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## ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS (SUMMARY)

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≈ SUMMARY ≈

**ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS**

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**Principal Topic**

Entrepreneurship research has largely attributed positive entrepreneurial outcomes to positive psychological characteristics using theories and empirical associations grounded in mean tendencies. As such, entrepreneurship represents merely a context for general psychological theory rather than an arena for developing unique psychological theory. We venture outside the realm of the ‘normal’ and instead sample extreme individuals at the tail of the distribution. We explore the efficacy of using theories about abnormalities, examining the potential positive effects in entrepreneurship of otherwise negative psychological deviations. Specifically, we explore the implications of ADHD and autism.

**Methods**

As there is little theoretical antecedent to our research, we apply a grounded theory approach extracting insights from multiple, purposefully selected cases. We follow theoretical sampling and interviewed 15 entrepreneurs formally diagnosed with ADHD and/or autism. These disorders are common, hereditary, acknowledged in several prominent entrepreneurs, and there is theoretical reason to believe that certain symptoms are consistent with entrepreneurship. Respondents diagnosed with these disorders were identified through support organizations.

We used semi-structured interviews focusing on the interplay between their particular disorder and their entrepreneurial paths, seeking to elicit rich descriptions. Analyses build and refine the conceptual categories emerging from the data and develop tentative propositions, continuing the process until we reach theoretical saturation. We use an iterative process utilizing theoretical arguments from the literature, which improves construct definitions and underlying arguments.

**Results and Implications**

We identify a multitude of traits and behaviors related to their entrepreneurial endeavors that are consistent across the cases. When framed in psychiatry terms, these traits and behaviors are consistent with the broad *negative* categories of poor self-regulation, impulsivity and boundarylessness. When framed in entrepreneurship terms, these traits and behaviors are consistent with the broad *positive* categories intuition, gut feel, effectuation, action orientation and entrepreneurial orientation. These findings have multiple implications. They suggest that certain characteristics are simultaneously strengths *and* weaknesses – the uncertainty of the context influencing which dominates; that several behaviors at the tails of the distribution likely have both positive and negative implications, which entrepreneurship research has not considered; and that entrepreneurship can allow otherwise maladapted individuals to flourish.

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