

12-31-2024

Passion in Sport Management Research: Looking Back to Move Ahead

Jiayao Qi

Indiana University, Bloomington, qi1@iu.edu

Marshall Magnusen

Baylor University, Marshall_Magnusen@baylor.edu

Samuel Y. Todd

University of South Carolina - Columbia, toddsy@mailbox.sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>



Part of the [Education Commons](#), [Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#), and the [Sports Management Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Qi, Jiayao; Magnusen, Marshall; and Todd, Samuel Y. (2024) "Passion in Sport Management Research: Looking Back to Move Ahead," *Journal of Applied Sport Management*: Vol. 16 : Iss. 4.

<https://doi.org/10.7290/jasm16onrk>

Available at: <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm/vol16/iss4/7>

This article is brought to you freely and openly by Volunteer, Open-access, Library-hosted Journals (VOL Journals), published in partnership with The University of Tennessee (UT) University Libraries. This article has been accepted for inclusion in *Journal of Applied Sport Management* by an authorized editor. For more information, please visit <https://trace.tennessee.edu/jasm>.

Passion in Sport Management Research: Looking Back to Move Ahead

Jiayao Qi

Indiana University Bloomington

Marshall J. Magnusen

Baylor University

Samuel Y. Todd

University of South Carolina

Please send correspondence to Jiayao Qi, qi1@iu.edu.

Abstract

As a nearly “abused” term, passion is pervasive and distinctive concept in the sport industry. However, research about passion has often been limited to mainstream frameworks such as the dualistic model of passion, which was originally developed among sport participants (e.g., athletes) with survey-based research methods. Though helpful, this has created a gap between what the current literature offers and what is needed from contemporary passion research in sport management. Notably, more attention needs to be given to both sport job seekers and sport employees. Accordingly, in this piece, we look back on passion, covering its history, key theories, and relevant sport management studies in order to move ahead with an argument for greater exploration of work passion and how it can advance the study of passion in the professional realm of sport business.

Keywords: job seekers, management, organizational behavior, recruiting, sport employees

What is passion, and how is the study of it relevant to management-based sport research? This paper aims to address those questions by looking back to better understand new ways forward. Accordingly, we provide a brief overview of the history of passion and key research that has amassed on the topic. From there, having addressed the past, we point to a new horizon that deviates from the sport management status quo in hopes of progressing the pursuit of passion research in the profession of sport.

Roots of Passion and Emergence of the Dualistic Model

Through the scope of Aristotle's investigation of character traits, several distinct characteristics of passion began to manifest in Ancient Greece. In Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, which was likely written in 4th century BC, passion was described in terms of impulsion (e.g., passion will always fall short of the extreme point at which people would lose control), motivation (e.g., an individual is urged to make a choice based on the passion that conflicts with rational choice), and commitment (e.g., arousing the passions of others can amount to giving them proper grounds for conviction; Dow, 2015; Kraut, 2022). Inspired by this line of thinking, philosophers began to characterize passion in terms of two sides: one side being the loss of reason and control and one side being the motivation of positive behavioral tendencies (Rony, 1990). Presently, although researchers are still inspired by Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, they have sought to further clarify and evaluate the complicated nature of passion. Most notably, in their seminal piece on passion, Vallerand et al. (2003) defined the concept as "a strong inclination toward an activity that people like, that they find important, and in which they invest time and energy (p. 757)" and created a dualistic model to explain two types of passion: harmonious and obsessive.

Within the dualistic model, harmonious passion results from the autonomous internalization of activity into one's identity. It happens when individuals can freely accept the activity without any contagious attachment. In this sense, harmonious passion creates a motivational force in engaging in activities willingly, and this leads to positive affective experiences (e.g., pleasure, satisfaction, enjoyment). Obsessive passion is different. It stems from a controlled internalization of activity into one's identity. This promotes intrapersonal or interpersonal pressure because some contagious attachments (e.g., social acceptance, self-esteem, sense of overexcitement) are fused into the process, leading to negative affective experiences (e.g., guilt, shame, resentment).

In the dualistic model of passion, researchers have also emphasized how the different processes (i.e., autonomous vs. controlled) of internalization forge either harmonious or obsessive passion (Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2006). Derived from self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), identity serves as the theoretical foundation for the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). Identity represents internalized expectations about characteristics and goals that individuals regard as central, distinctive, and meaningful pieces about them and reflect who they are as individuals (Burke & Reitzes, 1981). Thus, internalization is important to a comprehensive understanding of passion because internalization in passion helps individuals realize and embody their idealized selves with the activities they love. Internalization provides motivational forces and thus, by extension, makes up their identities (e.g., athlete's desire to become a champion through training).

Passion in Sport Management Research

Much of the research on passion in sport management relies on the dualistic model of passion developed by Vallerand et al. (2003), focusing on either sport employees (i.e., people who work in sport organizations) or sport participants (e.g., professional athletes, student-athletes, recreational athletes). Verner-Filion et al. (2017), for example, correlated athlete passion and performance through the mediating role of deliberate practice. Anagnostopoulos et al. (2016) found that 97% of people who work in professional British football exhibited passion. Papadimitriou et al. (2017) also examined sport employees, only they did so with Greek workers rather than British. For municipal sport organization workers in Greece, job security was found to mediate the relationship between passion and job/career satisfaction.

Although valuable, the overwhelming reliance on the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003) may not provide a complete picture of passion research in diverse sport contexts (i.e., athlete passion vs. developing employee passion). Consider how the application and original participants in the dualistic model of passion were athletes or recreational participants (e.g., Vallerand et al., 2003; Vallerand et al., 2006). However, the way passion guides career aspirations and decision-making in vocational choices of sport stakeholders (e.g., fans, spectators) may be quite different and has been left largely unexplored. Indeed, as Todd and Kent (2009) observed, there are fundamental differences between sport activities and sport organizations, and employees in the sport industry may exhibit some distinctive characteristics that require greater research inquiry. Employees in sport organizations, for example, tend to maintain long-term passion for their work (Anagnostopoulos et al., 2016). Sport employees also tend to exhibit dual identities (e.g., fan identification and employee identification in sport; Oja et al., 2015, 2020) and demonstrate strong attachment to the organization with a high level of job security (Papadimitriou et al., 2017). Thus, passion appears to function differently in job seekers and employees in sport organizations than with athletes or recreational sport participants.

A New Horizon

Passion in a sport work environment may share characteristics with the construct of work passion (Chen et al., 2020), which contains positive affect (e.g., feelings toward the work in sport), identification (e.g., identified with a certain sport organization), and motivation (e.g., intention to pursue a career in a particular work environment). Additionally, the definition of work passion points out that passion in work is an emotionally positive desire based on cognitive and affective appraisals (Perrewé et al., 2014; Zigarini et al., 2009), both of which largely resemble sport job seekers/employees' psychological and behavior patterns (Todd & Kent, 2009). Thus, in hopes of inspiring more research on passion in sport work environments, an illustrative model is provided. Figure 1 presents a model that is informed by work passion and that details the broad strokes of passion in the workplace for both sport job seekers and employees.

Figure 1

Characteristics of passion for job seekers and employees in sport organizations

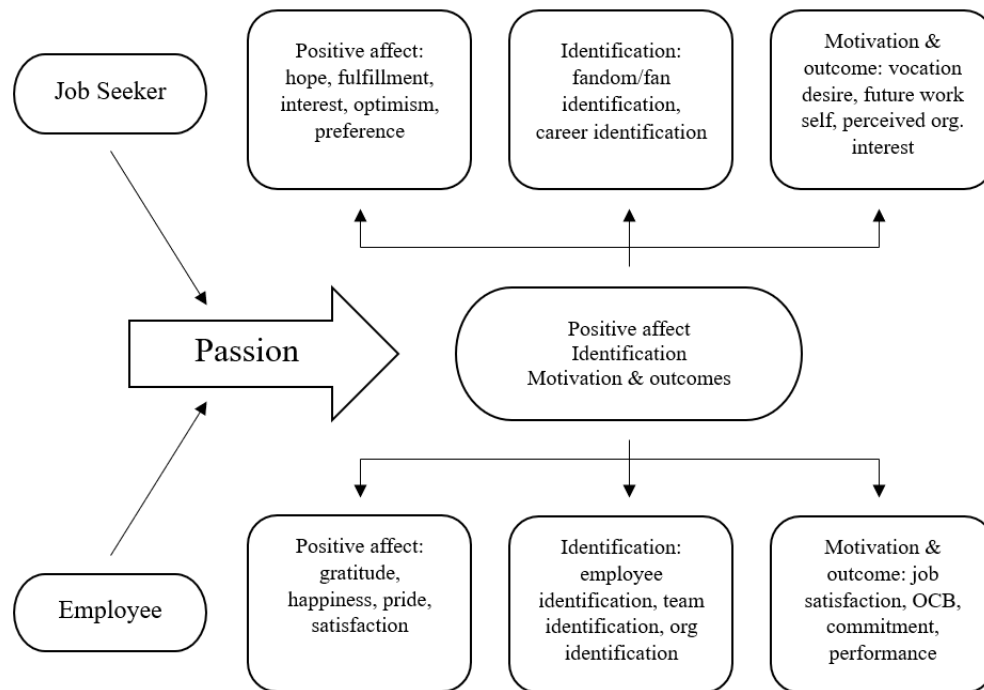


Figure 1 includes sport job seekers (i.e., those who are seeking employment) and employees in the sport industry. Both groups may display positive affect and emotions (e.g., hope, pride) toward certain work environments based on their identification with particular sport organizations. They may also experience enhanced motivation and engage in various behavioral outcomes. For example, they may more frequently engage in organizational citizenship behaviors (OCBs), which are actions that go above and beyond formal job requirements (e.g., bringing coffee to work, staying late to help pick up after an event).

The model provided, although only a conceptual representation of passion in the sport workplace, shows promise for guiding future inquiries. For instance, the proposed framework was partially tested via social experiments involving sport job seekers in a study by Qi (2024). These job seekers demonstrated vocational dreams and hopes stemming from their passion for sports. Specifically, Qi highlighted the simultaneous interplay between cognitive and affective appraisals using biometric measurements (see Perrewé et al., 2014 for more biometric measurement details) and found that appraisal, which originated from identification, was the key product of passion for working in sport. Highly overlapped identification evoked positive affect and emotional arousal for sport job seekers, and the interplay ignited career aspiration through motivating behaviors.

Continuing Toward the Horizon: Pathways for Passion Research in Sport

Based on the proposed model and recent findings (e.g., Qi, 2024), passion research in sport management would benefit from progress in several areas. The first area is theory and measurement. The usage of the dualistic model of passion in sport management research has been beneficial, but the adoption of

work passion (as shown in Figure 1) in sport research may be more applicable and beneficial to the study of passion in sport work environments. The measurement of work passion (e.g., Chen et al., 2020), for example, is designed to assess workplace psychology compared to athlete psychology as seen in the dualistic model of passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). Moreover, the interplay between cognitive and affective appraisals in the work passion better explains how sport stakeholders may envision, fantasize, and dream about sport while either pursuing a job in sport or being employed by a sport organization or team.

Next, passion research should be explored as a continuum that exists across different stages. These stages include passion being formed, passion before the workplace, and passion at the workplace. Viewing passion as a continuum across different stages establishes a foundation for exploring key questions about passion and working in sports. For instance, how does passion develop over time? What are the roles of identification and emotion during each of these stages? How does passion influence the career decisions of job seekers and sport employees? Indeed, with attention to the last question, scholars (Qi & Todd, 2023; Todd et al., 2014) have shown that sport job seekers' attitudes and behavior may change over time via interactions with the sport industry. Thus, as an additional avenue of inquiry that extends from the third question, researchers might not only look at how passion influences career decisions but also look at whether passion has a "shelf life" that may be influenced by industry interactions (e.g., career fairs, internships experiences).

Finally, the methodology of passion research in sport need to progress beyond survey-based studies. Survey research inspired by Vallerand et al.'s (2003) dualistic model of passion has been the primary method of examining workplace passion in sport, with items being modified to study sport job seekers or personnel instead of athletes. Work passion accentuates the interplay between cognitive and affective appraisal based on emotion and identification, which cannot be easily captured with only surveys. In psychology, affective appraisal is often associated with strong motivation or decision-making from the perspective of neuroscience (LeDoux, 2012). With much of the complexity about passion in sport still unknown, researchers should strongly consider employing novel approaches as they study this area. Incorporating biometric measurements (e.g., electroencephalogram, galvanic skin response) into quantitative studies, for example, may better connect passion to behavioral outcomes because biometric data offers insights from a physiological perspective (e.g., bodily arousal, excitement) that cannot be captured with traditional survey-based quantitative studies.

References

- Anagnostopoulos, C., Winand, M., & Papadimitriou, D. (2016). Passion in the workplace: Empirical insights from team sport organisations. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, 16(4), 385–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16184742.2016.1178794>
- Burke, P. J., & Reitzes, D. C. (1981). The link between identity and role performance. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 44(2), 83–92. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3033704>
- Chen, P., Lee, F., & Lim, S. (2020). Loving thy work: Developing a measure of work passion. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 29(1), 140–158. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1359432x.2019.1703680>
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior. *Ple-*

num Press.

- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). The “what” and “why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227–268. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327965pli1104_01
- Dow, J. (2015). *Passions and persuasion in Aristotle’s rhetoric*. Oxford University Press.
- Kraut, R. (2022, July 2). Aristotle’s ethics. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved February 12, 2023, from <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-ethics/>
- LeDoux, J. (2012). A neuroscientist’s perspective on debates about the nature of emotion. *Emotion Review*, 4(4), 375–379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073912445822>
- Oja, B. D., Bass, J. R., & Gordon, B. S. (2015). Conceptualizing employee identification with sport organizations: Sport employee identification (SEI). *Sport Management Review*, 18(4), 583–595. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2015.02.002>
- Oja, B. D., Bass, J. R., & Gordon, B. S. (2020). Identities in the sport workplace: Development of an instrument to measure sport employee identification. *Journal of Global Sport Management*, 5(3), 262–284. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24704067.2018.1477521>
- Papadimitriou, D., Winand, M., & Anagnostopoulos, C. (2017). Job and career satisfaction in an austerity environment: The role of job security and passion towards work. *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing*, 17(1/2), 7–31. <https://doi.org/10.1504/ijsmm.2017.083980>
- Perrewé, P. L., Hochwarter, W. A., Ferris, G. R., McAllister, C. P., & Harris, J. N. (2014). Developing a passion for work passion: Future directions on an emerging construct. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(1), 145–150. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.1902>
- Qi, J. (2024). *How passion functions in sport applicant attraction: A biometric approach* [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina]. <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/7993>
- Qi, J. C., & Todd, S. Y. (2023). Industry interactions and their influence on dreams, goals, work interests, and vocational attitude of sport industry job seekers. *Journal of Applied Sport Management*, 15(1), 8–17. <https://doi.org/10.7290/jasm153900>
- Rony, J. A. (1990). *Les passions*. Presses Universitaires de France.
- Todd, S. Y., & Kent, A. (2009). A social identity perspective on the job attitudes of employees in sport. *Management Decision*, 47(1), 173–190. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00251740910929777>
- Todd, S. Y., Magnusen, M. J., Andrew, D. P. S., & Lachowetz, T. (2014). From great expectations to realistic career outlooks: Exploring changes in job seeker perspectives following realistic job preview in sport. *Sport Management Education Journal*, 8, 58–70.
- Vallerand, R. J., Blanchard, C., Mageau, G. A., Koestner, R., Ratelle, C., Léonard, M., Gagné, M., & Marsolais, J. (2003). Les passions de l’âme: On obsessive and harmonious passion. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 85(4), 756–767. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.85.4.756>
- Vallerand, R. J., Rousseau, F. L., Grouzet, F. M. E., Dumais, A., Grenier, S., & Blanchard, C. M. (2006). Passion in sport: A look at determinants and affective experiences. *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*, 28(4), 454–478. <https://doi.org/10.1123/jsep.28.4.454>
- Verner-Filion, J., Vallerand, R. J., Amiot, C. E., & Mocanu, I. (2017). The two roads from passion to sport performance and psychological well-being: The mediating role of need satisfaction, delib-

erate practice, and achievement goals. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 30, 19–29. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2017.01.009>

Zigarmi, D., Nimon, K., Houson, D., Witt, D., & Diehl, J. (2009). Beyond engagement: Toward a framework and operational definition for employee work passion. *Human Resource Development Review*, 8(3), 300–326. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15344843093>

"Together We Go Far"

"Together We Go Far"

