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Entrepreneurial passion: Sources and sustenance

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Entrepreneurial passion: Sources and sustenance

Abstract

Entrepreneurial passion helps coordinate cognition and behavior of entrepreneurs, providing the fire that fuels innovation, persistence, and ultimate success. But where does entrepreneurial passion come from? Using a phenomenological approach, we conduct a qualitative study of 80 entrepreneurs and analyze their oral histories to explore the sources of entrepreneurial passion, as experienced by entrepreneurs. Our discovery process in the interviews suggests six major sources of entrepreneurial passion: passion for building/developing the venture, passion for people, passion for the product or service, passion for inventing, passion for competition, and passion for a social cause.

Keywords: entrepreneurial passion, social entrepreneurship, growth, oral history

Entrepreneurial passion: Sources and sustenance

The popular and academic press has argued somewhat convincingly that passion is an important aspect of entrepreneurship (e.g., Bierly, Kessler, & Christensen, 2000; Bird, 1989; Chen, Yao, & Kotha, 2009). Passion has been said to increase entrepreneurs' dedication and commitment to their venture, their persistence in pursuing venture-related goals and activities, and their ability to get and stay full engaged in their actions (Cardon, Wincent, Singh, & Drnovsek, 2009c; Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion of the entrepreneur may also be contagious to other stakeholders of the firm, such as employees (Cardon, 2008), and potential investors (Cardon, Sudek, & Mitteness, 2009b; Chen et al., 2009). Passion has even been called one of the most important aspects of entrepreneurship (Smilor, 1997).

Passion involves intense positive feelings - such as enthusiasm, zeal, and intense longing (Baum & Locke, 2004; Bird, 1989; Brännback, Carsrud, Elfving, & Krueger, 2006) – and a deep identity connection for the activities or objects that evoke such feelings (Cardon et al., 2009c; Murnieks, 2007). Yet empirical evidence concerning passion in this context is scarce. A particular question that has not been addressed is what makes entrepreneurs passionate. A variety of sources of passion have been suggested, such as one's hobby (Vallerand et al., 2003), the venture itself (Cardon, Zietsma, Saporito, Matherne, & Davis, 2005), the role of being an entrepreneur (Murnieks, 2007; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2006), activities associated with identifying opportunities, founding the venture, or developing a firm into maturity (Cardon et al., 2009c), and work more broadly (Baum & Locke, 2004). At a very basic level, we have no empirical evidence concerning whether entrepreneurs experience passion based on engagement with certain activities (e.g. biking, filing incorporation papers) or with specific objects (e.g. coin collections, the venture itself), both of which have been argued as viable objects of an

individual's passion (Vallerand et al., 2003). More fundamentally, every empirical approach to entrepreneurial passion has to date made assumptions about what entrepreneurs are passionate about then used a deductive approach to test the strength and/or effects of such passion. The problem with this approach is that it does not tell us what entrepreneurs are truly passionate about, and does not allow for comparison across potential sources. .

We instead use an inductive approach to discover how entrepreneurs experience and make sense of their passion and its sources. The inductive approach is based on the idea that an “individual's interpretation of an experience is an essential part of the experience itself (Patton, 1990)” (Cope, 2005: 168). The researchers' job is to explore and reveal the essential types and structures of such experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) so that better understanding of the phenomenon – here entrepreneurial passion – can occur. In particular, we focus on what events, processes, or objects stimulate entrepreneurial passion, as that passion is understood by entrepreneurs themselves.

The question of what entrepreneurs are passionate about is an important one because the object of one's passion can have important implications for the types of behaviors entrepreneurs engage in, such as their persistence and creativity (Cardon & Kirk, 2010; Cardon et al., 2009c), and the focus of such behaviors – persistence doing what? It can also have a big impact on the success of the behaviors, as certain types of passion have been associated with better performance and outcomes (e.g., harmonious passion, Vallerand, 2008; Vallerand & Houliort, 2003). This may also help shed light on why some entrepreneurs have difficulty in successfully balancing their passion with other aspects of their lives (obsessive passion, Vallerand et al., 2003).

A further question is whether or not the focus of passion is consistent over the life cycle of the business or the entrepreneur's involvement as an entrepreneur, or whether the original source of passion and the source of its sustenance changes over time. Cardon and colleagues (2009c) have suggested that if entrepreneurs are particularly passionate for one role identity and not others, then their passionate pursuit of venture goals may fade as the venture grows and changes, making activities the entrepreneur was passionate for less central to the venture's activities. In contrast, some entrepreneurs remain with their firms for many years, suggesting that despite the changing organization and relevant activities, the passion remains.

Understanding what entrepreneurs are passionate about and how this changes or does not during the life cycle of their ventures should help us understand the ebbs and flows of entrepreneurial careers, including why some entrepreneurs remain with their firms and others move easily from venture to venture, and others yet leave the career altogether.

We conducted a qualitative study of 80 entrepreneurs as part of a larger oral history project to explore the sources and sustenance of their passion. This study of the object of entrepreneurial passion has the potential to contribute to the literature in three key ways. First, if passion is important to entrepreneurial success (e.g., Bird, 1989), then understanding where it comes from and whether or not it can be sustained over time is critical. Existing research has tended to presume an object of one's passion (e.g., one's work, Baum & Locke, 2004) and then measured the extent of that passion, rather than opening up the possibilities concerning what entrepreneurs are passionate about and then measuring the extent of that passion. The latter approach allows for a more accurate depiction of one's passion, as different objects may evoke quite different feelings in entrepreneurs (Cardon et al., 2009c). Second, if we can better understand the sources and sustenance of entrepreneurial passion, then perhaps we can help

entrepreneurs better harness their passion in productive ways for themselves, their ventures, and their careers. For example, if entrepreneurs are most passionate about certain activities that need to be accomplished but less so for others, then knowing that may help them engage partners or employees who have complementary passions, so that the full range of activities associated with the venture is well attended to (e.g., Drnovsek, Cardon, & Murnieks, 2009).

Finally, some recent effort has been made to develop or adapt scales to measure passion specific to the context of entrepreneurship (Cardon, Gregoire, & Stevens, 2009a; Fisher & Langan-Fox, 2010; Murnieks, 2007). Yet for these scales to provide insights into *entrepreneurial* passion, rather than more generalized passion, they need to capture the essence of what passion means to entrepreneurs operating in this environment, rather than making assumptions about what is important. Careful attention to what passion means to active entrepreneurs and where they find the fire that fuels their entrepreneurial efforts is necessary to provide face validity to our measures, or perhaps to suggest new measures, and to build comprehensive knowledge of passion's effects going forward.

Passion in Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurial passion involves positive and intense feelings focused on activities associated with roles that are critical to the self-identity of entrepreneurs (Cardon et al., 2009c). One of the key aspects of entrepreneurial passion is that it is not a generalized feeling state experienced for everything, but is instead focused upon specific objects that evoke the positive intense feelings; objects that are identity-important to the specific entrepreneur. What objects are seen as important to one individual may not be important to another, so the identity-relevance and identity-importance piece is crucial to the experience of entrepreneurial passion (Cardon et al., 2009a).

The experience of entrepreneurial passion generally is thought to coordinate the cognitions, emotions, and behaviors of individuals experiencing such passion (Cardon et al., 2009c), and to have a huge motivating potential for entrepreneurial action (Baum, Locke, & Smith, 2001; Bird, 1989). Passion can lead individuals to want to make a difference (Bierly et al., 2000), to set high goals and remain committed to them (Utsch & Rauch, 2000), and to work long hours and make significant personal sacrifices in order to achieve the goals their passion inspires them towards (Cooper, Woo, & Dunkelberg, 1988; Odiorne, 1991). As an incredibly intense positive affect, passion can also stimulate creative thinking and problem-solving (Isen, 1993; Isen, 2000), and enhance task involvement (Pham, 2004). In addition to these direct impacts on behaviors and cognitions, passion has also been found to enhance venture growth (Drnovsek, Cardon, & Patel, 2010). Overall, it appears that passion can be a powerful driving force, leading to better outcomes for entrepreneurs (Cardon & Kirk, 2010), their ventures (Drnovsek et al., 2010), and those who fund or otherwise support them (Cardon et al., 2009b; Sudek, 2006). The natural question for such an important resource is then where it comes from.

Sources of Passion

Throughout the literature concerning passion in the workplace, a variety of sources of passion have been suggested. In the management and psychology literatures, the source of passion is often an individual's hobby, such as bicycling, gambling, or coin collecting (Vallerand et al., 2003). Passion for work in general has also been studied (Baum & Locke, 2004; Baum et al., 2001; Bierly et al., 2000; Smilor, 1997) with scholars focusing on the extent to which individuals are passionate about their job or work (Perttula, 2004), and whether such passion is harmonious or obsessive (Forest, Mageau, Sarrazin, & Morin, 2011).

Within entrepreneurship, Murnieks and colleagues (Murnieks, 2007; Murnieks & Mosakowski, 2006) have explored the passion entrepreneurs have for the role of being an entrepreneur. Others have suggested that entrepreneurs may be passionate for their venture they have created, rather than the role of being an entrepreneur (Baron & Hannan, 2002; Bird, 1989; Cardon et al., 2005; Chen et al., 2009). Still others have suggested that entrepreneurs may be passionate or at least experience positive emotions for particular opportunities they are pursuing (Branzei & Zietsma, 2003; Sundararajan & Peters, 2007), regardless of the venture involved. More recently, Cardon and colleagues (2009c) suggested that there may be specific sets of activities associated with roles that are important to entrepreneurs, and these roles may be the object of entrepreneurial passion. They identify three such roles: 1) passion for inventing, which involves “identifying, inventing, and exploring new opportunities”; 2) passion for founding, which is for activities involved in “establishing a venture for commercializing and exploiting opportunities”; and 3) passion for developing, which involves “nurturing, growing, and expanding the venture once it has been created” (Cardon et al., 2009c: 516).

The predominant empirical approach in this literature has been to choose an object, such as work or the entrepreneurial role, and ask respondents the extent to which they are passionate about that object. While this is interesting and does capture the strength of one’s feelings of passion, and perhaps even the extent to which that particular object is identity-important (Cardon et al., 2009a), it does not allow for respondents to freely indicate what particular aspects of their job or entrepreneurial role they are passionate about, or to have differing levels of passion for different aspects of entrepreneurship (see Cardon et al., 2009a for an exception). The implicit assumption in our empirical work has been that passion will operate in the same manner regardless of the object of that passion, and that there are only one or a few potential objects of

passion (although the particular object varies by study). Yet recent theoretical work has suggested that the object of passion is important. Cardon and colleagues (2009: 525, emphasis in original) argue that, “studies that ask what passion is or what it does must begin by addressing *passion for what.*” They suggest that entrepreneurs are passionate about things that are meaningful to them, such that they reinforce the entrepreneur’s self-identity. Therefore it is important to find out what is meaningful to entrepreneurs - where their “true passion” lies – to find out what drives their cognitions and behaviors during entrepreneurial goal pursuit.

Methodology

Sample

In this study, we use interview data with 80 entrepreneurs to explore the sources and sustenance of entrepreneurial passion. These interviews were conducted between 1995 and 2009 as part of a continuing project to collect oral histories of entrepreneurs (Glauser, 2009). Purposeful sampling as described by Patton (1990: 169) was used to select entrepreneurs for this ongoing project. This process involves contacting knowledgeable individuals and reviewing data sources that can lead the researchers to interesting, information-rich cases. Entrepreneurs are identified by contacting attorneys, accountants, consultants, and professors, and by scouring numerous publications that feature successful business founders. The companies involved are typically at least three years old, and have grown beyond the sole proprietorship stage. They have already reached viability and are now growing, as evidenced by them creating jobs, hiring employees, increasing revenue, and gaining market share in their industries. The final sample selected for this study represents entrepreneurs with a variety of genders, ages and ethnic backgrounds who operate firms of varying sizes and ages in a broad range of industries. Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the participants.

----- Insert Table 1 about here -----

The entrepreneurs were contacted by letter, phone or email and asked if they would be willing to share their story for research and educational purposes. Interviews were then conducted by phone or in person on one or more occasions, and were recorded in audio format. They were typically between 30-120 minutes long, with most averaging 60 minutes. The interviews were semi-structured, with the entrepreneurs being asked to tell their story “*from the time you conceived your idea up to today.*” Interviewers probed during the interviews to obtain a greater understanding of the opportunity, sources of inspiration, venture creation, growth stages, and keys to success. This approach is designed to get to the “real world” or that which is subjectively experienced by the entrepreneurs being interviewed (Hammond, Howarth, & Keat, 1991). The job of the entrepreneur in such interviews is “to provide a careful and authentic description of ordinary conscious experience” (Cope, 2005: 167) which provides the researcher with the concrete contexts of experiences, as they were made sense of by the entrepreneurs. The goal in such phenomenological interviewing (Thompson, Locander, & Pollio, 1989) is to get first-person explanations of a specific domain of experience, here of the venturing experience, where participants in the interviews set the course of the dialogue and are free to describe their entrepreneurial experiences in whatever level of detail they wish (Cope, 2005; Thompson et al., 1989). Such interviews are typically very loosely structured, where the interviewer starts with a broad question such as “tell me about your venture” or “tell me your entrepreneurial story.” The dialogue between entrepreneur and interviewer then proceeds with questions deriving from the interview itself, rather than having been determined ahead of time (Cope, 2005).

Analytical Method

In this phenomenological approach, the task of the researcher is to “explore and reveal the essential types and structures of experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979)” (Cope, 2005: 166). The goal of analysis is to identify common themes within the interviews (Mitchell, 1996), specifically as they related to what entrepreneurs are most passionate about concerning their entrepreneurial experience. Rather than fitting the data to any existing frameworks for passion, we let the categories for what entrepreneurs are passionate about emerge from the oral histories and stories the entrepreneurs told the interviewer.

Once the interviews were completed and transcribed or recorded, the authors read the transcriptions and listened to the interviews multiple times to pull out the core themes related to passion from within each story, and to compare these themes across the stories. Specific words we focused on included passion, love, excitement, and who or what I am (identity), as well as the context and subtext related to them. We looked for “coherent and important examples, themes, and patterns in the data. The analyst looks for quotations or observations that go together, that are examples of the same underlying idea, issue, or concept” (Patton, 1987: 149). We then wrote up summaries of each emergent category, drawing from the data without use of relevant theoretical literature. Finally, we compared existing theory concerning the focus of entrepreneurial passion and the categories evident in our data to help develop and extend that theory “with stronger credibility and deeper conceptual insight” (Cope, 2005: 179) stemming from the lived-in experiences of entrepreneurs concerning their passion. Eisenhardt (1989: 544) argues that, “an essential part of theory building is comparison of emergent concepts, theory, or hypotheses with the extant literature. This involves asking what is this similar to, what does it contradict, and why.” We describe our findings and compare them to extant literature in the sections that follow.

Results

Analysis of the interview data revealed six major objects of passion among the entrepreneurs in our sample, as summarized in Table 2. The most frequently mentioned object of passion was for building and growing a company, and 49% of the interviewees talked about this focus of their passion. Some entrepreneurs had focused this passion for growth on only one firm, such as Brent Bishop from Greenbacks who grew the firm to over 100 stores before he sold the business. Interestingly, his company was a dollar store, an idea that he had seen on the East Coast that he transported to the West Coast. The implication is that the opportunity here was not completely novel, but the application of the business concepts to a new market, the West Coast, was. Brooks Merrill was similarly passionate for growth, and his company, Golden Canyon, outgrew warehouses every six months because the business was growing so fast. Other entrepreneurs passionate about growth had built and grown several companies, like Josh Coates of Mozy, who said, “I like to build things. That’s what I like to do.” Individuals in our sample that talked about passion for growth focused on how their firm had gotten larger through expansion of stores, distribution centers, and employees, but not through offering more or newer products or services.

----- Insert Table 2 about here -----

The second major focus of passion was people, with 45% of our entrepreneurs indicating they were passionate about working with their family, satisfying their customers or clients, and building meaningful relationships with employees, vendors, or affiliates. A great example of this was Colomba Aguilar of Colomba Café Carambola, who talked about her love for developing unique menus for her customers and making them happy. Michael Hyacinthe from Urban Liberty said that he was “passionate about fulfilling a need for these people,” referring to soldiers

stationed abroad. Jason Araghi started and runs a company called Green Beans Coffee, which builds coffee houses in shipping containers and installs them in war zones abroad so that soldiers have a few moments of home in the midst of their difficult circumstances. Jason said he has to be passionate about what he is doing, as he faces incredible challenges in his business; “Without the passion, I don’t think I could lead the company the way I am doing.”

A third focus of passion was on the particular product or service provided by the company, and this was talked about by 43% of the entrepreneurs we interviewed. The founder of an adventure travel company said, “I loved travel and wanted to share that with people.” Others said, “I love the sport that we represent,” “I’m in a business where I really love the products,” and “I just started doing something because I had a passion for it.” The range of products and services for the entrepreneurs in this category was large and included the travel industry, hotel industry, outdoors, holistic healing, dancing, horses, mountain biking, and snow-boarding. Each entrepreneur in this category had an overwhelming love for something in their lives and wanted to create a way to share that passion with others, develop that passion into a business, and improve products in that industry for themselves and for others.

The fourth major focus of passion in our sample was on competition, where 32% of the entrepreneurs interviewed loved the challenge of proving they were a success and that they were more successful or had better products than other businesses. Ellis Ivory of Ivory Homes said “we have led our market for 20 years, and we’re the only builder in the US that’s ever done that.” Josh Coates of Mozy said it even more simply, “winning is fun.” Interestingly, while a few entrepreneurs mentioned they enjoyed the money that often comes with success, money was not a major focus of passion for entrepreneurs in our sample, even those who talked about being passionate about competing and winning those competitions.

The fifth category in our data was passion for inventing, including creating new products and services and looking for new opportunities in the marketplace. This focus of passion was discussed by 31% of the entrepreneurs in our sample. Carl Winefordner of Crank Brothers said, “our love is design, not running a company or answering the phone,” and Brad Keywell of Media Bank said, “I’m passionate about creating things.” Bryce Phillips of Evogear said, “I really had a passion for doing something different and observing what was going on and not going on in the market.”

The final category that emerged was passion for a social mission, mentioned by 23% of the entrepreneurs in our sample. These entrepreneurs talked about loving helping people improve their lives, giving back to soldiers, helping people prevent breast cancer and recover from breast cancer surgery, and championing a cause because “I have to do something,” said by Amelia Antonetti of Soapworks. Janet Yorgason of At Your Door Haircare talked about her excitement to create a business that would better meet the needs of families with children and shut-ins, and Aaron Fernandez of Open Sky loves helping kids and young adults face their problems using a holistic recovery experience.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to study the sources of passion for entrepreneurs, to open-mindedly find out what entrepreneurs say they are actually passionate about. This is a contribution to the literature because we previously have presumed the source or focus of passion, such as for work (e.g., Baum & Locke, 2004) or being an entrepreneur in general (e.g., Fisher & Langan-Fox, 2010; Murnieks, 2007), and measured the extent to which individuals feel passion for that object or role. In contrast, in this study we asked entrepreneurs very open

question to tell us what they were passionate about, if anything, and let their experiences guide our findings and theorizing.

Our results underscore the importance of this approach because the sources of passion revealed were fairly specific rather than just for entrepreneurship or work in general. This builds on the conceptual work of Cardon and colleagues (2009), who suggested that entrepreneurs will likely experience passion for something specific, not the overall entrepreneurial experience. Our results differed from that conceptual work, though, in terms of the categories or roles that drive such passion. Cardon, et al. (2009) argued that entrepreneurs may experience passion for inventor, founder, and developer roles. We found evidence of passion for inventing and passion for developing firms, consistent with the prior definitions, but also found passion for new aspects of entrepreneurship. In particular passion for a product, service, or industry was new, as was passion for the people involved in the business, passion for the cause or social mission, and passion for competition.

The most dominant focus of passion in our sample was passion for growth, which is consistent with passion for the developer identity discussed by Cardon and colleagues (2009). Here the passion “is for activities related to nurturing, growing, and expanding the venture once it has been created” (Cardon et al., 2009: 516). Many entrepreneurs are motivated to grow and expand their ventures (Cliff, 1998) and a significant portion of the entrepreneurship literature is focused on trying to understand the drivers of venture growth. Indeed, a recent study by Wong, Ho, and Autio (2005) revealed that across 37 advanced countries, firms focused on high growth were the only significant contributors to economic growth of those countries. For societal, venture, and individual financial reasons, high growth is important for many entrepreneurs, and such growth is the most common source of passion in our study.

Our finding of a major source of passion being that for inventing new products or services is also consistent with Cardon and colleagues (2009: 516), who talk about passion “for activities involved with identifying, inventing, and exploring new opportunities.” This was the fifth most frequently cited source of passion for our participants, rather than one of the top three as Cardon and colleagues suggest. Opportunity recognition and creation are huge topics in the field, and scholars have recognized that some entrepreneurs search for innovative ideas more deeply and frequently than others (Katila & Ahuja, 2002). Indeed a foundational definition of entrepreneurship provided by Venkataraman (1997) says that the existence of entrepreneurship relies upon the presence of lucrative opportunities along with the presence of enterprising individuals to act on those opportunities (Shane & Venkataraman, 2000). Much attention has been given in the literature to ways for entrepreneurs to search for opportunities (Fiet, 2002) and to whether opportunities are found or created (Sarasvathy, 2001). Fundamental to this literature is the idea that the quest for lucrative opportunities is a core aspect of the entrepreneurial experience, and our data suggest that it is also a core driver of the passion of entrepreneurs.

The second most common focus of passion, for people, has not been discussed previously in the literature. Interestingly, the groups of people these entrepreneurs talked about were not consistent. For some entrepreneurs the passion for people was focused on customers and creating the best experiences possible for them. For others it was on employees and creating a workplace they could thrive in. Some entrepreneurs passionate for people talked about their families and loving creating a business where they could work alongside their spouses, children, or other relatives. This suggests a future area of research focused on the sources of passion within family firms. Do family firm entrepreneurs love their business itself, the products/services they produce, or just their ability to work with their family or carry on the family tradition? The

answer may impact the overall performance and sustainability of these businesses. Since passion is a fuel that powers a venture, family firm entrepreneurs who are passionate about multiple factors may engage in greater innovation, development and growth over time. In contrast, family firm entrepreneurs who are passionate about working with family members only, may not grow and develop their business, and hence struggle to survive. This problem may become worse when second generation owners who inherit the business have little passion for their products, inventing, growth, and even working with other family members.

Passion for product/service was interesting, because the advice often given to aspiring entrepreneurs is to figure out what they are passionate about in their lives, and then find a way to turn that into a business opportunity. This philosophy is found in numerous books by practitioners that teach aspiring entrepreneur to find their passion and the money will come. As noted above, 43% of the entrepreneurs in our study are passionate about a wide variety of products/services: cooking, cleaning, boats, helicopters, music, travel, skiing, technology, horses, dancing, cycling, etc. Yet the academic literature has not focused on this source of passion. The one exception is the work of Winnen (2005), who found that several of the entrepreneurs in her sample were passionate about the product they were selling, such as chocolate, more so than their businesses. Perhaps this source of passion is not surprising to scholars that study inventors, who often are very focused on the invention itself to the detriment of commercialization considerations. Many universities now offer technology commercialization programs and offices, and some have created partnerships between the science and business programs so that aspiring entrepreneurs and aspiring scientists can collaborate in order for both to achieve success. Entrepreneurs in our sample who were passionate about their product or service talked about how this had posed challenges for their business operations until they recognized this and hired

appropriate people to manage the operations of their business so they could focus on the products or services themselves.

Interestingly, competition is not something that's been associated with passion in the literature. The implicit assumption has been that when people found a business based on something in their personal lives that they love, this will end up being a life-style business with little opportunity for high growth or monumental success. Instead, almost a third of our sample indicated that they love competition and pushing themselves and their firms to be better. Our findings are consistent with the long-held assertion that entrepreneurship is about wealth creation and maximization. However, the entrepreneurs we spoke to were not focused on the financial gains they realized, but rather the feeling of having succeeded and in particular the feeling that they were winning a competition against other firms, and perhaps against their own expectations. Dave Burbidge, founder of Burbidge Disposal, is an example of a fierce competitor who was not very passionate about his product/service – garbage collection. He often wore sunglasses and a baseball hat so no one would recognize him driving a garbage truck, but he firmly believed he could “do garbage better” and beat the large, publicly traded companies in his market, which proved to be the case.

Finally, passion for a social mission emerged from our data. This is not all that surprising given the growing recognition of social entrepreneurship as an important area of scholarship (Dees, Anderson, & Wei-skillern, 2004) and pedagogy (Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Social entrepreneurs are focused not only on financial performance or growth of the firm, but instead measure their success by the extent to which they achieve “social transformation” (Pearce, 2003; Tracey & Phillips, 2007). This is a particularly difficult form of entrepreneurship (Tracey & Phillips, 2007). One challenge noted by Tracey & Phillips is particularly relevant to passion: the

challenge of managing one's identity with the competing for-profit and non-profit aspects of the venture. If one is passionate about the social cause alone, it is difficult and at times frustrating to maintain the economic feasibility of the venture (Tracey & Phillips, 2007). Here again passion alone will not lead to success of the venture, but instead passion combined with sound business practices or productive partnerships with individuals who enjoy the operational side of the business.

Taken together, the results suggest that entrepreneurs may be passionate about activities or objects, but the dominant focus was on action – searching for opportunities, experimenting with new products, serving a social mission, growing firms, helping people – not on the firm itself or other specific physical objects associated with it. Money, something often associated with why people become entrepreneurs, was quite interestingly not a dominant source of passion for the entrepreneurs in our study.

This study provides an important link between current research on entrepreneurial passion and the real life experiences of entrepreneurs feeling that passion. Hermeneutic phenomenological investigations such as this one can develop new theoretical constructs and enhance the potency of existing ones (Berglund, 2007). By using the inductive interpretations of entrepreneurs themselves, supported and integrated with the use of extant theoretical frameworks concerning passion, we can enhance the engagement of our theories with the sense-making processes of entrepreneurs (Lopez & Willis, 2004). As such, this provides a richer and perhaps more complete understanding of how entrepreneurs experience passion and where that passion comes from.

Future Research Directions

While this study takes an important step in the passion literature by expanding the current set of sources of passion, many questions remain. Perhaps the most important question is whether the differing sources of passion have differential effects on important outcomes. Indeed, perhaps which outcomes are viewed as important may vary based upon passion's source. For example, an entrepreneur passionate for a social mission may find accomplishment of the social mission (or significant progress towards it) an important outcome rather than growth of the venture, while an entrepreneur passionate for growth may feel differently. Quantitative research is needed that addresses multiple relevant outcomes as well as multiple potential sources of passion that may drive those outcomes.

A second major area of research concerns how the sources of passion change over the life cycle of a venture. In the interviews conducted for this study the sources of passion appeared to be invariant over the course of the entrepreneur's career. Yet these interviews were conducted at one point in time where entrepreneurs looked back and told us their story. Longitudinal studies that capture passion for different sources as it is experienced and at various stages of venture development may reveal changes and nuances that were not visible with our data collection method.

Finally, the literature on entrepreneurial passion has primarily focused on the passion experienced by one central entrepreneur, despite the fact that many firms are founded by teams rather than sole entrepreneurs (Chowdhury, 2005; Kamm, Shuman, Seeger, & Nurick, 1990). How might different sources of passion among a founding team, as well as differing levels/intensity of passion, impact team dynamics such as task and relationship conflict, decision-making, or performance? While Drnovsek and colleagues (2009) provided some early

theoretical exploration of such ideas, they focused on only three sources of passion rather than the six sources identified in our study or others that might exist in other samples.

Limitations

There are several limitations to our study. First, our data are from a non-representative sample of entrepreneurs who had already reached a level of stability/growth of their firms, and as such our results cannot be generalized to all entrepreneurs. Some research suggests that passion may be most important in earliest stages of firm development (Cardon, 2008), when the setbacks and trials are often most problematic. While we certainly found strong evidence of passion in entrepreneurs well beyond the initial stages of firm formation, we cannot say whether this is more or less than they had earlier on in their careers or firm's development. Nor can we comment on the level or sources of passion among entrepreneurs with ventures that were less successful. Our interviews were also done with entrepreneurs operating primarily in a North American context, which may or may not generalize to entrepreneurs from other countries.

We are not overly concerned with this limitation, because the point of an inductive phenomenological approach is not to confirm or disconfirm theory, but instead to develop bottom-up inductive theories that are inextricably grounded in the lived world. Any phenomenological research is done from the perspective of one particular context at one particular time, and is "iterative, with room for continuous improvement through application in new contexts" (Cope, 2005: 172). We encourage other scholars to engage in this process with us, bringing in entrepreneurs from different stages of venture growth, differing levels of success and/or failure, and countries of operation, among other factors.

A second potential limitation is consistent with Cope (2005), who notes that it can be particularly challenging for scholars to "bracket" their preexisting ideas about the phenomenon

of interest, so that they can go into the field with a mind entirely open to the entrepreneurs' emergent thoughts and experiences. We believe this is less of a concern in our study since the interviews were conducted by the second author as part of a large oral history project instead of to study the specific phenomenon of entrepreneurial passion. It was only through the sharing of multiple experiences that related strongly to passion by entrepreneurs in the field that the first author was brought into the specific study of entrepreneurial passion within these interviews. Thus any preconceived ideas about passion or its sources by the first author could not be projected onto the participants during the course of the interviews. However, it should be noted that both authors engaged in the analysis of the interview data, and as such complete impartiality in the analysis is not guaranteed.

Conclusion

"You have to be passionate and love what you do - you got to have fun" – Bill Kilberg, Hospitality Performance Network

Vallerand (2008: 1) suggested that "the type of passion one has for the activity may have different consequences on cognition, affect, behavior, relationships, and even performance." We argue that not only the type of passion, but also the source of that passion will have such important consequences. We take the first step towards testing this idea by exploring the specific sources of passion for entrepreneurs, and encourage additional work in this area.

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Table 1
Summary of Participants

Gender		Ethnicity		Industry		Years in Business*	
Male	60%	Caucasian	84%	Business/Professional Services	14%	Less than 5 Years	14%
Female	40%	Hispanic	6%	Food Services/Dining	13%	5 to 10 Years	40%
		African American	4%	Travel/Transportation	13%	More than 10 Years	46%
		Native American	3%	Consumer Products	11%		
		Asian	3%	Sports/Recreation	9%		
				Arts/Entertainment	9%		
				Health/Medical	8%		
				Technology Development	5%		
				Clothing/Accessories	5%		
				Home/Garden Products	5%		
				Real Estate/Construction	4%		
				Education/Training	4%		
				Energy/Environment	3%		
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding 		* At the time of the interview	

Table 2
Summary of Results

Source of Passion	% of Mention*	Sample Statement
Building/Growing Company	49%	I like to build things; that's what I like to do.
People/Customers	45%	I am very passionate about fulfilling a need for these people.
Product/Service	43%	I am in a business where I really love the products.
Competition	32%	I have always been competitive; it didn't take too long until we were number one.
Inventing	31%	Our love is design, not running a company or answering the phone.
Social Mission	23%	Our bottom line is the utilization of profits to alleviate human suffering; so until we move beyond the profit level we haven't accomplished our corporate objective.
* Categories are not mutually exclusive	* Most entrepreneurs mentioned several sources of passion	