

Dr. Valerie Lynn Schrader

Professor Tenure-Line

Communication Arts and Sciences

Title of your research project.

“Talk to Your Doctor:” A Rhetorical Analysis of Burkean Identification in Direct-to-Consumer Pharmaceutical Advertisements

Description of research. Please provide a few sentences that explain the question and the methods employed in this research project.

In order to better understand the “face” of depression and mental health issues, we apply Erving Goffman’s theory of facework to photographs posted online that people took before attempting suicide. Through the use of rhetorical analysis of participatory photography, we examine Bored Panda’s “50 Photos that Prove Depression Symptoms Have No Face,” an article that consists of a compilation of social media posts in which people used the hashtag #faceofdepression to depict the struggles they themselves or their loved ones have faced with their mental health. Through the application of facework, we argue that there is no one true “face” of depression; depression exists in many different forms and is conveyed or hidden through a variety of different faces. We suggest that looking at social media posts through facework as a rhetorical lens provides a real and unfiltered view of mental health issues and provides a clearer picture of what someone is experiencing from a mental health perspective. Our analysis suggests that people experiencing depression and suicidal thoughts may use conflict front to hide what they are going through from those around them. When people recognize conflict fronts on their friends and loved ones’ social media, they may wish to reach out to these individuals regarding their mental health. The results of this study may encourage individuals to reach out to friends and loved ones who may be in need of help and to work to reduce the stigma associated with seeking help for depression, mental health concerns, and suicidal thoughts and ideations.

Did this project include Penn State students as researchers?

Yes, Sophia Bates.

If yes to the above question, please state where it was published.

It is currently being revised for resubmission in the Northwest Journal of Communication

What problem do you address with your research?

How facework can be used to begin difficult conversations with people about suicide