

Living "in the zone": hyperfocus in adult ADHD

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Abstract

Adults with ADHD often report episodes of long-lasting, highly focused attention, a surprising report given their tendency to be distracted by irrelevant information. This has been colloquially termed "hyperfocus" (HF). Here, we introduce a novel assessment tool, the "Adult Hyperfocus Questionnaire" and test the preregistered a priori hypothesis that HF is more prevalent in individuals with high levels of ADHD symptomology. We assess (1) a pilot sample ($n = 251$) and (2) a replication sample ($n = 372$) of adults with or without ADHD. Participants completed highly validated scales, including the Conners' Adult ADHD Rating Scale, to index ADHD symptomology. Those with higher ADHD symptomology reported higher total and dispositional HF and more frequent HF across each of the three settings (school, hobbies, and screen time) as well as on a fourth subscale describing real-world HF scenarios. These findings are both clinically and scientifically significant, as this is the first study to comprehensively assess HF in adults with high ADHD symptomology and to present a means for assessing HF. Moreover, the sizable prevalence of HF in adults with high levels of ADHD symptomology leads to a need to study it as a potentially separable feature of the ADHD syndrome.