Discovering Our Identity: The Power of LGBTQ Documentaries

Thomas Miller
Professor of the Practice of Cinematic Arts, School of Cinematic Arts

Abstract
Discovering Our Identity is an interdisciplinary micro-seminar demonstrating how LGBTQ documentaries have conveyed our unique voices over the past 30-years. This course will examine how this distinct form of personal filmmaking has played a key role in helping to change America's perception of the LGBTQ community.

The first day of the seminar the class will be viewing clips from several contemporary LGBTQ documentary films that deal with issues of identity and inclusion. The class will discuss the topics that have been presented from these documentaries, and reflect upon how they acted as catalysts for social change in American culture over the past three decades. Some of the LGBTQ topics to be discussed may include: religion, hate crimes, coming out, military service, and marriage and immigration rights. After the first class the students will be asked to prepare a list of some current LGBTQ issues that might be good topics for a short documentary.

The second day of the seminar will concentrate on two things: The first part of the class will be a group discussion narrowing down potential topics for a short personal documentary. The second half of the class will discuss practical ways to begin the process of making a film. What is a viable subject? How does one approach and interview a subject? What type of rights does one need to make a film? How do you form a viable documentary team? What type of camera and sound equipment does one need? How does one finance a project? How long does it take to make a film? How might I be able to produce and make a film while enrolled at USC? We will not be able to go into great depth but one will get a basic understanding of steps one can take and the thought processes behind creating a personal film about LGBTQ identity and inclusion.

This micro-seminar is a great way for LGBTQ students and their allies to connect and begin to forge a community here at USC. It will also begin to demonstrate the importance of collaboration with peers, which will be an extremely useful skill that should be incorporated into every discipline on campus.
Faculty Biography

THOMAS G. MILLER, ACE has worked on documentaries and in public television since 1994. He associate produced the Sundance award-winning film “Licensed To Kill” (POV-PBS), co-produced the feature documentary "Code Black," and co-produced and edited "Fender Philosophers" (PBS) and "Camp Out" (MTV/Logo). He has edited the multi-award winning feature documentary films, "Good Kurds, Bad Kurds" (Independent Lens-PBS), "Home of the Brave" (Sundance, BBC,CBC), and co-edited "Rock The Boat" (HBO), the last two being short-listed for an Academy Award. Miller was the Supervising Editor on "See What I'm Saying: The Deaf Entertainers Documentary" (The Documentary Channel), "Paraiso For Sale" (PBS) and currently "Making Waves: The Art of Cinematic Sound" (Cannes, Tribeca 2019). He produced, directed, wrote and co-edited the award-winning documentaries "ONE BAD CAT" (Ovation), and the IDA Humanitas Award winning "Limited Partnership" (Independent Lens-PBS). Other credits include editing and producing television films for Discovery, Fox Family and WNET's series on disabilities, "People in Motion". Tom served on the board of the International Documentary Association for 9-years and is a member of American Cinema Editors (ACE), the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences and the Writer's Guild of America, West. He is a Professor of the Practice of Cinema Arts at the USC School of Cinematic Arts and has been the Alfred P. Sloan science production mentor there since 2009. He is also a board certified pediatrician and has served as a medical consultant for "Sesame Street”. He graduated with a BS degree from The University of Michigan, an MD from the Medical College of Ohio and an MFA from the USC School of Cinematic Arts.