



BOISE PUBLIC LIBRARY

MAYOR: Lauren McLean | DIRECTOR: Jessica Dorr

MEMO

TO: Rebecca Lemmons, Board President
FROM: Jessica Dorr, Library Director
CC: Boise Public Library Board of Trustees
DATE: 4/17/2025
RE: Request for Reconsideration – *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again*

Overview

On April 7, 2025, Library Staff received a Request for Reconsideration form regarding *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again* by Johann Hari. This memo provides an overview of the title and its circulation history, an analysis of the title using Boise Public Library's policies, and a recommendation to the Board for consideration in the May meeting.

Background

Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again by Johann Hari was first published in 2022. After receiving the Request for Reconsideration, staff searched the collection and found that the Boise Public Library owns five copies of the title with a copy at each of our five locations. All copies are in the adult non-fiction collection. Since the five copies were added to the collection in 2022, they have checked out 171 times.

Requestor

The requestor indicated on the Request for Reconsideration form they are a Nampa Public Library cardholder. The barcode included to identify the copy of *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again* shows the requestor is referencing a Boise Public Library book. Additionally, the requestor used the Boise Public Library Request for Reconsideration form and mailed their request to the Boise Public Library. While Nampa Public Library also owns a copy of this title, we can safely assume the requestor obtained a copy of a Boise Public Library book through the Lynx Library Consortium. As such we followed the review process as outlined in "The Children's School and Library Protection Act" and applicable policies.

The requestor did not indicate they are a parent or guardian of a minor who obtained the material.

MAIN LIBRARY
715 S. Capitol Blvd., Boise, Idaho 83702
P: 208-972-8200 | TTY: 800-377-3529

LIBRARY! AT
BOWN CROSSING
P: 208-972-8360

LIBRARY! AT
COLE & USTICK
P: 208-972-8300

LIBRARY! AT
COLLISTER
P: 208-972-8320

LIBRARY! AT
HILLCREST
P: 208-972-8340

BOISE CITY COUNCIL: Colin Nash (President), Meredith Stead (President Pro Tem), Kathy Corless, Jimmy Hallyburton, Jordan Morales, Luci Willits

[BOISEPUBLICLIBRARY.ORG](https://boisepubliclibrary.org)

Request regarding *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again*

Staff reviewed *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again* based on the concerns raised in the Request for Reconsideration form:

- Profanity
- Review the book using library procedures

The requestor additionally asked the Library to “electronically relate my concerns to the author.”

Based on staff review, the material meets the following criteria for a work of non-fiction, regardless of format, outlined in the [Collection Development and Maintenance Policy \(5.01\)](#):

Helps people know more about themselves and their world	meets
Encourages informal self-education	meets
Meets the diverse informational needs and recreational interests of all people in the community	meets
Stimulates thoughtful participation in the affairs of the community, the country, and the world	meets
Gives access to a variety of opinions on matters of current interest and encourage freedom of expression	meets
Supports educational, civic, and cultural activities within the community;	n/a
Aids in learning and improving job-related skills	n/a
Assists the individual to grow intellectually and enjoy life more fully	meets

Based on staff review, the material meets the following criteria for a work of fiction, regardless of format, outlined in the [The Nature and Quality of Materials Regulation \(5.01c\)](#):

Suitability of physical form for library use	meets
Suitability of subject and style for intended audience	meets
Present and potential relevance to community needs	meets
Appropriateness of medium to content	meets
Insight into human and social condition	meets
Importance as a document of the times	meets
Relation to existing collection and other material on subject	n/a
Reputation and/or significance of author	meets
Skill, competence, and purpose of author	meets
Attention of critics, reviewers, and public	meets
Currency	meets
Affordability	meets
Scope and authority of subject matter	meets
Comprehensiveness and depth of treatment	meets
Objectivity	meets
Accuracy and logic of presentation	meets
Clarity of style	meets



Representation of challenging, though extreme or minority, point of view	n/a
Scarcity of information in subject field	meets
Self-published materials are generally not added due to lack of editor oversight and fact checking	Not self-published

Recommendation

Staff acknowledge that *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again* contains profanity, which can be offensive to members of our community. It has also been well reviewed by professionals (see page 4) and has been popular with our community as seen in the number of checkouts.

Based on these findings, staff recommend keeping *Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again* in the adult non-fiction collection.

Regarding the request that library staff electronically relate concerns about the profanity to the author, we plan to follow-up with the requestor to provide the book publisher's email address as well as the author's website, which includes social media contact options, so the requester can personally share her concerns.

Penguin Random House contact: consumerservices@penguinrandomhouse.com
 Author's website with social media contact options: <https://johannhari.com/>

Stolen Focus: Why You Can't Pay Attention – and How to Think Deeply Again was published in the United States by Crown, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York. We will also include a physical mailing address for the requestor's information.

Crown Publishing Group
 1745 Broadway
 New York, NY 10019-4396



Professional Reviews:**Publishers Weekly** (11/08/2021):

Journalist Hari (*Lost Connections*) explores a growing "crisis"--people's inability to focus their attention for extended periods--in this provocative study. He presents data that suggests students switch tasks once every 65 seconds, while adults in offices tend to remain focused on one thing for just three minutes. There are costs to this decrease in attention span, he suggests, from both an intellectual and a productivity perspective, as studies have shown that workers' IQ dropped by an average of 10 points when they faced frequent "technological distraction" in the form of emails and phone calls. Hari lays out a wide array of environmental factors at play in this decline: technology companies promote innovations to keep people glued to their screens; there's a large-scale sleep deprivation issue (40% of Americans are chronically sleep-deprived); and overall stress levels have increased--meanwhile, "deteriorating diets and rising pollution" do little to help. Although Hari addresses some actions that readers can take (such as locking phones up in a safe and taking six months off social media), he concludes that the issue is beyond individuals and is a regulatory problem--but his call that people need to band together to build "a movement to reclaim our attention" feels somewhat nebulous. Still, it's a comprehensive and chilling lay of the land. (*Jan.*)
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Kirkus Reviews:

A deep dive into one of today's most pertinent psychological problems. As Hari demonstrates, the fractured state of your attention span has more insidious causes and more drastic outcomes than you ever imagined. Tormented by his own inability to focus, the author traveled the world to speak to researchers and also abandoned his phone and computer to spend three months screen-free in Provincetown. The latter was liberating, enabling him to once again read books, have creative thoughts, and sleep well. Unfortunately, these effects didn't last long once he reconnected. As he learned from expert interviews, the causes of our attention issues are so vast that telling someone they can improve their plight by making personal adjustments is known as cruel optimism, "when you take a really big problem with deep causes in our culture--like obesity, or depression, or addiction--and you offer people, in upbeat language, a simplistic individual solution." The trouble is not just in our devices, but in our air, food, workplaces, the way we raise children, the surveillance of our lives by corporations, and more. Social media is especially dastardly, and Hari offers numerous appalling examples: Because feeling angry is more likely to keep your attention than any other emotion, YouTube has recommended videos by belligerent conspiracy theorist Alex Jones, such as the one claiming Sandy Hook was faked, 15 billion times. In Brazil, Facebook was used to swing an election in a way that sounds eerily familiar: filling people's heads "full of grotesque falsehoods, to the point where they can't distinguish real threats to their existence (an authoritarian leader pledging to shoot them) from nonexistent threats (their children being made gay by penises painted on baby bottles)." Systemic change is the key to any possible solution, but some of Hari's suggestions sound like more cruel optimism. Still, the author brings to light many important issues. Bristling with facts and ideas expressed in a high-energy, cliffhanger style. COPYRIGHT(2022) Kirkus Reviews, ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. (Online Review)

