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Audio Visual Resources

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Audio Visual Resources

Lori Messinger

Bad Fit: Challenging the prevalence of homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism in social work education by Ady Ben-Israel and Jill Kaufman, MSW Program, Hunter College School of Social Work (LGBTstories@hotmail.com). Video Length: 30 minutes. \$15.00.

Bad Fit is a video about the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) social work students. This short video, produced by the filmmakers when they were MSW students at Hunter College School of Social Work, is based on research they conducted on students' experiences of homophobia, heterosexism, biphobia, and transphobia. The film uses interviews with LGBT MSW students, practicing social workers, and faculty members from MSW programs in New York City. These interviews are interspersed with short commentary from the filmmakers. While some viewers might be nervous about using a video produced by students, the video quality is excellent.

In the interviews, the students and faculty offer reflections on their experiences, taking on a wide array of topics including:

- Homophobic comments in the classroom
- Faculty comfort and knowledge regarding LGBT issues
- Student issues in placement
- Absence of LGBT topics in the curriculum
- LGBT students' experiences with staff, faculty, and students
- Institutional policies and practices and their effects on LGBT students
- The roles and responsibilities of LGBT faculty members
- Culturally competent teaching methods for LGBT students

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Whereas the focus is on New York City programs, the issues resonate throughout the country. Comments and concerns raised by the students and faculty in the video mirror recent discussions in the professional literature about LGBT students' experiences in the Northwest (Diehm, 2004) and the South (Hylton, 2005; Messinger, 2004). The inclusion of transgender social work students and practitioners in the video are especially significant, because their perspectives are seldom found in the research on social work education.

This film raises important questions for students to consider. It could spark important conversations in BSW and MSW Human Behavior courses, Diversity courses, LGBT-specific courses, and even courses on school social work. The video could also be used successfully in pedagogy courses for social work doctoral students, playing specific vignettes about classroom interactions and asking students how they might handle each of the situations described.

Perhaps the most important audience for this video is social work faculty members and administrators. Faculty could watch the film and discuss a number of challenging questions: How responsive is their own program to LGBT student needs? Does the instructor have a responsibility to support LGBT students in the classroom? How should a faculty member respond to antigay speech in the classroom? Are faculty prepared to teach about LGBT people in ways that do not rely on stereotypes, inaccurate information, or personal biases? I can imagine spirited debates and thoughtful deliberations being sparked by viewing this video as part of a faculty retreat or discussion group.

The questions raised by this video begin with LGBT populations, but the video challenges the viewer to think even more broadly about issues of cultural competence in social work education. What would be different if the people being interviewed were discussing their experiences of being people of color? Or people with politically or religiously conservative views? Or people with disabilities? The purpose of the film, according to the student filmmakers, is to "engage social work communities in an ongoing conversation about diversity learning." This video offers the views of a few to spark conversations among us all.

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