



From Cannabis to Conspiracy: The Mediating Role of Conspiracy Mentality in THC-Paranoia Links

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Introduction

- Conspiracy Mentality** is a generic tendency to view major world events as the result of secret plots by malevolent groups (Swami et al., 2010).
- Paranoid Thoughts** revolve around beliefs of imminent personal harm, malevolent intent from others, and delusions of reference (Freeman, 2006).

Shared Mechanisms vs. Fundamental Divergence:

Both constructs share identical cognitive heuristics, such as the "jumping to conclusions" bias. However, they diverge behaviorally and focus on different targets:

- Paranoia:** Self-referenced threats → typically leads to social withdrawal.
- Conspiracy Mentality:** Collective threats → closely linked to anti-system attitudes and non-normative behaviors (Douglas et al., 2019)

The Literature Gap & Research Objective:

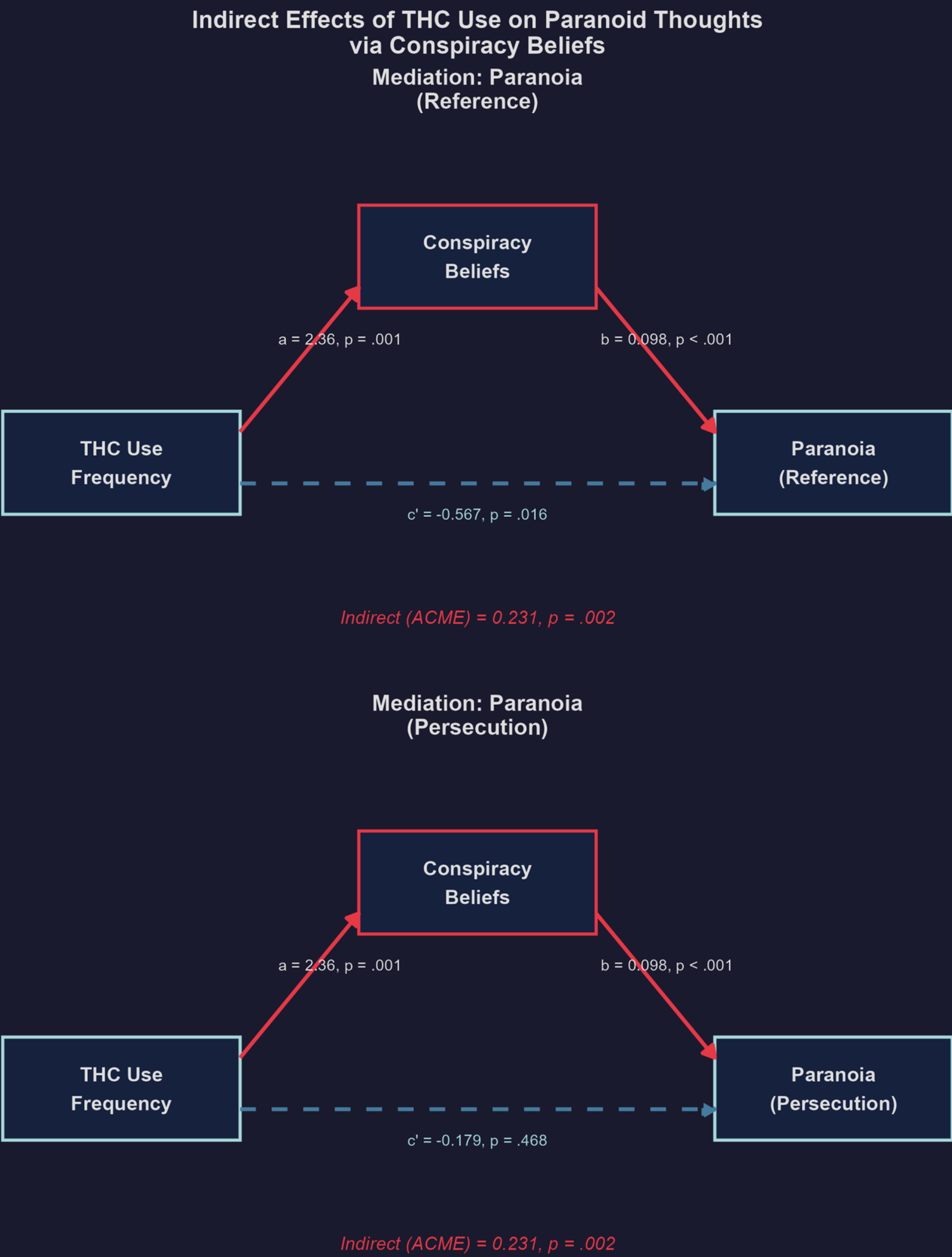
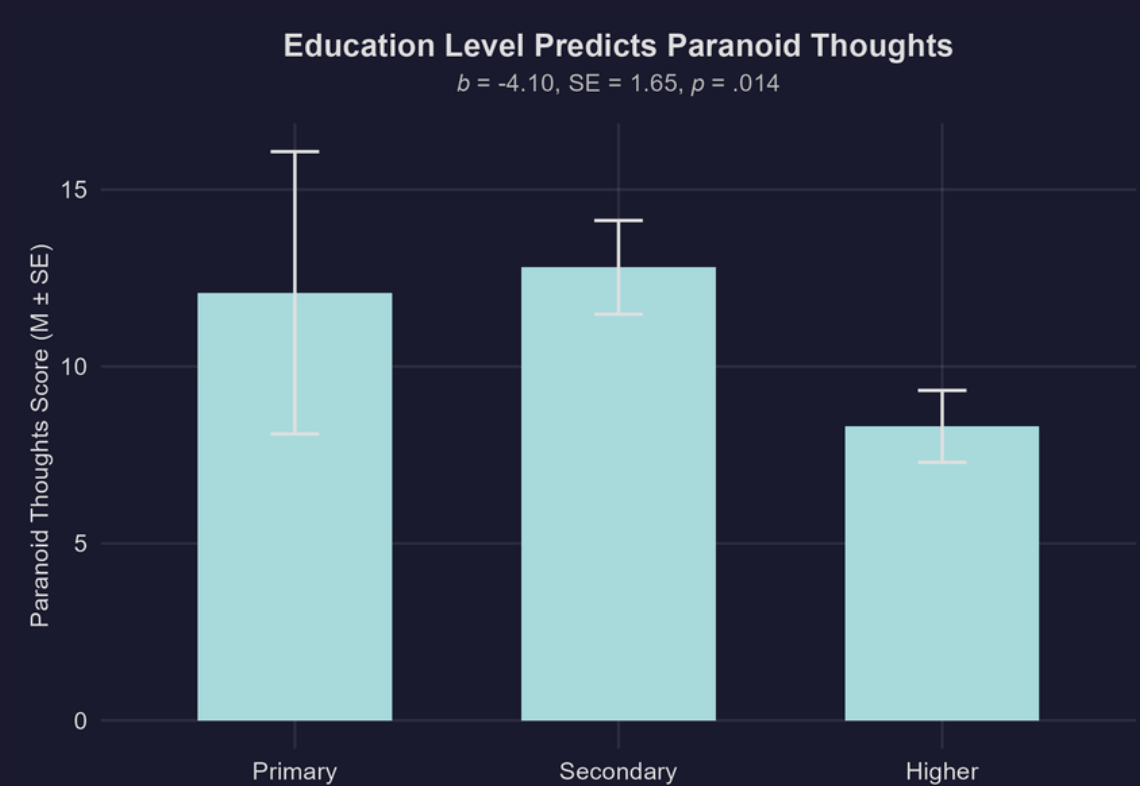
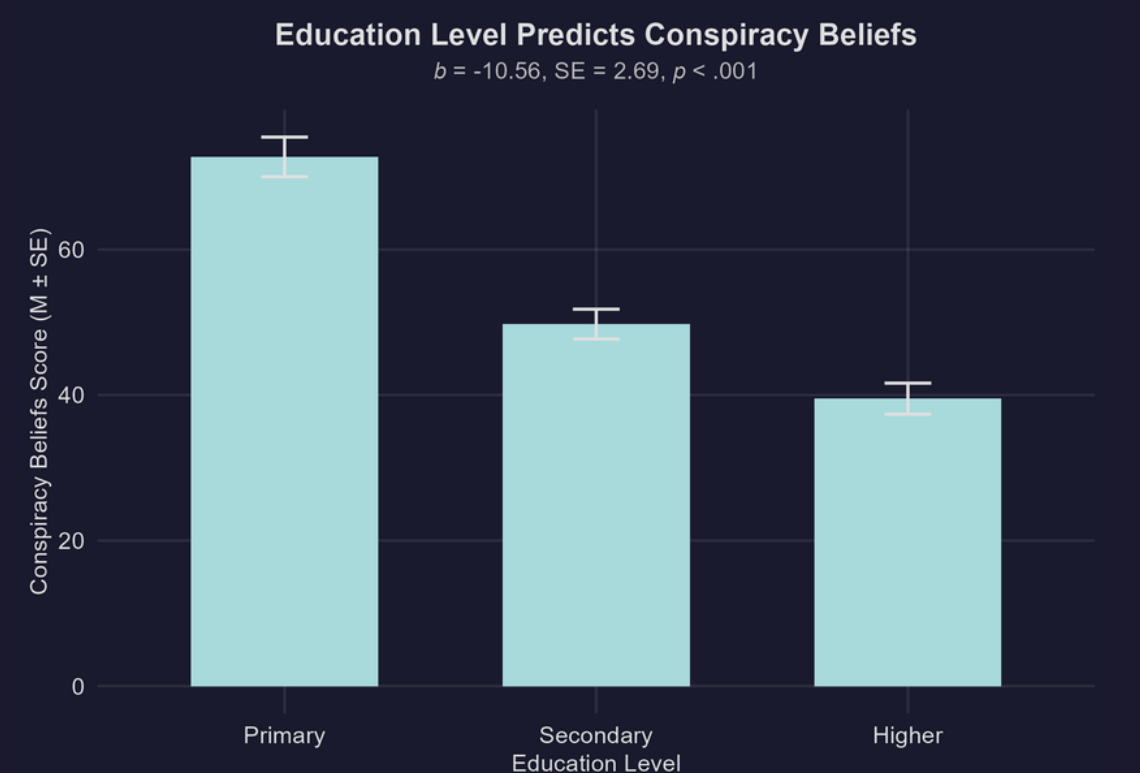
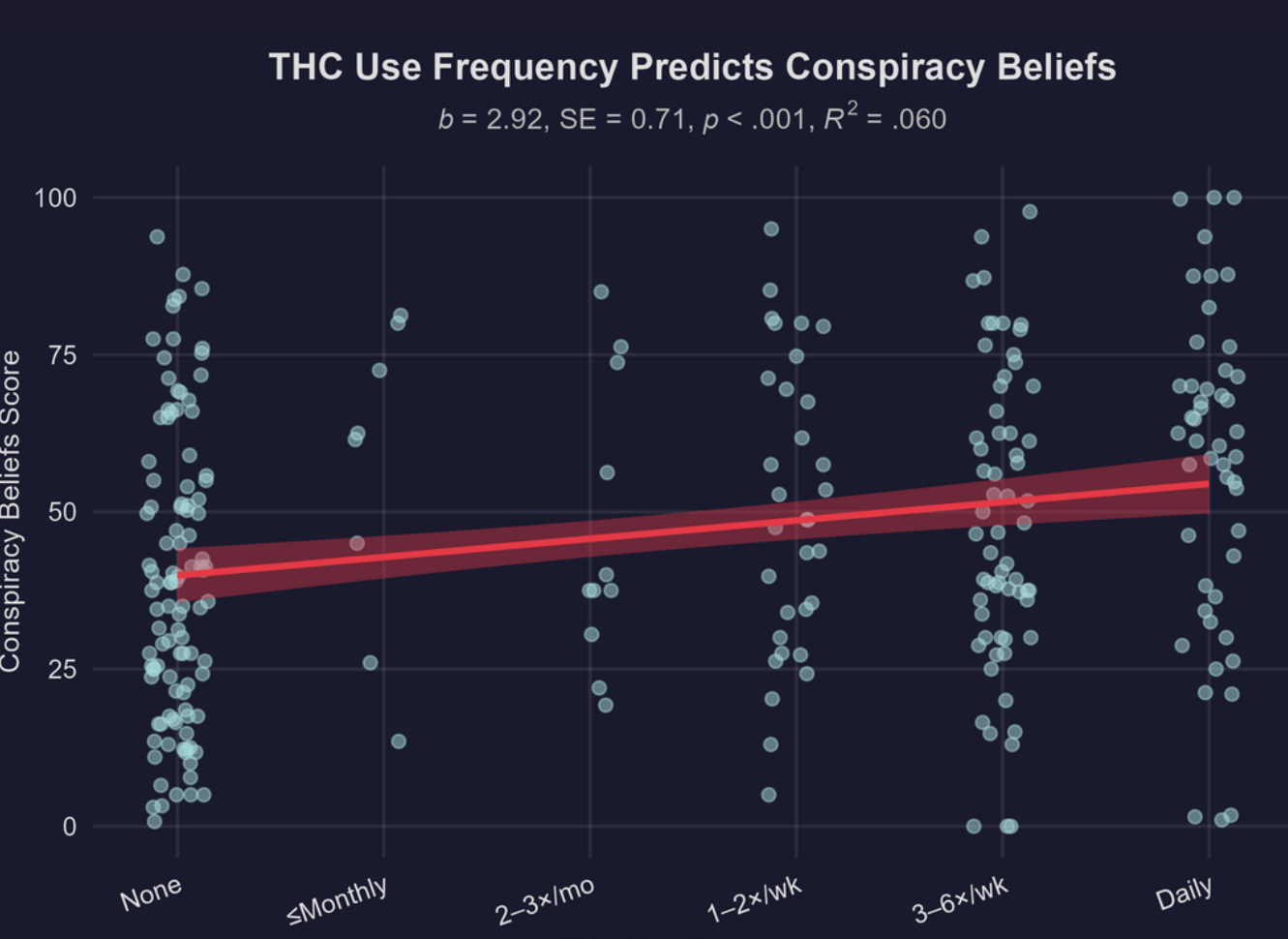
The use of cannabinoids (THC) is robustly linked with paranoia (Murri et al., 2025), yet its connection to conspiracy beliefs remains largely unexplored. Given their theoretical overlap, a bidirectional relationship between paranoia and conspiracy mentality suggests a possible mediating pathway between THC use and conspiracy beliefs via paranoia-related mechanisms. To address this gap, the present study investigates the direct association between regular THC use and conspiracy mentality, while exploratory mediation analyses test the underlying mediation mechanisms connecting these constructs.

Method

A total of 254 adult participants (aged 18 and older) took part in an online survey. After completing a demographic questionnaire, participants reported their frequency of THC use and completed a battery of psychological measures administered in a fixed order.

- Beliefs in conspiracy theories were assessed using the Polish translation of Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire (CMQ).
- Paranoid ideation was evaluated with the Revised Green et al. Paranoid Thoughts Scale (R-GPTS), capturing two distinct dimensions: persecutory ideation and ideas of reference. Finally, participants were debriefed regarding the true purpose of the study.

Results



Conspiracy Mentality was positively correlated with both Paranoid Thoughts subscales: ideas of reference ($r = .31, p < .05$) and persecution ideation ($r = .28, p < .05$), as well as with frequency of THC use ($r = .24, p < .05$). However, Paranoid Thoughts were not significantly associated with use of THC ($p > .05$). Regression analyses revealed that frequency of THC use significantly predicts Conspiracy Mentality ($B = 2.36, SE = 0.73, p = .001$), while controlling for demography. Education turned out to be a significant negative predictor of both Paranoia ($B = -4.18, SE = 1.66, p = .01$) and Conspiracy Mentality ($B = -10.56, SE = 2.69, p < .001$). Mediation analyses of both paranoia scales revealed the inconsistent mediation effect of THC use on ideas of reference via conspiracy beliefs ($ACME = 0.231, p = .002$; $ADE = -0.567, p = .016$; Total Effect = $-0.337, p = .126$) and indirect-only on persecutory ideation ($ACME = 0.231, p = .002$).

Discussion

Key Findings:

- As predicted, frequency of THC use was associated with conspiracy mentality, exhibiting a clear linear trend but, surprisingly, it was not associated with paranoia.
- Exploratory analysis revealed an inconsistent mediation model, highlighting a bridging effect of conspiracy mentality between THC use and paranoid thoughts.
- The opposing sign of the direct effect of THC on ideas of reference indicates a suppression effect, suggesting an unmeasured variable acts as an inhibitory force within this mechanism.

As this study allows for correlational conclusions, a potential explanation of these effects may lie in the link between conspiracy mentality and non-normative behaviors. Because Poland enforces strict cannabis prohibition, individuals with elevated conspiratorial thinking might be more inclined to deliberately seek out an illegal substance, while simultaneously being prone to developing paranoid ideation.

Future Directions & Limitations:

- Longitudinal designs are required to isolate the direct negative paths that currently suppress the total effect of THC on paranoia.
- Establishing the exact direction of these dynamics remains crucial: does THC use drive conspiratorial worldviews, or do the psychological components of a conspiracy mentality predispose individuals to consume cannabis?

References

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