

Examining the Relationship between Anxiety, Intolerance of Uncertainty, and Cynicism: I'm not Certain it Matters...

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Introduction

- ◆ Cynicism has been associated with interpersonal problems, job stress, burnout, and reduced mental health service use.
 - ◆ High cynicism is characterized by a negative view of the world, as well as a tendency to consider others as selfish and untrustworthy.
 - ◆ Conceptually, cynicism may also be related to anxiety.
- ◆ Intolerance of uncertainty (IU) is a tendency to be distressed by uncertain future events and has been implicated as a core construct of anxiety.
 - ◆ Prospective IU denotes negative beliefs about the uncertainty of future events.
 - ◆ Inhibitory IU comprises behavioural inhibition in response to situational uncertainty
- ◆ Research suggests cynicism may be related to state and trait anxiety; however, little research has investigated the relationship between cynicism and core components of anxiety, such as IU.
- ◆ The current study examined the interrelationship between anxiety, IU, and cynicism, with prospective and inhibitory IU posited as mediators.

Methods

- ◆ A total of 262 student and community members ($M_{age} = 30.22$, $SD = 10.72$; 27.5% male) completed measures as part of a larger online study.
- ◆ Measures included:
 - ◆ *Cynicism Scale (CS)* – an 11-item self-report measure that assesses negativity and mistrust toward others and the world.
 - ◆ *State-Trait Anxiety Inventory STAI* – a self-report measure assessing stable and transient dimensions of anxiety.
 - ◆ *STAI-State (STAI-S)* – 20 items measuring stable tendencies to experience anxiety.
 - ◆ *STAI-Trait (STAI-T)* – 20 items measuring current anxiousness.
 - ◆ *Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale-Short Form (IUS-12)* – a 12-item self-report measure that assesses individual responses to uncertainty.
 - ◆ *Prospective subscale* – 7 items measuring an individual's negative beliefs about uncertainty.
 - ◆ *Inhibitory subscale* – 5 items measuring an individual's behavioural response to uncertainty.
- ◆ Mediation analyses were performed using the Hayes' PROCESS procedure.

Results

- ◆ Descriptive statistics are presented in Table 1.
- ◆ Mediation analyses with prospective IU as the mediator are presented in Figure 1.
 - ◆ The prospective IUS-12 score statistically significantly mediated the relationship between the STAI-S score and the CS total score (b mediation = 0.11, CI = [0.06, 0.17], $\kappa^2 = 0.10$).
 - ◆ The prospective IUS-12 score statistically significantly mediated the relationship between the STAI-T score and the CS total score (b mediation = 0.13, CI = [0.07, 0.22], $\kappa^2 = 0.12$).
- ◆ Mediation analyses with inhibitory IU as the mediator are presented in Figure 2.
 - ◆ The inhibitory IUS-12 score statistically significantly mediated the relationship between the STAI-S score and the CS total score (b mediation = 0.15, CI = [0.07, 0.23], $\kappa^2 = 0.13$).
 - ◆ The inhibitory IUS-12 score statistically significantly mediated the relationship between the STAI-T score and the CS total score (b mediation = 0.17, CI = [0.06, 0.30], $\kappa^2 = 0.13$).

Discussion

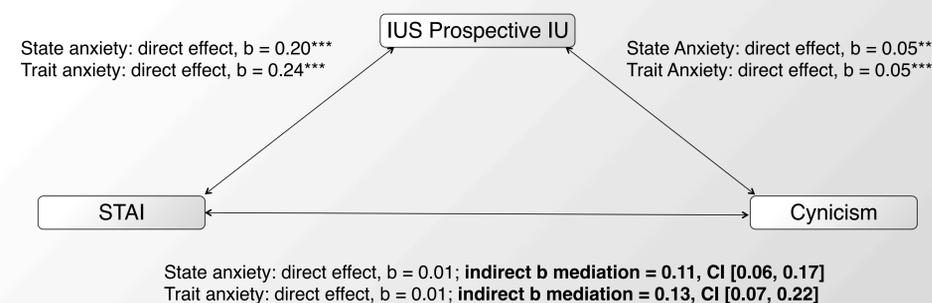
- ◆ The current results suggest that IU may play a role in the relationship between anxiety and cynicism.
 - ◆ Prospective and inhibitory dimensions of IU were significant mediators, suggesting that both present-oriented behavioural inhibition and future-oriented distress due to uncertainty may help account for the relationship between anxiety and cynicism.
- ◆ The unpredictability of others can make the world appear chaotic and threatening and may lend itself to a negative outlook for people with high IU.
 - ◆ Individuals with high IU may be uncertain about a number of things, including the consequences of mental health treatment.
 - ◆ Increased uncertainty may result in cynicism about mental health treatment outcomes, behavioural inhibition, and reduced service use.
- ◆ The current sample was derived from a general population of students and community members; future research should make use of clinical samples.
- ◆ Future research should also explore the relationship between anxiety, IU, and cynicism, with a focus on behavioural outcomes and implications for access to mental health services.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for CS, IUS-12 and STAI scores

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
CS Total	3.67	0.97
IUS Total	29.81	9.44
IUS Inhibitory IU	10.44	4.59
IUS Prospective IU	19.37	5.60
State Anxiety	34.72	10.31
Trait Anxiety	40.95	11.86

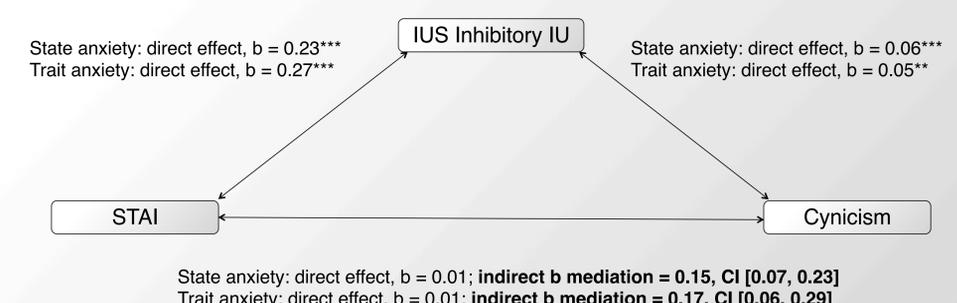
Note: CS – Cynicism Scale total score; IUS-12 – Intolerance of uncertainty scale – Short form; IUS Total – IUS-12 total score; IUS Inhibitory – IUS-12, Inhibitory subscale; IUS Prospective – IUS-12, Prospective subscale; State anxiety – State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, State Anxiety subscale; Trait Anxiety – State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, State Anxiety subscale.

Figure 1. Prospective IU Mediation Model



Note: Mediated regression models with the Prospective IU subscale score of the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale-Short Form as a mediating variable between subscale scores (i.e., State, Trait) of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and Cynicism Scale total score. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Figure 2. Inhibitory IU Mediation Model



Note: Mediated regression models with the Inhibitory IU subscale score of the Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale-Short Form as a mediating variable between subscale scores (i.e., State, Trait) of the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory and Cynicism Scale total score. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

