

**Harmonious and Obsessive Passion in Relation to  
Global and Domain Specific Self-Esteem and  
Affective Outcomes**



**Lina Harvold Dalskau**

**Master Thesis in Health Psychology, Department of Psychology**

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## **Abstract**

Passions have the potential to fill people's lives with meaning. However, there is a duality to the concept, where harmonious passion reflects a more volitional engagement, whilst obsessive passion reflects a more controlled, contingency driven engagement style. The aim of this study was to explore the assumption that self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting contingency contributing to a more obsessive activity engagement style. In order to tackle this assumption, the function of global and domain specific self-esteem in relation to harmonious and obsessive passion, and affective outcomes was considered. Also, to gain a better understanding of the function of self-esteem in relation to people's passions in the real world, the sample of 210 participants (92 females and 118 males) was split into one high obsessive passion-group (HOP), and one low obsessive passion-group (LOP). Results showed that the HOP-group had significantly more domain specific self-esteem, and also that this specific self-esteem was the main source of positive affect. In addition, the HOP-group had significantly more negative affect, as well as a more unstable self-esteem compared to the LOP-group. In conclusion, results therefore supported the notion that more obsessive individuals also have a more contingent activity engagement where their self-esteem is perceived as continually on the line, compared to their harmonious counterparts. Such a contingent engagement in a passionate activity seems to give both short term boosts in self-esteem and positive affect, as well as contribute to more ill-being and social problems over time.

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## 1 Introduction

*“Passion is a positive obsession. Obsession is a negative passion.”  
- Paul Carrel -*

Historically speaking, passions have been treated as dangerous and disruptive, interrupting our clarity of reason. This is also reflected in the original meaning of the word “passion” as suffering (Solomon, 1993). Today the concept has just begun to gain a somewhat better reputation, and Solomon puts it well when he argues that “[i]t is our passions, not our reason...that constitute our world, our relationships with other people and, consequently, our *Selves*” (Solomon, 1993, p. 15).

This is in line with positive psychology which is “the scientific study of what goes right in life, from birth to death and at all stops in between” (Peterson, 2006, p. 4). This new direction in psychology embraces the question of optimal human functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Linley, Joseph, Harrington, & Wood, 2006), thereby challenging the current imbalance in psychological research where the main focus has been on repairing the worst things in life (Linley, et al., 2006). As a result, positive psychology can lead to individual well-being, as well as thriving groups, institutions, and communities (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Passions indeed represent something that makes our lives worth living as “[i]t is through our passions that we fill (not simply find) our lives with meanings...” (Solomon, 1993, p. xvii). Therefore, when someone has passion towards an activity, they typically describe it as something they think is important, that they like, and that they invest a significant amount of time and energy in. In addition, passions also become integrated in people’s identities (Vallerand, et al., 2003).

### *1.1 The Dualistic Model of Passion*

However, even though passions have the potential to produce and fill people’s lives with meaning, there is a duality to this concept, represented by the harmonious and obsessive passion dimensions. This duality is supported by the amounting research pointing to the different experiences and outcomes harmonious and obsessive passion may generate.

First, harmonious passion has been associated with a flexible and volitional activity engagement style, where the activity is performed out of personal choice (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 1). Harmonious passion, therefore, has been shown to lead to a variety of positive outcomes like better concentration (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 1), flow (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 1), more positive affect (Mageau & Vallerand, 2007; Vallerand, et al., 2003,

study 1), subjective well-being (Vallerand, et al., 2006, study 2; Vallerand, et al., 2007), increases in global positive affect over time (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 2), and also the experience of positive outcomes in other domains of life (Stenseng, 2008).

On the contrary, obsessive passion has been associated with rigid behavioural patterns, where intra- or interpersonal pressure like social acceptance or self-esteem drives the activity engagement (Vallerand, et al., 2003). Research has demonstrated that obsessive passion positively predicts persistence in behaviour in absence of positive affect, and in face of personal costs (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 2 & 3). The obsessive activity engagement style therefore has been shown to have negative impact on other life domains (Stenseng, 2008), and may also be implicated in self destructive behaviour (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 4). As a result, obsessive passion is positively related to negative affect (Vallerand, et al., 2003), negatively or uncorrelated to positive affect (Ratelle, Vallerand, Mageau, Rousseau, & Provencher, 2004; Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 1), and subjective well-being (Vallerand, et al., 2007), and predicts high levels of rumination (Ratelle, et al., 2004), and increases in global negative affect over time (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 2).

These findings clearly point to the duality of the passion theory, where passion may represent a positive element in people's lives, at the same time as it can be a burden leading to negative outcomes (Vallerand, et al., 2003). However, whereas the understanding of passions is increasing and expanding, "... little information is currently available on the determinants of passion" (Vallerand, et al., 2006, p. 460). Exactly how the passion dimensions develop and persist within the individual remains somewhat unclear. Based on this, the focus of the present research is to more thoroughly investigate the assumption that self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting contingency contributing to the maintenance of an obsessive passion activity engagement style (Vallerand, et al., 2003). This will be considered in relation to both a "person-oriented approach" (Ratelle, Guay, Vallerand, Larose, & Sénécal, 2007, p. 734) where people with different passion profiles will be compared, as well as the traditional variable-oriented approach allowing for sound comparisons with relevant literature in this field.

### *1.2 The Development of a Passionate Activity*

In order to understand the function of self-esteem in relation to the passion orientations, it is important to have a clear understanding of the psychological processes underpinning the development of passion. There are three such processes, activity selection, activity valuation, and the nature of the internalisation of the activity (Vallerand, 2008).

The first two processes are simple. Activity selection refers to the person's preference for one activity over others (Vallerand, 2008). Further, activity valuation represents the person's subjective appraisal towards the activity (Vallerand, 2008). Activity valuation therefore reflects the intensity dimension, where the more important or valued the activity is, the more passionate the person will be towards it (Vallerand, et al., 2006).

The last process in the development of a passionate activity is the internalisation, which reflects the quality dimension of the passion (Vallerand, 2008). There are two main processes through which such internalisation may occur (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994), each leading to the qualitatively different experiences associated with harmonious and obsessive passion outlined above.

Introjection is a controlled internalisation where "... the person "takes in" a value or regulatory process but does not identify with and accept it as his or her own. Instead, it becomes an inner control – a rule for action that is enforced by sanctions such as threats of guilt or promises of self-approval" (Deci, et al., 1994, p. 121). On the contrary, integration refers to an autonomous internalisation, where the person truly identifies with the value of the activity, leading to a wholly volitional more self-determined activity engagement style (Deci, et al., 1994).

### *1.3 The Internalisation Processes Defining Harmonious and Obsessive Passion*

However, in order to understand how and why these different internalisation processes come about, it is helpful to consider the self-determination theory (SDT). At the very core, SDT is an organismic dialectical theory which "postulate[s] that humans are active, growth-oriented organisms who are naturally inclined toward integration of their psychic elements into a unified sense of self and integration of themselves into larger social structures" (Deci & Ryan, 2000, p. 229). Further, continuous growth and psychological well-being is maintained through the satisfaction of the three innate needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness. (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Sheldon, Elliot, Kim, & Kasser, 2001). People's engagement in activities in general, and passionate activities in particular, may therefore be seen as attempts to fulfil these basic needs, (Vallerand, et al., 2003) creating the necessary conditions for psychological health, well-being, and effective functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Hodgins & Knee, 2002). However, whether or not such effective functioning is experienced is determined both by the immediate context, as well as by the personality of the individual.

First, regarding personality, it has been found that having an autonomous personality orientation, where one typically does things out of pleasure and choice, leads to an



autonomous identified internalisation, positively predicting harmonious passion (Vallerand, et al., 2006, study 1). On the contrary, having a controlled personality orientation, where one typically does things out of external and/or inner pressure, brings about a pressured introjection internalisation, positively predicting obsessive passion (Vallerand, et al., 2006, study 1).

Second, regarding contexts, it has been found that non-favourable conditions, like excessively controlling, challenging or rejecting contexts, may lead to thwarting of the innate needs which ensure effective and healthy functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This also results in a controlled internalisation where alternative, often defensive processes to protect the self are in play (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Contrary, contexts supporting the satisfaction of the basic human needs facilitate an autonomous identified internalisation, promoting an ongoing healthy functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Therefore both personality and context will influence the internalisation process, eventually leading to harmonious or obsessive passion. In addition, it becomes apparent that these internalisation processes, as described by the SDT, form the foundation for the assumption that self-esteem may be a persistence-promoting contingency driving an obsessive passion engagement. To further explore this assumption, the next focus of this article will be the function of self-esteem in general, as well as in relation to passion.

#### *1.4 Self- Esteem*

The field of self-esteem is a complex one, illustrated by the many puzzling findings within this literature. This is corroborated by Baumeister et al.'s (2003) review that found the population of high self-esteem individuals to be a heterogeneous group. This is confirmed by studies showing that whereas some high self-esteem individuals are the most likely to bully, others with high self-esteem are the most likely to defend against bullying (Baumeister, et al., 2003) The same pattern also emerged for cheating, where the ones who cheated the most and least all were individuals with high self-esteem (Lobel & Levanon, 1988). High self-esteem therefore seems to lead to both prosocial and antisocial behaviours compared to low self-esteem (Baumeister, et al., 2003). On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with victimization, and there is also some support for the traditional view that low self-esteem may predispose a person to participate in anti-social behaviour. However, whether low self-esteem is the cause or consequence is not known (Baumeister, et al., 2003).

Contrary to this, a well-established finding in the literature is that people with high self-esteem are considerably happier (Baumeister, et al., 2003; Furnham & Cheng, 2000;

Lyubomirsky, Tkach, & DiMatteo, 2006), and less likely to be depressed compared to other people (Baumeister, et al., 2003; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2006). On the other hand, low self-esteem is linked to depression (Franck, De Raedt, & De Houwer, 2007; Schmitz, Kugler, & Rollnik, 2003). The nature of this relationship however, remains open to controversy (Miller, Warner, Wickramaratne, & Weissman, 1999), something that is also supported by Baumeister et al.'s (2003) review which concludes that the relationship between low self-esteem and depression is weak, inconsistent, and conditional on other variables.

Based on this, with the exception of happiness and to some degree depression, most of the effects found between the level of self-esteem and behaviours are weak to modest. Self-esteem is thus not a major predictor or cause of hardly anything (Baumeister, et al., 2003).

### *1.5 A Dynamic Approach for Understanding Self-Esteem*

The definition of self-esteem may shed some light on the inconsistent findings between the level of self-esteem and behaviour. Self-esteem is defined as the evaluative component of self knowledge (Baumeister, et al., 2003; Rosenberg, Schooler, Schoenbach, & Rosenberg, 1995), and can therefore be viewed as an attitude (Marsh, 1990) with both cognitive and affective elements (Rosenberg, et al., 1995)

The affective component of this attitude towards oneself is represented by global self-esteem. Taylor & Brown (1988), Paradise & Kernis (2002) and Rosenberg et al., (1995) all found that global self-esteem was most strongly related to measures of psychological well-being. In addition, global self-esteem also tends to be stable and trait-like (Chen, Gully, & Eden, 2001; Chen, Gully, Whiteman, & Kilcullen, 2000), and therefore lacks the power to internally generate rewards and punishments for behaviour (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). On the other hand, the cognitive element of self-esteem is represented by domain specific self-esteem, which is in accordance with Rosenberg et al.'s (1995) finding that specific (academic) self-esteem was the best predictor of school performance. Contrary to global self-esteem, domain specific self-esteem has more unstable state-like characteristics (Rosenberg, et al., 1995), which gives specific self-esteem motivational qualities that far outstrip the steady level of global self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

This motivation springs from the fact that domains where people have invested their self-worth come to represent contingencies for people's self-esteem. Such contingencies are linked to personal goals and self-standards (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003), and because people typically strive to be worthy rather than unworthy, these goals become particularly potent (Park, Crocker, & Kiefer, 2007). Failing to achieve goals set in contingent domains therefore

not only leads to negative emotions, but also lowered self-esteem. Similarly, achieving the goals results not only in positive emotions, but also in elevated self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). This dynamic approach for understanding self-esteem dates back to James (1890), as he defined self-esteem as both a stable trait and an unstable state, where temporary feelings of self-esteem would fluctuate around a typical trait level, in response to positive and negative event.

### *1.6 The Stability of Self-Esteem*

This dynamic approach also points to the differences regarding stability of self-esteem, which represent an area that has increasingly being emphasized as crucial for understanding the role and functioning of self-esteem (Johnson, 1998).

In the literature of self-esteem stability there is a broad consensus that the more an individual's feelings of overall self-worth is contingent on specific evaluative information, the more unstable their self-esteem is likely to be (Waschull & Kernis, 1996). This was also found by Johnson (1998) who concluded that self-esteem was more unstable when the need for earning self-esteem by competence was high. Also Kernis et al. (1993) found that unstable self-esteem was associated with greater fluctuations in specific self-evaluations. This implies that individuals with high unstable self-esteem may be more likely to perceive the outcomes of day to day activities as relevant to their self-esteem leading to an experience of their self-worth as continually on the line. Consequently, unstable self-esteem has also been empirically linked to having strivings that are more control motivated (Kernis, Paradise, Whitaker, Wheatman, & Goldman, 2000). (Kernis, et al., 1993; Waschull & Kernis, 1996).

Therefore, having high self-esteem simply is not the same as having self-esteem that is optimal. An optimal self-esteem, in addition to being high, must also be genuine, true, and stable (Kernis, 2003). This has been supported by research where, compared to individuals with stable high self-esteem, individuals with unstable high self-esteem reported a greater likelihood of reacting in ways reflecting fragile feelings of self-worth (Kernis, Greenier, Herlocker, Whisenhunt, & Abend, 1997), as well as more defensive reactions to negative feedback (Baumeister, Smart, & Boden, 1996; Kernis, et al., 1993). Inflated unstable beliefs in the self as being superior therefore has been linked to both violent behaviours (Baumeister, et al., 1996), and depression (Franck & De Raedt, 2007). On the other hand, high stable self-esteem has been associated with greater well-being (Paradise & Kernis, 2002).

### *1.7 Linking Self-Esteem to Harmonious and Obsessive Passion*

To further understand the function of self-esteem in relation to harmonious and obsessive passion, the focus once again turns to the self-determination theory. As abovementioned, from a SDT standpoint, engagement in passion activities may be seen as an attempt to fulfil the fundamental human needs. However, building on the understanding of the different internalisation processes leading to harmonious and obsessive passion, the different engagement styles of harmonious and obsessive passion may also result in qualitatively differences in relation to self-esteem.

*1.7.1 Harmonious Passion and Non-Contingent Self-Esteem.* First, research has indeed supported the notion that harmonious passion is implicated in need satisfaction, as it has been positively correlated with both competence, relatedness (Stenseng, Rise, & Kraft, 2009), and autonomy (Standage & Gillison, 2007). Further, when individuals' basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness are met, they are motivated autonomously. This was supported by Standage and Gillison (2007), who found that both competence and autonomy were positive predictors of autonomous motivation towards physical education, and further, that autonomous motivation positively predicted global self-esteem (Standage & Gillison, 2007). This is also in accordance with findings that satisfaction of all three needs is associated with greater emotional well-being (Reis, Sheldon, Gable, Roscoe, & Ryan, 2000).

This type of activity engagement typically leads to a non-contingent self-esteem. For individuals with this kind of self-esteem the issue of self-worth is not salient, because they experience themselves on a fundamental level as worthy of love and esteem (Ryan & Brown, 2003). They therefore experience a more secure self-worth with little need to protect themselves by avoiding information embedded in experiences (Standage & Gillison, 2007). Instead, non-contingent self-esteem individuals experience an enhanced sense of self-worth by performing the behaviour for autonomous reasons (Hein & Hagger, 2007). Harmonious passion therefore reflects the highest level of psychological development, where the regulation of behaviour is in harmony with internal needs and the social environment (Deponte, 2004).

*1.7.2 Obsessive Passion and Contingent Self-Esteem.* On the other hand, research has also supported the notion that obsessive passion, because it has contingencies attached to it, may be implicated in a continuous thwarting of the fundamental human needs. Stenseng, Rise and Kraft (2009), found that obsessive passion, while leading to competence, was negatively

correlated with autonomy and unrelated to relatedness. Also Crocker and Luhtanen (2003) found that contingencies of self-worth have a cost in terms of stress experienced during the freshman year of college, and that such contingencies may play a role in the thwarting of the fundamental human needs (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Crocker & Park, 2004). Further, when intrinsic psychological needs are unmet, individuals become control motivated, self-worth is called into question, and individuals develop self-esteem that is contingent on performance outcomes (Hodgins, Brown, & Carver, 2007).

The type of ego involvement where one's worth is on the line, is an example of an internally controlling regulation that is accompanied by the experience of pressure and tension (Deci, et al., 1994). Here people are preoccupied with questions of worth, as they see their worth as depending upon reaching certain goals and standards, or appearing in certain ways (Ryan & Brown, 2003). Gains or losses in self-esteem therefore supply the basis of this controlling behavioural regulation, and people will often go to great length to uphold positive feelings of self-worth (Ryan & Brown, 2003). This is supported by research showing that the attempt to satisfy contingencies can be implicated in social problems that are costly and destructive to self or others (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001).

As explained by the SDT, such lack of need satisfaction may also involve the development of a rigid behaviour pattern that is as adaptive as possible under the hostile circumstances, helping people to protect themselves from the inner harm associated with thwarted needs (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Another likely response to need thwarting associated with ill-being is need substituting, where compensatory motives that do not satisfy the basic human needs are developed, as they provide some collateral satisfaction for the individual (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Need substituting also tends to perpetuate the lack of need satisfaction because it keeps people focused on the compensatory need substitutes, thus strengthening the negative ill-being consequences of need thwarting (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Therefore, in relation to an obsessive engagement style, the protection, maintenance, and enhancement of self-esteem may become the overriding goal, confusing successful self-regulation (Crocker, Brook, Niiya, & Villacorta, 2006). Thwarting of the fundamental human needs may therefore, as a result of these mechanisms, become a vicious circle.

*1.7.3 The Great Paradox of Self-Esteem.* As pointed out by Ryan & Brown (2003, p. 74), the great paradox of self-esteem “if you need it you don't have it, and if you have it you don't need it” therefore becomes apparent, as successful pursuit of self-esteem through passionate activities only have short-term emotional benefits, such as increased happiness and decreased

anxiety (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Crocker & Park, 2004). Even if high self-esteem is maintained by achieving success, contingent self-esteem is always fragile because the foundation of one's self-regard is continually on the line. The question whether one is worthy thus becomes a prominent question that needs answering again and again, and merely asking the question leads to a forced and driven experience (Hodgins, et al., 2007). Passionate activities which are contingent on self-esteem therefore may lead to problems in relation to human needs for competence, autonomy and relatedness (Crocker & Knight, 2005), ultimately resulting in a lower degree of adjustment and psychological well-being (DePonte, 2004).

### *1.8 The Present Study*

The main focus of this research therefore, is to scientifically explore the assumption that self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting contingency contributing to the maintenance of an obsessive passion activity engagement style. In order to tackle this assumption, the function of global and domain specific self-esteem in relation to harmonious and obsessive passion, and affective outcomes will be considered, using a path model.

Based on the literature's conceptual framing of self-esteem as an attitude with affective and cognitive components, the passion dimensions should predict domain specific self-esteem more strongly, whilst global self-esteem should be a stronger predictor of affective outcomes. In addition, global and specific self-esteem should only be weakly related to each other. Last, in accordance with passion research, harmonious passion is expected to lead to positive affect, whilst obsessive passion should be positively or unrelated to negative effect.

However, because both types of passion exist side by side within the individual, it becomes especially important to try to grasp how harmonious and obsessive passions coexist to form the experiences people have in relation to their passionate activities in the real world. Therefore, in this research comparison among groups comprising people with different passion profiles will also be conducted. These groups will be based on participants' scores on both the harmonious and the obsessive passion dimension, and will emerge naturally from the data. Even though it is hard to make predictions as regards to how individuals will place themselves in the different groups, I might find, in accordance with Vallerand (2003, study 3 & 4), that the main differences between the individuals in the sample will appear in relation to their obsessive passion scores, whilst scores on the harmonious passion dimension will be similar.

Further, these group dynamics may give us some indications of the differences among the groups regarding their engagement style in their favourite activities. First, supporting the assumption of self-esteem being implicated as a persistence-promoting contingency maintaining an obsessive passion style, groups with a more obsessive passion profile should reflect a more contingent engagement where they experience more domain specific self-esteem and negative affect. Differences between groups in global self-esteem however, may not appear, as more contingent individuals not necessarily have a lower, but rather a more unstable self-esteem. In accordance with this, there may not be any differences between the groups regarding positive affect either, as obsessive more contingent individuals should be able to maintain high positive affect as long as they maintain a high sense of self-esteem through their activity engagement.

Second, a comparison of such group dimensions may also yield important information regarding how harmonious and obsessive passion coexist within the individual, as the function of self-esteem and affect may be different for the various groups. In general I expect groups with more obsessive passion to have a relationship among the variables of passion, self-esteem and affect that reflects a more contingent activity engagement style. Again, it is hard to make explicit prediction. However, according to the contingencies of self-worth theory, I expect groups with a more obsessive passion profile to also have a stronger link between their domain specific self-esteem and affective outcomes compared to more harmonious groups.

## **2 Method**

### *2.1 Participants and Procedure*

The sample consisted of 210 participants, 92 females (43.8%), and 118 males (56.2%). Age ranged from 14 to 65, with a mean age of 28 (SD 10.92). Respondents were recruited through internet forums with reference to passionate activities like swimming, cycling, skiing, and soccer. They actively chose to partake in the survey by clicking on a link posted on the site. Participants had been performing their activities for an average of 11 years (SD 9.2), spending 11 hours and 24 minutes (SD 7.24) on it per week on average.

### *2.2 Materials*

*2.2.1 The Passion Scale* (Vallerand, et al., 2003). Passion orientations were measured using the 16-item Passion Scale. The instrument consists of two six-item subscales assessing harmonious passion (HP) through statements such as “the activity is in harmony with other

parts of my life”, and obsessive passion (OP) through statements such as “this activity is the only thing that really excites me”, in relation to respondents’ favourite activities. In addition, four criterion variables measured the liking, importance, time investment, and passion for the activity. Respondents indicated how strongly they agreed with all items using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). The internal variability of the scale was satisfactory (Chronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = .81$  for harmonious passion, and  $\alpha = .86$  for obsessive passion).

*2.2.2 Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale* (Rosenberg, 1965). Global self-esteem was assessed with the widely used, well-validated 10-item Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSE). Participants indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how much they agreed with statements such as “on the whole, I am satisfied with myself,” and “at times, I think I am no good at all,” (reversed). The internal variability of the scale was satisfactory (Chronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = .88$ ).

*2.2.3 Activity Related Self-Esteem Scale.* Domain specific self-esteem was measured using the 7-item activity related self-esteem scale (ASE). The scale was developed and validated through social consensus in relation to a student project on passion at the University of Oslo. The process of constructing this instrument was initiated by the lack of an available tool for measuring domain specific self-esteem. The scale comprised 5 positively worded items and 2 negatively worded items. Because of the low internal consistency of the items, where the negatively worded items proved to be problematic, only the positively worded items were included in the further analysis. Participants indicated on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) how much they agreed with statements such as “the activity gives me increased self-esteem”. The internal variability of the scale was satisfactory (Chronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = .88$ ).

*2.2.4 Affective Outcomes.* Affective outcomes were measured with 15 items from the PANAS-X (Watson & Clark, 1999), chosen for their relevance in relation to the passionate activity context. Participants rated 9 items on how much they experienced negative affect (NA) (i.e., angry, agitated), and 6 items on how much they experienced positive affect (PA) (i.e., happy, pleased), in relation to their favourite activity using a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (never) to 7 (always). The internal variability of the scale was satisfactory (Chronbach’s alpha  $\alpha = .89$  for negative affect, and  $\alpha = .78$  for positive affect).



### 3 Results

Major findings showed that harmonious and obsessive passion were most strongly related to domain specific self-esteem, whilst global self-esteem was most strongly related to affective outcomes. In addition, global and specific self-esteem were only weakly related to each other.

Regarding the passion profile groups, participants were split into two main groups: The high obsessive passion-group (HOP) included 31% of the sample and contained individuals who scored above average on both passion dimensions. The low obsessive passion-group (LOP) included 64.3% of the sample and contained individuals who scored above average on the harmonious dimension, but below average on the obsessive passion dimension.

Major results based on the comparison between these groups showed that the high obsessive passion-group had significantly more domain specific self-esteem and negative affect compared to the low obsessive passion-group. In addition, the groups did not differ regarding their level of global self-esteem and positive affect.

There was also a stronger link between domain specific self-esteem and positive affective outcomes for the dominant obsessive HOP-group. In addition, neither of the passion dimensions was directly linked to affective outcomes for this group. On the contrary for the dominant harmonious LOP-group, both domain specific and global self-esteem as well as the harmonious dimension positively predicted positive affect. In addition, negative affective outcomes were predicted by obsessive passion for the LOP-group.

Last, for the LOP-group, global self-esteem was positively predicted by harmonious passion and negatively predicted by obsessive passion. For the HOP-group, global self-esteem was positively predicted by domain specific self-esteem.

### 3.1 Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1**

*Number of Participants, Mean, Standard Deviation, Instrumental Range and Measured Range for Harmonious and Obsessive Passion, Domain Specific (ASE) and Global Self-Esteem (RSE), and Positive and Negative Affect*

	N	Mean	SD	Measured Range	Instrument Range
HP	210	5.74	.89	1.33 – 7	1 - 7
OP	210	3.49	1.38	1 – 7	1 - 7
ASE	210	5.27	1.14	1.20 – 7	1 - 7
RSE	210	5.45	.96	2.40 – 7	1 - 7
PA	210	5.42	.90	1 – 7	1 - 7
NA	210	1.78	.80	1 – 4.56	1 - 7

Table 1 revealed a sample with a high mean score on HP, ASE, RSE, and PA, a midrange mean score on OP, and a low mean score on NA.

### 3.2 Bivariate Correlations

**Table 2**

*Pearson's Linear Correlations for Harmonious and Obsessive Passion, Domain Specific (ASE) and Global Self-Esteem (RSE), and Positive and Negative Affect*

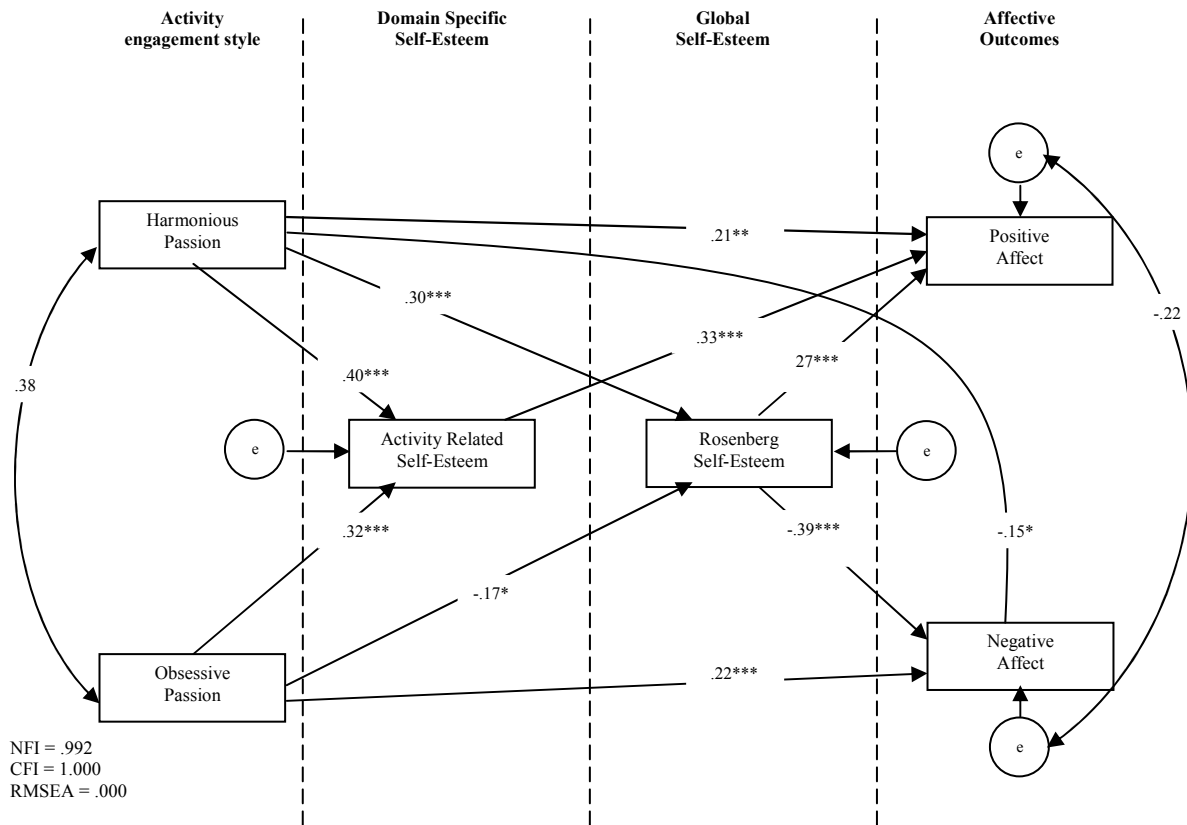
	HP	OP	ASE	RSE	PA
OP	.379**	-	-	-	-
ASE	.521**	.470**	-	-	-
RSE	.239**	-.056	.160*	-	-
PA	.444**	.202**	.477**	.371**	-
NA	-.161*	.185**	-.041	-.439**	-.323**

Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

As seen in table 2, HP was positively correlated with OP, ASE, RSE and PA, but negatively correlated with NA. OP was also significantly positively related to ASE, and PA, but contrary to HP, it was positively correlated with NA. In addition to the passion dimensions being correlated with affect, both ASE and RSE were positively correlated with PA, whilst RSE also was negatively correlated with NA. The relationship between ASE and

RSE was weak but significantly positive. Last, HP and OP were positively correlated, whilst PA and NA were negatively correlated.

### 3.3 Path Model



**Figure 1.** Standardized regression coefficients among activity engagement styles (HP and OP), domain specific (ASE) and global self-esteem (RSE), and affective outcomes (PA and NA). Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

As seen in Figure 1, the regression analysis showed that the HP and OP activity engagement styles both positively predicted domain specific self-esteem (ASE). HP also positively predicted RSE, whilst OP was a negative predictor of RSE. In relation to affective outcomes, ASE came out as the most important positive predictor of PA, closely followed by RSE and HP. RSE was the strongest negative predictor of NA, followed by a much weaker HP. OP, on the other hand, was the only positive predictor of NA in the sample.

### 3.4 Passion Profile Groups

Next, participants were plotted into a 2x2 matrix based on their scores on the HP and OP dimensions. Participants therefore ended up in one out of four possible groups: High score on both HP and OP (group 1), high scores on HP and low scores on OP (group 2), low scores on HP and high scores on OP (group 3), or low scores on both HP and OP (group 4).

**Table 3**

*Number of Participants in Groups Based on Their Individual Scores on both the Harmonious and Obsessive Passion Dimensions*

	Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Total
N	135	65	0	10	210

Note. Group 1 = high scores on HP and OP. Group 2 = high scores on HP and low scores on OP. Group 3 = low scores on HP and high scores on OP. Group 4 = low scores on HP and OP.

As seen in Table 3, the majority of the sample (64.3%) ended up in the group containing individuals who scored high on HP and low on OP. The second largest group (31%) contained individuals scoring high on both dimensions of passion. There were no individuals scoring high on OP and low on HP, and there were only a few (4.8%) scoring low on both passion dimensions. Because the majority of the participants scored above average on the harmonious passion dimension, the sample was divided in two main groups depending on their scores on the obsessive dimension. The first group labelled “low obsessive passion” (LOP) contains 145 individuals, whereas the second group labelled “high obsessive passion” (HOP) contains 65 individuals.

### 3.5 Independent samples t-tests

An independent samples t-test showed that there were no significant differences between the two groups in relation to global self-esteem ( $t(208) = .55$ , ns), or positive affect ( $t(208) = 1.83$ , ns). However, the HOP-group had significantly more activity related self-esteem ( $t(208) = -4.80$ ,  $p < .000$ ), and negative affect ( $t(208) = -2.125$ ,  $p < .35$ ), compared to the LOP-group.

### 3.6 GroupWise Bivariate Correlations

**Table 5.1**

*Pearson's Linear Correlations for Harmonious and Obsessive Passion, Domain Specific (ASE) and Global Self-Esteem (RSE), and Positive and Negative Affect for the LOP-group*

	HP	OP	ASE	RSE	PA
OP	.233**	-	-	-	-
ASE	.494**	.368**	-	-	-
RSE	.264**	-.113	.137	-	-
PA	.446**	.150	.437**	.369**	-
NA	-.193*	.211*	-.021	-.438**	-.255**

Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

As seen in table 5.1, for the LOP-group HP was positively correlated with OP, ASE, RSE and PA, and negatively correlated with NA. OP was significantly positively related to ASE and NA. Both ASE and RSE were positively correlated with PA, whilst RSE was also negatively correlated with NA. Last, HP and OP were positively correlated, whilst PA and NA were negatively correlated.

**Table 5.2**

*Pearson's Linear Correlations for Harmonious and Obsessive Passion, Domain Specific (ASE) and Global Self-Esteem (RSE), and Positive and Negative Affect for the HOP-group*

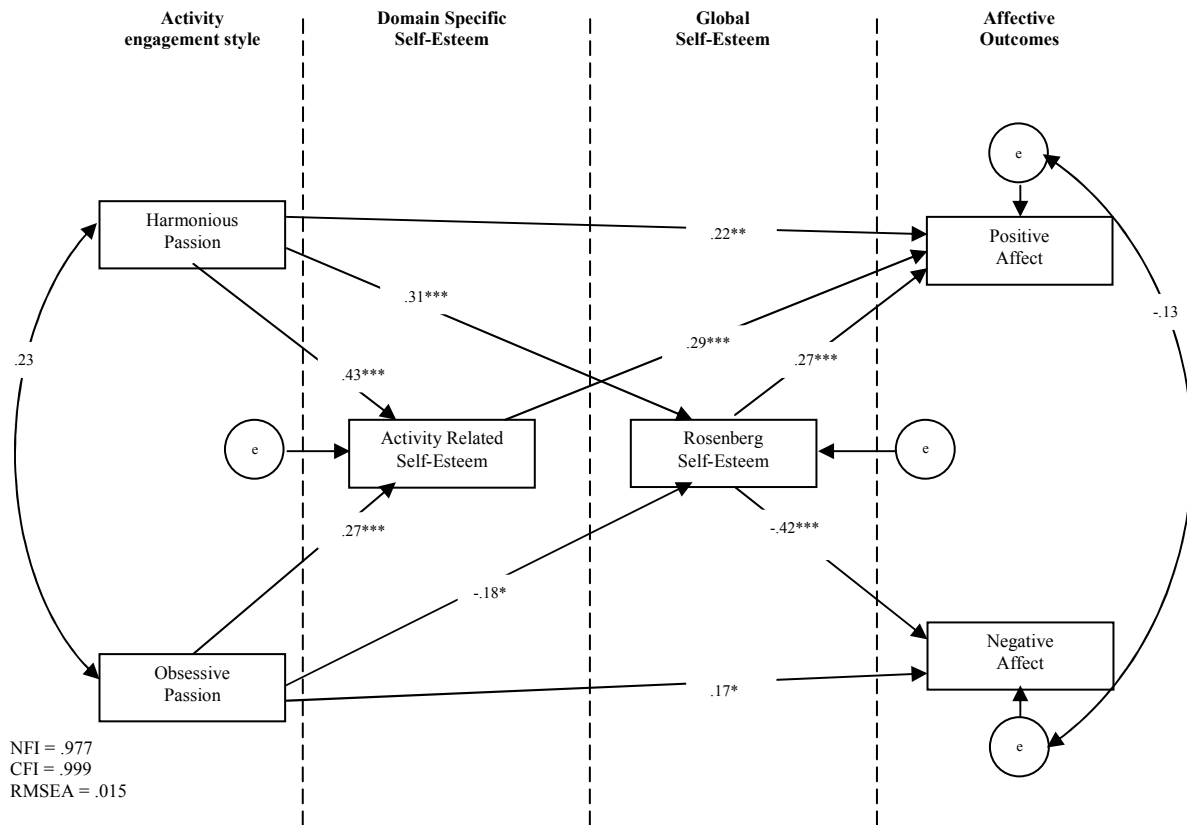
	HP	OP	ASE	RSE	PA
OP	.358**	-	-	-	-
ASE	.389**	.463**	-	-	-
RSE	.267*	.091	.312*	-	-
PA	.405**	.221	.567**	.399**	-
NA	-.284*	-.109	-.331**	-.446**	-.556**

Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed).

As seen in table 5.2, for the HOP-group HP was still positively correlated with OP, RSE, ASE, and PA, and negatively correlated with NA. OP was also significantly positively related to ASE, but contrary to the LOP-group, OP was no longer positively correlated with NA. Both ASE and RSE were positively correlated with PA, whilst RSE was also negatively correlated with NA. For the HOP-group the relationship between ASE and RSE was also

significantly positive. Last, HP and OP were positively correlated, whilst PA and NA were negatively correlated.

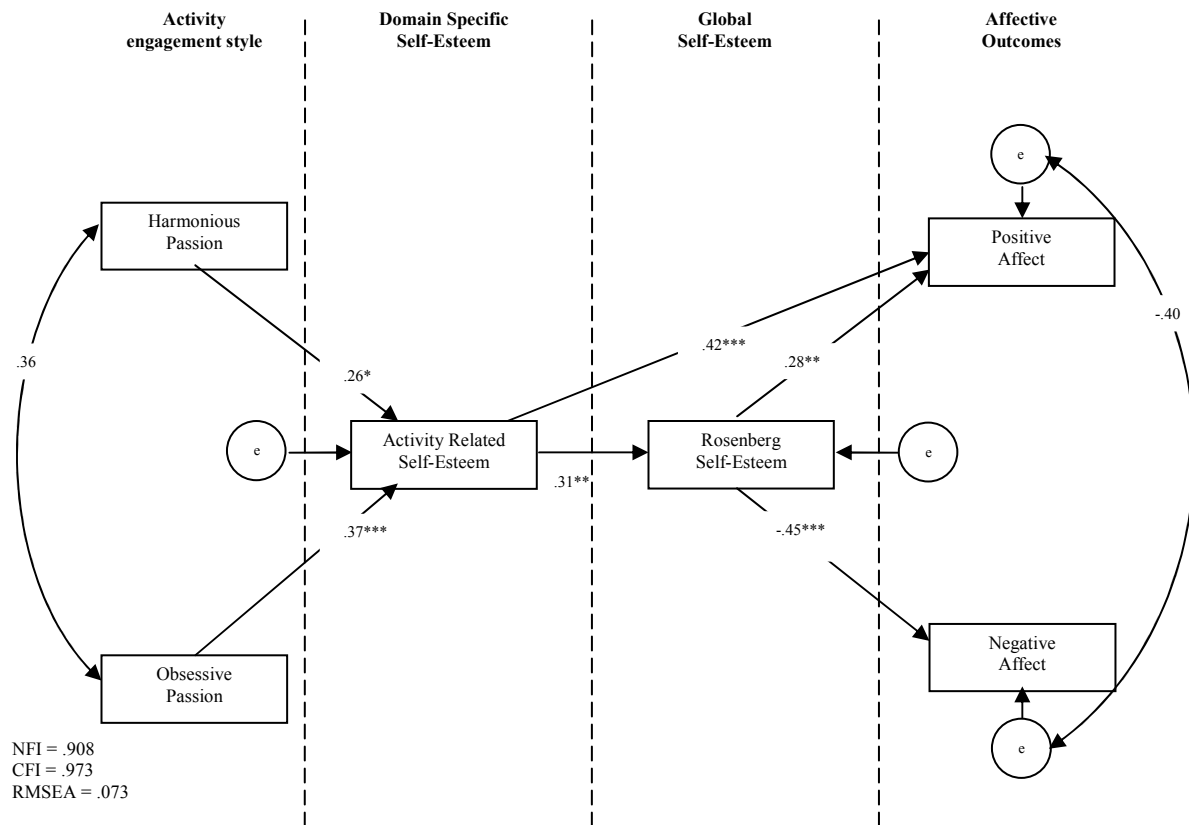
### 3.7 Path Model for the LOP-Group



**Figure 2.** Standardized regression coefficients among the activity engagement styles (HP and OP), domain specific (ASE), and global self-esteem (RSE), and affective outcomes (PA and NA) for LOP-group. Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

As seen in Figure 2, the regression analysis for the LOP-group showed that both passion dimensions positively predicted domain specific self-esteem (ASE). HP also positively predicted RSE, whilst OP was a negative predictor of RSE. In relation to affective outcomes, there were multiple routes leading to PA, ASE and RSE coming out as the strongest positive predictors, closely followed by HP. RSE was also the only negative predictor of NA. OP, on the other hand, was the only positive predictor of NA.

### 3.8 Path Model for the HOP-Group



**Figure 3.** Standardized regression coefficients among the activity engagement styles (HP and OP), domain specific (ASE), and global self-esteem, and affective outcomes (PA and NA) for the HOP-group. Note. \*  $p < .05$  (2-tailed). \*\*  $p < .01$  (2-tailed). \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (2-tailed).

As seen in Figure 3, the regression analysis for the HOP-group showed that both passion dimensions positively predicted ASE. However, HP and OP no longer had any predictive power RSE as seen with the LOP-group. In relation to affective outcomes, ASE was the strongest positive predictor of PA, followed by a weaker RSE. RSE was also the only negative predictor of NA. However, OP no longer positively predicted NA as was found for the LOP-group. Also for the HOP-group ASE positively predicted RSE.

## 4 Discussion

The results supported the conceptual framing of self-esteem as an attitude with affective and cognitive components. First, major findings showed that even though harmonious and obsessive passion predicted global self-esteem, they were most strongly related to domain specific self-esteem. Second, global self-esteem proved to be a strong predictor of affect. In addition, the finding that global and specific self-esteem were only weakly related also

supported the present conceptual framing of self-esteem. Last, the results in the path model were in accordance with the passion literature in the sense that harmonious passion predicted positive affective outcomes from activity engagement and obsessive passion predicted negative affective outcomes.

However, to gain a deeper understanding of the function of self-esteem in relation to people's passions in the real world, comparisons between groups of individuals comprising different passion profiles were conducted. Regarding the passion profile groups, the sample had predominantly high scores ( $M > 5$ ) on the harmonious dimension, while their scores on the obsessive dimension showed more variance. As a result, only scores on the obsessive passion dimension differentiated the individuals in this sample, a phenomenon that has also been observed by (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 3 & 4). Participants were therefore split into two main groups: 1) the high obsessive passion-group (HOP), where individuals scored above average on both passion dimensions, and 2) the low obsessive passion-group (LOP), which included individuals who scored above average on the harmonious dimension, but below average on the obsessive passion dimension.

Comparisons between these groups supported the assumption that self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting contingency enhancing the obsessive aspect of the passion engagement. As foreseen, the high obsessive passion-group showed significantly more domain specific self-esteem and negative affect compared to the low obsessive passion-group. Furthermore, the expectation that the groups would show similar levels of global self-esteem and positive affect was also confirmed.

The results from the path analyses based on the passion profile groups supported the general prediction that HOP individuals experience relationships among the variables of passion dimensions, self-esteem and affective outcomes that reflects a more contingent activity engagement style compared to LOP individuals. As expected, the results showed that there was a stronger link between domain specific self-esteem and positive affective outcomes for the more obsessive group, in the sense that these individuals mainly experience positive affective outcomes from domain specific self-esteem. This was also supported by the findings on the HOP-group, where neither of the passion dimensions was directly linked to affective outcomes from activity engagement. This was contrary to the LOP-group, which reflects a more harmonious passion profile. In this group, several variables led to positive affect. Both domain specific and global self-esteem positively predicted positive emotions, as well as the harmonious dimension. On the other hand, the LOP-groups obsessive dimension seemed to leave them vulnerable to experiencing negative affect.



Finally, the groups also differed regarding the prediction of global self-esteem. For the LOP-group, global self-esteem was positively predicted by harmonious passion and negatively predicted by obsessive passion. In contrast, for the HOP-group another interesting pattern emerged. Domain specific self-esteem positively predicted global self-esteem, which may indicate that dominantly obsessive individuals experience more fluctuation in levels of self-esteem compared to dominantly harmonious individuals.

#### *4.1 The Attitude of Self-Esteem*

Self-esteem in itself represents a complex and multifaceted concept. In this research, Rosenberg's conceptual framing of self-esteem as having both a cognitive and affective component (Marsh, 1990; Rosenberg, et al., 1995) was therefore used to unravel the relationship between self-esteem and passions. Results show that there was a broad support for this conceptual framing of self-esteem. First, the passion dimensions predicted specific self-esteem more strongly than global self-esteem. This link between harmonious and obsessive passion and the domain specific self-esteem reflects the passion dimensions' power in generating domain specific self-esteem. In addition, it also proposes potential motivational properties of specific self-esteem in relation to passionate behaviours (Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Park, et al., 2007). These findings are in accordance with Rosenberg et al.'s, (1995) findings that specific (academic) self-esteem was a better predictor of school performance than global self-esteem.

In concordance with a conceptual framing of self-esteem as an attitude, Rosenberg et al. (1995) also found that global self-esteem was more strongly related to measures of psychological well-being, making it largely an expression of personal affect. This was also supported by the current results in the way that global self-esteem protected individuals from experiencing negative affective outcomes from activity engagement, in addition to being an important positive predictor towards positive affect. However, the stable and trait-like nature of global self-esteem (Chen, et al., 2001; Chen, et al., 2000), also means that it lacks the power to provide internally generated rewards and punishments for behaviour that was found for the specific self-esteem (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Therefore, either type of self-esteem by itself would do a poor job at uncovering how self-esteem and passions are intertwined, whereas the synergy effect of using both measures of self-esteem contributes to this understanding.

#### *4.2 Why Do Some People Need Self-Esteem?*

The great paradox of self-esteem as stated by Ryan & Brown (2003, p. 74): “if you need it you don’t have it, and if you have it you don’t need it” tells us something about how self-esteem not only influences, but also constitutes parts of our selves. If we try to understand this paradox in relation to people’s passions, some individuals will engage in their passionate activities because they need to maintain and boost their self-esteem through the activity, whereas others will engage in their passionate activity simply because the activity itself is experienced as something positive.

However, a major question remains: Why do some people need to get their self-esteem from their passion activities, whereas others do not? A consideration of the present results in relation to recent theoretical developments may yield some answers as to why self-esteem may present a persistence-promoting contingency strengthening the obsessive activity engagement style.

#### *4.3 Domain Specific Self-Esteem in Relation to the Passion Profiles*

Domain specific self-esteem may illuminate why highly obsessive individuals seem to be caught up in the negative circle of habitual self-esteeming through engagement in their passion activities. First of all, a simple comparison of the HOP-group and the LOP-group reveals that the more obsessive HOP-group had a significantly higher level of specific self-esteem in relation to their passions compared to the more harmonious LOP-group. This finding is in accordance with Crocker’s theory where domains generating more specific self-esteem also reflect stronger contingencies of self-worth (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). Passionate activities for the HOP individuals therefore, to a greater extent, represent domains where people have invested their self-worth, compared to the LOP individuals.

##### *4.3.1 Domain Specific Self-Esteem and Affective Outcomes.*

However, following Crocker’s argumentation, it is not just the amount of specific self-esteem that reflects a more contingent engagement style, since also the link between specific self-esteem and affective experiences should be stronger in more contingent domains (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). This was also confirmed by results regarding positive affect. There were in fact different patterns regarding how positive affect was predicted within each group, although there were no differences regarding the levels of positive affective outcomes between the two groups.

Again, results supported the notion that self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting contingency in relation to obsessive passion, since the more obsessive HOP-group also showed a stronger relationship between their domain specific self-esteem and their positive affective outcomes, compared to the LOP-group. Specific self-esteem was in fact the main predictor of positive affective outcomes for these individuals. In addition, the more obsessive HOP-group, regardless of high scores on both passion dimensions, still did not get positive affect from their harmonious passion dimension. Despite having such high scores on the harmonious dimension, the harmonious aspect of their passion seems to be inhibited by their high scores on the obsessive dimension. Further, this missing relationship between harmonious passion and positive affect also reflects a more contingent approach, as the activity engagement alone does not yield positive affect, but rather is experienced almost exclusively as a result of enhancing one's self-esteem through the activity engagement.

On the other hand, the more harmonious LOP-group displayed no such relationship between their domain specific self-esteem and positive affect. Their engagement style seems to be less contingent and more autonomous in character. For this group, positive affective outcomes were positively predicted by both specific and global self-esteem, closely followed by harmonious passion. Especially the latter relationship indicates a more internally motivated engagement style, as positive emotions are not contingent upon any particular outcome, but rather is experienced purely as a result of the activity engagement itself.

However, according to theory, domain specific self-esteem should also be linked to negative affect, a relationship that was not found in the present research. One explanation for this may be that the use of only the positively worded items of the domain specific self-esteem measurement makes it more prone to be linked to the positive emotions generated by feeling good and worthy as a person.

#### *4.4 Negative Affect in Relation to the Passion Profiles*

Even though domain specific self-esteem was not directly linked to negative affect, the pattern emerging for the prediction of negative affective outcomes for the two groups adds an interesting dimension to understanding the differences between the more obsessive HOP-group compared to the predominantly harmonious LOP-group.

Interestingly for the LOP individuals the obsessive dimension still makes them vulnerable for experiences of negative affect in relation to activity engagement. However, the results also showed that although HOP individuals experienced significantly more negative affect compared to the LOP-group, the obsessive dimension did not predict negative affect for these

individuals. In fact, there are no positive predictors of negative affect for the HOP-group at all. This finding indicated that individuals in the HOP-group experience short-term positive affective outcomes, but that the activity engagement also indirectly may lead to more negative affect in their lives over time.

The present findings on the dominantly obsessive individuals may be understood in relation to the self-determination theory. Because such an obsessive engagement style has been associated with need thwarting (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Stenseng, et al., 2009), the short term positive emotional outcomes may reflect a pattern of need substituting. Need substituting involves the development of compensatory motives that do not satisfy the thwarted basic needs, but provide some collateral satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000). For these individuals the compensatory motive seems to be the enhancement of self-esteem through the activity engagement. The problem associated with such need substituting is that it not only keeps people focused on the wrong goals, but that it also intensifies the negative ill-being consequences of need thwarting (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Thus, it would seem plausible that also the higher level of negative affect these individuals experience may be explained by the increased ill-being associated with such need thwarting.

However, the lack of a relationship between obsessive passion and negative affect for the HOP-group may also be due to the missing relationship between their domain specific self-esteem and negative affect as mentioned above.

#### *4.5 Global Self-Esteem in Relation to the Passion Profiles*

Also the function of global self-esteem in relation to people's passions seems to point to important differences between the passion profile groups. Once more, results supported the persistence-promoting function of self-esteem in relation to obsessive passion. The high obsessive passion-group again reflected an engagement style that was more contingent. Despite there being no significant differences between the groups regarding the levels of global self-esteem, there were important variations separating the groups regarding how global self-esteem was predicted.

First, for the low obsessive passion-group, global self-esteem was positively predicted by their harmonious dimension and negatively predicted by their obsessive dimension. These findings are in accordance with self-determination theory, which postulates that the satisfaction of the fundamental human needs is associated with a harmonious engagement style (Standage & Gillison, 2007; Stenseng, et al., 2009), and will lead to a secure and non-contingent self-esteem (Standage & Gillison, 2007). Correspondingly, thwarting of the

fundamental needs, which has been linked to a more obsessive engagement style (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Stenseng, et al., 2009), may lead to a more insecure contingent self-esteem (Hodgins, et al., 2007). However, considering the predominantly harmonious nature of the LOP-group's passion profile, these individuals' activity engagement would most certainly promote satisfaction of the fundamental human needs, thereby contributing positively to a non-contingent stable self-esteem associated with healthy functioning (Kernis, et al., 2000).

On the contrary, for the more obsessive HOP-group the passion dimensions had no predictive power towards their global self-esteem. The fact that harmonious passion did not stand out as a positive predictor for these individuals' global self-esteem, may once again suggest that having high scores on the obsessive passion dimension seem to inhibit the positive effects of also having high scores on the harmonious passion dimension. In addition, the missing negative relationship between obsessive passion and global self-esteem may indicate that for the HOP-group, the risks associated with having an obsessive engagement style have somewhat disappeared. However, this may not tell the entire story, as a new interesting relationship emerged for the HOP-group, where their domain specific self-esteem positively predicted their global self-esteem.

#### *4.6 Stability of Self-Esteem*

This relationship between domain specific and global self-esteem reflects a more unstable fragile self-esteem, thereby leading us to the question of self-esteem stability. The assumption that more obsessive individuals also have a more contingent activity engagement is in accordance with the literature on self-esteem stability, which postulates that a more unstable self-esteem is typically also more contingent (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Kernis, et al., 2000; Waschull & Kernis, 1996).

Crocker's theory of contingencies of self-worth illustrates why a more contingent self-esteem also should have a more unstable character. A contingency can be defined as "a domain or category of outcomes on which a person has staked his or her self-esteem, so that person's view of his or her value or worth depends on perceived successes or failures or adherence to self-standards in that domain" (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001, p. 594). The issue of instability therefore stems from the foundation of a contingent self-esteem depending on reaching certain goals and self-standards in a particular domain. This is also supported by others who have found specific self-esteem to be more state-like in nature (Rosenberg, et al., 1995). However, the real problem appears when this specific state-like self-esteem also directly influences the more stable trait-like global self-esteem (Chen, et al., 2001; Chen, et

al., 2000), potentially leading not only to an unstable specific self-esteem, but also a more fluctuating global self-esteem.

This type of self-esteem instability thus makes the more contingent HOP-group more prone to both violent behaviour (Baumeister, et al., 1996) and depression (Franck & De Raedt, 2007), whereas the high stable self-esteem of the more autonomous LOP-group has been associated with greater well-being (Paradise & Kernis, 2002).

#### *4.7 So Why Do Some People Need Self-Esteem?*

If we look back at the great paradox of self-esteem (Ryan & Brown, 2003), the need for esteeming oneself, even if it would seem akin to prescriptions like being optimistic and holding positive illusions, therefore is more problematic than it seems (Ryan & Brown, 2003). This is clearly demonstrated by the current results showing that self-esteem presents a persistence-promoting contingency in relation to a more obsessive passion profile. Consequently, these results also support the understanding of passion as a dualistic dimension capable of representing something positive and good in people's life or potentially being something harmful (Stenseng, 2008; Vallerand, et al., 2003; Vallerand, et al., 2006). Therefore, I once again consider the question that was the starting point of this discussion: Why do more obsessive people need to esteem themselves through their passionate activities whilst more harmonious people do not, and how is it that self-esteem comes to represent a persistence-promoting contingency strengthening the obsessive passion dimension?

#### *4.8 Harmonious Passion and Self-Esteem*

A dominantly harmonious engagement in one's passionate activity does not seem to come from a desire to enhance one's self-esteem. This may be because these individuals to a larger extent are promoting need satisfaction in activity engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and/or possess an autonomous personality enhancing need satisfaction across all life contexts (Vallerand, et al., 2006, study 1), This is in accordance with previous passion research that has demonstrated a link between harmonious passion and need satisfaction (Standage & Gillison, 2007; Stenseng, et al., 2009). This type of autonomous internalization brings about a flexible and volitional activity engagement style where the activity is performed out of personal choice (Deci, et al., 1994), typically predicting a non-contingent self-esteem (Ryan & Brown, 2003) and general well-being (Reis, et al., 2000).

This understanding was also supported by the current study. Individuals with a more harmonious passion profile showed a less contingent activity engagement style compared to

individuals with a dominantly obsessive passion profile, as their self-worth was less dependent on activity engagement. In addition, the harmonious dimension directly and positively predicted positive affect, indicating that the activity engagement itself yields positive emotions without being linked to any particular outcome. As a result, a more harmonious activity engagement style represents the highest level of psychological development, which allows for the regulation of behaviour, in harmony with internal fundamental human needs and the social environment (Deponete, 2004), resulting in non-contingent self-esteem and positive emotional outcomes (Hein & Hagger, 2007).

#### *4.9 Obsessive Passion and Self-Esteem*

On the contrary, the more obsessive individuals seem to have a need for self-esteem, where their passionate activities become vehicles for enhancing their feelings of self-worth. This may be because these individuals are in contexts undermining need satisfaction (Deci & Ryan, 2000), and/or have a controlled personality hindering need satisfaction across all life contexts (Vallerand, et al., 2006, study 1). This is also in accordance with passion research demonstrating the link between obsessive passion and the thwarting of the fundamental human needs (Crocker & Knight, 2005; Stenseng, et al., 2009). This type of controlled internalization, where contingencies in the form of intra- or interpersonal pressure motivates the activity engagement (Vallerand, et al., 2003), typically predicts a contingent self-esteem where self-worth becomes contingent on the performance outcomes of the passionate activity (Hodgins, et al., 2007). This type of activity engagement involves needs thwarting, and therefore pose the answer to why and how self-esteem comes to represent a persistence-promoting factor for a more obsessive passion profile. This was supported by the current results, in that individuals with an obsessive passion profile had a more contingent activity engagement, where their worth as a person was continually on the line and experienced more negative affect.

*4.9.1 Reconsidering the Paradox of Obsessive Passion.* However, findings regarding the experience of positive affect for these more obsessive individuals may represent new knowledge that advice a more nuanced interpretation of the paradox of passion. This paradox postulates that obsessive passion has been shown to predict persistence in the behaviour in absence of positive affect (Vallerand, et al., 2003, study 2 & 3). However, the results of this study clearly demonstrate that more obsessive individuals experience just as much positive affect as their harmonious counterparts, but that the positive emotions almost exclusively

come from an enhancement of self-esteem through engagement in their passionate activities. Therefore, people with an obsessive passion profile do not simply continue with their passionate activity despite only experiencing negative affect, rather they continue because of the short term boosts of both positive affect and self-esteem. However, this type of engagement may present problems for people over time, and could potentially have harmful implications for people's lives (Crocker, et al., 2006; Crocker & Luhtanen, 2003; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001; Deci & Ryan, 2000). As discussed above, this phenomenon may be due to need substituting (Deci & Ryan, 2000), a common reaction to need thwarting, which has also been shown to lead to more ill-being (Crocker, et al., 2006; Deci & Ryan, 2000).

An obsessive activity engagement therefore reflects a lower degree of adjustment, even though high self-esteem is maintained by achieving success. Need thwarting may lead to need substituting and rigid behavioural patterns that typically lead to a more contingent unstable self-esteem. The question of worth must be answered repeatedly, and simply asking the question results in a pressured and driven experience (Hodgins, et al., 2007), and a lower degree of psychological well-being (Deponte, 2004).

The conclusions that can be drawn from this research therefore contribute to the understanding of what makes people's passions a nutritious source or a negative burden in their lives. This makes the present findings relevant to positive psychology and the question of optimal human functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Linley, et al., 2006). The present understanding of passion and self-esteem has the potential to enhance individual well-being, but may also be relevant for thriving groups, institutions and communities in general (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

#### *4.10 Future Research*

Future studies should further investigate the link between harmonious and obsessive passion, need satisfaction, and self-esteem, as well as examine how the passion dimensions coexist within the individual. Succeeding work may also investigate more thoroughly the issue of stability of these passion profiles. In addition, the finding that a strong obsessive passion dimension seems to undermine the positive aspect related to also having a strong harmonious passion dimension should be looked into as well. This may in turn tell us more about how people's passions are experienced in the real world.



#### *4.11 Conclusion*

Passion is something that has the potential to fill people's lives with meaning. However, there is a duality to the concept, represented by the harmonious and obsessive passion dimensions. Harmonious passion has been associated with a flexible and volitional activity engagement style, thereby leading to a variety of positive outcomes. On the contrary, obsessive passion has been associated with a controlled activity engagement style, driven by contingencies like social acceptance and self-esteem, and has therefore been associated with a variety of negative outcomes. Based on this, the main aim of the present study was to examine whether self-esteem represents a persistence-promoting factor enhancing a more obsessive engagement style. Naturally emerging groups comprising different passion profiles were compared to get a more accurate understanding of the function of self-esteem in relation to people's passions in the real world.

Findings supported the notion that dominantly obsessive individuals have a more contingent engagement style compared to their harmonious counterparts. Current research showed that the high obsessive passion-group experienced significantly more domain specific self-esteem, and also that this specific self-esteem was the main source of positive affect. The HOP-group also experienced significantly more negative affect, as well as having a more unstable self-esteem compared to the LOP-group.

In conclusion, more obsessive individuals therefore indeed seem to have a more contingent activity engagement where their worth as a person is continually on the line. This contingent style therefore gives the obsessive individuals short term boosts in self-esteem and positive affect as a result of their passions. However, the negative consequences following from need thwarting in terms of need substitution and the development of a rigid behavioral pattern will eventually catch up with them, contributing to more ill-being and social problems in their lives. This research contributes to the scientific understanding of the function of self-esteem in relation to harmonious and obsessive passion. Consequently, it also supports the understanding of passion as a dualistic dimension capable of representing something positive and ultimately good in people's life or potentially being something harmful.

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