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Passion and personality: Is passionate behaviour a function of personality?

Passion et personnalité : le comportement passionné s'exprimerait-il en fonction de la personnalité ?

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ABSTRACT

Introduction. – Passion as a concept but also as a way of life seems to generate an ever-growing interest among researchers and even employers. The Dualistic model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) has suggested that passion could take two distinct forms: harmonious or obsessive passion. However, the debate still remains open on the factors (contextual or dispositional) that are likely to influence the tendency to develop a passion for an activity.

Objective. – This research was designed to explore the relations between passion and personality and to determine the strength of those links.

Method. – To this end, 241 participants completed an online questionnaire comprising one measure of passion along with one measure of personality, namely an assessment of the Big Five dimensions.

Results. – The results show a pattern of relations between passion and personality that is consistent with previous research which highlighted the more positive/adaptive nature and consequences of harmonious passion, in comparison with obsessive passion.

Conclusion. – These outcomes nevertheless remain weak. More research is needed to focus on the contextual factors that could play an important role in the development of passion, mainly in its harmonious form.

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RÉSUMÉ

La passion, en tant que concept mais également en tant que mode de vie, semble susciter un intérêt toujours croissant dans la population des chercheurs, et même celle des employeurs. Le Modèle Dualiste des Passions (Vallerand et al., 2003) a suggéré que celle-ci pouvait prendre deux formes distinctes : harmonieuse vs. obsessive. Le débat restait néanmoins ouvert concernant les facteurs (contextuels vs. dispositionnels) susceptibles d'influencer la propension à développer une passion. Cette recherche visait à explorer les relations entre passion et dimensions de la personnalité, et à se prononcer sur l'importance de ces liens. Pour ce faire, 241 participants ont rempli un questionnaire en ligne comprenant une mesure de la passion, ainsi qu'une mesure de personnalité, à savoir une évaluation des différentes dimensions du Big Five. Les résultats obtenus permettent d'établir certains liens entre passion et personnalité. Toutefois, la faiblesse des relations observées encourage les recherches futures à se concentrer davantage sur les facteurs contextuels pouvant jouer un rôle dans le développement de la passion, principalement sous sa forme harmonieuse.

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There is a famous French maxim that says: “*La sagesse fait durer, les passions font vivre*” (Chamfort, 1928, p. 29); wisdom lengthens life, but passions make us live. Indeed, throughout history humans’ hearts have beaten to the rhythm of their passions. They are a real

strength enabling individuals to go into action and to achieve great things. When people are passionate, their view of life is driven by positive affectivity; they tend to give their best and to surpass themselves. Many great discoveries, inventions and achievements were only attained due to the enthusiasm and the perseverance that characterise passionate behaviour.

Because of these many potentialities, passion appears to be an essential factor for optimising the way in which human

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organizations work. In this sense, passionate employees have been found to report higher levels of psychological adjustment to work compared to non-passionate ones (Vallerand and Houlfort, 2003). But passion also constitutes a strong marketing tool. For instance, some sport stores have been found mostly to recruit passionate sportspeople as their sales clerks because they have a greater ability to attract and retain customers (Gasparini and Pichot, 2007). On this basis, every company should consider hiring passionate employees. However, we should first be able to provide an answer to the following critical question: does passion fit a personality profile that we ought to recruit or, on the other hand, does it develop in a particular context that we should put in place?

1. Passion and personality: an ongoing debate

At the beginning of the twentieth century, passion was primarily understood as a temperament, a trait or at least something resulting from an individual's internal dispositions (Ribot, 1907). With the introduction of personality inventories, Heymans and Wiersma (1912) developed a typology of eight characters including the "passionate" type described as emotional, active and secondary. According to these authors, this character is the most frequent as it applies to one third of the population. This classification has also been taken up by Le Senne (1963) who has described "the passionate" as the most intense character where "history can find its most active heroes" (p. 259). The individuals concerned by this categorisation are characterised by their remarkable capacity for action, their perseverance, their ability to release long-lasting and powerful energy and their open minds, but nevertheless they sometimes appear vain and showy. However, it should be noted that only the two above-mentioned references explored personality traits associated with individuals termed "passionate". Thereafter, characterology gave way to the emergence of personality models and the "passionate" type completely disappeared from typologies. Very recently, the concept of passion has reappeared in the psychological literature, although now it is no longer considered as a personality type but rather as a motivational strength whose development inside a human being has never been justified other than by environmental factors.

Nowadays, the model that has become dominant in empirical psychology clearly favours an approach based on motivational aspects. This is known as the Dualistic model of Passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) and it defines passion as a "strong inclination towards an activity that people like (or even love), that they find important and in which they invest time and energy". The theory behind this model relies in part on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985, 2000). Further, the characteristic feature of this conception lies in the fact that it postulates the existence of two types of passion for an activity, namely harmonious and obsessive passion. Those two forms both relate to the general definition of passion given above, but are distinguishable from one another in their mode of development as well as the kind of consequences they lead to.

The Dualistic model hypothesises that two processes are in play in the development of passion: activity valuation and the internalisation of the representation of the activity in one's identity (Vallerand et al., 2006). Indeed, past research has demonstrated that when an object of interest is highly valued, individuals are inclined to internalise the given object, to make it part of themselves (Aron et al., 1992; Csikszentmihalyi et al., 1993). According to Deci and Ryan (2000) (Ryan and Deci, 2003), this internalisation process can be of two different kinds. An "autonomous" internalisation occurs when people freely accept that the activity has become important for them. This configuration would lead to the emergence of a more harmonious passion. In contrast, a

"controlled" internalisation would occur when the individual is subject to some intra- and/or interpersonal pressure (e.g. a young child who engages in a given activity in order to please his or her parents). Such an internalisation might then result in a more obsessive form of passion. In the former case, the individual can control the activity he or she decided to engage in, whereas in the latter, the individual is controlled by the favourite activity because he or she cannot help but engage in it (Vallerand et al., 2003).

Finally, regarding the consequences of passion, numerous differences can be reported between the two forms. Harmonious passion seems to lead to positive affective, cognitive, behavioural and relational outcomes, while obsessive passion appears to lead to more negative ones (e.g. Mageau and Vallerand, 2007; Stoeber et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007). Results from various studies conducted on these two forms have brought significant nuances to the optimistic view of passion mentioned at the beginning of this article. Not every passion leads to the desired positive outcomes; some kinds of passion appear to be linked to behaviours that can be viewed as counterproductive, conflictual or even detrimental for passionate individuals and/or for the circle they live in (e.g. Ratelle et al., 2004; Rip et al., 2006; Séguin-Lévesque et al., 2003; Vallerand, 2008).

2. The personality issue in the Dualistic model

According to the Dualistic model, passion constitutes a kind of dynamic process that develops in the interface between an individual and a given activity. Such a definition makes it less likely to fit with the idea that passion relies on a specific personality type (Carbonneau et al., 2010) and suggests that passion can in fact develop in everyone. Very recently, Mageau et al. (2009) examined some contextual factors that might influence the development of a passion for an activity. The results showed that the individuals' social environment – and especially that of their parents – seems to have an impact on the internalisation process that will occur as well as on the type of passion that will develop further. Concretely, the occurrence of a harmonious passion would be favoured by having parents who support autonomy. In contrast, parents with a controlling style that forces their child to think, feel and behave in a very precise way pave the way to the emergence of a more obsessive form of passion in the very heart of their child.

Nonetheless, Vallerand et al. (2006) emphasised the fact that personality could also constitute an important determinant of the internalisation process. In line with this statement, an "autonomous" personality orientation (tendency to do things out of pleasure and/or choice) would entail an "autonomous" internalisation style and would further lead to the emergence of a harmonious passion whereas a more "controlled" personality orientation (tendency to do things due to outside or inner pressure) would facilitate a "controlled" internalisation style and would give rise to some obsessive passion. However, this hypothesis has never been tested. Two studies did investigate the links between passion and personality (Tosun and Lajunen, 2009; Wang and Yang, 2008), but it should be noted that the authors chose to assess personality with inventories that are not widely used (Gomez's 25-item personality scale, Gomez, 2006) and/or chose to focus on a very specific type of passion (passion for the Internet/for online shopping).

3. Present research

Doubts still remain about the role of personality in passion as well as in the development of one type of passion or another. The main purpose of the present study was therefore to empirically examine the relationships between passion and personality and to assess the predominance of those possible links. In order to achieve

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