



The role of passion in mainstream and radical behaviors: A look at environmental activism



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ABSTRACT

The dualistic model of passion proposes that individuals can have two distinct types of passion toward an activity, a harmonious passion (HP) or an obsessive passion (OP), that lead to more or less adaptive outcomes, respectively. The purpose of the present research was to investigate the differential role of passion toward the environmental cause in mainstream and radical activist behaviors. Three studies were conducted with participants actively engaged in the environmental cause. In Study 1 ($n = 106$), path analysis results revealed that both HP and OP were associated with the endorsement of mainstream behaviors whereas only OP was related to the endorsement of radical behaviors. Study 2 ($n = 123$) replicated this pattern of results by looking at the extent to which participants were willing to engage in mainstream and radical behaviors in a hypothetical scenario depicting a real-life situation. Finally, path analysis results in Study 3 ($n = 169$) underscored the mediating role of emotions in the relationship between passion and activist behaviors. Overall, the present findings highlight the importance of distinguishing HP from OP for an important cause such as that of the environment.

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“Without passion, change is not possible.”

David Suzuki, 2002, p. 3

determine its relevance in predicting mainstream and radical behaviors as pertains to the environmental cause.

1.1. Research on activism

1. Introduction

Nowadays, one of the most talked-about causes is the environmental cause. Students in environment programs, as well as workers and volunteers in environmental organizations, are actively involved in this cause to help the population change for the better. However, while some activists use peaceful and moderate means to achieve their ends, others are more radical. Why? What makes an environmental activist cross the line of social norms to engage in radical behaviors? We posit that passion is a key concept in the explanation of the phenomenon of environmental radicalism. In line with the dualistic model of passion proposed by Vallerand et al. (2003), the purpose of the present research was to look at the concept of passion in the environmental field in order to

Many approaches have been developed to better understand the determinants of pro-environmental behavior and activism. One of the most commonly used is perhaps Ajzen's theory of planned behavior (1991). The theory stipulates that attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control precede the intention to act in an environmentally friendly manner which then leads to the actual behavior. Stern's values-belief-norm (VBN) model (2000) is another important approach. It asserts that one's different values and beliefs lead the person to have a sense of obligation to take pro-environmental actions (personal norms) which then lead to several kind of behaviors like activism. Theoretically closer with the dualistic model of passion, self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2002) is also an interesting approach to proenvironmental behaviors. However, although past research has shown that autodetermined motivation was associated with a high occurrence of difficult proenvironmental behaviors (e.g., Green-Demers, Pelletier, & Ménard, 1997), it seems to be a poor predictor of environmental activism (see Dono, Webb, & Richardson, 2010). These approaches have one thing in common: activism is generally conceptualized as

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public mainstream and normative behaviors like participating in a demonstration, signing a petition, engaging in environmental organizations, etc. The purpose of the present research was to go a little further by examining why some activists tend to adopt radical non-normative behaviors. We posit that passion, a complex motivational concept imbricated in the identity, could be a part of the answer.

2. The dualistic model of passion

The dualistic model of passion toward an activity (Vallerand, 2010; Vallerand et al., 2003) defines passion as a strong inclination toward a self-defining activity that people love, find important, and in which they invest time and energy. Passion is thus a strong motivational force. Moreover, the object of one's passion is internalized in one's identity (Amiot, Vallerand, & Blanchard, 2006; Vallerand et al., 2003). Thereby, a person having a passion for the environmental cause would define himself or herself as an environmentalist or an eco-citizen and not only as someone who recycles from time to time. This is noteworthy because past research has shown that self-identity is a significant predictor of behavior (see Whitmarsh & O'Neill, 2010).

Imbricated in the definition of passion is the notion of activity valuation. This subjective importance given to the activity by the person is expected to play an important role in the internalization of the activity in identity. Research has shown that when the object of interest (the activity) is highly valued, one is inclined to internalize the valued object, to make it part of him or herself (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994). So, once an interesting activity becomes highly valued, and thus, internalized in identity, the person will tend to develop a passion toward this activity. The dualistic model of passion goes further and proposes that the type of passion that will ensue is determined by the type of internalization process that takes place. Indeed, the model posits the existence of two distinct types of processes by which the passionate activity can be internalized in one's identity. These processes lead to two different types of passion: harmonious (HP) and obsessive (OP) passion. According to Vallerand et al. (2003), harmonious passion originates from an autonomous internalization of the passionate activity in one's identity. An autonomous internalization occurs when there is no contingency attached to the engagement in the activity. This type of internalization produces a motivational force to engage in the activity willingly and engenders a sense of volition and personal endorsement about pursuing the activity. People with a harmonious passion can thus freely choose to engage in the activity that they love. In such a case, the activity occupies a significant but not overpowering space in the person's identity and is in harmony with other aspects of the person's life. Individuals with a harmonious passion are in control of their engagement. In other words, they are able to decide when to and when not to engage in the activity. Engagement in the passionate activity is thus seen as flexible (Vallerand, 2010). For instance, knowing that there is an important exam the next morning, an undergraduate student with a harmonious passion for video gaming would freely choose to study instead of playing *World of Warcraft* with his friends. The undergraduate adjusts him or herself to the situation and puts aside his or her passion for the task at hand.

Conversely, the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) posits that obsessive passion is derived from a controlled internalization of the passionate activity in one's identity. This controlled internalization process originates from certain contingencies attached to the activity such as intra or interpersonal pressure (e.g., feelings of social acceptance or self-esteem; see Mageau, Carpentier, & Vallerand, 2011). People with an obsessive passion can thus find themselves in the position of experiencing an uncontrollable urge to partake in the activity they view as important and enjoyable. They cannot help but to engage in the passionate activity. Because it

occupies an overpowering space in one's identity, the passionate activity can lead the person to experience conflicts with other aspects of his or her life (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1). For instance, an undergraduate student with an obsessive passion for video gaming might not be able to resist an invitation to play *World of Warcraft* with his/her friends even if he/she should study for the fast approaching exam instead. The student cannot control his or her urge to engage in the video game. Furthermore, in opposition to harmonious passion, obsessive passion is associated with a rigid persistence in the activity. In other words, irrespective of the emotions or outcomes experienced during or after the activity, the individual who experiences obsessive passion will continue to invest time and energy in the activity even at the expense of his or her own emotional or physical well-being.

The dualistic model of passion further proposes that one important determinant of the internalization process is the extent to which the social environment promotes one's autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1987) toward activity selection and activity valuation. Indeed, autonomy support (or promoting choice and self-initiation of another person's behavior) from a significant other (e.g., parents, teachers) is associated with an autonomous internalization of non-interesting activities such as school (see Grolnick & Ryan, 1989; Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997). It also facilitates the autonomous internalization of interesting (and valued) activities in one's identity, thereby leading to a harmonious passion. Conversely, a controlling environment facilitates a controlled internalization of the activity in one's identity, thereby leading to an obsessive passion for the activity. Results from Mageau et al. (2009, Study 3) underscored the important role of autonomy support in the internalization process. Indeed, they found that high levels of autonomy support from close adults (parents and music teachers) were conducive to the development of harmonious passion toward music for first-year high school students who had never played a musical instrument before. Results also demonstrated that high levels of parental perceived valuation for music (probably experienced as external pressure) and lack of autonomy support (or controlling behavior from close adults) were found to predict the development of obsessive passion. In sum, it is important to differentiate between the two types of internalization process in order to predict the occurrence of the two types of passion.

Research has provided empirical support for several aspects of the passion conceptualization. For instance, results from exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses with the Passion Scale supported the existence of two constructs corresponding to harmonious and obsessive passion (Rousseau, Vallerand, Ratelle, Mageau, & Provencher, 2002; Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1; Vallerand et al., 2006, Study 1). The Passion Scale was also shown to have high levels of internal consistency as well as predictive, discriminant, construct, and external validity (see Vallerand, 2010). Furthermore, results from partial correlations (controlling for the correlation between the two types of passion) revealed that both harmonious and obsessive passion were positively associated with measures of activity valuation and loving, time and energy expenditure for the activity, measures of the activity being perceived as a passion, and inclusion of the activity in the person's identity thereby providing support for the definition of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003, Study 1). Finally, several studies conducted in various contexts support the hypotheses from the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003), notably in the realm of gambling (Castelda, Mattson, MacKillop, Anderson, & Donovan, 2007; Mageau, Vallerand, Rousseau, Ratelle, & Provencher, 2005; Ratelle, Vallerand, Mageau, Rousseau, & Provencher, 2004; Rousseau et al., 2002), dance (Rip, Fortin, & Vallerand, 2006), work (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008; Vallerand & Houffort, 2003), sport (Amiot et al., 2006; Vallerand et al., 2006, Study 1), Internet use (Séguin-Lévesque, Laliberté, Pelletier, Blanchard, & Vallerand, 2003), as well as with

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