

August 2013

Valuing Diversity and Equal Opportunity

“Out in the Silence” – But Not Out of the Way: A DVD Review

One moment stands out in particular from my viewing of the DVD, “Out in the Silence.” But first, let’s set the stage: You could expect that a video like this to be just another “coming of age” story – with a (by now) typical gay slant: the “sensitive” teenage boy finding his identity in a small town, blah, blah, blah. But this one is thankfully different. The “sensitive” teen in this movie was on his high school football team, he stands up to his – shall we say – less sensitive peers who take exception to his professed orientation. While he’s big enough to give as good as he gets in the inevitable fist fights and other scuffles he encounters in school after he decides to “out” himself on his seventeenth birthday, still, it is a lonely time. His former friends suddenly avoid him – something he had not expected. His single parent Mom goes to the school board and school administration – they do nothing about the extreme discrimination her son is facing. The teachers at the school do nothing as well. Finally, after too many days of taunts and fights, the mom takes him out of school to homeschool him.

Then one day his mother sees something she had never expected to see in the local hometown paper: a gay wedding announcement: two men marrying . . . one a former resident of the town who had actually attended the same high school her son had been suffering at! She writes to him and pleads with him to help in some way, if he can. Still following me? The gentleman who placed that wedding announcement did so out of a sense of deep disappointment in himself . . . in high school when he discovered he was “different” from his buddies, he had lacked the courage to come out himself. So when he gets that letter from the worried mother in his old hometown, he decides to help. His life partner is a documentary film maker. They both decide to go to that town (in the hills of western Pennsylvania) and make a film about this teenager’s struggle for acceptance.

NOW, the moment in the film that stands out the most for me. The film goes on and is very effective and affective and I recommend it. The filmmaker gives a video camera to the boy to film things from *his* perspective. From the voiceover it’s clear that the filmmaker envisioned that the boy would produce this sensitive portrayal of his struggles as a young gay man in an extremely prejudiced little town, etc., etc. Instead, the kid teams up with his one friend in town and they make this goofy little movie where they mug for the camera and pretend to lose fingers when they stick their hand into an electric fan. You know, stupid stuff you’d expect from a teenager. The kids think it’s hilarious, the filmmaker in voiceover says he will give the boy the camera again but this time

Cont. next page.

Changes in Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee: New Staff Members

The ANR Equal Opportunity Advisory Committee recently welcomed three new staff members who will be replacing three other staff who were no longer able to participate. Our three new staff members are Patti Verdugo Johnson, Business Services Administrator in Ventura County, Lisa Rawleigh, Administrative Assistant for ANR News & Outreach in Spanish in Riverside, and Mary McMann, 4-H Program Representative in Alameda.

The EO Advisory Committee advises Director Bill Frost on affirmative action and diversity issues. The Committee meets quarterly. The complete listing of members can be seen at http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/Diversity/Affirmative_Action/EO_Advisory/#.

Cultural Resource Team: Helping Diversity’s Reach

Sometimes, Advisors and Program Representatives who need to do programmatic outreach to a particular minority cultural group can be unfamiliar with the language, unfamiliar with what’s acceptable behavior, and unfamiliar with what outreach method might work best within that culture. They could use some help. While the Affirmative Action Office has had some response to the call for volunteers, ANR continues to seek volunteers (academic and staff) to form an ANR Cultural Resource Team. We’re looking for bilingual individuals and/or those with a close identification/experience with a minority culture. There will be no meetings to attend. If you volunteer for the Cultural Resource Team, your name, contact information and the language(s) other than English you are fluent in and/or the minority culture you have experience with will be put on a list. ANR Advisors or Program Representatives who lack experience

Cont. next page.

suggest that he take a more intellectual approach.

I heard that and I thought to myself, “Good luck with that!”

It was a great moment in the film and I’m sure the filmmaker left it in because it so well illustrates, that, hey, we’re not all that different: teenagers with a video camera will probably come up with stupid stuff and we shouldn’t be too surprised by this – no matter what their orientation.

While the movie is more concerned with equal rights rather than with gay marriage, the topic of gay marriage is so intimately connected with equal rights for gays that it is frequently brought up during the film. Also, gay marriage is easily the most polarizing issue whenever the topic of equal rights for gays comes up. While the teen in the film is not shown as contemplating marriage at all, the topic is so contentious that it tends of “highjack” the documentary now and then. To its credit, the film makes an honest attempt to present both sides of this issue – and the “warts” on both sides, too. It examines in a good-hearted way how each side holds stereotypes about the other and how these seldom aid the way towards a truly civil society with an honest environment free of discrimination. But it also shows how, with a little bit of open-mindedness, just a little bit, these stereotypes can be replaced or let go. Surprisingly, even the filmmakers are shown to shed some of their own stereotypes and come to a better understanding and respect (not a love, but a respect) for the Religious Right – as represented by a local minister who is interacted with often during the film. In fact, probably the best subplot in the movie involves this minister and his wife. Somehow or other (I can’t recall exactly how) they get involved with the documentary and come to represent the unequivocal support for “traditional” marriage. As the film goes on, we revisit this minister and his wife several times as they interact and have discussions with the filmmakers. By the end of the film, both the minister and his wife have decided that even in the confines of their very conservative faith, there may be a little room to squeeze in a respect (not a love, but a respect) for gay rights and even (if I recall correctly) gay marriage. Other community members do not complete this same journey. Nevertheless, each little step closer to human equality and equal rights is – in the end – not so little, after all.

To find this DVD go to the Subheading *Gay Rights* at http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/Diversity/Affirmative_Action/Resources/

Fill in and send the Resource Library Loan Form (<http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/files/144764.pdf>) to me at the address on the form or email it to me: dewwhite@ucanr.edu



with a particular cultural group and are looking for advice or help with the language or some general understanding of the culture may contact you. Assuming you would have already gotten your supervisor’s permission to participate in the Cultural Resource Team you would offer what advice and time to help that you could -- given the obligations of your other duties within ANR.

Of course, you may never get called, but by volunteering you will be giving voice to your commitment to helping others help with diversity and equal opportunity.

If you’re interested in putting your name on the list and becoming a part of the ANR Cultural Resource Team, send your name, contact info and the language(s) and/or cultures you are familiar with to David White : dewwhite@ucanr.edu

Updated Nondiscrimination Statement!

UCOP recently issued an update to the UC Nondiscrimination Statement (effective July 3, 2013). You can find the ANR version (along with Spanish translations) at

http://ucanr.edu/sites/anrstaff/Diversity/Affirmative_Action/Resources/Policy-related_downloads/



David White
Principal Analyst, Affirmative Action

