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SALLY RIDE SCIENCE

Forbes on SALLY documentary: Why Sally Ride's Legacy Still Challenges the Culture Of STEM



(<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/D9XvI6sU8AA0DcU-scaled.jpg>)

June 24, 2025 (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/forbes-on-sally-documentary-why-sally-rides-legacy-still-challenges-the-culture-of-stem/>) by Sally Ride Science (<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/author/mking/>) ·

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From [Forbes \(https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/2025/06/15/why-sally-rides-legacy-still-challenges-the-culture-of-stem/\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/2025/06/15/why-sally-rides-legacy-still-challenges-the-culture-of-stem/), June 15, 2025

By [Tony Bradley \(https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/\)](https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/), Senior Contributor

Jun 15, 2025

Sally Ride made history on June 18, 1983, when she became the first American woman to launch into space. Her calm precision and unflinching focus made her an icon in STEM—a face of possibility for girls across the country and around the world. But a [new documentary from National Geographic, *Sally*](https://films.nationalgeographic.com/) (https://films.nationalgeographic.com/), reveals another dimension of her legacy—one that remained private throughout her lifetime.

**SALLY,
a National Geographic
Documentary Films
production directed
by Cristina Costantini,
is streaming on
Disney+ and Hulu.**

Premiering June 16 on National Geographic and streaming on [Disney+](https://www.disneyplus.com/) (https://www.disneyplus.com/) and [Hulu](https://www.hulu.com/welcome?orig_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F) (https://www.hulu.com/welcome?orig_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F) the next day, *Sally* tells the story not only of Ride’s groundbreaking achievements as a physicist and astronaut, but of her 27-year partnership with fellow scientist and educator Tam O’Shaughnessy—a relationship Ride never publicly acknowledged while she was alive. Directed by Emmy-winner Cristina Costantini, the film reframes Ride’s legacy, offering a deeper, more personal portrait of a woman who inspired millions while carefully guarding her own truth.

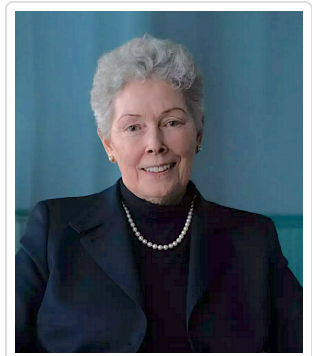
I recently had the privilege of sitting down with O’Shaughnessy and Costantini to better understand the motivation behind the documentary and what they hope audiences will take away from it. What emerged from our conversation was a sense that this film isn’t just about legacy—it’s about visibility, resilience and the complicated cost of breaking barriers in science.

When Representation Requires Erasure

Being first often means carrying the weight of symbolic representation. Ride wasn’t just an astronaut—she was proof that women could thrive in space and science. But with that role came expectations: be competent, but never emotional. Be visible, but only selectively. The unwritten contract Ride operated under demanded technical excellence and personal silence.

As Tam told me, the decision to finally share their relationship publicly didn’t begin with a film pitch. It began with grief. “Since about a week before Sally died, I told her I wanted to hold a celebration of her life,” she said. “And then I wondered who I was going to be to the people coming to the celebration who didn’t know we were a couple.”

Sally told her, “You decide. Whatever you decide will be the right thing to do.” That moment of quiet affirmation—Ride’s way of granting permission without demanding visibility—was the start of a longer process. It would take more than a decade, but O’Shaughnessy eventually found the right partners in National Geographic and Costantini to tell the full story.



Tam O’Shaughnessy

STEM’s Culture of Conformity

Costantini, known for documentaries like *Science Fair*

(<https://www.forbes.com/sites/tonybradley/2023/11/10/stories-of-hope-and-ingenuity-in-science-fair-the-series/>)

and *Mucho Mucho Amor*, wanted *Sally* to be about more than just history. “We made this film for anyone who’s ever had to hide part of themselves to get where they want to be,” she told me. “In 2025, that experience feels more relevant than ever.”

That sense of coded identity—the need to suppress aspects of self to be taken seriously—remains a reality in many corners of science and technology. Despite progress, LGBTQ+ scientists are still underrepresented in leadership roles. Women in STEM continue to navigate environments that value output over authenticity.

This is particularly poignant and relevant today, as the Trump administration systematically and aggressively works to erase visibility of women, people of color, immigrants and LGBTQ+ individuals from US history.

Cristina Costantini

And while Ride’s accomplishments helped crack the glass ceiling, her silence shows us the structural weight it takes to hold that ceiling in place.

Sally’s Enduring Influence in STEM

Even after leaving NASA, Ride continued to shape the STEM world.

In 2001, she and O’Shaughnessy founded Sally Ride Science, a nonprofit aimed at promoting STEM education for girls and underrepresented youth. That mission continues today at [UC San Diego \(https://ucsd.edu/\)](https://ucsd.edu/), where O’Shaughnessy and a dedicated team run programs that connect students with scientists and researchers.

It’s not just the curriculum that draws kids in—it’s the name. “Sally’s name is magic,” O’Shaughnessy said. “It’s why the boys and girls sign up, and it’s why parents want their kids to be exposed to these programs.”

And that's what makes the timing of *Sally* so significant. At a moment when LGBTQ+ stories are being scrubbed from public institutions and women's rights are under attack, this documentary insists on complexity. It reclaims a narrative that was always there, but never acknowledged.

A Legacy No Longer Coded

What *Sally* reveals is a fuller picture of a scientist, a leader and a partner. Someone who not only pushed the boundaries of what women could do in science, but who also made space—quietly, privately—for the people she loved.

Ride's story still resonates because it's unfinished. It now invites a broader range of people to see themselves in her legacy—not just young girls interested in STEM, but anyone who's ever felt that they had to choose between their passion and their identity.

For the STEM community, that's the crux of the problem. The human race has a lot of challenges to address and there are plenty of undiscovered frontiers to tackle. We can't afford to exclude entire populations of people based on nothing more than fragile egos and narrow-minded bigotry.

It's not enough to recruit diverse talent. We have to build systems where people can bring their full selves to the work. Because progress isn't just about putting the first woman in space. It's about making sure she wouldn't have to hide once she landed.

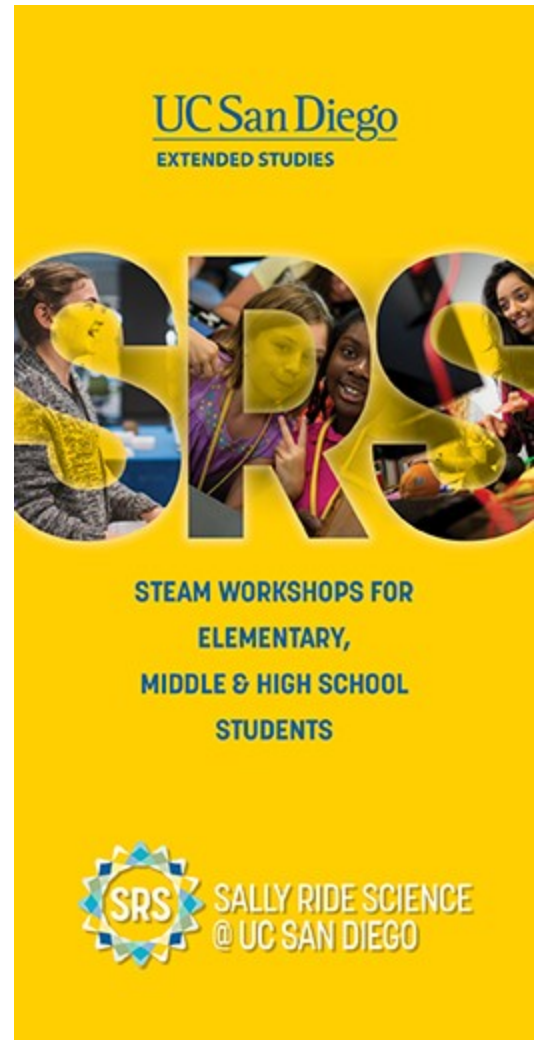
Read more about SALLY

- **TIME:** Partner of the First U.S. Woman in Space Reflects On Their Hidden Relationship (<https://time.com/7289170/sally-ride-documentary-tam-oshaughnessy-interview/>)
- **LOS ANGELES TIMES:** 'Sally' explains why a trailblazing astronaut chose to stay in the closet (<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/tv/story/2025-06-16/sally-ride-tam-oshaughnessy-cristina-costantini-documentary>)
- **THE NEW YORKER:** A First Kiss from America's First Woman in Space (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/06/16/a-first-kiss-from-americas-first-woman-in-space>)

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➡ MIT Standout Jessica Lu Named Recipient of 2025 ITA Sally Ride STEM Award
(<https://sallyridescience.ucsd.edu/mit-standout-jessica-lu-named-recipient-of-2025-ita-sally-ride-stem-award/>)

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