

Interview with Bår Tyrmi and Dag Mykland

by [Dimitra Kouzi](#)

Bår Tyrmi, director and co-editor, 'Lie To Me'

Dag Mykland, producer and co-director, 'Lie To Me'

Dimitra Kouzi: What initially drew you to the story of the OneCoin scam?

Dag Mykland (D): It's actually quite a story. I remember the date well. It was 6 June 2020, and I was walking to the office, when I got a phone call from an unknown number. I picked up, and this guy just told me: 'My name is Bjørn Bjercke. I've sent you two messages on LinkedIn. Google me, and I'll call you back in 20 minutes.' I remember thinking: 'Who the hell is this?'

Bår Tyrmi (B): Yes, I remember you phoned me just after that. We both googled and decided this was extremely interesting.

D: That phone call sent us straight down the OneCoin rabbit hole!

Bjørn Bjercke is a central character. How did you gain his trust and convince him to participate in the documentary?

B: We had previously made two other feature docs on blockchain technology: 'The Bitcoin Experiment' in 2015 and 'The Code of Trust' in 2019. They both screened on the national broadcaster NRK, and Bjørn had watched them. He liked our approach to the technology and how we made documentaries. He basically chose us to make the film about his story.

D: It was how we portrayed and explained crypto technology that caught his attention. I guess making hundreds of movies for educational purposes back in the day really paid off.

'Lie to Me' follows Bjørn Bjercke for over three years. What were the biggest challenges in capturing his journey in terms of your or other people's safety? Did you as filmmakers ever feel unsafe or under threat?

D: Bjørn has received serious threats to himself and his family, and is still living at a secret address. This meant we could never disclose the real locations when filming, and we had to keep the shooting dates and places secret.

B: I remember meeting Jamie Bartlett with Bjørn in London. He is the journalist behind the award-winning BBC podcast 'The Missing Cryptoqueen,' and has been researching the OneCoin case for years. He had his doubts whether Bjørn was exaggerating the security issues. But after Jamie started receiving threats himself, he told us he was so happy to be protected by the BBC. That made him think how brave Bjørn was to stand up to these people.

D: We have not received threats. But when we went to the Stockholm event in 2022 and confronted the OneCoin leaders, they were quite angry with us for spreading 'lies.' But it's really Bjørn, Jonatan, Duncan, Layla, Daniel, and Amjad who have been the brave ones. And for us as documentarists, such discoveries are golden!

How did you distinguish the truth from all those lies while doing the research?

D: That is really difficult because the information about OneCoin comes from so many different sources: social media, blogs, online newspapers, court documents, emails, chat groups... There are so many stakeholders. Some want to clear their name, some want their money back, some want to keep on scamming, some want to bring criminals to justice. They all have their own side to the story.

B: You have to double-check the information. When the same facts appear in different places, different sources and stakeholders, you can kind of conclude that they are true. It's very time-consuming, and you can never be one hundred per cent sure that what you've found is true. You have to go for what is plausible and most likely to be true.

D: I remember us saying, 'It's hard to spot a scam in a room full of liars.' That was our working motto while researching this story. But after working on it for more than three years, we have formed quite a good picture of what really happened.

The film explores the psychology behind the scam. Can you elaborate on the specific techniques used by OneCoin to manipulate investors?

D: The people behind OneCoin were very clever; you have to give it to them. It was the first scam that really combined crypto with multi-level marketing. At a scale never seen before. Erica says in our film, 'Not only are you gonna get rich, but if you get your friend to invest, you'll get loads more money, and if you get other people to invest, you'll get lots more money.' It really hit people in a psychological weak spot. That, combined with the insecurity and hype around Bitcoin's investment potential – it really hit hard.

B: The combination of social psychology with branding, group and cult mentality, and prospects of getting rich quick was brilliant. If you just add a bit of scarcity or exclusivity to it, it creates a massive FOMO (fear of missing out). It's all very emotional; it gets you hooked. And that cocktail spread like wildfire.

In terms of storytelling, can you elaborate on the specific techniques used to build the story?

B: A challenge with 'Lie to Me' was that it is a complex, multi-character story. It stretches over a period of eight years, and the starting point of the film is in the middle of that timeline. But to fully understand who these people are and the plot, we take leaps forward and backward in time... We worked a lot with the narrative structure, when to provide and when to withhold information. Our editor, Jo Eldøen, has really done a fantastic job structuring the film.

We wanted to keep our audience in suspense throughout the 90 minutes, and make them feel the same way as we did while we worked with the film. When we thought we knew where the story was going, a new surprise would pop up out of nowhere. It is a real rollercoaster!

That emotionality was one of the things we tried to bring to the film through the use of archive footage and graphics.

D: It's been a thrilling ride for sure. We also worked with the scriptwriter Siw Rajendram Eliassen as a consultant for the narrative. She really helped us figure out the main sentences of what we were looking into. That helped us when we had to make decisions on the fly.

B: I remember her saying, 'Somebody has to die in the fourth act.'

Does anyone die?

D: I guess you have to watch the film to find out.

The banker Duncan Arthur, a former OneCoin insider, is also featured. How did his perspective contribute to the film's narrative?

D: Duncan has been extremely important for the film. On one hand, he gave us a lot of inside information we could use to verify the actual story. He also made us realise that this story is kind of a tragedy for everybody involved, including the people behind it. Everybody loses on a scam like this.

On the other hand, his dubious persona impersonates the OneCoin scam, in a way. He's selling, funny, open, and you kind of want to trust him – but can you?

The documentary highlights the international reach of the OneCoin scam. How did you approach filming across different countries?

B: The OneCoin scam is global, so we soon realised we would have to travel. We would research online, and reach out to people that had expressed interesting views in chat rooms or online publications. Sometimes it would take months to get a reply. A lot of people have been hesitant to participate. It is quite an undertaking to come forward in a case like this. It was also challenging because we never offered sign-off fees to participate in our film as many other production companies do. We wanted people to talk with us for the right reasons.

D: But when a person finally agreed, we would act fast to secure the shoot before they change their mind. This has been quite risky, economically, because we are a small production company on a low budget. Luckily most trips ended in solid stories and have ended up in the final edit.

'Lie to Me' is troubling because the scam persists despite being exposed. What do you hope viewers will learn from this aspect of the story?

B: Even if it can be shameful to realise that you have been scammed, it is never too late to pull out. Too many people continue just because they do not want to realise that they have been wrong.

D: It's sad to hear and see all these people who have lost money but still have hope. I guess when you're too far down a scam like this, it's sometimes easier to accept another lie than to face the truth.

You mentioned the film utilises graphics and archive footage. Can you give some examples of how you chose them and how these elements enhance the storytelling?

B: We wanted to reflect some of the tackiness and larger-than-life nature of the whole OneCoin environment in the visual style of the film. The OneCoin people live on lies, and that is reflected in how they present themselves. Gold, champagne, fast cars, Hollywood glam... but in a tacky way. This has inspired us in choosing the archive and the use of stock footage, and editing the sequences as compact film trailers.

D: Internally, we have referred to the archive sequences as 'film-poems.' We are not so concerned to illustrate exactly *what* the different persons in the film are talking about, but more about finding the feeling and deeper message in what they say.

The production spanned three and a half years. Were there any surprising discoveries or developments during filming?

D: Too many! Basically we set out to make a retrospective film about a fake cryptocurrency already exposed as a scam, with the people behind it in jail or missing. Yet we ended up following an ongoing scam for more than three years... so the film was full of surprising discoveries for us. Even now, there's new developments in the case against the leaders of OneCoin. This story never ceases to surprise us.

How did you work together as the film's two directors?

B: Dag and I have been working together for almost 15 years, and for the last 10 years we have run the Hacienda production house together. In most productions, we cooperate on scriptwriting, production, directing, and editing. We have a saying that no ideas are too small, irrelevant, or crazy to be discussed.

Investigative documentaries are hard and expensive to make. What would make your work easier?

D: We're lucky to have a wide range of funding opportunities in Norway. But working with investigative documentaries, the lines between development stage and production are often blurry. It's an ongoing process and story, and you never know what comes next – you simply have to be aware and throw yourself at what you believe is important to catch on camera. We all know shooting days are expensive, and I believe having access to more of the film's total budget earlier in the process would make it easier and less financially risky for small production houses such as Hacienda. However, I must

also give credit to some of the consultants at Norwegian Film institute and Sørnorsk Film Centre, who have been with us in every step. Especially how they are so open and helpful in creating the best story by adjusting budget, production plan, partnering in narrative and plot-talks along the way.

The documentary has already been acquired by TVE, NRK, SVT, and Al Jazeera. What is your vision for the film's future?

D: We hope the film can be screened in more festivals in North and South-America, Europe, and Asia. The topic is global, so I hope it would attract an audience that either wants to watch it or perhaps *needs* to watch it.

The ambition is that when financial opportunities like OneCoin or any other scheme come along, you're able to see the red flags and keep away.

Looking back, is there anything you would have done differently in making this documentary?

B: There are always many things that could have been done differently. We should have aimed for a higher budget to allow ourselves more time in post-production. And there were some leads and possible shoots that we had to cancel for financial or risk reasons... Looking back, it would have made the film even more global.

'Lie to Me' goes beyond simply exposing a scam. What is the larger message you want audiences to take away?

D: If something looks like a rat, walks like a rat, and smells like a rat... it is probably a rat.

B: There are a lot of people and organisations that want our attention, time, money, and endorsement. We all need to be aware of the red flags. If something looks or sounds too good to be true, it probably is.