

Ellen and RuPaul: Why we need to hold them accountable - and honor them

EXCLUSIVE: Tre'vell Anderson talks with GSN about where Hollywood needs to go with LGBTI representation

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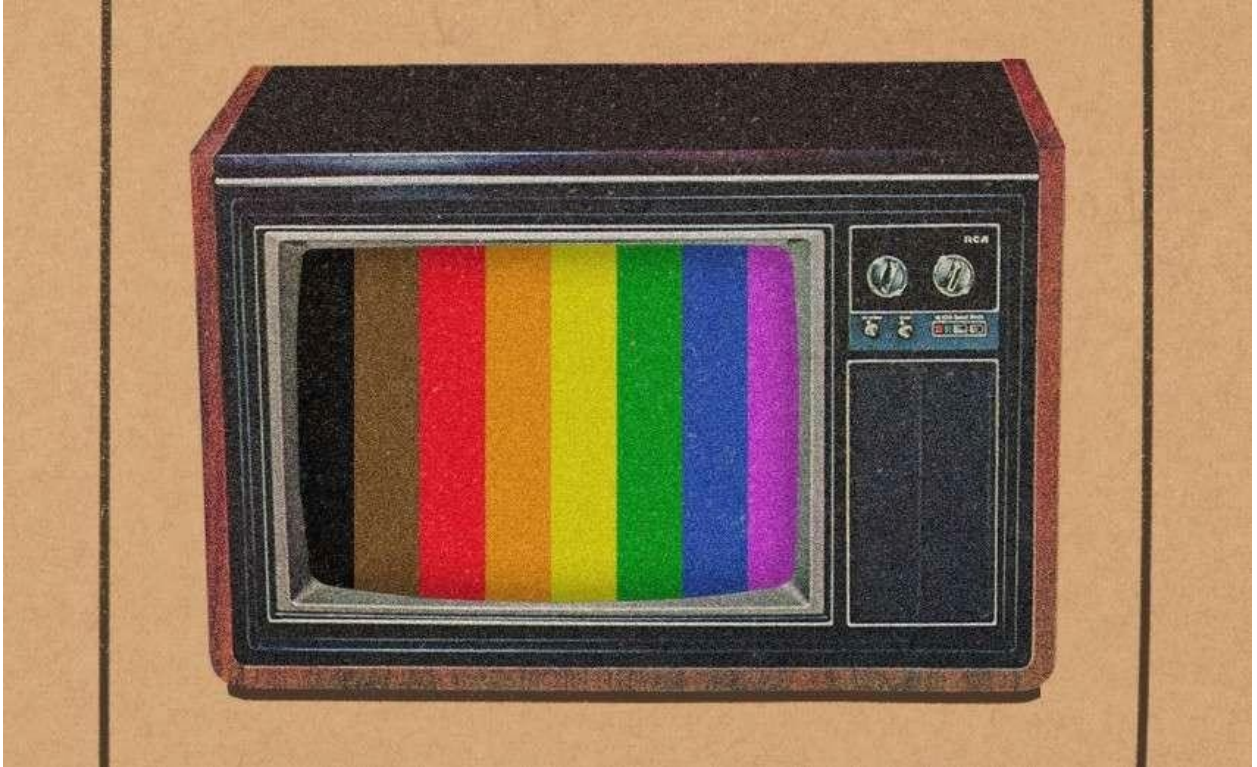
Anya Crittenton

Representation matters. It's a phrase you hear often in discussions about **Hollywood and diversity**. It matters to see LGBTI people, people of color, people with disabilities. While we can all agree this is true, we don't discuss enough about what exactly this means or how to achieve it.

I sat down with **Tre'vell Anderson**, the Director of Culture and Entertainment for Out Magazine, to talk about this exact idea.

Anderson recently paired with **Crooked Media** for a four-part podcast series about LGBTI representation on-screen. Each episode focused on a different identity: gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.

In our conversation, we dive into everything from 'exclusively gay moments' to Janet Mock and holding icons accountable.



Crooked Media's Pride on Screen podcast | Photo: Provided/Crooked Media

The biggest flaw of Hollywood LGBTI representation today

When I ask Anderson what they think is the biggest shortcoming of LGBTI representation on-screen today, they're quick to answer: we're not nearly far enough with transgender and gender-nonconforming people.

They point out GLAAD's annual reports of TV representation and how white gay men consistently account for the most visibility.

'What would happen in Hollywood if Black trans folks were given the keys?' Anderson ponders aloud. 'Of all communities, not just their own. That's what we're trying to get to – the most marginalized in our community getting the power over the narrative.'

'That's why Janet Mock's deal with Netflix is legendary. It's the kind of shift that will hopefully have positive long-term effects.'

Access in general is one of the biggest problems, Anderson posits, both behind the screen and in front of it.

We move on to the recent debate about straight actors playing LGB roles, or cis actors taking on trans roles.

'When it comes to this conversation, we need to keep an eye on the ultimate goal – that any actor will be able to act,' Anderson says. 'But in actual experiences, LGBTQ actors have greater difficulty just getting into the room.'

So how can a director or anyone else say they have the best person for the job if they haven't seen everyone who wants the chance to audition? We want people to simply have the opportunity to audition.'

Anderson has one thing to say to Hollywood: 'Put in the work.'



Tre'vell Anderson | Photo: Provided

Holding Hollywood creators and icons accountable

Putting in the work means we need to hold the most powerful figures in Hollywood accountable — both those who are LGBTI and those who aren't.

While Anderson acknowledges that Hollywood is, first and foremost, a business, they also point out audiences are becoming savvier.

'We're getting into a space where audiences are saying, "We don't want you to just tell us a character is LGBTQ without showing that identity on screen,"' they say. 'There's no actual exploration and LGBTQ audiences in particular are wising up to that. We're not accepting it anymore.'

It's not enough for Disney to tout an 'exclusively gay moment' or to get the barest of crumbs in a blockbuster superhero film.

It also applies to powerful LGBTI figures in Hollywood, like **Ellen DeGeneres** and **RuPaul**.

'I think we're realizing we can both uplift people who have come before and paved the way for LGBTQ visibility while also holding them accountable,' Anderson explains. 'It's happened with Ellen, it's happened with RuPaul.'

'With Ellen specifically we have to acknowledge she is a person of privilege and that affects how she sees the world. But I don't think that contradicts or calls into question her status as an LGBTQ icon.'

Not every LGBTI story has to be about tragedy

There's a pattern in Hollywood for LGBTI stories to either be steeped in stereotypes or tragedies. Anderson, when discussing this idea, goes back to Hollywood being a business: 'Tragedy sells.'

It's not the only part of our story, however, and Anderson hopes more creators going forward 'will continue to show our stories of tragedy and strife, but also our stories of joy and triumph, because our experiences encompass all of that'.

Talking about this duality leads Anderson and I to gushing about **Pose**, a series that made history with the most series regular trans actors ever.

‘This is one of the beauties of having LGBTQ people, specifically trans people in the writers room and behind the camera,’ Anderson explains. ‘They are able to balance the tragedy with the joy and laughter. Janet Mock and Our Lady J lend their lived experiences to Pose. People in our community have to be able to have the agency to be part of creating the story.’

Speaking of Pose...

Finally, when asked to pick one movie and one television series to show LGBTQ youth, Anderson, after much deliberation, settles on their answers.

The documentary *Black Is...Black Ain't* by Marlon Riggs and Pose for a TV show.