

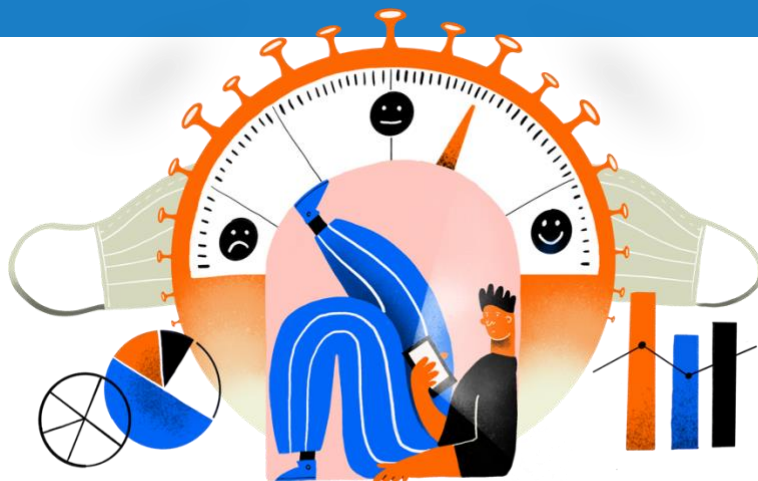
REPORT 7

Does 'bubbling' on Mother's Day boost our relatedness and motivation?

The Motivation Barometer

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Mothers will probably remember Mother's Day from this historic corona year for a long time to come. The government made a social gesture and relaxed social measures as early as Sunday, May 10. This allowed the population to celebrate Mother's Day together as a family. But how many families took advantage of this opportunity for social reunion? Which individuals postponed a physical meeting with family or friends for a while? Is it important to connect with "many" bubbles or is a warm contact with one bubble enough? Is the 'rule of 4' sufficiently clear to the population? Did the making of social choices cause stress and tension in families? How relationally encouraging was this physical social contact? Enough to boost the relatedness and motivation of the population? Report #7 answers 5 pressing relational questions based on the ongoing Motivation Barometer study of Ghent University.

Relatedness: A Basic Psychological Need

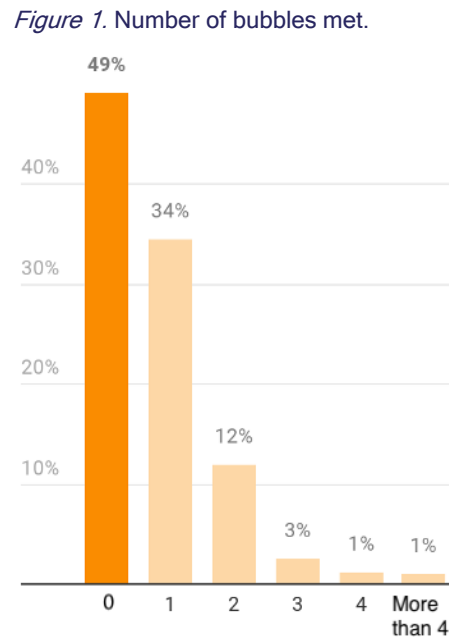
The population yearned to be able to visit family or friends again. The fact that the government responded to this request is a good thing. Warm social contacts and relatedness are as much basic human needs as food and water. When we experience intimacy and mutual care, if we can laugh and have fun together, it benefits our well-being. We can recharge our energy reservoirs, and it could even give new oxygen to our motivation to keep adhering to the measures.

This social choice by the government was well timed. The Motivation Barometer study of the University of Ghent, which has now been running for more than 50 days, showed that our sense of belonging gradually declined since the beginning of the lockdown. We initially succeeded in maintaining social contacts through digital means, but this formula is becoming harder and harder. The prospect of being able to physically get together with family or friends on Mother's Day was a real social boost. The fact that these social contacts were already possible on Mother's Day (Sunday) and not only from Monday onwards shows empathy and flexibility.

In order to map initial bubble experiences on Mother's Day, participants were asked a series of questions about their social experiences and contacts on Mother's Day starting on Sunday. Specifically, the study involved 2174 individuals with an average age of 49 (85% female). The study yields some intriguing results with direct policy implications.

1. Did everyone 'bubble up' on Mother's Day?

No, not everyone takes advantage of these social relaxations. Of the surveyed participants, 49% reported that they did not interact with another bubble on Mother's Day, while 51% confessed to interacting with one or more bubbles (see Figure 1). Young adults (18-35 years) made significantly more use of bubble opportunities compared to middle (35-55 years) and late adults (+55 years). Singles and cohabitants bubbled to the same extent. Individuals more voluntarily motivated to follow the measures bubbled less, while 'must'-ivated - those who feel pressure to *have to* follow the measures (e.g., to avoid a fine or criticism) - more easily took advantage of the bubble opportunities. Thus, individuals convinced of the necessity and importance of the measures voluntarily refrained from social contact. Avoiding bubble contact remained a personal choice they fully supported. Similarly, persons concerned about the presence of adequate medical care more frequently stayed home on Mother's Day and did not bubble.

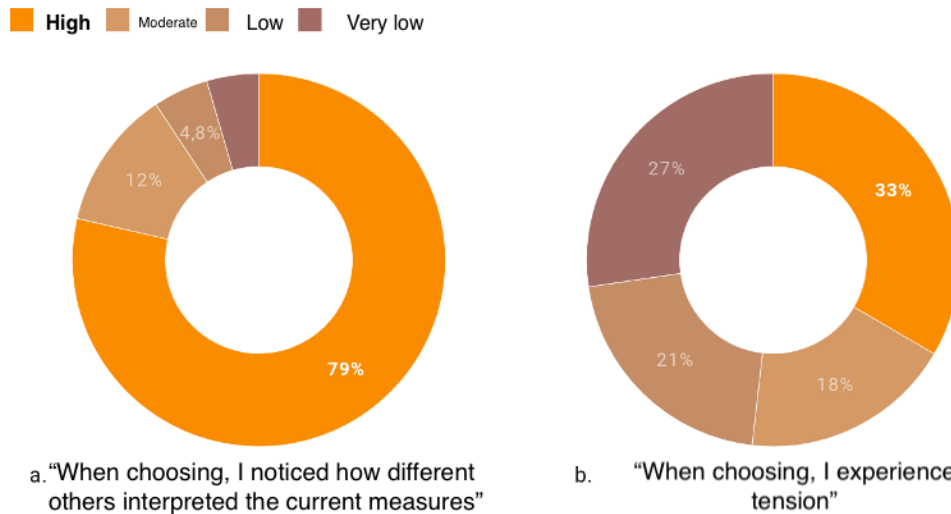


Fact #1: Not everyone wishes to take advantage of this social relaxation. In particular, citizens who adhere to the measures out of full conviction appear to voluntarily forego these bubble opportunities.

2. How clear is the rule of 4 and how difficult is choosing a bubble?

Many pointed out last week that making social choices could be hard. The rule of 4 was not sufficiently clear. Choosing between social contacts could also be accompanied by stress and tension, as some members of a family or friend groups might feel left out. Similar to a birthday party, where you are unable to invite all your friends and family. Although scholars and the government tried to clarify the rule of 4, it continues to cause a great deal of confusion.

Figure 2. Experienced ambiguity and tension in making bubble choices.



When asked if people noticed, when choosing a bubble, that others were interpreting this rule differently, nearly 80% indicated that they agreed (see Figure 2a). One rule, but many, various interpretations. Even Minister De Block (former Minister of public health) was confused for a moment about the concretization of the rule. The fact that the choice is up to each individual also caused a lot of tension in families (see figure 2b): 41% of the participants indicated that they felt (a lot of) tension when making such social choices.

It is obvious that the rule of 4 still causes confusion. Much simpler than the rule of 4 is the bubble logic: any bubble, whether you are single, a couple or a family of 8, can meet one and only one other bubble. A clear principle that virologists also advocate because it limits the chances of spreading the virus. The fact that, from now on, a bubble of 5 is not allowed to meet another bubble of 5 is particularly difficult to explain. If citizens think about this more deeply, they must be confused. Without clear-cut justification, the number 4 just becomes arbitrary. In this reasoning, it is not that inconceivable that people disobey. In the absence of clarity, everyone has an own interpretation of this rule to which they behave, some taking risks with regard to their health. Moreover, because the population does not understand the underlying principle, it risks losing its motivation to follow the rules.

Moreover, you limit the burden of choice if you are allowed to commit to only one bubble. In such case, everyone understands the lack of personal choice you have with regard to your social interactions. However, at this moment, the already legendary rule of 4 exists and cannot be reversed. But psychologists could have meaningfully advised the interpretation of this relaxed social measure.

Fact #2: The rule of 4 continues to cause confusion. Keep pushing forward the more motivating and logical bubble principle: each bubble interacts with a single other bubble.

3. Who adheres to the bubble logic?

In recent days, scientists and the government stressed that it is more optimal to limit social contact to one bubble. In this way, you put your own and other's health the least at risk. However, this is only a recommendation. A person can interact with multiple bubbles, as long as the number of people met is limited to 4. But who adhered to this bubble logic and who met multiple bubbles?

The motivation of the population to adhere appears to play an important role in this. Citizens who are voluntarily motivated to adhere to the measures not only bubble less (cfr. conclusion 1), if they do, they more frequently apply the bubble logic: only meeting one extra bubble. Citizens who feel obliged to conform to the measures followed the bubble logic less. If 'must'-ivation for following the measures prevails, then following them is a difficult task. Because of the severe burden, 'must'-ivated citizens feel they deserve some kind of social compensation: they seek contact with various other bubbles. Because 'must'-ivated citizens had to make multiple choices, it is not surprising that they also reported more tension with regard to those choices.

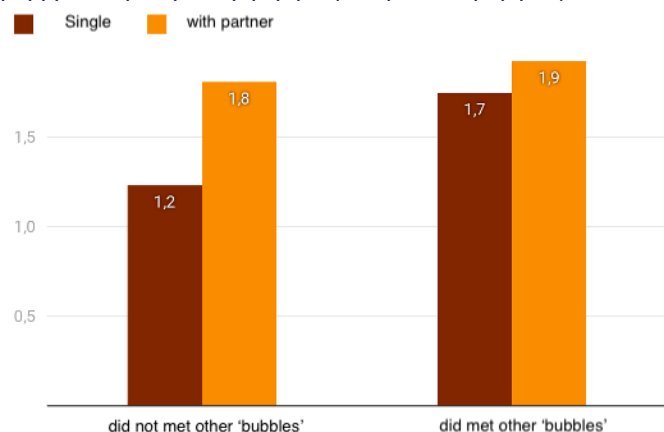
Fact #3: Not everyone adheres to bubble logic. Therefore, continue to promote voluntary motivation to follow the measures. If the initiative is with the people, on their own behalf, they will make the most healthy and solidary-based choices.

4. Is the bubbling per se, the bubble warmth, or the number of bubbles important to our relatedness?

Those who bubbled on Sunday generally experienced stronger relatedness than those who did not, although this beneficial effect occurred only among singles (see Figure 3). Bubbling was especially beneficial for them.

So, did cohabitants not benefit from bubbling? Yes, but for cohabitants to benefit from bubbling, an important condition had to be met: they had to

Figure 3. Perceived relatedness according to whether or not



have a warm contact during the bubble encounter. If the encounter was superficial and one did not feel a connection with the other bubbler(s), this did not benefit the need for relatedness. This appeared to be true for cohabitants, but also for single bubblers. Furthermore, prior family consultation about the bubble choices was beneficial to relatedness, while tensions in the bubble selection process caused a reduced sense of relatedness.

An important question is whether the fulfillment of the basic need for relatedness depends on the number of bubbles, which we interact with? This does not appear to be the case. More than the number of bubbles we met, the quality of the social interaction seems to be important. Those who indicated that they had warm contact with others, even if it was limited to one bubble, felt more connected. So, it is best to get along with one bubble: a good conversation, laughing together, catching up, and listening to and sharing concerns ... These things strengthen our relatedness and also gave a motivational boost. This conclusion also applies to singles. For them, too, the expansion of their individual bubble with one new social contact proved sufficient to provide relational oxygen.

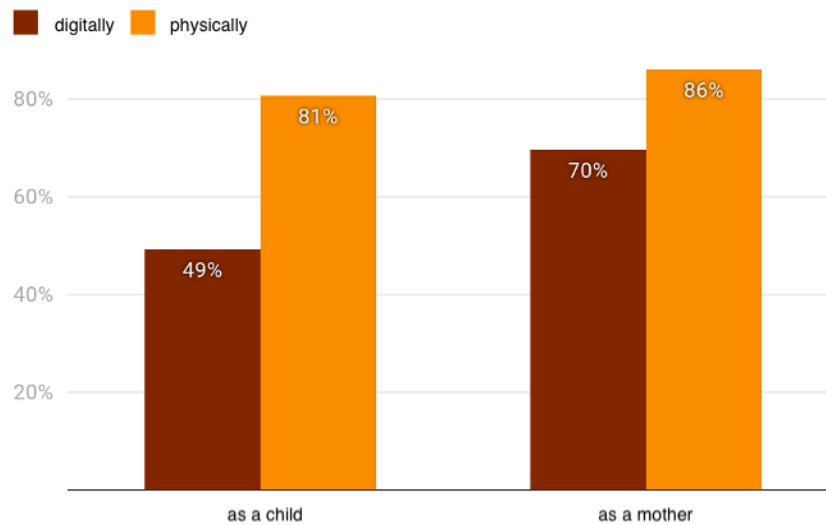
Fact #4: Bubbling satisfies the basic need for relatedness for singles. However, what proves especially decisive is the warmth of the encounter, much more than the number of bubbles met. The adage "less is sometimes more" is thereby confirmed.

5. Did a physical encounter with mother provide greater homelike warmth?

A physical encounter with mother or the children appeared to be beneficial for the feeling of warmth. Mothers who had physical contact with their children and, conversely, children who had physical contact with their mothers indicated that their interaction last Sunday was warmer compared to those who had only digital contact. In percentage terms, 83% of those who had a physical encounter (86% of mothers and 81% of children) appeared to describe the interaction as warm and intimate (see Figure 4). Undoubtedly, physical contacts lasted longer than digital ones. To experience warmth, some shared time is necessary. Furthermore, it was again found that a prior family consultation positively predicted relatedness. When family members seek consensus when making bubble choices, everyone can be at peace with this and this has positive effects on the mother-child bond. Interestingly, physical contact was also found to have a beneficial effect on voluntary motivation, of both mothers and children. Those who had physical contact said they were motivated to a greater extent to adhere to the measures.

Fact #5: A physical meeting is more beneficial than a digital one, although it is good to properly consult and avoid discussion when making social choices.

Figure 4. Experience of warm and intimate bonding on Mother's Day with mother (left) and child (right) by role (child vs. mother) and form of encounter (digital vs. physical)



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