

Background

- Conspiracy theories (CTs) are prevalent in societies (e.g., Douglas, 2021; Jochen, 2020)
- ... at times also promoted in higher education
- Prior research has focused mainly on students – not on faculty (e.g., Dyrendal & Jolley, 2020)
- Faculty are epistemic authorities that can shape students' beliefs (Siegel et al., 2025)

Objectives

- Understand: prevalence, predictors, consequences and responses to CTs in higher education
- Develop a multi-level framework (micro–meso–macro)

Research Question

How and why do faculty members endorse conspiracy theories, and how can institutions respond effectively?

Key theoretical insights

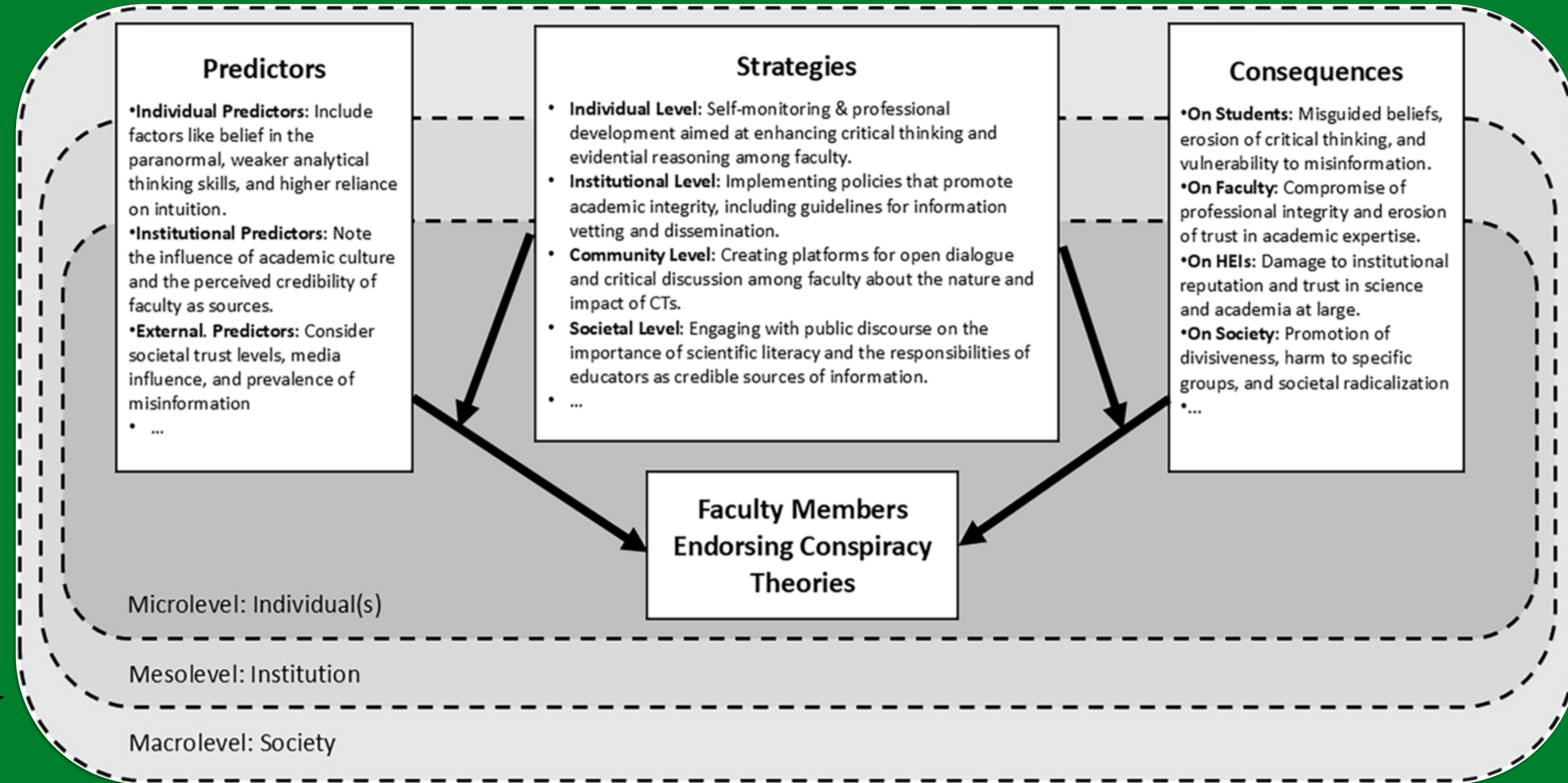
- CTs = epistemically unwarranted beliefs lacking evidence (Butter, 2020, van der Linden, 2023)
- They differ from scientific theories / thinking (among others):
 - not falsifiable
 - often self-sealing (Lewandowsky et al., 2020)
- Faculty influence is particularly critical due to authority

Exemplary Implications:

- Do not suppress debate → raise epistemic standards
- Academic (relative) freedom ≠ absolute freedom
- Universities should:
 - provide supporting and reporting structures
 - promote evidence-based teaching
- Faculty must:
 - model critical thinking (van der Linden et al., 2020)
 - avoid legitimizing misinformation

“We don’t need no thought control”

What to do when faculty spread conspiracy theories in the classroom



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Primary References

