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978-0-521-83407-0 - Cognitive Limitations in Aging and Psychopathology

Edited by Randall W. Engle, Grzegorz Sedek, Ulrich von Hecker and Daniel N. McIntosh

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Cognitive Limitations in Aging and Psychopathology

This book examines the major progress made in recent psychological science in understanding the cognitive control of thought, emotion, and behavior and what happens when that control is diminished as a result of aging, depression, developmental disabilities, or psychopathology. Each chapter of this volume reports the most recent research by a leading researcher on the international stage. Topics include the effects on thought, emotion, and behavior by limitations in working memory, cognitive control, attention, inhibition, and reasoning processes. Other chapters review standard and emerging research paradigms and new findings on limitations in cognitive functioning associated with aging and psychopathology. The explicit goal behind this volume was to facilitate cross-area research and training by familiarizing researchers with paradigms and findings in areas different from, but related to, their own.

Randall W. Engle is Professor and Chair in the School of Psychology at Georgia Institute of Technology. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from Ohio State University. His research over the past 20 years has evolved from that regarding the nature of individual differences in working memory capacity (WMC) to the role of WMC in higher-order cognition.

Grzegorz Sedek is Director of the Institute of Social Psychology at Warsaw School of Social Psychology in Poland and professor at the Institute of Psychology, Polish Academy of Sciences. He received his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of Warsaw in Poland. His main areas of research involve cognitive limitations in depression, aging, after uncontrollability pre-exposure, and dual-process models in social cognition.

Ulrich von Hecker is Lecturer at the School of Psychology at Cardiff University. His current research involves social cognition, cognitive limitations in depression, and the nature and the dynamic character of emotion. He has written many articles and has published in the *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, and *Social Cognition*.

Daniel N. McIntosh is Associate Professor of Psychology at the University of Denver. His research focuses on emotions and coping using survey, laboratory, and psychophysiological methods. In particular, he investigates the role of religion in coping, stress and coping in low control contexts, and cognitive deficits emerging from situations of uncontrollability and depression.

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Edited by

RANDALL W. ENGLE

Georgia Institute of Technology

GRZEGORZ SEDEK

Warsaw School of Social Psychology and

Polish Academy of Sciences

ULRICH VON HECKER

Cardiff University

DANIEL N. MCINTOSH

University of Denver

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521834070

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First published 2005

Printed in the United States of America

A catalog record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data.

Cognitive limitations in aging and psychopathology / edited by Randall W.

Engle . . . [et al.].

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and indexes.

ISBN 0-521-83407-4 (hardback) – ISBN 0-521-54195-6 (pbk.)

1. Cognition disorders. 2. Cognition disorders in old age. 3. Developmental disabilities.

4. Psychology, Pathological. 5. Cognition in old age. 6. Cognitive psychology.

7. Cognition. I. Engle, Randall W.

RC553.C64C635 2005

618.97'68 – dc22 2005000124

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83407-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-83407-4 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-54195-4 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-54195-6 paperback

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Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	page vii
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
1. Cognitive Limitations in Aging and Psychopathology: An Introduction and a Brief Tutorial to Research Methods <i>Randall W. Engle, Grzegorz Sedek, Ulrich von Hecker, and Daniel N. McIntosh</i>	1
SECTION I WORKING MEMORY AND COGNITIVE FUNCTIONS	
2. Working Memory Capacity in Hot and Cold Cognition <i>Nash Unsworth, Richard P. Heitz, and Randall W. Engle</i>	19
3. Age Differences and Individual Differences in Cognitive Functions <i>Klaus Oberauer</i>	44
4. Stress and Working Memory: Between-Person and Within-Person Relationships <i>Martin Sliwinski, Joshua Smyth, Robert S. Stawski, and Christina Wasylshyn</i>	73
SECTION II AGING AND PSYCHOPATHOLOGY OF COGNITIVE CONTROL	
5. The Aging of Cognitive Control: Studies of Conflict Processing, Goal Neglect, and Error Monitoring <i>Robert West and Ritvij Bowry</i>	97
6. Cognitive Control and Schizophrenia: Psychological and Neural Mechanisms <i>Deanna M. Barch and Todd S. Braver</i>	122

vi	Contents
7. Aging and Varieties of Cognitive Control: A Review of Meta-Analyses on Resistance to Interference, Coordination, and Task Switching, and an Experimental Exploration of Age-Sensitivity in the Newly Identified Process of Focus Switching	160
<i>Paul Verhaeghen, John Cerella, Kara L. Bopp, and Chandramallika Basak</i>	
8. An Ecological Approach to Studying Aging and Dual-Task Performance	190
<i>Karen Z. H. Li, Ralf Th. Krampe, and Albina Bondar</i>	
9. Cognitive Performance After Preexposure to Uncontrollability and in a Depressive State: Going with a Simpler “Plan B”	219
<i>Daniel N. McIntosh, Grzegorz Sedek, Susan Fojas, Aneta Brzezicka-Rotkiewicz, and Miroslaw Kofta</i>	
SECTION III ATTENTION, INHIBITION, AND REASONING PROCESSES	
10. The Nature of Attentional Bias in Human Anxiety	249
<i>Elaine Fox and George A. Georgiou</i>	
11. Inhibition, Rumination, and Mood Regulation in Depression	275
<i>Jutta Joormann</i>	
12. Aging and Inhibitory Processes in Memory, Attentional, and Motor Tasks	313
<i>Elizabeth A. Maylor, Friederike Schlaghecken, and Derrick G. Watson</i>	
13. Impairments of Memory and Reasoning in Patients with Neuropsychiatric Illness: Disruptions of Dynamic Cognitive Binding?	346
<i>James A. Waltz</i>	
14. Generative Reasoning as Influenced by Depression, Aging, Stereotype Threat, and Prejudice	377
<i>Ulrich von Hecker, Grzegorz Sedek, Kinga Piber-Dabrowska, and Sylwia Bedynska</i>	
Name Index	402
Subject Index	419

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-83407-0 - Cognitive Limitations in Aging and Psychopathology

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributors

Deanna M. Barch

Department of Psychology
Washington University
Campus Box 1125
One Brookings Drive
St. Louis, MO 63130
e-mail: dbarch@artsci.wustl.edu

Chandramallika Basak

Department of Psychology and
Center for Health and Behavior
Syracuse University
430 Huntington Hall
Syracuse, NY 13210
e-mail: cbasak@syr.edu

Sylwia Bedynska

Warsaw School of Social
Psychology
Chodakowska 19/31
03-815 Warsaw
Poland
e-mail: bedynska@pro.onet.pl

Albina Bondar

Max Planck Institute for Human
Development
Center for Lifespan Psychology
Lentzeallee 94 D-14195 Berlin
Germany

e-mail:

bondar@mpib-berlin.mpg.de

Kara L. Bopp

Department of Psychology
Hamilton College
198 College Hill Road
Clinton, NY 13323
kbopp@hamilton.edu

Ritvij Bowry

118 Haggard Hall
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556
e-mail: Ritvij.Bowry.1@nd.edu

Todd S. Braver

Department of Psychology
Washington University
Campus Box 1125
One Brookings Drive
St. Louis, MO 63130
e-mail: tbraver@artsci.wustl.edu

Aneta Brzezicka-Rotkiewicz

Warsaw School of Social
Psychology
Chodakowska 19/31
03-815 Warsaw
Poland
e-mail: abrzezi2@swps.edu.pl

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii

Contributors

John Cerella

Department of Psychology and
Center for Health and Behavior
Syracuse University
430 Huntington Hall
Syracuse, NY 13210
e-mail: jcerella@psych.syr.edu

Randall W. Engle

School of Psychology
Georgia Institute of Technology
654 Cherry Street
Atlanta, GA 30332-0170
e-mail:
randall.engage@psych.gatech.edu

Susan Fojas

Department of Psychology
University of Denver
Denver, CO 80208
e-mail: fojass@jccany.org

Elaine Fox

Department of Psychology
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ
United Kingdom
e-mail: efox@essex.ac.uk

George A. Georgiou

School of Humanities and Social
Sciences
Intercollege
46 Makedonitissas Avenue
P.O. Box 24005
1700 Nicosia
Cyprus
e-mail:
georgiou.g@intercollege.ac.cy

Richard P. Heitz

School of Psychology
Georgia Institute of Technology
654 Cherry Street
Atlanta, GA 30332-0170
e-mail: gte016z@prism.gatech.edu

Jutta Joormann

Department of Psychology
Bldg. 420 Jordan Hall, Room 160
Stanford University
Stanford, CA 94305
e-mail:
joormann@psych.stanford.edu

Mirosław Kofta

Faculty of Psychology
University of Warsaw
Stawki 5/7 Warsaw
Poland
e-mail:
kofta@engram.psych.uw.edu.pl

Ralf Th. Krampe

Max Planck Institute for Human
Development
Center for Lifespan Psychology
Lentzeallee 94 D-14195 Berlin
Germany
e-mail:
krampe@mpib-berlin.mpg.de

Karen Z. H. Li

Centre for Research in Human
Development
Department of Psychology
Concordia University
7141 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec
Canada H4B 1R6
e-mail: kli@vax2.concordia.ca

Elizabeth A. Maylor

Department of Psychology
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
United Kingdom
e-mail:
Elizabeth.Maylor@warwick.ac.uk

Daniel N. McIntosh

Department of Psychology
University of Denver

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contributors

ix

Denver, CO 80208
e-mail: dmcintos@du.edu

Klaus Oberauer
University of Potsdam
Allgemeine Psychologie I
Postfach 60 15 53
14415 Potsdam
Germany
e-mail: ko@rz.uni-potsdam.de

Kinga Piber-Dabrowska
Warsaw School of Social
Psychology
Chodakowska 19/31
03-815 Warsaw
Poland
e-mail: kinga.piber-
dabrowska@swps.edu.pl

Friederike Schlaghecken
Department of Psychology
University of Warwick
Coventry CV4 7AL
United Kingdom
e-mail:
F.Schlaghecken@warwick.ac.uk

Grzegorz Sedek
Warsaw School of Social
Psychology and Polish
Academy of Sciences
Chodakowska 19/31
03-815 Warsaw
Poland
e-mail:
Grzegorz.Sedek@swps.edu.pl

Martin Sliwinski
Department of Psychology
Huntington Hall 430
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13244
e-mail: mjsliwin@psych.syr.edu

Joshua Smyth
Department of Psychology
Huntington Hall 430
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13244
e-mail: jmsmyth@psych.syr.edu

Robert S. Stawski
Department of Psychology
Huntington Hall 430
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13244
e-mail: rsstawski@syr.edu

Nash Unsworth
School of Psychology
Georgia Institute of Technology
654 Cherry Street
Atlanta, GA 30332-0170
e-mail: gtg039d@prism.gatech.edu

Paul Verhaeghen
Department of Psychology and
Center for Health and Behavior
Syracuse University
430 Huntington Hall
Syracuse, NY 13210
e-mail: pverhaeg@psych.syr.edu

Ulrich von Hecker
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
P.O. Box 901
Cardiff, CF10 3YG
United Kingdom
e-mail: vonheckeru@cardiff.ac.uk

James A. Waltz
University of Maryland School of
Medicine
Maryland Psychiatric Research
Center
P. O. Box 21247
Baltimore, MD 21228
e-mail:
jwaltz@mprc.umaryland.edu

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

Contributors

Christina Wasylyshyn

Department of Psychology
Huntington Hall 430
Syracuse University
Syracuse, NY 13244
e-mail: cwasylys@syr.edu

Derrick G. Watson

Department of Psychology
University of Warwick

Coventry CV4 7AL

United Kingdom

e-mail:

D.G.Watson@warwick.ac.uk

Robert West

118 Haggard Hall
University of Notre Dame
Notre Dame, IN 46556
e-mail: west.19@nd.edu

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Frontmatter[More information](#)

Preface

As technological advances lead to more understanding of the brain, or the “hardware” of human thought, the importance of understanding the “software” that is, cognitive functions, has become even more important. There has been progress in the cognitive sciences in understanding the basic processes of cognition and how these processes relate to the operations and behaviors of the organism in the environment. Among the most intensely studied processes are those relating to attention and working memory (e.g., inhibition, updating, and coordination) and higher level cognitive abilities such as planning, reasoning, comprehension, and problem solving, which are attributed to circuits associated with the brain’s frontal lobe. One reason for this accelerating interest is the rapid progress in those areas of cognitive psychology and cognitive neuroscience that focus on *working memory* and *neuroimaging* research (Andrade, 2001; Cabeza & Nyberg, 2000; Davidson, Pizzagalli, Nitschke, & Putnam, 2002; Gazzaniga, Ivry, & Mangum, 1998; Logie & Gilhooly, 1999; Miyake & Shah, 1999; Richardson et al., 1996). Another reason for this surge of interest is that many populations, such as older adults (Craig & Salthouse, 2000; Perfect & Maylor, 2000; Rabbitt, 1997), persons with emotional disorders (Hertel, 1997; von Hecker & Sedek, 1999; Williams, Watts, MacLeod, & Mathews, 1997), and individuals with brain injuries (Waltz et al., 1999), have demonstrated cognitive limitations with respect to attention, working memory, and other so-called executive functions.

The significance of these functions is underscored by the wide range of populations in which such impairments have been found and by the areas of specialization within the cognitive sciences in which they have become increasingly important. In this broad interdisciplinary research domain, one might distinguish, on the one hand, basic research fostering the understanding of cognitive processes, and, on the other hand, research fields that combine those recent advances in cognitive psychology with the investigation into individual or group differences. Such individual

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Frontmatter[More information](#)

differences might be associated with developmental changes such as aging, developmental problems such as reading disability, and psychopathology such as depression and schizophrenia. For example, *cognitive aging* links the research lines on aging to those on cognitive processes. Similarly, studies in *cognitive psychopathology* examine emotional, mental, and brain disorders in terms of the underlying basic cognitive mechanisms that are affected in these states. Unfortunately, the literatures in these affiliated fields tend to evolve and progress largely separate from each other, although they share common concepts and objectives and are tightly linked by their central objective to obtain insights into cognitive functions. Explanations of the effects of aging and psychopathology on cognitive performance often make use of concepts from the basic cognitive literature; however, contributors to the two literatures do not often communicate directly with one another. This lack of communication means that insights and information gained from scientists working with one population, or with a particular paradigm, often do little to advance understanding in other closely related areas.

Our experience is that discussions across disciplines provide inspiration that help focus and develop our own understanding and research. The goal of the present volume is to provide such stimulation to others working in the large area of the cognitive sciences. This volume is unique in that it is an original attempt to combine a range of recent research achievements of North American and European teams fostering innovative experimental investigations in the previously mentioned fields. The publication of the volume was motivated by an international, interdisciplinary conference in Kazimierz Dolny, Poland, in autumn 2002, during which most of the chapter authors presented and discussed their work. Unlike larger conferences during which scientists communicate primarily with those working in their own areas of specialization, this conference focused on the presentation and discussion of cutting-edge paradigms and findings from each others' areas, and listening to the thoughts of "outsiders" regarding one's own work. The presenters came from different backgrounds with substantial overlap, such as the emotion–cognition link (Elaine Fox, Jutta Joormann, Edward Necka, Grzegorz Sedek), working memory (Randall Engle, Akira Miyake, Klaus Oberauer, James Waltz), social cognition (Miroslaw Kofta, Daniel McIntosh, Ulrich von Hecker), and cognitive aging (Elizabeth Maylor, Ralf Krampe, Paul Verhaeghen, Patrick Rabbitt).

The aim of the conference was to bring together scholars from different but intersecting fields in an environment that engendered dialogue and understanding of problems common to the intersecting areas. The beautiful Polish countryside and wonderful Polish food and vodka served to lubricate and stimulate the easy flow of ideas across the participants. In terms of this dialogue, for example, cognitive functioning and adaptation were addressed in the context of basic research on working memory and

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Frontmatter[More information](#)*Preface*

xiii

in various attempts to understand specific psychological states. Anxiety, depression, older age, or the experience of social stigmatization, to name just a few examples, can change the way we memorize, reason, or make judgments. Conversely, knowledge about these functional changes might again inform theories about working memory and social cognition in general. The speakers at the conference, and mostly the authors of the present volume, focused their contributions on the relation between the allocated amount of attentional resources and particular modes of processing and on how certain patterns of executive functioning may directly characterize certain states, such as anxiety, depression (dysphoria), or activated stereotypes. They also talked about different candidate functions within current models of working memory, such as attention, maintenance, or inhibition, to better understand the mechanisms of how psychological states might affect thinking and judgment.

In an attempt to further strengthen the theoretical and empirical scope of the volume along the lines discussed at the conference, we invited a number of further authors who are leading experts on related fields, but had not been part of our meetings, to share their views and contribute chapters. We are especially delighted to have received enthusiastic feedback to this invitation and thus be able to include Barch and Braver's chapter on impairments of cognitive control in schizophrenia; Sliwinski, Smyth, Stawski, and Wasylyshyn's chapter on the relation between stress experience and working memory performance; and West and Bowry's chapter on cognitive neuroscience methodologies applied to cognitive aging.

Our aim was to produce a work with chapters that meet the highest demands of accuracy and currency within specializations, but that is accessible to scientists and students outside the authors' specialties. To accomplish this aim, all chapters were reviewed not only by the external reviewers (professionals from the same research field) but also by graduate students who were specialists in areas other than the chapter they reviewed. We believe that those currently working in one area will find the chapters from researchers both inside and outside their area relevant and stimulating. We also believe that students of any of the cognitive sciences will benefit from exposure to both "hot cognition" and "cold cognition" perspectives represented here. We hope readers will find this volume as informative, stimulating, and generative as we found both the conference and the reading of these chapters.

Autumn 2004

Randall W. Engle

(Georgia Institute of Technology, USA)

Grzegorz Sedek

(Warsaw School of Social Psychology
and Polish Academy of Sciences, Poland)

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xiv

Preface

Ulrich von Hecker
(Cardiff University, UK)

Daniel N. McIntosh
(University of Denver, USA)

References

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Acknowledgments

The editors owe thanks to a number of people, organizations, and institutions. Without their help and support, it would not have been possible to complete this book.

First, we express our thanks to various granting agencies that supported our research and indeed the completion of our editing work. Randall Engle was supported by Grant F49620-00-1-131 from the Air Force Office of Scientific Research. Grzegorz Sedek was supported by the Polish Committee for Scientific Research (grant 5 H01F 013 21). Ulrich von Hecker was supported by the German National Research Foundation (grant He 2225) and by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant RES-000-23-0496). Daniel McIntosh was supported by the Walter Rosenberry Fund and Office of Internationalization at the University of Denver. The Warsaw School of Social Psychology provided financial and logistic help in organizing and running our conference in Kazimierz Dolny. Very obviously, much expertise and enthusiasm went into selecting and preparing such a wonderful, stimulating location for our meeting. In this respect, we thank all members of the local organizing committee, especially Aneta Brzezicka-Rotkiewicz, Sylwia Bedynska, Izabela Krejtz, and Kinga Piber-Dabrowska.

Akira Miyake, Edward Necka, and Patrick Rabbitt gave presentations at the conference and shared highly stimulating ideas in the discussions. They did not contribute to the present volume, but we highly appreciated their input and company.

We would also like to express thanks to all those who read, reviewed, and commented on draft papers that led to the final chapters published in this book. This includes not only peers and colleagues but also graduate students at several universities. We feel that the book as a whole has hugely benefited from the expertise and the feedback of these early readers, the communication among authors and readers, and among author groups from different chapters. All of these communications have in fact sparked many ideas for innovative research. Communication was made easy and

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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enjoyable by a Web site that was opened specifically for the purpose of exchanging views and arguments about the chapters and their draft versions during the time of writing. This Web site was professionally set up and managed by Tomasz Grzelka, whom we thank wholeheartedly. And, of course, our thanks go to the authors of all chapters, all of whom cooperated in a constructive way, preparing two or three drafts upon receiving editorial comments and collegial criticism.

We sincerely thank Philip Laughlin from Cambridge University Press for smoothly guiding the whole book project and for many helpful suggestions during the editorial process. Rhiannon Buck language-edited and commented on drafts of various parts of the book. Wiola Wisniewska, Ewa Lipiec, and Rafal Albinski provided valuable help with technical issues of editing.