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Shampoo-hating Babies and the New Generations

Gone are the days of the dunce cap and corporal punishment; what is there left to motivate kids nowadays? The complaint that people from younger generations are “too soft” and “lazy” is commonplace throughout America, especially among older generations who believe that they were more disciplined in whatever they did. The rise of the internet and social media is often regarded as a major culprit in this difference of upbringing, and leads to hasty generalizations and misconceptions about the newer generations. This has been addressed in both a traditional argumentative approach and a satirical one, in the form of Sara A. Konrath’s “The Younger Generation Isn’t Lazy; They’re Burned Out” and The Onion’s “Johnson & Johnson Introduces ‘Nothing But Tears’ Shampoo To Toughen Up Newborns” respectively. While the traditional approach incorporates some facts and statistics to convey its point, the satirical piece uses clever wordplay, reduction, and imagery to construct a coherent appeal to emotion that helps connect a broader audience to this issue on a deeper level.

Throughout “The Younger Generation Isn’t Lazy; They’re Burned Out,” results from studies are constantly referenced throughout the piece to refute misconceptions about the values of the younger generations. For an appeal to ethos, Konrath initially introduces her job as a social scientist and explains a method of observing generational change. As the reader is provided with parts of her background and why she is suited to write this article, this establishment of

credibility early on in the article strengthens her argument. Furthermore, she incorporates statistics for every section of the article. For example, the fact that “there have been consistent increases in IQ scores in the past century (three points per decade in the U.S.)” is immediately followed up by an explanation of how the idea that the younger generation is less intelligent than its predecessors is simply a myth. Konrath uses an “if... then...” structure to implicitly demonstrate an appeal to logos. To address the idea that people nowadays are lazier than ever, the same structure is used: she cites various studies that show greater time spent in education, busier schedules, and less free time in later generations. Through an abundance of logical reasoning and structured flow of the article, Konrath constructs a sound refutation for these common misconceptions in addition to potential solutions for resulting issues like burnout.

However, while the article touches upon an issue that involves a lot of emotional thinking, it distances itself from the reader. The consistent use of logos to form an argument is met with little use of ethos. Even in the section where the author addresses burnout, the use of phrases such as the “burnout equation” to describe factors that play a role in the physical or mental exhaustion evoke the idea of a logical explanation, leading to less relatability even if readers can connect with the idea of burnout. The lack of anecdotes or other devices to establish a connection with the reader also detract from the effectiveness of the piece. While the article makes many points that are applicable to many people today, it fails to take these ideas and actually relate them to the experiences of the reader.

The satirical piece, however, employs different techniques to create emotion within the reader, despite having less of a focus on facts. The article mocks this idea through the form of a shampoo product made for babies to toughen them up, appropriately and ironically named “Nothing But Tears.” The consistent use of harsh imagery to describe the effects of the shampoo

conjure up the pain and sensations that the recipients of this “shampoo” experience, which serves to make the reader realize the absurdity of using the shampoo—or in a broader context, the absurdity of the notion of the new generation being too soft. The phrase “thicker skin” after using the shampoo can be interpreted as a double entendre; the application of the shampoo itself may result in thicker skin physiologically, but the phrase can also be used to describe someone who is less sensitive to criticism. The clever use of this phrasing gives the idea of using shampoo to satirize this topic more nuance. The piece also incorporates many physically painful descriptions to express the harm that the product has. For instance, the shampoo uses “only the most abrasive of natural ingredients and is nearly impossible to rinse from a baby’s screaming face.” The understatement in the first part of the sentence—a parody on how many companies market their products by claiming they use only the best ingredients—coupled with the adynaton in the second develops a vivid illustration of the unpleasant effects, to the point where the readers themselves may imagine the sandpaper-like shampoo becoming stuck to their faces. In doing so, they realize why the shampoo is so undesirable. Likewise, the constant criticism of each new generation feels akin to what the shampoo feels like on the skin: irritating and difficult to shake off. Unlike the traditional approach, The Onion’s article also provides anecdotes—albeit fake ones—to demonstrate how ridiculous the shampoo is. For instance, the satire concludes with a mother recounting her experience after using the shampoo on her baby, who starts to “kick and scream and wail” and speak her first words, “No, Mommy, don’t.” The author uses irony in this extreme scenario to demonstrate the effects of persistently telling young children to “grow up” and “get thicker skin.” Expecting one’s first words to be something like “mama” or “papa,” the article instead makes them a plea for mercy, indicating just how brutal these expectations can be;

by elucidating that this is the scenario that parents want, their remarks about how children should be raised are cast as damaging and ridiculous.

The traditional approach simply equates statistics to a refutation of these common misconceptions, but the satirical approach dives deeper into the underlying reasons for why they are wrong. Through the use of structured logical reasoning, the article by Konrath disproves these misbeliefs; however, that same structure and appeal to logos also create too much distance between the author and the reader when there is not enough of an appeal to pathos. For a topic that involves a reason for the divide between the values of different generations, the use of emotion to get the point across to the target audience is a must. Numbers and statistics can help to explain why the beliefs are incorrect, but on their own, they can't instill change. They don't connect to the reader on a deeper level. The satirical piece focuses on why these practices and notions are wrong by showing the absurdity of these expectations and the harm they can do. It articulates the idea that future generations may not always be held to the same standards as previous ones (especially at such a young age), but with this new adaptation of standards comes the filtering out of unhealthy expectations.

References

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