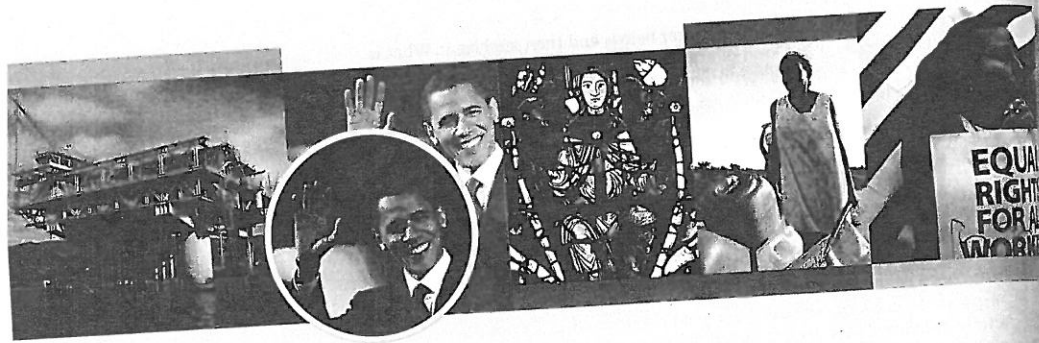


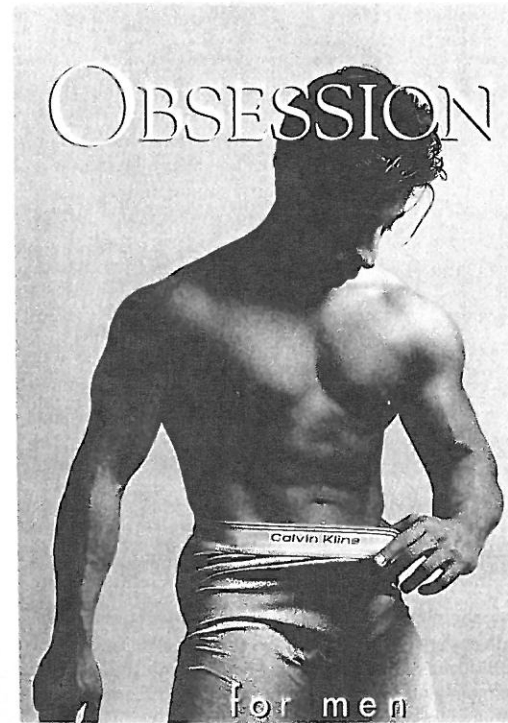
2

Arguments Based on Emotion: Pathos



What makes you glance at a magazine ad long enough to notice a product? These days, it's probably an image or boldfaced words promising pleasure (a Caribbean beach), excitement (extreme diving on Maui), beauty (a model in low-rise jeans), technology (a glossy high-tech phone), or good health (more models). In the blink of an eye, ads can appeal to your emotions, intrigue you, and perhaps even seduce you. Look closer, and you might find logical reasons given for buying a product or service. But would you have even gotten there without an emotional tug to pull you into the page?

Emotional appeals (sometimes called *appeals to pathos*) are powerful tools for influencing what people think and believe. We all make decisions—even important ones—based on our feelings. We rent funky apartments or buy worn-out cars because we fall in love with some



This image parodies ads that exploit one of the most powerful of emotional appeals.

small detail. On impulse, we collect whole racks of shirts or shoes that we're later too embarrassed to wear. We date and maybe even marry people that everyone else seemed to know are wrong for us—and sometimes it works out just fine.

That may be because we're not computers that use cost-and-benefit analyses to choose our friends or make our political decisions. Feelings belong in our lives. There's a powerful moment in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* when the soldier Macduff learns that his wife and children have been executed by the power-mad king. A well-meaning friend urges Macduff to "dispute it like a man." Macduff responds gruffly, "But I must also feel it as a man" (*Mac.* 4.3.219–21). As a writer, you must learn like Macduff to appreciate legitimate emotions, particularly when you want to influence the public. When you hear that formal or academic arguments should rely solely on facts, remember that facts alone often won't carry the day, even for a worthy cause. The civil rights struggle of the 1960s is a particularly good example of a movement that persuaded people equally by means of the reasonableness and the passion of its claims.

You don't have to look hard for less noble campaigns that are fueled with emotions such as hatred, envy, and greed. Democracies suffer when people use emotional arguments (and related fallacies such as personal attacks and name-calling) to drive wedges between groups, making them fearful or hateful. For that reason alone, writers should not use emotional appeals casually. (For more about emotional fallacies, see Chapter 17.)

Understanding How Emotional Arguments Work

You already know that words, images, and sounds can arouse emotions. In fact, the stirrings they generate are often physical. You've likely had the clichéd "chill down the spine" or felt something in the "pit of the stomach" when a speaker (or photograph or event) hits precisely the right note. On such occasions, it's likely that the speaker has you and people like you in mind and is seeking to rouse an emotion that will make you well disposed toward a particular message.

But sometimes speakers are called on to address not a particular group (such as a gathering of political supporters) but an entire nation or even the entire world. Such was the case during World War II when Prime Minister Winston Churchill spoke to the British House of Commons on June 4, 1940, seeking to raise British spirits and strengthen the country's resolve in resisting the German attacks:

We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. We shall fight in France, we shall fight on the seas and oceans, we shall fight with



Hearing Barack Obama speak following a primary victory in Wisconsin, journalist Chris Matthews declared, "My, I felt this thrill going up my leg. I mean, I don't have that too often." Even some professionals can't resist a good emotional appeal.

growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills. We shall never surrender.

—Winston Churchill, "We Shall Fight on the Beaches"

When writers and speakers find the words and images that evoke certain emotions in people, they might also move their audiences to sympathize with ideas that they connect to those feelings and even to act on them. Make people be aware of how much they owe to others, and they'll acknowledge that debt; persuade people to hate an enemy, and they'll rally against it; help people to imagine suffering, and they'll strive to relieve it; make people feel secure or happy (or insecure or unhappy), and they'll buy products that promise such good feelings. In 2008, Barack Obama jump-started an entire presidential campaign by appealing to a single emotion—hope.

Arguments based on emotion probably count more when you're persuading than when you're arguing. When arguing, you might use reasons and evidence to convince readers something is true—for instance, that preserving wetlands is a worthy environmental goal. When persuading, however, you want people to take action—to join an environmental boycott, contribute money to an organization dedicated to wetlands protection, or write a well-researched op-ed piece for the local paper about a local marsh that is threatened by development.

The practical differences between being convinced and acting on a conviction can be enormous. Your readers may agree that contributing to charity is a noble act, but this conviction may not be enough to persuade them to part with their spare change. You need a spur that is sharper than logic, and that's when emotion might kick in. You can embarrass readers into contributing to a good cause (*Change a child's life for the price of a pizza*), make them feel the impact of their gift (*Imagine the smile on that little child's face*), or tell them a moving story (*In a tiny village in Central America . . .*). We've all seen such techniques work.

When Nancy from Ann Arbor, Michigan, called into NPR's *Talk of the Nation*, she used emotional appeals to persuade others to treat online harassment as a serious issue.

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A March 20, 2008, cover of *Rolling Stone* presented Barack Obama as an emblem of hope, even giving him an aura. Later that election year (July 21, 2008), a *New Yorker* cover presented him and his wife, Michelle, in a different light, suggesting how his opponents would depict the Obamas to evoke the politics of another emotion—fear.



Not Just Words

Take a look at this image, which at first glance depicts the familiar stars and stripes of the American flag. But a second glance reveals corporate logos rather than stars. Study the picture carefully and write for two or three minutes about the emotions that the image arouses in you. Do you respond first to the flag and then to the logos? What clash of emotional appeals do you see here, and how do you feel about that conflict? Try your hand at creating one or two possible titles or captions for this image.

Using Emotions to Build Bridges

You may sometimes want to use emotions to connect with readers to assure them that you understand their experiences or, to use President Bill Clinton's famous line, "feel their pain." Such a bridge is especially important when you're writing about matters that readers regard as sensitive. Before they'll trust you, they'll want assurances that you understand the issues in depth. If you strike the right emotional note, you'll establish an important connection. That's what Apple founder Steve Jobs does in a 2005 commencement address in which he tells the audience that he doesn't have a fancy speech, just three stories from his life:

My second story is about love and loss. I was lucky. I found what I loved to do early in life. Woz [Steve Wozniak] and I started Apple in my parents' garage when I was twenty. We worked hard and in ten years, Apple had grown from just the two of us in a garage into a \$2 billion company with over 4,000 employees. We'd just released our finest creation, the Macintosh, a year earlier, and I'd just turned thirty, and then I got fired. How can you get fired from a company you started? Well, as Apple grew, we hired someone who I thought was very talented to run the company with me, and for the first year or so, things went well. But then our visions of the future began to diverge, and eventually we had a falling out. When we did, our board of directors sided with him, and so at thirty, I was out, and very publicly out. . . .

I didn't see it then, but it turned out that getting fired from Apple was the best thing that could have ever happened to me. The heaviness of being successful was replaced by the lightness of being a beginner again, less sure about everything. It freed me to enter one of the most creative periods in my life. During the next five years I started a company named NeXT, another company named Pixar and fell in love with an amazing woman who would become my wife. Pixar went on to create the world's first computer-animated feature film, *Toy Story*, and is now the most successful animation studio in the world.

—Steve Jobs, "You've Got to Find What You Love, Jobs Says"

In no obvious way is Jobs's recollection a formal argument. But it prepares his audience to accept the advice he'll give later in his speech, at least partly because he's speaking from meaningful personal experiences.

A more obvious way to build an emotional tie is simply to help readers identify with your experiences. If, like Georgina Kleege, you were

Kathy Freston appeals to her readers' feelings about the environment and their responsibility to it to build bridges to her audience.

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blind and wanted to argue for more sensible attitudes toward blind people, you might ask readers in the first paragraph of your argument to confront their prejudices. Here Kleege, a writer and college instructor, makes an emotional point by telling a story:

I tell the class, "I am legally blind." There is a pause, a collective intake of breath. I feel them look away uncertainly and then look back. After all, I just said I couldn't see. Or did I? I had managed to get there on my own—no cane, no dog, none of the usual trappings of blindness. Eyeing me askance now, they might detect that my gaze is not quite focused. . . . They watch me glance down, or towards the door where someone's coming in late. I'm just like anyone else.

—Georgina Kleege, "Call It Blindness"

Given that the way she narrates the first day of class, readers are as likely to identify with the students as with Kleege, imagining themselves sitting in a classroom, facing a sightless instructor, confronting their own prejudices about the blind. Kleege wants to put them on edge emotionally.

Let's consider another rhetorical situation: how do you win over an audience when the logical claims that you're making are likely to go against what many in the audience believe? Once again, a slightly risky appeal to emotions on a personal level may work. That's the tack that Michael Pollan takes in bringing readers to consider that "the great moral struggle of our time will be for the rights of animals." In introducing his lengthy exploratory argument, Pollan uses personal experience to appeal to his audience:

The first time I opened Peter Singer's *Animal Liberation*, I was dining alone at the Palm, trying to enjoy a rib-eye steak cooked medium-rare. If this sounds like a good recipe for cognitive dissonance (if not indigestion), that was sort of the idea. Preposterous as it might seem to supporters of animal rights, what I was doing was tantamount to reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on a plantation in the Deep South in 1852.

—Michael Pollan, "An Animal's Place"

In creating a vivid image of his first encounter with Singer's book, Pollan's opening builds a bridge between himself as a person trying to enter into the animal rights debate in a fair and open-minded, if still skeptical, way and readers who might be passionate about either side of this argument.

A visual version of Michael Pollan's rhetorical situation



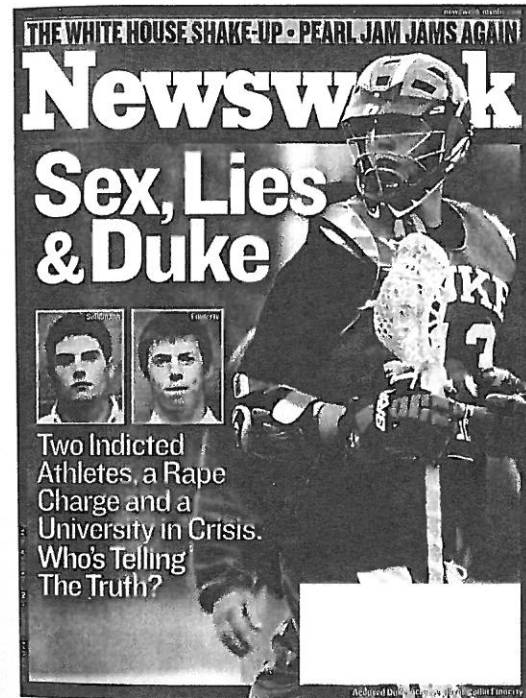
Using Emotions to Sustain an Argument

You can also use emotional appeals to make logical claims stronger or more memorable. That is the way that photographs and other images add power to arguments. In a TV attack ad, the scowling black-and-white photograph of a political opponent may do as much damage as the claim that he bought his home on the cheap from a financier convicted of fraud. Or the attractive skier in a spot for lip balm may make us yearn for brisk, snowy winter days. The technique is tricky, however. Lay on too much emotion—especially those like outrage, pity, or shame, which make people uncomfortable—and you may offend the very audiences you hoped to convince.

But sometimes a strong emotion such as anger adds energy to a passage, as it does when writer Stuart Taylor and history professor K. C. Johnson react in outrage when Mike Nifong, a prosecutor charged with deliberately lying about evidence in an emotionally charged rape case at Duke University, received only a twenty-four-hour sentence for his misconduct. In an op-ed in the *Washington Post*, the authors review the wider dimensions of the biased prosecution and turn their ire especially on faculty who were too eager to pillory three white student athletes at Duke for an alleged crime against a minority woman that subsequent

investigations proved never occurred. As you read the following excerpt, notice how the authors' use of emotional language might lead some readers to share their anger and others to resent it.

To be sure, it was natural to assume at first that Nifong had a case. Why else would he confidently declare the players guilty? But many academics and journalists continued to presume guilt months after



What is the emotional impact of a *Newsweek* cover like this one, which appeared on May 1, 2006, following initial indictments in what became known as the Duke University rape case? Does the magazine seem to be taking sides?

massive evidence of innocence poured into the public record. Indeed, some professors persisted in attacks even after the three defendants were declared innocent in April by North Carolina Attorney General Roy Cooper—an almost unheard-of event.

Brushing aside concern with “the ‘truth’ . . . about the incident,” as one put it, these faculty ideologues just changed their indictments from rape to drunkenness (hardly a rarity in college); exploiting poor black women (the players had expected white and Hispanic strippers); and being born white, male and prosperous.

This shameful conduct was rooted in a broader trend toward subordinating facts and evidence to faith-based ideological posturing. Worse, the ascendant ideology, especially in academia, is an obsession with the fantasy that oppression of minorities and women by “privileged” white men remains rampant in America. Its crude stereotyping of white men, especially athletes, resembles old-fashioned racism and sexism.

—Stuart Taylor and K. C. Johnson, “Guilty in the Duke Case”

In using language this way, writers can generate emotions by presenting arguments in their starkest terms, stripped of qualifications or subtleties. Readers or listeners are confronted with core issues or important choices and asked to consider the consequences.

It’s difficult to gauge how much emotion will work in a given argument. Some issues—such as racism, rape, abortion, and gun control—provoke strong feelings and, as a result, are often argued on emotional terms. But even issues that seem deadly dull—such as funding for Medicare and Social Security—can be argued passionately when proposed changes in these programs are set in human terms: cut benefits and Grandma will have to eat cat food; don’t cut benefits and Social Security will surely go broke, leaving nothing for later generations of seniors. Both alternatives might scare people into paying enough attention to take political action.

Using Humor

Humor has always played an important role in argument, sometimes as the sugar that makes the medicine go down. You can slip humor into an argument to put readers at ease, thereby making them more open to a proposal you have to offer. It’s hard to say no when you’re laughing. Humor also makes otherwise sober people suspend their judgment and even their prejudices, perhaps because the surprise and naughtiness of

wit are combusive: they provoke laughter or smiles, not reflection. That may be why TV sitcoms like *Sex and the City* and *Will & Grace* became popular with mainstream audiences, despite their sometimes controversial subjects. Similarly, it’s possible to make a point through humor that might not work in more sober writing. Consider the gross stereotypes about men that humorist Dave Barry presents here, tongue in cheek, as he explains why people don’t read the instructions that come with the products they buy:

The third reason why consumers don’t read manuals is that many consumers are men, and we men would no more read a manual than we would ask directions, because this would be an admission that the person who wrote the manual has a bigger . . . OK, a bigger grasp of technology than we do. We men would rather hook up our new DVD player in such a way that it ignites the DVDs and shoots them across the room—like small flaming UFOs—than admit that the manual-writer possesses a more manly technological manhood than we do.

—Dave Barry, “Owners’ Manual Step No. 1:
Bang Head against the Wall”

Our laughter testifies to a kernel of truth in Barry’s observations and makes us more likely to agree with his conclusions.

A writer or speaker can use humor to deal with especially sensitive issues. For example, sports commentator Bob Costas, given the honor of eulogizing the great baseball player Mickey Mantle, couldn’t ignore problems in Mantle’s life. So he argues for Mantle’s greatness by admitting the man’s weaknesses indirectly through humor:

It brings to mind a story Mickey liked to tell on himself and maybe some of you have heard it. He pictured himself at the pearly gates, met by St. Peter who shook his head and said, “Mick, we checked the record. We know some of what went on. Sorry, we can’t let you in. But before you go, God wants to know if you’d sign these six dozen baseballs.”

—Bob Costas, “Eulogy for Mickey Mantle”

Similarly, politicians use humor to admit problems or mistakes they couldn’t acknowledge in any other way. Here, for example, is President George W. Bush at the 2004 Radio and TV Correspondents Dinner discussing his much-mocked intellect:

Those stories about my intellectual capacity do get under my skin. You know, for a while I even thought my staff believed it. There on my schedule first thing every morning it said, “Intelligence briefing.”

—George W. Bush

Charles M. Blow begins his blog posting about who posts on social networking sites with a joke about how old his kids think he is—a move that will build bridges with many parents who might read the blog.

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Not all humor is well intentioned. In fact, among the most powerful forms of emotional argument is ridicule—humor aimed at a particular target. Eighteenth-century poet and critic Samuel Johnson was known for his stinging and humorous put-downs, such as this comment to an aspiring writer: “Your manuscript is both good and original, but the part that is good is not original and the part that is original is not good.” Today, even bumper stickers can be vehicles for succinct arguments:



But ridicule is a two-edged sword that requires a deft hand to wield it. Humor that reflects bad taste discredits a writer completely, as does ridicule that misses its mark. Unless your target deserves assault and you can be very funny, it's usually better to steer clear of humor.

Using Arguments Based on Emotion

You don't want to play puppetmaster with people's emotions when you write arguments, but it's a good idea to spend some time early in your writing or designing process thinking about how you want readers to feel as they consider your persuasive claims. For example, would readers of your editorial about campus traffic policies be more inclined to agree with you if you made them envy faculty privileges, or would arousing their sense of fairness work better? What emotional appeals might persuade meat eaters to consider a vegan diet—or vice versa? Would sketches of stage props on a Web site persuade people to buy a season ticket to the theater, or would you spark more interest by featuring pictures of costumed performers?

Consider, too, the effect that a story can have on readers. Writers and journalists routinely use what are called *human-interest stories* to give presence to issues or arguments. You can do the same, using a particular incident to evoke sympathy, understanding, outrage, or amusement. Take care, though, to tell an honest story.

RESPOND •

- To what specific emotions do the following slogans, sales pitches, and maxims appeal?
 - “Just do it.” (ad for Nike)
 - “Think different.” (ad for Apple Computers)
 - “Reach out and touch someone.” (ad for AT&T)
 - “Yes we can!” (2008 presidential campaign slogan for Barack Obama)
 - “Country first.” (2008 presidential campaign slogan for John McCain)
 - “By any means necessary.” (rallying cry from Malcolm X)
 - “Have it your way.” (slogan for Burger King)
 - “You can trust your car to the man who wears the star.” (slogan for Texaco)
 - “It's everywhere you want to be.” (slogan for Visa)
 - “Know what comes between me and my Calvins? Nothing!” (tag line for Calvin Klein jeans)
 - “Don't mess with Texas!” (antilitter campaign slogan)
- Bring a magazine to class, and analyze the emotional appeals in as many full-page ads as you can. Then classify those ads by types of emotional appeal, and see whether you can connect the appeals to the subject or target audience of the magazine. Compare your results with those of your classmates, and discuss your findings. For instance, do the ads in newsmagazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* appeal to different emotions and desires from the ads in publications such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Spin*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Automobile*, and *National Geographic*?
- How do arguments based on emotion work in different media? Are such arguments more or less effective in books, articles, television (both news and entertainment shows), films, brochures, magazines, email, Web sites, the theater, street protests, and so on? You might explore how a single medium handles emotional appeals or compare different media. For example, why do Internet newsgroups seem to encourage angry outbursts? Are newspapers an emotionally colder source of information than television news programs? If so, why?
- Spend some time looking for arguments that use ridicule or humor to make their point: check out your favorite Web sites; watch for bumper stickers, posters, or advertisements; and listen to popular song lyrics. Bring one or two examples to class, and be ready to explain how the humor makes an emotional appeal and whether it's effective.