

# Of the 773 Regular Characters on TV, Guess How Many Have HIV

GLAAD study finds “drastic decrease” in HIV-positive characters on TV but sees an uptick in LGBTQ people of color.

January 18, 2021 By [Trent Straube](#)

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Fewer TV characters are HIV positive. In fact, in the 2020–2021 TV season, out of a total of 773 series regulars, only three characters were living with HIV—and all three were on the same show, FX’s *Pose*. This marks a “drastic decrease” from the previous year, which included nine characters with HIV, [according to new study findings from GLAAD](#), an advocacy group that focuses on LGBTQ representation in the media.

GLAAD’s “Where We Are on TV Report—2020” marks the 25<sup>th</sup> year the group has analyzed LGBTQ characters on television, including characters living with HIV. Other findings from the report show that:

- 9.1% of series regular characters scheduled to appear on broadcast scripted prime time television this season are LGBTQ—a decrease of one percentage point from last year’s record high percentage of 10.2%
- Nearly one in every five LGBTQ characters appear on a series that is tied to one of just four creatives—Shonda Rhimes, Greg Berlanti, Lena Waithe and Ryan Murphy
- For the first time in the report’s history, over half of LGBTQ characters on cable television are people of color, meeting GLAAD’s challenge from last year’s report.

The lone standout for HIV representation was *Pose*, which is co-produced by Ryan Murphy and chronicles a community of predominantly African-American and Latinx New Yorkers in the 1980s and early ’90s underground ball scene popularized by Madonna’s “Vogue.” It stars “the largest cast of transgender actors in series regular roles as well as the largest recurring cast of LGBTQ

actors ever for a scripted series,” according to FX when the first season debuted. For more, see the POZ article “[10s Across the Board: ‘Pose’ and the Latex Ball Serve HIV Realness.](#)”

“In the midst of a destructive pandemic, a long overdue cultural reckoning with racial injustice, and a transition into...

Posted by [GLAAD](#) on [Thursday, January 14, 2021](#)

You can read more findings of the GLAAD study and download the full report [at GLAAD.org](#). The site also offers an analysis by Raina Deerwater, an entertainment research associate at GLAAD, in a separate [GLAAD blog post](#). “While the COVID-19 pandemic sweeps the globe, Americans, and audiences across the world, are tuning in to their televisions,” Deerwater writes. “The importance and impact of television has grown exponentially this year. Fandom.com’s [State of Fandom 2020](#) study found that audiences were looking to entertainment to find connection now more than ever: whether that be finding connection with a character or story onscreen or using entertainment for connection with friends and family.”

Deerwater continues: “People who reported using entertainment ‘to connect with someone else’ grew 80% year-over-year and those saying entertainment lets them ‘spend quality time with friends and family’ increased 41% from the previous year.... This renewed drive for connection via television, paired with a growth in audiences’ appetite for more and new content, is a huge opportunity for LGBTQ visibility across the industry.”

Bill Porter in a scene from "Pose"

GLAAD is urging the TV industry to respond to the underrepresentation of HIV-positive characters by introducing at least three new recurring characters living with HIV. "Hollywood must tell these stories that not only entertain but which also have the opportunity to inform and educate its audiences," said DaShawn Usher, a program officer at GLAAD who specializes in communities of color and HIV and AIDS advocacy. "While there have been so many advances and developments in HIV education, prevention and treatment, I cannot say the same when it comes to Hollywood telling these diverse and compelling stories."

"In the midst of a destructive pandemic, a long overdue cultural reckoning with racial injustice and a transition into a new political era for this country, representation matters more than ever as people turn to entertainment storytelling for connection and escape," said Sarah Kate Ellis, GLAAD's president and CEO, in a [press release about the report](#). "This time of unprecedented change matched with increased demand represents an opportunity to break new ground with stories we have not seen before and create LGBTQ characters that do not reinforce harmful stereotypes."

In related news, last summer GLAAD released findings from a national survey titled "The State of HIV Stigma Study." To read about the results, see "[How Comfortable Are Americans Around People With HIV? \[VIDEO\]](#)."

