

How We GLOW

[JAMILA HUMPHRIE](#)

NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

[EMILY SCHORR LESNICK](#)

INTRODUCTION

Ethnodrama alleviates the burden on young people to explain to others the words and meanings that define their identities and sexualities. Our play, *How We GLOW*, explores the ways LGBTQ+ youth craft their own identities and communities, building from the past and utilizing new modalities like social media. As co-researchers, collaborators, and partners, we combine theoretical study with daily work in schools. The desire to connect with youth on their own terms drove this research.

As adults, being in GLOW, a gender and sexuality student discussion group which stands for Gay, Lesbian or Whatever, offered opportunities to not only support LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and beyond) youth, but to explore new labels and terminology and understand the issues that most impact LGBTQ+ students. The question of identity labels, and how students (dis)connect on and offline, emerged from informal discussion with young people and

were the questions that helmed our research.

Too often, research about youth imagines young people, rather than listening to them and their stories directly. Not only did this form allow for those sharing their stories to feel empowered, but as the play grew and we produced it for over 20 schools, we saw the power of this piece in audience members seeing themselves in the stories.

METHODOLOGY

The desire to create *How We GLOW* came from a curiosity about young people's experiences and a desire to hear their voices directly. Too much of youth work talks *about* youth, rather than *with* youth. Our methodology blended traditional ethnographic interviews with theatrical storytelling tools, allowing for an authentic portrayal of truth. Researchers Judith Ackroyd and John O'Toole (2010) write of ethnodrama: "It's a natural development of the new-found confidence in acknowledging the subjectivity of their [researchers'] human research and of celebrating rather than reducing the richness of rich data" (p. 3). Ethnodrama draws on the rigorous anthropological process of describing, interpreting, and in turn constructing cultural behavior. This method lends itself to understand the ways people create their own cultural meaning. Ethnotheatre, the performance of ethnodrama, brings this process to life in a process of bearing witness to stories and moving to action. In outlining our process, we hope to illuminate potential steps that institutions can take to listen to and share their community's stories.

We reached out to email listservs of LGBTQ+ students at the high school and university level, narrowing our scope to youth between the ages of 14-24. We also connected with educators who put us in touch with interview participants. We conducted 21 open-ended interviews. Our questions were: *How would you describe your identity and how did you come to understand it? Do you have a coming out story or stories to share with us? Do you or have you participated in any identity-based groups in your school or elsewhere? What do you think is the biggest issue or issues facing the LGBTQ+ community? What do you know about the Stonewall Riots?*

Our participants attended a diverse range of schools. Of our interviewees, 7 were college students, 5 were in public school, 6 were independent school students and 2 were not in school. Interviewees had

the option to share their name or use a pseudonym. This practice and others were informed and reviewed by NYU's University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects.

Upon completing the interview process, we coded the data for emergent themes (performative coming out experiences, feeling a generational divide between parents and/or teachers, exploration of identity, and intra-community differences emerged as themes) and transcribed the interviews verbatim (every uh, um and pause was included). Although we interviewed everyone individually, many of the stories that emerged in our conversations were in congruence or in conflict with each other. The beauty of this form is that we can explore these tensions and divergences through theatre. Our transcription method borrows from the style of MacArthur Genius/researcher/actor/playwright Anna Deavere Smith and theatremaker/professor Joe Salvatore, which tries to capture the poetry of human speech verbatim: language is identity and identity is language. The richest details, the patterns and pauses of speech, illuminate as much about a person as the content of their words. By using a "hard return" to connote a break in the flow of speech, this style really imitates each person as a unique character in this play. We then wove the transcriptions into a script which featured sections from 11 of our 21 interviews.

We then worked with actors to devise parts of the performance, and presented the show to our community. Our casting intentionally cast actors in roles that were incongruous with their racial or gender experiences, as we wanted the audience to challenge their assumptions about the stories we ascribe onto certain bodies. Feedback from educators and youth members of our audience encouraged us to share the piece with schools, and we have spent two years touring the show to assemblies, conferences, and festivals from Seattle to Dublin. We have performed for students as young as ten years old, in gymnasiums of large public schools and in black box theatres of selective independent schools. Some schools organized pre-discussions in advisor groups, and each performance ended with a larger talkback to clarify language, provide space for student reflection and testimonials, and to ask about our process. Sharing the piece in schools allowed for simultaneous exposure to LGBTQ+ voices for straight or cisgender students, as well as an affirmation for LGBTQ+ students.

Hearing the stories of LGBTQ+ youth revealed the powerful

intersection of identities: age as a social identifier uniquely impacted their gender and sexual identities along with other social identifiers. Additionally, interviewees identified homelessness and intra-group divisions as strong issues facing their communities (interestingly, nobody identified marriage as a key issue, even during our interview period of spring 2015). Last, though the ways that youth engaged with labels varied, the access to claiming or rejecting a label almost always came through internet communities. Facebook groups brought youth together with other young people outside of their social circles to build virtual communities of consciousness raising and support.

HOW WE G.L.O.W.

Created by Jamila Humphrie & Emily Schorr Lesnick

CREATORS' STATEMENT

We seek to amplify the voices of lgbtq+ youth through interview theatre. We conceived this project in an effort to explore the process through which young people navigate identity development, specifically around gender identity and sexual orientation, and how those identities intersect with other cultural identifiers. In a political and cultural environment where demonstrations of non-normative identities can be dangerous, we aimed to create a space for lgbtq+ youth to share openly, in their own words.

We completed 21 interviews with young people of diverse backgrounds about their identities, the labels they claim or create, and the biggest issues facing their communities. This script comes verbatim from interview transcripts. Inspired by The Laramie Project and the work of Anna Deavere Smith, this project blurs the line between audience, theatre and community. By learning about how these young people G.L.O.W. (Gay, Lesbian or Whatever), we hope audiences will leave with a desire to deepen cross-generational dialogue and to work in solidarity with these young people towards structural changes that support their identities.

We are forever grateful to the young people who so bravely shared their time and stories with us.

CHARACTERS

The names and descriptions used by each character are derived from verbatim interview data.

ANDREA LI	21 year old Asian American asexual "neut"
ASIA	19 year old Hispanic cisgender lesbian
ERIC	17 year old Vietnamese bisexual male
JACK	15 year old White gay cisgender male
JENNY	18 year old White bisexual/queer cisgender female

KYLE	16 year old “White for the most part, but I’m Puerto Rican as well” cisgender male, homosexual
MB	19 year old Indian bisexual female
ROCCO	16 year old White bisexual cisgender male
RYAN DE LA CRUZ	17 year old Filipina gay female
SAM	18 year old White homosexual biromantic gender-fluid female
SHANTANA	19 year old Black Jamaican lesbian with no gender label

INTERVIEW OBSERVATIONS

Andrea Li is Asian American and identifies as asexual and as a “neut.” Ze has greasy, long black hair and wears simple glasses. While Andrea speaks, ze sits with arms crossed and picks at zir inner elbow skin. Andrea does not smile the entire time ze speaks.

Asia wears a backwards hat which reads “I am” on the back part in hand-stitched writing. She is very happy and has great energy. She is very expressive in her face and hands and makes lots of eye contact. She has short hair and wears glasses.

Eric has braces and hair an inch long. He makes good eye contact and keeps his hands under the table.

Jack has blue eyes and is built like a football player--short but stocky. He wears a black hoodie and articulates with his hands, which shook with nerves. He got emotional and his eyes glazed when speaking.

Jenny has long, light brown hair, pale skin and light eyes. She smiles the entire time, even through the difficult moments. During difficult moments she held her own arms, extending her left arm through her legs, and holding that arm with her right at the elbow. She would cross and uncross her leg. She squints and looks away with an upwards glance, otherwise making eye contact. She has very white and straight teeth.

Kyle has light eyes/skin and some pimples covered by makeup. His hair is long and curly on top, short/close shave on the side, and he has a

beard, which he plays with. He also plays with his long necklace chain. He makes eye contact, but looks away when he thinks of more to say.

MB is a medium-toned Indian woman with rectangle glasses and a mole above her left eye. She makes a lot of eye contact, and looks up when not looking directly at the interviewer. She does not play with her long black hair.

Rocco is skinny, White and as long stringy hair. He has moderate acne and wears rectangle glasses. He sits up straight, but keeps readjusting.

Ryan has black hair, black eyes, with teeth sticking out. She is focused, yet jovial. She crosses and uncrosses her leg, putting both of her hands on her knees.

Sam looks away when speaking and pushes up her square glasses as a tick. She has dark, mousy hair, pale skin and pronounces “women” as “woman”. She wears a Pippin the musical t-shirt.

Shantana has a thick Mohawk dyed blonde then dyed aquamarine green. She has pierced ears and nose and dark skin. She break into smiles and her eyes water when emotional. She fidgets with headphones that were looped through her shirt. She has two visible tattoos. One on each arm.

SUGGESTED CASTING

This play is to be performed with actors in multiple roles. Below you will find suggested casting options.

Actor 1: Jack/Shantana	Actor A: Ryan de la Cruz / Kyle
Actor 2: Andrea Li/Sam	/Jack
Actor 3: Eric/Ryan de la Cruz/	Actor B: Andrea Li / Sam
Kyle	Actor C: Jenny / MB
Actor 4: Jenny/MB	Actor D: Eric / Shantana
Actor 5: Rocco/Asia	Actor E: Rocco/ Asia

FLOW OF PLAY

Part I: My Identity

Part II: Coming Out

Part III: Find the Strength

Part IV: That's the Last Thing I Want to Say

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[Jamila Humphrie & Emily Schorr Lesnick](#)

914.260.0288

PART I: MY IDENTITY

RYAN DE LA CRUZ

so

I identify as

a gay

female

um

for some reason I've always been uncomfortable with the word lesbian

like it really took me a while to work up to saying that word

and

sorry

what was the second part of the question?

SHANTANA

oh

um

like right now I'm claiming no label

because

um

I feel like

I

dress very masculine

but I also feel very feminine--

feminine

and I don't

want

to

be

considered only masculine

or feminine

I feel like I'm like a mix of both

so

I just go with no label

does that answer that?

ANDREA LI

I identify as a

person who does not

(pause)

who does not belong to the
female or male part of the g-
gender binary

MB

it took me
maybe
two years
to figure it out?
like I started off like saying
I think I am because I realized that I liked girls as well
it was around middle school
and um
at one point
I was like
okay
I'm definitely attracted to girls
I'm definitely attracted to boys
and then
and even later when I found out about the whole spectrum of genders
there was no difference in my attractions

ANDREA LI

ze for first person
spelled z-e-
zir spelled z-i-r for third person

ROCCO

mhm
I would
describe my identity
like a modified form of bisexual I guess
um
it's

um

I don't really see the entire point of fitting people into I--
into boxes and into labels

ANDREA LI

my mother wanted me
wanted me to be
wanted me to be a girly girl growing up
but it didn't fit me

ROCCO

um
obviously as humans we have a need to categorize things very
specifically
but

(clears throat)

excuse me
tsk
but we
not everybody fits cleanly into those so
we really need to
I don't think there's a need
to say this person's xyz this person's abc
you can just say
I am
I am a person and
as a person I'm very complicated and um
there is no need or requirement for me to fit into these predetermined
labels
so the way I see my identity is that
I
don't see gender as
anything that matters in terms of potential relationships
it is
you can see
my mother once said this to me is that you fall in love with people not

with genders
so there's
no need to limit yourself by saying I only like females
I only like males

KYLE

I would describe as a
as a gay man
um

(clears throat)

and
I guess I kind of um
I never really had a word to put with
how I was feeling
um
up until maybe
sss
seventh grade

(clears throat)

which is when
you know
in middle school and
it starts being thrown around like the
word gay and
you know
the f-word
as kind of like
a bad thing
but um

(clears throat)

when I learned what
it actually meant I kind of

realized that oh I was that
that bad thing
I guess
um
but
then
you know
we've got
the internet and all that so kind of delving into all that
um
that entire new world

(Company begins "Internet Noise" and pantomiming.)

ASIA

I
took the course of looking at the internet and seeing other people
who
identified as something different
and
I saw this like
world
of like
just
different ways that people express themselves and I like
first got really confused

KYLE

kind of
helped me come to terms with the fact that
maybe it wasn't such a bad thing
and that being a gay man is
a normal thing and that there are many other people like me

ASIA

(breathes out quickly)

what?

was like
pansexual
and asexual
and a-romantic
and I was like
what I don't know any of these
and what does that even mean
and I don't know what bisexual is
and I was
totally lost and
really confused

RYAN DE LA CRUZ

I went around like social media like Tumblr
Facebook
little things like that
um
and I tried to find
people who were basically like me
people who were gay
and people you know
who were teenagers
and identified the same way I identified
and
in a way
I kinda looked towards those people as support
and like
kinda like my goals
my future goals of where I want to be
later on
in my life
and
as
I
have slowly come out to
you know
various people in my life
I've begun to take more pride

in my identity
I've
become to
I've
understood more of what it means to be gay
what it means to be gay in our society

ASIA

and
um
I started
uh
identifying as nothing for a while
I was just like
I'm just a person
and I don't care what happens
and
um
I am who I am
and
and for a while
it was like
that's my motto
and I kind of didn't find any happiness in that
and it was so weird
because I knew a lot of people that were like
oh I'm so happy being
like
unlabeled and content in that
and I really wasn't because I was so confused about everything
and
so I like sat down and I
this sounds like a really weird thing but I
went through
like
different definitions of what everyone thought
like
what pansexual is

and a-romantic
and
bisexual
and
just everything
and I was like
okay
I don't
none of this applies to me
and this doesn't apply to me
and I understand like
certain aspect of things
and there's still a ton of stuff that I don't understand
but
for me it was just like
I needed a simple label of
what I was
and what I was doing
and for me that was
cisgendered female
that happens to love girls
and I had a nice connection with them
so
I started identifying as lesbian
and
I
I dunno
I've never not liked it

("Internet Noise" ends.)

ERIC

(clicks tongue)

um
I currently identify as a bisexual
male
um that's with gender

male
um
and I kind of
know this about myself in
in 6th and 7th grade
um
do you want me to tell you how do I know?

JACK

I went to a Catholic school and gay was only something I really saw
on *Glee* at the time
um
and
I actually remember having a girlfriend in sixth grade and
being like
y'know I remember
seeing you know
the only role model I had was Kurt and
eventually Blaine and I was just like
well I'm not really like those guys
so I'm not gay or anything
but
like
I kinda knew that I wa--
let's just say I was more interested in male anatomy than I was in
female anatomy
so
I kind of
knew that
and
then eventually other things started falling into place
um
and yeah
I guess
that's basically the
um
the base of it

MB

I mean
middle school was when people started talking about
ooh boys
you know everything and the girls around me would be talking about
that
and one time I was like
ooh I kind of feel that way about girls sometimes
and I said
ooh girls
and somebody was like oh you're you're a lesbian
and they were kind of weird about it
and um
and I said no no no
I like boys too
I like both
I like girls and boys
and I said I think that's the way I am
and like

(As MB speaks, the rest of the cast looks at her.)

SHANTANA

in middle school
I was out
but like
I was like
in this rough place in my life
this life
I feel like
this was a part of me where I was still growing
and finding myself
but I wanted to find myself right then and there
but I just didn't know how
so I was like
still confused
um
dating this girl online

and it was getting pretty serious
we were already talking for like two years
and
it was
very unhealthy
cause like
I didn't know how to
like
be myself and be gay
I was more or less
pretending to be a guy
with her
because
that's how she wanted
and she was the girl that I wanted
and I was in this really bad place
like I was
cutting myself
I was very
self-loathing
it was just terrible
in middle school

MB

I didn't know what it was called

(laughs)

at the time
I didn't know there was a word bisexual

(Pause/Transition.)

JENNY

so I identify as bisexual
um
well I really like to just
say I'm queer

I like that word a lot because
I mean there are so many different labels and
people try to get like as specific as they can
but
I think that's kind of silly because
I've come to realize at least that my sexuality's
very fluid
and even
although I do say I'm bisexual
even that
kind
having something clear-cut doesn't make any sense to me
so just saying I'm not straight
and
that's kind of enough
so I that's why
I like the word queer

RYAN DE LA CRUZ

when I'm around my gay friends we'll say
oh look
we're a gaggle of queers
and I'm like
oh okay
I guess this is an okay word to say?
I never really had an opinion on it until I heard
you know
my gay friends saying it

MB

I personally don't use it for an umbrella term for GRSM
gender
romantic
uh sexual minorities
because I know a lot of people are uncomfortable with it
it's still being used in slurs

ASIA

It's not
really definable
I just feel like the word queer is just kind of
this big umbrella of like
everything under the rainbow

SHANTANA

it's just underneath that umbrella
that's what I feel like being queer is
like
being gay
or whatever
it doesn't matter
just in the family

ROCCO

um
queer is like an umbrella term for all kinds of um
basically
anything that's not straight
and cisgender

JACK

it's just become
the umbrella term
for everybody
I know we had
GSA a big conversation about that word

SAM

people
tend to have a different idea on if it's
if if it's a positive connotation or if it's a negative connotation and
the way that I use it
um
it's sort of like
something that used to be negative and now it's positive and when I

say queer I sort of
it's just sort of to describe the entire community

JACK

kind of hard to
you know explain for people to
you know even I don't understand what that
sole identity means
but now
I know a lot of people just use it
as an umbrella term
um
so basically they'll
they'll say just
the
queer people and it it
even it is

SAM

like
you know
people who don't
identify as being
cisgender
people who don't identify as being straight
so it just it's
it's sort of the way that
at least people who I know and the way I've picked it up
it's sort of been as um
umbrella term
so um
at least for me that's what queer means
I know it's different for
um
other people but
you—for me and for some others it's
um basically an umbrella term

JACK

I know I had a friend of my dorm ask me
a
couple nights ago
is it offensive if I use
queer to describe
as an umbrella term
and I was thinking
you know I was just like
you know I don't know
I
sincerely
don't know
um
and there
I remember when we were talking about
queer
at the Q and A
there were a lot of adults there
you could see
kind of see tense up a little
as the
um
the uh
glbt
um
adults there
remember it as being that
you know
offensive word
uh
and it was just
kind of weird
that generation gap is so huge
between
um
something I've noticed a lot especially with my advisor
you know

the generation gap is incredible
and
so for me it means an umbrella term
but
I also realize it could mean a lot of things
uh
to everybody else

ASIA

we're queer
we're not
you know
what you would expect to be
normal
whatever that would be anyway

PART II: COMING OUT

(Actors stand in a vertical line, each stepping forward to speak and stepping away when complete.)

JENNY

once I reached high school I started
realizing that I could be my own person that I didn't need to like
fit other people's labels
um
I heard the word queer
and that like made the most sense
um
because I was kind of tired of like questioning
every single thought that I had and like feeling that I had
and I felt I should just be done with it

ROCCO

I've always been
kind of like
a loner student I've never really interacted with many people—I've
always been reading
and when
I
came out everybody was
oh I thought you were asexual
which
kind of made me laugh and kind of made me sad
because um
it showed how little everybody understood me

SAM

oh yeah I have a good coming out story
this one's a more comical one
um
it was in my
it was in my
I guess
do you mind if I share two actually cuz one's more recent

okay
so one was um
it was in my AP literature class
and
I remember that
yeah
it was
we were
basically
given time to sort of get into Mrs. Dalloway and
take notes on it
and I mean it was two-
I was between two of my friends
and
I wa-
we were just you know doing our work and stuff like that
and
I don't remember what one of them said
but one of them said something that was like
something about being in the cl-
like being in the closet
it like not in any
s- you know queer way just like
about closets in general
and I was thinking to myself there's this opportunity here
like
I'm going to take it
like
why not
so I
just kind of quietly whispered so that they could hear I was like I was in
the closet once
but the thing is like only one of them like picked up on it like
I was talking to another one
I made another closet joke
with them because they were talking about
like their dark abysmal place known as the closet and I was like
you know I was in a dark abysmal place known as the closet once

and I added
I'm bi he's like
oooh so that's what you meant
and I'm like
yeah what else did you think I mean and he was like
I'm sorry that I'm short and these things fly over my head
so um
that was one story

MB

coming out has always been
um
a really difficult concept for me to understand
because it seemed to me that every time you meet a person
you're technically coming out of the closet aren't you and it must be a
very exhaustive process
um
and
well
the real issue
is like

ERIC

um
I
I'm not
I should
I dunno
I'm not actually out
completely at my school
and one of the reasons why I'm not is because
well
I should also say that I'm the president of the GSA at my high school
and I
I believe personally that
the best way to fight homophobia
is to show people that there can be a straight ally
um to

lgbtq
the community
um
one who is the president of the GSA
it's not weird to
b-
you know
be a gay rights activist and be straight at the same time
and to kinda break that awkwardness between the straight people and
gay people
um

(clicks tongue)

so that's
the reason that I'm not
out
at my school
um
my parents
my parents know so I came out to them
and that
I don't think there was
it really much of a story to tell there because
they they knew that I liked this boy
and so
they could tell
they could
and I think at one point they asked directly
and I said
I said yeah
basically
and I never told them if I was bisexual or gay
I just said
you know
I like this boy
um
and I had a girlfriend later in 8th grade so they

so they uh
I think they know I'm bisexual
and I've never really had a conversations about
or our conversations were really only about that one boy
or about that one girl
they never were
universal
and so
but
back at school
I
I think
it's a bummer
that I don't feel comfortable coming out
and I
um
but I felt
well for me at least
I felt like a have a pretty good reason not to
yeah

(Jack steps forward and speaks directly to Eric.)

JACK

it's very
kind of scary to just have to say it cuz there's no way to really just
skirt around it
it's kind of those things you just have to say like
you know
I I'm gay
at this point
I'm just
you just have to say it

(Ryan stands DSR, everyone else sits cross-legged to face her.)

RYAN DE LA CRUZ

technically it's not anyone's business how I identify

but at the same time
I wanted the comfort that
um
a lot of heterosexual people have
knowing that they can identify how they would like to
and
you know
no one questions it
or forces another label upon them
I wanted to be myself fully
and not have to hide any of that
so
when I had come out to my school
the only people I had told was my close friend group and a couple of
teachers
um
and other than that that was it
so I was the last person to go
and
I flashed on the screen the gay flag
and the words

UNISON

my gay agenda

RYAN DE LA CRUZ

and I was like
in case you guys didn't know
I'm gay
and I'm gonna talk to you guys about
um
some misconceptions people have about the LGBTQ community
and I talked about things people have said to me
who's the man in the relationship
does this mean you're a boy
right now
um
you have very like well-intentioned questions which are ignorant

and back-handed at the same time
and when I was done with it
that was probably one of the happiest moments of my life
I felt so proud of myself
I felt so loved by my school community
I remember looking out into the audience
and like
everyone was smiling
um
the whole English Department of my school is gay
so they all
they all went up to me afterwards
or like they emailed me
or they spoke to me
they were like
we're so proud of what you've done
for this community
thank you for doing this
I remember one teacher was crying as she hugged me
just
a really great feeling to know you're not alone
yeah
that was very exciting
I loved that moment

(Shantana stands DSL to speak, everyone scooches to face her.)

SHANTANA

but then um
like my real coming out to my dad
like telling him myself
was at my senior year in high school
I did this poem
um
it's called
D.Y.K.E.
but it stands for
do you know arrogance [sic]

erro with an e
and

(clears throat)

uh
it was pretty much going off about how
what I told you about my sexual identity
I don't feel like a man
and I don't feel like I have to wear skirts to prove that I'm a woman
and that
I love woman
that's who I am
and that was my
that's the gist of my poem
I invited my father
and he was there
he didn't clap
but
he heard me
so that was enough for me

(Sitting on the floor, cast shifts to face forward.)

ANDREA LI

I never told my parents because I knew they wouldn't accept me

MB

um
I
my family
is very
they're not homophobic
at all
I know because I've heard them state their political views publicly
I've heard them state their personal views
but I also know that you're not supposed to talk about anything in my
family

ASIA

first was when I came out to my parents through uh
letters
because again the internet taught me
great things

(laughs)

(Asia hands a letter to father, played by Actor 2/B.

MB sits in a seat next to car father, played by Actor 1/C.)

MB

and I suppose the most difficult thing was when I tried to come out to
my dad
um
I was like
okay
because he was
he was t-talking about in the car
I was like
you know we never really talk
I want to get to know you better
and so I was like
okay
and he was like
tell me what's going on with your friends
so I decided to do the
my friend
thing
and my dad's not very good at picking up on that so

(laughs)

so I said
you know my friend recently came out as bisexual and he's like
why are you telling me this
and I'm like
I don't know

I don't know
you said you wanted to know what was happening with my friends
and that's what happened
I thought maybe he would pick up on me saying me
but he wasn't
so he was like
okay
well
what does it matter
you're in high school you should be studying anyway

(laughs)

and I said
well yes
but what do you think about it
and he said
well sooner or later you have to choose
and I said
why
and he's like
well you can't marry two people
and I was like
right but
and
then I realized because my mom was the first person he ever dated
so I said
dad
you can date more than one person
can't you?
like
you can break up with a person and then date another person and he's
like
oh
I guess you could do that
I mean
I never did that
so I wouldn't think about other people doing that

(laughs)

so I realized
that
there's like
a sharing level that he's never going to be on that level

(Cast goes off stage, except for Asia and father, played by Actor 2/B.)

ASIA

and I went home
um
on the next Monday
and my dad was there
and my mom was still gone
and
he didn't say anything
and I thought
oh no
he either didn't read it
or he's so mad
he doesn't wanna talk
so we're washing dishes
and he's washing and I'm drying
and then
he um
he just turns to me
and he stops and turns off the water
and goes

(exhales)

really deep
and goes
um
so there's like no chance whatsoever that you're going to randomly
start dating men?
and I turned and looked at him and I was holding this dish

and I was like
I don't
know
I mean
who knows?
but right now I'm pretty sure no
and he was like
okay
and then
that was it
and he turned the water back on
and I was like
okay
and then he turned to me and he goes
um
hey uh
you know
everybody just
a little
little
out there about things
and I was like
I don't
know what
that means
and then he was like
when I was in college
and I was like
oh no
I am not ready for this conversation
and he was like
even your mom
and I was like
I'm not even ready
for that one
and he was like
I don't know if your mom still does that
sometimes

I do
and I was like
are you telling me that you're

(laughs)

he was like
oh yeah
like
um
I don't like to put a label on it
but I'm sure you guys would call me bisexual or something
and I was like
okay

JACK

I say he was the best one to handle it because my
second older sister
um
that night
you know came into my room
and you know
she's just very worried
I can still tell that she's very worried
um
we she had a big conversation for like the big three things that she
wanted me to know
like
don't settle for people just cuz you're
in a minority
um
don't get AIDS and die
um
and
um
yeah
I guess and I guess just be careful
of

you know
um
homophobic
um
homophobic
homophobic environments
um
but
well she did a really good job of freaking me out
um
and
and my dad just said look that's fine
like doesn't really change my opinion of you
and that was it
um
yeah so that was basically
like coming out to
close people

RYAN

oh my dad was very relaxed about it
he started jumping up and down
he started dancing with the dog
he was like
she's gay
I'm gay
we're all happy, yay!
okay
dad
thanks for putting the enthusiasm in that mom didn't

(As Ryan speaks, everyone else starts jumping and dancing.)

PART III: FIND THE STRENGTH

(Actors are seated in chairs and on the floor. Andrea faces away from the rest of the group.)

ANDREA LI

(sighs)

I managed to be thrown in with
the people that I live with
because of
bad circumstances
I have run away from home
and the place I now live in is a shelter

KYLE

there's a lot of
a lot of um
queer homelessness
from what I've
heard
um
so that's
especially trans youth
um
I I'm not really
knowledgeable on the subject
but I just know that um
a lot of
lgbt teens are
kicked out of their homes
I've
I've heard a lot of like
success stories though
where they get like adopted
a trans
um
teen was recently
adopted

but then you hear cases um
like Leelah Alcorn
um
so
I think
just a lot of
I think we really need to submerge
um
like our modern culture in
mm
the fact that
lgbtq people exist and that we are
everywhere
we're coming

ANDREA LI

I guess you could say
being homeless
transcends
this
our sexuality
or our gender identity sometimes
to me that is
like
being homeless is the only identity we share
outside of specific sexualities or gender identities
well
that's
that's more a part of how I see myself
I don't know about the others see themselves

MB

I think we need
to
focus
a lot on
like
homeless youth

I think that's a really big issue
you know
just reading the statistics like
a disparagingly high number of homeless youth are
um
you know
lgbt
and they're doing that because they're not accepted in their homes
like
um
I recognize the need
like how getting acceptance for marriage will get acceptance for
will help gain acceptance for the kids
but I um
you know
gaining acceptance over all
but I feel as though
maybe if we concentrate on that
and
you know
giving
resources
so they could start their life
like I feel like that would be very important

ANDREA LI

and I'm so tired of hearing about the suicides
and murders
and no one seems to care about them
I would hope that the message of this community
would spread through so that people stop killing themselves

ROCCO

I think we're
we're building an understanding of trans people
but it still
has a long way to go
a while ago I read a story on the news about this trans girl who

committed suicide

ANDREA LI

I can't tell you to stop caring about what other people think
but I hope I can change the way you feel
in particular about yourself
namely that it is not wrong
nor is it something to be ashamed of who you are

ROCCO

um
and her parents had always refused to refer to her by her and she
and instead said he and him
um
and even
in
her
obituary
they used her birth name
and said
him
which
made me really angry

(coughs)

excuse me

ANDREA LI

I hope you can find the strength to go on

ROCCO

um
because
it just showed a complete lack of respect
for her
own child
and a complete lack of understanding of what

she actually was

SHANTANA

I had a few trans friends
I don't have that many
I'm not exposed to it as much
and I think
homelessness amongst the gay
people
like there's too many gay youth on the piers by my job

ANDREA LI

the space I'm in now
is supposed to be lgbtq friendly
but it doesn't always seem that way
because how hostile being homeless makes everyone

SHANTANA

I see
a lot of them
they look stagnant
in their lives
they look like this is the rock bottom
but it seems like there's more
you know
it feels like with them
there's always like less like
um
I don't know
more ground to go down
this is just never it
and like
I don't know if they feel like they can ever climb up
you know
um
so I feel like that's one thing
another thing
I don't know

I think that's all I can think of right now
and those are just things that like bother me

ROCCO

a lot of people don't really understand what it means to be
trans

ANDREA LI

The staff could do more but they can't because they're so understaffed
and some of the program funding has been cut
we're fighting for a limited number of resources

ROCCO

because these people don't understand and they lash out at what they
don't understand
which hurts
the people
and makes them
depressed
suicidal
all these bad things
um
and
with trans people specifically

ANDREA LI

(sighs)

I wish that my situation would actually be
looked on not with pity
but with
respect
like
I wish
even though
I wish that one
my gender identity
the identity itself would be more normal

so people don't look at me like I'm crazy
when I try to explain
and two
my living situation could always use more help

(sighs)

that just sounds like I'm begging
like all the other homeless people people tend to ignore
so I'm not sure really how to gain support for that
like how to I get support without sounding manipulative

SHANTANA

I dunno
I just hope
everything gets better
for us all

PART IV: THAT'S THE LAST THING I WANT TO SAY

ASIA

um

I know that a lot of issues
outside of the community itself that are kind of
facing us
but I

JENNY

I think one issue with the lgbt
like community is that everyone that's not in it kind of thinks
that it's like this
happy rainbow

ASIA

the way we regard each other
inside the community
is the most like
crucial thing
that we've ever faced
and it's still something that's a really big problem
um
like
just
like hate in the community itself

JENNY

like
warm community
where everyone automatically like
love each other and is there for each other
and that's not always true and I think it's because

ASIA

of watching people be like
oh
that's not a real thing

or
like
nobody has it as bad as we have it
or like people
inside of the community looking at other people
like
in the community thinking
they don't belong here

MB

we very often talk about
um
the homophobia in
you know
minority communities
you know
like
the Indian communities
Black communities
but we never talk about the racism that can come up in the lgbt
communities
and very often
they're prevalent
so

ASIA

that's always kind of been the biggest issue with like
the lgbt community
is that
um
for a community that wants to be
all inclusive
we're very like exclusive
including to each other
and I think that's probably our biggest issue

(Group starts to hug and say goodbye. Lights dim. Group gathers around Jenny's character in a semi-circle.)

JENNY

actually could I add something
to the interview?
is it still running?
ok
well
so after I told my mom
and she said well
I still want grandchildren
and there was no like
fluffly like hug
I still love you
this is like great whatever
um
the next day I when I went
I talked to my
AP government and politics teacher
who I'm pretty close with
um
and he had
earlier in the year given me a book called um
The Fire Next Time by James Baldwin
which is about
he was gay
although he doesn't really talk that much about it in the book
um
but it's mostly about being black in the 60s
and
after sh- I told my mom
I actually went back to the book and I read a couple pages
that just made me feel really good about being different
and like why that's great
so I told my teacher about that
cuz he's the one that gave me the book
and
while we were talking I was telling him how she reacted and
how she probably wished I was straight
which was fine

because I've spent so much time wishing I was straight because
that would make things so much more simple
and the one thing that he said that
really rang in my mind I guess for the rest of the day was
like I don't wish you were straight
that's crazy
and he's a s-
heterosexual cisgendered man
White man
so like
one of the pe-
like least understanding people you would think
when it comes to something like this
but like that was the moment when I realized I didn't hafta
like
wish that I wasn't different
and that that actually
might mean something good

(Group in the semi-circle says in the line in unison.)

UNISON

How did that feel?

JENNY

it felt
I don't know
like surreal
like I'd never been told that before
like I'd always been told things like it gets better
and
like you'll find people that do love you
but I'd never been told like
y-
this is how you should be
and this isn't any better or any worse
than being straight
this is you and that's great

JACK

um
maybe just a
little
I was thinking about how uh
just
another injustice in a way
or I-
my personal
things that have bugged me
um
and
one of the things I know I like to write and read a lot
and
I always find it
um
that it's been harder to do those kind of
things
after coming out
in a way
um
which is another
you know once you
at least in my
experience
um
when after I'd
come out
like would before
I don't want to do things like stage makeup or write about why gay
characters or read gay books
because
I was afraid that people were gonna think I was gay
and now that I've come out
um
you know
every single time I do these things that I actually have always liked to
do but am afraid to

um
it's because I'm gay
you know it's becau-
just because of that
you know it wa-
I'm changing myself
so my sister
my second older sister thinks
that I'm
doing this stuff to change myself to fit a stereotype
and so does my
advisor
who
likes to kind of tease me
um
I've asked to
stop many times but I don't think he really gets how
much of an impact it makes when he says
you're putting yourself in a box
you are
making yourself entirely this
my father said
it is a part of you but you don't have to wear it like a badge
but
and I even had um
I remember telling uh
uh
a few of my friends about this uh
a play I wrote
um
where it had um
a couple gay characters in it
and they said
do you write like any like straight characters and I was like
yeah I write some why
and they just like
well it just seems like you're only writing
gay characters

you know
I just feel like that's really limiting yourself as
a writer and I'm just like
you know if I was straight and I was only writing straight characters
even if I was gay and only writing straight characters
you wouldn't be saying this to me
like
I know that because I would write things
and only have straight characters and nobody said
are you writing any gay characters and that was
kind of limiting yourself
and I
you know I feel like it's the same
for
a lot of writers actually
you know
I know
talking to my friend
who is
she's black and she said
yeah I write a lot of black characters but everybody is like you know
why can't you write
any white characters
yeah
cuz we're in a shortage of white characters
um
so
it's
it's just crazy things like that that I feel like
not an injustice you know
I don't
at least
not an injustice widely
it's been
a difficulty
trying to get people to understand that
it actually
yeah maybe

they think it's just my sexuality
and
but it is a little bit more of me
and no I'm gonna try and shove it in your face
but
and not everything is gonna be
about that
but
just so you know
it's a little more than who I want to
fall in love with
who I want to sleep with it's about
you know
I
cuz I
I realize I'm standing on the shoulders of people
in the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS crisis and
um
even though
those were not my personal struggles
I still
feel a connection to those people and I'm thankful
and I'm
I should be able to feel that
and I should be able to
represent the way I feel
in
my
sort of my
artistic mediums
anybody should
and I feel
that it
strangely
coming out
which is supposed to be something that's freeing
has inhibited that because if I was writing gay characters beforehand
people would be a little too afraid to say are you doing this because

you're gay
um
so I just think that's kind of a
fun little
funny
not fun
little uh
you know
double standard
like yeah we'll accept you just
so you're not changing yourself
it's like I'm s-
I'm a teenager
how do you know if I'm changing myself or just discovering who I am
so
that's the last thing I want to say

(Cast walks around space, reciting lines from their characters, then creating a frozen image. This happens three times. On the last time, lights fade to black.)

END.

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Jamila Humphrie (she/her) is a PhD student at NYU in the Educational Leadership program. Her academic and professional work includes; facilitating conversations for queer people of color, co-creating a piece of interview theatre, *How We GLOW*, with her partner Emily Schorr Lesnick, and presenting on her work at conferences and in schools across the country. Jamila serves on GLSEN's Education Advisory Committee and the Making Gay History Podcast Advisory Committee. In 2016, she was an intern in the White House in the Social Office of the First Lady Michelle Obama. Jamila also received a Fulbright Award to Brazil in 2012.

Emily Schorr Lesnick (she/her) is an educator, theatre maker, and equity facilitator who works primarily with middle and upper school students. With her partner Jamila Humphrie, she co-created *How We GLOW*, a piece of interview theatre that explores LGBTQ+ identity, which has toured to community spaces and schools across the world. An alum of Steinhardt's Educational Theatre program, she currently serves on GLSEN's Educator Advisory Committee.