



## On the bike and in the cubicle: The role of passion and regulatory focus in cycling and work satisfaction



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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To examine the relationships between cycling passion and satisfaction with cycling and work. First we examine the how two types of passion for cycling (harmonious and obsessive) differentially affect cycling satisfaction. Second, we examine how a passion for cycling can have a spillover effect on work satisfaction. Third, we examine the mediating role of regulatory focus on the relationship between passion and satisfaction.

**Design:** Cross-sectional study of U.S. competitive cyclists using an online survey.

**Methods:** Self-reports of study variables were collected from 119 competitive cyclists, who were also employed in work roles beyond their cycling pursuits. Structural equation modeling techniques were used to examine the relationships between passion, regulatory focus, and satisfaction.

**Results:** Results from our sample indicate that while holding a harmonious passion for cycling positively relates to both cycling and work satisfaction, an obsessive passion results in diminished work satisfaction. Moreover, results from our mediation analysis indicate that regulatory focus partially mediates the relationships between harmonious passion and both cycling and work satisfaction.

**Conclusions:** These findings illustrate that not all forms of passion are beneficial to one's pursuits, demonstrate the potential spillover effect of pursuing one's passion for sport and its influence on work satisfaction, and suggest that regulatory focus helps explain the relationship between passion and satisfaction.

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Passion is a huge prerequisite to winning. It makes you willing to jump through hoops, go through all the ups and downs and everything in-between to reach your goal.

– Kerri Walsh-Jennings, beach volleyball Olympic gold medalist

It is not difficult to find advice from athletes and coaches that suggests passion is a key determinant of success. This passion-leads-to-success proposition is inherently alluring; however the concept of passion has received relatively little attention in the applied psychology literature and the outcomes of passion remain poorly understood (Perrewé, Hochwarter, Ferris, McAllister, & Harris, 2014). Although passions can come from a variety of activities ranging from spending time with friends to playing the guitar,

individuals frequently find passion in some sort of athletic pursuit (Lafrenière, Jowett, Vallerand, & Carbonneau, 2011; Vallerand et al., 2003). Therefore, we choose to study passion pursuit in the context of athletics, specifically competitive cycling, to examine its effects on both cycling and work satisfaction. We believe that this participant group of cyclists is relevant because cycling is a rigorous cardiovascular sport and the necessary training for racing success can be time intensive and physically demanding.

The primary purpose of our study is to examine the relationships between cycling passion and satisfaction with cycling and work. In line with this purpose, we first sought to examine how different types of cycling passion (harmonious and obsessive) influence cycling satisfaction. Second, we sought to examine how a passion for cycling could influence work satisfaction. Our dual focus on the relationship between passion in cycling and both cycling and workplace satisfaction acknowledges that employees' behaviors do not exist in a vacuum. Instead, non-work events spillover to influence employees' workplace experiences (Hecht & Boies, 2009). Third, our research examines whether regulatory focus serves as an

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underlying motivation orientation in the relationship between harmonious and obsessive passion for cycling and cycling and work satisfaction. Aligning with scholarly work that has recently begun to study how leisure activities can help individuals cope with stress and promote work stress recovery (Buman, Tuccitto, & Giacobbi, 2007; Wijndaele et al., 2007; Wilson, McDermott, & Munir, 2016), we address recent calls to further examine the potential for positive overlap between work and non-work experiences on personal outcomes (Roddenberry & Renk, 2010).

### 1. Cycling passion and cycling satisfaction

The topic of passion has recently seen increased interest from scholars, where theoretical and empirical evidence outline the notion that passion moves people toward success on a particular task, including athletics, leisure activities, and work tasks (Curran, Hill, Appleton, Vallerand, & Standage, 2015; Stenseng, 2008; Vallerand et al., 2008). Grounded in self-determination and identity theory, passion is conceptualized as a strong inclination to invest time and energy into an important activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Scholars have embraced Vallerand et al. (2003) dualistic passion model, which proposes that passion can affect individual outcomes in two divergent ways: harmonious passion represents a seamless, balanced integration of the activity into a person's identity; obsessive passion represents a deliberate or controlled emphasis on the activity that creates internal pressure to engage in that activity. Existing research has demonstrated that harmonious passion results in attainment of performance goals, whereas obsessive passion results in both diminished performance and mental health (see Curran et al., 2015; Lafrenière et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2007).

Previous passion research outlines the distinct differences between harmonious and obsessive passion. Harmonious passion represents the near seamless and autonomous integration of the activity into the person's identity (Vallerand et al., 2003). The individual enjoys the activity, desires continued growth in the activity, and the activity aligns with the individual's lifestyle with only subtle changes. In this sense, harmonious passion aligns with the authentic self to provide the person an opportunity to participate freely and openly in an activity and without the presence of undesirable consequences (Hodgins & Knee, 2002; Hodgins, Yacko, & Gottlieb, 2006). Harmonious passion helps one maintain the personal balance to be their most productive selves (Lefebvre, 2004), and in turn, leads to positive outcomes across various contexts, including improved sport performance (Lavigne, Forest, & Crevier-Braud, 2012; Vallerand et al., 2008). In contrast, obsessive passion is more controlled by pressures that force participation in the passion-laden activity (Vallerand et al., 2008). These pressures can be social acceptance, identity issues, or an overwhelming, almost addictive need that is fulfilled while participating in the activity (Wang & Chu, 2007). Due to the compulsive nature of obsessive passion, the personal outcomes are often harmful as individuals are compelled to engage in the activity regardless of potential deleterious costs (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2008). In spite of such pressure-laden conditions, individuals still enjoy the activity (Mageau et al., 2009), but find it difficult to disengage fully from the activity (Hodgins & Knee, 2002) and find themselves psychologically dependent on the activity (Vallerand et al., 2003). Thus, obsessive passion spurs continued emotional demands (e.g., burnout, disengagement, and negative affect), which facilitate harmful personal outcomes, such as diminished sport performance (Birkeland & Buch, 2015; Vallerand et al., 2007, 2008). Based on these relationships, in our study we posit that whereas harmonious passion leads to cycling satisfaction, obsessive passion diminishes cycling satisfaction.

### 2. Cycling passion and work satisfaction

A next step in extending the role of passion considers the potential spillover effect that passion in one's recreational pursuits has an effect on workplace experiences. An increasing amount of research indicates that an individual's off-job activities can impact work attitudes and performance. This research is based on the notion that work imposes multiple conflicting demands, disengagement and even burnout (Quinn, Spreitzer, & Lam, 2012), and that active participation in meaningful leisure activities can help individuals recover and reenergize (e.g., Sonnentag, Arbeus, Mahn, & Fritz, 2014; Sonnentag, Binnewies, & Mojza, 2008). Specific to the present study, the pursuit of sport activities have been shown to help individuals cope with job stressors (Feuerhahn, Sonnentag, & Woll, 2014). Stenseng, Haugen, Torstveit, Høigaard (2015) demonstrate how cyclists with an obsessive passion experience interpersonal conflict with regard to cycling and other life obligations, whereas cyclists with a harmonious passion view cycling as an avenue towards a well-balanced life. These findings suggest that when individuals are harmoniously passionate about an activity, it fits with the rest of their other important activities, such as workplace obligations (Vallerand et al., 2003). Conversely, obsessive passion in cycling has the potential for deleterious workplace performance. For instance, those that are obsessively passionate may sacrifice other obligations, such as workplace responsibilities, in order to fulfill the intense craving of participating in cycling (Vallerand et al., 2003, 2008). This follows earlier research that shows how obsessive passion leads to conflict with other life activities (Caudroit, Boiché, Stephan, Scannff, & Trouilloud, 2011; Vallerand, Paquet, Philippe, & Charest, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003). Thus, based on previous research that suggests the meaningful pursuit of leisure activities can create resources to help cope with job demands (Feuerhahn et al., 2014; Sonnentag et al., 2014, 2008), we posit that individuals who are harmoniously passionate about cycling will also experience heightened work satisfaction. On the other hand, those obsessively passionate about cycling may see work as interfering with cycling, sacrifice work in order to ride, and thus, experience diminished work satisfaction.

### 3. The mediating role of regulatory focus

Regulatory focus theory describes the strategies that individuals utilize to regulate their behavior in the goal achievement process (Furman & Buhrmester, 2009; Higgins, 1997, 1998). Regulatory focus theory describes two distinct regulatory orientations that stem from the hedonic principle that people are attracted to pleasure (e.g. promotion orientation) and to avoid pain (e.g. prevention orientation) (Higgins, 1997). Promotion focus stimulates feelings and behaviors that involve striving for ideals, advancement, and accomplishment (Crowe & Higgins, 1997). For instance, a cyclist recognizes that to become a better cyclist, he or she will have to train more hours each week in order to attain his or her goals. On the other hand, a prevention focus relies on prudence and caution in goal attainment, and stimulates feelings and behaviors that lead individuals to be more vigilant, diligent and responsible in order to prevent committing errors (Brockner & Higgins, 2001; Johnson, Chang, & Yang, 2010). In this case, a prevention focused cyclist might choose not to compete against the most competitive racers due to a fear of losing. Importantly, the regulatory focus literature outlines the divergent outcomes that result in the presence of either a promotion or prevention focus in both workplace endeavors and recreational pursuits (Andrews, Kacmar, & Kacmar, 2014; Ferris et al., 2013). In general, regulatory focus research has linked superior performance to promotion focus as compared to those in a prevention focus (e.g., Galinsky, Leonardelli, Okhuysen, &

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