

# Losing the benefits of work passion? The implications of low ego-resilience for passionate workers

Received 26 May 2022  
Revised 1 August 2022  
3 August 2022  
Accepted 5 August 2022

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This research assessed the interactive effects of employee passion and ego-resilience (ER) on relevant work outcomes, including job satisfaction, citizenship behavior, job tension, and emotional exhaustion. The authors hypothesize that higher work passion is associated with less positive work outcomes when employees are low in ER.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The authors collected data from three unique samples ( $N$ s = 175, 141, 164) to evaluate the moderating effect across outcomes. The authors conducted analyses with and without demographic controls and affectivity (e.g. negative and positive). The authors used a time-separated data collection approach in Sample 3. The authors also empirically assess the potential for non-linear passion and ER main effect relationships to emerge.

**Findings** – Findings across samples confirm that high passion employees with elevated levels of ER report positive attitudinal, behavioral, and well-being outcomes. Conversely, high passion employees do not experience comparable effects when reporting low levels of ER. Results were broadly consistent when considering demographics and affectivity.

**Research limitations/implications** – Despite the single-source nature of the three data collections, The authors took steps to minimize common method bias concerns (e.g. time separation and including affectivity). Future research will benefit from multiple data sources collected longitudinally and examining a more comprehensive range of occupational contexts.

**Practical implications** – Passion is something that organizations want in all employees. However, the authors' results show that passion may not be enough to lead to favorable outcomes without considering factors that support its efficacy. Also, results show that moderate levels of passion may offer little benefit compared to low levels and may be detrimental.

**Originality/value** – As a focal research topic, work passion research is still in early development. Studies exploring factors that support or derail expected favorable effects of work passion are needed to establish a



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foundation for subsequent analyses. Moreover, the authors comment on the assumed “more is better” phenomenon. The authors argue for reconsidering the linear approach to predicting behavior in science and practice.

**Keywords** Work passion, Ego-resilience, Proactivity, Job satisfaction, Tension, Citizenship behavior

**Paper type** Research paper

Since individuals spend over a third of their lives engaged in work, it is not surprising that mainstream media, researchers, and practitioners alike have championed the importance of work passion – a strong emotional proclivity for, and liking of, one’s job (Amarnani *et al.*, 2020; McAllister *et al.*, 2017). Employees’ expression of work passion is consistent with earlier Central Life Interest (CLI) research, which supports that individuals have an expressed preference for salient institutional settings that best tap into their reservoir of focused energy (Dubin, 1956). Dubin (1992) contends that “Personal choice is the basis for investing in a CLI” (p. 209). However, since the alternatives of not working are undesirable to most people (e.g. poverty, starvation) (Lu *et al.*, 2019), most people work out of necessity rather than intrinsic motivation. By default, work has become a CLI for most individuals in capitalistic societies (Weber, 1930).

Passion is necessary for success in settings where heightened levels of personal attachment exist (McAllister *et al.*, 2017; Tang *et al.*, 2022). The widespread acceptance of passion as a mechanism for personal and organizational success has prompted research to harness this desired worker attribute (Vallerand and Houliort, 2019). Despite widespread interest, however, “the organizational sciences have yet to develop an informed understanding of passion’s content domain, predictive efficacy, and influence on relevant outcomes” (Perrewé *et al.*, 2014, p. 145), leading to a field of study described as “nuanced” (Pollack *et al.*, 2020), “limited,” and lacking a scientific consensus (Chen *et al.*, 2020).

Much of the existing research associates work passion with positive (short- and long-term) work outcomes (e.g. engagement, absorption; Ho *et al.*, 2011) across work contexts, including leadership (Ho and Astakhova, 2020) and entrepreneurship (Murnieks *et al.*, 2014), and hospitality. However, emergent research also suggests that work passion can lead to aversive effects (e.g. obsession, exhaustion and burnout) (Trépanier *et al.*, 2014). To explain conflicting empirical results, Vallerand *et al.* (2003) proposed the *dualistic model of passion* (DMP), which distinguishes between the different antecedents and manifestations of positive (harmonious) and antagonistic (obsessive) motivational forms of work passion. Although empirical research has supported the tenets of the DMP (Vallerand *et al.*, 2019), evidence suggests that scholars consider passion a unidimensional construct (Chen *et al.*, 2020) and that control-related boundary conditions can explain less optimal work passion outcomes (Amarnani *et al.*, 2020).

To navigate the work environment, passionate employees must have internal regulatory mechanisms that allow preparation (proactivity), adaptation, and resilience (Baum and Locke, 2004). For example, learning orientation – one’s predisposition to enhance skills by seeking development opportunities – represents an intermediate linkage between prior entrepreneurial experiences (e.g. both direct and modeling) and passion (Türk *et al.*, 2020). Despite these contributions, the passion construct’s complexity has yielded inconsistent results (Pollack *et al.*, 2020), and critical questions remain unanswered (e.g. Astakhova and Porter, 2015). For example, McAllister *et al.*’s (2017) multi-study research found that work passion was associated with citizenship behavior in two of the three samples. In addition, passion was positively correlated with tension in one sample and negatively correlated in another. Astakhova and Porter (2015) reported inconsistent results regarding passion-performance relations. Examining moderators capable of shedding new light on these inconsistent results is thus, needed (Pollack *et al.*, 2020). Despite widespread support for this

approach, we know little about moderators of work passion for employee outcomes and the more specific implications of personal resources on passion–work outcome relationships (Dalla Rosa and Vianello, 2020). This lack of direction is surprising because significant research has examined passion through a “resource-based lens” (Astakhova, 2015).

In response, we examine ego-resilience (ER) as a self-regulatory resource that moderates the relationship between work passion and various outcomes, including job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), job tension, and emotional exhaustion across three unique samples. We draw on prior work, which views passion as a unidimensional work attribute (Chen *et al.*, 2020). Further, we propose ER as a moderator that explains when passion changes from a positive and engaging feature that enhances positive outcomes to a debilitating compulsion that leads to adverse effects. This approach is necessary because ER reflects a boundary condition that explains proactivity’s positive and negative aspects, including work passion (Schellenberg and Gaudreau, 2020).

Extending ego-depletion (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) and job demands-resources theories (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), we argue that at low levels of ER (i.e. when employees have difficulties adapting to environmental changes), employees experience depleted self-regulatory resources (i.e. resources that impact their ability to control their thoughts, impulses, and behaviors) which weaken (strengthen) the relationship between work passion and positive (negative) work outcomes. Such theorizing aligns with earlier studies showing that ER can elicit positive and negative employee outcomes (Alessandri *et al.*, 2020). For example, recent research documents direct effects on burnout when ER is high (Zhao *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, less ER “may negatively affect how employees interpret aspects of their work and react to workplace events, leading to more negative stress reactions and increasing mental health problems” (Extremera *et al.*, 2020, p. 2).

This research contributes to the existing passion research in five critical ways. First, by examining ER as a self-regulatory boundary condition, we answer recent calls to investigate moderators of passion–employee outcome relationships (Pathak and Srivastava, 2020). We also address prior research (e.g. Pollack *et al.*, 2020) that reports weak findings between passion and workplace outcomes (Burke *et al.*, 2015) and propose that ER is a critical boundary condition explaining inconsistent results. Second, we contribute to the developing research examining the “dark side” of work passion (Pollack *et al.*, 2020). Specifically, we position ER as a critical self-regulatory coping mechanism that can explain the favorable, neutral, and dark sides of work passion in greater detail (Ho and Astakhova, 2019).

Third, we focus on a context-specific form of passion (i.e. *work* passion), providing a more nuanced understanding of how passion manifests (Zigarmi *et al.*, 2018). Fourth, in response to recent calls to examine and control for non-linear effects in management research in general (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013), and passion studies specifically (Astakhova, 2015), we document curvilinear associations examining whether passion is exclusively linear. Fifth, prior meta-analytic research (Pollack *et al.*, 2020) has noted a lack of studies linking passion to essential workplace outcomes such as emotional exhaustion and OCB. We bridge this gap by including these variables in our study and illuminating the relationship between passion and these critical workplace outcomes. Lastly, we develop a three-study convergent package amidst a replication crisis in the organizational sciences (Aguinis *et al.*, 2017) and calls for such consideration in passion research (McAllister *et al.*, 2017). In doing so, we support the reproducibility of our findings across unique contexts.

Finally, this research addresses challenges currently affecting organizational psychology science and practice. In addition to the scientific shortcomings mentioned above, this research has practical appeal for leaders responsible for staffing and developing employees to participate in the “new normal” post-pandemic world. Research suggests that technology infusions hastened a level of employee “passion decay” that affected work and home domains. Tang *et al.* (2022) found that working closely with automated technology and the

associated routinization predicted passion decay. This effect subsequently influenced work and family disengagement. However, these effects were not consistent across all workers. Employees higher in openness to experience were less prone to suffer these effects as robotic interactions increased. This research suggests that (1) passion is open to malleability in contemporary work settings due to recent dramatic changes in workplace policies and procedures, and (2) identifying individual differences factors can aid science and practice.

### Theoretical foundations and hypotheses development

Job demands-resources theory explains how work and personal characteristics affect outcomes such as performance and well-being (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Job demands-resources theory (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001) categorizes work characteristics as either a *demand* that requires effort and depletes resources or a *resource* that aids in goal achievement, reduces demands, or fosters personal growth. Under this framework, demands increase strain, and continued pressure leads to health impairment while resources increase motivation resulting in performance improvements. Further, the theory suggests that resources can function as buffers and attenuate the relationship between job demands and strain (Li *et al.*, 2022).

While the original job demands-resources model focused on characteristics of the organization, the expanded job demands-resources theory captures the interaction between work and employee personal characteristics (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In contrast to job resources and demands that arise from the organization and work, *personal resources* reflect an individual's sense that they can control or affect their work environment. *Personal demands* reflect self-imposed work goals that require effort. The expanded theory also captures mechanisms by which employees can create job resources and demands (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). Consistent with job demands-resources theory, we position passion as a personal resource that employees bring to the work environment.

Chen *et al.* (2020) define passion as a strong identification with “a line of work that one feels motivated to engage in and derives positive affect from doing” (p. 140). Therefore, several factors must be present for work passion to manifest at work. Namely, employees must (a) experience affect while doing their job, (b) feel a reliable identification toward the job, and (c) be motivated to engage. Once these conditions are met, employees possess internalized emotions, cognitions, and motivations connected to their workplace identity (Houlihan *et al.*, 2015). Although other constructs such as job involvement and commitment capture facets of passion (i.e. sense of identification or motivation to engage), they also encompass effects of extrinsic motivation, which are beyond Passion's scope. Thus, passion is a personal resource instrumental in the motivational process through intrinsic incentives. However, this increased motivation can result in increased demands that hinder the buffering effects of passion on strain.

Although predicting beneficial effects (Pollack *et al.*, 2020), passion may also create a mindset of fixation when employees do not have the self-regulatory mechanisms that allow for proper preparation (proactivity), adaption, and resilience (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007). We draw on ego depletion theory (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) and job demands-resources theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) to explain why ER serves as an adaptive resource (Oshio *et al.*, 2018) that moderates the effect of work passion on employee outcomes. Whereas some employees high in work passion devote *excessive* resources toward job completion at the expense of their psychological, emotional, and physical health (Chen *et al.*, 2020), we argue that ER helps employees manage their behavioral control and attentional focus to ensure more productive and positive work outcomes.

### A self-regulatory perspective on work passion

According to ego depletion theory (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007), individuals possess finite self-regulatory resources to use when needed (i.e. necessary or beneficial). Passion-driven work

activities that involve the continual investment of time and energy, focused attention, and the active management of work attitudes and behaviors (Vallerand and Houlfort, 2019) draw from a limited pool (Lanaj *et al.*, 2016). As these resources are exhausted, employees have trouble regulating their behaviors and are increasingly susceptible to urges and distractions, resulting in less favorable work outcomes (Hagger *et al.*, 2010). Indeed, self-regulatory factors can potentially affect passion-driven behavior (Lafrenière *et al.*, 2011). This reasoning is consistent with the job demands-resources theory (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), which argues that passion may lead to negative consequences when employees lack the resources necessary to cope with demands (Fernet *et al.*, 2019).

The self-regulation domain is extensive (Strauman, 2017). Accordingly, research opportunities linking passion with self-control indices are “challenging yet abundant” (Syed *et al.*, 2020). To further this research, we focus on a form of self-regulation. Specifically, we examine ER, a concept of human adaptability formulated over 70 years ago (Block, 1950), which refers to an individual’s ability to adjust to continuously changing environmental demands (Block and Kremen, 1996). Ego-resilient employees can adapt their control levels through “resourceful adaptation to changing circumstances and environmental contingencies” (Block and Block, 1980, p. 48). When examined through a job demands-resources lens, ER serves as an essential self-regulatory coping resource, allowing employees to adapt to their changing environment and achieve engagement. Conversely, when ER is low, employees have more difficulties regulating and coping with change, resulting in more negative work outcomes (Oshio *et al.*, 2018). In sum, Sroufe *et al.* (2005) acknowledge that ego-resiliency represents an essential indicator of self-regulation capabilities.

When examined directly, general work passion is a significant positive predictor of traditional work outcomes, including job satisfaction (Pollack *et al.*, 2020). Job satisfaction refers to an evaluative judgment about one’s work (Weiss, 2002). Like most attitudes, job satisfaction is reactive to self-regulatory factors, including ER (Yang, 2015). Whereas high ER supplies passionate employees the ability to quickly recover from challenging demands (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004), low ER leads to rigid and inappropriate stress responses (Fan and Zhang, 2019) and reduced satisfaction (Yang, 2015).

Moreover, low levels of ER may promote the “downsides” of passion. Theories of goal striving suggest that increased motivation leads to goal achievement and increased perceptions of self-efficacy, which in turn inspire individuals to adopt higher goals and exert correspondingly more elevated levels of effort to reach the new goal (Kanfer *et al.*, 2017). Thus, the motivating effects of passion can lead to increased personal demands through repeated escalation of goal difficulty. For example, without a regulatory mechanism (i.e. ER in this case), employees may set and strive for unattainable goals, which will deplete their resources, potentially sending them into a loss spiral characterized by self-undermining compensating behaviors (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Research has shown that passionate individuals invest more resources (e.g. effort, energy, time) into projects than necessary (Baum and Locke, 2004). Passion also increases identification with a venture that calls for such a connection (Cardon *et al.*, 2009). Benefits notwithstanding, investment and identity can lead to harm if not calibrated. One recognized outcome is an escalation of commitment (Staw, 1976), resulting in individuals protecting identities “wrapped up” in a task they are passionate. Similarly, research affirms detrimental associations between passion and goal attainment. For example, passionate individuals overestimate their abilities (Bailey *et al.*, 2020) and exaggerate the likelihood of goal attainment (Astakhova, 2015), even when signals offer contrary support for success. Because ER reflects (a) tolerance for ambiguity, (b) the capacity to regulate impulse, (c) an aptitude for rationally redefining situations when faced with conflicting cues, and (d) the use of cognitive problem solving to adapt one’s behavior (Block and Kremen, 1996), a deficit likely magnifies the detriments of ill-placed investments and inappropriate galvanized identity (Mitchell *et al.*,



2019). We posit that ER will buffer the relationship between work passion and job satisfaction.

- H1.* ER moderates the positive relationship between work passion and job satisfaction. At low levels of ER, the relationship between work passion and job satisfaction is attenuated.

Unlike traditional work tasks in employees' job descriptions, OCBs are initiative-taking activities that exceed general standards for acceptable behavior (Carpenter *et al.*, 2014). Because passion occurs when motivations are internalized into employees' identities (Liu *et al.*, 2011), passionate employees are innately motivated to engage in behaviors that help themselves, their social groups, and their organization (Gagné and Deci, 2005). Like job satisfaction, a link between general work passion and OCBs exists (McAllister *et al.*, 2017).

In line with previous work on self-regulation and OCB, we position OCB as a motivation-driven activity to obtain identity-driven goals. OCB is the outcome of "a process involving choices that are made, planned, carried out, and evaluated in a continuous cycle," affected by workers' self-concepts (Bolino *et al.*, 2012, p. 128). When employees are passionate about their work, their self-identities become attached to the workplace (Houliort *et al.*, 2015) or their work-related ventures (Cardon *et al.*, 2009). Because high ER workers can cope with environmental demands, they can allocate passion-depleting resources to extra-role behaviors (Bolino *et al.*, 2012).

In contrast, at low levels of ER, passionate employees who cannot adjust to their changing environmental demands may struggle to experience frustration and begin to focus their resources on personal coping and adjustment to their shifting environmental demands rather than engaging in OCBs that go beyond their core job requirements. We posit that ER moderates the relationship between work passion and OCB.

- H2.* ER moderates the positive relationship between work passion and organizational citizenship behavior. At low levels of ER, the relationship between work passion and organizational citizenship behavior is attenuated.

Whereas positive associations between work passion and job satisfaction and OCBs exist, the implications of work passion on job tension remain tenuous. A recent meta-analysis documented no significant association between the two constructs (Pollack *et al.*, 2020). This finding is intuitive given that primary studies yield positive and negative effects across samples (McAllister *et al.*, 2017), which often counterbalance one another when meta-analytically examined. General inconsistent findings across primary studies and the overall non-significant effect noted by Pollack *et al.* (2020) provide initial evidence for impactful boundary conditions (Jachimowicz *et al.*, 2019).

McAllister *et al.* (2017) noted that passionate workers set aggressive goals and are often persistent regardless of the outcome, leading to limited resources' recurring expenditure (Baum and Locke, 2004). Because resources are committed to pursuing workplace passions, obstacles and job demands intensify (Vallerand *et al.*, 2007). Although consistent effort typically leads to positive work outcomes, passion-driven persistence fails when self-regulatory mechanisms are not present to surveil behavior. Per the functions of ER, resilience can function as a protective factor and recovery resource that provides initiative-taking functioning behaviors when faced with challenges (Zellars *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, passion for work coupled with low ER causes employees to perceive work demands as stress-inducing obstacles (Sutcliffe and Vogus, 2003) that hinder their well-being. Conversely, at high ER levels, employees view comparable job demands more favorably, mitigating the negative effect of passion on job tension. Thus, the persistent desire to engage in work activities for employees high in work passion should increase job tension when ER is low while decreasing job tension under high ER conditions. Thus, we posit a crossover

interaction effect between work passion and ER on employee job tension, where the relationship's direction depends on the level of ER.

- H3.* ER moderates the relationship between work passion and job tension. At low (high) levels of ER, the relationship between work passion and job tension is positive (negative).

Baumeister and Vohs (2016) explained that the self (e.g. ego) and self-regulation are resources tied to energy and are, consequently, amenable to expansion and depletion. Thus, ego depletion theory treats self-regulation as a limited resource consumed and exhausted over time under repeated exposure to stressful situations (Inzlicht and Schmeichel, 2012). Consistent with job demands-resource tenants (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), job demands that exceed coping resources result in maladaptive health consequences, including emotional exhaustion (Knudsen *et al.*, 2009).

Emotional exhaustion occurs when work pressures lessen employees' physical and cognitive resources (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Under normal conditions, positive manifestations of passion lead to less emotional exhaustion at work as employees perceive stress as opportunities for development and growth (i.e. as job resources) (Donahue *et al.*, 2012). However, when employees are low in self-regulatory coping mechanisms (i.e. low in ER), they are more likely to perceive stress as an insurmountable challenge (i.e. an exhaustive job demand), leading to more emotional exhaustion (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007). Thus, when passionate employees are low in ER, their passion may turn into an unhealthy fixation, resulting in the exhaustion of resources. We posit that ER moderates the relationship between work passion and emotional exhaustion.

- H4.* ER moderates the negative relationship between work passion and emotional exhaustion. At low levels of ER, the relationship between work passion and emotional exhaustion is exacerbated.

## Methods

### *Participants and procedures*

*Sample 1.* We collected data from seminar participants in construction/property management industries. We distributed surveys and submission instructions following a presentation unrelated to the topics examined in this research. Occupations covered a range of jobs within the construction industry, including administration, architects, builders, and government regulators. Initially, we distributed 209 surveys and received 178 (85.1% response rate) after the deadline. Following a preliminary review, we omitted three surveys for obvious errors, inappropriate response generation (e.g. repeated responses across multiple sections), and missing data. Males comprised 48.9% of the sample which averaged 41 years of age ( $M = 41.49$ ,  $SD = 11.36$ ), and nine years of organizational tenure ( $M = 8.99$ ,  $SD = 7.85$ ).

*Sample 2.* We distributed surveys (and return envelopes) to all 189 administrative personnel working at a large bank's headquarters. After two weeks (and one email prompt), we received 141 responses (75% response rate). The sample had no lending responsibilities. We withdrew eleven surveys due to incomplete or inaccurate responses. Males made up 41% of the sample which averaged 45 years of age ( $M = 44.89$ ,  $SD = 8.37$ ), and six years of company tenure ( $M = 6.12$ ,  $SD = 5.16$ ).

*Sample 3.* Consistent with prior discussions (Hochwarter, 2014) and field studies (Wihler *et al.*, 2017), students supplied survey links to full-time workers (working 35 or more hours per week) over the age of 25. We sent 185 links at Time 1 and Time 2 surveys one week after the Time 1 deadline. We received useable, time-matched data from 164 participants (88% response rate). The sample was college educated (85.4%) and employed in white-collar positions (i.e. lawyer, accounting, administration). Males formed 45% of the sample which

averaged 44 years of age ( $M = 44.26$ ,  $SD = 11.56$ ), and six years of company tenure ( $M = 5.92$ ,  $SD = 4.21$ ).

### Measurement

We measured all constructs on a seven-point response format ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (7). We used similar measures across samples.

*Work passion.* We measured work passion using the four-item scale developed by [McAllister et al. \(2017\)](#) ( $\alpha = 0.86$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.89$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.86$  – Sample 3). “I’m excited to get to work most days” is a scale item.

*Ego-resilience.* We measured ER using a modified six-item version of [Block and Kremen’s \(1996\)](#) scale, developed and validated by [Smith et al. \(2008\)](#) ( $\alpha = 0.73$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.71$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.77$  – Sample 3). “When surprised by something, I get over the shock quickly” is a scale item.

*Job satisfaction.* We measured job satisfaction using [Brayfield and Rothe’s \(1951\)](#) six-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.85$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.89$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.90$  – Sample 3). “I consider my job rather unpleasant” (reversed coded) is a scale item.

*Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB).* We used a three-item scale developed by [Smith et al. \(1983\)](#) to measure OCBs ( $\alpha = 0.77$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.81$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.84$  – Sample 3). “I help others who have heavy workloads” is a scale item.

*Job tension.* We measured tension using [House and Rizzo’s \(1972\)](#) 6-item scale ( $\alpha = 0.81$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.89$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.90$  – Sample 3). “My job tends to directly affect my health” is a scale item.

*Emotional exhaustion.* We measured emotional exhaustion with six items from [Maslach and Jackson’s \(1981\)](#) scale ( $\alpha = 0.88$  – Sample 1;  $\alpha = 0.83$  – Sample 2;  $\alpha = 0.90$  – Sample 3). “I feel emotionally drained from my work” is a scale item.

### Data analysis

We conducted hierarchical moderated regression analyses ([Cohen et al., 2003](#)) to examine the interactive work passion–ER relationship. We included age, gender, and organizational tenure as control variables in the first step, given their documented associations with work-related outcomes ([Hochwarter et al., 2007](#)). The second step included the main effect terms for work passion and ER. Recent research theorized (and documented) the potential of passion for showing non-linear effects when examining work outcomes ([Song et al., 2019](#)). Similar arguments for regulation-related constructs also exist ([Chen et al., 2018](#)), given their resource-dependent properties ([Johnson et al., 2018](#)). Provided these documented curvilinear effects, we controlled for nonlinearity in Step 3 to reduce Type 1 Error ([Matuschek and Kliegl, 2018](#)). Last, the last step had the interactive work passion–ER term. All terms were mean-centered.

## Results

We provide descriptive statistics and intercorrelations in [Table 1](#) for all three samples. Bivariate relationships among predictors and outcomes are consistent with earlier research. For example, our reported age and gender relationships with work passion are like those examined earlier ([Astakhova, 2015](#); [McAllister et al., 2017](#)). The ER – emotional exhaustion relationships are comparable to studies conducted across occupations ([Newmeyer et al., 2014](#)), as are passion – job satisfaction associations reported here ([Ho et al., 2011](#)). Relationships among outcome variables are uniform with past studies ([Mackey et al., 2019](#)) and considered modest. To illustrate statistically significant results, we plotted high (i.e. one standard deviation above the mean) and low (i.e. one standard deviation below the mean)



Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Age	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
2. Gender	0.14*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
3. Organizational tenure	0.08*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
4. Work passion	0.15	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
5. Ego-resilience	0.50*	–0.09	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
6. Job satisfaction	0.40*	0.07	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
7. Organizational citizenship behavior	0.44*	–0.01	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
8. Job tension	0.22*	0.14*	0.12*	–	–	–	–	–	–
9. Emotional exhaustion	0.17*	0.21*	0.15*	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>1</sub> <i>M</i>	0.26*	0.19*	0.08	–	–	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>1</sub> <i>SD</i>	0.15*	0.01	0.11*	0.34*	–	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>2</sub> <i>M</i>	0.31*	0.07	0.13*	0.29*	–	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>2</sub> <i>SD</i>	0.32*	0.10	0.09	0.46	–	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>3</sub> <i>M</i>	0.15*	0.07	0.10	0.51*	0.25*	–	–	–	–
Sample <sub>3</sub> <i>SD</i>	0.17*	0.09	0.14*	0.43*	0.19*	–	–	–	–
Means	0.21*	0.04	0.09	0.55*	0.27*	–	–	–	–
Standard deviations	0.16*	0.21*	0.08	0.31*	0.33*	0.39*	–	–	–
Intercorrelations	0.21*	0.07	0.22*	0.37*	0.35*	–0.31*	–	–	–
Sample <sub>1</sub>	0.30*	0.14	0.13	0.39*	0.41*	–0.33*	–	–	–
Sample <sub>2</sub>	0.21*	0.07	0.27*	–0.01	–0.06	–0.13*	0.07	–	–
Sample <sub>3</sub>	0.24*	0.01	0.33*	–0.16*	–0.01	–0.51*	0.02	–	–
Sample <sub>1</sub>	0.11	0.04	0.11	–0.15	–0.01	–0.30*	–0.01	–	–
Sample <sub>2</sub>	–0.05	0.03	0.05	–0.31*	–0.22*	–0.45*	–0.12*	0.54*	–
Sample <sub>3</sub>	–0.10	–0.04	0.02	–0.33*	–0.10	–0.53*	–0.25*	0.51*	–
Sample <sub>1</sub>	–0.10	0.02	–0.12	–0.39*	–0.15	–0.48*	–0.21*	0.49*	–
Sample <sub>2</sub>	41.49	1.49	8.99	5.11	5.21	5.31	5.11	4.04	3.71
Sample <sub>3</sub>	11.36	0.50	7.85	1.21	1.03	1.12	1.15	1.31	1.56
Sample <sub>1</sub>	44.89	1.41	6.12	5.27	5.11	5.01	5.38	3.89	3.51
Sample <sub>2</sub>	8.37	0.50	5.16	1.27	1.13	1.02	1.07	1.21	1.51
Sample <sub>3</sub>	44.26	1.45	5.92	5.16	5.25	5.30	5.33	3.81	3.45
Sample <sub>1</sub>	11.56	0.50	4.21	1.22	0.80	1.18	1.01	1.09	1.31

**Table 1.** Means, standard deviation, and intercorrelations among study variables

**Note(s):** Sample<sub>1</sub>, *N* = 175; Sample<sub>2</sub>, *N* = 130; Sample<sub>3</sub>, *N* = 164. \**p* < 0.05

levels of ER across the range of work passion scores (Stone-Romero and Liakhovitski, 2002) [1].

Table 2 provides standardized regression results for all three samples [2]. Hypothesis 1 theorized that low ER would attenuate the positive effects of work passion on employee job satisfaction. Across all three samples, the work passion–ER cross-product term explained incremental variance in job satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.14, 0.18, \text{ and } 0.19$ , respectively). For Sample 1, the slope for the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.27, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was non-significant [ $0.02, ns$ ]). For Sample 2 (Figure 1, left), the slope for the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.17, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was negative and significant [ $-0.15, p < 0.05$ ]). For Sample 3 (Figure 1, right), the slope of the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.19, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was non-significant [ $0.03, ns$ ]). Thus, we found support for Hypothesis 1 across all three samples.

Hypothesis 2 theorized that low ER would attenuate the positive effects of work passion on employee OCBs. The work passion—ER cross-product term explained incremental variance in OCB across all three samples ( $\beta = 0.12, 0.25, \text{ and } 0.19$ , respectively). For Sample 1, the slope for the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.23, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group

	Job satisfaction $\beta$			Organizational citizenship behavior $\beta$			Job tension $\beta$			Emotional exhaustion $\beta$		
	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>	S <sub>1</sub>	S <sub>2</sub>	S <sub>3</sub>
<i>Step 1</i>												
Age		0.01	0.01	0.01	0.03**	0.03**	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.09
Gender	0.13	0.20	0.06	0.44**	0.14	0.21	0.21	0.06	0.07	0.17	-0.08	0.08
Org. Tenure	0.01	0.02	0.01	0.05	0.01	-0.01	0.04**	0.07*	0.02	0.02	0.01	-0.04
$\Delta R^2$	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.06	0.09	0.08	0.09	0.07	0.02	0.01	0.00	0.02
<i>Step 2</i>												
Work Passion	0.51**	0.61**	0.57**	0.19**	0.17*	0.21**	-0.07	-0.28**	-0.21*	-0.39**	-0.45**	-0.51**
Ego-Resilience	0.03	0.15*	-0.10	0.34**	0.28**	0.30**	-0.18*	-0.02	0.03	-0.27*	-0.03	0.06
$\Delta R^2$	0.28**	0.27**	0.21**	0.13**	0.10**	0.14*	0.02*	0.08**	0.03*	0.12**	0.15**	0.16**
<i>Step 3</i>												
Work Passion <sup>2</sup>	0.09**	0.15**	0.12**	0.10**	0.13**	0.12**	-0.06	-0.02	-0.05	-0.12*	-0.16*	-0.21**
Ego-Resilience <sup>2</sup>	-0.07	-0.07	0.04	-0.04	-0.02	0.01	0.03	0.12	-0.10	-0.01	0.10	0.01
$\Delta R^2$	0.03**	0.06**	0.04**	0.04**	0.05**	0.05**	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.02*	0.03*	0.05**
<i>Step 4</i>												
Work Passion x Ego-Resilience	0.14**	0.18**	0.18*	0.12*	0.25**	0.15*	-0.18**	-0.12	-0.05	-0.30**	-0.33**	-0.25*
$\Delta R^2$	0.03**	0.03**	0.02*	0.02*	0.04**	0.02*	0.03**	0.01	0.00	0.03**	0.04**	0.02*

Note(s): \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$

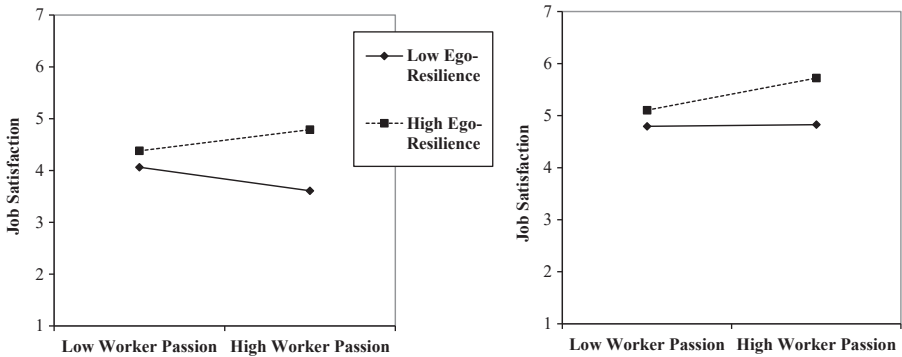
**Table 2.**  
Results of hierarchical  
regression results

was non-significant [ $-0.01, ns$ ]. For Sample 2 (Figure 2, left), the slope for the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.18, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was non-significant [ $0.01, ns$ ]). For Sample 3 (Figure 2, right), the slope of the high ER group was positive and significant ( $0.20, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was non-significant [ $0.05, ns$ ]). Overall, findings support Hypothesis 2.

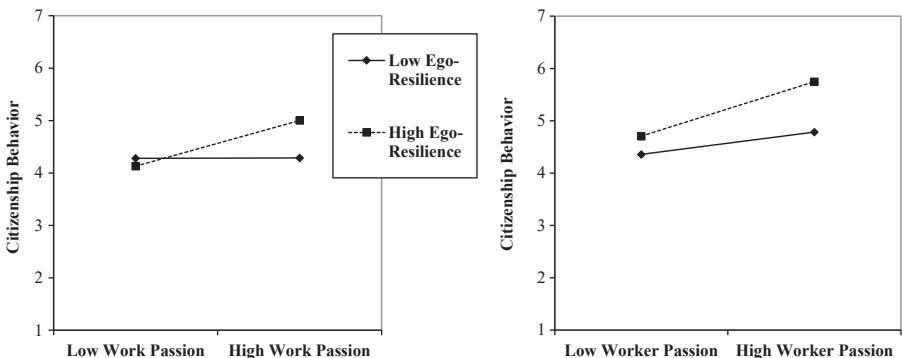
Hypothesis 3 theorized that low ER would exacerbate the adverse effects of work passion on employee job tension. The cross-product work passion-ER term only explained incremental variance in job tension in Sample 1 ( $\beta = -0.18$ ). The effects in Samples 2 and 3 were not significant ( $\beta = -0.12$  and  $-0.05$ , respectively). In Sample 1 (Figure 3), where ER did serve as a significant moderator, the slope for the high ER group was negative and significant ( $-0.17, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was positive and significant [ $0.16, p < 0.05$ ]). Thus, the results of Hypothesis 3 were inconclusive.

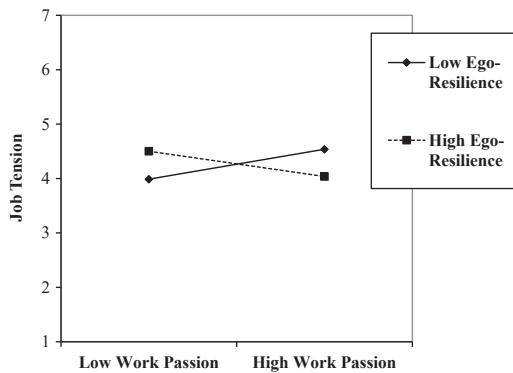
Lastly, Hypothesis 4 theorized that low ER would worsen the negative effects of work passion on employee emotional exhaustion. The work passion-ER cross-product term explained incremental variance in emotional exhaustion across all three samples ( $\beta = -0.30, -0.33, \text{ and } -0.25$ , respectively). For Sample 1, the slope for the high ER group was negative and significant ( $-0.19, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was positive and significant [ $0.18, p < 0.05$ ]). For Sample 2 (Figure 4, left), the slope for the high ER group was negative and significant ( $-0.15, p < 0.05$ ; the low ER group was positive and significant [ $0.18, p < 0.05$ ]). For Sample 3 (Figure 4, right), the slope for the high ER group was negative and significant

**Figure 1.**  
The interactive effects of work passion and ego-resilience on job satisfaction (Sample 2 and Sample 3)

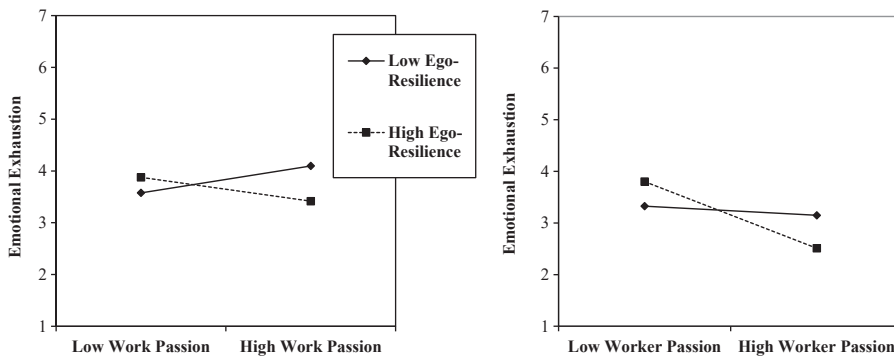


**Figure 2.**  
The interactive effects of work passion and ego-resilience on organizational citizenship behaviors (Sample 2 and Sample 3)





**Figure 3.**  
The interactive effects  
of work passion and  
ego-resilience on job  
tension (Sample 1)



**Figure 4.**  
The interactive effects  
of work passion and  
ego-resilience on  
emotional exhaustion  
(Sample 2 and  
Sample 3)

( $-0.23, p < 0.01$ ; the low ER group was not significant [ $0.18, p < 0.05$ ]). Thus, we documented support for [Hypothesis 4](#) across samples.

We examined variance inflation (VIF) and tolerance (TOL) scores to assess method effects. Across samples, VIF and TOL's mean values for model predictors were 1.54 and 0.51, respectively. These scores suggest little evidence of multicollinearity when compared to established benchmarks (e.g. VIF <10; TOL >0.10) ([Tabachnick and Fidell, 2001](#)).

## Discussion

Prior research suggests that passion is a crucial predictor of workplace outcomes ([Pollack et al., 2020](#)). However, these studies also reported that passion could be a double-edged sword (e.g. [Li et al., 2019](#)), having positive and initiative-taking effects for some people and destructive implications for others. By examining the impact of ER on the relationship between work passion and employee work outcomes, we added this body of research by examining *why* some people who feel passionate about their work react positively. In contrast, others find that heightened passion does not have its intended effect. We draw on ego depletion theory and the job demands-resources theory, arguing that employees (a) who couple passion with ER report positive attitudinal, behavioral, and well-being outcomes and (b) who are low in ER do not experience comparable effects when passion exists at heightened levels.

*Theoretical contributions*

We extend the work passion literature by examining ER as an employee-specific boundary condition of the relationship between work passion and essential work outcomes, including job satisfaction, OCB, job tension, and emotional exhaustion. In doing so, we answer calls to study unique moderators of passion–employee outcome relationships, including those associated with displaying personal motivations (Ho *et al.*, 2018). By focusing on a self-regulatory variable as a moderator, our research also aligns with recent theorizing that positive outcomes of passion are driven by *internalization* elements (Pollack *et al.*, 2020).

Second, passion’s “dark side” is still misunderstood (Perrewé *et al.*, 2014; Pollack *et al.*, 2020). Utilizing ER as a boundary condition, we showed that well-intentioned work passion is not always productive and can often backfire (McAllister *et al.*, 2017). Specifically, we found that low ER attenuated the positive effects of work passion on job satisfaction and OCBs and exacerbated the harmful effects of work passion on emotional exhaustion. Additionally, we document several crossover interactions. Specifically, under conditions of high passion and low (high) ER, the work passion–job satisfaction (Sample 2) relationship is negative (positive), and the work passion–job tension (Sample 1), and the work passion–emotional exhaustion (Sample 1 and Sample 2) relationships are positive (negative). This research confirms that ER may function as an explanatory mechanism that distinguishes between positive, neutral, and negative employee work outcomes (Ho and Astakhova, 2019).

Third, passion can deplete personal resources, given the intensity and proactiveness involved with passion-driven activities (Perrewé *et al.*, 2014). For this reason, researchers emphasize the importance of capturing context-specific forms of passion when examining empirical relationships. Following such suggestions, we focus solely on *work* passion – a strong emotional predisposition for one’s job – allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how passion manifests in the workplace. We contribute to research by linking ego-depletion (Baumeister *et al.*, 2007) and the job demands-resources theories (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017), highlighting the synergies between the two and their collective impacts on employee work outcomes.

Fourth, although not hypothesized, we also document non-linear associations between passion and essential work outcomes. Hence, we advance theory (Edwards and Berry, 2010) in the work passion literature by further showing a “too-much-of-a-good-thing” effect of work passion (Pierce and Aguinis, 2013). More specifically, we found that job satisfaction ( $b$ ’s = 0.09, 0.15, and 0.12, across samples 1–3, respectively) and OCB ( $b$ ’s = 0.10, 0.13, and 0.12, across samples 1–3, respectively) demonstrated U-shaped relationships. Specifically, passion was most favorable at elevated levels and less positive at moderate levels. Also, passion’s ( $\beta$ ’s =  $-0.12$ ,  $-0.15$ , and  $-0.21$ , across samples 1–3, respectively) effect on emotional exhaustion modeled an inverted-U form, such that high and low levels of passion were more beneficial than moderate levels. It is not surprising that less passion is associated with lower reports of exhaustion. However, the finding that elevated levels of passion are associated with less exhaustion is noteworthy. Although several potential explanations exist, it is conceivable that elevated levels of passion allow workers to shape their environment through job crafting or other resource-accruing efforts (Lavigne *et al.*, 2014).

Fifth, prior meta-analytic studies (Pollack *et al.*, 2020) have noted a lack of research linking passion to important outcomes (e.g. OCBs and emotional exhaustion). In this paper, we examine the relationship between work passion and a variety of attitudinal (i.e. job satisfaction), behavioral (i.e. OCBs), and well-being outcomes (i.e. job tension and emotional exhaustion). Thus, our inclusion of various dependent variables allows us to contribute to the literature by showing the differential effects work passion can have on different outcomes. This research addresses Pollacks *et al.*’s (2020) call and may help future meta-analyses glean more information about the impact of work passion on workplace outcomes.

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Lastly, to address concerns regarding the replicability of empirical results, we develop a three-study convergent package to evaluate our hypotheses (Freese and Peterson, 2017). In contrast, operational replications seek exact duplication. Our studies employ different sampling designs and methodologies across samples, allowing for a more robust test of associations (Finkel *et al.*, 2016) and the establishment of greater generalizability (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2011).

#### *Practical implications*

Our findings also offer practical implications for organizations interested in selecting and developing passionate employees. Given the importance of ER on work passion–outcome relationships, organizations should train leaders to find out when a passionate employee is experiencing low levels of ER. If they can identify these signs, they may intervene before employees experience the adverse outcomes of ego depletion. Furthermore, highly passionate employees who are self-aware may be better able to realize when they are experiencing ego depletion and can step away from a situation until they can recuperate their resources and evaluate alternative courses of action. This self-awareness may reduce the negative impacts of ego depletion on work outcomes. Organizations should consider self-awareness when interviewing, developing, and promoting employees due to its favorable effects on coping (Manning-Geist *et al.*, 2020).

Human resource departments can also provide employee training programs to cope with stress, threats, and work-life imbalance. These training programs may teach employees critical coping skills and provide the resources necessary to reduce the negative implications of passion at work. Overall, it is essential that organizations fully consider and evaluate the impacts of dramatic changes in employees' work environments. Ego depletion, because of change, can have debilitating costs for employees. It may cause individuals who were once happy, passionate, and engaged workers to experience adverse health outcomes such as emotional exhaustion or job tension that may eventually result in worker turnover. Thus, organizations must evaluate how these changes will affect their passionate employees and consider these impacts (when possible) before making extensive modifications or generalizations across contexts.

Lastly, our results have implications for careers in ever-dynamic work environments. More workers are opting for "gig work," where internal motivation is considered a prerequisite for success (Zaman *et al.*, 2020). Hence, the initiative-taking aspects of gig work imply a heightened level of passion. An essential first step for gig workers and leaders in organizations that previously employed these employees would be to determine "passion for what?" (e.g. pay, autonomy and creativity). Non-traditional work settings may be more accepting of an individual's ER variations and deficiencies (Ashford *et al.*, 2018) for those across a range of passion displays compared to contexts with less tolerance. Organizations have encouraged gig participation by failing to adopt a holistic approach to employee development (Maddox and Creech, 2022). Perhaps this reality has been partially responsible for the employee shortages across industries in the post-pandemic world (Alexander and Johnson, 2021; Roy, 2022).

#### *Strengths, limitations, and future research*

We recognize that there are potential limitations in this study. One inherent limitation is that we measured all variables from the employees' perspective. We addressed this issue using *a priori* procedural and statistical approaches to lessen the effect of method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Further, Sample 3 employed time-separated data, validating our findings' causal nature. Because passion deals with intense emotional and identity attachments to an activity, and ER and self-regulation are limited resources, reviewing



how they interact over time using repeated designs provides added insight. Lastly, we conducted our analyses with and without individual differences, including affectivity. As noted, results were analogous in both sets of analyses. Previous research suggests that considering affectivity (predominantly negative affectivity) is a legitimate approach to circumvent method concerns (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2006; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012).

Although our study documents between-person associations between work passion and ER, future studies may want to use experience sampling methodologies to examine within-person differences (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022). Specifically, research should focus on how work passion and ER change throughout the workday or week and the consequences of those changes for employee outcomes each day. One exciting context to study this phenomenon is the shift from traditional to remote work settings in coronavirus's wake (COVID-19). With COVID-19, working professionals experienced great uncertainty which changed virtually all aspects of the job (e.g. working from home and managing childcare duties while working). Individuals passionate about their jobs, but lack ER, may experience more difficulties and may be more predisposed to experience adverse health-related outcomes in stress in less-structured work environments. Conversely, individuals who are high in ER may be better able to cope with the changing nature of their job demands.

Our study focused exclusively on work passion and ER on various work outcomes. However, another promising line of research is examining potential mediators of these relationships. Thus, future studies also may want to consider explanatory variables that can better explain the processes through which passion impacts outcomes. Other avenues for future research also can pertain to measures of passion, where passion is directed, and non-linear relationships with moderators and outcomes (Hochwarter *et al.*, 2022; Jordan *et al.*, 2019).

Lastly, we examined a modest subset of employee outcomes while examining the passion–ER interaction. In this initial research, we examined outcomes within the employee's control and those that were best capable of accurately reporting (Ferris *et al.*, 2009). In doing so, we support Kohn and Schooler (1973), who argued, “[T]he method is useful. . . for studying the immediate characteristics of a man's own job – what he does, who determines how he does it, in what physical and social circumstances he works, subject to what risks and rewards” (p. 99). Others require attention to develop a richer understanding of passion's positive, neutral, and adverse effects. Job performance is a logical extension given its wide-ranging appeal to scholars and decision-makers. If adopted, we recommend that scholars consider self- and other-report indices to identify similarities in perceptions and factors that cause discrepancies (Bailey *et al.*, 2020).

## Conclusion

Work passion represents an essential construct in the organizational sciences. Despite earlier research contributions noted here and elsewhere (Smith *et al.*, 2022), important questions remain unanswered. We took a self-regulatory perspective to explain *when* work passion leads to less favorable employee outcomes. Specifically, we position ER as an essential self-regulatory coping mechanism that can illuminate conditions under which work passion produces neutral and dark-side consequences. Overall, opportunities to provide essential discussions for practitioners and scholars exist. We hope this research will stimulate further scholarly work examining work passion's positive, neutral, and negative implications.

## Notes

1. Interactive effects were comparable across the three samples. We provide visual depictions of specific interactive effects (all additional figures are available upon request).
2. Consistent with recent discussions (Becker *et al.*, 2016), we conducted analyses with and without controls. Results without controls were broadly comparable and are available upon request.

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