



# On the accuracy of affective forecasting: The moderating role of passion

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## ABSTRACT

Research on affective forecasting has demonstrated that people are generally inaccurate in predicting their future emotional states (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). It is proposed that passion toward an activity would moderate this inaccuracy. According to the Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand, 2010), individuals can be passionate in two distinct fashions (harmonious and obsessive). It was hypothesized that harmonious passion would lead individuals' affective forecasts to be more coherent with their experienced affective reactions. This is so because harmonious passion stems from an integrated self-structure in which the activity takes an important but not overpowering space in identity. Conversely, obsessive passion stems from ego-invested self-structures, in which the activity takes a disproportionate place in one's identity. Thus, obsessive passion should not be a significant moderator of affective forecasting accuracy. The present study was conducted with a sample of soccer fans ( $N = 62$ ) who reported their forecasted and experienced affective reactions before and following their favorite team's games in the 2010 World Cup of soccer. Results revealed that harmonious passion was associated with greater affective forecasting accuracy. Obsessive passion was unrelated to this phenomenon. Results are discussed in light of the affective forecasting and passion literatures.

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## 1. Introduction

People often try to anticipate the emotional consequences of future events. Research on affective forecasting (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003) has generally shown that people are poor at predicting the affective impact of future life events (Gilbert, Wilson, Pinel, Blumberg, & Wheatley, 1998; Wilson & Gilbert, 2003). More specifically, people tend to overestimate the affective consequences of upcoming events, as they generally expect that future positive events will make them happier than they really do, just as they expect that future negative events will make them unhappier than they actually do (Wilson & Gilbert, 2003).

Although more than a decade of research on affective forecasting has demonstrated a variety of biases, only a handful of studies have looked at how individual differences might influence people's affective forecasting accuracy (e.g., Buehler & McFarland, 2001; Sevdalis, Petrides, & Harvey, 2007; Tomlinson, Carmichael, Reis, & Aron, 2010). Furthermore, it has also been demonstrated that the impact bias is greater under important and emotionally charged circumstances (Gilbert et al., 1998; Wilson, Wheatley, Meyers, Gilbert, & Axsom, 2000). As passion toward an activity entails being strongly

affectively inclined toward an activity (Vallerand et al., 2003), being passionate should lead one to enthusiastically anticipate an upcoming event related to the passionate activity. We thus posited that passion toward an activity (Vallerand, 2010) would represent a psychological factor that has an impact on people's affective forecasts. Therefore, the purpose of this paper was to investigate the role of passion for an activity in the accuracy of affective forecasting.

## 2. The Dualistic Model of Passion

The Dualistic Model of Passion (Vallerand, 2010) defines passion as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that one loves, finds important, and in which one invests a significant amount of time and energy. This model further proposes that two distinct types of passion exist, harmonious and obsessive. Harmonious passion refers to a strong desire to freely engage in the activity that one loves. With harmonious passion, the activity is part of an integrated self-structure (Hodgins & Knee, 2002) and, in such a case, occupies a significant but not overpowering space in the person's identity. Thus, harmonious passion is expected to be associated with adaptive outcomes not only during, but also after activity engagement. On the other hand, obsessive passion refers to an uncontrollable urge to engage in the activity. While the activity becomes part of one's identity, individuals with an obsessive passion come to develop ego-invested self-structures toward the passionate activity (Hodgins & Knee, 2002) in which the activity

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represents an overpowering space in one's identity. Consequently, obsessive passion is expected to be associated with less adaptive outcomes.

Empirical findings have been consistent with this conceptualization of passion. Both types of passion have been found to be positively associated with measures of activity importance, of perceptions of the activity as being a passion, and of activity inclusion in the self (see Vallerand, 2010, for a review). However, the two types of passion have been found to be differentially associated with various outcomes. Harmonious passion is positively related, whereas obsessive passion is either unrelated or negatively related, to indices of psychological adjustment, positive emotions, and flow (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 2). Obsessive passion is also strongly associated with rumination (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1) and negative affect when one is prevented from engaging in the activity (Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005). Moreover, obsessive passion is positively related to the experience of conflict between one's passion and other life activities, whereas harmonious passion is negatively related to it (Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2008).

### 3. The present research

Passionate activities do not simply reflect a short-lived interest. They are central in people's lives, as passionate people spend a significant amount of time and energy engaged in the passionate activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). In light of past research underlining the role of perceived activity importance and emotional involvement in the accuracy of affective forecasts (Gilbert et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2000), it is thus proposed that passion toward an activity should have an impact on people's accuracy of affective forecasts. The purpose of the present research was thus to investigate the role of harmonious and obsessive passion for an activity in the accuracy of affective forecasts. The problem of *focalism* (Wilson et al., 2000), whereby people focus too much on a specific (focal) upcoming event and fail to consider the impact of other life events that will influence their emotions at the time being, is particularly relevant to passionate individuals. As with obsessive passion, the activity represents an overpowering space (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), individuals are less likely to hold other interests than the passionate activity, which should lead to lower levels of self-complexity (Linville, 1985, 1987). Along the same vein, past research has shown that obsessive passion leads to experiences of conflict between the passionate activity and other important life activities (Vallerand et al., 2008, 2010). Therefore, when asked to predict the emotional consequences of future activity-related events, obsessively passionate individuals might be less likely to go beyond the specific event and think about other important things that will influence their future emotions. It was thus hypothesized that obsessive passion should not be a significant moderator of affective forecasting accuracy. Obsessive passion should lead individuals to display the customary overestimation of the affective consequences regarding an upcoming activity-related event.

However, this should not be the case for harmonious passion. This is because with harmonious passion, the activity takes an important but not overpowering space in one's identity (Hodgins & Knee, 2002), individuals are more likely to hold other interests (e.g., family, friends, work, etc.), which should lead to higher levels of self-complexity (Linville, 1985, 1987). Moreover, individuals with a high harmonious passion are more efficient in self-regulating multiple life activities, leading to less conflict (Vallerand et al., 2008, 2010). Therefore, when asked to predict the emotional consequences of future activity-related events, harmoniously passionate individuals might be more likely to go beyond the specific event and think about other important things that will influence their future

emotions. In other words, harmoniously passionate individuals are less likely to think of future activity-related events as happening in a vacuum. Thus, we hypothesized that individuals high on harmonious passion would experience greater affective forecasting accuracy, given that they are more likely to engage in the pertinent activity thoughtfully while keeping in perspective other key life domains. Moreover, as mentioned above, past research has also shown that the impact bias is greater under important and emotionally charged circumstances (Gilbert et al., 1998; Wilson et al., 2000). As a result, it was hypothesized that perceived activity importance should be associated to less affective forecasting accuracy and should be taken into account in assessing the specific role of harmonious and obsessive passions in affective forecasting accuracy.

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited online through forums and Facebook advertisements dedicated to soccer fans. Participation was voluntary and no incentive was given in exchange for participation. A total of 264 fans completed the initial questionnaire through an online survey a few days before the beginning of 2010 World Cup of soccer. This questionnaire comprised measures of passion toward fandom, activity importance, and affective forecasting. Of these 264 participants, 65 (57 males and 8 females) consented to participate in a diary study for the duration of the tournament. A MANOVA showed no difference on any variables from the initial questionnaire (i.e., harmonious and obsessive passion, activity importance, and affective forecasting) between individuals who participated in the follow-up and those who did not. The mean age of the 65 participants was 26.55 years ( $SD = 12.14$  years). They were supporters of a variety of teams such as Spain ( $N = 17$ ; 26.2%), the Netherlands ( $N = 14$ ; 21.5%), the United States of America ( $N = 5$ ; 7.7%), Brazil ( $N = 4$ ; 6.2%), England ( $N = 4$ ; 6.2%), and others ( $N = 21$ ; 32.3%). A MANOVA showed no differences among the supported teams on all variables.

Each day following a game in which their favorite team had played, fans received an email inviting them to complete an online follow-up questionnaire assessing experienced affect after this specific game. These questionnaires were accessible until two hours before the beginning of their favorite team's next game. Over the course of the diary study, participants were asked to respond to follow-up questionnaires ranging from 1 to 7 occasions.

## 5. Measures

### 5.1. Passion for being a soccer fan

Fans' passion toward supporting one's favorite team was assessed using a short version of the Passion Scale (Vallerand et al., 2003) in order to make the questionnaire as short as possible and thus ensure maximum participation. Participants were asked to complete the scale's items with regard to their favorite soccer team. Two 3-item subscales were used to assess harmonious (e.g., "Being a soccer fan [e.g., Spain fan] is in harmony with other things that are part of me";  $\alpha = .84$ ) and obsessive (e.g., "Being a soccer fan [e.g., Spain fan] is so exciting that I sometimes lose control over it,  $\alpha = .74$ ) passion. This scale was completed on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*do not agree at all*) to 7 (*very strongly agree*). Results of a confirmatory factor analysis on the initial sample confirmed the two-factor structure of the short version of the Passion Scale,  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 15$ ,  $N = 264$ ) = 22.51,  $p < .05$ ; CFI = .97, NNFI = .95, RMSEA = .08. Furthermore, a recent study revealed that

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