Passion: Its Importance and Meaning for Every Person

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Find the documentary associated with this project [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9O4-vFdwM6o)

Introduction

Passion is so integral to the everyday lives of every person on the planet. For some people, passion is a reason to live, a reason to be happy with life. Others may not feel passion prominently, and their lives might be lackluster because of this. Why does passion have such a grip on the human experience?

The Oxford dictionary definition of passion is “a strong and barely controllable emotion,” which implies a feeling that so intensely grabs people, they can no longer control themselves.

Furthermore, Merriam-Webster defines passion as “the emotions as distinguished from reason” (“passion”). This definition takes it even a step further. Passions can be so strong that, in fact, they can force a person to leave behind reason.

Passion has been studied through a psychological lens since the 1990s, in the hope of figuring out what makes passion so important to people. “Being passionate entails being emotionally charged, or at least effectively inclined toward the object or activity. That is, passion and emotion are related… However, although related, emotions and passions are not equivalent” (Vallerand 100).

This definition of passion provides intrigue, because we *feel* passion as human beings. But, according to the psychological perspectives on it, passion is not an emotion. Rather, it is something more. Feeling passionate is of a different element than feeling happy or feeling sad.

Passion is an intriguing subject, because it can hold so many meanings, yet it is still the same psychological phenomenon. I am studying the psychology of passion to find out about the different ways that it can affect people’s lives, in order to show people how they might use passion to better their own lives.

Passion also sparks interest from a psychological perspective because of how varying it can be. People can feel passion towards a loved one, a sport, a hobby, a career, a religion, or even a food. One can have a passion for knitting, or a passion for ending social injustice. How can a single word or brain process occupy both of these feelings? And yet, every person has an innate knowledge of what passion is, and an innate, psychologically-driven desire to strive for it.

By studying what we know through psychology and translating it into a medium like journalism, people may be able to better understand passion, and use it as a way to make their lives as happy as they can possibly be.

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Past Literature and Contextualization

Passion as Psychology

The pattern of passion which is cited by most psychologists today is called the “dualistic model of passion,” or the DMP, and it acknowledges that passion can be either obsessive or harmonious. In both cases, the passion becomes something that the person identifies with. Obsessive passion occurs when an individual has a controlled internalization of their passion. They cannot help but partake in the activity, and it can negatively affect perspectives and the people around them. On the other hand, harmonious passion is an autonomous internalization of a passion. The individual does not participate in the activity because they feel an uncontrollable urge to do so, but rather because they have a healthy desire to do so ([Vallerand et al. 2003](https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0065260110420031?fr=RR-2&ref=pdf_download&rr=771e8a12ec2d8e9c)).

In the brain itself, passion releases dopamine, which is a chemical that causes happy and satisfactory feelings in a person. Low levels of dopamine can cause mental health disorders. Proper dopamine levels can help people to feel motivation, which is essential for good mental health ([healthdirect.gov](https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/dopamine#:~:text=my%20dopamine%20levels%3F-,What%20is%20dopamine%3F,send%20messages%20to%20each%20other.)).

Passion can create better mental well-being ([Vallerand 2012](https://psywb.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/2211-1522-2-1#Sec1)). Well-being is defined in two ways, as general happiness and again as self-realization and personal growth. Passion can improve both aspects of well-being, as it increases dopamine, which increases the happiness factor. Then, dopamine increases motivation in a general sense, which can lead to that personal growth.

Brain chemistry provides an even stronger case for the importance of passion. Passion triggers chemicals in the brain that can save humans from dangerous mental illnesses. When someone feels a passion for something, they are likely to do it multiple times. Thus creating a sustained supply of dopamine which can be hugely beneficial to the person.

Passion as Humanity

When one looks at passion exclusively through a psychological lens, they leave out the essential humanity component of passion. The humanity aspect of passion can be found in other books and articles, written about the passion for specific activities. Passion as a human phenomenon is perhaps the most important piece, which is why it covers a huge portion of my project.

Passion is often a root cause of political participation, which is essential for a democracy to function. Democracies rely on participation from the people, which requires a certain motivation from the people to better their own society. Some sort of passion is a requirement for people to want to participate in their democracy.

One can also feel intense passion towards a political party, movement, or idea. There are people everywhere who dedicate their whole lives to such causes.

Following the DMP model, people can have an obsessive passion or a harmonious passion towards anything, which includes politics. There are people from every facet of politics who display high levels of harmonious passion for their causes and beliefs. At the same time, there are people from both sides of the political spectrum who show obsessive passion.

Studies show that those who test positively for obsessive passion toward any political belief were predisposed to violent behavior and were more likely to support violence in politics ([Bélanger et al., 2020](https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1368430220933954)).

Other studies found that harmonious passion for any belief was positively associated with peaceful behaviors ([Bélanger et al., 2019](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jopy.12470)).

If levels of passion can accurately predict whether a person will become violent about their belief, then passion as a study is infinitely important, especially in today’s political climate.

Careers are often a person’s life work. People spend their entire lives dedicated to one field of work, sometimes out of necessity for money, and other times out of passion. A discussion and study on passion would be utterly incomplete without looking into passion in a workplace setting. Often, this setting is where passion flourishes, or a setting where it dies out.

In American culture, it is important that one is passionate about their work. Having a complete lack of passion towards the career that one chooses is surely to lead to unhappiness, or so the culture says. Many studies have gone in depth about work passion, and how it correlates to success in a job.

Obsessive passion in the workplace is something that can be a determining factor in a person’s well-being. When people become so identified by their work, they become less able to enjoy it and less able to enjoy themselves outside of work.

On the reverse side, work passion can also be harmonious. This phenomenon occurs when an individual enjoys the characteristics of the work, or finds it to be meaningful and challenging ([Ho et al., 2018](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.01.005)).

Teaching is one example of a field in which passion is prevalent. The field does not come with a lot of pay, and often teachers have to handle tough situations involving children. And yet, despite the inglorious nature of it, people still desire to teach, often because of a passion element. Multiple studies have looked into the passion, or lack thereof, of teachers. One such study found that grit and passion were found in many teachers, which is a primary motivation to continue in a field with low pay. These are the teachers that thrive in their positions. However, the same study looked into teacher burnout. Burnout is a phenomenon that can be caused by a lack of passion, or just as easily by too much obsessive passion. In this scenario, teachers might be obsessively passionate towards their jobs, and work longer hours in order to train their own ego, rather than because they love their job ([Youngblood 2020](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2491138419/fulltextPDF/398864B8A54047FCPQ/1?accountid=14503)).

Of course, teaching is not the only line of work that features passionate people. Any workplace can have many people who are passionate about their jobs, even if the job seems random to those outside of it.

For example, a recent study looked into the relative passions of civil aviation maintenance and safety crews. Aircraft technicians are responsible for the safety of everyone who boards a plane. One can imagine how important this job is, and the study looked into the motivations behind going into such work, and if passion for the job caused more or less safety in that workplace.

The study found that the technicians who were highly passionate about their work displayed more safety motivation than those who did not ([Chen 2021](https://doi.org/10.1080/24721840.2021.1945928)). Passion plays a role in society everywhere, and it can even dictate whether or not a plane is safe to fly.

Passion is also integral to hobbies that people gravitate towards. A hobby is something that one does purely for pleasure, not for money or a job. These can often incur the highest amount of passion, because money or job security is not a factor. A person does the activity simply for the love of the activity.

Perhaps the most prominent hobby studied in passion psychology is sports, particularly recreational sports. These are the sports that people are not paid to play, but rather they play for fun, or for passion.

A study was conducted on recreational golfers, and they were tested on how they reacted to winnings and failures on the course. Everyone who reported having at least some level of passion also reported having an emotional response when they won or lost. Passion, in this case, controls whether or not we feel emotions that are connected to activities, such as sports.

On the other hand, the same study reported that those with the highest levels of obsessive passion also showed the highest levels of emotional reactivity, in comparison with those who showed harmonious passion ([Verner-Filion et al., 2018](https://journals.humankinetics.com/view/journals/jsep/40/5/article-p280.xml)).

Another common hobby among young people is video gaming. Gaming is, unsurprisingly, a hobby which many feel some sort of passion about. There are also many benefits of video games as a hobby. A study found that gamers who displayed harmonious passion were able to reap the benefits of gaming, such as an increase in social capital via playing with friends, increase in creativity, better teamwork skills, and more critical thinking knowledge.

However, as is the theme in passion literature, it can also become an obsessive passion. Obsessive passion in video games can be traced to a lack of satisfaction with life in general, and it causes the player to have a less positive experience with video games. Obsessive passion, like in many other areas, can eventually lead to addiction ([Johnson et al., 2022](https://www.proquest.com/docview/2516330507/132E963722404B32PQ/29?accountid=14503#s7)).

Passion as Philosophy

Passion psychology is a relatively new field, but passion is not a new concept. Philosophy is an age-old field, and it has looked into the idea of passion for activities since its inception. Rene Descartes wrote his *Philosophical Writings, Volume 1* in the 17th century. The chapter is entitled, “The Passions in General (and incidentally the whole nature of man)” (Descartes 327). The strongly worded nature of the title alone shows just how significant passion was to Descartes and those who read his ideas.

Descartes describes passions as they derive from the soul, and cause actions to be made in the body. Passions, from this perspective, are the thoughts of the soul. They are more important to the people they inhabit than the thoughts of the brain, and have a higher capability to engulf a person’s thoughts, actions, and even life.

Similarly, in the year 1837, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel wrote his *Lectures on the Philosophies of History*. In it, he briefly delves into the implications on passion as they relate throughout history. He claims that, when examining human history, nothing is more important than passion. His argument can be summarized by his quote, “We may affirm absolutely that nothing great in the world has been accomplished without passion” (Hegel).

The philosophers of old times are not the only ones who looked at passion in this sort of light. Modern philosophers agree wholeheartedly on the importance of passion. Robert C. Solomon wrote “The Joy of Philosophy,” in 2003, in which he argues that a passionate life is not only ideal, it is the only type of life which is worth living. “A life without passion would be a life barely worth living” ([Solomon 2003](https://doi.org/10.1093/0195165403.003.0002)).

Passion in Culture

Such a topic as passion cannot be understated in its importance for every human being on the planet. And the intrigue is not lost on the world of popular culture. Popular culture contributes to the plethora of media on the subject of passion and even its duality. There are countless movies, books, and journalistic-style stories which are about people who are passionate. Although these do not advertise themselves as being “about passion,” they are on the subject nonetheless.

Passionate people often have exciting stories, many of which are portrayed in Hollywood films. The list of “movies about passion” would be too long to even begin, but it is useful to note their impact and existence.

The Disney/Pixar animated fictional film *Coco* depicts a young Mexican boy’s true passion for playing the guitar. In the movie, a young boy named Miguel has an intense passion for music. At the beginning of the movie, this passion is certainly of the obsessive nature. He runs from his family to pursue his dream of being a musician. He goes on a dramatic adventure in the colorful Land of the Dead, which is a piece of Mexican culture that the movie plays into.

By the end, he learns to not put his passion for music above his love for family, which would conclude his character arc with a very harmonious passion for music (*Coco*).

*Coco* is a very well-liked movie, garnering a 97% score on Rotten Tomatoes. Although the story is fictional, it is important to note it in a discussion about passion. Audiences loved it because stories about passion can often be as gripping as the passion itself. People relate to these desires, which make them all the more important to study and understand.

Just as people are drawn to passion stories through film, they are also drawn to this in literature. *Into the Wild* is a work of nonfiction, which depicts a fierce passion for the wilderness. Christopher McCandless desired so badly to be surrounded by nature and away from the troubles of modern societal life. He left his home and all his belongings and trekked all across the country, trying to find a place where he could escape into the wilderness. This desire and passion for the wilderness is incredibly obsessive, and it eventually leads Christopher to his death in the Alaskan wild (Krakauer).

Christopher’s tale is a real-life example of how powerful passions can be. This feeling drove him away from everything that was familiar to him and towards an untimely death. But again, audiences loved the movie, which was adapted from a book.

People love stories about people who are passionate about something, because they relate to it. Even people who are not passionate about playing the guitar still feel the emotion which Miguel feels. Even people who do not relate to Christopher’s passion are hooked on his story.

From the perspective of journalism, there are countless stories about people who possess strong passion. Passionate people make for good characters, which is why we see passion everywhere in the news, and in almost every media.

A simple Google search for “passion” and a click into the “news” section will reveal just how prolific journalists can be in writing on this subject. And the same Google search the next day will reveal all new items, because of how often this trope is used.

There is a story about professional wrestler Dax Harwood and his deep passion for WWE wrestling, and how he recognizes that this passion can sometimes fall into a more obsessive pattern ([Thomas](https://411mania.com/wrestling/dax-harwood-passion-wrestling-gets-him-in-trouble/)). In the same page of Google search results, there is a podcast entitled “A Passion to Know Him,” which is a full-length sermon about the benefits of having a passion toward finding God in your everyday life ([Stanley](https://www.intouch.org/listen/radio/a-passion-to-know-him-part-2)).

WWE wrestling and religion do not have many spheres where they overlap. But both areas feature passionate people. The fact that people can use the same term to refer to these two concepts shows how important this term is. It involves everyone on the planet.

Conclusion

Nevertheless, there is a lot of academic literature on the subject of passion, and psychologists provide much investigation into the psychological implications of it. Society shows many examples in popular media, like movies, which show examples of passion. Nonfiction films or documentaries about passionate people also make up a substantial amount of the media produced by the culture. However, there is no media which intertwines these concepts of psychology, academia, philosophy, and storytelling into one project.

The concept of passion has been fleshed out by psychologists and philosophers. Passion stories have been told time and time again, by authors of books, journalists, and Hollywood movie producers. And yet, with all of this talk of passion in the world, there is no media which combines all of this information. There is nothing which tells stories of passionate people, while explaining why they feel this way.

Creative Project Overview

My creative project is a documentary which incorporates this idea. It takes what I have learned through research of passion psychologically, philosophically, and in a humanity aspect, and applies it into a documentary. Firstly, I found a couple of subjects who exemplified high levels of passion for activities that they participated in. The subjects were found by sending out a survey, which ranked people’s passion on the “Passion Scale,” which is a method that psychologists use to quantify passion, and to determine if it is harmonious or obsessive ([Sigmundsson 2020](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.newideapsych.2019.06.001)). I contacted the people who ranked highly to see if they would be interested in being the subjects for the documentary.

One of the two people that tested highly on the test was Vicki Burke, who is the director of food services at Holy Family High School. She exemplifies incredible passion for cooking and for the students she serves daily, and the students reflect that love in an incredible way. Her story shows how passion can elevate the level of work that you do, and can expand to the people around you. The immense passion of one person can do incredible things for a community.

The second subject is Stele Ely, who has dedicated his life to his passion for saving the planet from the destruction of climate change. His passion specifically is to go hiking in the fresh air of nature and meet new people. When he meets new people, he talks to them about the plight of the Earth, and challenges them to devote some of their time and money to the cause. Ely also says that his passion is not only for the Earth, but for the love that is contained in it. His story is one of inspiring levels of dedication to a cause, and dedication to a specific passion.

I interviewed Dr. Jais Adam-Troian, a well-known social psychologist and behavioral scientist who works in the field of passion study at the Canadian University of Dubai. I also interviewed Dr. David Allen, a University of Colorado Boulder professor who specializes in biological psychology. These two psychological perspectives, both social and neurological, are interspersed throughout the documentary. They provide context and explanation about what happens in the brain of a passionate individual.

The documentary attempts to fill in that gap in passion studies. The world of media is missing that component which ties everything together. With a few poignant stories such as these and the right amount of research to accompany them, this documentary could be very important for future studies on the subject.

There have been documentaries about passion before, but none about the concept of passion. These are all about the passion of a specific person and how it played out in their lives. But there is no documentary which showcases the passion of people while also explaining it.

Every other medium shows passion from a one-sided point of view, whether that be a study or a psychological theory. None show every perspective of it.

This documentary will be the first of its kind to contribute to our society’s understanding of passion. It will utilize personal stories, scientific research, and academic findings to show a holistic view of passion.

Upon completion of the project, I have taken away many lessons about passion and about the journalistic process. Journalism is a field which is full of passion, and I discovered and capitalized on my own passion for storytelling. I loved getting to know the documentary subjects more closely, and their stories fueled me to make this project as pristine as possible. Both Burke and Ely have such strong passions that I felt more passionate about telling their stories.

Despite this, the process was not without struggle. Finding subjects was certainly more difficult than I had expected. I asked the people in my circle if they knew people who were passionate, and I got a lot of responses from that question. But it was incredibly difficult to convince those recommended people to take the survey, much less to be subjects for the documentary.

If I could do it all over again, I would have started that process much sooner. I also would have reached out to as many people as possible to begin with, instead of waiting for someone to not respond to me before reaching out to the next person on the list. I created a habit of assuming that someone would be a good source, and therefore I could place all of my bets on that person before they agreed to participate. Then, I would not reach out to anyone else until I hadn’t heard from that person for about a week. This was not a good practice, and I learned that lesson. I will apply that learning to any of my future journalistic endeavors.

I also learned to test out technology in advance, especially Adobe Premiere Pro. I had a lot of issues getting the program to start, and it set me back a couple of days on my timeline. In the future, when doing a large video project such as this, I will make sure that I account for technical difficulties when planning out a timeline for a project.

Overall, this project taught me a lot about journalism as a profession, and about creating video projects. But I also learned a lot about my own passion while I dove into the passions of others. My appreciation for passion grew immensely, and I learned to love the way that humans can have so many different types of passions, all of which bring beauty into the world.

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