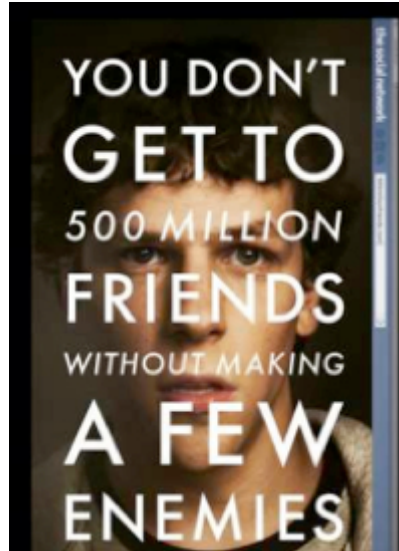




Written by [Eric Egan](#) on October 3, 2010

The Social Network: A Picture of the Face Behind Facebook

In early 2004, Mark Zuckerberg founded Thefacebook.com in a dorm room at the not-so-humble nursery of the elite, Harvard University. The world, for better or worse, has not been the same since. Nor is it likely to be for quite some time to come. Flash forward to today. Thefacebook.com is now simply Facebook.com and, with over 500 million members, has permeated nearly every aspect of modern-day life. The only untouched reaches of the 21st century are either rebellious holdouts, grandma and grandpa, clueless parents, or those understandably leery of what the privacy implications of this technological behemoth may be. It was only a matter of time for the site and its founder to receive their very own silver screen treatment.



Directed by David Fincher, *The Social Network* charts the rise of Zuckerberg from obscure Harvard undergraduate nerd hungry for acceptance to alpha CEO sitting triumphantly atop a mountain of money that rivals the highest cash peaks in Silicon Valley.

The film opens in a crowded college bar with a rapid-fire talkfest between Zuckerberg and his girlfriend at the time, Erica Albright. The interchange exhibits Zuckerberg's amazing ability to carry on multiple conversations at once, switching among them at will, thus confusing Albright to exhaustion. The opening discussion also exhibits Zuckerberg's inability to connect on a human level. By the end of the five-minute conversation, he has driven Albright to break up with him, managing to insult not only her inferior education and upbringing, but also her sexual reputation — and he can't understand why she is leaving him. She informs him that he will go through life assuming that girls don't like him because he is a computer nerd, but that they actually won't like him because he is an alternative title for a donkey coupled with the entrance to a rabbit's home.

The rest of the film is an expertly handled biopic that is an expansion of the thesis of this opening conversation — namely that Zuckerberg is a borderline obsessive compulsive driven by a singular desire for acceptance, whose inability to connect with people will insure that he is, ultimately, alone. The irony could be cut with a knife. The man who will change the way people connect can not connect.

Jesse Eisenberg's performance as Zuckerberg is oozing with snide sarcasm. He comes off as a boorish neurotic fueled by a pathological need to prove his worth to the prestigious Harvard clubs that turned him down. Zuckerberg is smarter than everyone else and he makes sure they know it. And yet, for all of Zuckerberg's jerkiness, there is something slightly endearing in that he never seems completely happy with himself and at least makes an attempt to suffer the company of fools. It's not much but it's enough to make watching his rise to the top of the dot-com milk jug, while simultaneously burning all of his



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friends, fascinating and bittersweet instead of simply annoying. In spite of himself, Zuckerberg is sort of likeable. The final shot is of him sitting at a computer — alone. He sends a friend request to Albright, whom he hasn't seen for years, and tragically refreshes the page over and over again hoping for a confirmation of her acceptance. He has become a slave to his own creation.

The film successfully captures the feeling of just how surreal it must be for a 20-something college drop-out to helm the company that would make Google stand up and take notice. The notion is ridiculous. In fact, that a still-living 26-year-old should have a biopic made about his life is perhaps even more ridiculous. Fincher and his crew have crafted a film that has just the right touch of bizarre to live up to all of this ridiculousness. The Winklevoss twins, Tyler and Cameron, have a slight *Alice in Wonderland* feel in their comical ineptitude and their ability to finish each other's sentences. In a pitch-perfect performance, Justin Timberlake plays sleazy Silicon Valley wizard Sean Parker, the smooth-talking, cocaine-sniffing, womanizing founder of Napster. The film may just have The Academy standing up and taking notice come awards season.

While all of this makes for smashingly good entertainment, the source material must be kept in mind. The film is based on the book *The Accidental Billionaires: The Founding of Facebook: A Tale of Sex, Money, Genius, and Betrayal*, by Ben Mezrich. The title of the source material should be enough to make any unflattering look at Zuckerberg suspicious at best. It smacks of yellow journalism. That Mezrich used Eduardo Saverin as his primary source for a book that is irresponsibly categorized as non-fiction means the film could border on slander. Saverin is a man that who obviously has a dog in the fight — he and Zuckerberg have sued each other numerous times over claims of who did what to whom and when. Unsurprisingly, Saverin comes off as the most sympathetic character in the film.

All this is not to say that Zuckerberg is likely Mr. Goodie Two-Shoes. *Businessinsider.com* has done an expert job separating fact from fiction in an [ongoing series of articles](#) that take an unbiased look at the history of Facebook and Zuckerberg. There are certain past transgressions by Zuckerberg that suggest that, in the past at least, he has lacked a sufficient respect for privacy. This is a huge concern as he has potentially greater access to a certain amount of private information of more people than any other man in the history of the world. For a quick rundown of the inaccuracies in the film, check out [The Ten Most Glaring Lies In The Social Network](#).

I highly recommend *The Social Network* as a piece of expertly crafted filmmaking, but before running out to see it, I suggest two things. First, get a babysitter, because not only is *Network's* PG-13 rating justified for drug use and some sexuality, but the kids would likely be bored to death by a subject that they probably wouldn't understand. Second, look into the history behind Facebook and the face behind Facebook for yourself. Whether we like it or not, Facebook.com is here to stay, and as Jessi Hempel, writing about *The Social Network's* source material for *Cnnmoney.com*, put it, "The story may be more fiction than fact, [but] it may well take its place in American culture as Facebook's definitive founding myth, particularly if Hollywood gives it the full treatment."

Well. That story has now been given Hollywood's full treatment and that story's chance of cementing itself as "Facebook's definitive founding myth" has just been exponentially increased. It would behoove us to not ignore it.



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