

The social network: a rhetorical analysis

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The Social Network Rhetorical Analysis

“The Social Network” is a movie directed by David Fincher and written by Aaron Sorkin to examine the birth of Facebook and to show the viewer the story that unraveled behind the scenes as Facebook quickly became famous. The story is revealed in flashbacks in between the two lawsuits that Mark was undergoing with his best friend Eduardo Saverin, co-founder of Facebook and capital provider to develop the company, and the Winklevoss twins who claim that Mark had stolen their idea. The film displays the themes of greed and the desire to be loved, most powerfully through the role of Mark Zuckerberg, (played by Jesse Eisenberg) a tortured and condescending computer genius who is focused on his desire to make Facebook “cool”. The themes are revealed through the portrayal of characters and the director’s choices involving the choice of actors and their acting, cinematography and dialogue.

The film starts off with the introduction of two characters, Mark Zuckerberg and his girlfriend, who would soon turn into an ex-girlfriend, Erica Albright. After the break up, Mark becomes upset and angry towards Erica, eventually leading him to create Facemash. com, a website that puts two girls next to each other, allowing male students to decide who they believe to be more attractive. His website becomes a huge hit widely throughout the campus in just a few hours. This website allows for him to become noticed by the Winklevoss twins, where they recruit him to be the programmer for their website Harvard Connections. This sparks Mark’s idea into creating Facebook, which leads to his lawsuit with the Winklevoss twins. As Mark had

begun to create the site, he created the page with his friend Eduardo's help. After the startup and the site quickly gained popularity, Eduardo pushed to monetize the site while Mark was strongly against it, afraid that it would make it "uncool". The two soon meet Sean Parker, a smooth genius who created Napster at the age of 19, who quickly becomes Mark's idol. After meeting Sean, Mark saw Eduardo to be expendable and had Eduardo sign a few papers which dilute his company shares. This eventually led to another lawsuit for Mark between him and his best friend. In the end of all of the lawsuits, Mark is seen alone in the deposition room, refreshing his Facebook page. The scenes could all be interpreted differently, as The authors of the book *Practices of Looking* states, "A single image can serve a multitude of purposes, appear in a range of settings, and mean different things to different people. The roles played by images are multiple, diverse, and complex" (Sturken 11). So this shortened summary is to give an objective view of the movie, before I dive deeper into analyzing the scenes.

In the first scene of Mark and Erica on a date, the audience is introduced to the two characters. Erica Albright is a smart and attractive girl that Mark dates. After Erica breaks up with Mark due to his condescending behavior and attitude, he swiftly runs back to his dorm room. As soon as he rushes into his dorm, Mark grabs a beer from his refrigerator and then automatically turns to his computer to fume about Erica's family and her physical attributes on his blog. Out of blind rage while drunk, he took a friend's idea on comparing people to farm animals and then ultimately created Facemash.com in just a few hours. The pace during this scene happens all very quickly to express the idea of how quickly the site became popular and due to that,

his blog became just as trendy, the same blog that was used to express his mean and hurtful words about Erica. The editing of the film was done so that in between the creation of Facemash and the partying, Erica finds out about the blog posts and boys on her hall make mean gestures regarding her bra size. His goal for this was to be noticed by Erica, to hurt her like she hurt him all the while still hoping that she would reconsider their break up. The scene changes to the deposition room, where Mark and Eduardo are discussing the events that unfolded with their lawyers. While everyone else is discussing the story of what's happened in the past with Facemash, Mark is distracted with the idea of Erica. This exemplifies that Mark's always had the desire to be accepted and loved by Erica, her being his ultimate goal when it all began.

Mark seems to always portray the desire for love as he seems to always be interested in Erica's well being and her opinions of him. In the scene where Mark and Eduardo are in a new pub, Mark notices Erica from across the room and approaches Erica, she visibly expresses her unhappiness to see Mark. When he speaks to her, he asks if she's heard about his new website, which she says has not. After hearing that she hasn't heard about his success, the first thing that he says to Eduardo is, " We have to expand" with a tortured look on his face. Then he gets his friends together and he says that he wants the story of facebook to go on BU's newspaper in exchange for him to offer 10 hours of free programming for BU students.

Mark continues to show his desire for love as when Sean speaks about a girl that he wanted in high school, Mark asks him, " Do you ever think about that

girl?" Showing that his main focus all along was to find approval from Erica. He still holds scars from Erica's break up, so he wonders if he would ever recover from the memory of her. Eduardo talks with Mark in the " offices" of Facebook in California, and the first thing that Mark brings up to Eduardo is about his girlfriend, Christy. Eduardo calls her crazy and psychotic, but Mark simply states, " Still, it's nice that you have a girlfriend." This scene implies that Mark has never fully gotten over the idea of being loved by another person in the way that he would have wished. As Facebook has become successful, Sean Parker mentions Ashley, an employee at Facebook, and Ashley's sister, which then Mark's attention and interest piqued a little. Mark's attention has always been focused on women, hoping to fill the hole that Erica had left behind. The movie makes a full circle around Mark's obsession with Erica, first beginning with how horrible he's been to Erica in the beginning of the film, to the end where Mark ends up sending a friend request to her, refreshing his page every second as he sits alone in the deposition room.

The theme of greed is prevalent throughout the film, beginning with embodiment from individual characters. Eduardo appears as a business savvy and a skillful professional and student. He's been pushing for monetizing the website ever since it's been widely successful on Harvard campus. He's been in search for sponsors from the start, all the while Mark didn't want to monetize it just yet as he believed that it would run the image of the site, " We know that it's cool. That's a priceless asset I'm not giving up."

The Winklevii twins (as Mark calls the pair), are the perfect examples of greed and entitlement. They come from an affluent and powerful family, giving them the sense of entitlement to everything. And as Mark had pointed out, “ The Winklevii aren’t suing me for intellectual property theft, they’re suing me because for the first time in their lives, things weren’t working out the way that they were supposed to for them.” And their sense of entitlement entwines with their greed, to be better and greater than anyone else. And when they saw that their website, Harvard Connections, was becoming less and less valuable with every passing moment that Facebook was up and running, they became furious as they realized that what they believed was rightfully theirs had been taken away from them. The twins used their money and power to achieve whatever they wanted, which also included a meeting with the president of the university, “ My brother and I, we pay tuition at this school, we carry a 3.9 GPA, we won trophies for this school, and we’ll be rowing in the olympics for this school, I want a goddamn meeting with the president.” When they met with the president of the university and saw that he was belittling their problems to a minor issue, the twins were livid, “ this isn’t petty larceny, this idea is potentially worth thousands of dollars!”

There is a constant theme of societal greed and popularity from the beginning of the film, where Mark expresses his desire to be accepted into a Final Club, an elite and exclusive club that members could only be invited to. Mark believed that to be accepted into one would mean that it would lead him to a “ better life” with more opportunities and access to people that he otherwise would have never been able to have access to before. Before Mark

discussed the creation of Facebook with Eduardo, Eduardo tells Mark that he's been "punched" by the Phoenix, one of the Final Clubs, Mark tries to put on a mask of happiness but his emotions betray him and his face scrunches up and he appears to be in deep thought until Eduardo asks him, again, what he wanted to talk to him about. They walk outside where Mark describes the idea and his plans for it. After the discussion, as Eduardo was walking back into the building Mark says, "It was probably a diversity thing, but so what." Through Mark's facial expressions and gestures and the dialogue between the two, Fincher and Sorkin suggest Mark's jealous towards Eduardo for being invited into a Final Club, all the while he had not. The second time Eduardo tells Mark about the Phoenix, he shrugs and says, "That's good. You should be proud of that. Don't worry if you don't make it any further" and then turns his back on him and sits back down and ignores him until Eduardo excuses himself.

Sean Parker appears as a smooth, intelligent and manipulative guy who understands Mark's feelings. His greed for money, popularity, and vengeance that could be gained from Facebook and Mark resides from his character the moment they meet. He knew that Mark had potential and he wanted to take advantage of him for his talents. Mark is invested in being "cool" and maintaining that image, which Sean agreed with. Believing that his newfound idol was "cool" and that there was something to be obtained from being around Sean, Mark quickly took up many of Sean's ideas and approaches to business. Sean was aware that Eduardo was skeptical about his intentions, so steered clear from Eduardo all the while feeding snide comments about Eduardo to Mark, creating small rifts at a time. "He should

be here right now.” Eduardo saw behind Sean’s facade, but Mark chose to ignore Eduardo as he was still obsessed with the idea of reaching the full potential of being “cool” and he believed that Sean was the only one who would be able to help him to reach the pinnacle of popularity. Using Mark’s rising popularity amongst investors and other companies, Sean uses him for vengeance. “You’re twenty minutes late...Case equity is going to pitch you. You’re going to nod and then you’re going to say, ‘Which of you is Mitch Manningham?’ and he’s going to say, ‘I am. I’m Mitch Manningham. And you say, ‘Sean Parker says, ‘F**k. You.’ Walk out.” Sean exemplifies greediness of his reputation, and ultimately uses Mark to get back to those who had not been so favorable to him. Sean’s obsession with maintaining a perfect reputation creates for him to control everything Mark does, eventually even controlling every conversation that Mark has.

Mark displays his societal greed and obsession with popularity once again during the later parts of the film when Eduardo freezes the bank account that was linked to Facebook, which then Mark calls Eduardo, emphasizing Mark’s greed to be popular and to be liked. “Do you like being nobody? Do you like being a joke? Do you want to go back to that?” Mark becomes increasingly obsessed with the social class and his place in it, exemplifying characteristics of Sean, who he has been idolizing since the moment the two have met.

Mark’s greed ultimately led him to his downfall regarding relationships, along with many others who exemplified greediness. Mark’s fixation for status and wealth deprived him of the only real relationship that he had with Eduardo. “

"I was your only friend. You had one friend." Sorkin demonstrates how far Mark had come from the beginning of Facebook with the idea of farm animals as it is constantly noted throughout the film. When he first started off as the nerdy college student that didn't get the girl that he wanted, to be the youngest billionaire there is. Fincher and Sorkin allow for the audience to feel a bit sorry for Mark as he sits alone at the end, explaining to the only person there, Marylin, that he's not a bad guy, that he was just drunk, angry and stupid when things had unraveled. When even Marylin leaves, Mark is left with nothing but his computer and the website that's led him to be where he is at the end. The song at the end of the film is "Baby you're a rich man. How does it feel to be one of the beautiful people. Now that you know who you really are. What do you want to be." But Mark is left all alone, and we could see that although he had reached the status that he wanted, in the end, everything that he's worked for, to become "cool" and wealthy, it's left him all alone.

These feelings are innate in all of us, and it's only natural to desire love and to feel greed at times. There is a psychological need for a connection and in an environment without such could affect the individual (Cacioppo 4). And although all of the characters in the film embodied these human qualities, Mark exemplified them more strongly than others. Fincher and Sorkin point out something that's really important for all humans to remember, that in the end of the day, if there's no one that you love to share the fame and wealth with, then there's no real meaning behind it all. As humans, we desire and need human connection and to be without it, we're just left with the shell of a human body.