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Perceptions of Campus Climate by Sexual Minorities

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Abstract
Previous research has indicated that students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) often have negative experiences on university campuses due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. Direct and indirect experiences contribute to an overall perception of the campus climate. This study used an online survey to assess students' perceptions of campus climate, their experiences confronting bias, support of family members and friends, and whether they had considered leaving campus. Multiple regression analysis indicated that perceptions of poorer campus climate were predicted by greater unfair treatment by instructors, more impact from anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) bias on friends' and families' emotional support, and having hidden one's LGBT identity from other students. Cluster analyses revealed four groups of participants distinguished by openness about their sexual orientation and negative experiences, with one group appearing to be at risk for poor retention. Results are discussed in terms of the needs of LGBTQ students on campus.

Keywords: campus climate, sexual orientation, university retention

Campus climate has been defined by Rankin (2005) as "the cumulative attitudes, behaviors and standards of employees and students concerning access for, inclusion of, and level of respect for individual and group needs, abilities and potential." Rankin (2005) also stated that campus climate has an impact on academic development and participation in campus

life. Attention to campus climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) individuals has resulted in a growing body of research about LGBTQ identity development, campus climate for LGBTQ students, and best practices to create more inclusive campus environments for LGBTQ students, faculty, and staff. The LGBTQ identity development models combined with campus climate information provide a sketch of how LGBTQ students experience campus environments.

Campus climate is a lens through which to view LGBTQ students' experiences at colleges and universities. Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keilig (2004) reported that campus climate refers to the environment on campus for a given population. Evans and Rankin (1998) suggested that the campus climate for LGBTQ people was made up of both LGBTQ students' perceptions of discrimination and harassment and the attitudes of presumably straight individuals on campus toward the LGBTQ community. In addition, Hurtado, Milem, Clayton-Pederson, and Allen (1999) summarized the extant research. They concluded that students' perceptions of the campus climate have real effects on the students themselves. In addition, Hurtado et al. reported that a diverse student body improved students' abilities to understand multiple perspectives and think about problems in more complex ways.

Empirical Studies of Campus Climate for LGBTQ Students

Studies have investigated the experiences of LGBTQ individuals using qualitative techniques, such as interviews (Dilley, 2005; Evans & Broido, 2002; Evans & Heriot, 2004; Renn, 2007; Stevens, 2004). For example, Evans and Broido conducted interviews with 10 lesbian and bisexual white women living in residence halls. The authors found that halls which were regarded as positive places to live housed LGB-friendly individuals, lacked anti-lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) incidents, and were academically focused. Halls that were perceived as negative places to live were associated with graffiti, first-year students, sorority members, athletes, and indifferent resident assistants. A theme emerged suggesting the women in the sample were conditioned to anticipate heterosexism and viewed environments as positive if "nothing bad happens" (p. 39), which may be conceived of as a "neutral" (rather than positive) environment.

Quantitative studies of the experiences of LGBTQ students have indicated that many students' experiences with college campus climates are neither positive nor inclusive, with many students experiencing hostility because of the anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) attitudes of others (Gortmaker & Brown, 2006; Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2004; Tomlinson & Fassinger, 2003). Rankin (2004) conducted a national quantitative study of LGBTQ climate at 14 institutions with a sample including 1,000 students and 669 faculty, staff, and administrators. Rankin (2004) found that 34% of the students felt the need to hide their sexual orientation or gender identity on campus and 19% were concerned for their physical safety. Twenty-eight percent of LGB respondents reported being harassed during the year preceding their participation in the survey. More transgender respondents (41%) reported the same. In addition to the differences between LGB individuals and transgender individuals, more LGBT people of color in Rankin's (2004) sample reported harassment (32%) than white LGBT people did (28%). These differences may indicate that in addition

to heterosexism, transphobia and racism on college campuses contributes to an even more hostile environment for LGB people of color and transgender individuals. The extent to which discriminatory attitudes of any kind exist on a campus may contribute to negative perceptions of that campus's climate.

Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, and Frazer (2010) found that negative experiences are still commonplace, despite improvements in campus climates. These experiences range from a lack of social inclusion to name calling, graffiti, and physical abuse. These types of experiences create a hostile climate toward LGBTQ individuals and groups. The key findings of the national survey indicated that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and queer (LGBQ) respondents experience higher rates of harassment and discrimination than their heterosexual allies. Respondents identifying as transmasculine, transfeminine, and gender nonconforming (GNC) reported higher rates of harassment based on gender identity than those who identified as women and men reported experiencing. LGBTQ respondents of color were more likely to report race as a reason for experiencing harassment than LGBQ white respondents (although sexual identity was reported by both groups as a risk factor). Transmasculine, transfeminine, and GNC respondents reported higher rates of harassment than men and women of color. LGBQ students reported experiencing higher rates of harassment they attributed to sexual identity than did LGBQ faculty and staff. LGBQ faculty were most likely to attribute harassment to gender identity (Rankin et al., 2010).

Having nationally based information contributes to our understanding of campus climate on a larger scale. To understand the climate at particular types of institutions, this information must be supplemented by studies of individual campuses. In their study of climate at a large, Midwestern university, Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, and Robinson-Keilig (2002) found that LGBTQ students' perceptions of campus were more negative than those of the general student population. All (100%) LGBTQ respondents indicated that anti-LGBTQ attitudes existed to some extent, and 47% reported these attitudes existed to a great or very great extent. For the non-LGBTQ individuals in the sample, 74% reported that anti-LGBTQ attitudes existed to some extent, whereas a much smaller percentage (24%) indicated that such attitudes existed to a great or very great extent.

Although none of the LGBTQ individuals in Brown et al.'s (2002) sample had been physically assaulted in the year preceding the survey, 3% reported being threatened with physical violence, 9% reported having had personal property destroyed, and 30% reported they had experienced verbal insults at least once. The LGBTQ individuals in the sample reported hiding their sexual orientation or gender identity from other students (66%), faculty (57%), university staff members (40%), health care providers (23%), and roommates (22%).

In comparing *out* students with *closeted* students, Gortmaker and Brown (2006) concluded that out students may have a higher risk of victimization because of increased visibility. This may explain the decreased involvement by the seniors in their sample. As students prepare to graduate and consider their career options, being open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity may be seen as a potential hindrance. Research has suggested that when students' perceptions of campus climate are more positive it may help with their career development. For example, Tomlinson and Fassinger (2003) found a positive, predictive relationship between lesbian students' perceptions of their campus environment and their career development.

Our current knowledge of campus climates for LGBTQ individuals has been based on the reported experiences and perceptions of a group of individuals at various campuses. These experiences and perceptions include how welcoming that climate is for LGBTQ people, and the effects these perceptions have on the well-being of the members of a LGBTQ campus community (e.g., Brown et al., 2004). Qualitative work has revealed that some LGBTQ people may be conditioned to anticipate negative experiences on campus to the extent that an environment which is neutral or free of overt heterosexism (rather than one that is welcoming and inclusive) is regarded positively (Evans & Broido, 2002). LGBTQ students may actually perceive these environments as positive, as a result of lowered expectations due to experiences of a hostile campus climate, past experiences (on or off campus), or the fear of negative experiences. Quantitative research shows that hiding sexual orientation and gender identity, fearing for one's physical safety and experiencing harassment, are common phenomena for LGBTQ students (Rankin, 2004; Rankin et al., 2010). In addition, nearly one in five first-year students reported being uninterested in making friends with LGBTQ students (Mohr & Sedlacek, 2000). Taken together, this information suggests that LGBTQ students may face a great deal of adversity from the campus climate. Best practices information shows that campuses can change their policies, procedures, and facilities to be more inclusive (Beemyn, Curtis, Davis, & Tubbs, 2005; Fassinger, 1991), resulting in improved climates and enhancing the college experience for LGBTQ individuals.

This study followed up on previous work (Brown et al., 2002, 2004) assessing campus climate for LGBTQ students. The goals of the climate survey included assessing students' perceptions and awareness of programs, services and resources on campus; the overall campus climate and experiences on campus; exploring whether certain groups of students could be identified who consider leaving the university; and contributing to the understanding of how social support considered more broadly impacts these thoughts of leaving the university. The data were analyzed to determine if students' perceptions and experiences could reliably predict perceptions of campus climate. We also explored identifying students who are more likely to consider leaving school.

Method

An online survey was developed to assess the current needs of LGBTQ students at a large, Midwestern university. The survey took place in the Spring of 2009.

Participants

Participants were 77 LGBTQ-identified students at a predominately white, large, land-grant, research university in the Great Plains region of the United States. Data from two participants were not used because their results indicated they were not valid, resulting in 75 participants. One gave identical responses across all items, and the second identified as straight and *cis-gender*, thus not meeting the criteria of the study. Although most of the participants identified as LGBTQ, some of the participants used other labels to describe themselves. As shown in Table 1, participants were largely European American and undergraduate students. The demographic makeup of the participants was similar to that of the university at large.

Table 1. Demographic Information

Variable	Descriptive statistics	
Age	*M* = 22.70	*SD* = 5.26
Race	White	55 (85%)
	Asian American	4 (6%)
	Hispanic	5 (8%)
	African American	0 (0%)
	Other	1 (2%)
Class rank	Freshman	3 (5%)
	Sophomore	7 (10%)
	Junior	18 (27%)
	Senior	25 (37%)
	Graduate/professional	14 (21%)
Gender	Female	31 (46%)
	Male	30 (45%)
	Transgender	3 (5%)
	Other	3 (5%)
Sexual orientation	Gay	25 (37%)
	Lesbian	12 (18%)
	Heterosexual	1 (2%)
	Bisexual	17 (25%)
	Queer	9 (13%)
	Other	3 (4%)

Measures

The online survey instrument was developed and adapted from the Campus Climate and Needs Assessment Instrument created by Brown et al. (2002, 2004). We reviewed, updated, and adapted the instrument for online use focusing on LGBTQ-identified students currently enrolled at a large university. The survey was designed primarily to assess LGBTQ students' experiences, perceptions, and awareness and use of resources. The survey included 58 items. Participants' perception of campus climate was rated on a 4-point scale, with higher numbers indicating better perceived climate. There were four items asking how likely students would be to confront or report faculty or students for negative comments or discriminatory behavior on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*very unlikely*) to 4 (*very likely*), which were collapsed into a single overall confrontation variable. Three items assessed impact of anti-LGBTQ bias on participants in terms of loss of support from friends or family and where they chose to live, on a 0 (*not at all*) to 4 (*a lot*) scale. Several variables were rated on a frequency scale of "never," "once," "twice," "three or more times," and "four or more times." Variables rated on this frequency scale included how often participants had experienced unfair treatment or negative comments by an instructor, staff member, or by other students due to LGBTQ status; how often participants had hidden their LGBTQ identity from an instructor or other students; how often they had experienced anti-LGBTQ harassment (5 items); how often they had considered leaving campus; and how often they had attended a LGBT event on campus (3 items). The survey took 25 to 30 min for participants to complete.

Potential participants were given access to the link on Survey Monkey via the recruitment materials (e-mails; social media; flyers; a link on the Web page for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning and Ally (LGBTQA) Programs, Services, & Resource Center; and announcements in LGBTQ-themed classes). Participant confidentially was ensured through data encryption and the use of a secure Survey Monkey server. Participants went to the link, gave consent or assent, verified that they were students at the institution, verified that they identified as part of the LGBTQ community, and then began filling out the survey. At the completion of the survey, participants were thanked. If a participant did not give consent or assent, did not verify that they were a student at the institution, or did not verify that they identified as a member of the LGBTQ community, they were taken to a Web page thanking them for their time, and they were exited from the survey. All procedures were approved by the local institutional review board.

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Means, standard deviations and frequencies for the primary variables from the questionnaire reported in this study are shown in Table 2.

Participants perceived the campus climate as relatively positive (M = 2.57, SD = 0.47; on a 4-point scale). There were four items asking how likely students would be to confront or report faculty and staff or students for negative comments that were collapsed into a single likelihood of confrontation variable. There was a significant correlation found between likelihood to confront and campus climate (r = .316, p = .014), indicating that a greater likelihood to confront the anti-LGBT statements on the part of faculty and students is associated with better perceptions of campus climate. Participants reported relatively low impact of anti-LGBTQ bias in the loss of support from friends and where they chose to live, with a somewhat greater impact on loss of support from their families, $t(69)$ = 2.571, p = .012.

The majority had not experienced unfair treatment by an instructor (86%), with 14% reporting one or more experiences. Fifty-three percent reported having experienced unfair treatment by other students one or more times. Although the majority reported never having hidden their identity from an instructor (58%), they have hidden their identity from other students one or more times (65%), with 41% hiding their sexual orientation four or more times. The majority (62%) have not experienced harassment with 38% of the respondents reported having experienced harassment. Approximately one-fourth (26%) considered leaving campus, and more than one-half (60%) reported that they have not attended a LGBT event on campus.

To explore the underlying relationships between campus climate and students' experiences and perceptions, variables were collapsed for data analysis purposes. The following explains the variables that were collapsed and how they were analyzed.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics for Preliminary Analyses

Variable	Possible range	Descriptive statistics	
Campus climate	1–4	*M* = 2.57	*SD* = 0.47
Impact: Family support	0–4	*M* = 1.29	*SD* = 1.34
Impact: Friends support	0–4	*M* = 0.84	*SD* = 1.13
Impact: Living situation	0–4	*M* = 0.76	*SD* = 1.14
Likelihood of confronting students or faculty for discrimination	0–4	*M* = 2.65	*SD* = 0.80
Unfair treatment by an instructor		Never	57 (86.4%)
		Once	6 (9.1%)
		Twice	3 (4.5%)
Unfair treatment by a student		Never	30 (44.8%)
		Once	13 (19.4%)
		Twice	12 (16.0%)
		Three times	3 (4.0%)
		Four or more	9 (13.4%)
Unfair treatment by a staff		Never	57 (91.0%)
		Once	3 (5.0%)
		Twice	1 (2.0%)
		Three times	—
		Four or more	2 (3.0%)
Hide LGBT identity from students		Never	22 (34.9%)
		Once	6 (9.5%)
		Twice	7 (11.1%)
		Three times	2 (3.2%)
		Four or more	26 (41.3%)
Hide LGBT identity from instructor		Never	34 (57.6%)
		Once	9 (15.3%)
		Twice	5 (6.7%)
		Three times	2 (3.4%)
		Four or more	9 (15.3%)
Experienced harassment (verbal or physical)		Yes	23 (38.0%)
		No	37 (62.0%)
Thought about leaving campus		Never	50 (73.5%)
		Once	8 (11.8%)
		Twice	3 (4.4%)
		Three times	2 (2.7%)
		Four or more	5 (6.7%)
Attended an LGBT event		Never	45 (60.0%)
		Once or more	30 (40.0%)

Note: LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender.

The survey included two items that assessed the number of times that students felt they had been treated unfairly by other students or faculty, and these variables were converted into binaries (has or has not been treated unfairly). The four items that asked how often participants had hidden their sexual orientation or gender identity from students or instructors, and these variables were collapsed into a single binary variable (has or has not hidden LGBT identity) for data analysis purposes. There were five items assessing the number of times students had experienced various types of harassment, and these were

collapsed into a single binary variable (has or has not experienced harassment). The number of times students had thoughts about leaving school was collapsed into a binary variable (has or has not thought about leaving) for data analysis. There were also three items that assessed how often students had attended LGBT-friendly events on campus, and these were collapsed into a single binary (has or has not attended anything).

To determine if there were gender effects across the primary variables, two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were run—one using variables related to negative impacts and one using variables related to the experience of campus life. The MANOVA to check for gender differences in negative impacts included the variables for negative impacts on family emotional support, friends' emotional support, living situation, having been unfairly treated by students, having been unfairly treated by instructors, having experienced harassment, and whether the student had thought about leaving school; the multivariate effect for gender was nonsignificant: Wilks's λ = .939; $F(7, 46)$ = 0.430, p = .878. The MANOVA for experience of campus life included having hidden one's LGBT identity from students, having hidden it from instructors, willingness to confront discrimination, having been involved in LGBT events, and campus climate ratings. Again, there was no multivariate effect for gender: Wilks's λ = .867; $F(5, 42)$ = 1.284, p = .289. Given the lack of significant effects for gender, the remainder of the analyses is collapsed across genders.

Predictors of Perceived Campus Climate

Correlation and multiple regression analyses were used to examine the relation of campus climate for LGBTQ individuals to a number of potential predictors. All categorical variables listed in Table 2 were converted to binary variables for analysis. Correlations with campus climate for variables in the initial regression model are shown in Table 3. There was a significant positive correlation between perception of campus climate and likelihood of confronting discrimination from faculty or students, indicating that increased likelihood of confronting discrimination was associated with a better view of campus climate. Having hidden LGBT identity from an instructor, negative impacts on friends' emotional support, having hidden LGBT identity from students, and having been treated unfairly by an instructor each had a significant negative correlation with campus climate, indicating that more negative impacts and being hidden were associated with lower climate ratings. Attending a LGBT event combined attending student organization meetings or other sponsored programming.

All variables with significant zero-order correlations were simultaneously entered into the regression. There was significant multicollinearity among the variables, so three variables remained significant in the final model predicting perception of campus climate: unfair treatment by instructors, impacts on friends' emotional support, and having hidden one's LGBT identity from students (R^2 = .289), $F(3, 51)$ = 6.920, p < .001 (MSE = 0.168; see Table 3).

Table 3. Campus Climate Ratings: Summary Statistics, Correlations, and Multiple Regression Results

Variable	M	SD	Correlation with climate	Multiple regression weights	
				B	β
Campus climate rating	2.57	0.47	—	—	—
Likelihood of confronting students or faculty for discrimination	2.65	0.80	.316*	—	—
Hide LGBT identity from instructor (yes/no)	0.42	0.50	−.388**	—	—
Impact: Friends support	0.84	1.13	−.334**	−.103	−.265
Hide LGBT identity from students (yes/no)	0.65	0.48	−.340**	−.274	−.286
Unfair treatment by an instructor (yes/no)	0.14	0.35	−.291*	−.426	−.303

Note: LGBT = lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Regression weights are included only for variables that were significant in the final model. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Cluster Analysis

To determine whether there were identifiable subgroups of LGBTQ students in the sample, hierarchical cluster analysis was performed using Ward's method and squared Euclidean distances to determine cluster membership. Participants were clustered on similarities of their ratings of the impact that anti-LGBTQ bias has had on the emotional support from their family and friends and on their living situation (impact), their overall rating on the campus climate scale, whether they had experienced harassment, and whether they had hidden their LGBTQ identity from their fellow students (open or not open). The goal was to illuminate the profile of students who had thoughts of leaving the university in the past year because of the environment for LGBTQ individuals.

As a result of incomplete data on some variables, a total of 57 participants were included in the hierarchical cluster analysis. All scores were converted to z scores prior to analysis to standardize their values. Examination of the agglomeration schedule indicated an increase in error in the reduction from four to three groups of 22%, compared to the previous increase of 19%. Examination of the dendogram also indicated four groups with large enough membership to be interpretable. The resultant cluster profiles are shown in Figure 1. Cluster 1 had 9 members and was characterized as "not open, high impact"; Cluster 2 had 19 members and was characterized as "not open, low impact"; Cluster 3 had 15 members and was characterized as "moderately open, moderate impact"; and Cluster four had 14 members and was characterized as "open, low impact." The results of analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and least significant difference (LSD) *post hoc* tests comparing mean ratings for each cluster on the clustering variables are shown in Table 4.
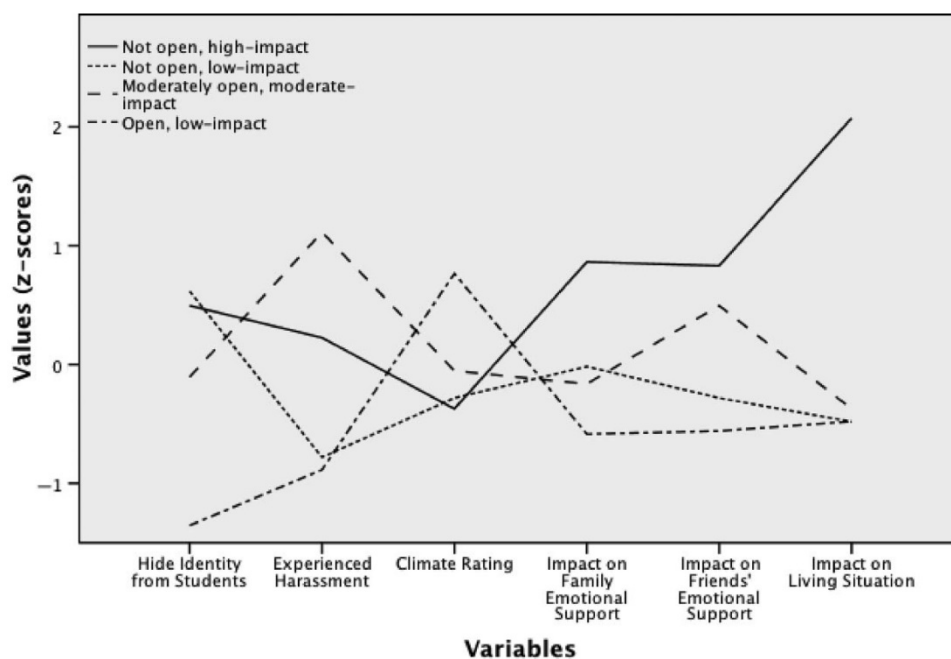
Figure 1. Graph of Cluster Mean Values on the Clustering Variables

Table 4. Comparison of Clusters on the Clustering Variables

Variable	Not open, high impact		Not open, low impact		Moderately open, moderate impact		Open, low impact		F	p
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD		
Hide identity from students	0.89[a]	0.330	0.95[a]	0.23	0.60	0.51	0.00	0.00	26.23	< .001
Has experienced harassment	0.56	0.530	0.05[a]	0.23	1.00	0.00	0.00[a]	0.00	56.26	< .001
Climate rating	2.40[a]	0.340	2.44a	0.40	2.55a	0.45	2.93	0.53	4.18	.010
Impact on family's emotional support	2.44	1.510	1.26[a]	1.45	1.07[a]	0.88	0.50[a]	0.86	4.89	.004
Impact on friends' emotional support	1.78[a]	1.300	0.53[b]	0.77	1.40[a]	1.60	0.21[b]	0.43	5.65	.002
Impact on living situation	3.11	0.601	0.21[a]	0.42	0.33[a]	0.49	0.21[a]	0.43	93.61	< .001

Note: Means with the same superscripts did not significantly differ in the least significant difference pairwise comparisons.

The clusters were further compared on ratings of whether they had thought of leaving school. The results of the ANOVA indicated significant mean differences between the groups on thoughts of leaving school, $F(3, 51) = 3.876$, $p = .017$ ($MSE = 0.168$). Pairwise comparisons using LSD indicated that more individuals in the "not open, high-impact" cluster ($M = 0.667$, $SD = 0.500$) had thought about leaving than in the "not open, low-impact" cluster ($M = 0.167$, $SD = 0.383$), the "moderately open, moderate-impact" cluster ($M = 0.214$, $SD = 0.426$), or the "open, low-impact" cluster ($M = 0.143$, $SD = 0.363$).

Discussion

A variety of methods have been used to assess campus climate on individual as well as multiple college and university campuses, contributing to our understanding of LGBTQ experiences with, and perceptions of, campus climate. Understanding the complex relations among experiences on campus, how students perceive those experiences, and how those perceptions affect students is crucial to creating campus climates in which LGBTQ students will thrive. Recognizing the diversity of LGBTQ students' experiences can also help faculty, staff and administrators more effectively work to create a campus environment that is positive and welcoming to individuals from all sectors of the LGBTQ community. These positive environments can help foster personal and professional development to help prepare all students, straight- and LGBTQ-identified, to succeed on campus and beyond. The primary findings of the study indicate that, holding the other variables in the model constant, the views of campus climate tended to be lower for those who had been treated unfairly by an instructor, those who had hidden their LGBTQ identity from other students, and those who had lost emotional support from their friends as a result of their LGBTQ identity. Similarly, the results of the cluster analysis indicate that the ability to be open about one's sexual orientation or gender identity and the ability to maintain social support after disclosure are important factors related both to perception of campus climate and to students' thoughts about leaving. Although the correlational design of the study prevents conclusions about causality, these results can support the development of a model to help predict perceptions of campus climate based on students' experiences with instructors, their friends' emotional support, and whether they have hidden their sexual or gender identity from others on campus.

These factors make sense because they relate to students' daily lives: how they are treated in class, the support they receive from their friends, and whether they feel safe to let people know who they are. Anecdotally, this would seem to apply to most people. When people are treated fairly at work, we have emotional support from our families and friends, and we feel safe to be open about who we are (i.e., our sexual orientation and gender identity), our perceptions of the environment will be more positive. When the opposite is true, the climate will be perceived as less positive or as more negative or even hostile. The results also indicate that the same campus can be perceived differently by individuals within a community. Understanding why perceptions vary is critical to creating inclusive campus environments for a wide range of individuals and groups.

In this study, gender was not a significant factor in understanding campus climate, which is surprising because gay men are often more likely to experience anti-gay bias than bisexual men or women or lesbians (Herek, 2009). The results indicated that level of openness about one's identity and experience with faculty and students on campus influence perceptions of campus climate and are related to having thought about leaving campus based on the environment for LGBT people. Approximately one-fourth of the respondents had thought about leaving campus. The students who were most likely to have thought about leaving campus were those who reported that they are not open about their sexual orientation or gender identity and those who had experienced unfair treatment by an instructor, impacts on the emotional support from their friends and family, and impacts on

their living situations based on their sexual or gender identity (compared to the other three groups identified by how open they were).

When students feel the need to hide their identities and have experienced negative consequences based on LGBTQ bias, it is reasonable for them to consider the climate as less positive and less safe, and consider alternatives. Leaving families and friends to find an environment that is more welcoming and inclusive may or may not be an effective solution. However, leaving does provide an opportunity to find a more welcoming environment and develop new friendships, support systems and living situations. A campus whose climate includes policies, procedures, facilities, programs and services that are visibly welcoming and inclusive may make the difference in how these students adapt to college life. In addition, although students may consider leaving, we do not have data that track which, and how many, LGBTQ students leave because of the climate, how and which schools they choose to attend, or if they terminate their academic careers entirely. If a major issue is personal support, providing inclusive student programs and services that encourage involvement on campus are vital. Despite negative perceptions or experiences, many students opt to remain for a variety of reasons (Rankin et al., 2010).

The majority of LGBTQ students' experiences with unfair treatment were more likely to come from other students (65%), rather than from faculty (14%). Students were also more likely to have hidden their identity from other students (64%), than from faculty (41%), although many students did not feel safe enough to be open with either faculty or other students. These numbers are both similar to and different from the results found by Brown et al. (2004) in which respondents reported they hid their identity from other students 66% of the time, and from faculty 57% of the time. Students in the Brown study also reported that 80% of the negative remarks they heard came from other students.

The students most likely to confront LGBT bias were those who were more open about their identity. These students were also more likely to report experiencing harassment. What may make a difference for these students is that they have not experienced a loss of support from their friends or family, or experienced an impact on their living situation. Their perceptions of campus climate are also more positive. Indeed, these students have the most positive perception of campus climate of the four groups, although they reported the most harassment.

More positive perceptions of campus climate are also positively correlated with an increased likelihood of confronting students or faculty for negative comments. If students perceive a higher degree of safety, they are more likely to challenge what is perceived to be unfair. Given that faculty are seen as authority figures, willingness to confront indicates a degree of self-confidence in one's ability to do so. This may also be an indicator of willingness to deal with potential consequences because of perceived or actual support on the campus or in one's personal life. Students speaking up in the classroom (or not) may also influence perceptions of the campus climate as well as serving as a form of peer education about LGBTQ people. When these efforts are supported by other students, faculty, staff, and administrators, perceptions of campus climate are likely to improve. If attempts to address anti-LGBTQ bias are met with indifference or hostility, students may begin to perceive the environment more negatively.

Even with relatively positive perceptions of climate, the majority of students (60%) reported that they had not attended a LGBT event on campus. Rankin et al. (2010) reported that the primary reason students gave for not attending such events is the concern that they will be labeled. Not wanting to be labeled as a result of attending a LGBTQ event can be interpreted to be a result of perceived stigma based on perceived identity (this may be true for non-LGBTQ individuals as well).

It is interesting to note that students were aware of resources, and many used them, but resources did not appear to be significant in perceptions of climate. This result is surprising, but it may be that the effects of resources on perceptions of climate were masked by the adequacy of those same resources. In a study examining retention in distance education, Street (2010) found that organizational support was an important factor in retention. However, this study found that individuals were not consciously aware of support when it was sufficient but were acutely aware and dissatisfied when it was lacking. It is plausible that this same effect accounts for the results regarding resources and climate and that the presence or absence of LGBTQ resources is, in fact, an important factor in perception of climate. Further research in this area will help campus communities understand the impact that programs and services have on a particular campus, the LGBTQ community, and individual students. This area is particularly in need of further research because of the potential impact that colleges and universities can have through the visibility and availability of resources, supportive and inclusive policies, procedures, facilities, programs, and services. Without visibility and availability of LGBTQ-supportive resources, policies, programs, and services, the implication is that the environment is, at best, not supportive or acknowledging of sexual orientation and gender identity, which then supports heteronormativity. Ellis (2009), as in our study, found that fellow students are primarily responsible for the majority of homophobic incidents; and concludes that the resistance to LGBT inclusivity and visibility helps create a climate that inhibits many LGBT people from being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Developing a model that predicts campus climates can assist in the development, evaluation and assessment of best practices in higher education regarding diversity, inclusion and students' professional and personal development. Distinguishing among the different needs, perceptions and experiences of students is also important as we try to equitably meet the needs of LGBTQA students on our campuses. Given the challenges and issues related to gender identity, it was surprising to find that gender was not a significant predictor in our sample. The factors that assisted in identifying subgroups of LGBTQ students related to their comfort and ability to live more openly, as well as experiences with their families and friends. The more positive (or less negative) the personal consequences were, having consistent support from friends and family, not having an impact on one's living situation, and being treated fairly go a long way toward perceptions and experiences with campus climate. Indeed, the students who were more open and who had experienced discrimination were more positive about the climate than were students who hid their identity and had not experienced discrimination. Being able to be more open about who we are, being able to address LGBT bias in the classroom, and having support from one's friends resulted in more positive perceptions of the campus. The perception of climate may also be related to the sufficiency of resources available on the campus and the visibility of

support for LGBTQ individuals. Research to clarify the factors that individuals use to define a campus climate as positive, neutral, or negative or hostile will be helpful in further identifying constructs underlying perceptions of campus climate.

Currently, campus climate appears to be variable for LGBTQ students depending on how open they are about who they are, and what their support system is like. This may also impact their experience in the classroom and involvement on campus. It seems fair to say that any individual campus can vary in climate depending on where you are on campus, who is there, and what is going on. LGBTQ students in our survey tended to gravitate toward the arts and sciences. Anecdotally, perceptions exist that some areas on campus are more challenging regarding climate (e.g., athletics, the Greek system, and housing), and individual students' experiences prior to coming to a college or university (whether at school, home, an organization, or a faith community) all vary and impact expectations as well. Our study indicates the variability in experience and perceptions that exist within the LGBTQ community. Despite these differences, there are commonalities that exist. In fact, these commonalities arise in similar research outside of the United States (e.g., Ellis, 2009), but these commonalities underscore the fact that campus climate is largely contextual in nature.

Several limitations should be taken into account when examining the results of this study. The sample used in this study was a convenience sample so it is uncertain as to how representative it is of LGBTQ population on campus. Certainly individuals who had left campus were not included. The data were not collected longitudinally, so the effects of the climate variables on actual retention and academic success could not be assessed. Also, no actual retention data were collected from participants. Although these three issues do represent limitations of the study, they allowed for anonymous data collection, which ensured the confidentiality of the participants, who may have been reluctant to participate in the research otherwise. In addition, the study is correlational in nature, preventing causal interpretations. Finally, these results represent only the findings from one university and hence raise questions about the generalizability of the results. It is notable, however, that the construct of campus climate is likely to be heterogeneous in nature across differing contexts, so it can be more accurately researched and understood in the context of a single college or university.

Further research exploring factors that can assist in creating more positive outcomes for LGBTQ people living openly include educating the campus community about sexual orientation and gender identity to increase everyone's comfort level in working with diverse populations and determining which resources provide the most benefit to students based on their identity. The information gathered from this additional research may be particularly important for creating services and programs for students who lack sufficient support in their personal lives. Further understanding of perceptions of campus climate may facilitate the work of creating more welcoming and inclusive campus climates for all.

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