COMM 971: The Dark Side of Interpersonal and Family Communication
Spring 2017

Professor: Dr. Jody Koenig Kellas
Class meetings: Tuesdays, 3:30-6:10, Oldfather 438
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Required texts:


A required set of readings is available on our Blackboard Website under “Course Documents”

Mission of Department of Communication Studies
The mission of the faculty and students of the Department of Communication Studies is to examine human symbolic activity as it shapes and is shaped by relationships, institutions, technology, and culture. This work concerns the creation, analysis, and critique of messages ranging from face-to-face to digital media contexts. The department’s research and teaching devote particular attention to scholarly initiatives aimed at understanding and explaining the role of communication in (a) facilitating civic engagement, mediating public controversies, and organizing for social change, (b) constituting individual and family health, promoting healthy behaviors, and helping persons navigate relational challenges, and (c) creating, maintaining, and challenging personal, social, and community identity in a complex and diverse world.

Course Description
Communication Studies 971 is focused on “the dark side” of interpersonal and family communication. According to Brian Spitzberg, the “dark side” is a metaphor used to describe those areas of interpersonal communication that are (a) underexplored or “lying in the shadows,” awaiting scholarly attention, (b) presumed to be destructive, dysfunctional, evil, immoral, malicious, criminal, abusive, exploitative, lunatic, or otherwise really icky, naughty, or not at all very nice, (c) those aspects of communication that are viewed as dark, but should not be (e.g., things presumed to be bad that function to produce preferred outcomes), and (d) those aspects of communication that are presumed to be good that should not be (i.e., things presumed to be good that function to produce dispreferred outcomes). Although much communication (and related) research orients us to the value of open, effective, honest, and competent, etc. communication, this course acknowledges that an examination of the “brighter” sides of communication only provides part of the picture of
the characteristics of communication that make up our everyday lives. Surely, each of us has experienced lying, equivocation, ambiguity, gossip, loneliness, irresolvable conflicts, rejection, oversharing (i.e., TMI), incompetence, etc. in our interpersonal interactions. This course sets out to explore research and theory that illuminates the dark side of interpersonal communication and provides an orientation for understanding the dark side as inseparable from the brighter side in understanding and researching human communication.

The objectives of this course include:
- Understanding the “dark side” metaphor and its relationship and importance to interpersonal communication research, theory, and practice.
- Critiquing current interpersonal and family communication theories and research, as well as applying them to a holistic understanding of the dark and bright sides of interaction.
- Understanding the complexities associated with dark side topics including the potentially collaborative, systemic, dialectic, and functionally ambivalent nature of the “dark side.”
- Advancing original, (“aha!”), potentially translational research on the dark side of interpersonal communication.
- Thoughtfully reflecting on and making sense of “dark side” concepts by balancing between our roles and responses as critics and citizens (i.e., researchers and/or interpersonal communicators).
- Mindfully considering the ways in which the dark side can be extended, improved, and applied.
- Broadly engaging the dark side through critical reflection, engaged discussion, and applied learning.

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. I will sometimes post reading guide/discussion questions for you to think about prior to coming to class and for your consideration as you do your readings and construct your weekly blog (see below). The blog assignment is also designed to help foster quality in-class discussion. You should be consistently and thoroughly prepared to lead and engage one another and me in discussion about the week’s topic and readings. Given the course objectives outlined above, it is acceptable to interrogate the topics we discuss from a student critic, researcher, or personal standpoint. It is important, however, that whichever lens guides our discussion it be grounded in or linked to the scholarly readings, theories, or topics relevant to the class and course readings. In addition to your in-class involvement, I will also assess the quantity and quality of your comments on other classmates’ blogs. Note: blogs are not discussion boards; thus, I do not expect you to read and comment on every person’s blog every single week! I do expect that you will read, reflect, and engage (through posted comments) on at least one other person’s blog on a regular (weekly) basis to demonstrate your class involvement and also to maximize the potential for the blogs to generate critical reflection, engaged discussion, and applied learning.

Dark Side Blogs (25%): One of the instructional objectives in this course is to balance between becoming critics and citizens, reflectors and practitioners, researchers and interpersonal
communicators in the context of learning about and conducting research on the Dark Side of Interpersonal and Family Communication. In order to foster this over the course of a 16-week seminar, you will create a keep a weekly blog. “A blog (a contraction of the term "Web log") is a Web site, usually maintained by an individual with regular entries of commentary, descriptions of events, or other material such as graphics or video. Entries are commonly displayed in reverse-chronological order. "Blog" can also be used as a verb, meaning to maintain or add content to a blog. Many blogs provide commentary or news on a particular subject; others function as more personal online diaries. A typical blog combines text, images, and links to other blogs, Web pages, and other media related to its topic. The ability for readers to leave comments in an interactive format is an important part of many blogs. Most blogs are primarily textual, although some focus on art (artlog), photographs (photoblog), sketches (sketchblog), videos (vlog), music (MP3 blog), audio (podcasting), which are part of a wider network of social media. Micro-blogging is another type of blogging, one which consists of blogs with very short posts. As of December 2007, blog search engine Technorati was tracking more than 112 million blogs.\[1\] With the advent of video blogging, the word blog has taken on an even looser meaning — that of any bit of media wherein the subject expresses his opinion or simply talks about something” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blog).

The purpose of your weekly blog will be to reflect on the week’s readings, as well as any other course material (i.e., theories, readings, models from previous weeks), and your own experiences with, or reactions to, the topic as an interpersonal communicator and/or researcher. The blogs should help you and your classmates achieve the learning objectives of critical reflection, engaged discussion, and applied learning. First, writing about course readings ensures engaged and critical reflection on those readings. Thinking and reflecting in writing thoughtfully about the week’s reading prior to coming to class should help you to engage more with the material and should also help with the second goal, engaged classroom discussion. Much of a seminar is about grappling with ideas in order that we might help each other become more prepared critics and citizens (Bryan Mcann, personal communication, December 2008). Thus, the blogs are also designed to foster engaged discussion during our seminar meeting. Finally, by giving you the opportunity to reflect not only on the readings but also on the ways in which they relate to, make you think about, connect with your own life as an interpersonal communicator, family or relationship member, and/or interpersonal and family communication researcher should enhance your learning. Applied learning gives you an opportunity to connect with and sink your teeth into material in a way that will make it more significant, interesting, helping to, as Doug Kelley (2008) would say, bring you from “No duh” to “Aha!” moments. A complete handout outlining the requirements of the semester-long blog project will be handed out in class and posted on Blackboard. As detailed above, part of your involvement grade will include your active participation in reading and commenting on others’ blogs. I will not grade you on the “look” of your blogs (after all, I am not very technologically savvy!), however, I hope you will personalize and have fun with a space that is designed to enhance your learning of the dark side of interpersonal and family communication. In order to be graded, blog entries must be submitted by 12:00 PM each Thursday. This should give others a chance to look at blogs prior to class, although commenting on others’ posts may happen after the Thursday they are posted. Finally, you must complete at least 10 of the 12 blogs over the course of the semester which means that you have two “free” weeks when you can opt out of a blog if you wish. You must complete the first (Week 2) and last (Week 16 blogs).
In class article and theory discussion facilitation (10%): At the beginning of the semester, you will sign up to lead discussion during a portion of one seminar on a topic that is of interest to you. You should, first, select an empirical, peer-reviewed journal article relevant to the day’s discussion. Second, you should read that article and incorporate at least some of your thoughts about it into your weekly blog. (If you can post the article to your blog that is great too, but not required). Third, you should introduce a (preferably communication) theory that you think sheds light on the dark side topic you chose to present about. This theory does not need to be presented in the article you chose or the readings for the week. Rather, because dark side research can be atheoretical, your task is to identify a theory that you think lends or can lend insight or texture into the dark side topic you chose to investigate. Introduce the theory and briefly explain how you think it is well-suited for the study of the dark side in your blog post for the week. Finally, you will have 30 minutes of class (15 minutes for article and theory summary; 15 minutes to lead discussion) to present on and lead discussion about your article and theory and how they connect with and/or diverges from the current week’s readings as well as any other previous theoretical or topical material you feel is relevant. You may use your blog as an interactive presentation tool (i.e., link other relevant media, post a story you would like the class to read in advance, display comments relevant to your discussion).

Semester Project (40%): This course is designed in part to foster the design and implementation of an original study on some aspect of the dark side of interpersonal and/or family communication. Thus, the major assignment in this class entails completing a research proposal in which you will be required to review literature and theory to provide a strong warrant for a study, develop research questions, and propose (or carry out) the methods by which you will collect, analyze, and interpret an original set of data. You have two options for this project, including:

1) **Option I: Original Empirical Study.** This option entails seminar participants, either individually or in pairs, designing and implementing an original study on some aspect of the dark side of IPC. Students who choose Option I will be required to review literature and theory to provide a strong warrant for their study, develop research questions, collect an original set of data, analyze the data, and interpret those data, and articulate limitations and directions for future research. The goal of this project is for students to complete a conference- and/or publication-ready paper for submission to a national or regional conference and/or scholarly journal. Individuals and pairs selecting Option I will be required to submit proposals for their studies and meet with me for approval and consultation during the semester. If you choose to carry out a full empirical study on some aspect of the dark side over the course of the semester, you will need to move quickly to meet with me (during week 1 or 2), discuss your project and get it approved, and then submit IRB (by week 3 if possible) so that you will have time to collect your data and write up your results.

2) **Option II: Empirical Study Proposal and Roundtable Panel Proposal.** Research proposals will include a justification for your research, a review of the literature on your topic, a rationale for research question(s) and/or hypotheses, and a clearly outlined discussion of how you plan on studying these questions (methods section). In addition to the proposal, you will also be required to turn in a conference-ready roundtable (or discussion) panel proposal on some aspect of the dark side of interpersonal and family communication. Option II should enable you to begin data collection once the semester ends (and once you have received IRB approval) on your research project. This option also ensures that you will have a completed product (roundtable proposal) ready to send out for conference review once the semester ends. You may work in groups for the roundtable assignment.
A detailed assignment sheet will be given in class for each option.

*Applied/Translational Section*: In line with course objectives, for either option, you will also be required to include an “Applied/Translational” section of your paper. Similar to the requirements for articles in the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, each paper will include a section on how the project can, does, or has the potential (either in its current form or as it contributes to a line of scholarship) to illustrate “how communication defines, reforms, alters and shed lights on contemporary issues” including a section “detailing the intended or potential practical applications of the findings” (*Journal of Applied Communication Research* Editorial Policy, 2011)

*Semester project presentations*: 5% of your grade for the semester project will be a conference style presentation of your proposal or study. These presentations will be given during Week 15 of the course.

**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/dos/code](http://stuafs.unl.edu/dos/code) for the university policies and descriptions of all academic dishonesty and [http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/integrity#plagiarism](http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/integrity#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.
### Tentative Course Schedule, Readings, and Assignments
*Indicates readings available in the course reading packet and/or on our BB site

#### Week 1, 1/12/16: Introduction to the Course and Translational Research


#### Conceptualizing the Dark (and Light) Side

#### Week 2, 1/19/16: Defining the Dark Side: Historical Perspectives, Needs, and Ethical Implications

**Assignment(s):**
- Create blogs. 1st blog must be posted by 12:00 PM on Thursday 1/19; you MUST complete this blog (i.e., it cannot be used for one of your two free weeks)
- Meet with me during this week (if not sooner) regarding research project ideas and options.
- Option I semester project proposals due by Friday, 1/20

**Readings (in order)**

**Also recommended:**

#### Week 3, 1/26/16: Defining the Dark Side: Contemporary Perspectives and Agendas

**Assignment(s):**
- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM
- Option II semester project proposals due
*In-class SEMESTER PROJECT CHECK-POINT* (be prepared to discuss your topics/progress to this point)

**Readings**

**Also recommended:**

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**Week 4: 2/2/16:** *Problematising, Extending, Theorizing, and Juxtaposing the Dark Side*

**Assignment(s):**
- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

**Readings**

**Also Recommended:**
Endearing and Aversive Behaviors and Emotions

Week 5: 2/9/16: Interrogating what is light and what is dark

Assignment(s):
- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

Readings


Also Recommended:

Week 6: 2/16/16: Aversive and Aggressive Behaviors

Assignment(s):
- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

Readings


Also recommended:


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**Week 7: 2/23/16: The Light and Dark Side of Emotions**

**Assignment(s):**

- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

- *In-class SEMESTER PROJECT CHECK-POINT* (be prepared to discuss your topics/progress to this point)

**Readings**


**Also Recommended:**


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**The Dark Side of Intimacy, Relationships, and Loss**

**Week 8: 3/2/17: Understanding Potentially Destructive Relational Patterns**


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**Week 9:** 3/9/17: *Responses to Relational Turbulence and Transgressions*

**Assignment(s):**

- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

**Readings**


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**Week 10:** 3/16/16: *Communication and Loss*

**Assignment(s):**

- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

**Readings**


**Also recommended:**


Masuda, M. (2006). Perspectives on premarital postdissolutional relationships: Account-


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**Week 11: 3/23/16: SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS MEETING**

**Week 12: 3/30/16: (Re)framing the dark side: Hope, optimism, and making sense**

**Assignment(s):**

- Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM

*In-class SEMESTER PROJECT CHECK-POINT* (be prepared to discuss your topics/progress to this point)

**Readings**


**Also recommended:**


McNulty, J. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). Beyond positive psychology? Toward a contextual view of psychological process and well-being. *American Psychologist, 67*, 101-110. (*read also Lyumbomirsky’s one paragraph commentary attached to the end of this article*).

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**Week 13: 4/6/16: (Dys)Functional Families: Contextual Views**

**Assignment(s):**

- NO BLOG DUE THIS WEEK
Readings


Violence, Abuse, and Other Dark Issues

Week 14: 4/13/16: Challenge, Rejection, and Abuse in Families and Personal Relationships

Assignment(s):

Blog must be posted by 12:00 PM


Week 15: 4/20/16: Research Presentations

Assignment(s):

Final semester research project due

Wrapping Up

Week 16: 4/27/16: Verbal, Physical, Sexual, and Psychological Abuse

Assignment(s):

Blog must be posted by Wednesday at 12:00 PM (you MUST complete this blog entry – it may not be used as one of your free weeks)

Readings


Also recommended: