

Dr. David Lee presented “Inoculating Against Disease and Misinformation,” as part of the Humanities Department’s Works in the Works faculty lecture series.

Doctor Lee shared his research interests and experience with health communication, and, in particular, with the rhetoric of health and medicine in museum exhibits.

Doctor Lee began his lecture by introducing William McGuire’s inoculation theory, which postulates that persuasive messages are most effective when the audience is exposed to small doses of the opposing argument. The point, Lee stated, is to immunize the audience from persuasive attacks, in much the same way as the body can be shielded from disease. The act of defending and refuting weaker attacks on one's' belief system creates resistance to stronger persuasive appeals. The terminology used to explain and describe the inoculation process makes inoculation theory well-suited to the health communication inquiry.

Doctor Lee’s complex work weaves together several theoretical modalities and techniques to examine two health exhibitions at the Tampa Museum of Science and Industry, *Body Armour* and *Biocontroversy*. Doctor Lee presented video clips and explained the difference between descriptive and prescriptive messages, in conjunction with classical rhetoric and Speech Act Theory. A critical variable in his research is power, specifically the way it affects health communication and outcomes. Lee studies attitudinal inoculation from a rhetorical perspective as a strategy for changing behaviors.

Most interesting, however, was Doctor Lee’s rhetorical analysis of the indirect directive messages within the exhibits. He evaluated the use of enthymemes, practical syllogisms, and preemptive refutations within persuasive messages. He explained how enthymemes and syllogisms “mobilize the recipient’s inferential apparatus, so that they fill in the blanks and come to the desired conclusion or perform the desired behaviors.” The message contains both critical information and a tacit command, expressing what the speaker wants the listener to do with the information. According to health communication theory, if the command is too explicit, psychological “reactance” can result, having a counter-persuasive outcome.

Doctor Lee’s presentation left the audience with a better understanding of the function of inoculation in public health messages. Doctor Lee intends to continue his study of inoculation theory from a rhetorical perspective. The process is important to health care delivery and is thus deserving of careful attention. We look forward to his investigation of attitudinal inoculation in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Thank you, Doctor Lee.

Professor Denise Scannell Guida, PhD