

COMM 970D: Narratives, Health, and Relationships

Fall 2013

Professor: Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas
Class meetings: Tuesdays, 6:30-9:10, OLD 438
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Required reading:

- *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self.* Dan P. McAdams (1997). The Guilford Press. ISBN: 978-1572301887
- *Black sheep and kissing cousins: How our family stories shape us.* Elizabeth Stone (2004). Transaction publishers. ISBN: 978-0765805881
- *Maps of narrative practice.* Michael White (2007). Norton. ISBN: 978-0-393-70516-4
- *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics.* Arthur Frank (1997). University of Chicago Press. ISBN: 978-0226259932
- *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness.* Rita Charon (2008). Oxford University Press. ISBN: 978-0195340228
- *Thrice told tales: Married couples tell their stories.* Diane Holmberg, Terri Orbuch, and Joseph Veroff. (2004). Routledge. ISBN: 978-0805841008
- *Additional required readings will be available on Blackboard*

Mission of the Department of Communication Studies

The role and mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies are to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, and societies. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages. The department's research, teaching, and service devote particular attention to understanding the ways in which communication erodes and sustains collaboration within and among local, national, and global communities.

Course Description and Objectives

Communication Studies 970D is designed to investigate current research issues, directions, and methodology in interpersonal communication. This semester we will explore a burgeoning

field of interpersonal and family communication inquiry – narratives, storytelling, and symbolic meaning-making in personal relationships.

Stories serve as prevalent forms of communication in relationships and act as one of the many communicative ways in which people describe, makes sense of, explain, negotiate, and construct relationships. They are also primary in how we make meaning in relationships and negotiate those relationships in public and private contexts. Thus, this course explores theory and research which situates narrative as central to making sense of, constituting, and reflecting our relational lives. Given the expansive breadth and depth of narrative research across academic disciplines, this course can and does not provide an exhaustive review of narrative research. Instead, it purposes to expose students to a range of methodological and interdisciplinary approaches to understanding and researching storytelling in ways that specifically inform our understanding of personal relationships. This semester, we will also focus in more specifically on an approach to narratives and storytelling that focuses specifically on the communicative manifestation of narratives and how the content and features of these interactions are relevant to mental, physical, and relational health both within and outside the context of health care. This approach on Communicated Narrative Sense-Making (CNSM) will provide a model and structure for our shared reading, critique, discussion and understanding of narratives and storytelling in and about personal relationships and health.

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

- Articulate foundational narrative approaches and theories across disciplines, particularly as they inform a CNSM approach to narrative.
- Understand the larger conceptual and empirical context of communicated sense-making and recognize other sense-making devices as linked to and distinct from narratives and storytelling.
- Understand and demonstrate an ability to apply the main theoretically and empirically evidenced foundational lenses and functions of narratives and storytelling in and about personal relationships, including but not limited to creating, socializing, and coping.
- Articulate, critique, and propose research in the CNSM tradition, including research on retrospective, interactional, and/or translational storytelling.
- Innovate ideas, arguments, and research projects on the heuristic and practical relationship between interpersonal storytelling and health.
- Engage: Generate questions that are theoretically grounded, empirically important, and heuristic about narratives and storytelling in and about personal relationships, both in conversation, writing prompts, writing reflections, class discussion, comprehensive exams, and in current and future research.
- Recognize and demonstrate the power and pitfalls of narratives and storytelling for health and well-being at various levels of abstraction.

Course Requirements

Class Participation (25%)

Although I will be offering my own insights in class to orient you to various theories and perspectives, as a graduate seminar, the class format will consist of significant student-run discussion. Therefore, class participation, including thoughtful preparation of the readings and quality engagement with each other during discussion is essential to this class. In preparation for each class, I would like you to reflect on each reading in the following way: (1) Summarize in one sentence (article)/paragraph-page (book) the major premise/thesis/argument of the article/chapter/book, (2) offer a one to two sentence/paragraph reaction to the article's premise (i.e., contradict, critique, support, extend), and (3) pose a thoughtful and reflective question that was inspired by the reading and that you would like to discuss in class. Although I will not collect and grade these preparations, I do expect you to bring them to class and they will often serve as the jumping off point for our discussions. The primary goal of these exercises is to foster an engaging and provocative class interaction. Thus, you should be consistently and thoroughly prepared to lead and engage one another and me in discussion about the week's topic and readings. You should also bring in a writing prompt which is detailed in the section on narrative pedagogy below.

Narrative Pedagogy – Appointments and Writing Prompts (15%)

As described in my teaching philosophy narrative (see attached), narrative pedagogy is an adaptation of narrative medicine which is training in “narrative competence to recognize, absorb, metabolize, interpret, and be moved by the stories of illness. Through narrative training... doctors, nurses, social workers, and therapists [improve] the effectiveness of care by developing the capacity for attention, reflection, representation, and affiliation with patients and colleagues” (www.narrativemedicine.org). We will explore the concepts associated with narrative medicine throughout the semester in an effort to ensure more effective teaching and learning through narrative pedagogy appointments, in-class narrative reflection (i.e., writing prompts/written reflections/reading discussions), and through reading Rita Charon's book *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness*.

Narrative Pedagogy Appointment. You will need to schedule one (ungraded) narrative pedagogy appointment with me this semester (during the first month of classes). During this appointment, please be prepared to respond to the following: “I will be your professor and so I have great deal to learn about your education and your life. Please tell me what you think I should know about your situation” (based on Charon, 2006, p. 177). As in the practice of narrative medicine, I will do my best not only to listen in a manner that recognizes, absorbs, and interprets your stories, but also to be moved by them. Keep in mind that this is not intended to be a therapy session, as I am not a trained psychologist and so you shouldn't feel pressure to tell or not tell more personal information. After our appointments I will write a short narrative summarizing our appointment (based on Charon, 2006). I will email you one copy and I will save another.

Narrative Pedagogy Prompts. Instead of writing formally outside of class this semester (except your notes and reading prep), we will do most of our writing in class. Specifically, we will engage in narrative reflection. This process will entail analyzing our class and other

readings and then writing to short writing prompts (3-5 minutes) which you will prepare prior to coming to class. These writing prompts should be designed to help us synthesize and provide a point of departure, analysis, evaluation, or synthesis of the readings. For each class period, you should bring a writing prompt as well as a paragraph (no more!) which explains/justifies why you crafted the prompt you did. The paragraph is meant to help situate and contextualize the critical thinking behind your prompt since prompts, themselves, can be brief, broad, etc. (e.g., "Write about a time your story was ironic). If your prompt is chosen for a specific class period, you will use the paragraph to debrief after people have written and shared their writings. I will introduce the notions of prompts during the first few classes before you are required to submit them. Although they will not be formally graded, I will sometimes collect your writings to get a finger on the pulse of the thinking of the class and to consider in your overall participation grade.

"Functions" Annotated Bibliography (FAB!) and In-Class Presentation (10%)

During the first eight weeks of the semester, you and a **partner** will select one of the functions (creating, socializing, or coping) that peaks your interest and relates most closely to your intended area of narrative research (i.e., the focus of your final project). You should pair up, therefore, based on common interest. You will then begin to read theory and research relevant to this topic, including readings from the course syllabus as well as those you have researched on your own. During Weeks 3 - 8, on your assigned week, you will turn in an annotated bibliography of at least 6 articles/books/book chapters. An annotated bibliography includes (a) a full citation of the article in APA format, (b) a few sentences summarizing the major questions and findings of the study you reviewed, and (c) a 1-2 sentence reflection on the article relevant to your project, the role of communication scholarship, the applied nature of the research, and/or a critique, etc. The annotated bibliography is designed to get you thinking about theory and research related to a topic you are interested in. It's not a contract to conduct research on this topic, per se, but should help you facilitate and narrow your ideas. You and your partner will then supplement the knowledge of the class by preparing and giving an engaging presentation about the research on the function you chose. Your 20-30 minute presentation should include at minimum: (a) a synthesized overview of your annotated articles, (b) an artifact that helps apply/illuminate the findings in the research you presented (e.g., song lyrics, a Youtube video, a conversation, a written narrative), and (c) a set of no more than three discussion questions that should provocatively generate class discussion on the day's topics and your readings (do not pose close-ended/yes-no questions).

CNSM Application Presentation (10%)

In a vein similar to the annotated bibliography assignment, you will pick an area of CNSM (retrospective, interactional, or translational storytelling) that interests you most and sign up with a **partner** to present a mini-method/application/analysis project on the area you chose. These will be spread out over the weeks so that you have had at least one week of exposure to the approach before having to present on it, but you should begin thinking about what you want to do early and using the Koenig Kellas & Kranstuber Horstman (in press) chapter and

additional independent readings as a guide for orienting you to the type of analysis you want to present. Examples might include, but are certainly not limited to:

- Conducting a mini-retrospective storytelling interview project in which you interview a few people on a particular genre of storytelling (e.g., parents' courtship stories, being told the adoption entrance story) and analyze and present the results to the class.
- Video-taping a storytelling interaction, analyzing it using an existing scheme or one you created, and then presenting your results to the class; getting the class involved in some portion of the analysis.
- Designing and testing an intervention strategy on the class (or other group) using narrative and storytelling methods.

You will turn in a **brief** write up of your analyses, including a research question/hypothesis, description of your method, and report of your results.

Final project (40%)

This course is designed, in part, to foster the design of an original study on some aspect of narratives or storytelling, health, and relationships. Thus, the semester project entails completing a research proposal on your topic and question(s) of interest. The final paper should ideally build on our meetings, your annotated bibliography (or what you learned from it), and possibly the in-class application you presented. The final proposal will include a warrant for the study, research questions and/or hypotheses, and the methods by which you will collect, analyze, and interpret an original set of data. If you choose Option 1, you should have a completed project at the end of the semester. If you choose Option 2 these projects should position you to begin collecting data after the semester has ended (after you apply for and receive IRB approval) and submit to the study to a conference (and/or publication) thereafter. I will meet with each of you at least twice during the semester to discuss your proposal ideas to assist you in facilitating your ideas, methods, analysis plans, etc.

Option 1: Study proposal + Specific Aims and Budget Page of a grant proposal associated with this study.

Option 2: Completion of a full study (IRB approval, data collection, literature review , methods, results, discussion sections completed).

(Possible)

Option 3: Depending on student interest, there is a possibility of working on a research team project headed up by me this semester. This option would need to be limited to about three students to ensure that everyone has an equal part in the project. If interest exceeds this, we will stick with Options 1 and 2.

A detailed assignment sheet for each part of the semester project will be given in class.

Course Policies

Attendance: As with any graduate seminar, attendance at each class is expected. Should you have an emergency that prevents you from attending class, please get in touch with me as soon as you can prior to your absence.

Accommodations. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the instructor for a confidential discussion of their individual needs for academic accommodation. It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln to provide flexible and individualized accommodation to students with documented disabilities that may affect their ability to fully participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. To receive accommodation services, students must be registered with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office, 132 Canfield Administration, 472-3787 voice or TTY.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and grounds for university action. According to the University's Bulletin (2013-2014), plagiarism is considered an act of Academic Dishonesty and is defined as, but not limited to "Presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgment of the source) and submitting examinations, theses, reports, speeches, drawings, laboratory notes or other academic work in whole or in part as one's own when such work has been prepared by another person or copied from another person." Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade and may be grounds for failing the course. It is the policy of the Department of Communication Studies to file a report with the Dean of Students for any infraction (no matter how minor it may seem). It is your responsibility as a student to familiarize yourself with and adhere to these guidelines (see <http://stuafs.unl.edu/ja/code/three.shtml> for the university policies and descriptions of all academic dishonesty and <http://www.unl.edu/writing/avoiding-plagiarism> for helpful tips on avoiding plagiarism). It is my responsibility to report any cases of cheating or plagiarism to the administration. All assignments must be your own original work and must be prepared specifically for this course.

Course Schedule

Introducing Narrative from a Communication Lens

Week 1 (8/27): Introduction to the course and Narrative Pedagogy

Readings:

- Charon, R. (2009). Narrative Medicine as witness for the self-telling body. *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 37, 118-131.

Week 2 (9/3): Introduction to CNSM

TO DO: *Schedule narrative pedagogy appointments with me*
 Choose partners and sign up for "Functions" Annotated Bib Presentations

Readings:

- **Fisher, W. R.** (1987). *Human communication as narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action* (pp. 5-23; 57-84). Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.
- **Langellier, K. M.** (1999). Personal narratives, performance, performativity: Two or three things I know for sure. *Text and Performance Quarterly*, 19, 125-144.
- **Bochner, A. P., Ellis, C., & Tillman-Healy, L. M.** (2000). Relationships as stories: Accounts, storied lives, evocative narratives. In K. Dindia & S. Duck (Eds.) *Communication and personal relationships* (pp. 13-29). New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- **Japp, P. M., Harter, L. M., & Beck, C. S.** (2005). Overview and vital problematics of narrative theorizing about health and healing. In L. M. Harter, P. M. Japp, & C. S. Beck (Eds.) *Narratives, health, and healing: Communication theory, research, and practice* (pp. 1-29). New York: Routledge.
- **Koenig Kellas, J., & Kranstuber Horstman, H.** (in press). Communicated narrative sense-making: Understanding family narratives, storytelling, and the construction of meaning through a communicative lens. In L. M. Turner, & R. West (Eds.) *Sage handbook of family communication*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Functions: Creating & Socializing

Week 3 (9/10): Foundations in creating individual identity

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **McAdams, D. P.** (1997). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self.* (Introduction through Chapter 5)

Week 4 (9/17): Foundations in creating individual identity

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **McAdams, D. P.** (1997). *The stories we live by: Personal myths and the making of the self.* (Chapter 6 through Epilogue)

Week 5 (9/24): Foundations in creating family identity and socializing members

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **Stone, E.** (2004). *Black sheep and kissing cousins: How our family stories shape us.*

Week 6 (10/1): Empirical Examinations

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **Aleman, M. W., & Helfrich, K. W.** (2010). Inheriting the narratives of dementia: A collaborative tale of a mother and daughter. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*, 7-23.
- **Reese, E., Yan, C. Jack, F., & Hayne, H.** (2010). Emerging identities: Narrative and self from early childhood to early adolescence. In K. C. McLean, & M. Paspupathi (Eds.) *Narrative development in adolescence* (pp. 23-43). New York: Springer.
- **Miller, P. F., Wiley, A. R., Fung, H., & Liang, C.** (1997). Personal Storytelling as a Medium of Socialization in Chinese and American Families. *Child Development, 68*, 557-568.
- **Marin, K. A.; Bohanek, J. G.; Fivush, R.** (2008). Positive Effects of Talking About the Negative: Family Narratives of Negative Experiences and Preadolescents' Perceived Competence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 18*, 573-593.
- **Manoogian, M. M., Harter, L. M., & Denham, S. A.** (2010). The storied nature of health legacies in the familial experience of Type 2 diabetes. *Journal of Family Communication, 10*, 40-56.

Functions: Sense-making, Coping, and Health

Week 7 (10/8): Foundations: Making sense of illness

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **Frank, A.** (1997). *The wounded storyteller: Body, illness, and ethics.*

Week 8 (10/15): Foundations: Reframing dispreferred narratives

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- **White, M.** (2007). *Maps of narrative practice.*

Week 9 (10/22): FALL BREAK – NO CLASS MEETING

Week 10 (10/29): Empirical investigations

Due: *Presenters' FABs*

Readings:

- Smyth, J. M., & Pennebaker, J. W. (2008). Exploring the boundary conditions of expressive writing: In search of the right recipe. *British Journal of Health Psychology*, 13, 1-7.
- Seih, Y., Chang, C. K., & Pennbaker, J. W. (2011). Experimental manipulations of perspective taking and perspective switching in expressive writing. *Cognition and Emotion*, 25, 926-938.
- Pauley, P. M., Morman, M. T., & Floyd, K. (2011). Expressive writing improves subjective health among testicular cancer survivors: A pilot study. *International Journal of Men's Health*, 10, 199-219.
- Koenig Kellas, J., Horstman, H. K., Willer, E. K., & Carr, K. (under review). The Benefits and Risks of Telling and Listening to Stories of Difficulty Over Time: Experimentally Testing the Expressive Writing Paradigm in the Context of Interpersonal Communication Between Friends. *Health Communication*.
- Bosticco, C., & Thompson, T. L. (2005). An examination of the role of narratives and storytelling in bereavement. In L. M. Harter, P. M. Japp, & C. S. Beck (Eds.) *Narratives, health, and healing: Communication theory, research, and practice* (pp. 391-411). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

CNSM: Retrospective Storytelling

Week 11 (11/5): Retrospective storytelling

Readings:

- Kranstuber Horstman, H. (2013). "Love stories aren't always like the movies": The relational implications of inheriting parents' courtship stories. In J. Koenig Kellas (Ed.) *Family storytelling: Negotiating identities, teaching lessons, and making meaning* (pp. 57-78). New York: Routledge.
- Hayden, J.M., Singer, J. A., & Chrisler, J. C. (2006). The transmission of birth stories from mother to daughter: Self-esteem and mother-daughter attachment. *Sex Roles*, 55, 373-383.
- Hest, T. L., Pearson, J. C., & Child, J. T. (2006). Cover stories as family communication practice. In L. H. Turner, & R. West (Eds.) *The family communication sourcebook* (pp. 129-142). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Vangelisti, A. L., Crumley, L. P., & Baker, J. L. (1999). Family portraits: Stories as standards for family relationships. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 16, 335-368.

CNSM: Interactional Storytelling

Week 12 (11/12): Foundations

Due: *Retrospective CNSM application presentations and write-ups*

Readings:

- Holmberg, D., Orbuch, T., & Veroff, J. (2004). *Thrice told tales: Married couples tell their stories.*

Week 13 (11/19): Empirical investigations (a.k.a. shameless self-promotion 😊)

Due: *Interactional CNSM application presentations and write-ups*

Readings:

- Koenig Kellas, J. (2005). Family ties: Communicating identity through jointly told family stories. *Communication Monographs*, 72, 365-389.
- Fiese, B. H., & Marjinsky, K. A. T. (1999). Dinnertime stories: Connecting family practices with relationship beliefs and child adjustment. *Monographs for the Society for Research in Child Development*, 64, 52-68.
- Koenig Kellas, J., Trees, A. R., Schrod, P., LeClaire-Underberg, C., & Willer, E. K. (2010). Exploring links between well-being and interactional sense-making in married couples' jointly told stories of stress. *Journal of Family Communication*, 10, 174-193.
- Koenig Kellas, J., Willer, E. K., & Trees, A. R. (2013). Communicated perspective-taking: Spouses' perceptions of each others' behaviors during stories of marital stress. *Southern Communication Journal*, 78, 326-251.

CNSM: Translational Storytelling

Week 14 (11/26): Foundations

Readings:

- Charon, R. (2008). *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness.* (PARTS I & II)

Week 15 (12/3): Foundations

Due: *Translational CNSM application presentations and write-ups – Jen & Kaitlin*

- Charon, R. (2008). *Narrative medicine: Honoring the stories of illness.* (PARTS III & IV)

Week 16 (12/10): Empirical investigations

Due: *Translational CNSM application presentations and write-ups*

Readings:

- Hecht, M. L., & Miller-Day, M. (2007). The Drug Resistance Strategies Project as translational research, *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, 35, 343-349.
- Beach, W. A. (2010). Communicating about cancer in families and clinics. *Health Communication*, 25, 599-600.
- Wittenberg-Lyles, E., Goldsmith, J., & Ragan, S. (2011). The shift to early palliative care: A typology of illness journeys and the role of nursing. *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*,

15, 304-310.

- Harter reading or film TBA

Synthesizing

Finals Week (12/17): Project presentations

Due: Final Projects