

# Sex, Lies, and Videotape Exposes Raw Nerve

**Sex, lies, and videotape**  
Cineplex Westmount

review by Ron Kuipers

**S**ex, lies, and videotape is a riveting film about, well, sex, lies and videotape. Ok, that's still a little vague. It deals with sex, yet not graphically so. It's about lies, but it's not preachy. It examines the medium of videotape, but not in the form most people think it would. It is a film that relies heavily upon dialogue to make its point. Even so, *Sex, lies, and videotape* remains an intriguing film.

Nothing about this film is terribly exciting visually. Sure, some interesting things are done with camera movement, angles, and depth of field, but there is really nothing out of the ordinary here. It's definitely not boring to watch, but it's the dialogue that keeps the audience fixated on the screen. Writer/director Steven Soderbergh has created an amazing cast of diverse, sometimes bizarre, but always real characters.

The film examines a dangerous love triangle between a married couple and the wife's younger sister. The triangle is intruded upon when the husband's friend Graham (played by James Spader) comes to visit. This somewhat introverted, eccentric guest is given to posing the most personal inquiries via the medium of videotape. As Graham discovers the innermost secrets of the other characters, he inadvertently becomes the film's catalyst, forcing the others to confront the truth about themselves and each other.

This film is exciting because it exposes truths about some sore spots in human nature—namely, sexuality and honesty. These two aspects of human nature are oftentimes

involved with each other, and frequently they are either the seeds of our downfall or keys to our self-discovery. You can lie to yourself, or you can lie to other people, but ultimately you will always be lying to yourself. The movie deals with this aspect of humanity quite convincingly. The characters who fall are the ones who won't be honest with other people or themselves. Yet the film doesn't say it, it does it.

Interpersonal dialogue is the key to understanding this film. Yet the clues to discovering the film's message lies not so much in what the characters say, as in what they do not say. When Graham is asked why he doesn't rent an apartment, he simply tells people that he only likes to carry one key. When you get an apartment, he explains, that's two keys. If you get a job you will probably have to lock something, that's three keys. When Graham says this he's not joking, he's serious. It even makes you wonder yourself why you carry so many keys. But the fact that Graham remains serious gives us clues to his introverted, remote character. What makes this guy tick?

Unfortunately, James is the one character that the audience finds out about the least. He catalyzes the revelation of the other characters— from the prudish, repressed nature of the wife, Ann (played brilliantly by Andie MacDowell), to the overbearing sexuality of her sister Cynthia (forcefully acted by Laura San Giacomo). Graham affects the lives of these women drastically, especially when they let themselves be documented in his unusual (to put it mildly) video collection.

Some of the most revealing moments are captured on Graham's videotape. This is interesting in itself— sort of like metafiction. The medium of film is being used to examine itself. But even in these videotaped segments,



Laura San Giacomo plays the sensual Cynthia.

it is still the dialogue that is important. Graham poses sexual queries of the most intimate nature towards his subjects. Their responses are sometimes the most revealing parts of the movie. This is especially true when Ann turns the tables on Graham,

pointing the camera at him.

Underneath the camera eye, there is no room for dishonesty. When everything is lit up, nothing is left unexposed. See this movie because it helps you see yourself. It touches your rawest, most frazzled nerve.

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