

Below are statements and quotes regarding Speaking OUT: Voices of Queer Youth

The Advocate:

Portraits of a Revolution: Photographer Rachelle Lee Smith gives lesbian and gay youth an outlet to speak for themselves.

Simple, yet powerful photos of queer youth speak reams

HRC:

Rachelle Lee Smith has created a powerful (art exhibit) sharing the stories of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender youth. Youth from across the country were photographed and asked to offer their voice, opinions, and comments about their experience as GLBT. In their own words and handwriting, these youth have shared their stories creating a very intimate and personal view on what it is like to be a GLBT person today.

Malcolm Lazin – Executive Director, Equality Forum:

Rachelle Lee Smith's photographs take us one step closer and provide an inside, emotionally bare look at some of the unheard voices of young queer people. Smith offers a suggestion of the vast numbers of diversity of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender youth and encourages her subjects to express their own powerful ideas and thoughts. The work is especially impressive in its presentation of image and written narrative of GLBTQ youth. I have followed Rachelle's work for over ten years. Her work has made a unique contribution to GLBT civil rights.

Equality Forum:

Shot against a stark white background, Smith's photographs allow her subjects to appear naturally and reveal raw emotions, without environmental influence or outside suggestion. The pictures themselves are only half of each piece. Only after the subject has written his or her personal story in the white space of his or her portrait does the complete work take shape.

Candace Gingrich – Senior Youth Outreach Manager, Human Rights Campaign

It is very powerful stuff that should be seen by as many people as possible.

Sean Buffington – President, The University of the Arts

Rachelle Lee Smith's photographic project presents us with the face and the voice of this generation of LGBT youth: they are passionate, angry, funny, and committed. As an openly gay educational leader, I think this project is critical—not only for young queer people, but for their teachers, parents, mentors, and friends. We need to put this project in libraries and schools across the country!

As the leader of an institution that seeks to help young creative people rise to the awesome challenge of making meaningful artistic work, I am keenly aware of the power of such work to move, inspire, and transform the lives and perceptions of maker and of audience. I am at the same time conscious of how hard it is for a young person—artist or not—to define and embrace an identity for him or herself and to present, inhabit, and defend that identity publicly. Ms. Smith's project plays a dual role: it is both powerful aesthetic statement and also a practical tool for LGBT youth to utilize in constructing durable public identities.

This project, however, moves me more than only intellectually. As a gay man—who sought to forge a public identity at a different time—I am inspired by this project. To “hear” the voices of these young men and women, to be confronted by the immediacy of their words and images is to perceive a group of friends and allies, to see a way of being, a strategy for surviving, a pathway to a proud self-embrace that I know I would have welcomed—no, been desperate for—at the same age. That, I suppose, is a roundabout way of saying that I believe this project is critical now. It is a project that must find its way, not only into the hands of young queer people, but to their teachers, parents, mentors, and friends as well.

Barbara Proud – Photographer/Professor:

In a typical museum or gallery, one might encounter photographs accompanied by text or by an elaborate explanation honoring who the artist is and analyzing the meaning of the work. No need for that in the work of Rachelle Lee Smith, whose GLBTQ youth use their own words in their own handwriting to boldly celebrate themselves and each other. They are proud, happy, seemingly devoid of teen angst and through their statements ask the world to “get over” their stereotypes and accept them as who they are.....people....just like everyone else.

That the subjects are portrayed against a stark white background

eliminates any environmental influences and perpetual stereotypes and forces the viewer to encounter the subject directly, one on one, face to face. More importantly, it forces the subjects themselves to be exactly who and how they are, without the use of props or articles of comfort.

The use of the square format with visible film edges further confines the subjects to a limited environment. They are boxed in. Yet they leap and dance and laugh; they brood or they stare us directly in the eye, their spirits transcending the boundaries of the frame and daring us to be free enough to love, honor and live together in harmony. These are photographs that not only need to be seen, they need to be heard.

Erin Gotthardt – Coordinator, Identity Center (NY):

Pride/Prejudice reminds us of something about young people that is often forgotten: whatever their sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or culture, they are beautiful and important, unique and valuable. Being able to display several pieces from this project in our youth center gave Identity Youth the opportunity to see that they are not alone; there are other young people who have experienced the same joy, frustration, sorrow, hatred, love, confusion, peace, ostracism and belonging. Through this project, the youth were able to find the rare accurate mirror of themselves, and to contribute their own faces and voices to the positive self-view of other queer youth.

Carrie Jacobs, PhD - Executive Director, Attic Youth Center (PA)

I have provided you with four options, all really variations on the same theme, for you to use for your book. I am not sure how you want me to convey my role as an LGBTQ youth provider, etc. Please feel free to choose and/or mix and match. I want it to say what you are looking to convey and how you want it presented. After all, you are the artist.

1) I had the opportunity to observe part of the development of Rachelle's eye-grabbing, one-of-a-kind, mixed-media project, as she photographed many of the youth who attend our center. Each youth who worked with her was encouraged to find their own voice and story and to express it passionately. What I saw was particularly empowering to the youth who participated, and I personally believe that every young person who witnesses this work will feel a part of that power.

Carrie Jacobs, PhD

Executive Director, Attic Youth Center

(Philadelphia's LGBTQ Youth Center)

2) As the Executive Director of Philadelphia's LGBTQ youth center, I had the opportunity to observe part of the development of Rachelle's amazing body of work, as she photographed many of the youth who attend our center. Those who worked with her felt uniquely endorsed and empowered through their participation in this project, and I believe this work will positively impact LGBTQ youth who have the opportunity to experience these photographs.

3) I have seen first hand the impact of Rachelle's innovative work as she has created an opportunity for LGBTQ youth to express their power and voice. I believe that every young person who witnesses this work will feel a part of that power.

4) Rachelle's work speaks volumes - telling stories that need to be told and giving voice to those whose lives need to be heard. I believe that all those who witness her work will experience the power and voice of the LGBTQ youth she has photographed.