

Understanding Emotions

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Final Paper

The Emotional Tact Used in Campaigns and who can be affected

In terms of emotions one might question whether they are extrinsically or intrinsically motivated. Are emotions something that we use in order to reap tangible benefits such as using the appropriate and desired emotions to obtain praise, social cohesion, or material wealth? Or do they actually represent an outward expression of some genuine or organic internal feeling that is used to maintain harmony within oneself? It is possible that because emotions are often proposed as being a product of biology and culture one might conclude that they are a substance that interacts with both external as well as internal goals. One might assess the prevalence of this notion within the context of campaigns, and for the purpose of this paper, within the campaigns of anti-abortion activists. These campaigns, relying on human vulnerability, use specific tools to evoke an emotional response from its audience. It could be argued that the campaigners pose both intrinsic and extrinsic emotional rewards for those who choose to support the cause. Further, the activists might target an audience to whom they perceive as most influenced by these particular types of rewards or emotional benefits, or more on the surface, those they feel have higher aptitude to take part in what they are campaigning against, in this particular case, abortion. One might also consider this campaign under the context of culture. The campaign itself may only exist because of its cultural relevance, and therefore may be considered obsolete in different parts of the world.

To fully understand some of the motives of the campaign we must look at a few different aspects regarding tact. As discussed in Maruska Svasek's article, "Emotions and Subject-Object Ambiguity," it becomes apparent that lifeless material objects have the ability to possess emotional agency due to context, symbolism, and their representation and uses throughout space and time. Based off this notion, that an image or photograph has the ability to retain and evoke some sort of emotion, it easy to see why in the case of the anti-abortion campaign, pictures

containing strong emotional themes are utilized. The activists use gruesome imagery of acts of genocide as well as graphic images of abortion and place them side by side as if to compare the two as similar and equal acts of horror. They compare the tools used to perform abortions with weapons of genocide as well as fetuses with the victims of genocide. Clearly one could already start to make a conclusion about what message the campaign is intending to send. It utilizes the feelings of horror, disgust, and dismay that are associated with genocide in order to evoke similar feelings about abortion. These images are used as emotional bait to capture the audience's attention as well as use these assumed emotions of outrage to attract people to support their cause. Therefore we can recognize how these campaigners use both extrinsic and intrinsic emotional rewards to try to persuade onlookers to unite and help advocate for their cause to eliminate abortion. Understanding that emotional reward is a plausible concept one can observe in this particular campaign that the activists utilize this concept of the emotional duty and responsibility of the individual in order to motivate them towards their cause. This could be considered a perceived intrinsic emotional reward granted to an individual whom decides to support the anti-abortion campaign. This decision to do so further allows the person a possible alleviating feeling or release of some sort of discomfort for the campaign makes the idea of anti-abortion appear honorable. The perceived honor or social praise offered by the activists to supporters could be understood as an extrinsic emotional reward. It is this idea that standing up against abortion is as honorable of an act as standing up against genocide. When this idea is implanted into the minds of others it evokes the same feeling of civic duty. One might also consider the demographic targeted by these campaigners and why this demographic of people is of interest and possibly most useful for the campaigners in obtaining their goals.

In the instance of the anti-abortion campaign in question, the activists erected their display outside of a university's academic social studies building. Considering the fact that the campaigners used in the imagery they chose to display it would not be unreasonable to assume that their targeted audience was chosen in a methodological way as well. Although displayed on a busy street in Brno, CZ, there is no denying the presence of the campaign in relation to the university building, therefore one might assume that the university students, more specifically, are the ones most subjected to this display. It could be argued that activists chose a demographic they felt might be more likely to partake in or advocate for pro-choice ideas, being that students are usually perceived as young, not financially stable nor married. However, it might also be

argued that the perceived status of students might also make them more emotionally vulnerable to the displays and statements of the activists as well as some of the potential emotional and social rewards that come with advocating for a cause. It could be suggested that because university students might be perceived as young, still somewhat impressionable, and indecisive they are more susceptible to joining a cause that might present some sort of feeling of group-belonging as well as humanitarian efforts. This idea is further emphasized in the writing, “Exploring the Managed Heart,” by Arlie Russel Hochschild. In this article the author intends to explain the use of emotion as a sort of social commodity. The article further explains how emotions can be utilized as a contribution to the well-being of societies and social groups and that we utilize the correct amount of the appropriate emotion in order to maintain some sort of group cohesion. Therefore it might be assumed that the correct emotional response to the content of these campaigns would be one of compassion, frustration, or duty therefore we are able to recognize the activists’ preconceived notions about university students through way that they try manipulate and elicit the correct emotional response out of them using the graphic imagery and heart-felt literature that they choose to use. It could also be understood that university students may still be in a state of establishing a stable sense of self and therefore may not have concrete views or stances on topics such as abortion, making it presumably easier for activists to persuade them within in this context making this another reason for the activists to target them. Although I may not agree with this idea that university students are naïve and easily persuaded, it may just be the perceptions of others that cause activists like those seen at the anti-abortion campaign to believe they can manipulate them through the use of emotional imagery, rewards, and stimuli in general. Although this idea is being analyzed through this one specific incident, campaigns like this one are present on an even broader scale, and it might be argued that the emotional relevancy of these campaigns and their images are culturally exclusive.

Throughout much of the literature presented in this class from the works of Solomon to Rosaldo to Abu-Lugohd as well as Lindquist, has been the idea that the presence of culture is finely engrained in our emotions and how we perceive, relate to, and process them. It is not uncommon then to see the presence of culture in controversial subjects such as abortion that contain a lot of discussion fueled by emotion. However, the concept of abortion may not be equally present among all societies. This means that its existence as well as its meaning may not be the same for all communities around the world. Regarding this campaign in particular it is

important to understand that its motives, tools, and emotional rewards that it utilizes may not be relevant to all cultures. There is the possibility that one culture may not even be aware of the medical process of abortion and simply have a different meaning or understanding of abortion. There is also the possibility that the whole of a community may be emotionally unaffected by or maybe even support abortion in general, meaning this demographic of people would not relate to the campaign in the same way as a demographic or culture who is split on their opinions or beliefs about abortion. These ideas highlight the very culturally centered essence of this campaign and the emotional tactics it uses in order to achieve its goals. When understanding emotions within in the context of social controversy it is within reason to illustrate the issue as it relates to the culture in question exclusively.

This course has done its fair share of dissecting all of the different aspects of human life that involve emotions. Emotions have proved that they can be analyzed within the contexts of biology, culture, materials, politics, the occult, and so forth. They aren't solely a phenomenon that reacts within the self, but something that interacts within the self as well as takes on a role outside of the body, within ones social influenced surroundings, and is often times attached to a context that is perceived by the human. Once the complexity of the emotions' nature is established we are able to analyze such interactions as they are present in the instance of an anti-abortion campaign situated outside of an academic university building. The ways in which emotions are perceived and understood by the party promoting anti-abortion are reflected by the ways in which they choose to conduct their campaign. It is the motives of the anti-abortion activists that we relate crimes of genocide to acts of abortion regardless of the exceptional difference in the contexts between the two. They use choice images because they are aware of the types of emotions that surround them and how these emotions are a tool of manipulation when it comes to the perceived nature of the human-being. It is assumed that any just human would respond to acts of horror against other humans with a sense of humanitarian compassion and a genuine interest to help those in need, and that most would want to do right by the society within the cultural context. Because of our social nature it is assumed by the campaigners that we submit to emotional acts that reaffirm social cohesion and acceptance. Further, it is assumed by the activists that those attending university may be more prone to emotional submission due to peer pressure. This can be observed by the way in which the campaigners chose to present their cause, situating their campaign right outside of a university building. Understanding the context

of emotions as well as individual perceptions also allows us to view these types of campaigns from a broader sense. That is to say that we can understand them more as culturally relevant rather than an issue or emotional dilemma that is universal. Ideas about controversial issues and their culture relevance may allow a person to be more objective or at least more thorough with their understanding regarding it. However, there is no denying the presence of emotions and their power. The potential that emotions possess to sway human behavior will forever be a source of manipulation whether it is within the context of small one on one interaction or on a larger scale of manipulation based within those of real social power and their ability to control the masses.