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Inquiry Two

*Using Collaborative Rhetoric to Capture an Audience*

The documentary *I Am* is about a man’s quest for truth. Tom Shadyac is the director, narrator, and subject of the film. He searches all over the world asking the question, “What is wrong with the world and what can we do to fix it?” He talks to influential people from many different backgrounds to find his answer and prove his point. Shadyac believes that the major social issues we are facing today, like poverty, environmental crisis, war, and greed aren’t actually the problem. He says, “These are not the problems, they are the symptoms of a larger endemic problem.” The film *I Am* explores many view points on the same idea; society has coaxed humans away from their cooperative and loving nature, and the way to help right the world, is to change yourself.

With Shadyac being the director and also the main subject, the film has an interesting dynamic. By being the subject he adds a strong element of pathos, changing the relationship with his audience. The audience feels attached because they get to share in his journey, and his story is very personal. After a biking accident left him incapacitated and isolated from the world, he accepted death. Shadyac made this film his mission and possible final words. The other reason why his choice to be director and focus is important is because he establishes very early on that he has no credibility in the subject of the documentary. He was a director and writer of comedy films and lived a high end Hollywood life- not exactly a poster child for humanitarianism. He does, however, establish character by being very transparent and explaining his situation. He knows that somewhere along the way he missed what living is all about and is seeking to find it. As a viewer of the film you feel connected to Shadyac, because he is a person looking for answers just like yourself, not a spiritual guru who lives a perfect life. Shadyac’s decision to be the subject as well as director establishes his ethos, because as he chooses to embark on the journey with the audience, he is proving that the only way to change the world is to change yourself.

Although Tom himself doesn’t have scientific ethos in the subject matter, he works hard to establish credibility on the topic. By interviewing carefully selected people from around the world he finds ways to support his claim. Philosophers, religious leaders, activists, and others all have the same thing to say, just in different ways. For me the most inspirational man was Desmond Tutu, an activist and Noble Peace Prize winner who is renowned for speaking on the behalf of oppressed people all over the world. Other people with strong ethos in the film include world leader in sustainable ecology Dr. Suzuki, heart scientist Rollin McCraty, and antiwar activist Howard Zimm. The repetition in the argument builds trust and solidifies the ideas. All of the people Shadyac chooses to interview support the idea of individual people making a conscious effort to live differently, working collectively towards a brighter future for everyone.

Logos is also purposefully placed throughout the film, giving it a more factual basis. Shadyac talks to multiple scientists to assist his argument. The film looks at actual human nature, not just the ideals of today’s world. Through the study of animals and evolution, even refuting the commonly accepted ideal of “survival of the fittest”, they make the claim that humans are sympathetic and cooperative by nature, not ruthless competitors. Another scientific mind brings up the brain and something called the Mirror Neuron. The Mirror Neuron is the part of the brain that causes you to feel what someone else is feeling. For example when someone is hurt or sad, the feelings get reflected in yourself and you “feel for them”. The idea, although easy enough to believe, was more than proved when Shadyac chose to show a video clip I will never forget. The clip was old and appeared to be a magic show or some sort of demonstration. There was a man standing behind a woman who was sitting down and I was utterly unprepared for what happened next. He reached down and ever so calmly sliced her eye completely in half. Two minutes prior to seeing this clip I had no idea what a Mirror Neuron was, but I have never felt anything more real. Shadyac, to say the least, made his point. I cannot get the image out of my mind and still have a strong reaction to even the thought of this happening. The idea was to prove that this a real reaction in humans, and that it has been preserved through human adaptation for a reason; to keep the supportive and caring spirit that has shaped human evolution alive.

The effectiveness of Shaydac’s argument does not come from use of ethos, pathos, and logos independently, but rather from the collaborative use of these rhetorical devices. The facts are presented by distinguished professionals in a stirringly optimistic fashion that inspires the audience. This effects the whole situation because you have facts from credible sources to lean on and you feel emotionally invested. Shadyac’s argument that a better world is up to us to create is effectively communicated by getting the audience’s head and heart involved.

Shadyac’s audience is very large, as this film was intended for not just Americans, but the whole human race. The film is currently being shown in theaters in the United Kingdom and is out on DVD in Germany. In a time where the overall human condition seems to be deteriorating, *I Am* calls people to act. The purpose of the film is to shed light on social injustice and other things that ail the world that most people choose to ignore. Although this film could be potentially discouraging and depressing, instead it is presented as an encouragement to right the wrong. By using ethos, pathos, and logos Shadyac movingly expresses his argument that if individual people choose to live differently, it can make the world a better place for everyone living in it.