Sexuality & Disability: Teaching Resources in Social Work

From the “Disability and Sexuality: What Social Workers Should Know” Connect Session

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Presented by the Councilors of the

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**Videos**

*I Am Sam* (2001). Film about a man with cognitive impairments raising a child.

*Is Love Enough?* (2002). Documentary about parents with cognitive impairments. This is available through Academic Video Online, a resource many university libraries make available.

*Murderball* (2005). Documentary about the sport of quad rugby, nicknamed “Murderball” by players. Several scenes specifically discuss sexuality.

*Sex(Abled): Disability Uncensored* (2009). 15 minute documentary about physical disability and sexuality. This film was created in conjunction with the San Francisco State University’s Health Equity Institute. You can watch this online for free at : http://www.healthequityinstitute.org/doc/title/sexabled.html

*The Last Taboo* (2013). Documentary specifically about physical disability and sexuality. DVD copies are $8.00 to order, and it can also be watched online for free at http://thelasttaboodocumentary.com/.

*The Other Sister* (1999). A film about two individuals with cognitive impairments falling in love.

*The Sessions* (2012). Film based on the life of Mark O’Brien and his article “On Seeking a Sex Surogate”. To read his article on the topic, see http://thesunmagazine.org/issues/174/on\_seeing\_a\_sex\_surrogate. O’Brien was also the focus of the 1996 documentary *Breathing Lessons: The Life and Work of Mark O’Brien*.

**Case Examples Inspired by True Clients of a Social Worker**

*Dating*

*Shawna and Carlos, who both had mild forms of cerebral palsy, were in their early 20s, and both received support from the same supported living program. Shawn and Carlos developed a dating relationship after being friends for over a year. They appeared to communicate well with each other. In addition, they supported each other with their goals. Shawna was interested in obtaining a job and Carlos helped her to practice interviewing. Shawna and Carlos also helped other clients who had more severe forms of cerebral palsy and other physical disabilities. Another client and friend of Shawna’s reported that she wished she could find a boyfriend like Carlos.*

*Married*

*Bob and Sue both had Down ’s syndrome and were both 45 years old. They lived together in the house that they owned. Bob worked in a supervised enclave job and Sue worked in a sheltered workshop. Both of them did not make substantial amounts of money, but their home was bought for them years ago by their parents. Bob and Sue were able to pay for their utilities and groceries with their work income, Supplemental Security Income, and were covered for health insurance by Medicaid.*

*Victimized*

*Amber, a 35-year old woman with mild mental retardation, dated Sean, a man with mild mental retardation. For the extent of their relationship, Sean became aggressive with Amber. Amber stated that Sean hurt her sometimes, but would not reveal the details of the abuse. Sean punched walls in Amber’s apartment, which led her to be evicted. Amber continued to date Sean for eight years regardless of his aggression. She reported that he loved her and not that many people would love a person “like her”.*

*Sondra, a 42-year old woman with mild mental retardation and bi-polar disorder, rented her own apartment and worked a stable job in the hospitality business. Her social worker visited her in person monthly to ensure that she was paying her bills, taking her medication, and continued to live independently. Sondra often was not present for visits. When her social worker asked her why she had not been home or responding to the social worker’s phone calls, Sondra usually avoided the questions, but one time reported that she had been making money for sex.*

*Gena has been diagnosed with schizophrenia and is living in a group home. One of the live-in staff, also struggling with mental health issues, developed close relationships with several group home residents. After the live-in worker was arrested for drug possession, Gena reported to staff that she and he had been in a sexual relationship. She said that, at the time, she felt it was mutual, but now that he was gone she felt violated. She is upset and doesn’t know if she wants to contact the police or press charges.*

*Perpetrator*

*Larry, a 23-year old man with mild mental retardation, lived in a group home and worked at a sheltered workshop. Larry was supervised one on one with a staff member 24 hours a day. If Larry encountered women, he would try to grab or punch their breasts. Larry’s social worker and support team did not understand the motivation for his behavior, and did not know if Larry fully understood his motivations for his own actions.*

*Pete, a 40-year old man with moderate mental retardation, who lived in a group home, frequently became physically aggressive with his friends who lived with him and support staff. Pete also often had a difficult time sleeping. Late one night, Pete shared with a support staff member that his father abused him.*

*Pregnant and Parenting*

*Tanya, a 28-year old woman with Down’s syndrome, lived in a group home and worked in a community setting. After finding out that she was pregnant, her mother told her to quit her job and move home to be with her mother, who was her guardian.*

*Julie, a 33-year old woman with mild mental retardation, lived in a group home. She informed me that she had a son who she had not seen in years, because his adoptive parents did not let her. Julie had to give her son up for adoption, because she could not care for him on her own.*

*Lorena was a single mother to an 8-year-old son. She has mild cognitive impairments. Although her caseworker finds her to be a competent parent, she habitually allows near strangers to live at her home because she feels sorry for them. After the last occurrence, child protective services became involved because these strangers had been dealing drugs from the home.*

*Residential Living*

*Residents of Lone Oaks, a residential facility for adults with chronic mental health diagnoses, sign paperwork saying they will not have members of the opposite sex in their room. Although this is against the law, these residents did not realize it. This has led to instances of sexual activities occurring in semi-public areas and at the day program several of these residents attend.*