressed them*").

Relational well-being. Momentary relationship sentiment was also measured ("*Have you thought with pleasure about your relationship since the last beep?*") using a 0 (not at all) to 100 (all the time) scale.

Background questionnaires

Relationship satisfaction. In order to assess the relationship satisfaction of both partners, the Kansas Marital Satisfaction (KMS; Nichols et al., 1983) scale was used. The KMS is a 3-item scale designed to quickly assess relational satisfaction. Respondents

have to answer the items on a scale from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). Cronbach's α for the KMS equalled .88.

Perceived relationship quality. To assess the *perceived* relationship quality by both partners, the Perceived Relationship Quality Components Inventory (PRQCI; Fletcher et al., 2000) was used. The PRQCI consists of 6 components (Satisfaction, Commitment, Intimacy, Trust, Passion and Love), which in turn consist of three items each. Respondents answer 18 items, all on a scale from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied). The overall perceived quality was then calculated by summing the scores of all the questions. Cronbach's α for the PRQCI equalled .92.

Analyses

The distribution of our outcome variable revealed that it was strongly skewed with participants often reporting no perceived pressure from their partner (Figure 1). Therefore, we decided to use two-part mixed effect models which have been suggested as viable alternatives in (intensive) longitudinal studies when dealing with zero-inflated and positively skewed data (Farewell et al., 2017).

Two-part mixed effect models allow one to model both the frequency[2] and intensity[3] of an outcome variable by respectively combining logistic and standard linear mixed effect models. The frequency is expressed in terms of the log odds ratio, and reflects the likelihood of experiencing or not experiencing any pressure given a specific value of a predictor. The intensity then reflects the strength of the association between values of pressure and values of a specific predictor, given that the reported pressure is larger than 3 (normally this is zero, below we explain why we use three as a cut off value). In order to do so, the data is split up into two different parts, for which the aforementioned logistic and linear models are specified.

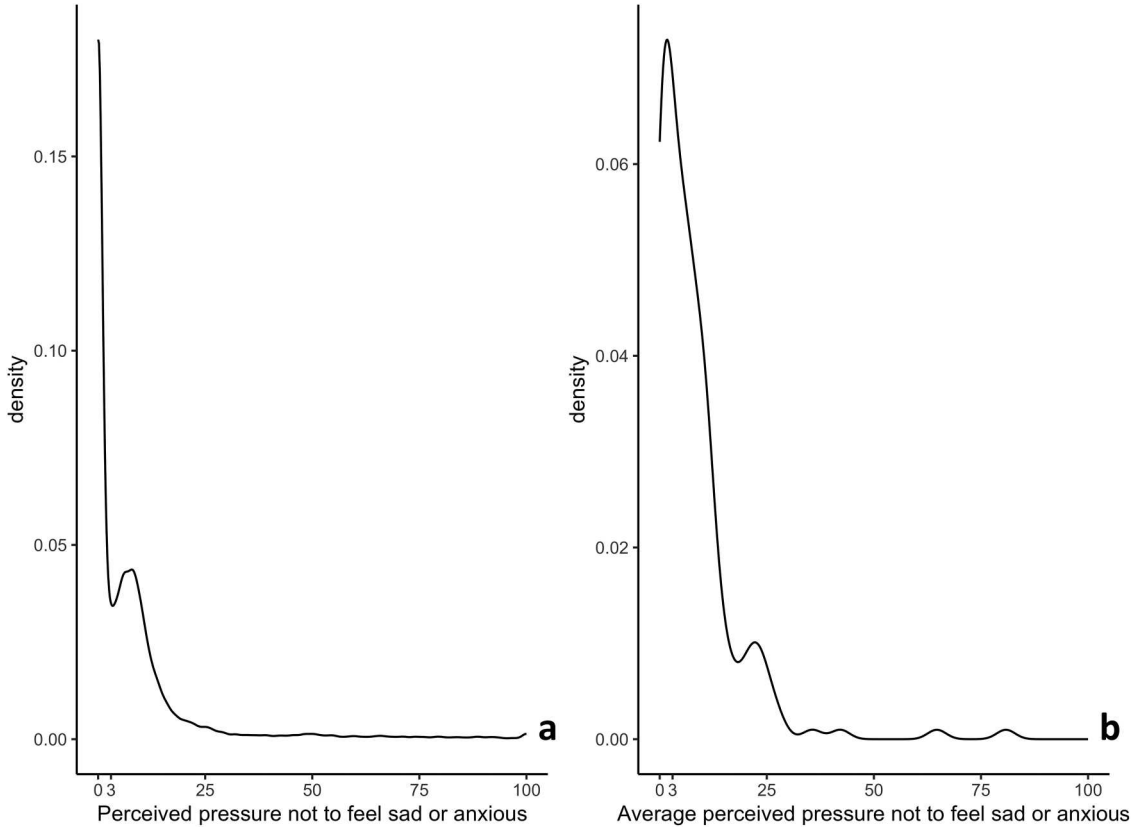


Figure 1. Smoothed density distribution of the (average) perceived pressure not to feel sad or anxious.

Notes: On the left panel (a) the smoothed distribution of the experienced pressure not to feel sad or anxious is presented. On the right panel (b) the smoothed average levels of experienced pressure per person are presented.

Below, we briefly discuss two-parts models by using participants' reported sadness as an example predictor variable ("*Sad*"), and pressure not to feel sad or anxious as an outcome variable ("*Pressure*"). Specifically, $Pressure_{ij}$ and Sad_{ij} reflect the scores on these variables at time *i* for person *j*.

To split up the data in two parts, we first recoded the outcome variable into a binary indicator variable (*Z*):

$$Z_{ij} = \begin{cases} 0 \;\; if \; Pressure_{ij} = \; 0, \; 1, \; 2, \; 3 \\ 1 \;\; if \; Pressure_{ij} > \; 3 \end{cases}$$

While usually every value larger than zero is coded as one, we used three as a cut-off value so that any value larger than three is coded as one. This decision was based on Figure 1(a), where we noted a local minimum in the smoothed density around the value of three. This local minimum might be the result of user error where people do not move the slider on their smartphone application far enough to the left (zero). This then results in low values which actually should be zero. The frequency (or log odds[4]) of reporting pressure not to feel sad or anxious is then estimated by specifying a logistic regression model for *Z*: $logit\{Pr(Z_{ij} = 1 \mid Sad_{ij}, U_i)\} = \beta_0 + Sad_{ij}(\beta_{sad} + U_{sad,i}) + U_{0i}$. β_0 and β_{sad} indicate the fixed intercept and slope, while the random intercept U_{0i} and random slope $U_{sad,i}$ were included to capture individual differences in the relation between the predictor and the outcome.

Next, we focus on the part of the data that has Z_{ij} scores equal to one and handle the positive skew by logarithmically transforming the $Pressure_{ij}$ scores. To model the intensity of the reported pressure and how it is related to the considered predictor *Sad*, we fit a standard mixed effect model to the $ln(Pressure_{ij})$ values, including a random intercept V_{0i} and slope $V_{sad,i}$:

$$ln(Pressure_{ij}) \mid Z_{ij} \rangle \; 0, Sad_{ij} \; = \; \beta'_0 + Sad_{ij}(\beta'_{sad} \; + V_{sad,i}) \; + \; V_{0i}.$$

Note that the random effects of both model parts (U_{0i}, $U_{sad,i}$, V_{0i}, $V_{sad,i}$) can be correlated.

For a more in depth exploration of these models we refer the reader to the review by Farewell et al. (2017).

For our within-person analyses, numeric time-varying predictors such as sadness, anxiety and (perceived) affect were person mean centred. In our initial set of analyses, we employed a two-part mixed-effect model tailored to each research question, featuring a research question specific predictor.

In order to verify whether the observed within-person relations between our predictors and perceived pressure to not feel bad are not merely due to poor momentary relationship sentiment, we performed an additional set of analyses. In this set of analyses, we retained the same specific predictor in our statistical models, along with (person mean-centred) positive relationship thoughts as control variable. Both variables were included as fixed effects, but only the research question-specific variable was introduced as a random effect. This choice was made because attempting to include both variables as random effects resulted in convergence issues across all models.

For our between-person analyses (including those related to relationship satisfaction and quality) we used the same two-part mixed effect models. In these analyses, we still included the time-varying perceived pressure that people reported as the outcome variable. However, we used the (person-)mean time-invariant values of our independent variables as predictors. For example, we would have the same pressure variable as outcome in both our within and between-person analyses, but now the time-invariant person mean of sadness, instead of momentary sadness was included as outcome.[5] A different model was formulated for each research question, and random intercepts were included. This way, our results would tell us something about how between-person differences, for example sadness, are related to the frequency and intensity of pressure which people perceive from their partner.

Lastly, we also conducted an additional set of sensitivity analyses to take into account the dyadic structure of the data (i.e. to account for the possible dependencies between observations nested within the same dyad). Here, we specified the random structure of our models to include dyad-correlated residuals as suggested by Laurenceau and Bolger (2012). Two-part mixed effect models could not be used when taking this dyadic structure into account. As an alternative, we approached these models as closely as possible by performing a separate logistic regression on a binarized outcome, and a linear mixed effect model for the continuous logarithmically transformed outcome (without the zero values). The results (both within- and between-person) of these dyadic sensitivity analyses are almost identical to our non-dyadic analyses (with some slight differences for the between-person results) and are reported in the supplementary materials.

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, within- and between-person correlations among all measures.

			Correlations					
Measures	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Pressure	7.77	14.9	1	−0.02	0.49*	0.66*	−0.06	−0.14
2. Positive relationship thoughts	55.3	27.3	−0.1*	1	−0.02	−0.1	0.15	−0.05
3. Sadness	7.93	13.9	0.25*	−0.19*	1	0.75*	−0.39*	0
4. Anxiety	6.01	10.4	0.24*	−0.12*	0.47*	1	−0.2*	−0.09
5. Perceived partner's valence	5.42	1.65	−0.07*	0.12*	−0.17*	−0.1	1	−0.06
6. Perceived partner's arousal	4.03	1.93	−0.01	−0.02*	0.06*	0.02	0.16*	1
6. Relationship satisfaction (KMS)	18.3	1.99						
7. Perceived relationship quality (PRQCI)	107	10.1						

Notes: Mean and SD reflect the grand mean and standard deviations (across all observations). Lower triangular correlations are Within-Person, upper triangular correlations are Between-Person. Results which are statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ are marked with an asterix.

Results

Distribution and descriptives

Within- and between-person correlations are presented in Table 1, together with basic descriptives. The distribution of reported pressure not to feel sad or anxious across all observations and participants can be observed in Figure 1(a). The distribution of the average level of reported pressure per participant can be found in Figure 1(b). The mean reported value across all participants and observations equals 7.77, with the overall standard deviation being 14.9, the within-person standard deviation 8.37 and the between-person standard deviation 10.01. The overall averages of the outcome variable for female ($M = 7.89$, SD = 14.26) and male ($M = 7.65$, SD = 15.45) participants are similar, as confirmed by means of a multilevel model testing for gender differences taking into account the dyadic structure of the data ($b = -.023$, $t(10701)$, $p = 0.834$, 95%CI[−2.383, 1.923]). About 50.6% (5462 observations) of the reported values were smaller than three, meaning that 49.4% (5534 observations) of reports indicated (very) mild to severe pressure (see Figure 2(b)). When disregarding the excess of zeros (including values equal to 1 and 2), the distribution still has a strong right skew (Figure 2(a)). The averages follow a similar distribution, although slightly less skewed (Figure 1(b)). While most people experienced some pressure at least once (average pressure is larger than zero), 10 participants did not. To summarise, the descriptive analyses suggest that most people tend to experience, on average, low amounts of pressure with the exception of some people who generally experience stronger levels of pressure.

Concerning relations between variables, the momentary pressure not to feel sad or anxious is significantly related to momentary relationship sentiment, sadness, anxiety and how people's valence (but not arousal) is perceived by their partner. Furthermore, people who generally report experiencing more pressure also report higher levels of general sadness and anxiety.

Within-person results

The results of our within-person analyses can be found in Table 2 (fixed effects) and Table 3 (random effects). Figures of the significant within-person associations between pressure and predictor variables can be found in Figure 3, while an overview of all within-person association can be found in the supplementary materials (Figure S4–S11).

Context: presence, contact and conflict

Reporting contact with one's partner did not affect the likelihood[6] of experiencing pressure (LOR = −0.041, $z = -0.328$, $p = 0.743$, 95%CI [−0.285, 0.204]). The same was true for reporting a partner's presence (LOR = −0.114, $z = -1.081$, $p = 0.28$, 95%CI [−0.321, 0.093]). Furthermore, conditional on some pressure being reported, contact with a partner was not associated with elevated levels of pressure ($B = 0.032$, z = 0.787, $p = 0.431$, 95%CI[0.112, 0.048]) but people did report stronger feelings of pressure when a partner was present ($B = 0.078$, $z = 2.373$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [0.014, 0.142]). Thus, participants reported experiencing pressure regardless of whether or not participants reported having contact with their partner, but when their partner was present they generally experienced stronger pressure.

Following conflict, people were less likely to experience pressure when they did not have a conflict, as opposed to when they did (LOR = 0.415, $z = 2.671$, $p = 0.0075$, 95%CI [0.110, 0.719]). Furthermore, people experienced weaker pressure when they did not report a conflict, as opposed to when

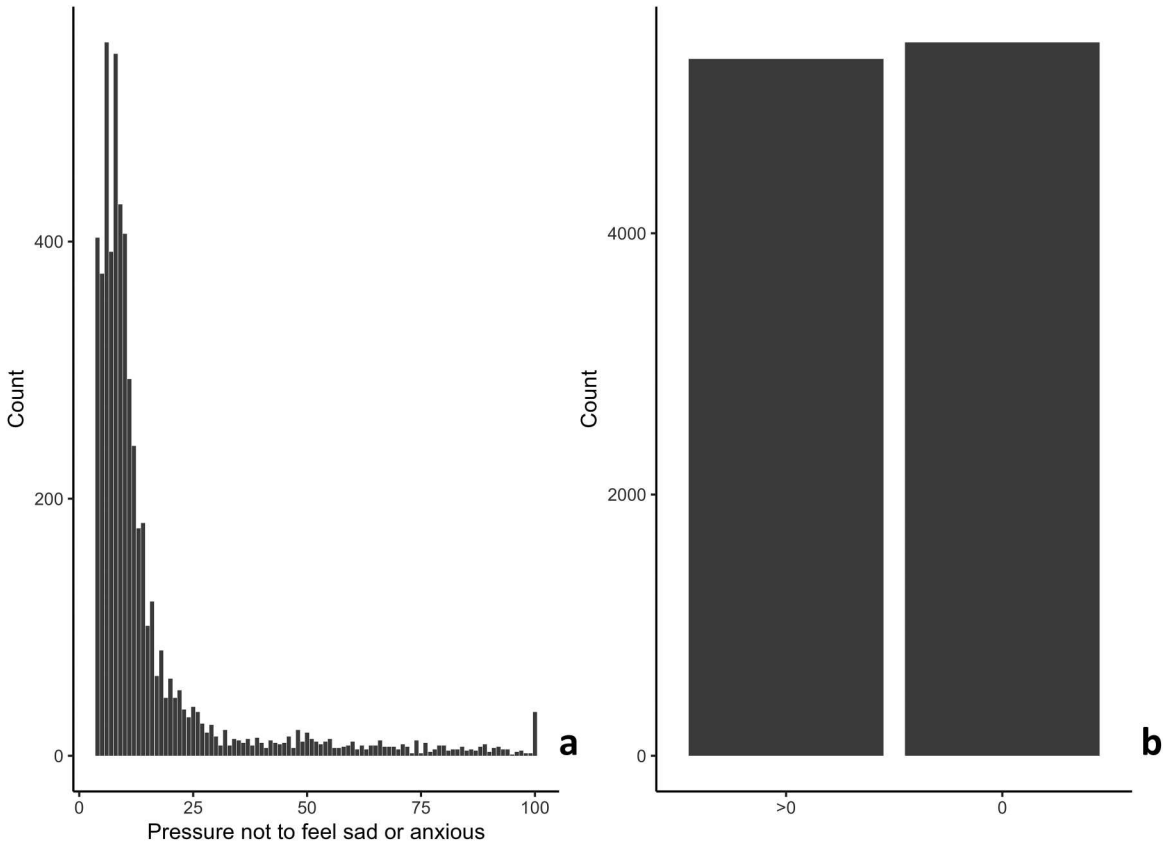


Figure 2. Descriptive plots of perceived pressure to not feel sad or anxious.

Notes: On the left panel (a) the distribution of our main variable of interest is depicted, without the excess of zeros (including values equal to 1 and 2). On the right panel (b) you can find the amount of values equal to and above three.

they did have a conflict ($B = -0.311$, $z = -3.917$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [−0.468, −0.156]) conditional on any pressure being reported. In other words, when participants reported having had a conflict since the last beep, they were more likely to experience pressure not to feel sad or anxious, *and* reported higher pressure.

Experienced and perceived emotion

Participants were more likely to report feelings of pressure on moments when they experienced higher levels of sadness (LOR = −0.068, $z = -7.57$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [−0.085, −0.0503]). Further, elevated reports of sadness were associated with increased reports of pressure, conditional on the reported pressure being larger than zero ($B = 0.015$, $z = 9.431$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [0.013, 0.018]).

Similarly, participants were more likely to report pressure when experiencing higher levels of anxiety (LOR = −0.108, $z = -8.552$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [−0.133, −0.083]), and experienced stronger levels of pressure when experiencing higher levels of anxiety ($B = 0.021$, $z = 9.497$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [0.017, 0.025]), conditional on any pressure being reported.

Finally, emotion suppression was significantly related to both odds (LOR = −1.623, $z = -3.436$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [−2.548, −0.697]) and strength ($B = 0.876$, $z = 6.565$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI [0.615, 1.138]) of experienced pressure. Furthermore, significant associations were also observed between reported pressure and how one's emotional valence was perceived by their partner in both the zero-inflated part (LOR = 0.087, $z = 3.569$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [0.039, 0.135]), and non-zero part ($B = -0.036$, $z = -2.98$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [−0.059, −0.012]). Similar findings were observed for arousal for the zero-part (LOR = 0.067, $z = 2.996$, $p = 0.003$, 95%CI [0.023, 0.110]), but not for the non-zero part ($B = -0.006$, $z = -0.559$, $p = 0.576$, 95%CI [−0.026, 0.014]).

Table 2. Results of within person-analysis using two-part mixed effect models with pressure as an outcome variable and context, emotions and emotional processes as predictors (fixed effects).

Predictor	Continuous estimate	LB (95%)	UB (95%)	Std. Err.	z	*p*	LOR (binary estimate)	LB (95%)	UB (95%)	Std. Err.	z	*p*
Intercept	2.283	2.191	2.374	0.047	49.068	0	0.176	−0.287	0.64	0.236	0.745	0.456
Presence	0.078	0.014	0.142	0.033	2.374	0.018	−0.114	−0.321	0.093	0.105	−1.081	0.28
Intercept	2.335	2.254	2.417	0.041	56.41	0	0.079	−0.325	0.483	0.206	0.384	0.701
No contact	−0.032	−0.112	0.048	0.041	−0.787	0.431	−0.041	−0.285	0.204	0.125	−0.328	0.743
Intercept	2.623	2.455	2.791	0.086	30.645	0	−0.284	−0.75	0.182	0.238	−1.193	0.233
No conflict	−0.312	−0.468	−0.156	0.08	−3.917	0	0.415	0.11	0.719	0.155	2.672	0.008
Intercept	2.297	2.217	2.376	0.041	56.636	0	0.003	−0.449	0.456	0.231	0.015	0.988
Sadness	0.015	0.012	0.018	0.002	9.432	0	−0.068	−0.085	−0.05	0.009	−7.57	0
Intercept	2.137	2.041	2.233	0.049	43.565	0	0.315	−0.176	0.806	0.25	1.258	0.208
Anxiety	0.021	0.017	0.025	0.002	9.497	0	−0.108	−0.133	−0.084	0.013	−8.553	0
Intercept	2.315	2.235	2.395	0.041	56.629	0	0.16	−0.253	0.572	0.21	0.758	0.448
Suppression	0.876	0.615	1.138	0.133	6.565	0	−1.623	−2.548	−0.697	0.472	−3.436	0.001
Intercept	2.31	2.229	2.39	0.041	56.249	0	0.057	−0.361	0.475	0.213	0.268	0.789
Valence as perceived by partner	−0.036	−0.059	−0.012	0.012	−2.979	0.003	0.087	0.039	0.135	0.024	3.569	0
Intercept	2.337	2.257	2.417	0.041	57.231	0	0.109	−0.302	0.52	0.21	0.52	0.603
Arousal as perceived by partner	−0.006	−0.026	0.014	0.01	−0.559	0.576	0.067	0.023	0.11	0.022	2.996	0.003

Notes: For each research questions/predictor a different model was specified. The results presented in the left part of the table are the results from the continuous part of the two part mixed effect models (represent the linear association between pressure and the specified predictor, given that any pressure larger than 0 was being reported). The results presented on the right part of the table are the results from the binary part of the two-part mixed effect models (represent the log odds ratio of people experiencing no pressure given a specific predictor). *P*-values which are equal to zero in the table in reality are *p*-values below 0.001.

Table 3. (Co-)Variances of the random slopes and intercepts for the within-person analyses with pressure as outcome variable and context, emotions, and emotional processes as predictors (Random effects).

Predictor	Variables	CI	CS	BI	BS
Presence	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2531			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.0224	0.026		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.5484	0.2674	9.7492	
	Binary Slope (BS)	0.0803	−0.0797	−1.4591	0.868
Contact	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2406			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.0137	0.0243		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.3683	−0.0724	7.7713	
	Binary Slope (BS)	−0.024	−0.1163	0.9601	1.0739
Conflict	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.4257			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.2117	0.2289		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.6447	0.2415	6.9424	
	Binary Slope (BS)	0.3202	−0.2567	0.2601	0.5806
Sadness	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2389			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.0018	0.0001		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.513	0.0052	9.7448	
	Binary Slope (BS)	−0.0006	−0.0004	0.1124	0.0065
Anxiety	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2905			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.0024	0.0002		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.8241	0.0121	10.3926	
	Binary Slope (BS)	0.0105	−0.0012	0.0478	0.0113
Suppress	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2343			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.1384	0.3312		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.3693	0.0949	8.2167	
	Binary Slope (BS)	−0.2229	−0.2546	−0.7685	1.3136
Valence as perceived by partner	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2436			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	−0.0041	0.006		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.4475	0.0085	8.3417	
	Binary Slope (BS)	0.0224	−0.0073	−0.2413	0.019
Arousal as perceived by partner	Continuous Intercept (CI)	0.2366			
	Continuous Slope (CS)	0.0019	0.0033		
	Binary Intercept (BI)	−0.3533	−0.0147	8.1312	
	Binary Slope (BS)	−0.0218	−0.0014	0.139	0.0187

Notes: For each research questions/predictor a different model was specified. The (co-)variance of the random slopes and intercepts for the two parts of the two part mixed effect models are reported.

In other words, when participants reported higher scores of sadness or anxiety, they also reported stronger feeling of pressure, given that any feeling of pressure was present. Furthermore, when people suppress their emotions they more often report pressure not to feel sad or anxious, and report stronger pressure. Lastly, when people's valence was perceived as more negative by their partner, they concurrently reported more and stronger feelings of pressure not to feel sad or anxious. When arousal was perceived as higher by a partner, they were more likely to report feelings of pressure, but these feelings were not necessarily stronger.

Analyses controlling for momentary relationship sentiment

The additional analyses controlling for momentary relationship sentiment revealed an almost identical pattern of results (see Table S1) indicating that mere sentiment does not explain the relationships we found between perceived pressure and the other variables. On top of momentary relationship sentiment, perceived pressure is still related to most of our predictors. There was one small exception: while both parts of the two-part mixed effect model exhibited a significant relationship between conflict and pressure initially, the significant effect in the zero part of the model disappeared after including the control variable (LOR = 0.221, $z = 1.128$, $p = 0.259$, 95% CI[−0.163, 0.605]). In other words: while the significant relation between conflict and intensity of pressure remains, the relation with frequency of pressure does not appear to be significant anymore. This indicates that when controlling for positive thoughts, conflict is not associated with the odds of experiencing feelings of pressure from a partner. However, when feelings of pressure are experienced, they are stronger following conflict.

Sensitivity analysis

To address the uncertainty in parameter estimation and ensure the adequacy of our sample size, we

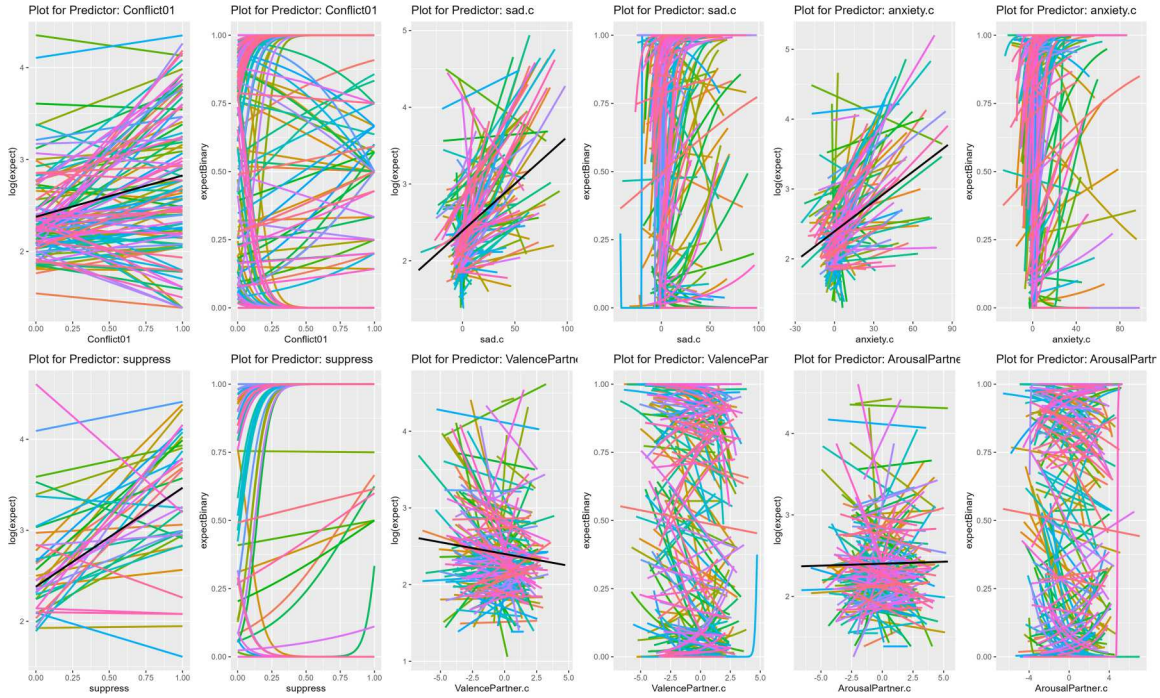


Figure 3. Plot depicting the significant within-person associations between predictors and pressure.

Notes: The black regression line is the average of the within-person associations. The coloured lines depict a different within-person association. The left panel represents the continuous part of the two-part mixed effect model (without zeros and with a logarithmically transformed outcome variable). The right panel represents the binary (logistic regression) part of the two part mixed effect model, with the binarized outcome variable. Importantly, we always present both the zero and non-zero part if one of both was significant. Not all associations presented here are significant.

conducted sensitivity analyses for the within-person results using simulation (Lafit et al., 2021) and analytic methods (Lafit et al., 2024) for respectively the zero, and the non-zero part of the two-part model. Specifically, we computed the power for the estimated effects and for values two standard errors below our estimated effect. This approach, related to safeguard power analysis as described by Perugini et al. (2014) investigates how power varies as a function of the uncertainty in parameter estimation. By incorporating this method, we provide additional insights into the robustness of our findings and additional assurance regarding the adequacy of our sample size (see Figure S12). The analyses suggest that we generally reach sufficient power to detect our effects. For anxiety, sadness, and emotion suppression, the power remains at 100% even when considering a value of two standard errors below our point estimate. For other variables (valence, arousal, conflict), the power occasionally becomes insufficient at this lower bound. However, given that the power is often still sufficient or nearly sufficient, even with a substantial underestimation of the point estimate, the study can be considered adequately powered.

Between-person results

The results of our between-person analyses can be found in Table 4 (fixed effects) and Table 5 (random effects).

Context: presence, contact and conflict

Our between-person analyses showed that neither the average amount of contact, presence or conflict with a partner is significantly related to the frequency (respectively LOR = 1.991, $z = 1.522$, $p = 0.128$, 95%CI [−0.573, 4.554]); (LOR = 0.579, $z = 0.58$, $p = 0.562$, 95%CI[−1.377, 2.535]; LOR = −9,178, $z = -1.947$, $p = 0.052$, 95%CI[−18.42, 0.063]) or intensity (respectively $B = 0.001$, $z = 0.005$, $p = 0.996$, 95%CI[−0.472, 0.474]; $B = -0.099$, $z = -0.524$, $p = 0.6$, 95%CI[−0.471, 0.272]; $B = 1.172$, $z = 1.324$, $p = 0.186$, 95%CI[−0.563, 2.907]) of the pressure people generally experience. In other words, participants who generally report more contact, conflict or being together do not experience more or stronger pressure than others.

Table 4. Results of between person-analysis using two-part mixed effect models with pressure as an outcome variable and context, emotions, emotional processes and relational wellbeing as predictors (fixed effects).

Predictor	Continuous estimate	LB (95%)	UB (95%)	Std. Err.	*z*	*p*	LOR (binary estimate)	LB (95%)	UB (95%)	Std. Err	*z*	*p*
Intercept	2.339	1.963	2.714	0.192	12.204	0	−1.453	−3.502	0.596	1.045	−1.39	0.165
No contact	0.001	−0.472	0.474	0.241	0.005	0.996	1.991	−0.573	4.554	1.308	1.522	0.128
Intercept	2.398	2.167	2.63	0.118	20.287	0	−0.247	−1.467	0.973	0.622	−0.396	0.692
Presence	−0.099	−0.471	0.272	0.19	−0.524	0.6	0.579	−1.377	2.535	0.998	0.58	0.562
Intercept	2.283	2.166	2.4	0.06	38.19	0	0.525	−0.061	1.112	0.299	1.756	0.079
No conflict	1.172	−0.563	2.907	0.885	1.324	0.186	−9.178	−18.42	0.063	4.715	−1.947	0.052
Intercept	2.427	2.273	2.582	0.079	30.819	0	2.399	1.99	2.808	0.209	11.495	0
Anxiety	−0.019	−0.04	0.001	0.01	−1.858	0.063	−0.39	−0.445	−0.335	0.028	−13.943	0
Intercept	2.263	2.138	2.387	0.063	35.643	0	1.611	1.078	2.144	0.272	5.921	0
Sadness	0.006	−0.006	0.017	0.006	1	0.318	−0.19	−0.24	−0.139	0.026	−7.353	0
Intercept	2.284	2.204	2.363	0.041	56.372	0	0.047	−0.394	0.488	0.225	0.209	0.834
meanSuppr	3.837	1.949	5.725	0.963	3.984	0	4.151	−5.83	14.132	5.092	0.815	0.415
Intercept	2.495	2.171	2.819	0.165	15.097	0	−0.302	−2.003	1.4	0.868	−0.348	0.728
Arousal as perceived by partner	−0.039	−0.117	0.039	0.04	−0.976	0.329	0.119	−0.29	0.528	0.209	0.57	0.568
Intercept	2.659	2.134	3.184	0.268	9.93	0	1.275	−1.543	4.094	1.438	0.887	0.375
Valence as perceived by partner	−0.059	−0.155	0.036	0.049	−1.218	0.223	−0.206	−0.72	0.308	0.262	−0.786	0.432
Intercept	3.065	2.345	3.785	0.367	8.345	0	1.735	−2.235	5.705	2.026	0.856	0.392
Satisfaction	−0.04	−0.079	−0.001	0.02	−2.016	0.044	−0.09	−0.306	0.126	0.11	−0.818	0.413
Intercept	1.865	0.563	3.166	0.664	2.808	0.005	−0.105	−5.07	4.861	2.533	−0.041	0.967
Quality	0	−0.011	0.011	0.006	0.001	0.999	0.01	−0.035	0.054	0.023	0.436	0.663

Notes: For each research questions/predictor a different model was specified. The results presented in the left part of the table are the results from the continuous part of the two part mixed effect models (represent the linear association between pressure and the specified predictor, given that any pressure larger than 0 was being reported). The results presented on the right part of the table are the results from the binary part of the two-part mixed effect models (represent the log odds ratio of people experiencing no pressure given a specific predictor). *P*-values which are equal to zero in the table in reality are *p*-values below 0.001.

Table 5. (Co-)Variances of the random intercepts for the between-person analyses with pressure as outcome variable and context, emotions, emotional processes and relational wellbeing as predictors (Random effects).

Predictor	Effect	Variance	Covariance
Contact	Continuous intercept	0.236	−0.336
	Binary intercept	7.747	
Presence	Continuous intercept	0.236	−0.335
	Binary intercept	7.95	
Conflict	Continuous intercept	0.235	−0.331
	Binary intercept	7.778	
Anxiety	Continuous intercept	0.29	0.074
	Binary intercept	3.029	
Sadness	Continuous intercept	0.227	−0.065
	Binary intercept	5.859	
Supression	Continuous intercept	0.211	−0.362
	Binary intercept	8.147	
Arousal	Continuous intercept	0.232	−0.317
	Binary intercept	7.99	
Valence	Continuous intercept	0.232	−0.339
	Binary intercept	8.074	
Satisfaction	Continuous intercept	0.237	−0.454
	Binary intercept	8.197	
Quality	Continuous intercept	0.491	−1.113
	Binary intercept	8.941	

Notes: For each research questions/predictor a different model was specified. The (co-)variance of the random intercepts for the two parts of the two part mixed effect models are reported.

Experienced and perceived emotion

Yet, people who are on average more sad (LOR = −0.19, $z = -7.353$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI[−0.24, −0.139]) and anxious (LOR = −0.39, Z = −13,943, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI[−0.445, −0.335]) report experiencing pressure more often,[7] but the pressure which these people experience is not necessarily more intense (sad: $B = 0.006$, $z = 1$, $p = 0.318$, 95%CI[−0.006, 0.017]; anxious: $B = -0.019$, $z = -1.858$, $p = 0.063$, 95%CI[−0.04, 0.001]). Furthermore, people who report suppressing their emotions more often, tend to experience stronger feelings of pressure ($B = 3.837$, $z = 3.984$, $p < 0.001$, 95%CI[1.949, 5.725]), but do not experience pressure more often than people who suppress their emotions less (LOR = 4.151, $z = 0.815$, $p = 0.415$, 95%CI[−5.83, 14.132]). Lastly, how participants' valence and arousal were generally perceived by their partner was not related to the frequency (valence: LOR = −0.206, $z = -0.786$, $p = 0.432$, 95%CI[−0.72, 0.308]; arousal: LOR = 0.119, $z = 0.57$, $p = 0.568$, 95%CI[−0.29, 0.528]) or intensity (valence: $B = -0.059$, $z = -1.218$, $p = 0.223$, 95%CI[−0.155, 0.036]; arousal: $B = -0.039$, $z = -0.976$, $p = 0.329$, 95%CI[−0.117, 0.039]) of the pressure which they experience.

To summarise, people who are on average more sad and anxious tend to report experiencing pressure more often (but not necessarily more intense pressure), and people who suppress their emotions often tend to experience stronger pressure (but not more often).

Relationship well-being

With regards to relationship well-being, neither perceived relationship quality (LOR = 0.01, $z = 0.436$, $p = 0.663$, 95%CI [−0.035, 0.054]) or relationship satisfaction (LOR = −0.09, $z = -0.818$, $p = 0.413$, 95%CI [−0.306, 0.126]) was related to the log odds of perceiving pressure from a partner. However, the intensity of the pressure which people experience from their partner was significantly related to relationship satisfaction ($B = -0.040$, $z = -2.016$, $p = 0.044$, 95%CI [−0.079, −0.001]), but not to relationship quality ($B = 0$, $z = 0.001$, $p = 0.999$, 95%CI[−0.011, 0.011]).

In other words, people who are more satisfied report weaker feelings of pressure, but do not experience pressure less often. Perceived relationship quality was not related to the frequency or intensity of the pressure which people experience.

Discussion

We set out to examine the pressure people may experience from their romantic partner not to feel bad (i.e. sad or anxious), and to better understand if, when, and how this pressure is experienced within romantic relationships. To further validate our investigation's focus on the intended phenomenon of partner-induced pressure not to feel bad rather than mere relationship sentiment, we conducted an additional set of analyses controlling for momentary relationship sentiment. The outcomes of these supplementary analyses exhibit minimal divergence from our initial findings, affirming the specific role of perceived pressure not to feel bad independent of momentary relationship sentiment. Explicitly taking into account the dyadic structure of the data likewise did not change our main findings (see Table S1, S2 and S3 for the complete results). We conducted sensitivity analyses and conclude that our study can be considered adequately powered (see Figure S12).

Prevalence and intensity

While participants often reported no pressure to feel bad, they still reported some degree of pressure in almost half of all the sampled moments. Importantly, almost every participant also reported experiencing pressure at some point in time, notwithstanding some exceptions. If most people experience *some*

feeling of restriction from a partner on one's inner emotional life from time to time, this is important to know theoretically and clinically, especially considering the documented negative consequences of experiencing pressure not to feel bad (Bastian et al., 2012; Dejonckheere et al., 2017).

That being said, there was a wide array of observed pressure not to feel bad and there were many times when no or only little perceived partner pressure was reported. Overall, people also reported relatively low amounts of average pressure (with exceptions). As no research has reported on the prevalence of this pressure from another person in daily life, we do not know if this is due to characteristics of our specific sample or the type of partner (romantic partner), or that these results are generalisable to other samples. Possibly, people might experience more pressure not to feel bad from others in their environment, or society in general, rather than from their partner. Relationships with friends, co-workers and others where one feels less at ease might induce stronger feelings of pressure not to feel bad. At the same time, it is also possible that due to the internalisation of cultural norms pertaining to ideal or desired affect people predominantly experience pressure not to feel bad from themselves rather than others (Tsai, 2017). We therefore believe it is important to also investigate other types of relationships, and the degree to which people experience pressure not to feel bad therein, as well as more specific inquiries into the source of their perceived pressure.

Finally, it is also possible that the pressure not to feel bad in daily life is just not experienced very frequently or intensely at all. Future research needs to address these questions in order to further develop our understanding (of the importance) of this phenomenon.

Context: presence, contact and conflict

With regards to context, we found no significant evidence for our hypothesis that reported contact with one's partner since the last beep is associated with either the frequency or intensity of pressure not to feel bad reported by participants. Physical presence of one's partner did not appear to be associated with the likelihood of reporting pressure, while a significant association was found with intensity of pressure. Furthermore, at the between-person level people who reported more contact or conflict with and presence of their partner did not experience stronger or more frequent pressure in general.

Considering these results, contact with and/or presence of a partner do not seem like necessary requirements to experience pressure not to feel sad or anxious. This might mean that feelings of pressure are persistent, and can remain lingering after the most recent interaction with a partner. Again, this also could suggest that pressure predominantly arises within individuals, and that they project the pressure which they put on themselves onto others.

Lastly, we found that conflict with a partner increased the likelihood and intensity of feeling pressured to not feel bad. This suggests that conflictual interactions can make people feel more pressured by their partner momentarily, but that couples who generally have more conflict do not necessarily experience more overall pressure.

Emotional processes

As we expected, both the odds and intensity of experienced pressure were significantly associated with reported negative emotions (i.e. sadness and anxiety) at the within-person level. When participants reported higher negative emotions, they more frequently reported feelings of pressure not to feel sad or anxious, as well as stronger reports of pressure. Furthermore, at the between-person level, people who are more sad or anxious also experience pressure more often (but not more intensely).

These findings were mostly in line with our hypotheses. While our findings are correlational, earlier experimental research has shown that inducing changes in social expectations impacts the experience of negative emotions (Bastian et al., 2012), so it seems likely that experiencing more pressure not to feel sad or anxious from your partner induces negative emotions. In turn, this then could suggest that people who generally experience more negative emotions also tend to experience more pressure from their partners. This bears important implications to what constitutes adaptive emotional functioning within a romantic relationship. However, as can be read below, intensity and odds of reported pressure were not related to relationship quality, and only weakly to relationship satisfaction.

We also found that reported emotion suppression was related to both the intensity and odds of experiencing pressure. Also, at the between-person level, people who suppress their emotions more often in general experience stronger pressure not to feel sad or anxious. Unexpectedly, we also found that if

people reported more pressure to not feel sad or anxious their partner generally perceived them in a worser mood as opposed to when they reported lower pressure not to feel sad or anxious. Lastly, we also observed a significant association with the frequency, but not intensity of perceived arousal.

The findings concerning emotion suppression indicate an association with the pressure which people experience from their partner. Furthermore, the findings concerning participants' perceived emotional valence by their partner also indicate that in general, when participants experience pressure not to feel sad or anxious they are not always successful in hiding their negatively valenced emotions.

An important question that follows then is how emotion suppression and how one's emotions are perceived by their partner are related to each other, and whether pressure is also paired with increased negative perceived emotions by a partner when people do report suppressing their emotions. In other words, whether or not participants in these instances where their emotions are perceived as more negative even wanted, and *attempted* to suppress or hide their emotions when they experienced this pressure. Since what is attempted, and whether or not the attempt is successful, potentially might moderate the degree to which negative emotions are evoked after feeling pressure.

Relational wellbeing

Neither relationship satisfaction nor relationship quality significantly influenced the likelihood of experiencing pressure not to feel sad or anxious, and there was only a slight association with relationship satisfaction in terms of pressure intensity. These unexpected findings, along with the limited occurrence of high-pressure reports, suggest that pressure in this context might be more influenced by relationships outside the romantic domain.

Moreover, it is essential to recognise that participants reported perceived pressure, which may not necessarily be imposed by their partner. Some individuals might be more prone to interpreting social cues negatively, making them more likely to feel pressure even when it is not explicitly expected by their partner. This could explain why relationship-level predictors do not strongly correlate with the frequency or intensity of perceived pressure. Future research can investigate individual factors like negativity biases in interpreting social cues or adopt a dyadic approach to understand how expectations about a partner's emotions relate to an individual's pressure not to feel sad or anxious.

On the other hand, as we discuss below, the participants in this sample all scored relatively high on relationship satisfaction and quality. We do believe that for another sample with a more diverse range of relational-wellbeing these results might be different. In this satisfied sample, a weak association between satisfaction and pressure was observed, and since pressure repeatedly has been shown to be associated with negative emotions (also in this study), we believe that prolonged perceived pressure from romantic partners could be detrimental for relationship quality/satisfaction. However, further research is needed to confirm these claims. Also, it is possible that found relations may be in function of relationship quality. For instance, it could be that in strained relationships, perceived pressure is more strongly tied to negative emotionality, suppression, or perceived partner emotionality. Such questions of moderation fall outside the scope of the present manuscript, however.

Limitations

Considering these results, several shortcomings should be addressed. The first being the notably low variability in certain variables. We found no significant effects concerning factors like relationship quality and satisfaction because the majority of participants reported high values. This is expected as participants knew in advance that they would discuss their relationship, making it less likely for those facing relationship difficulties to participate. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact of partner pressure on relationship dysfunction, a more diverse sample with greater well-being and satisfaction variance is necessary. Future studies could explore how relatively stable relationship characteristics like relationship satisfaction moderate the observed associations across diverse samples.

Second, our sample is predominantly heterosexual and primarily from Belgium, the Netherlands, or Germany. We did not collect data on race or ethnicity, limiting the generalizability of our findings to non-Western populations where cultural differences in the significance of happiness have been observed (Joshanloo & Weijers, 2014).

Lastly, our paper assumes a uniform response to partner pressure, but individuals may react differently. Some might conceal negative emotions, while others

may promptly address them with their partner. These diverse responses could lead to a range of emotional experiences, from negative to positive. Future research should focus on individual differences in goals, motivations, and behaviours following partner pressure to gain a more comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Feeling pressure not to experience negative emotions like sadness or anxiety has been related to a host of maladaptive outcomes. In this study, we show that this pressure also occurs in the context of (different-sex) romantic relationships. Partners report experiencing some level of pressure from their partner to not feel sad or anxious about half the time, although generally the level of this perceived pressure is low. When they do report experiencing pressure, this is often following conflicts and in conjunction with the experience of negative emotions. In addition, we found that experienced pressure is higher when the other partner perceives their partner's affect as more negative, and is correlated with more use of emotional suppression. Together, these findings show that the pressure not to feel sad or anxious is also experienced in the context of romantic relations, and is typically tied to negative emotion contexts where partners aim to suppress these negative emotions.

Notes

1. Most within-person (and those related to perceived relationship quality and relationship satisfaction) hypotheses and analyses were post-registered on https://osf.io/u94f3. All between-person analyses were conducted on request of a reviewer of this article, and therefore were not registered beforehand.
2. When we say frequency, we refer to the log odds ratio of reporting zero pressure not to feel sad or anxious as opposed to reporting pressure exceeding zero. A "higher frequency" would then mean that increases in the predictor variable are associated with a lower log odds ratio of reporting no pressure as opposed to higher than three.
3. When we say intensity, we refer to the strength of association with a predictor given that the reported pressure exceeded three.
4. Note that usually in logistic regression $Y_{ij} = 1$ is predicted, while in two-parts mixed effect models we predict $Y_{ij} = 0$.
5. We also conducted analyses where we tried to estimate the within- and between-person effects concurrently (within the same model), but these models were too complex for the data at hand.
6. As discussed in the analyses, we modelled the likelihood of the outcome being zero instead of one, so to be complete one should say that people were equally likely to not experience any pressure. For readability of the result section we do not mention this every time when reporting results.
7. Again, they actually report experiencing no pressure less often, but to increase readability this was rephrased.

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Within-person analyses and hypotheses of this study were post-registered and can be found together with the materials and code for analyses on the following link: https://osf.io/u94f3. At this time the data is not publicly available due to institutional privacy regulations for this type of data. Conceptualisation: OV, LS, EC, LV, GL & PK; Data curation: PK, EC, LS; Formal analysis: OV, GL, EC, PK; Funding acquisition: PK, EC & LV; Investigation: OV, PK, EC, LS; Methodology: OV, PK, EC, LS, GL; Project administration: LS, PK, EC; Resources: PK, EC, LV; Software: OV, PK, EC, GL; Supervision: PK, EC, LV; Validation: OV, PK, EC, GL; Visualisation: OV, PK, EC, GL; Writing – Original draft: OV; Writing – review and editing: OV, PK, EC, LV, LS, GL.

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