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Photo: [Lucia Thorne](#)

Director Sam Feder and actress-writer Jen Richards discussed trans representation in Hollywood in their documentary “Disclosure”

By [Lucia Thorne](#), Assistant Lifestyle Editor
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Disclosure director Sam Feder and actress-writer Jen Richards discussed the documentary’s analysis of the ways trans representation in Hollywood both empowers and endangers trans lives at a Q&A panel hosted by the Visual Media Arts department and Student Engagement and Leadership through Bright Lights Emerson on Monday night, moderated by Senior Distinguished Artist-in-Residence P Carl.

Since its release on [Netflix](#) in January, Richards said the film has already had an impact on the film industry and its attitude towards trans representation.

“It’s getting better, and it’s getting better very quickly,” Richards said at the panel held over Zoom. “[*Disclosure*] has resulted in people with real power in Hollywood wanting to do better, recognizing their own complicity and having a genuine enthusiastic desire to do better.”

The documentary takes a look at the history of trans representation in film. Trans leaders in the film industry including Laverne Cox, Sandra Caldwell, Candis Cayne, and Chaz Bono, discuss their interpretations of the trans experience displayed in the film, allowing the audience to see through the lens of the people being portrayed.

It focuses heavily on the benefits and disadvantages of the ways Hollywood chooses to illustrate trans experiences. Feder said the different opinions on Hollywood portrayals are why he decided to interview 31 trans people, each with their own unique view.

“We don’t know what people are going to take away from what they see, and so what’s most important, rather than saying what’s good or bad, is learning how to watch things with a critical lens, learning how to be media literate,” Feder said.

Those in front of the camera were not the only trans people who contributed to the project, which was a deliberate and necessary decision to enhance viewing trans film history through the trans lens. Feder said as soon as he began thinking about the documentary, he immediately prioritized working with trans people on both sides of the camera.

“From the get-go, I knew this had to have as many voices as possible and it had to be all trans voices,” Feder said. “This history had to come from the perspective, the memories and the experiences of trans people. So the first thing I did was make a list of every trans person I knew who worked on one side of the camera or the other.”

Feder initially struggled to hire a majority crew of trans people. To remedy this, he found experienced cis crew members to mentor less-experienced trans crew members, giving them opportunity to gain work experience on the set of *Disclosure*.

Richards said hiring a majority-trans crew allowed for the raw reactions and vulnerable moments captured throughout the documentary.

“So many of us, particularly those of us who are a little bit older and might’ve struggled a little bit to get where we are, we have a lot of walls built up,” Richards said. “On *Disclosure*, we could all just drop that armor, and that’s why those moments were possible.”

In the film, Richards reflects on her desire to feel “valued” as a trans woman by her family, her friends, and herself. She reacts to a clip from the show, *I am Cait*, where a father reflects on how raising his trans child is an “honor.” When asked about the clip, Richards said how important it is to see other members of the trans community remember that everyone is deserving of that type of love and acceptance, including themselves.

“Media plays a very powerful role in giving us that kind of permission,” Richards said. “I think that’s why it’s so important to have, amongst a plethora of trans representation, some that are very hopeful and very positive and show people who are supported and loved and lead lives that we might emulate.”

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