Advancing the study of sluggish cognitive tempo via DSM, RDoC, and hierarchical models of psychopathology.

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Abstract

Sluggish cognitive tempo (SCT) is separable from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and other psychopathologies, and growing evidence demonstrates SCT to be associated with impairment in both children and adults. However, it remains unclear how SCT should optimally be conceptualized. In this article, we argue that multiple models of psychopathology should be leveraged to make substantive advances to our understanding of SCT. Both categorical and dimensional approaches should be used, including the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) nosology, the Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) initiative, and hierarchical models of psychopathology. Studies are needed to determine whether individuals categorized with SCT can be reliably identified and differentiated from individuals without SCT in pathophysiological, neuropsychological, behavioral, and daily life functioning. Studies are also needed to evaluate the validity and utility of SCT as a transdiagnostic and dimensional construct. In considering SCT as a dimensional and potentially transdiagnostic construct, we describe ways in which SCT might be examined within the RDoC framework, including negative valence systems, cognitive systems, and arousal/regulatory systems, as well as within hierarchical models of psychopathology. Conceptualizing SCT within both categorical and dimensional models of psychopathology will help to better understand the causes, developmental pathways, and clinical implications of SCT, both as a construct in its own right and also in relation to other psychopathologies.