

The Effects of Sociocultural Factors on Social Connectedness and Its Relationship with Minority Stress in LGBTQ Young Adults

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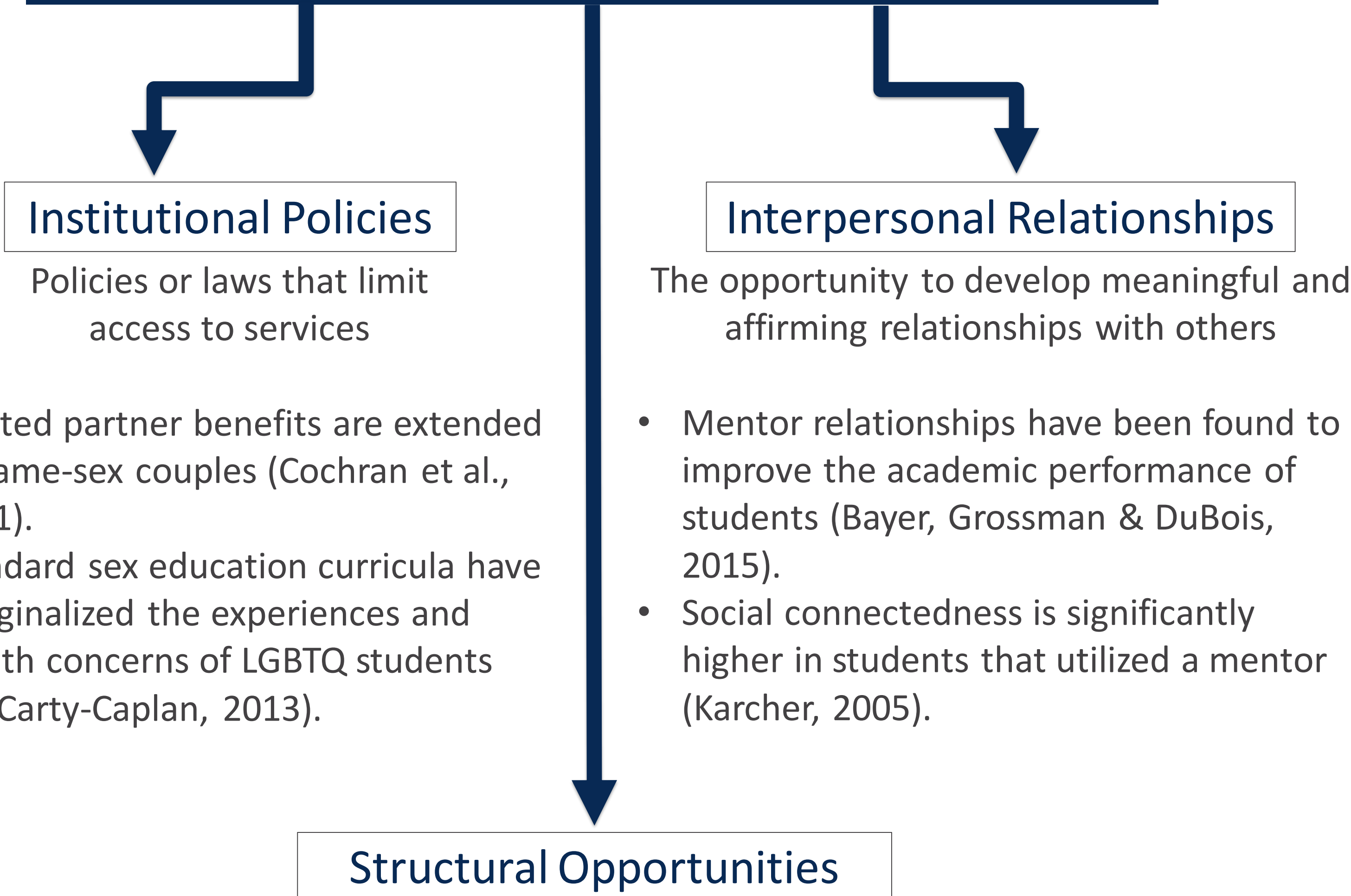
Introduction

- The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) community reports a higher prevalence of mental health problems than the heterosexual population (Meyer, 2003).
- The minority stress model states that this higher frequency of mental disorders exists due to alienation and isolation from social structures and institutions. It predicts that isolation is instigated by the individual's identification as a minority.
- Members of the LGBTQ community have historically been ostracized from various social groups, and this victimization has been associated with multiple functional impairments (Lick, Durso & Johnson, 2013).
- Social support and social connectedness have been identified as tools to reduce stress, and can encourage social and psychological well-being.
- People with low connectedness have been found to report higher levels of loneliness, anxiety, and depression, and lower self-esteem (Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Research shows insufficient institutional policies, structural opportunities, and interpersonal relationships can be tied to negative outcomes. However, there has been no research to assess how these factors might directly influence social connectedness. Differences in social connectedness might then alter the experience of minority stress.

Our research hypothesis is that sociocultural factors such as institutional policies, structural opportunities, and interpersonal relationships influence the development of social connectedness, which may mitigate the negative outcomes that originate from minority stress (Fig. 1).

Sociocultural Factors



Instances of exclusion, or lack of opportunity for inclusion, from social groups

- Limited partner benefits are extended to same-sex couples (Cochran et al., 2001).
- Standard sex education curricula have marginalized the experiences and health concerns of LGBTQ students (McCarty-Caplan, 2013).
- Mentor relationships have been found to improve the academic performance of students (Bayer, Grossman & DuBois, 2015).
- Social connectedness is significantly higher in students that utilized a mentor (Karcher, 2005).
- LGBTQ support organizations and Gay-Straight Alliances (GSA) can play a significant role in promoting a more inclusive campus climate.
- 35% of LGBTQ young adults were aware of a GSA at their high school (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, & Russell, 2011).
- Students who perceived the GSA as effective reported significantly less depression, fewer substance abuse issues, and higher rates of college attendance (Kosciw, Palmer, Kull, & Greytak, 2013).

Methods

Participants

A sample of 213 individuals who identify as LGBTQ between the ages of 18 and 24 were recruited via a Qualtrics participant panel; 28% gay/lesbian, 60% bisexual, 12% queer/questioning/other.

Survey

Participants were asked to complete a survey that assessed:

- Demographic Information:** Age, gender, sexual orientation, state or territory of residence, ethnicity, religious affiliation, current year in college, and socioeconomic status
- GSA Participation and Teacher/Staff Support:** Participation in a GSA at the high school or college campus attended, and experiences of support from teachers or staff
- Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Identity Scale** (Mohr & Kendra, 2011): Minority stress based on eight subscales (Acceptance concerns, Concealment motivation, Identity uncertainty, Internalized homonegativity, Difficult process, Identity superiority, Identity affirmation, and Identity centrality)
- Social Connectedness Scale (Revised)** (Lee, Draper, & Sujin, 2001): Social connectedness

Results

Dependent variable: Identity affirmation (IA)						
Effect	B	SE	t	p	LLCI	UPCI
<i>Direct Effects</i>						
GSA involvement (high school) > social connectedness	0.1102	0.0767	1.4369	0.1523	-0.041	0.2614
GSA involvement (high school) > IA	0.1947	0.0909	2.1419	0.0334	0.155	0.374
LGBTQ-supportive staff (high school) > social connectedness	0.0557	0.0698	0.7977	0.426	-0.0819	0.1933
LGBTQ-supportive staff (high school) > IA	0.2036	0.0818	2.4883	0.0136	0.0423	0.3649
Social connectedness (high school) > IA	0.3754	0.0821	4.5701	<0.001	0.2134	0.5374
GSA involvement (college) > social connectedness	0.2597	0.0695	3.7344	0.0002	0.1226	0.3968
GSA involvement (college) > IA	0.1845	0.0859	2.1484	0.0329	0.0152	0.3539
LGBTQ-supportive staff (college) > social connectedness	0.1165	0.0677	1.7193	0.0871	-0.0171	0.25
LGBTQ-supportive staff (college) > IA	0.3222	0.0783	4.1166	0.0001	0.1679	0.4766
Social connectedness (college) > IA	0.3475	0.0803	4.3259	<0.001	0.1891	0.5059
<i>Indirect Effects</i>						
GSA involvement (high school) on IA through social connectedness	0.0404	0.0297	--	0.1523	-0.0121	0.1079
LGBTQ-supportive staff (high school) on IA through social connectedness	0.0209	0.0272	--	0.426	-0.0296	0.0776
GSA involvement (college) on IA through social connectedness	0.0851	0.0327	--	0.0002	0.0335	0.1632
LGBTQ-supportive staff (college) on IA through social connectedness	0.0405	0.0244	--	0.0871	-0.0015	0.0953

Conclusions

Significant direct effects were found for the following:

- GSA involvement in high school on identity affirmation
- LGBTQ-supportive staff in high school on identity affirmation
- Social connectedness on identity affirmation
- GSA involvement in college on social connectedness
- GSA involvement in college on identity affirmation
- LGBTQ-supportive staff in college on identity affirmation

Social connectedness was found to be a mediating factor between GSA involvement and identity affirmation in college.

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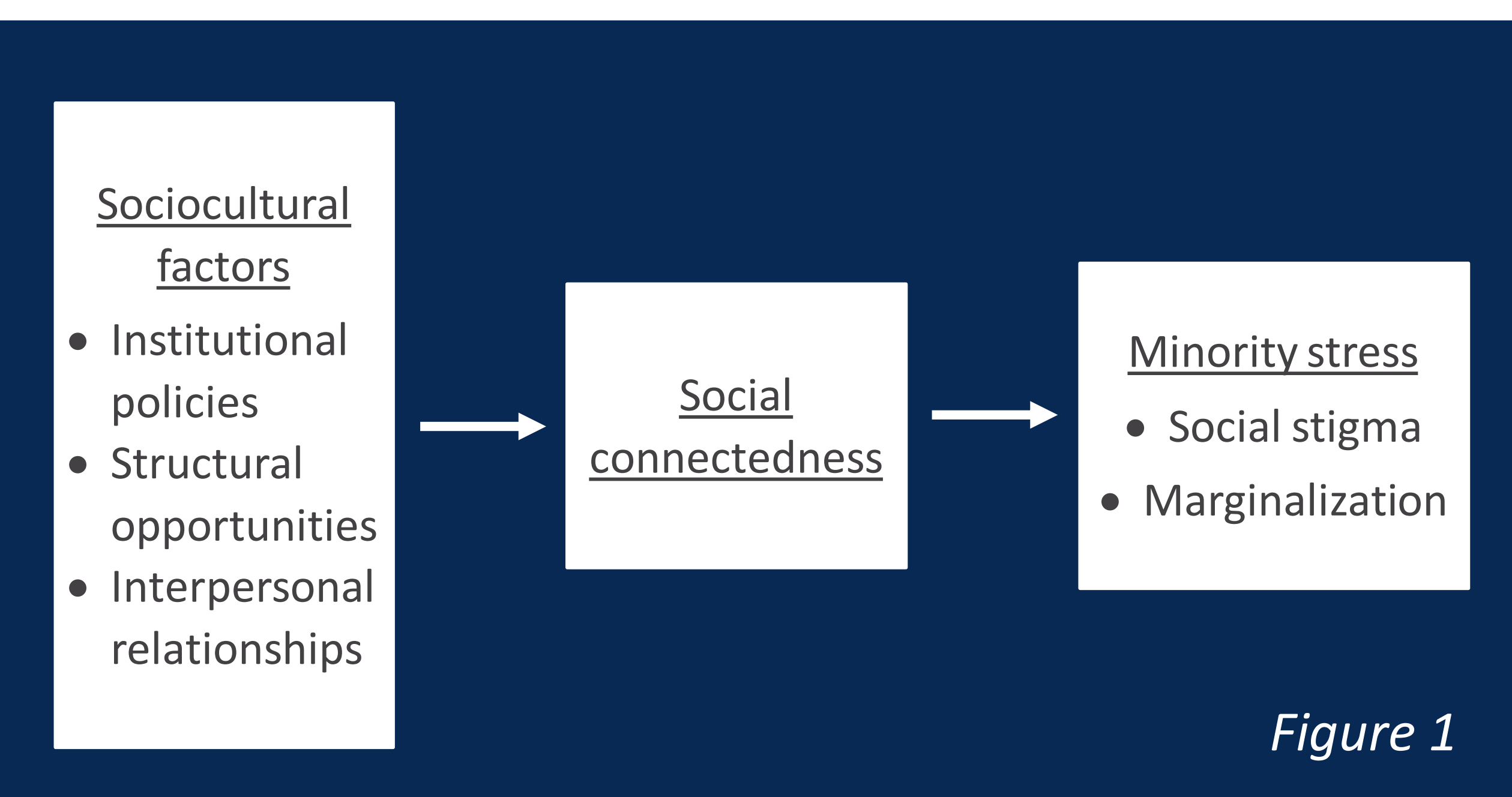


Figure 1