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The term “campus climate” is used quite often in higher education arenas. In general, campus climate consists of attitudes, perceptions, and feelings about an environment (Kuh, 1990). Peterson and Spencer (1990) explained how climate is a complicated and "pervasive" organizational phenomenon rooted in "current patterns and beliefs and behaviors" of community members (p.8). Climate measures can be valuable tools for understanding present campus realities and for comparing the beliefs and behaviors of campus constituents over time. Indeed, multi-institutional climate studies and university-specific climate assessments have helped faculty and administrators understand how the same socio-spatial space (i.e., campus) can engender radically diverse perceptions and behaviors from campus constituents.

In this article, I provide a brief overview of contemporary campus climate literature, which largely emphasizes the climate experiences of students from minoritized social identity groups (e.g., students of color, women, LGBT students). While these studies have been invaluable to the scholarly literature and climate improvement initiatives, I suggest four ways that future studies and assessments can be expanded to accurately document the complicated climate realities of diverse faculty, staff, and students. Armed with such data, campuses can develop more inclusive programs, policies, services, and curriculum.

Current Realities

Decades of higher education literature has shown that minoritized populations often experience campus climates as less than welcoming or downright exclusionary. For instance, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) students regularly experience homophobic, genderist, and heterosexist campus environments replete with exclusion, violence, and/or harassment (Bilodeau, 2009; D’Augelli, 1992; D’Augelli & Rose, 1990; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld & Frazer, 2010; Rhoads, 1997; Vaccaro, 2012; Windmeyer, 2005). Students of color at predominately white institutions (PWIs) can experience overt and covert forms of racism and consequently, feel unwelcome, unsupported, and unsafe (Feagin, Vera, & Imani, 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000; Yosso, Smith, Ceja, & Solórzano, 2009; Watson, Terrell, & Wright, 2002). The campus climate for women also has been described as a chilly one. The chill results from individuals and organizations devaluing women and their achievements, ignoring women or making women invisible, and singling women out because of their gender (Hall & Sandler, 1984, 1991). Patriarchal curriculum and policies, financial inequities, and male hostility also shape the contemporary chilly climate for women (Vaccaro, 2010a, 2010b).

Research suggests that navigating an unwelcoming campus climate can have negative effects on student success and wellbeing. Racist campus climates have a detrimental influence on the sense of belonging, academic success, and retention of students of color (Feagin et al., 1996; Hurtado & Carter, 1997; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Solórzano et al., 2000; Watson, et al., 2002). Women can be steered from traditionally masculine disciplines, discouraged from taking on leadership roles, and derailed from academic success in chilly climates (Hall & Sandler, 1984,

1991; Vaccaro, 2010a, 2010b). Learning in a heterosexist, genderist, or homophobic campus climate can negatively impact LGBT identity development (Evans & Broido, 1999), well-being, and mental health (Russell & Keel, 2002; Szymanski, 2005) and lead to high risk behavior including alcohol and drug use (Longerbeam, Johnson, Inkelas, & Lee, 2007; Reed, Prado, Matsumoto, & Amaro, 2010) and even suicidal ideation (D'Augelli, Grossman, Salter, Vasey, Starks, & Sinclair, 2005; Grossman & D'Augelli, 2007; Plöderl & Fartacek, 2005).

Given these harsh realities, it is imperative that institutions create welcoming and affirming climates for all students. But how? Institutions often take the initial step in the change process by assessing campus climate. Until a school knows how students perceive the climate, it is impossible to enact effective change initiatives. Unfortunately, the measurement of campus climate is not an easy task. If one uses a particular framework or definition of climate, the measurement tools will be shaped by those perspectives. Peterson and Spencer (1990) for example, described climate as a combination of the objective climate, perceived climate, and the psychological or felt climate. Milem, Chang, and Antonio (2005) suggested that campus climate is shaped by the psychological climate, behavioral climate, structural diversity, compositional diversity, and institutional history. Finally, Rankin and Reason (2008) argued that climate is composed of issues of access and retention, research and scholarship, curriculum, group relations, university policies, and external relations. Practitioners using each of these perspectives would likely develop or adopt instruments that look quite different. This was the case with Hart and Fellabaum's (2008) review of 118 campus climate studies, which found there was a plethora of definitions of campus climate and a lack of standardization or consistency in project design and instruments used in those projects.

In sum, our understanding of campus climate remains hampered by definitional and measurement issues. Large scale studies and local climate assessments are limited by a narrow focus on the oppression experienced by students of color, women, and LGBT students, with little attention given to other minoritized identities or issues of intersectionality.

Suggestions for Future Climate Studies

In this section, I offer four suggestions for future climate studies, which, if adopted, can provide more robust understandings of campus climate for diverse campus populations. First, climate studies should be expanded to include all members of a campus community. While the climate experiences of students of color, LGBT students, and women have been the focus of many studies, we know far less about how students from other minoritized social identity groups perceive and experience climate. For instance, individuals from non-dominant religious backgrounds (e.g., Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist) might experience unwelcoming climates when there are not adequate spaces to gather, pray, or celebrate important events, or when campus meal plans do not accommodate dietary restrictions (Mahaffey & Smith, 2009). Students from low and working class backgrounds could feel a climate is unwelcoming if they cannot participate in key involvement opportunities because of expensive dues (e.g. Greek organizations), event fees (e.g. campus trips or concerts), or costs and lost wages associated with unpaid internships or study abroad. Scholars also have suggested that low income students can feel pressured to adopt a "wealthy mindset" in order to pass in seemingly upper class campus climates (Aries & Seider, 2007, p. 146). Nicholas and Quaye (2009) described the prevalence of institutional, physical, and attitudinal barriers from both peers and faculty, which likely shape the climate for students with disabilities. Yet, we have little data to shed light on the climate

perceptions and experiences of students with a range of disabilities. In sum, a lack of empirical studies conducted with a variety of minoritized populations leaves a gap in our understanding of the climate experiences of many students.

Second, while higher education institutions need to know about the climate perceptions of a range of minoritized populations, climate studies and subsequent actions must evolve to honor intersectionality and diversity *within* student populations to be truly effective. A few years ago, I was invited to write an article about the contemporary chilly climate for women (Vaccaro, 2010b). My response to that request was, “Which women?” Not all women [or any sub-population of students] will experience a climate in exactly the same way. While the climate might indeed be chilly for all women, the way that chill manifests might feel quite different for women of color, women with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual women, transwomen, upper/middle/lower class women, and women from various religious backgrounds. Moreover, women will perceive and experience campus climate in different ways based upon the unique combination of their privileged and/or minoritized social identities.

While there is a rich and growing body of literature on multiple identities, intersectionality, and the intersectional experiences of students (Abes & Jones, 2004; Abes & Kasch, 2007; Jones, 1997), very few climate studies have specifically addressed the ways multiple and intersecting identities shape climate perceptions and experiences. A recent study using CIRP (Cooperative Institutional Research Program) data found “campuses with greater socioeconomic diversity and greater structural (racial) diversity have a more equitable environment for CRI [cross racial interactions] and diversity engagement” (Park, Denson, & Bowman, 2013, p. 488). Another study with racially diverse LGBTQ participants found that “the intersection of multiple cultural and social identities increases the risk for negative perceptions of campus climate” (Rankin et al., 2010). To be effective, climate studies need to delve more deeply into the ways students from multiple and intersecting privileged and minoritized social identities perceive and experience a campus climate.

Third, if institutions care about how the climate impacts all community members, then climate studies must include everyone on campus. However, many local climate assessments, and much of the campus climate literature, focus on students in general, and undergraduates in particular. Faculty and staff who experience a positive climate are more likely to be satisfied with their work, retained at their job, and have more energy to support students than those who feel alienated, harassed, targeted, or excluded (Bilimoria & Stewart, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Mayhew, Grunwald, & Dey, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010; Vaccaro, 2012). The limited climate studies that include faculty and staff along with students, have highlighted differences in their climate experiences, even when they possess similar minoritized social identities. For instance, Rankin et al. (2010) found that LGBTQ faculty reported higher levels of perceived harassment and lower levels of comfort with overall campus climate than LGBTQ students and staff. In a different climate study, I found that women students felt excluded by curriculum that focused largely on the perspectives and accomplishments of men. Undergraduate and graduate women also felt ignored, dismissed, or unfairly graded by male instructors. On that same campus, the chilly climate for women faculty and staff was shaped by gendered pay inequities, perceptions of a “good old boy” network, experiences with harassment, and disrespect from male colleagues (Vaccaro, 2010a). To engage in comprehensive climate change, future studies should more thoroughly assess the similarities and differences among faculty, staff, administrators, and students from diverse backgrounds.

Fourth, in addition to being more inclusive with regard to *who* is included in climate studies, we also must more effectively measure the realities of contemporary oppression – with a specific focus on the ways covert “isms” (e.g. racism, sexism, heterosexism, genderism, classism, ableism) shape campus climate. While traditional and overt forms of prejudice and discrimination happen all too regularly, contemporary “isms” can be subtle, covert, and hard to recognize. The psychology and education literature has begun to document a phenomenon referred to as microaggressions, which are “subtle and commonplace exchanges that somehow convey insulting or demeaning messages” (Constantine, 2007, p. 2).

Sue (2010a, 2010b) for example, described three manifestations of microaggressions that can be aimed at any minoritized group: microinvalidations, microinsults, and microassaults. Microinvalidations are “communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color [or other minoritized group]” and are usually perpetrated unconsciously (Sue, 2010b, p. 29). Microinsults are often unconscious forms of communication that dishonor or disrespect a person’s background. Microassaults resemble traditional forms of overt and conscious discrimination such as avoidance of individuals from diverse backgrounds or use of derogatory terms to describe a social identity group. Sue (2010a, 2010b) also explained that microaggressions are not only perpetrated by individuals, but they can also stem from an environment. Environmental microaggressions are social, educational, or political cues that send demeaning, threatening, or invalidating messages to minoritized groups. In combination, the four forms of microaggressions can convey messages of hostility, exclusion, and disrespect to minoritized populations (Sue, 2010b).

While much of the microaggressions literature comes from the field of psychology, a growing body of research has explored how students, faculty, and staff experience microaggressions in post-secondary settings. Some of this literature makes explicit the connections between microaggressions and climate perceptions and experiences. In a study with African American students, Smith, Allen, and Danley (2007) found participants experienced microaggressions in academic, social, and public spaces on campus. Similarly, Yosso et al. (2009) documented a variety of interpersonal and environmental (i.e. policy, rule, protocol) microaggressions faced by Latino students. Whether microaggressions come in the form of rude comments, racial jokes, or exclusionary policies, research suggests that the combined effects can create hostile campus climates for students of color (Smith et al., 2007; Solórzano et al., 2000; Yosso et al., 2009). A smaller body of research has focused on sexist microaggressions which include sexual objectification, assumptions of inferiority, reinforcement of traditional gender roles, sexist language, and other subtle forms of exclusion (Capodilupo, Nadal, Corman, Hamit, Lyons, & Weinberg, 2010; Nadal, 2010).

The key term in much of the microaggression literature is *subtle*, and subtle is difficult to measure. Moving forward, climate assessments must be nimble enough to measure these subtle forms of oppression. Without including questions about microaggressions in climate assessments, higher education institutions run the risk of drawing conclusions based solely on overt forms of oppression. Consequently, institutions may forego comprehensive understandings about the climate for minoritized populations, and in turn, engage in inadequate change efforts, such as those aimed solely at overt prejudice and discrimination.

Finally, climate studies of the future will need to acknowledge that higher education institutions are comprised of many microclimates (Ackelsberg, Hart, Miller, Queeny, & Van Dyne, 2009; Vaccaro, 2012). A microclimate is a localized sociospatial environment such as a department, building, residence hall, or particular area of campus (Vaccaro, 2012). Certainly

overarching campus climates exist, but very diverse microclimates within a campus may shape the success and retention of diverse populations.

In their study about the experiences of women faculty, Ackelsberg et al. (2009) concluded “faculty members from underrepresented groups. . . may experience different conditions than the majority of the faculty in any given institution” (p. 100). In essence, they determined that some faculty women worked in exclusionary and hostile department microclimates while others did not. Similarly, I found that the climate perceptions and experiences of LGB graduate students, faculty, and staff were almost exclusively shaped by their department, office, or building microclimate (Vaccaro, 2012). Rarely did participants in that study speak of an overarching campus climate as influential to their experiences.

Other scholars have found particular campus spaces, such as athletic facilities (Rankin et al., 2010) and Greek organizations, to be exceptionally unwelcoming and/or dangerous for LGBT people. Ackelsberg et al. (2009) argued that “it is imperative for any academic community to attend not only to the microclimate, but also the diverse range of microclimates that constitute the intellectual health of the academy” (p. 100). I concur. Members of minoritized populations might experience support, affirmation, and encouragement in particular campus microclimates (e.g., organizations, courses, departments) and hostility and discrimination in other campus spaces. By assessing campus microclimates *in addition to* the overarching macroclimate, post-secondary institutions are best poised to enact lasting change that is both widespread and targeted on the most unwelcoming microclimates on campus (Ackelsberg et al., 2009; Vaccaro, 2012). For instance, a campus might need university-wide policy change (e.g., non-discrimination statement, domestic partner benefits) and educational initiatives (e.g., safe zone programs) to improve the overall climate for LGBT people. That same campus might also need tailored interventions to increase the safety and inclusion of LGBT students and particular departments (e.g., housing, athletics).

Conclusion

For decades, campus climate has been an area of emphasis for higher education scholars and practitioners. Since negative campus experiences for minoritized individuals have been linked to decreased sense of belonging, academic success, retention, job satisfaction, and well-being, it is imperative for campuses to regularly assess their climates and implement programs, services, and policies that create welcoming and affirming spaces for all community members. As I have suggested in this article, to be most effective, future climate studies must move beyond sole emphasis on select minoritized classifications (e.g. race, gender, sexual orientation), acknowledge multiple identities and intersectionality, assess microaggressions, and include questions about various microclimates. Climate assessments that accomplish these tasks are poised to offer information that can be used to create deep and far reaching climate improvements.

Dr. Annemarie Vaccaro’s research focuses on the post-secondary experiences of students, faculty, and staff from diverse backgrounds. She uses qualitative methods to delve deeply into the stories and counterstories of campus community members. Dr. Vaccaro’s work is inspired by critical race and feminist perspectives which call attention to underlying inequalities embedded in society and social structures such as higher education.

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