

Exploring the role of intolerance of uncertainty in perseverative worry: Is the mechanism increased systematic processing?

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Aims/Hypotheses

Perseverative worry is associated with intolerance of uncertainty (IoU; e.g. Dugas et al., 1998). IoU is defined as the tendency to react negatively to an uncertain event or situation, regardless of the probability of the outcome and of any associated consequences.

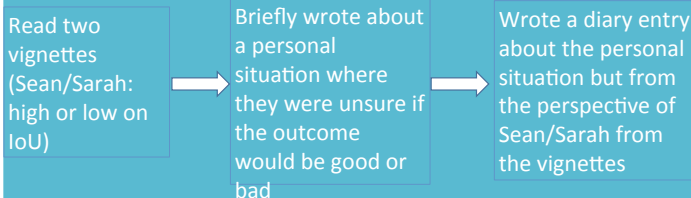
Perseverative worry is also associated with high levels of endemic negative mood (e.g. Meyer, Miller, Metzger & Borkovec, 1990). Previous work in our lab has demonstrated that negative mood increases self-report measures of variables known to increase systematic processing (a comprehensive analytical processing style where all input is scrutinised for relevance and importance, and integrated in the formation of judgements, Chaiken, Liberman & Eagly, 1989), and that these variables partially mediated individuals' worry levels (PSWQ). If perseverative worriers are indeed systematically processing their worries, IoU may also be expected to increase variables that facilitate systematic processing given its association with higher levels of worry.

Within the systematic processing literature, the sufficiency principle suggests individuals exert whatever level of effort is needed to be confident processing goals are met (Chaiken, Liberman & Eagly, 1989). IoU may increase systematic processing of worry thoughts by raising the sufficiency threshold.

Method

Information sheet, consent

INTOLERANCE OF UNCERTAINTY MANIPULATION



Manipulation checks: intolerance of uncertainty, mood, problem-solving confidence

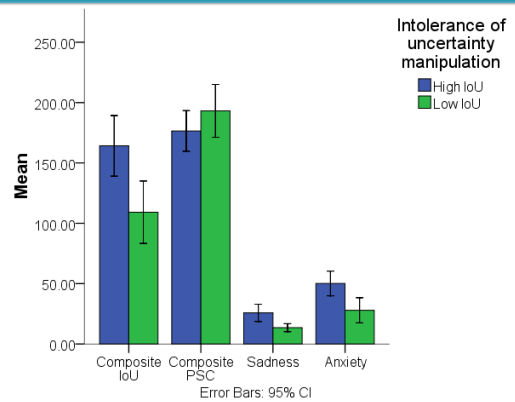
Read two worry vignettes and completed VAS questions measuring systematic processing facilitator variables: responsibility, accountability, control, cognition, task importance, personal relevance

Catastrophising Interview

Questionnaires: PSWQ, IUS, Problem-solving confidence subscale of PSI; debrief

References

- Chaiken, S., Liberman, A., & Eagly, A. H. (1989). Heuristic and systematic information processing within and beyond the persuasion context. In J. S. Uleman & J. A. Bargh (Eds.), *Unintended Thought*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich.
- Meyer, T. J., Miller, M. L., Metzger, R. L., & Borkovec, T. D. (1990). Development and validation of the Penn State Worry Questionnaire. *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 28, 487-495.

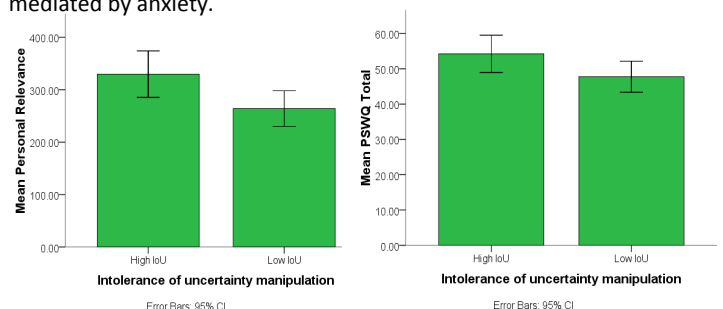


Results

Manipulation Checks: The high IoU group scored significantly higher than the low IoU group on a composite measure of IoU. The IoU manipulation also increased anxiety and sadness scores in the high IoU group compared to the low IoU group. There was no significant effect on problem-solving confidence.

Experimental Outcomes: There was a significant effect of IoU manipulation on personal relevance. The high IoU group reported feeling that a worry vignette was more personally relevant than the low IoU group. There was no significant effect of IoU on the other systematic processing facilitators (responsibility, accountability, control, cognition, task importance). The IoU manipulation also affected worry. The high IoU group scored higher on the PSWQ than the low IoU group. There was no significant difference on the catastrophising interview.

Mediation Analyses: A series of regression analyses were run as recommended by Baron and Kenny (1986). Anxiety and personal relevance fully mediated the relationship between IoU and worry. The relationship between IoU and personal relevance was also fully mediated by anxiety.



Conclusions

Higher levels of IoU significantly increase feelings of personal relevance, and along with anxiety, this fully mediates worry. Within the systematic processing literature, higher levels of personal relevance are considered to raise an individual's sufficiency threshold (the amount of processing they feel they need to do), and consequently, higher levels of IoU may result in greater levels of systematic processing (e.g. Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Furthermore, this experiment has shown that higher levels of IoU are associated with higher scores on the PSWQ. Mediation analyses suggest both of these relationships are fully mediated by anxiety. Clinicians attempting to reduce worry levels could address the cognitive appraisal of anxiety that arises when faced with high levels of IoU.