

# STYLE

  
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## GEN Z ICON

WHY AMANDLA  
STENBERG IS  
THE COOL GIRL  
YOUR DAUGHTERS  
WANT TO BE

SUMMER BUYS  
THE FOUR PRINT  
DRESSES THAT  
SUIT EVERYONE

WHAT KIND OF  
MAN AUDITIONS  
FOR MAGIC MIKE?  
LOUIS WISE MEETS  
THE WEST END  
WANNABES

‘ I DO FEEL  
A LOT OF  
WEIGHT  
ON MY  
SHOULDERS ’

AMANDLA STENBERG IS  
THE 19-YEAR-OLD  
ACTRESS, ACTIVIST AND  
BEYONCÉ PROTEGEE  
REWRITING THE  
HOLLYWOOD RULE  
BOOK. SHE TALKS TO  
**HELENA DE BERTODANO**  
ABOUT FIGHTING FOR  
WHAT SHE BELIEVES IN  
AND MAKING THE DECISION  
TO COME OUT AS GAY

Photographs **Daria Kobayashi Ritch**  
Styling **Sean Knight**



**This page** Purple bra top,  
£175, and silk dress, £640,  
Kenzo. Pearl Vermeer collar,  
£1,325, Sophie Buhai.  
Vintage gloves, worn  
throughout, Palace Costume.  
**Opposite** Lace top, £2,612,  
and skirt, £2,785, Rodarte;  
matchesfashion.com. Vintage  
boots, Palace Costume



**This page** Red gown, £9,100, Valentino.  
**Opposite** Silk dress, £2,025, Miu Miu.  
Vintage scarf, Palace Costume



# A mandla

Stenberg may be one of the most celebrated young actresses in Hollywood today, but she does not stand on ceremony. Best known for her portrayal of Rue in *The Hunger Games*, which grossed nearly \$700m worldwide, she suggests we meet at a creperie in Koreatown, instead of a swanky LA hotel, where most Hollywood interviews take place. I arrive first to find a handwritten sign scrawled on the door, under a clock that has no hands and tells no time: “My dear customer [sic], Today electric line some problem we need change so we are closed.”

“Oh no!” exclaims Stenberg in mock horror, pulling up alone in her VW Tiguan. “It’s one of my favourite places.” She invites me to hop in (the interior is pristine, just a copy of the novel *Carol*, by Patricia Highsmith, on the passenger seat) and we head off in search of somewhere else. “My friends make fun of me because they say it’s a mom car,” she laughs.

Indeed, Stenberg seems mature beyond her 19 years in many ways. She has made a name for herself not just as a singer and actress, but also as an activist, whose Tumblr video on the appropriation of black culture, *Don’t Cash Crop My Cornrows*, went viral when she was only 16, receiving nearly 2.4m hits to date. Named Most Influential Teen by *Time* magazine for two consecutive years, she worked with Beyoncé on her album *Lemonade*, impressing the singer so much she told Stenberg: “When Blue [her daughter] grows up, I want her to be just like you.” She has a devoted social media following — 1.6m on Instagram — and is part of the achingly “woke” group of Hollywood activists that includes Rowan Blanchard, Hari Nef and Yara Shahidi, all close friends.

Last month, she came out as gay, having previously identified as bisexual. “I wanted to make it explicitly clear that I’m only



**This page** Lace dress, £9,500, Stella McCartney. Arm cuff, £340, Sophie Buhai.  
**Opposite** Print dress, £1,665, boots, £2,155, and earrings, POA, Balenciaga

Silk dress, £8,520,  
Givenchy, Silver  
Moon choker, £830,  
Sophie Buhai

Hair Larry Sims at  
Forward Artists using  
Smooth'N Shine.

Make-up Karo Kangas at  
Art Department using  
Kate Somerville and Mac.

Local production  
Oui Productions



interested in women,” she says, as she deftly navigates the heavy LA traffic. Coming out, she says, was very “freeing”, but daunting. “There’s so much more stigma. If a woman says she’s bisexual, men can sexualise her and say, ‘That’s hot, maybe she’ll be in a threesome with me.’”

We pull into the parking lot of Nature’s Brew, a cafe near to her apartment, where she lives with her roommate, a dancer. As she orders a hazelnut latte and a fried egg sandwich, the server gives her a quizzical look. “Were you in *The Hunger Games*?” he asks. Stenberg nods, grinning. “OK, awesome: would you like avocado in your sandwich?”

Does that happen often, I ask Stenberg, who — to me at least, with her short cropped hair and extra years [she was only 12 then] — looks very different from her Rue days. “Less now. When I was younger I’d be walking down the street and would hear the whistle [a YouTube clip of Rue’s haunting whistle, which defined the film, has nearly 2.2m hits]. It was hilarious, but it definitely got a little old.”

By the end of this year, she will be known for a host of new roles: as Ruby, a teenager with exceptional powers in *The Darkest Minds*, a fantasy/sci-fi film, also starring Gwendoline Christie; as a girl who witnesses the fatal shooting of her best friend at the hands of a police officer in *The Hate U Give*; and as Leyna, a biracial teen who falls in love with a Hitler Youth member in *Where Hands Touch*, a controversial British romance drama directed by Amma Asante.

Like Leyna, Stenberg is biracial: her father, who was a music promoter, is Danish and her mother, an entertainment journalist, African-American. She has two older half-sisters on her father’s side. Her name Amandla is the Zulu word for power: “My mom gave me one of the blackest names she could. People used to make fun of the ‘L’. I was, like, ‘This is a real mother-f\*\*\*\*\* name.’”

At her private Los Angeles high school, she was aware of being different. “There were four black girls in our entire school and I remember everyone used to confuse our names. It was shocking to me.”

She knows people sometimes roll their eyes at how earnest she and her friends are. Online there is even a video called “Amandla Stenberg is unbearable”, which has had 355,000 views. One of the (less acerbic) comments underneath reads: “She’s very very annoying but hopefully she’ll just grow out of it.” In person she does not come across as annoying, instead she is sweet and sincere — she is wearing a white T-shirt with the slogan “Feminist: a person who believes in the social, political and economic equality of the sexes”, an H&M patchwork denim skirt and “comfy” sandals. “The people [who criticise] don’t want things to change. I don’t think we have a choice: the situation is so bad and we have all these tools [social media] at our disposal and it’s our responsibility to use them.” Her upcoming movie, *The Darkest Minds*, plays on this idea. “It’s allegorical — a world where kids have superpowers and adults are afraid of them.”

Not, she insists, that she doesn’t know how to have fun. “I do dumb stuff with my friends: we watch RuPaul’s *Drag Race*, go to the beach, dance.” She talks excitedly about a planned trip to the Joshua Tree National Park with Blanchard and Nef. They will stay in a hotel instead of camping. “We’re not salt of the earth, we’re a little bougie,” she jokes.

She attributes her activism to her mother. “I do feel a lot of weight on my shoulders. I think I was born awake [she is punning on ‘woke’]: my mom raised me with an awareness of humanity and community and how people walk in the world differently.” Her dream is to direct, and she is writing a script, “a coming-of-age story about going abroad and having somewhat wild experiences”.

**THERE WERE FOUR BLACK GIRLS IN OUR ENTIRE SCHOOL AND EVERYONE USED TO CONFUSE OUR NAMES. IT WAS SHOCKING TO ME**

It is based on personal experience. She went to Japan in January with three girlfriends after going through “enormous heartbreak” when splitting up with her boyfriend Tucker Tripp, a young director. Now, she says, she couldn’t be happier: “I always had such internal discomfort and confusion whenever I had romantic or sexual encounters with boys. I could never really put my finger on it. I always knew I liked girls, I just thought I liked both. With the sexual exploration of adulthood, I have come to the conclusion that I’m just gay. I know how wildly different it feels and how right it feels.”

Her girlfriend of the past five months is also in the entertainment industry. “For the first time in my life I find myself on the other side of the coin, she’s like ‘Hey I’m going away for a month, I have to focus on my career.’” One day she hopes to have a family: “I want to be a mother. I think all my skills would come together in parenting — nurturing, giving my love...”

In the meantime, she is nurturing her career. She tells a funny story about going to the CFDA awards in New York last month and finding herself outside an Instagram booth with Naomi Campbell. “I said, ‘Oh, it’s Naomi, she can go in front of me.’ She did her Naomi walk in front of the backdrop and then it was my turn. I asked for a dance song to mix it up a little. Then I heard Naomi’s voice saying, ‘She’s dancing? I want to dance.’”

“For a second I think she’s joining me and we’re going to have a video together. She goes, ‘Naomi Campbell is here, you can leave now.’ I couldn’t believe it, it was so absurd to me, the idea that me dancing was too much for her to handle, and then the fact that she had spoken about herself in the third person. I said, ‘Naomi, boo-boo, you have fun, girl.’ And I walked off the set.” Stenberg laughs: “I felt kind of honoured to be kicked out by her. God bless Naomi Campbell.”

It is 5pm on a Friday and as we part, I ask what she is doing later. The students at the next-door table have been chattering about the party they are planning. But Stenberg is cut from a different cloth. “I’m just going home to clean my room,” she smiles. ■

*The Darkest Minds* is out on August 10