Creating and Implementing a Data Ecosystem for Assessing Sexual Violence Campus Climate

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ABSTRACT

In this case study we examined how an institution engages in the development and implementation of a data ecosystem for assessing campus climate related to sexual violence. We found that while the institution was active in collecting different types of data, these data were limited to certain dimensions of campus climate (psychological and behavioral), which offer a limited understanding of campus climate. Further, this institution faced several challenges in engaging in data synthesis due to tensions related to trust, transparency/confidentiality, and perception/reality. These tensions created further challenges in collecting and using the data they were collecting, which in turn exacerbated the tensions. We conclude the piece by offering recommendations for more intentionally engaging in data synthesis that will benefit other institutions in similar situations.

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As part of their responsibilities under Title IX, institutions of higher education (IHE) are required to assess their campus climates related to the issue of sexual violence (McMahon et al., 2022). The rationale behind this mandate is that, by understanding climate, institutions are better positioned to prevent and respond to incidents of sexual violence because they have a better understanding of why the issue persists within their institution (McMahon et al., 2022). Most institutions administer large-scale, quantitative campus climate surveys to fulfill this requirement (McMahon et al., 2022). However, these typically only focus on perpetration rates, which offer a limited understanding of campus climate (McMahon et al., 2022). For this reason, Driver-Linn & Svensen (2017) recommend the implementation of a data ecosystem to understand more robustly the nature of an institution's climate for sexual violence. Additionally, most institutions rely on a limited understanding of climate focusing solely on behaviors and perceptions of the issue of sexual violence. For this reason, Moylan et al. (2021) proposed a broader conceptualization of campus climate informed by Hurtado et al.'s (2012) Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) model.

Understanding the climate of an institution, including the elements of the climate that contribute to the perpetration of sexual violence, is extremely important. This understanding builds an accurate sense of perpetration, affects programming, and assists program evaluation (Moylan et al., 2018). Yet, whether and how institutions assess a full picture of the campus climate as it relates to sexual violence remains unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this case study was to explore how institutional actors engage with data concerning campus sexual violence to implement a data ecosystem as informed by a robust climate framework. We sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the institutional factors that shape whether and how an institution engages in a data ecosystem related to sexual violence campus climate?
2. How do faculty, staff, and administrators understand a data ecosystem related to sexual violence campus climate?
3. How can institutions implement a data ecosystem to make context-specific, data-driven, system-level changes to address the issue of sexual violence?

A note on language: there are many terms to describe the type of violence described by this climate and conceptualized in this ecosystem. We will use the term "sexual violence" to refer to instances of assault, sexual harassment, gender-based violence, relationship violence, stalking, sexual misconduct, and sexual contact or attempted contact that is not consensual.

Conceptual Frameworks

In this study, we relied on two conceptual frameworks. First, Driver-Linn and Svensen's (2017) data ecosystem framework offers a comprehensive plan for collecting various types of campus climate data. Within their data ecosystem they include counts of behaviors, sampling of attitudes and experiences, comprehensive surveys of prevalence and climate, question-based data collection, and program evaluation (Driver-Linn & Svensen, 2017). They present both categories of data collection and suggest timelines of assessments; for example, they recommend staggering large-scale comprehensive climate

surveys every four years, with annual surveys to a narrower population, ongoing program evaluations with data-informed changes implemented and reviewed, staggered mixed-methods studies running parallel, and ongoing collection of prevalence data to be analyzed every term.

Following data collection, they articulate the need for data synthesis to provide a fuller picture of the campus climate. Unfortunately, this type of data ecosystem has not been documented as implemented by institutions (McMahon et al., 2022). One of the limitations of the data ecosystem is it focuses on collecting data from students and omits major campus populations that both play a significant role in shaping the climate and experience the climate themselves: employees including faculty, staff, and administrators (Moylan & Javorka, 2020).

Although Driver-Linn & Svensen (2017) push institutional actors to think beyond simply administering campus climate surveys, their recommendations are not informed by a campus climate framework. Therefore, we combined their concept of data ecosystem with our second framework proposed by Moylan et al. (2021) and informed by Hurtado et al.'s (2012) Diverse Learning Environments (DLE) model. In this expanded conceptualization of campus climate there are five dimensions: the historical, or context and legacy of the institution's past; the organizational, or structural components of institutional operation; the compositional, or the demographic makeup of student and employee populations; the behavioral, which encompasses observable interactions between individuals and groups; and the psychological, which includes feelings and perceptions of the climate.

While Hurtado et al. (2012) developed this model for fostering a climate of diversity, equity, and inclusion on campuses, Moylan et al. (2021) have found its consideration of holistic climate and reduction of harm useful for conceptualizing campus climates relating to sexual violence. We are using these dimensions as a model for campus climate for sexual violence and applying them as a lens for examining the synthesis component of Driver-Linn and Svensen's (2017) data ecosystem, where institutional actors collaborate to understand the implications of their collected data. Table 1 shows how these two concepts integrate into one framework.

Method

We conducted a case study using Yin's (2014) definition of case study as "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-world context" (p. 16) at one institution to understand how such a data ecosystem could be created, the importance and challenges of including faculty, staff, and administrators in an ecosystem, and to understand institutional factors that affect whether and how the institution engages in a data ecosystem related to campus climate. We chose a medium-sized private institution as the case study site because of its recent history regarding addressing concerns about the campus climate related to sexual violence. In early 2020, public activism called attention to the prevalence of sexual violence at the institution. These activists demanded the institution take active steps to address their concerns. Following this, the institution was part of the NASPA Culture of Respect cohort, which led to the administration of a campus climate survey. This demonstrated the institution was in the process of assessing their campus climate, which made them an appropriate site for

Table 1. *A Data Ecosystem Model within Diverse Learning Environments*

Ecosystem Data Type(s)	DLE Dimension(s)	Examples/Instruments
Counts of behaviors	Behavioral	Campus police reports, Student conduct reports, Title IX reports, Clery data collection
Localized sampling of attitudes and experiences	Psychological	Surveys of first-year students
Comprehensive, comparative surveys of prevalence and climate	Compositional	Campus-Wide Climate Surveys (e.g., HEDS, ACHA-NCHA)
Question-based data collection	Psychological	Focus groups for LGBTQIA+ students
Program evaluation	Organizational	Bystander prevention training evaluation, campus wide evaluations (e.g. CORE)
Synthesis	Historical Organizational	Campus-wide study of all data collected, Add individual institution's context (e.g. past social media activism); presentations to stakeholders

the study. Additionally, the institution experienced significant staff turnover in key positions related to sexual violence prevention and education over the previous few years.

Data Collection

We used two methods of data collection: artifact review and interviews. Participants also offered other artifacts during interviews, and after receiving access we reviewed these artifacts to further contextualize how the institution was thinking about campus climate data.

Artifact Review

We reviewed the following artifacts: 2022 HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Survey ("HEDS Survey"), also called the Campus Perceptions of Unwanted Sexual Experiences, and the institution's report of the findings, 2023 American College Health Association National College Health Assessment survey ("ACHA NCHA"), 2021 NASPA Culture of Respect Evaluation ("CORE"), 2020 student activism social media posts, and a student-produced research report.

We reviewed the HEDS Survey by mapping each question to its corresponding climate dimensions as outlined in our framework. The institution's website did not explain which stakeholders were using the data outside of the Title IX Office. We found nearly all of the 63 undergraduate survey items related to the compositional, behavioral, and psychological dimensions. A summary of this question mapping is in Table 2.

Table 2. *Mapping the Undergraduate HEDS Survey Instrument to the DLE dimensions*

DLE Dimension	Number of questions	Example
Compositional Dimension	19 questions	"Since starting at [institution] have you been sexually assaulted [on or near campus]?"
Behavioral Dimension	32 questions	"Did this incident of sexual assault involve your drinking alcohol?"
Psychological Dimension	12 questions	"What stopped you from telling anyone about the sexual assault?"
Organizational Dimension	3 questions	"Have you received information or education from [institution] about who on campus is required to report instances of sexual violence to campus authorities?"
Historical Dimension	0 questions	No related questions

Note. Three survey questions addressed multiple dimensions, so the table reflects 66 questions.

Similarly, a study participant recommended we review the ACHA NCHA. This survey assesses health and wellness behaviors to inform health-related programming and services (American College Health Association, 2025). A summary of this question mapping is in Table 3.

Table 3. *Mapping the ACHA NCHA Survey Instrument to the DLE dimensions*

DLE Dimension	Number of questions	example
Compositional Dimension	12 questions	"Did you experience the following in an intimate relationship: Were a victim of stalking?"
Behavioral Dimension	6 questions	"Have you experienced the following while drinking alcohol: Had sex with someone without their consent?"
Psychological Dimension	9 questions	"Select your level agreement with the following: We are a university where we look out for each other."
Organizational Dimension	0 questions	No related questions
Historical Dimension	0 questions	No related questions

The CORE included a thorough assessment of survivor supports and services, staffing and employee training protocol, training for students and student employees, collection and publication of prevalence data, engagement of faculty, staff, and students school-wide, and evaluation including campus climate surveys and other assessments. The institution's CORE report contained recommendations to expand on data collection and assessment efforts. Additionally, the CORE recommended that the institution report to

the students and employees updates and other communication related to data collection efforts and use.

We reviewed the January 2020 student activism social media posts. The posted demands for the institution included increased diversity and intersectionality among campus security personnel, more safety resources, trauma-informed training for campus employees, increased support resources for survivors, more survivor-focused policies and procedures, increased prevention programming, and better involvement in Greek Life regarding preventing and responding to violence. Institutional leadership responded to the demands in two memos praising the student activists and outlining actions to be taken in response to the demands. These documents provided insight into the institution's historical and organizational elements of campus climate.

Lastly, a study participant shared the report from a qualitative student research project completed in a recent undergraduate social science course. This study was conducted to examine feelings and perceptions of students, and whether the institution is making progress in preventing and addressing sexual violence on campus. Their findings relate to the psychological dimension of climate, as they remark on perceptions of a lack of support for students who have experienced sexual violence.

Interviews

To understand the nature of the data ecosystem on campus, we spoke to university employees to learn how they collect, access, share, and use data regarding the campus climate for sexual violence. Our inclusion criteria for participation was twofold: 1) participants were currently employed at the institution and 2) based on title and scope of work would likely have insight into sexual violence data collection and use. Using purposeful sampling we identified several employees who met the inclusion criteria and were also likely to be primary intended users of the climate data. These employees represented different units across campus, including the Title IX Office, Clery, Campus Security, Survivor Advocacy, Health Education, Student Conduct, and Institutional Research. We then used snowball sampling by asking our participants to recommend others who could speak to a data ecosystem. These recommendations resulted in interviews with employees from the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Student Health, and a second employee from Health Education, Student Involvement, and Diversity initiatives within an academic unit. We also invited other employees from Student Involvement, the Dean of Student Office, Assessment, and recommended faculty who all declined to participate. We maintain participant confidentiality in our findings by using pseudonyms and not including identifiable or attributable details related to their personal identities and roles on campus.

In total, we interviewed 12 employees via Zoom to provide convenience for the participants, and for the ease of the recording and transcription of each interview. The interviews were semi-structured to be a conversation between researchers and participants. Interview questions focused on the type of data each employee collects and uses related to sexual violence, how they engage with others related to these data, what challenges they have with collecting/using/sharing data, what data they wish they had to inform their jobs, and how historical records of their roles/data use are maintained.

Data Analysis

After conducting the artifact review, we identified all the types of data being collected by the institution as informed by our study participants and identified the types of data participants expressed wanting but not having. We used these lists to map each data type to the corresponding component of the data ecosystem framework as recommended by Driver-Linn and Svensen (2017) and campus climate framework (Moylan et al., 2021).

Immediately following each interview, we shared our reactions together and conducted some pre-analysis and memoing. Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, we conducted a largely inductive analysis. To ensure intercoder reliability, we started by independently coding the same interview transcript. We then came together to discuss similarities and differences in our approaches. We discussed the language and use of different codes to ensure consistency moving forward. We then separately coded different interviews. We found emerging codes related to ways participants gathered their own climate data, but also how they used existing data (e.g. from surveys). We also discovered codes relating to the relationships among employees and departments on campus, as well as tensions between transparency and confidentiality, challenges trusting data, processes, or leadership, and challenges associated with staff turnover or lack of funding for departments or projects. These codes align with themes from the artifact review. We also used deductive coding for codes associated with the DLE dimensions of climate (historical, organizational, compositional, behavioral, and psychological). This coding helped us conceptualize the data ecosystem, how the ecosystem is supported at the institution, where challenges are embedded in the ecosystem, and how employees think about the data ecosystem.

Criteria for Goodness & Delimitations

We intentionally chose a single-site case study, because we believe the institutional context is the heart of our understanding their approaches to implementing a data ecosystem. While we cannot claim generalizability of this study, we took several steps to ensure trustworthiness and transferability. The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board, and we received informed consent from participants. As noted in our analysis section, we took steps to ensure intercoder reliability. Additionally, protecting participant confidentially by using pseudonyms and masking demographic information and departmental affiliation helped ensure trustworthiness of their responses. Lastly, we offered thick description of the institutional context, our methodological choices, and the finding. Our hope is that others will be able to apply what we learned from this study to their own institutional context.

Results

Overall, we found the institution in our study collects many of the types of data outlined in Driver-Linn and Svensen's (2017) model. However, we found the biggest challenge with the ecosystem was a lack of institution-wide synthesis of collected data. Therefore, our central finding is that a data ecosystem is more than the collection, storage, and dissemination of data. An effective ecosystem connects divisions across campus and is represented in not only the collection efforts but also the relationships across the entire institution, especially concerning synthesis. These ecosystems require institution-wide

synthesis, trust, and continuity. They balance tensions created between transparency and confidentiality, and perception and reality.

A Data Ecosystem is as much about relationships as it is about data, and staffing challenges impede the sharing and synthesis of campus climate data

Driver-Linn and Svensen's (2017) ecosystem model includes synthesis, or "look[ing] at the whole picture of data collected and present to stakeholders and community…to build robust, interconnected data practices that allow for systematic and relatively automated examination of trends around important metrics" (Driver-Linn & Svensen, 2017, p. 2–3). We discovered that synthesizing and sharing data between departments in this case is not institutionalized and instead relies on relationships between individuals. When those relationships suffer, or when someone leaves their position, the sharing of data suffers. We found synthesis is challenging because of issues related to personnel, including employee turnover and tensions between balancing transparency and confidentiality.

Staff turnover plays a big role in the breakdown or lack of relationships and sharing between departments. In some instances, the employee someone had a relationship with left the institution and they need to start over building a relationship with a new person. As Dana explained:

> They have new staff, so I think we have to redevelop that [relationship]. But I had been really close with the previous director…and talked a lot and shared a lot of information with that staff, and so now we're going to rebuild those relationships.

In other instances, a department is now understaffed and cannot continue to collaborate regularly due to capacity. Taylor explained the impact of this turnover:

> Staff keep transitioning pretty quickly in and out of departments. I think they just don't feel that they have (and I believe they don't have) the capacity to focus on something else that's not their main job objectives.

Sam reflected on how their ability to work was interrupted due to a turnover of nearly their entire department:

> Our team lost a lot of institutional knowledge…we have obviously some transition documents that exist that do allow us to get some information from those people…but in terms of an explicit 'Here's the information you need to do your job the best that you can, and here are the places for you to go in order to access more information to be able to better inform your work,' I don't think we had that.

Part of this team's turnover meant that new members did not have access to the data from the most recent climate survey. When asked if they had seen or used data from the climate survey, Robin answered, "That is not data that has come across my email, to my knowledge." They explained that the data they were using to inform their work were

what had been shared directly by others engaged in similar work. This means that Robin's data access is limited by their individual relationships with others, and that valuable climate survey data is inaccessible.

Some employees try to mitigate the disruption of turnover internally. Dana explained how their department maintains an ongoing shared document to onboard new employees faster and to ensure work can continue despite changes in personnel. They referred to this practice as their "standard operating procedures" and explained how they use this method to share information among the team and with future new members. This is an answer to Sam's concern of not having enough guidance to continue the work of a department after turnover, yet this procedure is voluntary and department specific. However, these procedures do not include specific recommendations related to ensuring continued sharing and use of important campus climate data.

While staffing challenges impede the relationships on campus that fuel the data ecosystem, staffing also disrupts the work of preventing violence. Morgan reflected:

> We need to get [our efforts] way upstream rather than reacting [after violence occurs]. The challenge is we just don't have capacity to be upstream…But in a perfect world we would have all of the necessary resources, however we want to define that, to be upstream all the time.

Since employees in understaffed departments often undertake the work of two positions, they are unable to dedicate time to prevention efforts, including using resources like climate data or conducting their own smaller-scale assessments as recommended by Driver-Linn and Svensen (2017).

A major asset to the collection, synthesis, and sharing of climate data, and therefore an important component of the data ecosystem, is a robust employee base with time to build systematic relationships, the means to preserve institutional knowledge, and the staffing to ensure necessary work can be accomplished. Without this operationalized network, access and sharing of data relies on arbitrary relationships among staff, and efforts for smaller-scale data collection and assessment are limited.

Relationships are challenged by tensions with trust, transparency/ confidentiality, and perception/reality

For the interdepartmental relationships that do exist, we found several tensions in trying to balance efforts of sharing data, protecting the privacy of both students and survey responders, and making progress on efforts despite staffing challenges. These tensions represent different themes: One is the feelings of trust around data collection and use, one is the tension from balancing transparency and the need for confidentiality, and one is the tension between perceived work and processes and the reality of the work being conducted on the campus.

Tensions with Trust

A common sentiment from participants was a lack of trust with either the data collected, the processes and effort to address sexual violence, or both. Participants explained that faculty and students do not trust results of climate surveys, do not trust the

process of collection and analysis, do not trust the institution is working to prevent and respond to violence, and do not trust that preventing and responding to violence is an institutional priority.

First, participants discussed a lack of trust in the data being collected. A few admitted they were reluctant to put much faith in the data from the previous campus climate survey due to the low response rate, with Alex explaining:

> We didn't want to rely too much on that data because we knew that the response rate was fairly low…We didn't want to put as much emphasis on the reliability of the data and generalizing to the whole campus community, because we knew it wasn't particularly good response rate. It wasn't particularly representative, either.

Others were explicitly cautioned from putting too much stock in the results. Some participants believed they were encouraged to dismiss the survey results due to unsatisfactory results. Taylor explained how the data interpretation could seem arbitrary:

> People like the data when it shows them what they what they like to see. And then they're very happy to share it when it does. And they're less happy to share when the data is obviously a little more negative.

Taylor, Morgan, and Rory each expressed distrust in the institution, and a feeling that preventing and responding to sexual violence on campus is not currently a priority for the administration. To them, this was evidenced by a lack of funding for initiatives, understaffed offices, and a general lack of attention paid to the issue. Rory elaborated further:

> At the leadership level it's not a priority. So…and I say that across the board, from a sexual violence perspective, gender identity violence, to, you know, racial violence, to you know all sorts of different types of harm that we see across campus, it's not a priority for our leadership right now.

This lack of trust in the institutional commitment affects the ability to collect data in the future, as students and employees are reluctant to participate because they do not believe the data will be used to advance meaningful work.

Some participants observed a hesitancy by the institution to prioritize data collection and response to sexual violence. Taylor explained, "I think people are afraid of backlash or additional questions, or you know, 'What are you doing about this [violence]?'" Multiple participants implied the institution is not always transparent about its sexual violence data and efforts because the institution is afraid of how it will be perceived. It is almost like the institution does not trust its students or employees will believe it is working to prevent and respond to sexual violence.

Trust with the data ecosystem is important because if students and employees do not trust the institution with their data, or do not trust the institution to act on the data collected, then they are less likely to participate in data collection efforts. This continues the cycle of low response rates and therefore less trust in future data.

Tensions with transparency versus confidentiality

Participants pointed to a tension between transparency and confidentiality with data collection, utilization, and investigation efforts. For example, many reported not understanding why students and employees cannot learn the outcome of some Title IX investigations, or about sexual violence prevalence trends. Some departments mentioned sharing de-identified information with other departments, but others limited access to even de-identified data due to its confidential nature. Pat acknowledged that some information should be kept confidential to protect individuals' privacy, especially with the campus climate survey, but that the institution needed to be transparent about information needing this protection: "I know some of the data you're going to collect can't be [shared], so I think that's the other [important] thing is full transparency about what you can and cannot share from the get-go." Clarification on what information can and cannot be shared would be helpful for them but is not available.

Participants understood that confidentiality and privacy are necessary due to the sensitive nature of this data, but believed some information should be available. Alex said, "Even knowing confidentiality is one component of things…it'd be really helpful to see themes and patterns and general de-identified case studies, and communicate [all] together as a team." There is a strong desire to understand the climate better using data, but those data are inaccessible due to privacy concerns.

While many participants spoke on the trust in data availability and use, others considered trust in procedures. Pat framed their thinking by explaining the idea of procedural trust among employees:

> Faculty and staff want procedural trust, procedural justice. They want to know what is happening [within Title IX processes], how it's going to happen, where's the transparency, where is the outcome, who's accountable, what are the accountability structures? Those are the data points they actually want to see. It may not be a specific incident but it's the accumulation of incidents. So, '[Title IX Office] got this many complaints: Where did they all go? How were they handled? Who made the decisions? Why was this one decided this way, and this one decided a different way?' They want to see the scoping, right? They want to see the ecosystem. They want to see the levers behind to be able to trust that the university is also caring for them, not just looking out for its bottom line.

Other participants reflected on their understanding of student perspectives regarding transparency, and student desire to understand more about processes and outcomes. Taylor stated:

> Students want to know that they're being heard … [that] what they say isn't going into some nebulous cloud that they'll never see again, and they don't know how it impacts current programming or anything that they're being asked about on campus.

Several participants asked for more transparency with how the institution uses data to inform initiatives, and for more sharing about changes that were made in response

to data. This sharing extends to general outcomes of investigations and reports made by students. If students and faculty are aware that violence occurs, but are not made aware of the resolution, then the perception remains that harm continues with no action by the institution. Pat summed up the necessity of this sharing of prevalence and action data:

> A student [believes], 'I want to know that what happened to me will change something,' and maybe the student gets that. But what if that [resolution] never loops back to [a] faculty member? So those faculty members, all they know is 20 years of harm. And so that further potentially further replicates this notion of distrust…Faculty are like, 'Yeah, I've heard these stories over and over again; [the institution has] done nothing'.

This is the historical dimension of climate, as offered by the DLE. Pat went on to explain institutional memory:

> If you're going to change something you have to change [it for] the faculty and staff, not the students, actually. The students come and go…an institution only has a memory of four years. So, if you can navigate the waters of a really crappy incident within four years, it's gone for students… But what helped me in my career is like, "Oh, if I want to change things I have to work with faculty and staff. They're here longer. They have the memory."

To create and maintain a functional data ecosystem for climate, institutions must find ways to safely share specific data when it can, share other de-identified information, and set clear expectations with rationale with the campus community for what cannot be shared.

Tensions with perception versus reality

We discovered tensions between the perceptions and the reality of campus climate, processes, and work being done. One prominent example is how the Title IX Office is perceived. Several participants commented on how students or employees feel when they make reports to the Title IX Office. Pat observed the office "feels like…a black hole to a lot of people. Like, things just get sucked into it and they never show back up, including, people feel, their souls." The perception is Title IX issues are not resolved adequately, leading to anxiety.

There is also a perception that collected data are not being used to improve the campus climate. According to Alex:

> It's great that we're telling the deans what this data is, but how are we actually changing our programs and adapting to student needs if we're only getting bogged down in the presentations to the leadership that aren't actually implementing the programs?

Their implication is that data collection and sharing here is a performative act and is not actually informing decision-making.

Finally, there is a perception that campus members do not collaborate across divisions or departments in their work despite examples to the contrary. Robin spoke to this:

> Something that I've heard a couple of times now, in some of my campus partner meetings, is reflection on how sometimes how siloed [the institution] can be in its work. And in this position…it's requiring me to not be siloed. I can't do this position in a vacuum. I haven't experienced the siloing as much at [the institution] quite yet, but it's reflection that I've got from a couple different folks of people feeling kind of as though they're on their own island.

Whether employees' perceptions of the campus climate align with reality is not as important as understanding how these perceptions inform behavior. When students or employees perceive a lack of institutional commitment, they are less likely to report incidents. If they perceive the institution does not act upon its collected data, they are less likely to participate in data collection. This compromises the institution's assessment efforts across all sectors, not simply as it relates to campus climate for sexual violence.

Figure 1 illustrates these tensions, and how we found they contribute to a cycle of added or diminished trust, transparency, and perceptions on campus.

Discussion

Beyond merely collecting campus climate data, institutional actors need to attend to the data synthesis challenges and tensions we named above. Collecting data is not enough to position institutional actors to address the issue of campus sexual violence. And, in using a robust understanding of campus climate (Moylan et al., 2021), institutional actors might recognize that these challenges in relationships, trust, transparency/ confidentiality, and perception/reality, are part of the climate as well. Staff turnover, loss of institutional memory, and inability to implement change using previously collected data is part of the historical dimension of climate. The lack of institutionalized processes in facilitating data synthesis is part of the organizational dimension. The perceptions of our participants that their institution does not prioritize sexual violence prevention (organizational dimension), and that data collection is performative (psychological dimension) then influences their ability to engage in synthesis of data in their work (behavior dimension). These experiences from the participants represent an important understanding of the campus climate, which ultimately shapes the experiences and perceptions of students. With this in mind, we make the following recommendations for the case institution that can serve as an example for others looking to improve their assessment of campus climate for sexual violence. The appendix offers a guide for applying these themes to different contexts.

Figure 1. *Cycles of Trust and Transparency*

Note. The left cycle reflects increased transparency increasing trust and perceptions of institutional action. The right cycle reflects decreased transparency diminishing trust and creating a perception of inaction.

1. *Rebuild trust by increasing transparency with planning the next climate survey*

In preparing the next plan for surveying campus climate, this institution should take active steps to increase its transparency. It should create a plan that outlines both a clear timeline (including data analysis and reporting) and for the use of collected data. The institution can also regain trust by articulating how data from the previous survey informed decision-making and policy changes. Several participants shared how they used data from the previous climate survey in programming and education, so those efforts should be communicated broadly.

2. *Be transparent about how data will be shared and what will be kept confidential*

Several participants expressed a lack of clarity on privacy procedures and a suspicion that patterns and trends from the survey could have been easily de-identified and shared but simply were not. This frustrated and confused them, and diminished their trust. Some employees believe the institution purposefully withheld useful data about the climate. Therefore this institution must be clear when it collects data on how privacy will be ensured, how data will be shared, and whether there is any data that cannot be shared (e.g. student demographic data) in the event such data compromises student privacy.

3. *Share and use collected data*

Once survey data are compiled, this institution must follow through to both share results and then use the data (regardless of response rate) to inform decision-making. Several participants wished for the institution to act using data, and if action had been taken to communicate which actions were informed by survey data. This communication, explanation, and sharing will help to build trust in the survey, in the administration, and

in the institutional culture, because there will be more transparency in what the data say and how they are used.

While the synthesis step of the data ecosystem is happening on a small scale on this campus, this synthesis must occur on a institutional scale. Futhermore, data must be easily available, and employees must have capacity to use data and collaborate with others in their work.

Conclusion

As noted, this institution is engaging in a data ecosystem by collecting a variety of data types, over time, from different campus constituents. Multiple offices are involved in this ecosystem, which establishes significant potential for thorough synthesis. However, the institution has an opportunity to engage more robustly in data synthesis by attending to the issues of trust and transparency related to sexual violence campus climate data.

If an institution is not synthesizing its collected data regarding sexual violence, then it is not truly understanding its campus climate. Since the goal of the campus climate survey and other data collection efforts is to inform efforts to prevent and address sexual violence, an institution not meaningfully understanding its climate is not equipped to do this work. Institutions have an obligation to prevent harm to their students and employees, and by not meaningfully engaging in these assessments then an institution wastes time and resources on data that do not protect the community. Institutions must act to create more meaningful data ecosystems to conduct this critical work.

Appendices

Appendix A: Ecosystem Development Guide for Practitioners

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