

# Entrepreneurship and Competitive Dog Sports

Brenda A. Riemer, Eastern Michigan University  
Erica J. Zonder, Adrian College  
Jeanne L. Thomas, Eastern Michigan University

## **Abstract**

*Entrepreneurs are inherently innovative, in that they shape their business -- and perhaps even create a market niche (Kumar, 2007). The present study explored motivations of women entrepreneurs in a specific arena -- competitive dog sports -- in the context of the economic recession in the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Eight entrepreneurs were interviewed for the study. Five themes emerged from the interview transcripts: "Entrepreneur as participant", "entrepreneur as a secondary income", "deliberation versus plunge", "entrepreneurship and family", and "growth and maintenance in a recession". The participants also indicated that for them to be successful entrepreneurs, they needed to be successful in the sport, or at least participate in it. In that way, she was an insider to the sport and thus understood the businesses environment; to be successful she had to have credibility with her potential market.*

## **Introduction**

Entrepreneurs are individuals who are self-employed: they create a business, organize and manage it, and promote it. In short, entrepreneurs assume overall responsibility for their business (Segal, Borgia, & Schoenfeld, 2005). Entrepreneurs are inherently innovative, in that they shape their business -- and perhaps even create a market niche (Kumar, 2007). Numerous researchers have considered the motivation to become entrepreneurs (e.g. Ardichvili, Cardozo, & Ray, 2003; Berthold & Neumann, 2008; Stewart & Roth, 2007; Segal, Borgia & Schoenfeld, 2005). Goals cited in the literature include financial gain, and flexibility in committing time and effort to both work and family. The present study explored motivations of women entrepreneurs in a specific arena -- competitive dog sports -- in the context of the economic recession in the United States in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Kumar (2007) proposed that individuals typically experience varied emotional triggers for becoming an entrepreneur. These varied emotional triggers can "push" and "pull" an individual towards becoming an entrepreneur. For example, an individual might dislike her current job and want to leave it (push), want to have an outlet for creativity and initiative (pull), find her current commuting routine boring and draining (push), and see an unmet business market that matches her talent and resources (pull). Some triggers may threaten career identity, such as being laid-off or overlooked for promotion. There may also be negative emotional responses (e.g., fear of risk-taking; worry about financial uncertainty) towards the prospect of starting a business. Typically, these emotional vectors vary in intensity. The balance among all emotional triggers is one factor determining willingness to become an entrepreneur.

Kumar (2007) also considered self-efficacy, defined as "the belief one has in being able to execute a specific task to obtain a certain outcome" (Moritz, Feltz, Fahrback, & Mack, 2000, 280). Self-efficacy is a predictor of achievement motivation: an individual with high self-efficacy is likely to approach a challenge and work to master it (Feltz, Short, & Sullivan, 2007). Furthermore, high self-efficacy is associated with motivation to start a business (Segal, Borgia,

and Schoenfeld, 2005). One predictor of self-efficacy is an individual's past experience at a task. For example, entrepreneurial skills can be learned when an individual grows up in a family business (Krueger, 1993). It has also been theorized that participating in competitive sports can also increase an individual's self-efficacy in an entrepreneurial setting (Neergaard & Krueger, 2012). Although self-efficacy is a powerful influence, it is not the only psychological construct linked to entrepreneurial motivation.

Stewart and Roth (2007) conducted a meta-analysis to distinguish the achievement motivation of entrepreneurs as compared to managers. Entrepreneurs and managers were compared because "there is a general consensus that, at a minimum, an entrepreneur is someone who independently owns and actively manages a small business" (p. 403). In contrast, a manager, while responsible for a business's smooth operation, is not an owner of the business. The meta-analysis indicated "that entrepreneurs are moderately higher in achievement motivation than are managers" (p. 411). Using the Five Factor Model of personality, Stewart and Roth (2007) also identified conscientiousness as the factor most important in distinguishing entrepreneurs from managers; thus, entrepreneurs were relatively hardworking, ambitious, energetic, and persevering.

Stewart and Roth (2007) also recognized the need to understand situational factors influencing entrepreneurial behavior. These factors include economic opportunities and trends, and industry conditions. These authors assert that both robust and challenging economic contexts can motivate individuals to start a business. According to the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012), the unemployment rate in the United States was at 8.2% as of March 2012, a decrease from 8.9% in October 2011. Other indicators of economic vitality include job gains, growth in manufacturing, and relatively low levels of inflation. At the same time, housing prices remain low, and hiring rates slowed in 2012 (CNN Money, 2012). Petrova (2010) also discussed situational factors. Petrova created a model to determine if part time entrepreneurs were affected by financial constraint. Her findings indicated that "wealth does not significantly affect the propensity to become an entrepreneur" (p. 487).

Douglas (2013) proposed a model for entrepreneurial intention. This model included the opportunity (income, autonomy), the individual (attitudes, means), new venture orientation (growth, independence), and comparison with other opportunities. These variables influence the motivation to create a business opportunity. Douglas proposed that entrepreneurs will often choose to pursue opportunities that offer them the right "combination of income, autonomy, risk, work effort and work enjoyment" (p. 2). He also emphasized that the variables will be different depending if the entrepreneur is involved with a high-growth or low-growth venture. Specifically, if the individual has the means to begin a business and the opportunity, and the orientation of the person is geared towards new venture orientation (for example, the lifestyle), and then the individual may compare the idea of new venture orientation with other job opportunities. Given that comparison, if the person has motivation for the new opportunity, he or she will set up and launch the new business venture. One variable that was not included in this model was gender.

There are gender differences in entrepreneurial success, with several researchers noting that men are more successful entrepreneurs (e.g.: DeMartino & Barbato, 2003; Fairlie & Robb, 2009; Ahl, 2006). In these comparisons, entrepreneurial success was typically defined as increased business, which includes business size and profit margin. However, women business owners may simply have different business goals as compared to those of their male counterparts (Fairlie & Robb, 2009). Women, more often than men, report that their business is

a secondary income, and that their business goals are nonfinancial as well as financial (Fairlie & Robb, 2009).

As noted above, a common measure of entrepreneurial success is company size and growth plans. However, Cliff (1998) found no difference between expansion goals of male and female entrepreneurs. Many were comfortable with the size of their business, and did not plan to expand. Perhaps these entrepreneurs aspire to be a “small giant” rather than expand profits – thus not faring as well as growing businesses when these traditional measures of success are used. A “small giant” focuses on excelling in a dimension important to the owner (e.g., customer service, employee satisfaction, community contributions) rather than growing in size and profitability (Burlingham, 2007).

The motivation for starting a business may be different for women and men. The United States has the most restrictive family leave policies as compared to ten peer nations (Waldfoegel, 2001). According to DeMartino & Barbato, 2003, women with children are more likely to start a business than those who do not have children; being a business owner offers greater flexibility in dividing time between work and family than do most other career options. The ability to maintain an optimal work-family balance was the most important consideration for the women in this study. Men in the study, in contrast, rated such flexibility lowest among a set of possible motivations such as wealth creation or advancement (DeMartino & Barbato, 2003).

Ahl (2006) called for a new direction in research on women’s entrepreneurship. Her poststructuralist feminist review of entrepreneurial articles concluded that the term “entrepreneur” was implicitly defined as masculine. Ahl posits that entrepreneur is a masculine concept based on the male pronoun being predominantly used in the pre-1980s literature (before gender neutral terms were encouraged), and when considered in the framework of Bem’s (1974) Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Although the BSRI is rarely used today, the assumed masculinity of the term entrepreneur by researchers has led to assumptions that there are gender differences between female and male entrepreneurs. However, Ahl’s (2006) review identified minimal differences in these variables when the terms related to entrepreneurship were not assumed to be masculine (such as “has leadership abilities” and “ambitious”).

Entrepreneurs are assumed to have goals of increased earnings and growth for their business over time. Growth intentions refer to an entrepreneur’s preference for how large a business will grow. While it has been assumed that males have higher aspirations for their new business ventures, one variable has received little attention in the literature. Age, when intersecting with gender, influences high growth intentions. Davis and Shaver (2012) used life course theory to determine how life stages influenced entrepreneurial aspirations for females and males. Over one thousand female and male entrepreneurs participated in the study, and their ages ranged from 18 to retirement. The findings determined that young males with no experience had the highest growth intentions of all the participants, while females who were parents had high growth intentions. Interestingly, if only a gender analysis had been conducted, the results would have indicated that males had higher growth aspirations. This differs from previous studies which determined that there was a difference in high growth intentions between genders. A life course theory perspective indicates that it is young men who are different from other men and women.

Employer attitudes also have an effect on employees. Even in the contemporary United States, corporate attitudes include assumptions that women prioritize family over career, that women cannot be successful beyond a certain point in the corporate ladder (e.g., “the glass ceiling”),



biases in conducting performance evaluations, and the types of rewards available for success (e.g., promotion to positions of higher responsibility and income, longer hours, and greater stress) (Heilman & Chen, 2003). Heilman and Chen stated that women “are often not placed in the visible and demanding jobs that provide a conduit up the organizational ladder” (p. 351). Not hiring women for these positions both reflects and shapes the perception that these employees cannot be leaders. Becoming an entrepreneur may be a rational reaction to this attitudinal context, as one’s own business offers opportunities for visibility, and potential success, that working for others may not.

The United States’ economy is divided into sectors, based on the United States Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/econ/isp/>). Sport (professional, amateur, and recreational) spans at least eight sectors of the economy (Howard & Crompton, 2004), including construction, manufacturing, wholesale trade, retail trade, real estate rental and leasing, educational services, arts, entertainments, & recreation, and professional services (Eschenfelder & Li, 2006). It was estimated in the late 1990s that the sport and fitness industry was a \$213 to \$560 billion industry (Howard & Crompton, 2004). Within sport, the professional services sector was estimated to be \$14.03 billion of the industry.

Until 2005, the sport industry was profitable. Even with the late 2000’s economic downturn, entrepreneurs continue to create new opportunities in this sector. The sport and fitness industry encompasses many entrepreneurial avenues, including fitness consultants who advise individuals “on the latest fitness trends, training regimes, injury prevention, and nutritional programs; or assist organizations that require specialized project-based work in marketing, event management, organizational development, and program evaluation (Rehman & Frisby, 2000, p. 42).

Women in this industry enter entrepreneurship with various motivations. Rehman and Frisby’s (2000) found that women sport/fitness entrepreneurs were motivated by the desire for greater financial rewards, and the wish to seize an opportunity, as well as dissatisfaction with their prior employment. As in Helman and Chen’s (2003) work, these women did not aspire to expand their business; rather, they worked to gain repeat business, make social contributions, and balance work and other interests (including family). Because these women were primary family caregivers, this flexibility was important. These women entrepreneurs created work-family synergies that allowed them to attend to both work and family, while male entrepreneurs received support for their work from their family (Eddleston & Powell, 2012). What researchers do not know at this time is the motivation and support of entrepreneurs in non-traditional sports, such as competitive dog sports.

### ***Entrepreneurship and sport***

Rattan (2011) proposed a theory of entrepreneurship and sport management. In this seminal article, Rattan explained how entrepreneurship is “an integral part of sports management” (Rattan, p. 58). Rattan emphasized that the essential characteristics of sport entrepreneurship are “innovation, proactiveness, and risk-taking.” Rattan further explained these characteristics through examples of sport organizations. Sport entrepreneurs in this context demonstrate innovation by being able to foresee changes such as technological advances. They are proactive in their use to corporate social responsibility, and take risks when they sign players and purchase franchises. One area of entrepreneurship that Rattan discussed was “women’s entrepreneurship.” She emphasized that this occurs when women are involved in the innovation of business.

Rattan (2011) emphasized the dynamic aspects of sport entrepreneurship. The aspects included a business strategy, crisis management, new sport development, performance management, product innovation, promotional strategies, social issues, sustainability concerns, and technological developments. Rattan's aspects of sport entrepreneurship may apply to individuals in non-traditional sports.

An example of non-traditional sports is competitive dog sport. Similar to other sports, competitors have official trials where they compete, records are kept, and individuals create businesses to enhance the experience of the competitors. Because the majority of sport management research examines mainstream (or "traditional") sports, the motivation and experiences of entrepreneurs in this sector is unknown.

Pitts, Fielding, and Miller (1994) proposed that the sport industry has three segments: performance, production, and promotion. Competitive dog sport entrepreneurs span all three of these segments. For example, entrepreneurs in this sport include professional trainers who compete (performance), show secretaries (production), and marketing websites (promotion). Although competition dog events span the segments, the entrepreneurs in this area have not been researched. Understanding the motivations of sport entrepreneurs in non-traditional sports is important in order to preserve, and ideally expand, the variety of sporting opportunities available for spectators, participants, and entrepreneurs in contemporary America

### ***Competitive dog sports***

"Competitive dog sports" is an umbrella term that includes obedience, rally obedience, agility, tracking, and field events. This segment of sport is currently expanding, as activities such as Barn Hunt and Nosework emerge. Dog sports vary in the objective of the teamwork, the numbers of humans and dogs per team, entrance eligibility requirements, equipment needed, the level and length of training required and judging criteria. The entrepreneurial opportunities for these sports include "elite performers" (e.g., successful competitors who offer classes, private lessons, and seminars); and companies which take on the role of "show secretary" and process entries for clubs and offer to set up events and provide equipment (e.g., MB-F, Inc., Rau Dog Shows, Ltd., and Roy Jones Dog Shows, Inc.).

Before the 1990s, most individuals belonged to local dog clubs and trained there. Local dog clubs are non-profit businesses where members volunteer to teach classes. Although the time frame is slightly different for different regions of the United States, the movement towards private instruction began in the 1990s and expanded greatly after 2000. This shift has changed the sports of obedience and agility, as private instruction has increased the level of performance. The focus of this study is on "elite performers" who became entrepreneurs to give lessons and seminars. These individuals are, arguably, the true "small giants" who have made a name for themselves in their respective sports.

Competition obedience is one of the oldest and most widely recognized dog sports. "Dog and handler teams are judged on how closely they match the judge's mental picture of a theoretically perfect performance as they execute a series of specified exercises. Accuracy and precision are essential, but the natural movement of the handler and the willingness and enjoyment of the dog are very important"

([http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/what\\_is\\_obedience.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/what_is_obedience.cfm)).

In competition obedience, a dog-handler team completes a standard series of exercises, which are progressively more difficult at each of three levels. The team's performance of each exercise is judged against a standard of perfect execution. Each team's performance is scored; the teams who successfully complete each exercise and earn more than half of the available points for each exercise are recognized as "qualifying" in their class. In each class, special recognition is awarded to the qualifying teams earning the four highest scores. Dog-handler teams work toward earning titles that represent mastery of progressively more difficult exercises.

Agility is an athletic event that requires conditioning, concentration, training and teamwork. Dog and handlers negotiate an obstacle course racing against the clock ([http://www.akc.org/events/agility/what\\_is\\_agility.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/agility/what_is_agility.cfm)). They are judged to ensure that the obstacles are done in the correct order, and that the dog completes all the obstacles properly (for example, not knocking down a jump). Placements are awarded based on having a "clean" run and how fast the dog can run the course. Trainers teach the handlers how to run the courses in the most efficient manner, and how to teach the dogs the obstacles.

At elite levels of competition, dog-handler teams can earn national rankings and opportunities to compete in invitational tournaments. The scoring is similar to gymnastics or diving, as it is subjective and each team begins with a set score. A perfect score in obedience is 200 and is not common. To achieve the highest scores and titles, it is arguably necessary to train with an "elite performer" to earn scores between 198 and 200 in obedience, or clean runs with competitive times in agility. In both obedience and agility, statistics are kept for all competitors through such registries as the American Kennel Club (AKC), United Kennel Club (UKC), and the United States Dog Agility Association (USDAA). Competitors earn titles, and rankings are published every month.

Competitions for obedience and agility are local, regional, and international. The size of each trial depends on the location, and time of year (winter weather can be a concern in some parts of the United States). Some trials have entry limits due to the size of the building and how many judges the club can afford to hire. In 2013, there were 2,670 AKC obedience trials in the United States, with 140,381 entries. There were 3,268 AKC agility entries, with 1,242,000 entries (American Kennel Club Annual Report, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to understand the motivation and goals of entrepreneurs in the arena of competitive dog sports in the contemporary United States. Participants in these activities purchase books, equipment, nutritional supplements, massages and other rehabilitative techniques, videos and DVD's, classes, seminars and workshops, and private lessons to support their activities and improve their performance. In short, competitive dog sports are a viable business opportunity in the United States that attracts entrepreneurs in a variety of business niches. The significance of this study highlights the motivation and goals of entrepreneurs that have success while remaining "small giants."

## **Methodology**

### ***Participants***

Qualitative research and interviews in particular, tend to have fewer participants than a quantitative study. Baker and Edwards (2012) asked respective qualitative researchers how many interviews a qualitative research project should have. The over whelming response was "it

depends” (p. 3). Factors such as access to participants and funding play a role. More important, is the question of does the data derived from the interviews answer the research question. Adler and Adler (in Baker & Edwards, 2012) suggested shooting “for a sample of 12.” Denzin ,in the same publication, answered that one participant can be sufficient. In this study, fourteen competitive dog sport entrepreneurs were contacted by e-mail to determine their interest in participating in the study. The researchers knew three of the entrepreneurs because of their involvement in competitive dog obedience. The other entrepreneurs were contacted due to their reputation. Their e-mail addresses were located in *Front and Finish*, a publication widely read by competitive dog sport participants. The e-mails included an introduction of the lead researcher as a competitive dog show participant and researcher, the purpose of the study, and the consent form.

Eight entrepreneurs responded to the initial query. The participants varied in years of owning their business, type of business, and age. All participants were female. Please see Table 1 for the participants’ demographic information and Table 2 for their sport involvement.

**Table 1:** *Demographic Information*

Name	Age Range	Personal Relationship Status	Years in Current Business (Full Time as of 2015)
Laura R	41-50	Married	10
Debbie H	41-50	Single	3
Adele Y	41-50	Married	15
Elly B	51-60	Divorced	7
Diane B	51-60	Married	25
Connie C	41-50	not answered	25
Gerianne D	51-60	Married	21
Cathi W	51-60	Married	13

**Table 2:** *Sport Involvement*

Name	Sport Entrepreneurship Involvement
Laura R	Obedience
Debbie H	Agility
Adele Y	Obedience
Elly B	Obedience
Diane B	Obedience and Agility
Connie C	Obedience
Gerianne D	Obedience and Agility
Cathi W	Obedience and Agility

### ***The interviews***

Semi-structured interviews were conducted either in person or by telephone by the lead researcher. The participants interviewed in person were given a copy of the consent form to sign before the interview. Participants interviewed by phone received the consent form via email before the interview, and e-mailed the consent form back with the signature portion typed in and dated prior to the interview.



Every participant could choose to use a pseudonym for the interview, or waive confidentiality and use their actual name and business name. All chose to use their actual name/business name and signed the portion of the consent form stating their choice. Participants could also choose not to be taped, and/or to stop the taping process at any time. None chose either of these options.

The in-person interviews were conducted in various locations, including homes, training facilities, and restaurants. All locations were chosen by the participants. Phone interviews were scheduled according to the participant's convenience. One phone interview was rescheduled due to a participant having a last minute conflict. None were cancelled and not rescheduled. Interviews ranged from 30 to 90 minutes in length.

### ***Interview structure***

The interview began with two background information questions about the business. Participants were asked for the name and type of business, and for how many years they had owned the business. Broad questions guided the remainder of the interview, with follow up questions posed as needed. The broad questions included the participant's initial involvement in competitive dog sports, the type of work they did before they became entrepreneurs, their motivation for and transition to starting their business, and their plans for the future of their business.

### ***Data analysis***

The taped interviews were transcribed by the lead researcher. After the transcriptions were completed, each participant received their transcription and was asked to make any comments or changes on the document. The only changes made were either changes to a dog's name or the spelling of a word. None of the participants added information to their transcription.

Once the corrections were made in the transcription, the lead researcher gave the other researchers copies of each transcript. All researchers read the transcripts and noted interview themes in the data independently of one another. Once this process was completed, the researchers compared notes and discussed the themes.

This method of reviewing the data is one way to determine validity in a qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Barker & Pistrang, 2005). Specifically, the consensus between the researchers and member checks are extremely important when analyzing qualitative data. Once the researchers agreed upon themes, the data were compared to the literature on entrepreneurs.

### **Results and Discussion**

Reviews of the interview transcripts revealed five themes: "entrepreneur as participant", "entrepreneur as a secondary income", "deliberation versus plunge", "entrepreneurship and family", and "growth and maintenance in a recession". The participants also indicated that for them to be successful entrepreneurs, they needed to be successful in the sport, or at least participate in it. In that way, she was an insider to the sport and thus understood its businesses environment; to be successful she had to have credibility with her potential market.



### ***Theme 1: Entrepreneur as participant***

All of participants were successful exhibitors in obedience and/or agility; they had all earned prestigious titles such as Obedience Trial Champion and Master Agility Champion. Many also participated and had titled dogs in events such as herding, field trials, tracking, and conformation. Laura commented, “I just wanted to talk dogs, talk dog training, be with dog training people, do dog training. You know, that’s all I wanted to think about.” Connie started showing dogs when she was eight years old and has never stopped, and Diane commented that she needed a place to train, so she taught lessons to pay for the rent of the building. For most participants, their competitive success contributed to the success of their businesses. Diane commented that her business grew because of her success in the ring:

Once you start winning, everybody wants to know what you are doing. [Seminars] evolved in about 2 to 3 years and it evolved quickly because at that time the Gaines and Pupperoni events [author note: obedience tournaments] were very popular and I was winning a lot of them. So I was getting known on a large scale very quickly.

Gerianne’s comments were similar to Diane’s when she discussed her top 10 “dog of a lifetime,” who earned her lots of attention:

Someone said would you do a seminar? I never looked back. I was very hot in the 1990s and it was real fun to be famous for a while. It comes and goes.

It makes intuitive sense that competitors would want to learn from more successful competitors. But the participants stressed that training your own dog and competing successfully is not the same as teaching others to train and compete successfully.

Gail really encouraged me to teach pretty quickly. I’m still not sure why, just because you can train a dog doesn’t mean you can train people. For some reason Gail pushed me into it **strongly** (her emphasis)...And when I started the business I didn’t have a UD yet, I had a leg or two, but I didn’t have the title yet....But I also just love teaching. And I found I have something of a knack for it. (Adele)

Competitive dog sport entrepreneurs can be compared to entrepreneurs in other industries. Wadhwa, Aggarwal, Holly, and Salkever (2009) determined that 75.4% of the entrepreneurs they surveyed had worked at companies in the same business sector before starting their own business. For the participants in this study, training their own dogs and understanding how to be successful in the sport was their background; none had formal education in business.

### ***Theme 2: Entrepreneurship as a secondary income***

The strongest theme to emerge was “entrepreneurship as a secondary income.” Six of the eight participants described their business as involving less risk than it would have if it had been the main income for their family. For example, when asked if she had a fear about jumping into something new, Cathi responded:

Well, not really. As far as just doing it, not a big deal. It’s not that I opened my own store or business and put my shingle out. I just started doing this on the side, I did a lot of work for [business name]. I wasn’t that worried that much about the income because

my husband has a decent job. So you know, I wasn't worried that I wouldn't be able to pay the rent....

Gerianne also stated that it was easy for her since her husband had a successful business at the time. When asked at the end of the interview if she had anything to add, Gerianne elaborated on this theme with:

You are fortunate if you are not paying the rent. I probably could have if I needed to. Never pursued the pet market. You have to have something that people want. You can't just say I want to train people's dogs when you yourself don't have something that people want or emulate. I've never done much advertising.

These responses are consistent with Fairlie and Robb's (2009) research, in which women were more likely than men to own a business as a secondary income. However, the business status as a secondary income did not mean that it was not economically viable; rather, it meant that there was less risk in the transition than if it had been a primary income. In fact, most participants said that their business income could be the primary household income.

Debbie's transition took longer than the other participants primarily because she did not have another primary source of income. Debbie was working for a company that relocated, and she did not want to move to the new location. She had been making a good salary, and she did extensive research into the prospect of partnering with someone who had an established business. As she related:

This was a major decision for me. I had never not had a paycheck coming in every week. You know, and then to move to this ambiguous we don't know how much you are going to get paid or when you will get paid but we think you're going to get paid. This was not a theory I was ever raised to be comfortable with....It was a huge, a huge decision. I came to the decision that if I don't try this, I will kick myself in the butt.

Debbie took months to reach her decision to become a business partner; after two years, she decided to strike out on her own. She described her two transitions as something that had to happen. "I'm not sure I would have had the **guts** (her emphasis) to go, to not have that step in the middle. You know what I mean"?

Debbie's decision processes reflected Kumar's (2007) push and pull factors. Two other participants described similar vectors; others discussed simply jumping into their business. This dichotomy was the third theme: Deliberation versus Plunge.

### ***Theme 3: Deliberation versus plunge***

Recall that Kumar's (2007) push and pull refer to the dynamic between emotional responses. As described previously, Debbie had a push to leave the traditional corporate setting when she did not wish to relocate with the company. Laura's entrance to entrepreneurship was similar. She had been a computer programmer in the automobile industry and did not like her job. Laura accepted a buyout package, but was then told that she would not be bought out. Laura wanted to leave her job and "was strongly drawn to wanting to do obedience full time (pull)." Once the buyout was removed as an option, her job as a programmer became distasteful (push), and she cut back her hours:

Once I didn't get the buyout package, I quickly realized that my heart totally wasn't in that job anymore. I had no interest in it. I realized I had really mentally committed to the change and so I decided buyout package or no buyout package, I'm doing it anyway. Debbie and Laura deliberated quite a bit before deciding to become entrepreneurs.

Other participants made their decisions quickly. For example, Cathi moved from a salaried position in sales to being an independent contractor in graphic design and photography. Cathi was inspired by a photographer she saw at an agility trial. Recall that Cathi was not worried about jumping into her own business because her husband's income provided support for the family.

Like Cathi, some other participants could decide quickly (plunge) due to their personal circumstances. Ely was retired and recently divorced. With her pension and alimony, she had the freedom and income to start her business. Elly remembered that when she retired she said:

Well what do I want to do? I need to find a new direction here. And a friend of mine at the time had a training facility, a small one, and she said well, why don't you come on here and help me teach classes and then use the building occasionally for a lesson as needed? It was one of those cosmic powers that sort of pushed me in the right direction.

The support Elly had from her friend helped her make the transition. Connie also mentioned how support from a friend helped her to start her business:

I had a lot of very supportive people around me. At first I was running my little business on the side because I needed extra money. It was really the people around me and supporting me that encouraged me to do it....one was a good friend who made it possible for me. His old building was empty. He actually rented me that building, told me I could be Connie Cleveland Inc. and he believed in me and that he would rent me the building for a percentage of my gross. So that made it very easy for me to go into business.

Thus, factors contributing to a short or long transition included primary versus secondary income source, push versus pull factors, and social support. For some, family issues were also a factor in their choice to become an entrepreneur.

#### ***Theme 4: Entrepreneurship and family***

Adele discussed how she was motivated by both her love of teaching and her pregnancy. In Adele's words:

Number one. Our first son was due. I didn't want to put him in day care full time and go back to a full time job. That was a really strong motivator. But I also just love teaching. And found I have something of a knack for it. And um, Fritz was willing to let me, you know, he was glad to have me stay home with Chris and have him a couple of nights a week and be responsible, which in many ways was really valuable for their relationship. And I jumped in with both feet and rented this tiny little hole in the wall building in Belleville. Of course you don't have a lot of students when you first start but that was fine, I didn't have a lot of rent to pay and didn't have much room for very many.

Adele did not find the transition from full time computer work to having her own training business difficult. Once she made up her mind, she was motivated to succeed in her business. She also alluded to flexibility in the interview; the factor of being able to set her hours, hire people to do the tasks she doesn't enjoy, and to have time for her family. Her statement resonates with DeMartino and Barbato's (2003) work, showing that women found greater flexibility between work and family as business owners than as employees.

One reason that Debbie left the partnership to strike out on her own was her discomfort with the terms of the lease that she was asked to co-sign when she was initially a partner in an agility training facility. The lease stated that if the company defaulted, the landlords could seek payment from all heirs, which would have included her retired parents. Debbie stated:

A new lease was negotiated that I was relatively not a part of and it called for a 4 year lease for \$300,000. And a personal guarantee addendum gave the landlords the right and responsibility to go after our heirs if we defaulted at any time...I flat out told her that I can't do that. My parents are retired in Florida. I am not putting their house, their income, their future in jeopardy.

In this situation, Debbie was not looking for flexibility between work and family, but for assurance that her own business decisions would not affect her parents' retirement income.

Another example of how family trajectories intersected with women's entrepreneurial trajectories was Elly's situation: her divorce contributed to her ability to begin teaching, and then to afford the training building that provided the space she needed to succeed.

#### **Theme 5: Growth and maintenance in a recession**

The final theme was growth and maintenance during a recession. None of these entrepreneurs offers a service that consumers *must* have. Training, showing, and purchasing photos of dogs are all discretionary expenditures. However, none of these entrepreneurs experienced decreased business due to the recession. Some, in fact, have created a plan for expansion. People who want to train with Elly are not cutting back. As she stated:

All of our classes, especially my competitive obedience classes, are full to overflowing. I don't have enough hours, because they're mostly evening classes; I'm running out of times to have classes. I limit the size of my classes to 8 people, but even so I'm doing okay and having to turn people away.

Elly continued to discuss her expansion plan. She hopes to expand her building by doubling the size of the working area, and adding another bathroom and a storage and crating room. That expansion would allow her to offer two classes at a time (one that she would teach and a beginning class that another person would teach), or a class and a private lesson, or schedule a fun match (practice show).

Connie currently teaches seminars and obedience classes; she boards dogs at her facility; and she has a published videos and a book. At this time she isn't sure if she wants to continue with all of these initiatives or if she will shift her emphasis within her business. As she said:

I'm exploring this a bit. I have my fingers in a lot of different things...Am I going to want to be on the road in 5 years doing 12 seminars a year? I don't know...The thing that I'm enjoying right now is I'm teaching some on-line classes and some on-line private lessons



through an organization called [x], and it allows me to go into a virtual classroom and watch videos of your dog being trained or performing...That's been such fun for me because I've actually gotten to do lessons with people that I've met at seminars that are just hundreds of miles away that couldn't possibly come for lessons...And I think that's an exciting area to expand into.

Adele hired a business consultant last year; the process of working with the consultant led to her realization that she wants to do more writing and more teaching around the country. Adele has previously published two training books and a training video; she is currently working on an updated edition of the video. She finds now that much of her business runs without her (e.g., classes taught by others; fun matches; building rentals), which gives her the flexibility to try new business ideas. Adele's class enrollments peaked in 2005 and then declined slightly; her class enrollments are now increasing again.

I know my classes are quite a bit smaller than they use to be because there is so much more competition. But as R says, but doesn't it make you feel good because it all started with you? [Laughter]. People have so many choices in our area of where to go....But with my new book last year I did a whole lot more seminars. That's been a big help.

Adele also rents her building for obedience and agility trials which helps to bring in extra income. While Connie, Elly, and Adele have thought about expansion (or changes in the emphasis of their businesses), others expect to maintain their current business plan. Cathi mentioned that more people were buying smaller photos at the shows (versus 8x10s), but that people will still spend the money. As she said:

Recently I just did Christmas photos. I did a whole week and had people signed up for appointments. I was totally booked every moment. [It sounds as though people will still spend the money.] They will. It's really amazing, but they will

Cathi does not want to expand her business if it required extensive travel. She said, "I've actually had a number of people call me to do their national specialty or something. The problem is that I'm not into traveling."

Similar to Cathi, Gerianne and Diane were not looking to expand their businesses. Diane mentioned that people take fewer lessons each month, and that "I can't teach any more than I am. I would like to continue to train apprentices and keep my lesson schedule full." Gerianne is currently working on a new book, but is not planning to expand her business in other areas. Laura echoed Gerianne's comment when she stated:

My business has continued to grow. If I was willing to put more hours into it I could probably do more. But I'm not interested in driving myself crazy....I'm really not interested in trying to do more in the way of classes and lessons. Just simply because it would become a big strain on me time wise. But what I want to do is develop some materials that I can sell like books, tapes, pamphlets, how to. Try to start developing some things that I can sell.

In summary, all of the participants were satisfied with their business model. They were either actively planning to expand their business or maintain their current operations.

It would be a mistake to assume that not expanding meant that these entrepreneurs were not successful. These women were comfortable with the size of their businesses, and they aspired to be “small giants”. As Debbie stated:

It is a customer service business....Look at the customers, what do they want, what do they need, what are they getting out of it and if they aren't getting what they need then they feel cheated. Customer service business is different than a product business. Spend more time on marketing and reputation and think about those types of things because you're kind of marketing not a product but people....This is a face to face customer service business. It's me teaching them, it makes it that much more intricate to deal with. And some people don't take that into account.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the motivation and goals of entrepreneurs in the arena of competitive dog sports. Eight competitive dog sport entrepreneurs were interviewed. Five themes emerged from review of interview transcripts: “Entrepreneur as participant”, “entrepreneurship as a secondary income”, “deliberation versus plunge”, “entrepreneurship and family”, and “growth and maintenance in a recession”.

All of the participants had a background in training dogs and performing. Their initial love for the sport carried over to their motivation to start a business. Most were able to take the plunge and create a business because they were the secondary family income. Individuals who were less confident, or who were supporting themselves, engaged in greater deliberation between conceptualizing a business and actually initiating the business. Family considerations played a role in the decision making process in terms of both flexibility and financial security. All participants were maintaining their business in a challenging economic climate, and some were actively planning to expand. The enjoyment that each participant felt with her business was apparent. Adele emphasized this when she said:

One of the interesting things, I think it was X who said you haven't once said job or work. And that, the passion is still there. I still really enjoy teaching, and with all the seminars I did in the past year I just really get a charge out of that. Helping people's light bulbs go on, maybe showing them something a little bit different than what they've been struggling with, showing people that yes terriers (and other breeds) can do the work and enjoy it.

It would be valuable to learn about the professional development sport entrepreneurs find beneficial. The individuals in this study entered their business ventures without formal training in accounting, human resources management, legal issues, risk management, or marketing. Yet all learned enough about these aspects of managing a business to be successful. Unfortunately, we did not explore how these women acquired this knowledge. Thus, that question awaits further research.

Future researchers should investigate further how sport entrepreneurs define success, and how those definitions vary across business types and over the life cycle of a business. These entrepreneurs' businesses were stable, even growing, during a recession; however, many small businesses do not survive, even in periods of prosperity. Identifying characteristics of successful entrepreneurial approaches could be useful in distinguishing businesses likely to succeed from those likely to fail. This information, in turn, could provide useful information to prospective

entrepreneurs, as well as a basis for intervention in struggling businesses. Should these steps result in greater rates of success for sport entrepreneurs, the climate for future sporting business initiatives will be more welcoming.

The women entrepreneurs in this study had prior experience as a participant in dog sports. None had formal business training, yet all created successful businesses that were “small giants” (Burlingham, 2007). Particularly impressive, these women entrepreneurs were successful during the severe economic recession of the early twenty-first century in the United States. Their experiences provide illustrations and guidelines for success that can be instructive for women entrepreneurs in similarly challenging settings.

The results of this study support the work of Douglas (2013). Our participants pursued their business with certain lifestyle goals in mind. These entrepreneurs understood the time and financial commitments involved and took the risk. The results also supported the dynamics of sport-based entrepreneurship that Rattan (2011) proposed; specifically the areas of business strategy, promotional strategies, performance management, and in some cases, taking advantage of new sport development (such as rally obedience) for their businesses.

In conclusion, the study of entrepreneurs in non-traditional sports contributes not only to our knowledge of sport entrepreneurs, but to the overall study of entrepreneurship. The results of this study illustrate businesses that survived a recession, the importance of participating in a field before creating a business, and how to pursue a career and balance family. Future studies should continue to understand sport entrepreneurs from different types of sports, and build on the theoretical perspectives in the entrepreneurship literature.

## References

- Ahl, H. (2006). Why research on women entrepreneurs needs new directions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 30, 5, 596-621. doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6520.2006.00138.
- American Kennel Club (2013). *Annual Report*. [http://images.akc.org/pdf/2013\\_annual\\_report.pdf](http://images.akc.org/pdf/2013_annual_report.pdf)
- American Kennel Club (2015). Obedience. ([http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/what\\_is\\_obedience.cfm](http://www.akc.org/events/obedience/what_is_obedience.cfm))
- Ardichvili, A., Cardozo, R., & Ray, S. (2003). A theory of entrepreneurial opportunity identification and development. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18, 1, 105-123.
- Baker, S. E., & Edwards, R. (2012). How many qualitative interviews is enough? National Center for Research Methods. Available at: <http://eprints.ncrm.ac.uk/2273/>.
- Barker, C. & Pistrang, N. (2005). Quality criteria under methodological pluralism: Implications for conducting and evaluating research. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 35, 3-4, 201-212. doi: 10.1007/s10464-005-3398-7.
- Bem, S. (1974). The measurement of psychological androgyny. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 42, 2, 155-162.
- Berthold, N. & Neumann, M. (2008). The motivation of entrepreneurs: Are employed managers and self-employed owners different? *Intereconomics*, 43, 4, 236-244. doi: 10.1007/s10272-008-0256-9.
- Burlingham, Bo. (2007). *Small Giants*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Cliff, J.E. (1998). Does one size fit all? Exploring the relationship between attitudes towards growth, gender, and business size. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 13, 6, 523-542.
- Creswell, J.W. & Miller, D.L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory Into Practice*, 39, 3, 124-130.
- Davis, A.E. & Shaver, K.G. (2012). Understanding gendered variations in business growth



- intentions across the life course. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36, 495-512. Doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6520.2012.00508.x
- DeMartino, R. & Barbato, R. (2003). Differences between women and men MBA entrepreneurs: Exploring family flexibility and wealth creation as career motivators. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 18, 6, 815-832. doi: 10.1016/S0883-9026(03)00003-X.
- Douglas, E.J. (2013). Reconstructing entrepreneurial intentions to identify predisposition for growth. *Journal of Business Venturing*, 28, 633-651.
- Eddleston, K.A. & Powell, G.N. (2012). Nurturing entrepreneurs' work-family balance: A gendered perspective. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 36, 513-541. Doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6520.2012.00506.x
- Eschenfelder, M.J. & Li, M. (2006). *The economics of sports* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.
- Fairlie, R.W. & Robb, A.M. (2009). Gender differences in business performance: Evidence from the Characteristics of Business Owners Survey. *Small Business Economics*, 33, 375-395. doi: 10.1007/s11187-009-9207-5.
- Feltz, D.L., Short, S., & Sullivan, P. (2007). *Self-Efficacy in Sport: Research and Strategies for Working with Athletes, Teams, and Coaches*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Publishers.
- Heilman, M.E. & Chen, J.J. (2003). Entrepreneurship as a solution: The allure of self-employment for women and minorities. *Human Research Management Review*, 13, 347-364.
- Howard, D.R. & Crompton, J.L. (2004). *Financing Sport* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Morgantown, WV: Fitness Information Technology, Inc.
- Krueger, N. F. (1993). The impact of prior entrepreneurial exposure on perceptions of new venture feasibility and desirability. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 18, 5-21.
- Kumar, M. (2007). Explaining entrepreneurial success: A conceptual model. *Academy of Entrepreneurship Journal*, 13,1, 57-77.
- Money (2012, April 6). March Jobs Report: Hiring Slows, Unemployment Falls Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com>
- Money (2012, April 2). U.S. Manufacturing Continues to Rebound. Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com>
- Money (March 27, 2012). "Home Prices Fall to 2002 Levels." Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com>
- Money (March 16, 2012), "CPI: Inflation stays in check, despite high gas prices." Retrieved from <http://money.cnn.com>.
- Moritz, S.E., Feltz, D.L., Fahrback, K.R., & Mack, D.E. (2000). The relation of self-efficacy measures to sport performance: A meta-analytic review. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71, 3, 280-294.
- Neergaard, H. & Krueger, N. (2012). Still playing the game? *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Venturing*, 4, 18-31.
- Petrova, K. (2012). Part-time entrepreneurship and financial constraints: Evidence from the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics. *Small Business Economics*, 39, 473-493.
- Pitts, B.G., Fielding, L.F. & Miller, L.K. (1994). Industry segmentation theory and the sport industry: Developing a sport industry segmentation model. *Sport Marketing Quarterly*, 3, 15-24.
- Ratten, V. (2011). Sport-based entrepreneurship: Towards a new theory of entrepreneurship and sport management. *International Entrepreneurial Management Journal*, 7, 57-69.
- Rehman, L. & Frisby, W. (2000). Is self-employment liberating or marginalizing? The case of women consultants in the fitness and sport industry. *Journal of Sport Management*, 14, 1, 41-62.



- Segal, G., Borgia, D. & Schoenfeld, J. (2005). The motivation to become an entrepreneur. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior and Research*, 11, 1 42-57. doi: 10.1108/13552550510580834.
- Stewart, W.H. & Roth, P.L. (2007). A meta-analysis of achievement motivation differences between entrepreneurs and managers. *Journal of Small Business Management*, 45, 4, 401-421.
- United States Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/econ/isp/>).
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2012). *Economy at a glance*. Retrieved from <http://dta.bls.gov/cgi-bin/print.pl/eag/eag.us.htm>.
- Wadhwa, V., Aggarwal, R., Holly, K., & Salkever, A. (2009). The anatomy of an entrepreneur: Family background and motivation. Kauffman Foundation Report. <http://www.kauffman.org/research-and-policy/the-anatomy-of-an-entrepreneur.aspx>
- Waldfoegel, J. (2001). International policies toward parental leave and child care. *The Future of Children*, 11, 1, 99-111.

