

# Chapter 49

## A Comparison of “Inclusiveness” in Two Liberal Arts Catholic Universities: What Nurtures an Inclusive Campus Climate?

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Catholic Church has been a major player in the field of education, both nationally and internationally. Numerous religious orders, such as the Jesuits, Felicians, created higher education institutions. Such institutions afforded college education to first-generation students and were a ladder for upward mobility. A perception lingers of Catholic institutions being an exemplar of Christian values of love, acceptance and social justice. In reality, some institutions are far more successful in actualizing those values. This chapter looks retrospectively at Madonna University and compares it to John Carroll University to highlight differences in how each has dealt with the issue of inclusiveness. While each of the institutions is a single instance within the Catholic higher education community, there are still lessons we may take from this examination that intersect with issues related to religion, gender and inclusiveness.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The authors, both African American female professors, recount the experiences one encountered during employment at two different Catholic liberal arts universities. The perspective taken in this chapter is to highlight the differences between the occurrences the professor encountered at Madonna University, in Michigan in the early 1990s and occurrences encountered by the same professor at John Carroll

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University, in Ohio, beginning in 2004. By contrasting and comparing the two experiences at each respective university, the authors will provide a starting point for reflection, self-discovery and deeply engaged conversation that other universities, specifically Catholic institutions should consider if they seek to build an inclusive campus climate. Lastly, specific actions that promote an inclusive campus climate are presented

The chapter utilizes an ethnographic method that is ground in the research of Patricia Hill Collins (1990) who is credited with establishing the Black feminist epistemological framework. According to Hill-Collins there are two types of knowing. The first is *knowledge* and it is adequate for the powerful or those with position. Then there is *wisdom* and it is necessary for survival of the subordinates. Personal experience equals good evidence. For African American women knowledge comes from experience and thus, "knowledge validation processes reflect this groups interest (248)."

## **BACKGROUND**

This chapter reports research that is based on reflexivity qualitative research. Lambert, Jomeen and McSherry (2010) indicate, "qualitative research traditions consider that knowledge is based upon theory of assumption and examination of such phenomena is from a subjective position" (321). Accordingly, therefore the researchers own views and personal experiences are legitimately employed in interpretation of knowledge. Researchers are urged to talk about themselves, "their presuppositions, choices, experiences, and actions during the research process" (Mruck & Breuer, 2003, p. 3) to allow others to understand their thoughts and actions. Through the use of reflexive methodology, the author examines the elements of campus chemistry (e.g., climate, administration, etc.) on two Catholic college campuses.

Perhaps, the best illustration of campus climate can be made by reviewing, documented examples of glaringly toxic climates. Hamilton (2006) noted the death threat e-mails directed at Hispanic and African American athletes and female student leaders, to dissuade them from seeking positions in student government at Boulder, Colorado. White students, at University of Chicago wore chains, baggy pants, and partied to 50 Cent and Notorious B.I.G. at a "straight thugging party" (Hamilton, 2006). Such incidents are not unusual and often leave administrators bewildered, caught off guard. Faculty like-wise may not know what if anything should be done. For the targets of such behaviors what is apparent to them is the campus is not a welcoming respectful environment. The authors conceptualize campus climate as the feelings one has when immersed in the atmosphere of the institution. Is the atmosphere open and welcoming of people who are easily distinguishable visually? Are females respected on par with male colleagues? Do staff personnel afford persons of color the same respect given white faculty? Does the atmosphere make all people feel like they belong—if so, an inclusive campus climate would seem to exist.

Bryant (2006) describes the importance of climate for populations that have faced discrimination. As such, she studied the climate for women in campus religious settings in a campus-based religious organization. Observational data were collected from 25 interviewees. The researcher attended the "weekly large group meetings over a four month period, three small-group Bible studies, a semiformal and a women's dinner event" (p. 618). Qualitative analysis of data was conducted with an analysis of findings. Bryant found that the "gender-related attitudes expressed by the evangelical segment of the population were common in evangelical circles on college campuses" (p. 629). Women in this study were found to be socialized to accept their role as the submissive sex and encouraged to be independent from men. Beliefs about women's role, according to Bryant, can severely limit life goals and expectations. Similar

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