

# Laverne Cox

**Laverne Cox** (born May 29, 1972) is an American actress and LGBTQ+ advocate.<sup>[3][4][5]</sup> She rose to prominence with her role as *Sophia Burset* on the Netflix series *Orange Is the New Black*, becoming the first openly transgender person to be nominated for a *Primetime Emmy Award* in any acting category,<sup>[6][7]</sup> and the first to be nominated for an Emmy Award since composer *Angela Morley* in 1990.<sup>[8]</sup> In 2015, she won a *Daytime Emmy Award* in Outstanding Special Class Special as executive producer for *Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word*,<sup>[9][10]</sup> making her the first openly transgender woman to win the award.<sup>[9]</sup> In 2017, she became the first transgender person to play a transgender series regular on *broadcast TV* as *Cameron Wirth* on CBS's *Doubt*.<sup>[11]</sup>

Cox appeared as a contestant on the first season of VH1's reality show *I Want to Work for Diddy*, and co-produced and co-hosted the VH1 makeover television series *TRANSform Me*. In April 2014, Cox was honored by GLAAD with its *Stephen F. Kolzak Award* for her work as an advocate for the transgender community.<sup>[12]</sup> In June 2014, Cox became the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine.<sup>[6][13][14]</sup> Cox is the first openly transgender person to appear on the cover of a *Cosmopolitan* magazine, with her February 2018 cover on the South African edition.<sup>[15]</sup> She is also the first openly transgender person to have a wax figure of herself at *Madame Tussauds*.<sup>[16]</sup>

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## Early life

Laverne Cox



Cox in July 2014

<b>Born</b>	May 29, 1972 <sup>[1][2]</sup> <div>Mobile, Alabama, U.S.</div>
<b>Education</b>	Indiana University Bloomington Marymount Manhattan College
<b>Occupation</b>	Actress • activist
<b>Years active</b>	2000–present
<b>Relatives</b>	M Lamar (twin brother)
<b>Website</b>	<div>www.lavernecox.com</div> <div>(http://www.lavernecox.com)</div>

Laverne Cox was born in Mobile, Alabama,<sup>[17]</sup> and was raised by a single mother and grandmother within the AME Zion church.<sup>[18]</sup> She has an identical twin brother, M Lamar, who portrayed the pre-transitioning Sophia (as Marcus) in *Orange is the New Black*.<sup>[19][20][21]</sup> Cox stated she attempted suicide at the age of 11, when she noticed that she had developed feelings for her male classmates and had been bullied for several years for not acting "the way someone assigned male at birth was supposed to act."<sup>[18][22][23]</sup>

She is a graduate of the Alabama School of Fine Arts in Birmingham, Alabama, where she studied creative writing before switching to dance.<sup>[24]</sup> She then studied for two years at Indiana University Bloomington<sup>[25]</sup> before transferring to Marymount Manhattan College in New York City, where she switched from dancing (specifically classical ballet)<sup>[26]</sup> to acting.<sup>[20][27]</sup> During her first season on *Orange is the New Black*, she was still appearing at a restaurant on the Lower East Side as a drag queen (where she had applied initially to work as a waitress).<sup>[28]</sup>

## Career

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Cox appeared as a contestant on the first season of *I Want to Work for Diddy*; afterwards she was approached by VH1 about show ideas.<sup>[29]</sup> From that came the makeover television series *TRANSform Me*, which made Cox the first African-American transgender person to produce and star in her own TV show.<sup>[30][31]</sup> Both those shows were nominated for GLAAD media awards for outstanding reality programs, and when *Diddy* won in 2009, Cox accepted the award at the GLAAD ceremony, giving a speech described by the *San Francisco Sentinel* as "among the most poignant because [it] reminded us how important it is to tell our stories, all of our stories."<sup>[32][33][34]</sup> She has also acted in a number of TV shows and films, including *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, *Bored to Death*, and *Musical Chairs*.

In 2013, Cox began her recurring role in the Netflix series *Orange is the New Black* as Sophia Burset, a trans woman sent to prison for credit-card fraud. In that year, she stated, "Sophia is written as a multi-dimensional character who the audience can really empathize with—all of the sudden they're empathizing with a real Trans person. And for Trans folks out there, who need to see representations of people who are like them and of their experiences, that's when it becomes really important."<sup>[35]</sup> Cox's role in *Orange is the New Black* provides her a platform to speak on the rights of trans people.

In January 2014, Cox joined trans woman Carmen Carrera on Katie Couric's syndicated show, *Katie*. Couric referred to transgender people as "transgenders", and after being rebuffed by Carrera on the subject of her surgeries, specifically what genital reconstruction she had done, turned the same question to Cox. Cox responded,

I do feel there is a preoccupation with that. The preoccupation with transition and surgery objectifies trans people. And then we don't get to really deal with the real lived experiences. The reality of trans people's lives is that so often we are targets of violence. We experience discrimination disproportionately to the rest of the community. Our unemployment rate is twice the national average; if you are a trans person of color, that rate is four times the national average. The homicide rate is highest among trans women. If we focus on transition, we don't actually get to talk about those things.<sup>[36]</sup>

News outlets such as *Salon*, *The Huffington Post*, and *Business Insider* covered what was characterized by *Salon* writer Katie McDonough as Couric's "clueless" and "invasive" line of questioning.<sup>[37]</sup>



Laverne Cox at PaleyFest 2014 representing *Orange is the New Black*.

Cox was on the cover of the June 9, 2014, issue of *Time*, and was interviewed for the article "The Transgender Tipping Point" by Katy Steinmetz, which ran in that issue and the title of which was also featured on the cover; this makes Cox the first openly transgender person on the cover of *Time*.<sup>[13][38][39]</sup>

Later in 2014, Cox became the first openly transgender person to be nominated for a Primetime Emmy Award in an acting category: Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series for her role as Sophia Burset in *Orange Is the New Black*.<sup>[8][40][41]</sup> She also appeared in John Legend's video for the song "You & I (Nobody in the World)".<sup>[42]</sup>

Cox joined a campaign in 2014 against a Phoenix, Arizona law which allows police to arrest anyone suspected of "manifesting prostitution," and which she feels targets transgender women of color, following the conviction of activist (and transgender woman of color) Monica Jones.<sup>[43]</sup> Cox stated, "All over the country, trans women are targeted simply for being who they are. Laws like this manifestation law really support systematically the idea that girls like me, girls like me and Monica, are less than [others] in this country."<sup>[43]</sup> Later that year the Sylvia Rivera Law Project released a video in which Cox read a letter from transgender inmate Synthia China Blast, addressing common issues faced by trans inmates.<sup>[44]</sup> But when Cox learned that Blast was found guilty of the 1993 rape and murder of 13-year-old Ebony Williams, she wrote on her Tumblr, "I was not aware of the charges for which she was convicted. If I had been aware of those charges, I would have never agreed to read the letter."<sup>[44]</sup>

Cox was featured in the annual "Rebels" issue of *V* in late 2014.<sup>[45]</sup> For the issue, *V* asked celebrities and artists to nominate who they saw as their personal rebels, and Natasha Lyonne nominated Cox.<sup>[45]</sup> Cox was also on the cover of the October 2014 issue of *Essence* magazine, along with actresses Alfre Woodard, Nicole Beharie, and Danai Gurira.<sup>[46]</sup>

On October 17, 2014, *Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word*, an hour-long documentary executive-produced and narrated by Cox, premiered on MTV and Logo simultaneously.<sup>[47]</sup> That same year, Cox was featured on the fifth anniversary cover of *C☆NDY* magazine along with 13 other transgender women – Janet Mock, Carmen Carrera, Geena Rocero, Isis King, Gisele Alicea, Leyna Ramous, Dina Marie, Nina Poon, Juliana Huxtable, Niki M'nray, Pêche Di, Carmen Xtravaganza (House of Xtravaganza), and Yasmine Petty.<sup>[48]</sup>

In 2015, Cox won a Daytime Emmy Award in Outstanding Special Class Special as Executive Producer for *Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word*.<sup>[9][10]</sup> This made Cox the first openly transgender woman to win a Daytime Emmy as an Executive Producer; as well, *The T Word* is the first trans documentary to win a Daytime Emmy.<sup>[9]</sup> That year Cox, among others, posed nude for the *Allure* annual "Nudes" issue, becoming the first openly transgender actress to do so.<sup>[49]</sup>

Cox is the cover subject for the June 11, 2015 "totally not-straight issue" of *Entertainment Weekly*, the first issue of the magazine in 15 years to focus exclusively on gay, lesbian, and transgender entertainment.<sup>[50]</sup>

In June 2016, the Human Rights Campaign released a video in tribute to the victims of the 2016 Orlando gay nightclub shooting; in the video, Cox and others told the stories of the people killed there.<sup>[51][52]</sup>



Cox at L.A.'s Families Belong Together March in June 2018

In 2017, Cox began her role as transgender attorney Cameron Wirth on *Doubt* on CBS.<sup>[11]</sup> However, after only two episodes had aired, CBS announced that they were pulling the series from their schedule, leaving the future of the remaining unaired episodes uncertain.<sup>[53]</sup> It was the first official cancellation of the 2016–17 season, following weak viewership. CBS later announced that the remaining 11 episodes would be broadcast on Saturday, beginning July 1.<sup>[54]</sup>

Cox was nominated in 2017 for a Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series for her role in *Orange Is the New Black*.<sup>[55]</sup>

Also in 2017, Cox collaborated with the ACLU, Zackary Drucker, Molly Crabapple, and Kim Boekbinder, in making a video about transgender history and resistance, called "Time Marches Forward & So Do We", which Cox

narrated.<sup>[56]</sup> That year Cox became one of the four faces of the fall campaign for the Ivy Park line of clothing.<sup>[57]</sup>

Cox was featured in Taylor Swift's "You Need to Calm Down" music video, which was released June 17, 2019.<sup>[58]</sup>

She was one of fifteen women chosen by guest editor Meghan, Duchess of Sussex to appear on the cover of the September 2019 issue of British Vogue; this made Cox the first openly transgender woman to appear on the cover of British Vogue.<sup>[59][60][61]</sup>

## Impact

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Laverne Cox has been noted by her LGBT peers, and many others, for being a trailblazer for the transgender community,<sup>[62]</sup> and has won numerous awards for her activist approach in spreading awareness. Her impact and prominence in the media has led to a growing conversation about transgender culture,<sup>[63]</sup> specifically transgender women, and how being transgender intersects with one's race.<sup>[64]</sup> She is the first openly transgender person to be on the cover of Time magazine,<sup>[6]</sup> be nominated for a Primetime Emmy,<sup>[41]</sup> and have a wax work in Madame Tussauds,<sup>[16]</sup> as well as the first openly transgender woman to win a Daytime Emmy as an Executive Producer.<sup>[65]</sup> In May 2016, Cox was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from The New School in New York City for her progressive work in the fight for gender equality.<sup>[66]</sup>

## Honors and awards

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- 2013 – Anti-Violence Project 2013 Courage Award honoree<sup>[67]</sup>
- 2013 – Reader's Choice Award at Out Magazine's OUT100 Gala, honoring the magazine's selection of 2013's 100 "most compelling people of the year."<sup>[68]</sup>
- 2014 – Woman of the Year by Glamour magazine.<sup>[69][70]</sup>
- 2014 – Included in the annual Root 100; this list honors "standout black leaders, innovators and culture shapers" aged 45 and younger.<sup>[71]</sup>
- 2014 – Topped the British newspaper The Guardian's third annual World Pride Power List, which ranks the world's most influential LGBT people.<sup>[72]</sup>
- 2014 – Stephen F. Kolzak Award from GLAAD.<sup>[73]</sup>
- 2014 – Named to the EBONY Power 100 list.<sup>[74]</sup>
- 2015 – Named to the 2015 OUT Power 50 List.<sup>[75]</sup>
- 2015 – Included in the People World's Most Beautiful Women List.<sup>[76]</sup>
- 2015 – Three Twins Ice Cream in San Francisco renamed its chocolate orange confetti ice cream Laverne Cox's Chocolate Orange is the New Black for Pride weekend.<sup>[77]</sup>
- 2015 – Named in the 2015 Time 100 Most Influential People List; her entry was written by Jazz Jennings.<sup>[78]</sup>
- 2015 – Named by Forum for Equality as one of their 31 Icons of the LGBT History Month.<sup>[79]</sup>
- 2015 – Winner of a Daytime Emmy Award in Outstanding Special Class Special as Executive Producer for *Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word*.<sup>[65][10]</sup> This made Cox the first openly transgender woman to win a Daytime Emmy as an Executive Producer; as well, *The T Word* is the first trans documentary to win a Daytime Emmy.<sup>[65]</sup>
- 2016 — Awarded Honorary Doctorate from The New School.<sup>[80]</sup>
- 2017 – Named to the 2017 OUT Power 50 List.<sup>[81]</sup>
- 2018 — Received the Claire Skiffington Vanguard Award from Transgender Law Center. The award recognizes transgender community members who have been part of the movement's vanguard.<sup>[82]</sup>

## Filmography

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### Film

Year	Title	Role	Notes
2000	<i>Betty Anderson</i>	Deirdre	Short film
2004	<i>The Kings of Brooklyn</i>	Girl	
2008	<i>All Night</i>	Layla	Short film
2009	<i>Uncle Stephanie</i>	Stephanie	
2010	<i>Bronx Paradise</i>	Hooker	
2011	<i>Carla</i>	Cinnamon	
2011	<u><i>Musical Chairs</i></u>	Chantelle	
2012	<i>Migraine</i>	Lola	Short film
2012	<i>The Exhibitionists</i>	Blithe Stargazer	
2013	<u><i>36 Saints</i></u>	Genesuis	
2014	<i>Grand Street</i>	Chardonnay	
2014	<i>Laverne Cox Presents: The T Word</i>	Herself	<u>Daytime Emmy Awards for Outstanding Special Class Special (2015)</u> <u>Nominated - GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Documentary (2015)</u>
2015	<u><i>Grandma</i></u>	Deathy	
2017	<u><i>Freak Show</i></u>	Felicia	
2019	<u><i>Can You Keep a Secret?</i></u>	Cybill	
TBA	<u><i>Promising Young Woman</i></u>	Gail	Post-production
TBA	<u><i>Jolt</i></u>	Detective Nevin	Post-production

## Television

Year	Title	Role	Notes
2008	<i>Law &amp; Order: Special Victims Unit</i>	Candace	Episode: "Closet"
2008	<i>I Want to Work for Diddy</i>	Herself	6 episodes
2008	<i>Law &amp; Order</i>	Minnie	Episode: "Sweetie"
2009	<i>Bored to Death</i>	Transsexual prostitute	Episode: "Stockholm Syndrome"
2010	<i>TRANSform Me</i>	Herself	Also producer 8 episodes
2013–19	<i>Orange Is the New Black</i>	Sophia Bursat	Recurring role; 40 episodes Screen Actors Guild Award for Outstanding Performance by an Ensemble in a Comedy Series (2015–16) Nominated—Critics' Choice Television Award for Best Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series Nominated—NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Supporting Actress in a Comedy Series (2015–17) Nominated—Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Comedy Series (2014) Nominated—Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Guest Actress in a Drama Series (2017, 2019) <sup>[55]</sup> Guest star <i>Orange Is the New Black (season 7)</i>
2014	<i>Faking It</i>	Margot	Episode: "Lying Kings and Drama Queens"
2014	<i>Girlfriends' Guide to Divorce</i>	Adele Northrop	Episode: "Rule No. 426: Fantasyland: A Great Place to Visit"
2015–17	<i>The Mindy Project</i>	Sheena	3 episodes
2016	<i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show: Let's Do the Time Warp Again</i> <sup>[83]</sup>	Dr. Frank-N-Furter	Television movie
2016–19	<i>Lip Sync Battle</i>	Herself	2 episodes
2017	<i>Doubt</i>	Cameron Wirth	13 episodes
2019	<i>Weird City</i>	Liquia	Episode: "Smart House"
2019	<i>Tuca &amp; Bertie</i>	Ebony Black (voice)	Episode: "The Sex Bugs"
2019	<i>Curb Your Enthusiasm</i>	Herself	Episode: "#10.4"
2019	<i>Dear White People</i>	Cynthia Fray	Episode: "#3.7"
2019	<i>A Black Lady Sketch Show</i>	Kiana	Episode: "Angela Bassett Is the Baddest Bitch"

## Discography

### Soundtrack albums

Title	Album
<i>The Rocky Horror Picture Show: Let's Do the Time Warp Again</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Released: October 21, 2016<sup>[84]</sup></li> <li>Format: Digital download</li> <li>Label: <u>Ode Sounds &amp; Visuals</u></li></ul>

## Singles

Title	Year	Peak chart positions	
		US Dance Club <sup>[85]</sup>	US Dance/Elec. <sup>[86]</sup>
"Beat for the Gods"	2018	22	—
"Welcome Home"	2019	6	30

## See also

- LGBT culture in New York City

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## Further reading

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- *Contemporary Black biography. Volume 122 : profiles from the international Black community* (<http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/904154846>). Farmington Hills, Mich.: Gale, Cengage Learning. 2015. ISBN 9781573024310.

## External links

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- Official website (<http://www.lavernecox.com>)
  - Laverne Cox (<https://www.imdb.com/name/nm1209545/>) on IMDb
  - Interview with Laverne Cox (<http://www.phillygaycalendar.com/pages/video.php?id=450>) (video)
  - Laverne Cox (<https://twitter.com/Lavernecox>) on Twitter 
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