

Speaking OUT : Queer Youth in Focus

"[Speaking OUT: Queer Youth in Focus] is very powerful stuff that should be seen by as many people as possible."

- Candace Gingrich – Senior Youth Outreach Manager of the Human Rights Campaign

"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!"

- Sean Buffington – President of The University of the Arts

Speaking OUT: Queer Youth in Focus is an ongoing photographic essay that gives members of the LGBTQ community a voice. Over the last decade I have worked both as artist and activist to use photographic portraits with the subjects' own words to highlight the myriad differences and commonalities of queer identity.

My "subjects" have been shot against a stark white backdrop not to single them out, but rather to eliminate environmental influence. Without an environment to give contextual clues or text to tell their story, these people are presented without judgment and stereotype. Only when the subjects' handwritten text is added to their portrait do we discover their commonalities and their individual stories. What makes this body of work so powerful is not only that each individual youth is given the spotlight and a chance to have a voice, but also the strength of the group as a whole.

This body of work tells the stories of youth and identity. Adolescence is a difficult process to endure without the added hardship of societal homophobia. The discovery of sexual identity as a young adult can be both a blessing and a hurdle. This book explores the passions, confusions, prejudices, fulfillment, joys, and sorrows of growing up as a queer youth. Although the images and accompanying text tend to speak for themselves, I would like to punctuate the photographs with a forward and statements to enrich the images and further engage the viewer. I would like the photographs and the youths' writings to be interspersed with statements from LGBTQ community leaders, advocates, celebrities, and educators; thus, the book is more than a collection of photography, it is also an informative and entertaining resource.

My goal is for every youth center, LGBTQ center, library, school, and youth to own this book as an educational tool. In addition to the documentary art world this book would be perfect for youth organizations and parents hoping to help understand their child or have their child understand themselves. Currently in the LGBTQ market, there is no book that engages the subjects in the artistic process to this extent. This body of work has been showcased nationally and internationally in magazines, gallery spaces, youth centers, and universities. In book form this will be more accessible and reach a wider audience.

The purpose and importance of this book is to give a voice to an underserved group of people that are seldom heard and often silenced. The collaboration of image and accompanying text will serve to provide an outlet, show support, open minds, and help those who struggle. It will not only show unification within the LGBTQ community but also the commonalities across all borders regardless of age, race, gender, and sexual orientation.

With the recent public tragedies and the media attention, now, more than ever, these voices need to be heard.

I believe there is strength in numbers, power in words, and freedom in art and I strive to raise awareness with this book.

To view the complete body of work, please visit:

www.rachelleleesmith.com/PridePage.html

You can also find out more information about the process and work at my fundraising site:

<http://www.kickstarter.com/projects/1992512411/pride-prejudice-voices-of-lgbtq-youth-a-photo-book?ref=live>

My goal is to get this work published in order to reach a larger audience.

I am in search of a person, group, or organization to collaborate with or help support and guide this work in a stronger direction.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Rachelle Lee Smith

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