

COMM 510
Seminar in Relational Communication
Fall, 2012

LA 308
Wednesday, 2:10 pm - 5:00 pm
CRN # 75081

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Office Hours: Tuesday 1-2, Wednesday 10-11 and always by appt.

Course Overview

This seminar is designed to explore the field of personal relationship research. Research on personal relationships is an interdisciplinary endeavor, meaning that academic discussions are informed by knowledge from a diverse array of disciplines, and that personal relationship scholars share knowledge about theories and methods used across disciplines. For example, the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR) is composed of scholars of human communication, psychology, sociology, family studies, education, gerontology, and philosophy, among others. This seminar reflects this diversity in many ways.

The seminar is oriented toward assisting your progress toward the M.A. degree. In general terms, this means that you will have the opportunity to: Engage in scholarly discussions about theory and research; develop new ideas and engage in the process of research; enhance your ability to critically analyze theory and research; and learn how to overcome challenges of the research process. More specifically, the seminar will provide you with an overview of the major topics and issues surrounding personal relationship research, assist you in developing questions about relational communication, and help you construct a research project that you could eventually present at a professional conference.

Required materials

Vangelisti, A. L., & Perlman, D. (2006). *The Cambridge Handbook of Personal Relationships*. Cambridge University Press. New York.

Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association (6th ed.).

Readings on the Moodle course supplement

If you are at all interested in making the study of personal relationships a career (and even if you're not) you should consider joining the International Association for Relationship Research (IARR). You get the two top relationship research journals, the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* and *Personal Relationships*, a useful newsletter every few months, and the latest information on the IARR conferences. It's not too expensive for students - \$38-\$58/year, depending on the type of journal subscription you get).

Assignments

Some scholars argue that relationships are built and maintained most effectively through everyday conversation and participation in routine activities. My philosophy on education is that individuals learn more efficiently, effectively, and permanently when they remain active in their relationship with their course content. Thus, your coursework will involve a combination of participation and several regularly-submitted assignments.

Participation 50 points

Graduate seminars are small, discussion-based gatherings, in which ideas are generated and analyzed by all members of the group. The professor typically facilitates and guides the conversation, but does not normally lecture for the entire time. Your participation is therefore essential to the success of the course. Each week, I will keep notes about each person's participation, and use them to make my final assessments. Points will be earned through thoughtful and appropriate linguistic contributions (more is not necessarily better), nonverbal and linguistic responsiveness to others' contributions, and concentration on course materials over distractions (electronic or otherwise).

You may make up for a single missed class meeting by locating a scholarly reading (i.e., a peer-reviewed research report or scholarly book chapter) relevant to our discussion in the class you missed, and then providing a written or oral summary of the work when you return. I have guidelines for the content of those summaries, and will provide them as necessary. Please contact me immediately if you realize that you will need to miss a class, so that I can provide you with the criteria.

Weekly "Blog" Post 100 points

One of the largest problems in relationship research is the massive volume of probably-well-intentioned, but inaccurate, unhelpful, or even devastatingly wrong advice that is easily available. To counter that, a number of researchers have begun their own blogs to provide accurate, up-to-date knowledge to lay audiences about relationships. Some great examples of those blogs can be found here:

<http://www.iarr.org/media-blogs/>

This assignment has three main goals:

- (1) To provide an opportunity for you to immerse yourself in self-selected topics of relationship research.
- (2) To help you learn how to translate research findings for lay audiences.
- (3) To provide the class with stimulating, generative conversation about relationship research.

For this assignment, you will write a semi-weekly 300 – 500 word "blog post" on a matter relevant to relationship research (for a point of reference, there are 527 words on this page). Each post should be sent to the class (posted in the forum on the Moodle course supplement) at least 24 hours prior the class meeting. You should choose one for each week, although you can choose any three class meetings for which you do not submit a post.

- Seven (7) topic entries: For these posts, you'll locate an empirical research report published within the past two years in either the *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, or *Personal Relationships*. Once you find the article you wish to write about, read it, and write an analytic response. The goal is to interpret the research and help a lay audience understand what this research report is teaching us about relationships or communication. Introduce the topic by connecting the research problem to some issue relevant to your audience's life. Then go on to provide an overview of the study's main points or findings. Try to include in this discussion some very brief overview of the method used (survey, experiment, interviews, etc.), and discuss the findings as accurately as possible, using terms that anyone without a college degree could understand. Close by providing your overall analysis, and the "bottom line" for your audience. Obviously, you won't be able to discuss every detail of the study or review, so aim to highlight the key aspects of the rationale, method, and findings in your discussion.

Appended at the end of this syllabus is a description of de Bono's (2005) "thinking hats," which could fruitfully be used to approach the topics, and develop your thoughts about the research findings you are discussing. The analysis will be partly assessed on the application of these ways of thinking.

- One (1) Relational Communication scholar interview: For this post, you will need to contact a relationship researcher ahead of time, and ask him or her questions about relationship research. The questions can focus on the scholar's own research (such as a report that they recently published), or his or her thoughts about relationship research on general (what the most important topics are, where the field could be heading, advice for new relationship scholars, etc.). In your post, describe the conversation you had with him or her (what you asked, what he/she said, and what the main take-aways are from your interview). For some long, but good examples of interviews, listen to some of the podcasts here:
http://spr.sagepub.com/site/podcast/podcast_dir.xhtml

Generally, I recommend contacting communication researchers about their recently published or presented research (so it's fresh on their mind), and senior researchers for more esoteric conversations (about the field in general, for example). I would be very happy to recommend some people to contact, if you like.

For this post, you could post a recorded podcast, or could provide a summary of your interview. If you provide a summary, be sure to provide enough context so that your readers know the questions you asked, and the most important aspects of the scholar's response. You might or might not find it necessary to record the interview if you plan to provide a summary, but it would certainly help if you wish to provide quotations.

- Two (2) media analyses: For these posts, you should find a popular media article in which research is reported or advice given about some relationship issue. The report should be written by a journalist or other non-academic relationship researcher. Describe the source (and provide a link or a copy of it), and the main thesis of the article, in addition to any advice given. Then, provide your most logical, scholarly analysis of the report or advice (black hat, and/or white hat analysis). The best analyses will consult and discuss other relationship research findings to compare the author's thoughts against, and provide evidence for the reasoning. Relative to relationship research findings on this issue, does the author appear to get it correct? What do they get right, and what do they get wrong? What corrections or additions can you provide?

For this assignment, you may create your own blog (using the free services of Blogger, or WordPress, for example), or could submit your "posts" as documents to the class. Either way, the class should have access to your post at least 24 hours before the week's class meeting. Please post your link or attachment to the blog forum on the Moodle course supplement.

Research Proposal

Total point value: 150 points

This assignment is designed to promote your entrance into the communication discipline, by providing the foundation for what could be a study you conduct, and present at an academic conference. The paper will take place in four parts: the significance statement, the review of literature, the method proposal, and the final submission.

The significance statement 25 points

The purpose of this paper is convince your readers that your topic is important and worthy of research. While it might be tempting to say that some issue is important to investigate and discuss because nobody has done so before, few scholars will find that argument convincing. Instead, you should try to frame the importance of knowledge on a particular issue in terms of its: (a) potential to help people, (b) ability to fill "gaps" in current knowledge about the issue, (c) contribution to the field overall, or (d) ability to advance established theory.

Begin your paper with a strong opening statement (about one paragraph) that indicates what it is that you are interested in examining, and specifies your position on the topic. Proceed then to argue for the importance of your study. Provide evidence of the prevalence or effects of the problem. Continue to argue how or why addressing that problem is relevant to the state of current research or theory. Once you've made your points, provide a single clear statement indicating the intent of your study. Your purpose or intent should be obviously linked to the significance of the problem. In other words, upon finishing reading this paper, I should be convinced that this is a serious problem that needs to be addressed, and the need for your study should be clear. Underline or italicize your purpose statement (e.g., "*The purpose of this project is to...*"). Usually, significance statements are about a page and a half.

The Review of Literature 50 points

The purpose of the literature review is to discuss previous research on your topic in such a way that your readers: (a) understand the history of research on this topic, (b) are familiar with the major issues surrounding research on the topic, and (c) are convinced that new research should be conducted. You can include in your review actual research reports, theoretical proposals or critiques, and/or other literature reviews (Communication Yearbook is dedicated to publishing reviews of research and is thus a good source to consult for ideas and examples of excellent literature reviews). The essence of the literature review is synthesis and integration of ideas. That is, the literature should be reviewed in such a way that the connections between the articles and ideas are obvious to the reader. Some organizing patterns used in literature reviews include: chronological order (good to use when tracing the development of research on the topic), general to specific order (good to use when using theory to drive specific predictions about a specific issue), comparison/contrast (good to use when illustrating divergent perspectives on a topic), methodological focus (good to use if you will use a novel method to investigate your topic), and topical order (most common organization pattern – good to use when building up to a specific prediction or research question). See me for more information on any of these organization patterns or for further questions about writing a literature review. I also have a couple of chapters on reading/writing quantitative and qualitative research reports. See me if you would like to copy them.

Regardless of the organization pattern you choose, your review should logically lead up to a specific question (i.e., a research question) and/or prediction (i.e., a hypothesis) that could be examined using a specific research method. Hence, the third paper is a proposal of a study that you might conduct in the near future.

Method proposal 50 points

Although the predominance of research on personal relationships is conducted using quantitative methods, qualitative research is becoming increasingly common. You are free to propose using any type of research method you want, provided that you have good reason to support your choice. My philosophy is that your choice should be based on how you will best be able to fulfill your purpose stated in your significance statement and on which method will best help you answer your question – not on subjective thoughts and evaluations such as "I hate statistics," or "I am a quantitative/qualitative person/researcher."

That said, your method section should have roughly four sub-sections: (a) an introduction describing the general methodological approach and why that approach was selected, (b) who will participate in the study and how those participants will be collected (Labeled "**Participants**"), (c) the instruments that will be used (labeled "**Instruments**" or "**Measures**"), where you describe the questionnaires or interview schedule that you will use if you are using them (Note: If you are proposing a qualitative study, this is the section in which you would describe your "**position**" and role that you propose taking in the field [i.e., what relationships will you share with the cultural members? Will you be a complete observer, complete participant, or participant-observer?]), and finally, (d) a description of the procedures (labeled "**Procedures**") that you will use to answer your research question, test your hypothesis, and ultimately accomplish your stated goal(s). End your method section with a summary of how your proposed method will help you accomplish your stated purpose.

While this is only a *proposal* (you won't actually be conducting the study), my hope is that you will be able to turn this in to a study within the next year (perhaps in an independent study with me, Alan, or Christina, or for use as your thesis). Doing so would allow you to present your paper at a professional conference, which looks good on your resume if you are interested in a professional position (it shows your ability to organize, manage, and present major projects), and is necessary if you are interested in applying to Ph.D. programs and teaching.

Final Submission 25 points

Revise your previous submissions and combine them into one paper. Bring them to class and present your proposal to the class.

A note about submitting papers

All aspects of the paper must be written in APA style. This includes proper margin measures, a cover page, and proper font style (12-point Times New Roman), in addition to proper in-text and bibliographic citation style. Refer to your APA manual regularly while writing papers.

Other Possible Projects

I am open to other possible activities that you could do for a final project. Some ideas might include: conducting a full study with two or three other people in the class, or constructing a new undergraduate course on some special issue relevant to communication in personal relationships. Feel free to imagine the possibilities and talk with me about them.

On Civility and Professionalism

I hope to develop a collective, civil, and scholarly community in this course. A number of actions help promote this goal, but I generally believe this means coming to each class prepared to make thoughtful, appropriate, responsive, and supportive contributions to the discussion. During class, it means attending to others' comments, avoiding electronic distractions, and not eating loud or extremely odiferous foods. Professionalism includes civility, but extends to a separate set of actions local to the current context. Professionals submit timely work, and are ethical in the work they do. Ethical work includes being honest in one's efforts, and giving credit to others' ideas and efforts. Of course, the student conduct code applies to all activities and assignments in this class.

Course Calendar and Readings

Week 1: Overview and Foundations of Relationship Research

- Knapp, M. L., & Daly, J. A. (2012). Background and current trends in the study of interpersonal communication. In M. L. Knapp and J. A. Daly (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Interpersonal Communication* (pp. 3-22). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Perlman, D., & Duck, S. (2006). The seven seas of the study of personal relationships: From the thousand islands to interconnected waterways. (Chapter 2 in Vangelisti and Perlman).

Week 2: Studying communication in personal relationships

- Sillars, A. L., & Vangelisti, A. L. (2006). *Communication: Basic properties and their relevance to relationship research*. (Chapter 18 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Berger, C. R. (2005). Interpersonal communication: Theoretical perspectives, future prospects. *Journal of Communication*, 55, 415-447.
- Harvey, J. H., & Wenzel, A. (2006). *Theoretical perspectives in the study of close relationships*. (Chapter 3 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Charania, M., & Ickes, W. J. (2006). *Research methods for the study of personal relationships*. (Chapter 4 in Vangelisti and Perlman).

Week 3: Attraction, Relationship Initiation, and Attachment to personal relationships

This week: Discuss your research proposal idea

- Trost, M. R. & Alberts, J. K. (2006). How men and women communicate attraction: An evolutionary view. In D. J. Canary & K. Dindia (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication: Critical essays and empirical investigations of sex and gender in interaction* (pp. 317-336). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Weber, K., Goodboy, A. K., & Cayanus, J. L. (2010). Flirting competence: An experimental study on appropriate and effective opening lines. *Communication Research Reports*, 27, 184-191.
- Feeney, J. A., Noller, P., & Roberts, N. (2000). Attachment and close relationships. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook* (pp.185-201). Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Solomon, D. H., & Theiss, J. A. (2008). A longitudinal test of the relational turbulence model of romantic relationship development. *Personal Relationships*, 15, 339-357.

Week 4: Communication and Relationship Maintenance/Enhancement

Due: Significance Statement

- Huston, T. L. (2009). What's love got to do with it? Why some marriages succeed and others fail. *Personal Relationships*, 16, 301-327.
- Montgomery, B. M. (1988). Quality communication in personal relationships. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 343-362). Chichester, UK: Wiley.
- Canary, D. J. & Dainton, M. (2006). Maintaining relationships (Chapter 39 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Haas, S. M., & Stafford, L. (2005). Maintenance behaviors in same-sex and marital relationships: A matched sample comparison. *The Journal of Family Communication*, 5, 43-60.

Week 5: Partner Responsiveness and intimacy construction

- Maisel, N. C., Gable, S. L., & Strachman, A. (2008). Responsiveness in good times and bad. *Personal Relationships, 15*, 317-338.
- Laurenceau, J.-P., Rivera, L. M., Schaffer, A. R., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (2004). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: Current status and future directions. In D. J. Mashek and A. Aron (Eds.) *Handbook of closeness and intimacy* (pp. 61-78). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Laurenceau, J., Barrett, L. F., & Pietromonaco, P. R. (1998). Intimacy as an interpersonal process: The importance of self-disclosure, partner disclosure, and perceived partner responsiveness in interpersonal exchanges. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 74*(5), 1238-1251.
- Debrot, A., Cook, W. L., Perrez, M., & Horn, A. B. (2012). Deeds matter: Daily enacted responsiveness and intimacy in couples' daily lives. *Journal of Family Psychology, (June 11, 2012)*.
- Rusbult, C. E., Finkel, E. J., & Kumashiro, M. (2009). The Michelangelo Phenomenon. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 18*(6), 305-309.

Week 6: Emotions and emotional expressions in personal relationships

- Planalp, S., Fitness, J., & Fehr, B. (2006). Emotion in theories of close relationships (Chapter 20 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Guerrero, L. K., & Andersen, P. A. (2000). Emotion in close relationships. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook* (pp.171-183). Thousand Oaks: Sage
- Planalp, S. (1999). *Communicating emotion: Social, moral, and cultural processes*. Paris: Cambridge University Press. The specific reading is Chapter 4: How is emotional meaning constructed through communication? (pp. 104-133).
- Porter, R. E. & Samovar, L. A. (1998). Cultural influences in emotional expression: Implications for intercultural communication. In P. A. Andersen & L. K. Guerrero (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and emotion: Research, theory, applications, and contexts* (pp. 451-472). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Week 7: Technology and relationships

- Tom Tong, S., Van Der Heide, B., Langwell, L., & Walther, J. B. (2008). Too much of a good thing? The relationship between number of friends and interpersonal impressions on Facebook. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication, 13*, 531-549.
- Peter, J., & Valkenburg, P. M. (2007). Who looks for casual dates on the internet? A test of the compensation and the recreation hypotheses. *New Media & Society, 9*, 455-474.
- Tom Tong, S., & Walther, J. B. (2011). Just say "no thanks": Romantic rejection in computer-mediated communication. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 28*, 488-506.
- Roggensack, K. E., McFadden, J., Sullivan, S., & Sherwood, A. (2010, November). *I got dumped on Facebook: New media's role in conflict management*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Communication Association, San Francisco, CA.

Week 8: Disclosure and the management of privacy and uncertainty**Due: Literature Review**

- Afifi, T., & Steuber, K. (2009). The Revelation Risk Model (RRM): Factors that predict the revelation of secrets and the strategies used to reveal them. *Communication Monographs, 76*, 144-176.
- Finkenauer, C., & Hazam, H. (2000). Disclosure and secrecy in marriage: Do both contribute to marital satisfaction? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17*, 245-263.
- Knobloch, L. K., & Carpenter-Theune, K. E. (2004). Topic avoidance in developing romantic relationships: Associations with intimacy and relational uncertainty. *Communication Research, 31*, 173-205.
- Knobloch, L. K., & Theiss, J. A. (2011). Relational uncertainty and relationship talk within courtship: A longitudinal actor-partner interdependence model. *Communication Monographs, 78*, 3-26.

Week 9: Social Network Influences on Relationships

- Allan, G. (2006). Social networks and personal communities. (Chapter 35 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Parks, M. (2000). Communication networks and relationship life cycles. S. W. Duck (Ed.), *Handbook of personal relationships* (2nd Ed). (pp. 351-372). Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.
- Burger, E., & Milardo, R. M. (1995). Marital interdependence and social networks. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 12*, 403-415.
- Klein, R. C. A., & Milardo, R. M. (2000). The social context of couple conflict: Support and criticism from informal third parties. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17*, 618-637.

Week 10: Intercultural and Interethnic Communication and Relationship Issues

- Goodwin, R., & Pillay, U. (2006). Relationships, culture, and social change. (Chapter 37 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Gaines, S. O. Jr., & Liu, J. H. (2000). Multicultural/Multiracial relationships. In C. Hendrick & S. S. Hendrick (Eds.), *Close relationships: A sourcebook* (pp.97-108). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Adams, G. & Plaut, V. C. (2003). The cultural grounding of personal relationships: Friendship in North American and West African worlds. *Personal Relationships, 10*, 333-347.

Week 11: Negotiating Cross-Sex Friendships**Due: Method Proposal**

- Afifi, W. A., & Faulkner, S. L. (2000). On being 'just friends': The frequency and impact of sexual activity in cross-sex friendships, *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17*, 205-222.
- Monsour, M. (1997). Communication and cross-sex friendships across the life cycle: A review of the literature. *Communication Yearbook 20*, 375-414.
- Schneider, C. S., & Kenny, D. A. (2000). Cross-sex friends who were once romantic partners: Are they platonic friends now? *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 17*, 451-466.
- Werking, K. (1997). *We're just good friends: Women and men in non-romantic relationships*. New York: Guilford. Specific reading is Chapter 1: The societal contexts of cross-sex friendships: Comparisons with paradigmatic social relationships.

Week 12: NCA – No meeting**Week 13: Thanksgiving Break – No meeting****Week 14: Relationship Constricting Communication and the “Dark-Side” of Personal Relationships**

- Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). Disentangling the dark side of interpersonal communication. In B. H. Spitzberg, & W. R. Cupach (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed., pp. 3-28). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Knapp, M. L. (2006). Lying and deception in close relationships. (Chapter 28 in Vangelisti and Perlman).
- Guerrero, L. K. & Andersen, P. A. (1998). The dark side of jealousy and envy: Desire, delusion, desperation and destructive communication. *The dark side of close relationships* (pp. 33-70). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Yoshimura, S. M. (2007). The communication of revenge: On the virtues, viciousness, and vitality of vengeful behavior in interpersonal relationships. In B. H. Spitzberg and W. R. Cupach (Eds.). *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (2nd ed.) (pp. 277-296). Mahwah, NJ. Erlbaum.

Week 15: The Future of Relationship Research
Due: Final submission

- Reis, H. T. (2012). Perceived partner responsiveness as an organizing theme for the study of relationships and well-being. In H. T. Reis (Ed.). *Interdisciplinary research on close relationships: The case for integration* (pp. 27-52). Washington, DC, US: American Psychological Association.
- Floyd, K., & Cole, T. (2009). Communication and biology: The view from evolutionary psychology and psychophysiology. In M. J. Beatty, J. C. McCroskey, & K. Floyd (Eds.). *Biological dimensions of communication: Perspectives, methods, and research* (pp. 17-32). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.
- Acevedo, B. P., Aron, A., Fisher, H., & Brown, L. L. (2012). Neural correlates of long-term intense romantic love. *Social Cognitive and Affective Neuroscience*, 7, 145-159.
- Kubey, R., Larson, R., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). Experience sampling method applications to communication research questions. *Journal of Communication*, 46, 99-120.

The Six Thinking Hats

White hat: Neutral and objective

Thinker focuses on the objective facts and information. What is the data? What is the information we have here? What knowledge do we have, and what do we not have? No opinions or interpretation given. Useful at various stages of thinking.

Red hat: Emotional

Thinker focuses on feelings, hunches, or intuition. Your initial impressions of an idea, without justification or explanation. A good way to start many ideas.

Black hat: Logical, negative

Points out that something “does not fit” facts, experience, policy, system, ethics, values, etc. Can be used early in the development of an idea to point out the weaknesses, or it can be used later in the development of an idea for the purpose of assessment. Not desirable to use it all the time alone, but is powerful when combined with other “hats.”

Yellow hat: Logical, positive

Focuses on the logical feasibility, benefits, advantages, savings, etc. Requires some degree of justification, providing evidence for the optimism. Thinker explores the positive aspects of an idea, while providing logical support.

Green hat: Creativity

Used to develop new or unusual ideas, possibilities, provocations, alternatives. Thinking goes beyond the known, the obvious, or satisfaction. Can be used to generate new ideas and move forward from other ways of thinking.

Blue hat: Management and organization of the thinking process

Thinker strives to organize thoughts. Uses meta-thinking to ask questions, summarize, comment on the process of thinking, conducting the discussion.

Reference

de Bono, E. (1999). *Six thinking hats* (Revised and updated). New York, NY. Little, Brown, and Co.