The Virginia Cognitive Aging Project (VCAP) is a cross-sectional and longitudinal study of cognitive functioning in a large sample of healthy community-dwelling adults between the ages of 18-99 years (Salthouse, 2009). Data are collected on several domains of cognitive functioning and subjective ratings of cognition, as well as a myriad of individual difference characteristics including self-reports of physical activity, cognitive activity, social support, personality, well-being, and affective measures. This symposium focuses on findings from VCAP that examine cross-sectional and longitudinal links between individual difference characteristics, indicators of well-being, and objective and subjective cognition. These topics include the cross-sectional assessment of >5,000 participants on the mediating role of Need for Cognition on the relationship between cognition and well-being (Yazdani & Siedlecki) and the relationship between social support and ratings of subjective cognition (Mueller & Minahan). Jung uses cross-lagged analyses to assess temporal relationships between physical and cognitive activity and cognition. Falzarano et al. present findings regarding the longitudinal relationship between subjective and objective measures of cognition. Finally, Minahan and Siedlecki present findings examining the temporal relationship between ratings of loneliness and depression over time. The symposium provides insights into the complex role of individual differences characteristics and cognitive functioning across the adult lifespan.

NEED FOR COGNITION PARTIALLY MEDIATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COGNITION AND SUBJECTIVE WELL-BEING

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Aspects of cognitive functioning have been linked to measures of subjective well-being both cross-sectionally (Jones et al., 2003) and over time (Enkvisit et al., 2013) but the mechanisms underlying this relationship remain unclear. One potential mechanism may be individuals’ need for cognition, or the dispositional tendency to enjoy and engage in effortful cognitive activities (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). Analyses were conducted to examine need for cognition as a mediator of the relationship between five domains of cognition (episodic memory, processing speed, and vocabulary) after controlling for age, education, self-rated health and depression. Cross-lagged panel analyses indicate that very few of the temporal relationships between activity level and cognition were significant except higher levels of cognitive activity significantly predicted better future processing speed, but not the reverse. Findings suggest the importance of engaging in cognitively stimulating activities, which help adults preserve processing speed over time. This study also highlights the importance of longitudinal design on various domains of cognition to help develop domain-specific interventions.

THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT ON SUBJECTIVE COGNITION ACROSS ADULTHOOD

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Increased age is associated with declines in objective cognition (OC). A related but distinct construct is subjective cognition (SC), which is an individual’s self-appraisal of their OC. Research shows that SC impairment is an important precursor to declines in OC (Sánchez-Benavidez et al., 2018). Research has also demonstrated a positive relationship between OC and social support (SS) across adulthood (La Fleur & Salthouse, 2017), but there is limited research on the relationship between SC and SS. Participants (N = 1,873; age range 18-99) from the Virginia Cognitive Aging Project completed assessments of multiple domains of SC, OC, and SS. Results from the current study showed a consistent, significant association between negative interactions with others and poorer SC (Betas ranged from -.077 to .103, p < .05), beyond the influence of sociodemographic, well-being, and health factors. Our findings suggest that negative interactions may adversely impact one’s self-appraisal of cognitive functioning.

TEMPORAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ACTIVITY ENGAGEMENT AND COGNITION

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Previous studies have shown that activity engagement is related to cognitive function. However, few studies have examined the temporal order between activity engagement and various domains of cognition. Using data from the Virginia Cognitive Aging Project (baseline N = 5430, Mage = 51.28, SD = 18.12), we examined the temporal relationships between engagement in physical and cognitive activity and different cognitive domains (reasoning, spatial visualization, episodic memory, processing speed, vocabulary) after controlling for age, education, self-rated health and depression. Cross-lagged panel analyses indicate that very few of the temporal relationships between activity level and cognition were significant except higher levels of cognitive activity significantly predicted better future processing speed, but not the reverse. Findings suggest the importance of engaging in cognitively stimulating activities, which help adults preserve processing speed over time. This study also highlights the importance of longitudinal design on various domains of cognition to help develop domain-specific interventions.

INVESTIGATING THE LONGITUDINAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SUBJECTIVE COGNITIVE COMPLAINTS AND OBJECTIVE COGNITION

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Research examining the relationship between subjective cognitive complaints and objective cognitive performance has been mixed. Despite the lack of clear evidence demonstrating an association, subjective cognitive complaints are used as a criterion for the diagnosis of mild cognitive impairment and is considered a risk factor for Alzheimer’s disease. Cross-lagged panel analyses were used in the current study to examine the longitudinal relationships between subjective cognitive complaints (using the Memory Functioning Questionnaire) and objective cognition (e.g., reasoning, memory, spatial visualization, processing speed, and vocabulary) in healthy adults.