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New Developments in the Field: Measuring Community Climate

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New Developments in the Field: Measuring Community Climate

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Community climate is the degree of support for GLBT people within a specific locale. In this paper we describe the elements of community climate, theorize how it is produced, and argue that this approach provides an important elaboration of Meyer's (2003) minority stress model. Furthermore, we present a new methodology for assessing community climate that could be used by any researcher with a geographically diverse data set that includes location identifiers such as ZIP code. In closing we discuss the theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions that could be made by GLBT family scholars who utilize this new technique for measuring community climate.

KEYWORDS *Community climate, GLBT, measurement, minority stress theory, well-being*

INTRODUCTION

Minority stress theory (Meyer, 2003) is an important framework for studying gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) families because it provides a tool for examining how anti-GLBT prejudice affects individual well-being and relationship quality. According to Meyer, GLB (he does not include transgender) individuals have minority status in our society and are, thus, vulnerable to psychological distress that stems from negative encounters with others (i.e., “prejudice events”) as well as the person’s own internalized

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homophobia and anticipated rejection by society. The mental health impact of these stressors is modified by individual coping and identity strategies, as well as social support. Although Meyer refers to community opportunity structures by including “circumstances in the environment” as the foundational element in his model, these circumstances are defined as non-sexual orientation-based inequalities (e.g., poverty) that produce general stress. As a result, minority stress processes include specific events or individual perceptions that result from social stigma, but the larger social processes that promote or inhibit specific incidents of sexual orientation stigma are left unexamined. It is this gap that we seek to redress. Our goals in this paper are to (1) build upon Meyer’s model by elaborating the sexual orientation-related circumstances in the environment that we call *community climate* for GLBT people and their families and (2) present a new methodology for measuring community climate.

The method for measuring community climate that is described in this paper represents a new and important resource for researchers, policymakers, and/or practitioners who wish to objectively assess the degree of support for GLBT people within a specific locale. The methodology that we present utilizes publicly available data that were then attached to the first author’s *Rainbow Illinois* survey data set collected from 527 GLBT respondents living in downstate Illinois in the year 2000. First, we present our conceptualization of community climate, then summarize the empirical support for this approach, and finally describe our measures, their preliminary validation, and their implications for the field of GLBT family studies.

Community Climate

Community climate is defined as the level of community support for homosexuality, and indicated by objectively measurable phenomenon such as religious and political affiliations, legal rights, workplace opportunities and policies, and the presence of GLBT community members and services. Our interest in community climate originated from Oswald’s research on non-metropolitan Midwestern GLBT life. In 2000, Oswald collected *Rainbow Illinois* survey data from 527 GLBT respondents living across 38 downstate Illinois counties. In a qualitative thematic analysis of the “best” and “worst” aspects of respondents’ lives (from open-ended survey questions), Oswald and Culton (2003) found that social support for respondents (as GLBT people) whether from friends, family, coworkers, religious congregants, or GLBT-community groups was collectively identified as the “best thing in life.” The “worst things in life” concerned a lack of support for them as GLBT people, which came from either their lack of satisfaction with locally available GLB-specific resources or the religious and political/legal hostility towards GLBT people that was described as normative within many

downstate Illinois communities. When asked to describe what would improve their lives, the majority of respondents wrote about how to make their residential communities more supportive by strengthening the GLBT community infrastructure, advocating for legal rights and protections, and/or increasing support for GLBT people and families within local employers, schools, churches, and political organizations. Though specific to downstate Illinois, these findings demonstrate the importance of a supportive environment, and identify specific community features that make a given place more hostile or more supportive for GLBT individuals and their loved ones. Furthermore, these findings are upheld by more recent data regarding how GLB citizens felt in response to 2006 anti-GLB election campaigns across multiple states (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, Denton, & Huellemeier, in press).

Community climate can range from hostile to supportive. When community climate is more GLBT-supportive, it becomes a form of structural social capital (Harpham, 2006) that can bridge social distances by organizing social relations around affirming rather than stigmatizing sexual orientation diversity. Like other forms of social capital, supportive community climate is produced through collective efficacy (Kawachi, Subramanian, & Kim, 2008), namely the successful mobilization of citizens to create a community infrastructure embedded with varying levels of support for GLBT people. Community infrastructure includes the religious, legal, economic, and social systems within a given place. Though generally this infrastructure is proximal (i.e., local municipal and county systems), state and federal laws are part of a more distal system that governs local practices and are thus an aspect of community climate.

As a community-level phenomenon, community climate may be supportive of GLBT people even if an individual is hostile and vice versa. Though broader than individual beliefs, community climate is theorized to affect individuals within the community through the "contextual influences of the collective exerted on to the individual" (Kawachi et al., 2008, p. 3). Specifically, community climate is posited to affect the well-being of GLBT people by encoding the social environment with messages of support or rejection. As members of the community, GLBT people interact with religious, legal, economic, and social systems and are thus exposed to, and may internalize, the messages of support or rejection espoused. This daily exposure to messages regarding the valuation of homosexuality can be direct (e.g., when a GLBT individual is targeted by affirmation or stigma; analogous to the stress processes in Meyer's 2003 model) or indirect (e.g., when a GLBT individual knows that a local church is theologically hostile or supportive). These messages have an effect on GLBT well-being by increasing or decreasing the GLBT person's sense of social belonging, which in turn reinforces the social norms underlying those messages. Community climate is therefore conceptualized as an expression of informal social control and collective socialization processes (see Kawachi et al., 2008) that promote or inhibit

the acceptance of sexual orientation diversity. The general hypothesis is that a more supportive community climate will be linked to greater well-being among GLBT people. Empirical support for this hypothesis is summarized below; please note that due to space restrictions we are unable to provide a comprehensive review of the literature.

RELIGION

Many, if not most, religious denominations have an official stance towards the morality of homosexual desire and behavior, and the legitimacy of GLBT identities. Though several denominations have undergone internal debate leading to an officially supportive stance (e.g., Reform Judaism), most denominations remain ambivalent (e.g., Presbyterian) or overtly hostile (e.g., Southern Baptist). The official theological stance of a denomination regarding homosexuality may not be shared by all adherents, but it does shape what is said and done within congregations, and within other community settings in which adherents are involved (Yip, 1997b).

GLBT individuals are affected by religious messages regarding homosexuality (Yip, 1997a), especially if they consider themselves to be highly religious and/or identify with a particular denomination (Oswald, 2001). If the religious messages are supportive, then GLBT religious adherents may find them to be important sources of empowerment and a sense of belonging (Gray & Thumma, 1997). When religious messages are hostile, however, GLBT adherents may experience a profound conflict between religious teachings and their own sexual identity (Mahaffy, 1996) that may compromise their ability to practice their religion (Rostosky, Otis, Riggle, Brumett, & Brodnicki, 2007) and contribute to negative psychological outcomes, including depression (Schuck & Liddle, 2001).

The effects of theological messages regarding hostility or support are not contained within temple walls because such messages may be publicly expressed (Oswald & Culton, 2003). For example, everyone who participates in a community parade will be exposed to the banners held by different groups who wish to broadcast their views. The impact of "God Hates Fags" will differ from the impact of a banner proclaiming "Equal Marriage for Same-Sex Couples." *A community with more GLBT-affirming religious messages is a community with a more supportive climate; a place where, religious or not, GLBT people are more frequently exposed to the belief that they are morally decent people who are included in, rather than outcast from, the community.*

THE LAW

Community life is governed in part by municipal, state, and federal law. These laws establish legally acceptable or punishable behaviors and statuses,

and define the categories of persons who are allowed to access particular benefits or mechanisms of redress in the face of discrimination. For instance, laws may be in place to protect GLBT people from discrimination in housing, employment, credit, public accommodation, and in educational settings. Furthermore, laws may provide or deny rights to GLBT adults regarding marriage, adoption, fosterage, custody, and visitation. *The legal protections and rights that a given jurisdiction provides to GLBT people reflect the successful mobilization of citizens to create a legal infrastructure that is supportive of GLBT people and thereby send the message that they are recognized as worthy members of the community* (see D'Emilio, Turner, & Vaid, 2002).

Emerging empirical research supports the hypothesis that rights can affect the well-being of GLBT people. Specifically, same-sex couples with a legally recognized relationship reported fewer depressive symptoms and stress, and higher-being, compared to same-sex couples in committed non-legal relationships (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010). Conversely, GLB individuals residing in states that passed laws limiting marriage to one man and one woman showed significantly higher psychological distress (Rostosky, Riggle, Horne, & Miller, 2009). Less direct evidence can also be found. For example, gay men and lesbians living in states that do not legally recognize same-sex marriage were less likely to be out as gay/lesbian (deVries, Mason, Quam, & Acquaviva, 2009), which is associated with higher mental distress (Morris, Waldo, & Rothblum, 2001).

Regarding legal protections, recent population-based estimates of victimization indicate that approximately 50% of GLBT adults have been verbally harassed, 20% have experienced at least one crime against their property or person since age 18, and 10% have been discriminated against in housing or employment (Herek, 2009). Anti-GLBT victimization has been linked to depression (D'Augelli & Grossman, 2001; Morris & Balsam, 2003). No research has established whether laws prohibiting anti-GLBT discrimination or violence actually reduce the incidence of these acts. The laws do, however, provide avenues of legal recourse for a victim, which implies that GLBT people are seen as fully deserving citizens within the reporting jurisdiction (Berrill & Herek, 1992). Furthermore, new evidence suggests that nondiscrimination laws are associated with higher levels of disclosure and social support, and lower levels of internalized homophobia, among GLB individuals (Riggle, Rostosky, & Horne, 2010).

POLITICAL AFFILIATION

The overall political climate in a particular area can be identified through aggregate voting patterns. Previous research indicates that people with more conservative values are less likely to support GLBT rights (Wood & Bartkowski, 2004), and have more negative attitudes towards lesbian, gay

(Lambert et al., 2006; Morrison & Morrison, 2002), and bisexual people (Herek, 2002). The Republican National Committee (2009) explicitly states their opposition to same-sex marriage, which is a more socially conservative perspective. On the other hand, the Democratic National Committee (2009) asserts that they “will fight to end discrimination” based on sexual orientation. These declarations through publicly accessible media indicate that generally, Democrats may be more supportive of GLBT issues than Republicans. *Given the Democrat versus Republican values distinctions and research linking political ideologies with attitudes towards GLBT people, it is reasonable to believe that areas with higher percentages of people voting for Democratic candidates will have a more supportive community climate for GLBT people.*

EMPLOYMENT

Community climate may also be influenced by the local employment opportunities. Florida and Gates (2001) found that communities with more jobs in the “creative” and/or “bohemian” sectors (i.e., fields with a focus on knowledge production, diversity, creativity, and the arts) had higher rates of same-sex couples in residence. This is theorized to occur because employers and community leaders see their economic future as dependent upon being able to attract top workers regardless of sexual orientation, and therefore invest in creating GLB-affirming workplaces and communities (Florida, 2002; Florida & Gates, 2001). Indeed, workplace nondiscrimination policies have been associated with higher disclosure of sexual orientation at work (Rostosky & Riggle, 2002). Furthermore, a positive association has been found between workplace heterosexism and depression among GLBT employees (Smith & Ingram, 2004). *Thus it appears that there are links between workplaces and the broader community climate.*

GLBT PRESENCE

Whether organized by informal social networks or open-access organizations and events, local GLBT communities can play an important role in providing support (McLaren, 2009; Oswald & Culton, 2003; Oswald & Masciadrelli, 2008). For example, GLBT people who are coming out find important validation through identifying and involving themselves in activities with other GLBT people (Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz, & Smith, 2001) and these social ties may serve as a buffer against risky sexual behaviors (O'Donnell et al., 2002). Furthermore, accessing resources designed for GLBT populations can lessen the negative psychological outcomes of victimization experiences (Waldo, Hesson-McInnis, & D'Augelli, 1998). *Our model situates local GLBT residents and resources as one of several factors that contribute to overall community support for GLBT people.* We now turn to the operationalization of community climate.

INDICATORS OF COMMUNITY CLIMATE

Given the above framework, we sought to develop a methodology for measuring community climate that could be used by any researcher who has obtained respondent ZIP codes or other place-placed identifiers. Toward this end, we utilized public-access data regarding community characteristics relevant to our above conceptualization. Because these data were assessed at either the municipal or county level (and municipalities are nested within counties), it was conceptually and statistically important to maintain a clear distinction between these levels of measurement (Raudenbush & Bryk, 2002). What resulted were two independent municipal-level indicators, and one county-level index that combined five indicators. In this paper we present the municipal and county measures along with preliminary validation analyses using Oswald's *Rainbow Illinois* survey data from 527 GLBT individuals living across 38 downstate Illinois counties in the year 2000. Please note that all below indicators were compiled as they were true for the year in which *Rainbow Illinois* data were collected. Table 1 provides climate measure descriptive statistics; please refer to Oswald and Culton (2003) for a summary of *Rainbow Illinois* respondent demographics.

MUNICIPAL-LEVEL CLIMATE

Human rights ordinances. Laws related to sexual orientation are either municipal or state; they do not exist at the county level. To measure the degree of municipal legal support for GLBT people and their families, the presence or absence of sexual orientation as a protected class in the local non-discrimination ordinances of all municipalities within *Rainbow Illinois* was ascertained by reading their municipal code. These local ordinances

TABLE 1 Municipal, County, and Perceived Community Climate ($n = 469$)

Variable	% or M (SD)	Factor I Loading	Perceived Community Climate ^{1a} (rho)
<i>Municipal-Level Climate</i>			
Human Rights Ordinance	37.7%		.329***
GLBT-Serving Organizations	.298 (.200)		.327***
<i>County-Level Climate</i>			
Affirming Religious Adherents	.007 (.005)	.666	.256***
Voting Democrat or Green	50.019 (.462)	.649	.260***
Creative Economic Share	.266 (.056)	.946	.351***
Bohemian Economic Share	.011 (.003)	.896	.314***
Same-Sex Partner Households	.835 (.206)	.948	.344***
County-Level Index ($\alpha = .88$)	0 (4.112) ^b		.346***

^a1 = hostile, 2 = tolerant, 3 = supportive.

^bIndex constructed using z-scores; individual item descriptives are provided in their unconverted form.

*** $p \leq .001$.

typically identify classes of people who have legal recourse if discriminated against in the areas of housing, credit, employment, or public accommodation within the municipal jurisdiction. In the year 2000, two municipalities in *Rainbow Illinois* (adjacent and within the same county) offered this legal protection; 37.7% of respondents lived within these municipalities.

Though we considered municipal-level domestic partner registrations as an indicator of climate, they were not available in any downstate Illinois community in 2000 and thus were not included.

Local GLBT communities. To measure the presence of a local GLBT community, the number of businesses or organizations (e.g., lawyers, support groups, bookstores) in a given municipality was counted. This was done by counting all businesses or organizations with at least one advertisement in the sole downstate Illinois GLBT resource guide (organized by municipality), which was printed by the sole regional GLBT newspaper (the *Prairie Flame*) in March 2000. This number was then adjusted by dividing by the total municipal population.

COUNTY-LEVEL CLIMATE

Five indicators were combined into one internally consistent index of county-level climate. These indicators captured religious affiliations, voting patterns, percentage of labor market devoted to creative and bohemian employment, and the proportion of same-sex households. After describing how each was measured, we present preliminary validation data.

Supportive religious adherents. To measure the degree of theological support for homosexuality in a given community, Religious Congregations and Membership in the United States (RCM) data were used (ASARB, 2009). This data set is collected every U.S. Census year and is considered the most complete count of religious affiliation in the United States (ASARB, 2009); all religious bodies with an identifiable congregation are invited to provide adherent data. Congregational adherents include all full members, their children, and others who regularly attend services or participate in the congregation. The 2000 data set includes adherent statistics at the county level for 149 religious groups (139 Christian denominations, associations, or communions including Latter-day Saints and Unitarian/Universalists; two specially defined groups of independent Christian churches; Jewish and Islamic estimates; and counts of temples for 6 Eastern religions). Limitations of this data set are that, historically, African-American denominations are undercounted (Finke & Scheitle, 2005), and Jewish congregations are not divided into Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist denominations. Both of these limitations are addressed below.

A list of all 149 denominations included in the RCM data set was compiled. Then, each group's official denominational Web site was searched for information about their stance towards homosexuality (e.g., by looking

through the information on the Web site or searching it for terms such as lesbian, homosexuality, and marriage). If a denomination's official Web site explicitly stated that they welcomed GLBT people as they are, the group was coded as "supportive." The resulting theologically supportive group captured by our measure includes Episcopal, Metropolitan Community Church, Quaker, and Unitarian/Universalist congregations. The adherence rate for supportive denominations was then calculated by summing the number of adherents in each supportive denomination within a given county, and dividing by the county's total population.

RCM data aggregated all Muslims into one group. Because Islam is officially unsupportive of homosexuality (Siker, 2007), Muslims are not included in our supportive adherent rate. Jewish adherents are also aggregated in this data set. Because Reform Judaism is officially theologically supportive of GLBT people, we identified all Reform congregations within *Rainbow Illinois* counties and requested membership data. Unfortunately, these congregations count membership by family rather than individual, and thus we were unable to use the RCM algorithm to calculate a Reform adherent rate. Future use of our climate measure should consider ways of including Reform adherents. Regarding the undercounted traditionally African-American congregations, Lewis (2003) suggests that they are uniformly hostile towards homosexuality and thus their being undercounted is not problematic for our measure of theological support.

Political support. In 2000, a presidential election year, Republican George W. Bush ran against Democrat Al Gore and the Green Party's Ralph Nader. The degree of political support for GLBT people was measured as the proportion of the county vote that was for Gore or Nader. Nader was included here because his 2000 campaign was significant in the state of Illinois, and because the Green Party (2009) platform advocated GLBT rights. We downloaded county election results for the 2000 presidential election from the Center for Congressional and Presidential Studies' (2009) Web site. One limitation of this indicator is that it fails to account for non-voter sentiment.

Bohemian and creative class employment. The creative and bohemian shares of a county's economy represent the proportion of knowledge-based occupations that "create meaningful new forms" (Florida, 2002, p. 5) such as scientist, university professor, actor, architect, and cultural figure. We used the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) modification of Florida's original measure, which dropped all knowledge-based occupations that are required for basic cultural reproduction in a community (e.g., schoolteachers, nurses), thereby clarifying the unique contributions made by creative and bohemian workers (McGranahan & Wojan, 2007). County-level creative and bohemian class data based upon the 2000 U.S. Census were downloaded from the USDA Web site (www.ers.usda.gov/Data/Creative-ClassCodes/).

Same-sex couple households. U.S. Census data from 2000 include a count of same-sex partner households by county. We used the proportion of all partnered households that are headed by same-sex partners, rather than heterosexually married or cohabiting couples. We downloaded Illinois data from the Gay Demographics Web site (www.gaydemographics.org). Within the same-sex couples category, data were divided by gender of householders. Preliminary analyses suggested, however, that combining female-female and male-male households was statistically more powerful than utilizing only male-male or female-female, and thus we used an aggregate of all same-sex couple households.

PRELIMINARY VALIDATION OF MEASURES

The two municipal-level indicators are single items and have face validity. Regarding the county-level indicators—each is a ratio with a similar valence such that higher scores indicate more GLBT support related to a unique feature of community climate; thus their aggregation is conceptually valid. Furthermore, principal components analysis extracted a single factor solution (see Table 1) that explained 69.228% of the variance. Finally, the index (using z-scores) had an internal consistency of $\alpha = .88$. Together, these metrics demonstrate that this index of county-level climate is conceptually clear and internally consistent. They do not, however, establish convergent validity for the municipal- or county-level indicators. For that, we turn to analyses using *Rainbow Illinois* data.

Rainbow Illinois survey respondents provided their residential ZIP code, which enabled us to attach the indicators of municipal- and county-level climate. In addition, respondents rated whether they perceived their residential community climate to be 1 = *hostile*, 2 = *tolerant*, or 3 = *supportive* (rated respectively as 18%, 72%, 10%; the mean perceived community climate was “tolerant” [$M = 1.92$, $SD = 0.53$]).

Convergent Validity

As reported in Table 1, all indicators of municipal- and county-level climate were significantly correlated in the expected direction with *Rainbow Illinois* respondent ratings of “perceived community climate.” Indeed, the aggregated county-level index was an equal or stronger correlate than any individual county indicator. In addition to this correlational analysis, a generalized logit model ($n = 410$, Wald $\chi^2(2) = 39.078$, $p < .0001$) (not in Table 1) found that having a more supportive county-level climate increased the odds of perceiving one’s residential community as “supportive” as opposed to “tolerant” by 24%. In the same model, having a less supportive

county-level climate increased the odds of perceiving one's residential community as "hostile" as opposed to "tolerant" by 18%. Together these findings demonstrate significant agreement between our external/objective measurement of community climate and the subjective ratings made by GLBT people who live in those communities.

SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Meyer's (2003) formulation of "circumstances in the environment" referenced community opportunity structures such as poverty that contribute to general, and not minority, stress. While minority status in his model is connected to environmental circumstances, Meyer's elaboration focuses upon specific interpersonal and intrapsychic phenomena. One goal of this paper has been to build upon Meyer's model by offering a description of sexual orientation-related "circumstances in the environment" that we call community climate. Furthermore, we sought to provide an explanation of how climate is produced through collective efficacy, present some of the empirical evidence suggesting that climate has an effect on GLBT people, and offer a concrete methodological tool for assessing climate. Our next step will be to more closely test the link between community climate and minority stress processes; for example, by testing whether community climate predicts the levels of anti-GLBT victimization reported by *Rainbow Illinois* respondents. A state-level climate measure is also under development.

Beyond our work, measuring community climate has tremendous potential for use by other GLBT Family Studies scholars. First, though all scholars in our field discuss community climate at least indirectly when they reference heterosexism and homophobia, and some have assessed single features of overall climate (e.g., a particular legal status or GLBT community involvement), the measure presented here is the first comprehensive tool for assessing the extent to which residential communities are supportive of GLBT people and families. The municipal- and county-level tools offered here can be used by any researcher with geographically identified data and a hypothesis predicting that community climate will have an effect on mental or physical health, social development, relationship quality, or other outcome with theoretical, policy, and/or practice implications. Although we have focused on the importance of community climate for GLBT people themselves, researchers could also investigate the relationship between community climate for GLBT people and heterosexual people's health and well-being.

Use of this tool will enable us to move the field forward towards a more nuanced understanding of GLBT lives by providing a means to study place-specific variations. The longstanding assumption that GLBT communities and their supporters are inherently urban (see Weston, 1995) needs to be challenged. According to Gates and Ost (2004), same-sex partner households

have been documented in more than 97% of all U.S. counties, and the trend is for same-sex couples to be less urban even as the U.S. population as a whole becomes more urban. Same-sex couples raising children are more likely to live in communities with other child-rearing households than they are to live in communities with high-density same-sex household populations (Gates & Ost, 2004). Furthermore, the 11 states where cohabiting same-sex couples are most likely to be raising children include Idaho, Kentucky, Michigan, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, and Wyoming (Gates, e-mail communication, 1/12/10, based upon 2007 American Community Survey data), hardly “gay mecca” locations in the popular imagination. GLBT people are indeed everywhere—this is simply a fact. Furthermore, if we believe that GLBT people live where they do for good reasons and are not simply too dumb to move to San Francisco or another city, then we cannot assume that urban is better. Indeed, the small literature on nonmetropolitan GLBT life documents many positive elements of such communities (e.g., Oswald & Culton, 2003; Oswald & Masciadrelli, 2008). Use of the measures presented in this paper will enable us to carefully investigate climate rather than relying upon stereotypes.

By including measures of the municipal- and county-level variations of support for GLBT individuals and families, researchers may be able to identify which specific features of a local environment are most relevant for promoting well-being, which may be compelling to policymakers and others concerned with community development. For example, Van Gelderen, Gartrell, Bos, and Hermanns (2009) identified three community features that promote the resilience of children with lesbian mothers: contact with other children in similar families, attendance in a school with a GLBT-related curriculum, and mother’s contact with the lesbian community. Their findings raise questions about the availability of such resources. Attaching measures of community climate to Van Gelderen and colleagues’ data sets could enable us to identify the broader contextual factors that enable these vital supports to exist.

In addition to improving our ability to understand what enables the existence of GLBT-specific supports, our approach to community climate is important because it situates these supports within a broader context. As a result, the onus for increasing GLBT support may be placed upon everyone rather than focusing solely on minority-identified populations. This may be especially important in locations where GLBT-specific supports are less viable or accessible. For example, in a geographically dispersed or resource-poor area, anything more formal than friendship networks may be difficult to sustain and those networks may be cliquish or organized around very narrow interests (Oswald & Culton, 2003). GLBT people who are less attached to their local GLBT community may be especially impacted by the broader community climate (McLaren, 2009). Our approach can be used to focus

attention on the potential contributions made by local churches, employers, political entities, and social services.

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