

Character Diversity Makes for Better TV, The CW Says

Network reps LGBTQ+ viewers with out, trans heroes on 'Batwoman,' 'Supergirl'



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The CW has pulled off a tricky act across the last several years — airing programming that appeals to a wide audience, as befits a broadcast network, while also serving the LGBTQ+ community with a range of relevant, colorful characters. Fully 80% of the network's scripted shows in 2021-2022 feature characters representing the LGBTQ+ community.

It's a mission The CW takes very seriously. "As a network, The CW is in the business of inclusive storytelling, which begins with acknowledging that our audience and society-at-large is diverse and filled with a wide range of lifestyles and cultural values," The CW chairman and CEO Mark Pedowitz said.

The mission goes back at least a decade for The CW. The network had the first transgender superhero, in Nia Nal/Dreamer from *Supergirl*, portrayed by Nicole Maines; the first Black lesbian superhero in Anissa Pierce/Thunder from *Black Lightning*, played by Nafesa Williams; and the first lesbian superhero to headline a series, as was the case with Kate Kane of *Batwoman*, who was played by Ruby Rose.

After Rose departed the series, Javicia Leslie was cast as Ryan Wilder, a skilled-but-undisciplined fighter who becomes the new Batwoman after finding the Batsuit in an airplane crash.



Wilder gave The CW its first Black lesbian superhero to headline her own show.

In April, The CW launched the My CW Story campaign, which celebrates viewers who have been empowered by CW characters to live their true lives. As part of Pride Month, The CW rolled out the stories of James, a transgender man inspired by *Supergirl*'s Nia Nal, and

Julia, a bisexual woman inspired by *Riverdale*'s Cheryl Blossom (played by Madelaine Petsch).

Gaye Hirsch heads development for The CW, Michael Roberts oversees programming, and Dana Theodoratos heads up casting. Network executives have said that showcasing characters who represent a diverse America helps combat ignorance and injustice, and inspires positive change in the nation and beyond. Diverse characters also make for more authentic storytelling.

"On every level at The CW and in partnership with our incredibly passionate creative talent on both sides of the camera, we continue to work to ensure the LGBTQ community is seen and heard," Pedowitz said, "as we continue to focus on telling genuine and credible stories that not only reflect the world we live in,

but also the world we all want it to be."

The CW's efforts to better represent LGBTQ+ viewers were recognized at June 23's Pride Leadership Awards, as B+C, Multichannel News and Next TV honored the network for outstanding leadership or extraordinary courage displayed in the efforts to present LGBTQ+-themed television content. To view the ceremony, visit pridetsummit.com.

Below, Javicia Leslie portrayed television's first Black lesbian superhero to headline a show on The CW's *Batwoman*. At left, The CW chairman and CEO Mark Pedowitz.

