Subclinical symptoms of attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) are associated with specific creative processes

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Abstract

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by distractibility, hyperactivity, and impulsive behavior. Although ADHD generally associates with a range of cognitive impairments, evidence suggests that people with ADHD may be more creative than people without the disorder. However, the exact relationship between specific ADHD symptoms and different creative processes is unclear. In three studies, we investigated the relationship between subclinical symptoms of ADHD and flexible versus persistent creative processes. Although effect sizes were small, we found that ADHD symptoms, in general, were associated with enhanced self-reported creative behavior and more publically recognized creative achievements in daily life, in line with our hypotheses. Moreover, these symptoms were associated with enhanced divergent thinking and with a more original, but less practical, reconstruction of complex problems. Our results indicate that these relationships were mainly driven by hyperactive–impulsive rather than inattention symptoms of ADHD.