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## Entertainment : Film & TV : Interviews

### Atom Egoyan

04 May 2006

**When a beautiful young girl is found dead in the hotel suite of a famous '50s double act the duo are never implicated in the murder. 15 years pass and an ambitious young journalist attempts to find out what really happened.**

Where the Truth Lies is an erotic thriller that questions the subjectivity of memory and the cult of celebrity, starring Alison Lohman, Kevin Bacon and **Colin Firth** as a pill-popping poof with a violent streak.

As the film is released on DVD, Rachael Scott spoke to director Atom Egoyan about his wrangles with the American censors over the film's sex scenes, threesomes and the best way to protect a star's modesty when you're filming them!

**Kevin Bacon and Colin Firth seem an unlikely pairing at first. What influenced your decision in casting them?**

I cast intuitively and I wanted to create a duo that didn't already exist in people's minds. I felt that it was really important we weren't constantly wondering if this actually happened to Jerry Lewis or Dean Martin.

Looking at celebrities of that period you realise there were Englishmen who were floating around in American culture, people like David Niven, Rex Harrison and Cary Grant. These very suave civilised men who Americans seemed to need at that point to fulfil a certain projection or fantasy.

So, the idea of combining Vince's (Firth) character with a very compulsive, almost pre-rock 'n' roll figure like Lanny (Bacon) could have made sense. Vince's job was to always be the gentleman to Lanny's crude, vulgar persona and, of course, in reality it was Lanny who was the all-controlling one and Vince who was untethered.



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**"The thing that was so frustrating about the censors in the States was that nothing you see is technically hardcore. It's all quite camouflaged and very carefully choreographed. You aren't actually seeing anything, but you think you are."**

**Colin Firth described his character Vince as "vulnerable, venal and violent". I think many of his fans will be surprised to find him doing such a sexually explicit role. What made him choose it do you think?**

I know exactly why. At that moment he needed to cut himself from the Darcy character. He was so tired of that. He's a great actor and has played darker, malevolent characters earlier in his career. For the same reason Alison (Lohman), who has always played adolescents, wanted to reconstruct her image as well.

It was brave of Colin and he was very passionate about wanting to go to those places.

**In many ways Vince and Lanny are like a married couple that don't have sex. Was Vince gay or bisexual and was he in love with Lanny?**

I think he's bisexual and he *does* adore Lanny. I think Lanny understands that.

**How did you tackle the sex scenes?**

(*Where the Truth Lies* contains a threesome with Kevin Bacon, Colin Firth and Rachel Blanchard and a lesbian sex scene between Alison Lohman and Kristin Adams.)

They have to be very scripted. I think actors of this stature have to know exactly what's being seen. It had to be choreographed with diagrams so they could see exactly what the cameras were going to show and when people know what their limits are they can be very free within that.



The thing that was so frustrating about the censors in the States was that nothing you see is technically hardcore. It's all quite camouflaged and very carefully choreographed. You aren't actually seeing anything, but you think you are.

**I read that you employed a 'bag lady' to ensure that neither stars genitals could be seen. What is that?** Actually, it's called a 'pouch lady'. There are these pouches that are worn over the genitals and they're taped up with flesh coloured tape. It's kind of funny, it's like a sock. I think the word 'bag' is used in a misleading sense. Depending on how large the equipment is you could have a 'sack lady'!

**I thought it might be a job you could actually apply for! So, can you tell me what happened with the**

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**NC-17 rating in the States and how that ruling affected the film?**

It severely limited its release and it was most disappointing. It means it can't be released in many theatres in Middle America and that it can't be advertised in certain papers. We tried to re-cut it and we appealed three times, but I can't complain because ultimately I'm responsible for what happened.

I think anyone who watches it will be surprised by the severity of the ruling. I think it's because very well known actors are doing those scenes, if they had been unknown it would have been different.

The other issue is that the film is shot in a very glossy studio style and you don't normally see those types of scenes shot that way. But I will never know exactly what happened because I wasn't privy to those conversations.

**"There are these pouches that are worn over the genitals and they're taped up with flesh coloured tape. It's kind of funny, it's like a sock. I think the word 'bag' is used in a misleading sense. Depending on how large the equipment is you could have a 'sack lady'!"**

**Didn't they give you a reason then?**

No, they don't tell you specifically what to do so you're left guessing. It was very difficult. Speaking to other filmmakers in retrospect what you should do is shoot a more extreme version than you would ever wish to be shown so that you have something to cut. I never did that because of wanting to ensure the actors were comfortable.

**Do you know which scene was causing the problem?**

It was definitely the threesome, we cut the other scenes down, but we couldn't take out the threesome because it's so essential to the movie. When we took out the other scenes the censors still said there was a problem so it had to be the threesome scene. In the end we put everything back in, so what you're seeing now is the complete film.

**Do you think it had anything to do with the gay element?**

No, I don't think so. *Brokeback Mountain* didn't have a problem. I *do* think it's the nudity though, the disturbing nature of the scene. I can't really tell you because it would just be speculation.

**I read that it was to do with the amounts of "thrusts" during the scene.**

Yes. Someone advised us that usually there are no more than three full body thrusts allowed. Since then though I've seen films that have many more thrusts than we were able to get by with. So it's a mystery.

**Imagine being the person who sits there counting them!**

Well, with that and being a 'sack lady'.... If there were any jobs with double shifts I'd like to examine in my next film that would be it!

**"In this case you have a marriage between Vince and Lanny that is publicly consecrated, people adored this duo, but the true nature of what their relationship was about could never be spoken of."**

**What were you trying to say about the nature of celebrity in the film?**

We need it. In any culture we need to elevate certain human beings, we always have. I don't think you can say that celebrity is dangerous or even superficial because we need to project onto others and make them greater than we are. It's just a natural phenomenon.

One of the things I was interested in examining were the tolls and the consequences of being an entertainer and the public life they have to present. In this case you have a marriage between Vince and Lanny that is publicly consecrated, people adored this duo, but the true nature of what their relationship was about could never be spoken of.

**In the '50s celebrity lives weren't examined in the same way they are today, were they?**

No they weren't. The media kept a distance probably until the mid '60s and the Kennedy assassination and then there was Karen's (Alison Lohman) new school of journalism.

One of my favourite scenes is when Vince thinks he can blackmail her (with photographs of Karen having sex with another woman). Probably in *his* time the photographs would have been incriminating, but that seems ridiculous to her because she would be able to use them to make the story more exciting. Vince is completely flummoxed by her reaction and that's because he's living in a very different time.



Lanny, of course, had been able to adapt and seemed to thrive in the new climate.

**Now we know celebrities aren't perfect because there are so many magazines exposing their faults, but our obsession with them is just as strong.**

I think the key to modern celebrity is that you have to be able to reinvent yourself constantly. The ones who have been able to thrive are the Madonnas or the David Bowies. Our attention span is so much shorter I think.

**In *Where the Truth Lies* you question our ability to ever know the truth. Do you believe that the truth is always subjective?**

I think the truth is always the result of trying to find a compromise between conflicting agendas involving negotiation when there isn't something that can be agreed upon. What we see at the end of the film is all through the point of view of one individual who didn't have access to the room where the girl died.

**"I think the key to modern celebrity is that you have to be able to reinvent yourself constantly... Our attention span is so much shorter I think."**

**Do you have a preferred version of the truth about what happened to the murdered girl?**

I think that Karen's interpretation makes sense, but it's nothing she can ever really prove. What is true is the moment Lanny and Vince are elevated beyond any sort of human status in her eyes...where she felt they were responsible for saving her. That image is tarnished for her forever.

**How did working with a large budget differ to your other projects?**

Oh I loved it. The film had to have all these noir and neo-noir devices - the voice over, the music - and being able to have a lot of fun with a rich studio palette and the whole look. I needed it to be very glossy and have a seductive image, so it was great being able to plan those pictures and actually be in the Hollywood hills.

**What will your next project be about?**

Right now I'm directing a play in Dublin with Michael Gambon. We're doing the theatrical premiere of a television play that Samuel Beckett wrote. They're doing a big celebration for the centenary of his birth and then I'm doing an opera project in Toronto.

Read our review of [Where The Truth Lies](#) and our totty watch on [Colin Firth](#).

**Where The Truth Lies** [2005]

**Label:** Momentum

**Released:** 1 May 2006

**ASIN:** B000EF7XM4

**Catalogue Number:** MP511D

Buy the DVD of [Where the Truth Lies](#) on DVD and watch Kevin Bacon and Colin Firth develop their homoerotic side in this erotic thriller.

Author: Rachael Scott

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