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Title: "Differentiating Paranoia and Conspiracy Mentality - A Network Approach"

Abstract: While mostly viewed as separate constructs, conspiracy mentality and paranoia exhibit conceptual similarities, such as the presence of persecutory content and resistance to disconfirming evidence. We investigated the differentiation between conspiracy mentality and paranoia using self-report data from a large and multinational online sample ($N = 2,510$; from the UK, the US, Hong Kong, Germany, and Australia). Utilising network analysis, we further explored whether typical paranoia-related clinical factors, such as anxiety, social support or trauma, are similarly associated with conspiracy mentality. Paranoia and conspiracy mentality presented distinct yet weakly correlated ($r = .29$) constructs across all sites. Both had common correlates, including past traumatic experiences, holding generalised negative beliefs about the self and others, having sleep problems, and exhibiting worry tendencies. However, whereas paranoia was linked to higher negative affect (i.e., anxiety) and lower social support, the opposite pattern was found for conspiracy mentality (i.e., lower anxiety and depression, higher social support). These findings highlight the importance of accounting for the overlap of the two constructs while pointing towards both common and unique risk factors and underlying mechanisms.

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