

COMM 511, Survey of Interpersonal Communication

Alan Sillars

301 Liberal Arts, 243-4463

Email: alan.sillars@mso.umt.edu

Office hours: Mon. 10-12, Fri. 11-1 or by appointment (use email please)

Goals of the Course

- survey basic concepts, theories and issues in the study of interpersonal communication
- examine and illustrate methods for studying interpersonal communication
- consider how meaning is assigned during interpersonal communication, including the role of ambiguity, inference, and misunderstanding
- examine multiple, relational functions of communication
- explore the influence of gender
- assess current trends and future directions for interpersonal communication scholarship

Readings

Readings will be available electronically through Mansfield Library Electronic Reserve. Additional readings will be posted over the course of the semester.

Course Requirements

Grades will be assigned according to the +/- system, based on the following assignments.

Class Participation (33%): Most of the learning will take place through reading and discussion, so it is crucial that everyone keep up with the readings and come to class prepared to discuss them. Bring notes and come ready to ask questions and raise issues. I hope that we will have lively, informed discussions. The key is to have discussion that is informed by the readings and serve to clarify, critique, and extend them, rather than discussion that is based mostly on personal experiences.

Everyone gets one “free-pass.” That is, you are allowed to slack (i.e., read superficially, make especially lame comments, or even skip readings) for one week of your choosing, for whatever reason. Please use it wisely. Note: The free pass does not apply to deadlines on project work.

Thought Papers (33%): You should submit five thought papers over the course of the semester.

These papers should be about 4-5 pages and synthesize and respond to the readings. Each paper should identify and discuss **three** key ideas in the readings. When discussing each idea, you may: 1) compare and contrast perspectives of different authors; 2) discuss potential implications for research, theory or application; or 3) critique the idea and suggest an alternative.

Also construct three questions for the class to discuss. Questions should be emailed to seminar members and myself by the Friday prior to seminar. Be prepared to lead discussion of these questions and to talk about your written ideas during the seminar.

It is up to you to decide when you will submit a thought paper, as long as you complete five. These must be turned in on the day of class, not afterwards, since they are designed to stimulate discussion.

I'll grade the thought papers "plus," "check," or "minus." You have the option of rewriting. Papers should be well edited, thoughtful, and show knowledge of the assigned readings. You are not expected to go beyond the assigned readings to support your ideas.

Research Project/Paper (33%): You have the option of either working on a team research project on parent/adolescent communication or writing a paper on a topic of your own choosing.

Research project option:

If there is sufficient interest (4 people or more), we will analyze videotapes of parent-adolescent interactions, looking at demand-withdraw patterns and other factors. This would be a secondary analysis of existing data that I collected long ago and haven't completely analyzed. You will help to formulate hypotheses, code interactions, statistically analyze the data, and write a report for publication. The goal will be to have a completed report by the end of the semester. In the process, you will learn how to work collaboratively, doing a type of communication research (interaction analysis) that is generally too time-consuming for M.A. students to undertake on their own. I will organize, administer, and advise your work on the project. Everyone who participates fully will share authorship of any publication or presentation that comes of it. Your work will be evaluated according to the quality of the finished project, my observations about your contributions, and anonymous peer evaluations.

Since you'll be working as part of a research team, you'll need to arrange meetings outside of class – probably weekly meetings and perhaps more when coding the interactions. Individuals or pairs will write drafts of each section of the report, which others (myself included) will critique and edit. We'll work on data analysis together. I will assist with this and other phases of the project.

Paper option:

This can be done alone or in teams so long as the size of the team corresponds to the ambition of the project. I suggest two possibilities, although I will consider other ideas as well. The first is to propose a research project that is grounded in the literature, promises to contribute to it and is feasible. This is a good way to set up an M.A. thesis or other research project that you plan to do later. The second option is to write a synthetic/critical review of the literature that leads to a broader set of research questions and/or hypotheses, without proposing a specific study.

As with any graduate-level paper, the research paper for this seminar should reflect original work and be supported by primary sources from academic journals and books – not popular literature or lower level texts. The topic of the paper should fit within the scope of the seminar. Please talk with me if you are unsure about this. If you choose the paper option, you will submit a proposal early in the semester, so that I can make suggestions. Please talk with me at any time that I can be of assistance in recommending sources or discussing the direction of your paper. I also recommend that you submit a draft late in the semester, in time to receive comments and edit before submitting the final paper. The draft copy should be a good first draft (not a "rough draft").

Please consult the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th edition) when writing papers.

Deadlines

Project work or papers must be completed by Thursday of finals week. There will be other small deadlines for project work throughout the semester. If you choose the paper option, you should submit a brief prospectus (1 page) on the third week of the seminar indicating generally what you plan to do. You will discuss your paper with others in the seminar at our last meeting (Monday of finals week).

Reading List

The Basics

Basic trends, concepts, and issues

Smith, S. W., & Wilson, S. R. (*in press*). Evolving trends in interpersonal communication research. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Burleson, B. R. (*in press*). The nature of interpersonal communication: A message-centered approach. In C. Berger, M. Roloff, & D. R. Roskos-Ewoldsen (Eds.), *Handbook of communication science* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sillars, A. & Vangelisti, A. L. (2006). Communication: Basic properties and their relevance to personal relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 331-351). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Codes, context and meaning

Ritchie, L. D. (1991). *Information*. (pp. 1-20). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Duck, S. (2002). Hypertext in the key of G: Three types of "history" as influences on conversational structure and flow. *Communication Theory*, 12, 41-62.

Planalp, S., & Garvin-Doxas, K. (1994). Using mutual knowledge in conversation: Friends as experts on each other. In S. Duck (Ed.), *Dynamics of relationships* (pp. 1-26). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Roberts, G. L., & Bavelas, J. B. (1996). The communicative dictionary: A collaborative theory of meaning. In J. Stewart (Ed.), *Reflections on the representational use of language* (pp. 135-160). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Functions of Interpersonal Communication

Relationship definition

Watzlawick, P., Beavin, J., & Jackson, D. D. (1967). *Pragmatics of human communication: A study of interactional patterns, pathologies, and paradoxes* (pp. 48-71). New York: Norton.

Rogers, L. E. (1998). The meaning of relationship in relational communication. In R. L. Conville & L. E. Rogers (Eds.), *The meaning of "relationship" in interpersonal communication* (pp. 69-81). Westport, CT: Praeger.

Duck, S. (1995). Talking relationships into being. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 12, 535-540.

Donohue, W. A., & Roberto, A. J. (1993). Relational development as negotiated order in hostage negotiation. *Human Communication Research*, 20, 175-198.

Information Management #1

Green, K., Derlega, V. J., & Mathews, A. (2006). Self-disclosure in personal relationships. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 409-427). New York: Cambridge University Press.

Petronio, S. (1994). Privacy binds in family interactions: The case of parental privacy invasion. In W. R. Cupach & B. H. Spitzberg (Eds.), *The dark side of interpersonal communication* (pp. 241-257). New York: Wiley & Sons.

Golish, T. D., & Caughlin, J. P. (2002). "I'd rather not talk about it": Adolescents' and young adults' use of topic avoidance in stepfamilies. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 30, 78-106.

Information Management #2

Afifi, W. A. (*in press*). Uncertainty and information management in interpersonal contexts. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Knobloch, L. K. (*in press*). Relational uncertainty and interpersonal communication. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bavelas, J. B., Black, A., Chovil, N., & Mullett, J. (1990). *Equivocal communication*. (pp. 11-28, 234-259). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Comforting and Support

Jones, S.M. & Wirtz, J. G. (2006). How does the comforting process work? An empirical test of an appraisal-based model of comforting. *Human Communication Research*, 32, 217-243.

Goldsmith, D. (2004). *Communicating social support* (ch. 1-2). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Burleson, B. R. (*in press*). Explaining recipient responses to supportive messages: Development and tests of a dual-process theory. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Impression Management

Metts, S., & Grohskoph, E. (2003). Impression management: Goals, strategies, and skills. In J. O. Greene & B. R. Burleson (Eds.), *Handbook of communication and social interaction skills* (pp. 357-399). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Goldsmith, D. (2004). *Communicating social support* (ch. 3). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wilson, S. R., Aleman, C. G., & Leatham, G. B. (1998). Identity implications of influence goals: A revised analysis of face-threatening acts and application to seeking compliance with same-sex friends. *Human Communication Research, 25*, 64-96.

Relational Dialectics

Baxter, L. A., & Montgomery, B. M. (2000). Rethinking communication in personal relationships from a dialectic perspective. In K. Dindia & S. Duck (Eds.), *Communication and personal relationships* (pp. 31-53).

Erbert, L. A. & Duck, S. W. (1997). Rethinking satisfaction in personal relationships from a dialectical perspective. In R. J. Sternberg & M. Hojjat (Eds.), *Satisfaction in close relationships* (pp.190-216). New York: Guilford.

Sahlstein, Erin M. (2004). Relating at a distance: Negotiating being together and being apart in long-distance relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21*, 689-710.

Baxter, L. A., Braithwaite, D. O., Bryant, L., & Wagner, A. (2004). Stepchildren's perceptions of the contradictions in communication with stepparents. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 21*, 447-467.

Intersubjective Understanding

Laing, R. D., Phillipson, H., & Lee, A. R. (1966). *Interpersonal perception: A theory and a method of research* (ch. 2-3). New York: Springer-Verlag.

Ickes, W. (2003). *Everyday mind reading: Understanding what other people think and feel*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books. (selected chapters)

Sillars, A. L. (2002). *For better or for worse: Re-thinking the role of "misperception" and communication in close relationships and families*. 17th annual B. Aubrey Fisher Memorial Lecture, University of Utah.

Special Issues

Family Interactions

Laursen, B., & Collins, W. A. (2004). Parent-child communication during adolescence. In A. L. Vangelisti (Ed.), *Handbook of family communication* (pp. 333-348). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Caughlin, J. P., & Ramey, M. E. (2005). The demand/withdraw pattern of communication in parent-adolescent dyads. *Personal Relationships, 12*, 337-355.

Koerner, A. F., & Fitzpatrick, M. A. (2002). Understanding family communication patterns and family functioning: The roles of conversation orientation and conformity orientation. *Communication Yearbook*, 26, 36-68.

Sillars, A., Smith, T., & Koerner, A. (2009). Generational misattributions contributing to empathic (in)accuracy during parent-adolescent conflict discussions. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Mediated interpersonal communication

Walther, J. B., & Parks, M. R. (2002). Cues filtered out, cues filtered in: Computer-mediated communication and relationships. In M. L. Knapp, & J. A. Daly, (Eds.), *Handbook of interpersonal communication* (3rd. ed.) (pp. 539-563). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

O'Sullivan, P. B. (2000). What you don't know won't hurt me. Impression management functions of communication channels in relationships. *Human Communication Research*, 26, 403-431.

Boase, J. & Wellman, B. (2006). Personal relationships: On and off the internet. In A. L. Vangelisti & D. Perlman (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of personal relationships* (pp. 709-723). New York: Cambridge University Press

Walther, J. B., & Ramirez, A. (*in press*). New technologies and new direction in online relating. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Sex and gender differences

Wood, J. T. & Dindia, K. (1998). What's the difference? A dialogue about differences and similarities between men and women. In D. J. Canary & K. Dindia (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication* (pp. 19-39). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Kunkel, A. W. & Burleson, B. R. (1998). Social support and the emotional lives of men and women: An assessment of the different cultures hypothesis. In D. J. Canary & K. Dindia (Eds.), *Sex differences and similarities in communication* (pp. 101-125). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Caughlin, J. P., & Scott, A. M. (*in press*). Toward a communication theory of the demand/withdraw pattern of interaction in interpersonal relationships. In S. Smith & S. Wilson (Eds.), *New directions in interpersonal communication research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gottman, J. M. & Carrere, S. (1994). Why can't men and women get along? In D. J. Canary & L. Stafford (Eds.), *Communication and relational maintenance* (p.61-90). San Diego: Academic Press.

Seminar Schedule

Jan. 26	Introduction to the course
Fe. 2	Basic trends, concepts and issues
Fe. 9	Codes, context, and meaning
Fe. 16	Presidents' Day
Fe. 23	Relationship definition
Fe. 2	Information management #1
Mar. 9	Information management #2
Mar. 16	Impression management
Mar. 23	Comforting and support
Mar. 30	Spring Break
Ap. 6	Family relationships
Ap. 13	Sex and gender differences
Ap. 20	Relational dialectics
Ap. 27	Inter-subjective understanding
May 4	Mediated interpersonal communication
May 11	Discussion of projects and papers (no readings)