

Chapter 21

Can Affectively Negative Experiences Contribute to Well-Being? The Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model

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Abstract Psychological well-being is traditionally characterized by high positive affect and low negative affect. However, we propose that experiencing negative affect can be beneficial for well-being. Specifically, we advance that psychological needs, which are vital for well-being, can be fulfilled in situations characterized by negative affect. To support our proposal, we outline five affectively negative situations (i.e., stressful goal-pursuit, the frightening supernatural, other-directed annoyance, passion for social causes or beliefs, highly adverse life events) that can simultaneously meet psychological needs. We summarize our proposals in the Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model and contextualize our analysis within the literature.

According to scholarly orthodoxy, psychological or subjective well-being (henceforth: well-being) is characterized by high levels of positive affect (PA) and low levels of negative affect (NA). However, we propose that experiencing NA can be beneficial for well-being. In particular, we put forward that psychological needs, which are vital for maintaining and promoting well-being, can be fulfilled in situations characterized by NA. We summarize the conventional perspective on PA and NA's roles in well-being. Then, we consider how experiencing NA may be beneficial for well-being via need-fulfillment; here, we outline affectively negative situations

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that can meet psychological needs. Subsequently, we distill our proposals in a theoretical model and contextualize it within the literature.

Existing Perspective on Affect in Well-being

Well-being is generally conceptualized as a combination of high satisfaction with life, high PA, and low NA. We consider the role of PA and NA in well-being in more detail.

Positive Affect

Well-being is defined, in part, by the presence of PA (Diener, 1984). That is, being psychologically well involves feeling happiness, joy, contentment, pride, and enthusiasm (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). PA is such a large part of well-being that psychologists use the terms PA, happiness, and well-being interchangeably (Busseri & Sadava, 2011; Sheldon, 2016) and often operationally define well-being as PA (Diener et al., 1999). Clearly, individuals who experience more PA have better well-being. PA is also linked to physical health (Pressman & Cohen, 2005), creativity, sociability, and success in both work environments and family life (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Given PA's role in well-being and its broader benefits, psychologists have recently focused on promoting PA through interventions (e.g., expressing gratitude, counting one's blessings, engaging in prosocial behavior; Lyubomirsky & Layous, 2013).

Negative Affect

Well-being is also defined by the relative absence of NA (Diener, 1984). That is, being psychologically well involves the lack of sadness, anxiety, guilt, and anger. Traditionally, psychologists' efforts to improve well-being have focused largely on the reduction of affectively negative states (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This is understandable because frequent and intense NA is conducive to the onset of psychological disorders (Kashdan & Biswas-Diner, 2014).

Can Experiencing Negative Affect Be Beneficial for Well-being?

Despite the recent emphasis on promoting PA and a long-standing emphasis on reducing NA, we consider the idea that experiencing NA can sometimes be beneficial for well-being. Our proposal rests on two premises: (1) well-being is based, in part, on the fulfillment of psychological needs, and (2) psychological needs can be fulfilled within situations characterized by NA. The first premise is well accepted; however, we briefly expound it and define the psychological needs relevant to our proposal. The second premise has not been thoroughly articulated or directly supported. We theoretically develop it by outlining situations characterized by NA that can help meet psychological needs.

Psychological Needs

Psychological needs are psychological states that are necessary for the maintenance and promotion of psychological well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The notion that well-being rests on the fulfillment of psychological needs is central to several classic and contemporary theories in psychology (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Maslow, 1943; Murray, 1938; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Congruent with this, individuals who manifest better need fulfillment report greater satisfaction with life (Oishi, Diener, Lucas, & Suh, 1999; Rich, Hanna, & Wright, *in press*). Additionally, individuals evince higher PA within need-fulfilling situations (Diener, Larsen, & Emmons, 1984). Moreover, within-person increases in need-fulfillment are associated with higher PA (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000), and experimental interventions aimed at fulfilling psychological needs increase happiness (Sheldon et al., 2010).

Different theories highlight the relevance of different needs (Pittman & Zeigler, 2007). We do not wish to argue for the prominence of certain needs or to provide an exhaustive list of needs. Rather, we are interested in needs that are (1) widely considered to be basic needs, and (2) can be fulfilled within affectively negative situations. In particular, we focus on situations that can satisfy the needs for meaning, self-esteem, and social connectedness.

Meaning is the subjective experience of purpose, value, and coherence in one's life and in the world (Becker, 1971; Wong & Fry, 1998). Self-esteem refers to a positive evaluation of one's self (Sedikides & Gregg, 2008; Sedikides & Strube, 1997). Social connectedness is the sense of being accepted by, belonging to, and connected with other persons or groups (Bowlby, 1988; Deci & Ryan, 2000). Empirical evidence points to the importance of meaning (Low & Molzahn, 2007; Routledge & Juhl, 2010), self-esteem (Routledge et al., 2010; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001), and social connectedness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Jetten, Haslam, & Haslam, 2012) for well-being.

Affectively Negative Need-Fulfilling Situations

Given that well-being is largely contingent upon need-fulfillment, we must further specify our second premise, namely, that psychological needs can be fulfilled within situations characterized by NA. First, we define the term “situation” broadly. In some instances, situation may refer to an immediate context that lasts a few minutes or seconds (e.g., reading an e-mail, seeing a news headline). In other instances, situation may refer to a more permanent circumstance (e.g., attending college, raising children). Second, we do not propose that NA itself leads to need-fulfillment. Rather, we posit that these situations lead to need-fulfillment via other psychological processes that are activated within them. Third, we emphasize the simultaneity of NA and need-fulfillment. That is, we argue that there are situations that *simultaneously* arouse NA and fulfill one or more needs. We do not merely suggest that people are willing to temporarily endure unpleasant circumstances in exchange for longer-term PA or need-fulfillment benefits (i.e., delayed gratification). We propose instead that there are situations in which people can fulfill their psychological needs at the exact same instance they are experiencing NA. We call these affectively negative need-fulfilling situations (ANNFS).

To support our second premise, we consider five ANNFS: stressful goal-pursuit, the frightening supernatural, other-directed annoyance, passion for social causes or beliefs, and highly adverse life events. We provide a theoretical rationale for why each ANNFS simultaneously arouses NA and fulfills psychological needs, and we offer circumstantial evidence for our claims. This is not necessarily an exhaustive list of ANNFS, and the ANNFS may not be mutually exclusive.

Stressful Goal-Pursuit The first ANNFS is stressful goal-pursuit. This situation refers to experiencing psychological stress (anxiety, worry, fatigue) while pursuing goals. Although not all goal-pursuits are stressful, many are. To illustrate, several career goals require a grueling training process. Academics and professionals put themselves through emotionally taxing educational programs. Earning degrees involves tests, papers, projects, and deadlines, all of which can provoke anxiety and distress. Athletes similarly undergo physically and mentally painful training in pursuit of their career objectives. Additionally, the common goal of raising children entails stress and anxiety, as any sleepless and fatigued parent would attest. Supporting this, research shows that individuals who place greater importance on their goals experience more anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). Similarly, the more invested individuals are in their goals, the more worry they report about them (Pomerantz, Saxon, & Oishi, 2000).

Despite the NA accompanying some goal-pursuits, this situation may help fulfill the need for meaning. Goal-pursuits give people a purpose or reason to live, which fosters the sense that one’s life has value and significance (Feldman & Synder, 2005; Griffith & Graham, 2004). For example, career goals in which the professional has a considerable influence on others’ lives (e.g., medical doctor) are associated with greater meaning (Yeager & Bundick, 2009). Taken together, evidence demonstrates that goal-pursuits can be both stressful and need-fulfilling. However,

we could locate no research that directly speaks to the simultaneity of NA and meaning within the context of goal-pursuit. Nevertheless, preliminary evidence is consistent with this notion. For example, Steger, Kashdan and Oishi (2008) conducted a daily diary study to assess how the engagement in unpleasant activities (which included writing about goals) and pleasant activities are related to meaning. They found that engaging in unpleasant behaviors was positively associated with meaning, whereas engaging in pleasure-laden behaviors was not.

Further evidence consistent with our proposal originates from research on “the parental paradox,” which is the romanticized desire to have children juxtaposed the stress of actually raising children (Baumeister, 1991). Theorists have attempted to solve the paradox by suggesting that parenthood, albeit largely characterized by NA, is desired because it enhances meaning (Baumeister, 1991; Hansen, 2012). Raising children grants life with a purpose and offers a path to leave a legacy (Lyubomirsky & Boehm, 2010). Empirical work has demonstrated that raising children is characterized by NA (Evenson & Simon, 2005; Simon, 2008). However, identifying one’s self as a person who takes care of children is associated with greater meaning (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013). Also, experimentally inducing death thoughts by having participants write about death (1) intensifies the search for meaning (Juhl & Routledge, 2014; McGregor, Zanna, Holmes, & Spencer, 2001) and (2) increases the desire to have offspring (Wisman & Goldenberg, 2005). Together, these findings suggest that the desire for children is driven in part by the need for meaning. In all, engaging in goal-pursuits can sometimes be stressful, yet simultaneously fulfill the need for meaning.

The Frightening Supernatural Another ANNFS is frightening encounters with the supernatural world. This situation refers to perceiving an encounter, or merely thinking about and being exposed to information about encounters, with potentially threatening supernatural agents. The film *Paranormal Activity*, in which a young couple is haunted by a nefarious demon, provides a quintessential example of this situation. Viewers described it as a “truly scary” movie (Ebert, 2009) that creates a “pervasive sense of dread” (Lumenick, 2009). The situation, then, entails NA (fear, in particular). However, it also has the potential to fulfill the need for meaning. To illustrate how, it is prudent to discuss cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker’s (1971) dichotomy between the visible and invisible world.

In *The Birth and Death of Meaning*, Becker (1971) stated that one way people attain meaning is from believing that the universe contains an invisible world in addition to the physical (i.e., visible) one. To believe in the invisible world is to perceive that there are more significant causal agents or forces in the universe upon which the physical world depends. Becker claimed that if one’s behavior is ultimately rooted in and being observed by agents in a more meaningful invisible world, everything one does can have significance. Therefore, entertaining the idea that ghosts or demons exist suggests that an invisible world with causal agents is real and that the world is not simply a collection of random physical events, but a guided and purposeful place. Furthermore, the possibility that invisible spirits exist, even scary ones, may help affirm certain meaning-providing religious beliefs (Kwilecki, 2011).

In sum, ghosts and demons may provoke fear, but they should also allow people to ponder the notion that the world is a place imbued with meaning.

Although there is no research directly testing our proposal that supernatural experiences can simultaneously evoke fear and help meet the need for meaning, some findings provide tentative support for it. To begin, religiosity, which some scholars classify as supernatural belief (Tobacyk & Milford, 1983; Young & Morris, 2004), is a pervasive source of meaning (Kanazawa, 2015; Sedikides & Gebauer, 2013). Additionally, correlational work has shown that individuals who frequently perceive that they have experienced supernatural phenomena possess greater meaning (Palmer & Braud, 2002). Similarly, those claiming to have experienced paranormal phenomena report that their life is guided and purposeful (Kennedy, 2005; Kennedy & Kanthamani, 1995).

Experimental research also suggests that supernatural belief provides meaning. Routledge, Roylance, and Abeyta (2017) heightened the need for meaning (through a meaning threat manipulation) and then assessed participants' belief in supernatural testimonials. They found that heightening the need for meaning increased the belief that the supernatural testimonials were true. Similarly, experimentally inducing death thoughts (in essence, activating the need for meaning; Juhl & Routledge, 2014; McGregor et al., 2001) increases beliefs in supernatural agents (Norenzayan & Hansen, 2006). Overall, this work has illustrated that people turn to supernatural belief to meet their need for meaning. Nevertheless, more research is required to demonstrate the simultaneity of the experience of fear and increased meaning when encountering or thinking about supernatural phenomena.

Other-Directed Annoyance The next ANNFS is other-directed annoyance, which, as the name suggests, refers to being annoyed with another individual (or other individuals). Psychologists consider it a given that others can be a source of annoyance (Kowalski, 2003; Laak, Olthof, & Aleva, 2003). Despite the accompanying presence of NA, this situation may simultaneously help the annoyed individual meet the need for self-esteem. When an individual is annoyed with another person, the annoyed individual often renders an unfavorable judgment of the annoying person. Criticizing others gives the annoyed individual the opportunity for downward social comparison. That is, it gives him or her an opportunity to compare themselves to some who is, in some respect, worse off (e.g., less intelligent, morally inferior, unfunny). Comparing oneself to someone that is worse off can make the annoyed individual feel better about her/himself. Additionally, making unfavorable judgments of others implies that one is in a superior position from which such judgments can be made. This sense of superiority may boost self-esteem.

No research has shown that individuals can simultaneously be annoyed with another while experiencing a self-esteem boost. However, the literature has documented that downward social comparisons can be beneficial for self-esteem (Taylor & Lobel, 1989; Wills, 1981). Some of this research has focused specifically on how criticism and unfavorable judgments of others serve the need for self-esteem. This work has indicated that, in order to manage experimentally threatened self-esteem, individuals are more critical of and derogatory towards others. In one such study,

participants who experienced a self-esteem threat (by being placed in a relatively low status group) made more unfavorable judgments of their peers' written work than control participants (Amabile & Glazebrook, 1982). In another study, threatening self-esteem (by insulting participants' ability to solve a puzzle) increased derogatory attitudes towards minority groups (Cowen, Landes, & Schaet, 1959). Taken together, this work established that negatively judging others has the potential to help fulfill the need for self-esteem, suggesting that other-directed annoyance is an affectively unpleasant, yet need-fulfilling, situation.

Passion for Social Causes or Beliefs The fourth ANNFS is passion for social causes or beliefs. It reflects contexts in which passion for certain social causes (e.g., social movements, collective action, protests) or beliefs (e.g., religious, political) manifest in anger and frustration. The Tea Party rallies in 2009, the Arab Spring uprising in 2010, and the Occupy Wall Street demonstrations in 2011 are highly publicized examples of such social causes. Participants in these causes were frustrated, even enraged. Similarly, people's fervor for their beliefs can arouse negative emotions. People engage in frustrating arguments as a means to promote their beliefs. The 2016 presidential election in the US is an archetypal example of people irately asserting their political beliefs. It has sparked heated debate, leaving one journalist stating that the election is "All about Anger" (Kurtzleben, 2015). Indeed, research has shown that identifying with a social cause is associated with greater anger related to the cause (Stürmer & Simon 2009) and that social or political debate leads to anger (Holbert, Hansen, Caplan, & Mortensen, 2007). While this situation is characterized by NA, we propose that it simultaneously helps meet psychological needs for meaning, self-esteem, and social connectedness.

Meaning There are at least two ways in which taking part in social causes might augment meaning. First, participation can give individuals the sense of contributing to a purposeful endeavor that will make a substantial and positive difference in the world. Participants' actions, and hence their life, have value and meaning. Similarly, participating individuals incorporate such social causes into their identity (Jasper, 2014). Attaching one's self and contributing significantly to groups can make them feel as if their lives are more meaningful (Castano, Yzerbyt, & Paladino, 2004; Lifton, 1979/1983). Consistent with these ideas, individuals who participate in protests believe that their efforts will have an impact (Mannarini, Roccato, Fedi, & Rovere, 2009).

Second, belief systems (e.g., religious, political) are sources of meaning because they help individuals maintain perceptions that the world is a purposeful place. Engaging in debates and arguments regarding one's belief, although sometimes frustrating, gives people the opportunity to reflect, with bias, on their beliefs. This, in turn, can strengthen beliefs. Research confirms that such arguments bolster meaning-providing beliefs. For example, viewing political debates consolidates individuals' political beliefs (Meffert, Chung, Joiner, Waks, & Garst, 2006). Additionally, those who characterize themselves as argumentative have greater meaning (Baumeister et al., 2013).

Self-esteem The negative emotion that people often feel when lending support to social causes or asserting their beliefs is indignation, “the morally grounded form of anger” (Jasper, 2014, p. 208). That is, people feel frustrated because they perceive others as acting immorally and unjustly (Miller, 2001). Occupy Wall Street protesters, for example, were indignant of the corrupt financial sector and attacked the sector’s moral foundation. They took the moral high ground, asserting their own ethical principles.

Evidence indicates that taking the moral high ground benefits self-esteem. To begin, many individuals base their self-esteem, in part, on being virtuous and moral (Alicke & Sedikides, 2009; Sedikides & Gregg, 2008). There are even scales that measure the extent to which self-esteem is grounded in being virtuous and moral (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Crocker, Luhtanen, Cooper, & Bouvrette, 2003). Moreover, people meet self-esteem needs by self-enhancing, with most believing that they are better than average on socially desirable characteristics (Alicke & Govorun, 2005; Sedikides, Meek, Alicke, & Taylor, 2014). Morality is the characteristic on which people self-enhance the most (Allison, Messick, & Goethals, 1989; Van Lange & Sedikides, 1998). Taken together, although participating in social causes can be frustrating, it can help people meet the need for self-esteem.

Social Connectedness Participating in social causes may foster social connectedness because it gives individuals the opportunity to interact with like-minded others and be members of social groups. Although protesters may sometimes be angry, they stand alongside fellow protesters with common goals. This, in turn, may promote a sense of togetherness and a collective identity (Jasper, 2014). Consistent with these notions, participants in protests often identify with the social cause (Mannarini et al., 2009), and taking part in collective action increases the extent to which individuals identify with a social cause (Klandermans, 2003). In all, this research suggests that the need for social connectedness can be met while experiencing anger.

Highly Adverse Life Events It is impossible to escape life without experiencing some highly adverse life events (e.g., death of a loved one, serious illness or injury, sexual assault, natural disaster, terrorist attack on one’s ingroup, job loss; Bonanno, 2004). Certainly, some of these events (e.g., sexual assault) have no psychological silver lining. Yet, others may be conducive to the fulfilment of the needs for meaning or social connectedness.

Meaning Highly adverse events that are particularly significant may foster meaning, because individuals are able to detect that something significant has happened. For example, the death of a loved one is a meaningful event. The significance of the event, and life in general, is not likely lost on the bereaved. Terrorist attacks provide another example. 9/11 evoked fear in Americans. Nevertheless, Americans likely comprehended the gravitas of the event, understanding its contribution to the global drama and the history books for centuries to come.

There is little empirical evidence for these proposals. However, research on psychological responses to and preference for literary work and films provides tentative

support. Death thoughts (which activate the need for meaning) increase preferences for tragic stories (Goldenberg et al., 1999), suggesting that people find meaning in tragic events. Moreover, films judged to be meaningful by viewers also evoke sadness (Oliver & Raney, 2011). Of course, tragic or sad events happening to fictional characters is a far cry from similar personal experiences. However, psychological states elicited in response to fictional events may simulate, to some extent, psychological states elicited by those events in real life (Davis, 1980). Additionally, despite the gap between consuming fictional events and experiencing real events, this research is still consistent with our broader assertion that people can meet the need for meaning while experiencing NA.

Social Connectedness Highly adverse events may augment social connectedness because they render relationships and social identities salient. The passing of a loved one is extremely sad. However, when a family member dies, people commonly spend time with close family and friends, which may strengthen social connectedness. Indeed, research has shown that bereaving individuals receive high levels of social support (Thuen, 1997) and report feeling connected with others (Wheeler, 2001). As another illustration, although 9/11 induced fear, Americans reported being strongly connected with each other and to their collective identity to a greater extent immediately after 9/11 than six and 18 months after 9/11 (Moskalenko, McCauley, & Rozin, 2006). In all, highly adverse events may help meet the need for social connectedness.

Willfully Choosing to Be in ANNFS

Thus far, we have argued that people can fulfill psychological needs in situations characterized by NA. However, we also propose that people willfully place themselves in ANNFS in order to meet psychological needs. That is, guided by motives to fulfill psychological needs, individuals choose to be in situations that arouse NA, if those situations are also need-fulfilling. Certainly, this is not true for all ANNFS (e.g., highly adverse life experiences), but it is relevant to at least some ANNFS. For example, protesting on behalf of a social cause is something individuals clearly choose to do. Additionally, some individuals willfully put themselves in situations in which they are forced to consider the frightening possibility that ghosts exist. Consider, for example, the aforementioned film *Paranormal Activity*. Despite being notoriously horrifying, it grossed over 100 million dollars at the box office (boxoffice Mojo.com). Similarly, there are several popular reality shows devoted to hunting ghosts (e.g., *Ghost Adventures*, *The Dead Files*, *Ghost Hunters*), and people pay to go on tours of allegedly haunted locations. Thus, people willingly place themselves in at least some ANNFS.

The Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model

Well-being is typically construed as a combination of the presence of PA, the relative absence of NA, and high levels of life satisfaction. We have argued that well-being can be promoted within situations characterized by NA. Specifically, some of the core ingredients necessary for well-being (i.e., psychological needs) are attainable while simultaneously experiencing NA. As noted, the effects of psychological need-fulfillment on well-being manifest as increased PA and life satisfaction, and we suspect the same is true in the case of need-fulfillment within affectively negative situations. At the very least, need-fulfillment within affectively negative situations may induce a sense of satisfaction or contentment. Our position on whether need-fulfillment within affectively negative situations leads to PA is less firm, but we think this is plausible.

We summarize our proposals in the Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model (Fig. 21.1). The model begins with the motivation to fulfill psychological needs (box 1). The motivation propels individuals to place themselves in need-fulfilling situations. Certainly, the motivation may guide them towards a variety of need-fulfilling situations, only some of which are affectively negative. The model, however, only focuses on affectively negative situations (box 2). Also, while need-fulfillment motives push individuals to willingly place themselves in ANNFS, sometimes individuals simply find themselves within ANNFS. These situations elicit NA (box 3). Despite their affectively negative character, they are simultaneously need-fulfilling (box 5). Critically, ANNFS do not fulfill psychological needs because of the NA they engender—hence, the absence of an arrow from NA (box 3) to need-fulfillment (box 5). Rather, the situations fulfill psychological needs because of distinct psychological processes engendered within them (box 4). Finally, need-fulfillment produces satisfaction and PA (box 6), even when needs are fulfilled within affectively negative situations.

The model is laid out in sequential steps. However, we again want to emphasize the simultaneity of the psychological states in the model. Specifically, we propose that once a person finds themselves in box 2 (i.e., in an ANNFS), they immediately experience the states in boxes 3–6. Metaphorically, the progression from box 2 to boxes 3–6 is akin to electricity spreading when a light switch is turned on. Once in box 2, the switch is on and the subsequent states immediately follow. These states persist at least as long as the person remains in the situation. To illustrate, upon negatively judging another person, people immediately feel anger, irritation, and/or frustration. While simultaneously experiencing this NA, they make a downward social comparison, which instantaneously boosts self-esteem. Elevated self-esteem, then, instantaneously leads to a sense of satisfaction.

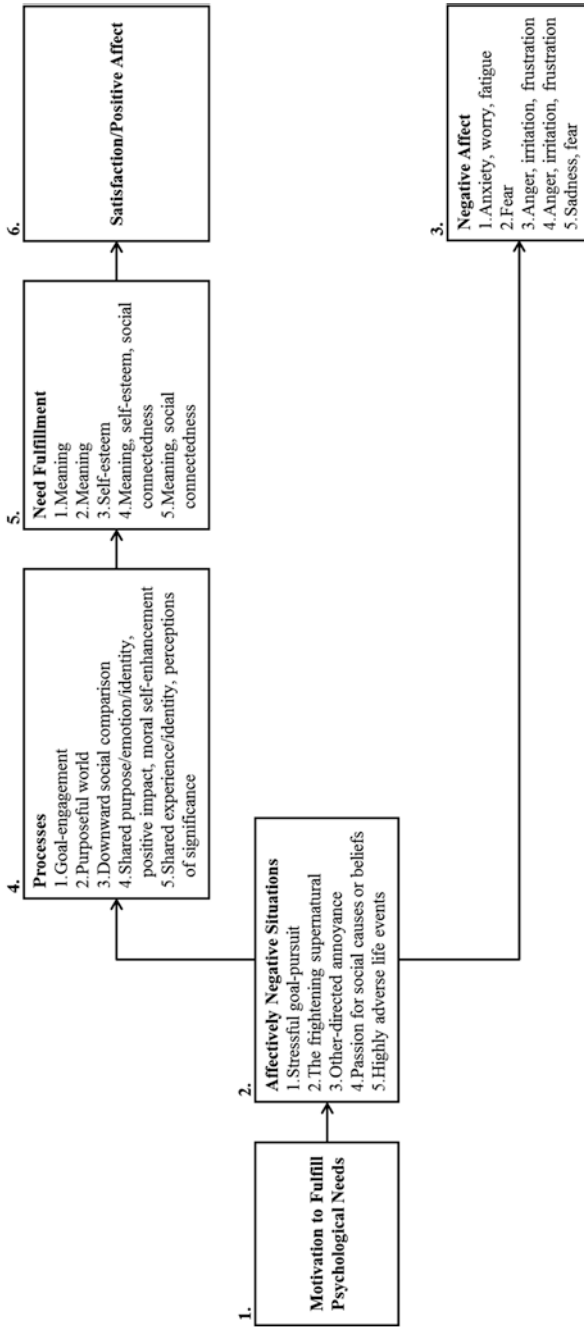


Fig. 21.1 Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model. *Note.* Numbers 1-5 within boxes 3, 4, and 5 correspond to the affectively negative situations in box 2. For example, “anxiety, worry, and fatigue” from number 1 of box 3 represents the affectively negative states of stressful goal-pursuit

Contextualizing the Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model

A key purpose of this chapter is to build upon the current understanding of well-being. We do not aspire to prescribe a path by which people can attain well-being. In particular, we do not advocate that individuals actively seek affectively negative experiences as a way to improve their well-being. Although we have argued that experiencing NA can be good for well-being, we think that experiencing frequent and intense NA is a recipe for psychological malfunction (Kashdan & Biswas-Diner, 2014). Regardless, our analysis is consistent with perspectives that NA is adaptive and should thus be embraced rather than avoided (Forgas, 2013; Kashdan & Biswas-Diner 2014). More importantly, the Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model is congruent with, yet distinct from, other lines of inquiry (such as the instrumental perspective of emotion regulation and research on trauma) that have highlighted the benefits associated with experiencing NA. In addition, the model sheds light on how individuals can experience mixed emotions.

Instrumental Emotion Regulation

Our analysis complements the instrumental perspective of emotion regulation (Tamir, 2016). According to this perspective, people want to feel pleasant emotions, but also want to feel emotions instrumental for attaining goals or desired outcomes. Sometimes the attainment of certain goals or outcomes is best facilitated by unpleasant emotions. For example, when needing to be competitive or confrontational, it is useful to be angry (Van Kleef, De Dreu, & Manstead, 2004). Indeed, when faced with confrontation, people prefer to engage with stimuli that increase anger (Tamir, Mitchell, & Gross, 2008). Similarly, they prefer to feel fear when fear helps them avoid threats (e.g., predators; Tamir & Ford, 2009).

In line with the instrumental perspective of emotion regulation, our analysis suggests that people are willing to experience unpleasant emotions when such emotions are paired with the fulfillment of psychological needs. Stated otherwise, the situations characterized by anxiety, fear, annoyance, anger, and sadness that we described above are useful for meeting psychological needs. Our analysis, however, differs in at least two ways from the instrumental perspective of emotion regulation. First, research on the instrumentality of emotions has shown that negative emotions, in and of themselves, are useful for achieving specific goals (e.g., winning an argument). Conversely, our analysis suggests that NA, itself, does not fulfill needs. Rather, it is features of the situations, in which NA is present, that are useful for need-fulfillment and beneficial for well-being. Second, we have focused on the *psychological* benefits (i.e., need-fulfillment, well-being) that can be harvested while concurrently experiencing NA. The instrumental perspective on emotion regulation focuses more on tangible (non-psychological) benefits, such as winning an argument or avoiding predators.

Trauma

In discussing the need for meaning, Victor Frankl (1946/1992) asserted that people can find meaning while suffering through objectionable circumstances. He argued that believing there is a meaning or purpose behind suffering (i.e., a good reason for suffering) helps maintain psychological equanimity. Contemporary psychologists have shown that traumatic experiences (e.g., serious illness, natural disaster) engender efforts to restore meaning that is threaten in these adverse circumstances (Neimeyer, 2002; Park, 2010). Although Frankl (and the contemporary research that ensued) addressed how individuals restore meaning to cope with suffering, he also suggested that people can experience personal growth and gain psychological strength above and beyond that which was originally threatened by the adverse situations. Specifically, Frankl (1946/1992) advocated that individuals view their suffering as an accomplishment—something they successfully survived. Consistent with this, contemporary research on posttraumatic growth suggests that, after individuals have had time to cope with and make sense out of adverse events, they may experience psychological benefits (e.g., meaning) that go above and beyond simply repairing the psychological damage caused by the traumatic event (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 2000; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998).

Our model differs from this work in several ways. First, psychological growth is not experienced during traumatic events. It is only when people have had the time to deeply introspect on life that they may become capable of harnessing psychological benefits from trauma (Davis et al., 1998). We instead propose that individuals can improve well-being (via need-fulfillment) while simultaneously experiencing NA, and not after a substantial adjustment period. Second, our model is irrelevant to the question of how people cope with NA or negative events. That is, for the situations we described, we do not propose that people actively try to find meaning (or seek to fulfill other needs) in order to reduce or cope with the accompanying NA. We posit instead that NA and need-fulfillment operate independently, yet simultaneously, in ANNFS. Third, the post-traumatic growth literature focuses exclusively on extremely negative or traumatic life events. Our proposals primarily, though not exclusively, concern events and situations that are not so severe. Although the anxiety of earning a medical degree, the stress of raising children, and the fear after a terrorist attack can be very unpleasant, they pale in comparison to the suffering of those in concentration camps. Finally, the posttraumatic growth literature focuses on traumatic events that people would never willingly choose to experience. We focus, by comparison, on affectively negative situations in which individuals may, though certainly do not always, willfully place themselves as a means to meet psychological needs.

Making Mixed Emotional Experiences Possible

The current analysis helps explain why it is possible for people to experience a mixture of positive and negative emotions simultaneously. Research has demonstrated that individuals can have such mixed emotional experiences. For example, situations such as college graduations (Ersner-Hershfield, Mikels, Sullivan, & Carstensen, 2008), ridding oneself of long-held possessions (Price, Arnould, & Curasi 2000), and watching bittersweet films (Larsen & McGraw, 2011) can all arouse both PA and NA. Our analysis offers a potential explanation for why it is possible to simultaneously experience PA and NA. We outlined several situations that are characterized by NA, yet can simultaneously help fulfill psychological needs. We also reviewed evidence that need-fulfillment improves well-being and that this can surface as increased PA. We further entertained the idea that need-fulfillment, even within affectively negative situations, can lead to PA. If this is true for some ANNFS, then individuals in such ANNFS experience a mixture of PA and NA. Thus, one reason why mixed affective experiences are possible is because needs can be fulfilled within affectively negative situations. To illustrate, the expected death of an elderly relative is arguably bittersweet. It is predominantly sad, but it may also foster social connectedness and thus PA.

Concluding Remarks

Traditionally, well-being has been characterized by a plethora of PA and a dearth of NA. Despite this, we have proposed that experiencing NA can be good for well-being. Prior work has revealed that fulfilling psychological needs is imperative for the promotion and maintenance of well-being, and we have argued that there are situations characterized by negative affect that can simultaneously fulfill these needs. Outlining several such situations, we theoretically explicated the Affectively Negative Need-Fulfillment Model and pieced together empirical support from existing literatures. In doing so, we have forged a path for future research to better understand the role of affect in well-being.

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