

IS ANY EXPLANATION BETTER THAN NO EXPLANATION? INTOLERANCE OF UNCERTAINTY AND PARANORMAL BELIEFS

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Conditions of uncertainty and anxiety are thought to provide fertile ground for paranormal beliefs to take root and flourish (Shermer, 2011). Few researchers have examined the condition of uncertainty, and, specifically, the relationship between intolerance of uncertainty and paranormal beliefs. The purpose in this study was to address this notable omission in the literature. The Intolerance of Uncertainty Scale (IUS; Freeston, Rhéaume, Letarte, Dugas, & Ladouceur, 1994) was used to measure the degree to which a person tolerates uncertainty. The Paranormal Belief Scale (PBS; Tobacyk & Milford, 1983) was used to measure a person's tendency to hold paranormal beliefs. Three hypotheses were proposed: **Hypothesis 1:** There will be a positive correlation between scores on the IUS and the PBS.

Hypothesis 2: There will be a positive correlation between IUS scores and traditional religious beliefs (PBS, subscale one).

Hypothesis 3: There will be a positive correlation between IUS scores and precognition (PBS, subscale seven).

Participants ($N = 183$; 103 women and 80 men) were recruited from introductory psychology courses at a medium-sized liberal arts university in the USA. Participants completed a packet of self-report measures, including the IUS ($\alpha = .872$) and the PBS ($\alpha = .88$).

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As we predicted, a simple correlation analysis revealed that IUS composite scores did correlate with PBS scores (H1: $r = .15$, $p < .05$). Additional simple correlations were performed between the IUS and the seven subscales of the PBS. These analyses failed to reveal the predicted relationship between IUS and traditional religious beliefs (PBS, subscale one; H2: $r = .07$, $p > .05$), but did reveal the predicted relationship between IUS and precognition (PBS, subscale 7; H3: $r = .22$, $p < .01$).

The results suggest that intolerance of uncertainty appears to be associated with paranormal beliefs in general and beliefs in precognition more specifically. Future researchers should address the limitations in this study by drawing participants from different populations (e.g., noncollege-aged individuals) and through the use of experimental designs that might shed light on a possible causal relationship between the constructs. Nevertheless, the results of this study represent an important first step in this process by finding that people high in intolerance of uncertainty may gravitate toward paranormal explanations of events, as any explanation may be better than no explanation.

Keywords: intolerance of uncertainty, pattern-seeking behavior, anxiety, paranormal beliefs, magical thinking.

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