Adweek Pride Stars Celebrates 15 LGBTQ Leaders in Sports, Media, Marketing and Culture

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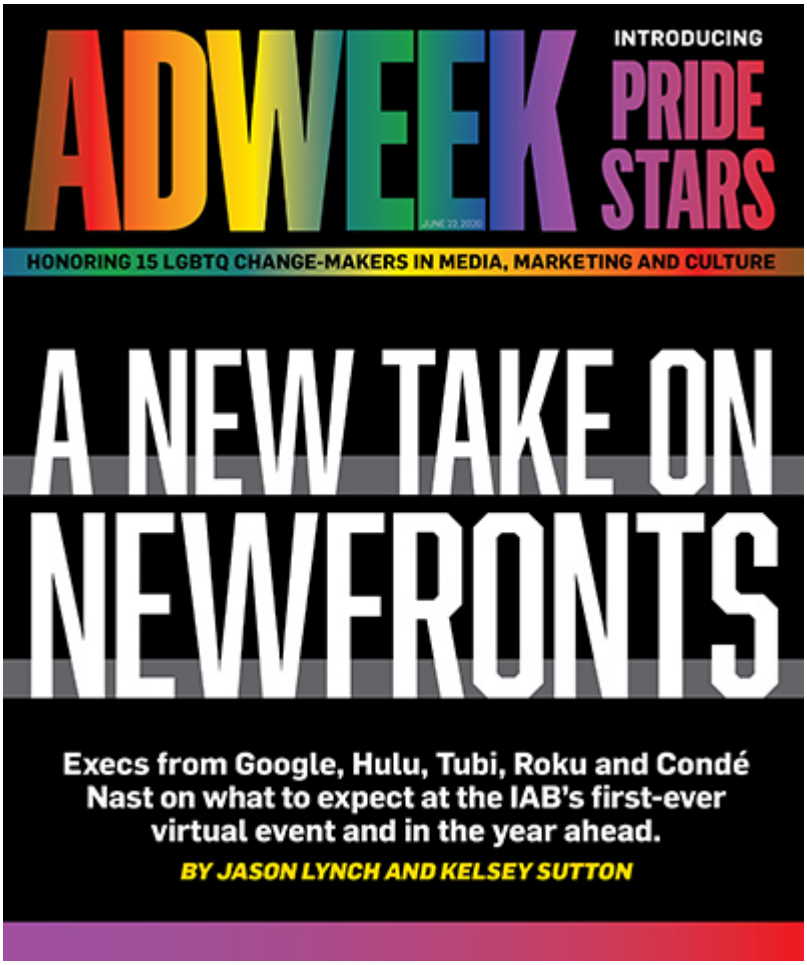

A big part of Adweek's mission is to spotlight innovative work and leadership in our industry, from celebrating those who advocate for greater diversity (Adweek + Adcolor Champions) to our Young Influentials (coming your way in August) and the Most Powerful Women in Sports (look for it in November). This year, we've added a new showcase to our portfolio: Adweek Pride Stars. Not only are we recognizing the remarkable leaders of the LGBTQ community across the industry spectrum, we're also shining a light on a consumer group that boasts a buying power of close to $4 trillion. The first class of Pride

Stars features A-list celebrities and NFL coaches, brand-inclusion officers, company founders and more. We're proud to share their stories. *—Kristina Feliciano*

Bowen Yang
Actor

Getty Images
Yang became Saturday Night Live's first "gaysian" cast member in September 2019, just in time to parody President Trump's trade war with China as the caustic-but-cute Chen "Trade Daddy" Biao on Weekend Update. As if that didn't queer the SNL stage enough, Yang's November skit about a horny gay social media manager posting through his work account—written for Harry Styles—brought a messy new meaning to the concept of code-switching. In a March interview with GQ, Yang called the sketch a "completely insane, loud dog whistle to the queer community, with all of the specific depressed gay voice."

Before Yang faced the world as a bitchy Kim Jong-un on one of the world's most influential TV shows, the LGBTQ community knew him through his podcast with Matt Rogers, Las Culturistas. That show's 60-second rant segment, "I Don't Think So, Honey," is a joyously cathartic, biting complaint fest telling of queer resilience in a challenging straight world. *—Mary Emily O'Hara*

Young M.A
Rapper

Getty Images
Young M.A is a lot of things. She's one of the most impressive freelancers in the rap game; the person who turned down the role of Freda Gatz on Empire even though it was reportedly written for her; and the director of an arty lesbian porn feature in partnership with Pornhub. She's also known for selling products, appearing in ads for Google Pixel, Beats by

Dre and Pandora. “My brand is innocent in this way, where you can trust it,” Young M.A says. “I can really bring a lot of fans and people to the table because people actually follow my movement.” Why has she captured fans’ adoration? Because she’s being fearlessly out, one of the few successful masculine “stud” lesbians in pop culture. She doesn’t make a big deal out of being gay, she says, and shrugs off homophobes with a blunt retort. “What could they say? I’m a dyke? OK, cool. I know,” says Young M.A, “And I get more bitches than you.” *—Mary Emily O’Hara* (Read Adweek’s full interview with Young M.A online.)

Rachael Rapinoe and Kendra Freeman
Co-founders
Mendi

Courtesy of Mendi
CBD is everywhere. The nonpsychoactive cannabis extract can be

found in sodas, chewing gum, lotions and even makeup. But Portland, Ore.-based Mendi co-founders Rapinoe and Freeman aren't just hopping on the green-rush bandwagon. They see their brand as both an opportunity to reduce addiction—by advocating for CBD as a replacement painkiller for athletes routinely overprescribed opioids—and as a tool to advance social justice. "The rate that people of color are arrested for marijuana is 4-to-1 compared to their counterparts," notes Freeman, who also helps set up criminal-record expungement clinics with the Oregon Cannabis Association. "I do not believe it is fair for anyone to make money on this plant while others sit in jail today." Rapinoe quickly signed up her twin sister, global soccer star Megan, and her basketball champ girlfriend, Sue Bird, as the brand's first ambassadors. "This world is far too diverse to primarily only show white heterosexual couples in the media," says Rapinoe of the chance to offer lesbian representation via Mendi's marketing. "If companies want to implement equality by putting their money where their mouths are, they can. If they don't, they're choosing not to." *—Mary Emily O'Hara*

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