

[00:00:00] **Music:** Gentle, trilling music with a steady drumbeat plays under the dialogue.

[00:00:01] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of [MaximumFun.org](https://www.maximumfun.org) and is distributed by NPR.

[00:00:14] **Music:** “Huddle Formation” from the album *Thunder, Lightning, Strike* by The Go! Team. A fast, upbeat, peppy song. Music plays as Jesse speaks, then fades out.

[00:00:21] **Jesse Thorn:** It's *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn. My guest is Tre'vell Anderson. You might recognize them if you're a regular on this show. They've actually hosted it a few times. They're also the host of the great podcast, *FANTI*, and they've covered entertainment for *Essence*, *Time Magazine*, and *Out*, among many other outlets.

Tre'vell is non-binary and Black, and they often focus their work on identity, especially the places where queerness intersects with Blackness. They've profiled little Nas X, Billy Porter, and Janelle Monet, among others. It makes sense then that their first book is about that intersection. It's called, *We See Each Other: A Black, Trans Journey Through TV and Film*.

Partly, it's a history of trans representation onscreen, especially Black trans representation, the good and the bad, but it's also a personal history. A story of how Tre'vell came into their own identity. But hey, (chuckling) why am I still talking when I have one of the greatest talkers I have ever known, right here? Let's get into my conversation with Tre'vell Anderson.

[00:01:32] **Music:** Bright, upbeat music with light vocalizations.

[00:01:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Tre'vell Anderson, welcome to *Bullseye*. It's nice to see you here. Or I should say welcome back to *Bullseye*, but welcome to *Bullseye* as a guest.

[00:01:44] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I know, right?

[00:01:45] **Jesse Thorn:** I know. Well, it's—the tables have turned. Oh, how the tables have turned, Tre'vell.

[00:01:48] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Listen. Man, they turn so quickly.

[00:01:50] **Jesse Thorn:** So, why did you want to write a book about the history of trans representation, and especially Black trans representation, in film and television?

[00:02:01] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yeah. You know, as a journalist covering the last decade or so of this conversation, one of the things that stuck out to me was this idea that so many people seem to believe that we as trans people dropped onto the face of the Earth with Laverne Cox and *Orange is the New Black* and her *Time* magazine cover in 2014.

But we know—those of us in community, those of us not in community—know that like trans people have always been here in every culture, in every community, in every society on this globe since the beginning of time. And it—I think it's deeply important to acknowledge that

history, both for trans people as a means of like allowing us to continue living and existing and loving and thriving, because we know that we belong to a long lineage of folks who did it before us. But also, as a means of hopefully improving the material realities of trans people in everyday life. Because folks will begin to say, “Oh, it's not that, you know, these people are new. It's that I just didn't know. And that the reason why I didn't know—right?—is because I did not create a safe enough environment for the trans people who are already existing in my everyday community to disclose to me that they were trans. And they didn't do that because they didn't feel safe.”

And so, the goal of the book and the reason behind the book was to kind of assert and claim a history that has always existed and been present, but to kind of shine a light on it. And then to also—in the process of writing the book, it became more personal than I intended. But it became important to also, you know, kind of document my own story, my own gender journey alongside many of these images—right—?that we often talk about or think about in the conversation of trans representation.

[00:04:04] **Jesse Thorn:** There were very few specific representations of trans people in American film and television before 20 years ago or so. And so, a big part of this story is stories about those few representations there were, which were often very problematic, and those kinds of sideways representations—things that a trans person could identify with, things that you can recognize as having resonances of the trans experience.

So, let's start first—before we get into your personal history, let's talk about before your personal history.

(Tre'vell chuckles.)

What are the first filmed representations that you would say reflect transness in some way?

[00:04:56] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Well, I would say—an early representation that I would call out in terms of a character that was played by a trans person that I think is important to distinguish from a number of the other characters that we might discuss would be the Lady Chablis in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, which is a film—a book—that many people are familiar with, but that made the Lady Chablis a cult celebrity of sorts.

[00:05:27] **Jesse Thorn:** She was both an actual human being, a character in this book, and a character in the film played by the actual human being herself.

[00:05:37] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yes, absolutely. And I encourage people to check out her autobiography—in particular, the audio book version, 'cause she reads it herself. Amazing. But I list that as an earlier positive—largely—example of trans life on screen. And then there are other images that I think cisgender people might conflate with trans identity that require us to grapple with them. And so that's where we talk about a *Psycho* or a *Silence of the Lambs*. Right? But all of this dates back to even before moving images began, to the era of vaudeville, to the ways in which we saw in particular men—right?—dressing up in drag to perform, to entertain. And being intentional about separating their characters from their identities and who they are as—who they were as men. And so, when you look back at the archives of, you know, magazines and publications who covered these individuals, you see

how much they focus on telling us as an audience that, okay, yes, this person plays this character, but in their real life they're such a man. You know, they like to get in fights. You know, they like to sleep around with everybody, right? These ways to assert—right?—some sort of security or understanding of their actual manhood and not anything else that might be going on. And so, yeah, I think—you know, there are a number of characters, a number of images that factor into this. Some that we readily think about when we talk about trans representation and others that nonetheless still inform that discussion, whether or not it was an actual trans character or not.

[00:07:32] **Jesse Thorn:** So, as you said, there are of course, hundreds and thousands of years of people performing genders other than their own for entertainment. Right? But at the beginning of the film era, one of the big genres of comedy was men dressed as women. And some of the earliest film shorts, film comedies, are men dressed as women. How do those things feel to you to watch now?

[00:08:07] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yeah, well, I would go further and say that it hasn't stopped. Right? So, watching, you know, *Meet Me at the Fountain*, which is a 1914 silent film—it's like six minutes long. You can watch it on YouTube. And now, watching Tyler Perry as Madea, you know, Martin Lawrence as Sheneneh, Jamie Foxx as Wanda, Robin Williams as Mrs. Doubtfire—to me it's the same impact, right? And the important thing, I think, we should be noting and realizing is that those same types of jokes and commentary that are lodged at those characters are the exact same jokes and commentary that get lodged at us as trans people—in particular trans women and femmes, in everyday life, in real community.

And most important for me in that conversation is focusing on the Black men who have dressed in drag and becoming, uh, famous for these characters that they've played because it is Black women, Black trans women, and Black trans femmes who are, you know, over-indexing compared to our counterparts in all of the -isms and -obias and violences that we are experiencing.

And in my every day, in real life, the same jokes that they make we make about, you know, Madea's hands or her voice or her, you know, legs or her size and stature are the exact same things that. We get told and joked about in everyday life, and it leads to real violence—i.e., the murders of Black trans people.

And so, it requires us just to think more differently about that which we see onscreen and the everyday, real-life, material impact that it's having. And yet still, I love Tyler Perry as Madea. I want to be clear. And so, part of the book is also about like not trying to do away with or like cancel any particular cultural production, but to legitimately wrestle with it, right? And to be able to hopefully make a judgment call about how we may be internalizing the things that we see onscreen and how they might be manifesting in our everyday communities.

[00:10:32] **Jesse Thorn:** Much more to get into with Tre'vell Anderson. Their new book is *We See Each Other*. Stay with us. It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:10:42] **Music:** Thumpy synth with light vocalizations.

[00:10:46] **Jesse Thorn:** Welcome back to *Bullseye*. I'm Jesse Thorn, if you're just joining us, my guest is Tre'vell Anderson. They're an award-winning journalist and the co-host of the podcast *FANTI*. Tre'vell, also just released the book *We See Each Other: A Black, Trans Journey Through TV and Film*. It's a personal exploration of trans representation on screen, especially Black trans representation.

Let's get back into our conversation. So, obviously there are explicitly trans characters and publicly trans performers in entertainment and always have been, but I think in American entertainment—mostly in the last 20 years or so—especially the two of those together. And so, representations of transness come sideways often. And I think it's really important to distinguish transness from other forms of gender expression in entertainment. So, tell me what the difference is between a trans character and a male character who's wearing women's clothing.

[00:12:07] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yeah, so Sophia Burset, which Laverne Cox played in *Orange as the New Black*, is a trans character. Buffalo Bill is not.

[00:12:19] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the bad guy from the *Silence of the Lambs*.

[00:12:22] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yes. You know, the difference is—right?—trans people, trans characters. There is no—the good ones, there is no air of deception. There is no air of, you know, trying to get away with something.

[00:12:48] **Jesse Thorn:** Mockery.

[00:12:49] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Mockery. Right? It's not necessarily—the identity of a trans character is not necessarily the punchline. Right? But so often with a number of these other characters—I call them drag characters 'cause that's what they are, right? They are men and people—right? 'Cause it's not just men who have embodied some of these trans characters, but they are dressing up for the sake of performance. And the characters often are trying to, you know, evade responsibility for something they are trying to commit or reproduce harm in community. And trans characters—

[00:13:33] **Jesse Thorn:** Even if it's playful. Even if it's Mrs. Doubtfire.

[00:13:35] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Even if it's playful. Even if it's Mrs. Doubtfire. And we all love *Mrs. Doubtfire*. Me too, me included. But there is—the thing to think about is the fact that in so many instances, those characters—right?—the actors are able to take off the wig, take off the dress—right?—and go about their life.

Sophia Burset, Laverne Cox as Sophia Burset, is able to not only embody and breathe life into that role onscreen based on the truth of her own lived experience—right?—but she also, once they yell cut, is still a Black trans woman, right? And so, her ability to articulate the needs of that community, the desires of visibility for that community is very different than Jeffrey Tambour—right?—when they yelled cut on *Transparent* and he attempted to have those conversations. It means something different when the dude is walking down the red

carpet trying to talk about trans issues, and a trans person is walking down the red carpet attempting to do the same.

[00:14:52] **Jesse Thorn:** Now, this is gonna be basic business for a lot of people listening, but I don't think for all people listening. You write a lot about drag performance in the book. Drag performers include both trans and cis people.

[00:15:06] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yes.

[00:15:07] **Jesse Thorn:** But they're primarily cis people. So, tell me a little bit about what drag is and how that's differentiated from, you know, fundamental gender identity.

[00:15:19] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yeah, I mean, drag is about a performance. It's about an act. It's about entertainment. Even trans people who perform, who are drag performers—right? They're doing and affecting a particular gig for an audience's entertainment.

[00:15:35] **Jesse Thorn:** And gender is an essential part of that performance. That is in some ways the basis of the performance.

[00:15:38] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely. It's poking fun at gender. It is blowing up gender. It is interrogating gender in so many different ways. But as trans people, we are not trans for your enjoyment. Right? We are not trans for your consumption, even as some trans people are also drag performers. Yeah.

[00:16:05] **Jesse Thorn:** Or some trans people are entertainers in general, in other forms. Yeah.

[00:16:07] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely right. I'm thinking of, uh, Lady Chablis who would balk at the thought of me calling her a drag queen. (Chuckles.) But she was a performer, right? She was a showgirl. And I think it's interesting to have a conversation about images of drag in conversation with images and the experiences of trans folks, because we know that some trans people who are drag performers have accessed—right?—their truth through that art of performance. Right? But that does not negate the difference and the separation therein, right? And so, how do we talk about the impact of a *To Wong Foo*—right?—or a *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*—these drag narratives, right?—as it relates to our discourse around transness?

[00:17:09] **Jesse Thorn:** I want to ask you about your own childhood. You had a single mother who was in the military, so a lot of the time you were raised by your grandmother. Tell me about your grandmother.

[00:17:25] **Tre'vell Anderson:** My grandmother's name—my maternal grandmother, Dorothy Montgomery Holmes.

(Jesse thanks them.)

She was a pastor in Charleston, South Carolina. She founded her own church, called God's Tabernacle of Prayer: Church of Christian Fellowship. And she founded that church because the church in which she—that she was a member of, in which she came to her calling from Christ, did not let women preach.

And so, she left, and she founded her own church in her living room with her seven or eight kids. I keep messing that up. It's right in the book. My mom keeps reminding me that. They were—her first parishioners, were her kids and then she ended up, you know, building it into a storefront church and whatnot.

[00:18:09] **Jesse Thorn:** And she built it into a storefront church in no small part because she didn't have the opportunity to lead a church unless it was her own church that she had created, because she was a woman.

[00:18:18] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely. She had no choice. Yeah, she had no choice. She felt called—right?—by Christ to do this work, and the church in which she was in did not let her or other women—right?—do it. And so, she—in order to act on the call—she founded her church, and she helped raise us and was an early possibility model for me in terms of just like my grandmother, who I loved. She also was a little bit of a local celebrity because her and her siblings had a singing—like a gospel singing group. And so, they traveled throughout the low country in the south, singing at different revivals and church, you know, performances.

And I often say—and I say in the book—that I ended up learning in retrospect, a lot about gender being under her in church, because of the ways in which not only she was like a feminist icon in her own right, pushing up against the ways in which some folks felt that she should or should not be showing up in the world, but also how she created a space that ended up reproducing the very harms that she was fighting against. Not only reproducing for herself and for the other women in her congregation, but also for everyone else, and myself included. And so, I love my grandmother and will always do, and she was pivotal in so much of who I am today. I consider myself a church queen still to this day. And I love God just like everybody else.

But I also now have a, a different lens on the world that complicates that relationship to faith and spirituality. But my grandmother is a core of sorts, even as I continue to interrogate what it means to exist—right?—in this particular world, in the body and the mindset and the spiritual place—right?—that I take up.

[00:20:28] **Jesse Thorn:** Church is a classic place where gender is enforced. And I can't imagine that was different even at your grandmother's church, where there was a woman pastor. It seems like an interesting place, particularly as an outsider in the Black church. Because that top layer is often male. But it also seems like substantially a women's world.

[00:20:56] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely.

[00:20:57] **Jesse Thorn:** And it's also very famously like a place of refuge for femme men. Gay men and other more feminine men. Right? And so, it is like a really complicated set of things. Did you feel steady in it? Like did you—could you see where you fit into all that?

[00:21:24] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I would say that the church, specifically the Black church as it relates to Black queer people, can be and has been a safe haven for many. But it also has come and comes with, you know, limitations, right? So, you can be Black and perceived as gay and effeminate in a Black church, but you know, you could only direct the choir, right?

And I think for me, my grandmother's church was a smaller church. We didn't have no choir. The congregation was the choir. Right? And my aunt, who was the assistant pastor—my great-aunt Inez Pratt was, you know, the de facto like soloist. Right? But everybody contributed to the sound. And so, we didn't have that type of stratification in that way—right?—as it relates to queer people in our church. But we would visit so many other churches and you would be able to see it. The only ways in which these folks were allowed to be themselves—you could only be yourself in this specific context. They cared about your gifts and your talent, but they did not care about your love or your life. Because you could direct the choir, but you could not get married in the church.

[00:22:49] **Jesse Thorn:** So, we have talked a lot about trans women and trans femme people. And there is a reason for that, which is there are many more representations of trans women and trans femme people—and even, you know, evil imaginary versions of that from earlier in the 20th century. And you are not a trans woman.

[00:23:16] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I'm not.

[00:23:17] **Jesse Thorn:** You are trans non-binary, and there are many, many trans men and trans masc people in the world as well. So, let's start with trans men and trans masc people. Why do you think—maybe this is above your pay grade.

[00:23:37] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Might be,

[00:23:37] **Jesse Thorn:** Why do you think there are so few representations relatively of trans men?

[00:23:44] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I think cis people are fascinated by the idea of someone they see as a man in their language “choosing” to be a woman, which in our society, women are treated less than men.

[00:24:07] **Jesse Thorn:** And also, if they are non-threatening, revered in a dehumanizing way.

[00:24:12] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely. Right? And so, I think people are like, “Wow, you—you chose to be a woman?” And of course, we do not choose to be who we are, we just are. But we do choose to live out loud if and when we are able to choose to live out loud. I think that preoccupation with that journey specifically is why we see more instances of, you know, whether it's trans women and trans femme characters or characters that could be conflated or perceived as trans women and trans femmes in culture.

And we see less trans men, right? It's a lot easier to say those men in wigs are trying to, you know, harm you than that woman in jeans is trying to harm you. You know, which is what

they will see trans men and trans masculine people as—right?—women dressing up as men. And so, I think that's why. Right? I think that is a manifestation of the ignorance and fear—right?—that folks have around their own personal identities that they project onto us. Because the reality is that we as trans people are just showing people how to be free, how to love themselves—right?—in spite of the ways that this world teaches us not to love ourselves. And I think when people see us, we unsettle some sort of something within them because they realize that they are not free. And they try to constrict us and bring us back to the...

[00:26:01] **Jesse Thorn:** Cage.

[00:26:03] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Back to the prison—right?—to the cage that is gender for many folks. And we reject that over and over again.

[00:26:14] **Jesse Thorn:** Do you have favorite representations of trans men or trans masc people in film and television?

[00:26:25] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I think that we are still in—we are in a moment right now in which we are seeing more trans men and trans masculine people on screen. And so, it's hard to say a favorite. I mean, I have a personal love for Brian Michael Smith, who made history as the first Black trans man to have a series, regular series, regular role.

He's on. Um, *9-1-1: Lone Star*, one of those Ryan Murphy shows. But I love him because before he was on that show, he was on *Queen Sugar*, right? Ava DuVernay's show. This Black show. And he used that role on that show to disclose to the world that he was a trans man after already acting for a number of years in cis roles.

So, I shout him out for his representation and for the work and visibility that he's doing. But then you also have other folks just in pop culture who have shown up on screen in various ways, right? You have Chaz Bono, right? You have Tiq Milan, who is a—you know—speaker, writer, advocate, and someone that I saw do a TED Talk, right?

You have Laith Ashley from reality TV. You have Kortney Ryan Ziegler, whose film, *Still Black*, is perhaps still the only, if not one of few filmed, you know, entities that center Black trans men. And so, I wish I had more, to be quite honest. Right? But part of this work is also realizing the ways in which, you know, I, and we as journalists, as interviewers—particularly over the last decade—like how I've contributed to that erasure, right?

You look at the bulk of my coverage of trans people, it's a lot of trans women and femmes. And so, you know, part of writing the book was I think about encouraging folks to do the self-interrogation necessary to get us to that promised land of equality and justice and all that other stuff we say we want. And I kind of wanted to like model that in the book in some ways.

[00:28:28] **Jesse Thorn:** We've got even more with Tre'vell Anderson still to come. They've never lost sight of their identity as Black and trans. I mean, really, it would be impossible. But when they sat down to write a book about a century of film and TV, what did they learn about themselves and their communities? We'll get into that in just a bit.

It's *Bullseye* from MaximumFun.org and NPR.

[00:28:53] **Promo:**

Music: Upbeat music.

Drea Clark: Hey there. This is Drea Clark.

Alonso Duralde: This is Alonso Duralde.

Ify Nwadiwe: And this is Sparta!

Drea: Ify...

Ify: Listen, I got 300 on the brain. We just watched the movie *300* in honor of our 300th episode of *Maximum Film!*

Alonso: That's right. And to celebrate this major milestone we brought back original co-hosts, Ricky Carmona and April Wolfe.

Ify: But just for this one episode, right?

Alonso: Oh, Ify. You know, we could never replace you.

Drea: Some of the voices have changed over the years. Heck, the name of the show has changed too. But through it all, *Maximum Film!* remains—

All: (In unison.) The movie podcast that isn't just a bunch of straight, White guys.

Ify: Deal with it.

Drea: Find this and all 300 episodes of *Maximum Film!* anytime on MaximumFun.org.

(Music ends.)

[00:29:38] **Music:** Thumpy rock music with a syncopated beat.

[00:29:42] **Jesse Thorn:** I'm Jesse Thorne. This is *Bullseye*. You're listening to my conversation with Tre'vell Anderson. Their new book is *We See Each Other: A Black, Trans Journey Through TV and Film*.

I wanna talk about your non-binary identity and vents to the non-binary representations in film and television. Did you think of yourself as gay at some point in life?

(Tre'vell confirms.)

You were signed male at birth? Yes. For our audience.

(Tre'vell confirms.)

At what point did that not feel like the right label for your identity and difference? Let me—let me start with this. Do you still?

[00:30:28] **Tre'vell Anderson:** No.

[00:30:29] **Jesse Thorn:** Okay. So, at what point did that not feel like the right label for your identity and your difference?

[00:30:38] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I will say that, as a Black person, the label of gay is always an interesting one because gay can often be synonymous with a White experience. Right? That's the reason why in the '90s, Cleo Manga came up with the term "same gender loving"—right?—for Black people, Black men in particular, who are attracted to other Black men to use to define themselves that denoted a specific difference in experience between Black gay people and White gay folk.

[00:31:18] **Jesse Thorn:** And the representations of almost any group in the United States where there is—where there are more White people and where power is even more concentrated among White people are, you know, often heavy with White people and if you add subgroups to that, you lose more and more definition among the—

(Tre'vell agrees.)

—among those people who aren't in those hegemonic groups.

[00:31:45] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely. And so, I would say that, in terms of the label of gay and when that became something that no longer described me—I wanna say I probably was an undergrad at Morehouse College, which is a historically Black, all-male institution in Atlanta, Georgia.

[00:32:04] **Jesse Thorn:** Well, all-male plus you and some other folks who snuck in.

[00:32:06] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Plus—yes. I should get—we should—we have to—we have to reframe a lot of that language. But historically, right?

[00:32:12] **Jesse Thorn:** Yeah. Who checked a—who checked a box on the application form.

[00:32:14] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Who checked the box because we had to check that box, 'cause there were no other boxes to check or more expansive boxes to check.

But that is a—it's a historically Black, historically male institution. There are trans people who are currently there who don't identify as men and who attended, as did I, who don't identify as men. But the lore around the school is all about making Morehouse men. That's the school that Martin Luther King Jr. attended in case anyone cares. Spike Lee, as well. Samuel L. Jackson. Could go down a long line of list. Anyway.

It was during that time in which I was just coming into myself, and I was witnessing just more opportunities and more possibilities for how to move through the world and exist by looking to my left and to my right, to the people that I was a student with—right?—who were showing up in ways that I did not know was possible.

[00:33:10] **Jesse Thorn:** Being in an all-male environment. I mean, my experience with this is my wife went to a formerly women's college. It was all genders when she was there, but still 75% women or 80% women or something. And there's two dynamics that could go on there. One is, well, it's a place that could attract queer people. Because they, you know, are safer among their own gender. The dating pool is probably wider, etc., etc., right? There's

more investigation of gender. On the other hand, it can also enforce gender expectations. Which was certainly the case for you at Morehouse, because Morehouse is so focused on generating a certain kind of man.

[00:34:02] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely.

[00:34:03] **Jesse Thorn:** And it is so—and that definition is so much about gender expectations.

[00:34:11] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yeah. Like, you know, we are an institution that has a very finite idea of what it means to be a Morehouse man and a man of Morehouse. Right? We have, even in the language of how we talk about this institution—right?—we say that Morehouse is the nation's headquarters for Black male excellence. But it's one of those institutions that also—right?—is deeply respectable.

By which I mean, you know, there are students going to classes in three-piece suits just cause it's Tuesday. Right? We are supposed to be the talented 10th, the folks who are going to save Black America, right? Based on, you know, whatever it is that we do, whether we're preachers or teachers or doctors or lawyers.

And so, yes, it was both wonderful to be there and be in community with the collective of queer people who were there—right?—who had been able to actualize parts of themselves when they were in high school and just continue to that journey when they came to school.

[00:35:21] **Jesse Thorn:** And are probably enjoying at Morehouse the fact that they can live their queerness without having to deal with the racial complications of living their queerness into context where 75% of their peers are White.

[00:35:34] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Absolutely. I think that definitely plays into it, but we're also—you know, HBCUs are also, though we are all Black—right?—Black people are not a monolith, so we're still navigating—right?—a number of the -isms and phobias that, that we have to navigate. And so, it created this environment that required many of us to continually push back against things, to continually carve out space, to continually challenge—right?—what it meant and means to be a graduate of Morehouse College. And it was during that time that I was like—I stopped wearing suits, for example, which was like a big deal. Both personally—

[00:36:16] **Jesse Thorn:** 'Cause you were a church kid.

[00:36:17] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Exactly. Both personally as well as just kind of in the collegiate community. Right? Because we, you know, you probably had to dress up at least once a week—right?—for convocation, or Crown Forum is what we called it, or some sort of presentation. And the fact that I was not wearing suits and I was wearing—that's when I started wearing clothing that one might assume or consider to be feminine, though it was not necessarily women's garb at the time. And slowly, as we as society have begun to reclaim a word like queer, that for me replaced gay. Because queer allowed me both to articulate an

unfolding politic that was, you know, manifesting, but also a set of desires that were less hinged to whatever—

[00:37:13] **Jesse Thorn:** Who you wanted to date.

[00:37:14] **Tre'vell Anderson:** —gender identity label—right?—I was, you know, finding a home in. So, I knew that man was not quite working, but also knew I was not interested in being a woman. So, those two options were not working. And so, therefore the sexualities related to those two options also would not work. But queer was something that was agnostic—right?—of that.

[00:37:39] **Jesse Thorn:** At what point did you— I mean, you've used they/them pronouns for some time now, but I think I knew you before you were using they/them pronouns.

(Tre'vell confirms and chuckles.)

But I think the first time we met you were—you had a pretty spectacular manicure.

(Tre'vell giggles.)

So, you were already certainly gender nonconforming. Right? So, at what point did you think, “Oh, maybe non-binary is a thing that’s me.”

[00:38:07] **Tre'vell Anderson:** I started, gender-wise, using gender nonconforming When I was in grad school, because I had bought my first pair of heels. I had started getting my nails done shortly after grad school. And so, gender nonconforming became the label that I think was digestible enough for those who were onlooking to be able to properly, at least at that time, categorize me.

Right? So, they were able to say, “Oh yeah, Tre'vell’s gender nonconforming.” Right? He is gender nonconforming, and he wears heels, he gets his nails done. But that was it at the time. And then from gender nonconforming, I went to non-binary as a term that felt right. Gender nonconforming felt very presentation focused in terms of what I was wearing and how I was showing up and non-binary felt more identity and personal and internal. And then, after non-binary came the language of transness. And it took that journey for me, because I was one of those people, as many of the folks who are listening to us are those people that believe that transness is about a medical procedure. That it is about engaging with the medical establishment in that particular way. And you don't have to engage with the medical establishment to be trans. And so, once I was able to do that education and that learning, then I was able to also find a home in that language as well.

[00:39:43] **Jesse Thorn:** Did the process of writing this book change how you thought about yourself, or about how you thought about watching film and television yourself as a culture critic?

[00:39:56] **Tre'vell Anderson:** Yes and no. I have long called myself a sociologist by training. And that's because that's what I studied in undergrad. (Chuckles.) And so, the idea of

like looking at art and cultural productions through some sort of sociopolitical lens is innate to me at this point. Right? But one of the things that writing the book did teach me is about how I, in particular, have been like robbed of community. Not just community in terms of the possibilities that TV and film sometimes, you know, present for many of us, but also robbed of in real life person community. Right? I realized while writing the book that I have a lot of gay friends. Love them! But I don't have as much of a trans community, trans family, that I would like.

And I think the fact that I did not know, did not see, have not seen many images and representations of the community part of a trans experience might be part of the reason why.

[00:41:23] **Jesse Thorn:** Tre'vell, I'm so grateful to you for taking the time to come on the show. It was great to talk to you. It was great to see you.

[00:41:28] **Tre'vell Anderson:** (Singsong.) Thanks for having me.

[00:41:30] **Jesse Thorn:** Tre'vell Anderson. Their new book is *We See Each Other*. Come for the insights into film and television history, stay for the only-from-Tre'vell exclamations that end about, I don't know, I'd say maybe one paragraph a page, maybe one in five paragraphs.

It is a lot of fun. There's also a lot to learn. Tre'vell also has a show that accompanies the book called *We See Each Other: The Podcast*. And of course, you can catch them on the Maximum Fun podcast *FANTI*. It is one of my favorites. I mean, I know I'm saying that because I work at Max Fun. But it really is one of my favorites. Tre'vell and their co-host, Jarrett Hill, they talk about the thorny stuff. They talk about the gray areas in pop culture. They are so smart and insightful and fun and funny. *FANTI*, great show. *We See Each Other*, also delightful. Go listen to both shows wherever you get podcasts.

[00:42:30] **Music:** Bright, joyful brass music.

[00:42:32] **Jesse Thorn:** That's the end of another episode of *Bullseye*. *Bullseye* is created from the homes of me and the staff of Maximum Fun in and around greater Los Angeles, California. I made it up to the Southern Sierras this past weekend. And, uh, hey, it's been rough up there. Climate change is real, folks. Some catastrophic snowstorms and some catastrophic fires. But people up there in Tulare County are hanging in there. So, shout out to Sequoia Crest and all the Southern Sierras.

Our show is produced by speaking into microphones. Our senior producer is Kevin Ferguson. Our producers are Jesus Ambrosio and Richard Robey. Our production fellow at Maximum Fun is Bryanna Paz. We get booking help from Mara Davis. Our interstitial music is composed and provided to us by DJW, also known as Dan Wally. Our theme song is by The Go! Team. It's called "Huddle Formation". Thanks to them and to their label, Memphis Industries.

Bullseye is also on YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook. Find us in those places and follow us. Please share our interviews. Tell a friend, please. If you thought something was great on this

show, send it to your uncle. Put it on your Tumblr. Got an anime Tumblr? Put it on there. I think that's about it. Just remember, all great radio hosts have a signature sign off.

[00:43:56] **Promo:** *Bullseye with Jesse Thorn* is a production of MaximumFun.org and is distributed by NPR.