

COMM 471: The **Dark Side** of Interpersonal Communication

Spring 2012

Professor: Dr. Jody (Koenig) Kellas
Class meetings: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-1:45, Oldfather 204
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Office hours: Tuesdays, 9:30-10:30, Thursdays, 2:00-3:00 or by appointment
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Course website: www.my.unl.edu (Blackboard)
Required texts: Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2007). *The dark side of interpersonal communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Spitzberg, B. H., & Cupach, W. R. (2010). *The dark side of close Relationships, 2nd ed.*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

*A **required** reading packet is available for purchase at an additional cost in Oldfather 433.*

Mission of 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

Communication Studies 471 is focused on “the dark side” of interpersonal 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 most of your communication courses have probably oriented you to the ways in which you can communicate more openly, effectively, honestly, etc., 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 human communication.

The cornerstones of learning in this course are **active learning, critical reflection, and engaged discussion** – you will be continually challenged to both critically examine theory and research and apply them to your own experiences and choices. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, this course requires your critical

reflection on course readings and assignments and engaged discussion. This course is an advanced, senior-level course. Engaged, insightful, and critical discussion is at the heart of the learning environment of this class and is essential to its success as well as yours. These approaches will afford you opportunities to not only gain theoretic knowledge, but will also allow you to grapple with and critique the material in ideological, critical, and ethical ways. One central way you will be doing that this semester is by sharing your own stories about your experience with “dark side” interactions. These stories are meant to help you and your classmates invest in, make sense of, and identify with the material in ways that offer potentially more richness and connection than other methods of learning.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course you will be able to:

- understand the “dark side” metaphor and its relationship and importance to interpersonal communication research, theory, and practice
- understand and engage in principles related to narrative medicine/pedagogy, both as an instructional and classroom climate practice and as a theoretically-driven response to the dark side of current medical models
- critique current interpersonal communication theories and research, as well as apply them to a holistic understanding of the dark and bright sides of interaction
- understand the complexities associated with dark side topics including message complexity, annoyances, dark emotions, relational struggles, relational disruption, as well as coercion, abuse, and the dark side of family interaction
- articulate the benefits and drawbacks of dark side concepts in developing, maintaining, and dissolving interpersonal relationships
- apply theories of the dark side of interpersonal communication to practical interpersonal situations
- critically examine the collaborative and patterned nature of “dark side” issues
- thoughtfully make sense of “dark side” concepts by applying them to your own stories and experiences.
- expand your repertoire for confronting “dark side” interactions.

Expectations

The contributions that we bring to the classroom will largely affect the quality of the learning that takes place. I teach best and the content of this course emerges most fruitfully when students are actively engaged in the learning process. This means that as students I expect you to be present both physically and mentally, engage in classroom discussion, complete assigned work by the due date, and help create a classroom environment that is supportive, sensitive, and respectful to all members.

Because this is a course about interpersonal communication, we will often discuss materials and experiences of a personal nature, including your own individual stories. Personal examples will help us to effectively apply and understand the course content, but may also at times challenge our comfort zones. In order to foster a classroom environment in which our discussions and personal application will benefit our understanding, we must work together to make it a safe and respectful forum. I expect everyone in the class to respect others’ rights to speak, to listen attentively to what is said, and to use discretion and sensitivity when speaking. If you have questions or concerns about this element of the course, I encourage you to bring them up in class or talk to me individually.

Course Requirements and Grading

You final grade will be based on two exams, entries in a narrative reflection journal, reading discussion questions (DQs) and one large semester research/application project. You will also be graded on involvement, which includes participation in classroom discussion as well as your involvement in several in-class application activities and one appointment with me (narrative pedagogy appointment). The grading breakdown is as follows:

<u>Assignment</u>	<u>Points</u>
Exam 1	100
Exam 2	100
Narrative journals (5 entries)	100 (20 points each)
Involvement	50
Narrative Pedagogy Appointment	10
Reading DQs (20)	40 (2 points each)
Final Project	<u>100</u>
TOTAL	500
Extra Credit Opportunities	2 @ 5 points each

Assignment/Exam Description

Exams

Exams will take the entire class period. They are designed to test your understanding and application of the concepts presented in the text, class lectures, group presentations, and activities, as well as your ability to critically engage with course content and bring your own thoughts, opinions, and critiques to bear on the ideas we discuss in course readings and during class time. Exams will be essay and will require your thorough and thoughtful preparation of the material in ways that show your clear understanding of class material as well as your ability to articulate critical thinking.

Class Involvement:

This class revolves around active learning, critical reflection, and engaged discussion. Make no mistake about it – part of your grade in this class depends on your active, prepared, and thoughtful participation in class discussion. This means that if you do not like to talk in class, this is probably not the class for you. Your involvement is what will bring meaning and make this class worthwhile to you and to others. That said, I am looking for **quality** involvement, not just quantity. This means that I want you to engage fully in class discussion and listen actively to others. Participation in activities, asking questions, and integrating reading materials into class discussion also serve as quality involvement. Involvement includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Attending class regularly and on time (you are expected to attend all classes for the duration of the class period)
- Leading class discussion on concepts in the readings for that day that provoked, confused, excited, irked, and/or effected you in some way
- Being focused and practicing good listening skills
- Contributing to group discussion
- Participating relevantly and actively in class exercises
- Reading and reflecting on others' narrative reflection journal entries
- Talking with me about class concepts, skills, and issues
- Relating class material to the “outside” world
- Not monopolizing discussion or discrediting others

Narrative Pedagogy Appointments¹

As described in my teaching philosophy narrative, 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). In an effort to ensure more effective teaching and learning, and engage in personalized communication that has the potential to impact your learning and your life in beneficial ways, we will be practicing narrative pedagogy this semester. You will need to schedule one narrative pedagogy appointment with me within the first month of the semester. During this appointment, which should be completed between January 12th and February 10th, 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).

Although there is only one required narrative pedagogy appointment, I encourage you to come in and visit me again during the semester during which time you are welcome to share with me anything you would like, related to the class or to something outside the course. 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 (although I am more than willing to put you in touch with someone on campus if you’d like) 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. The appointment is required and you will receive 10 points for attending.

Reading DQs

Completing the assigned reading on time is another essential and required part of this course. In order to ensure that students are keeping up with the reading material, in preparation for each class, you should prepare **typed** responses for each reading that include the following: (1) Summarize in one sentence the major premise/thesis/argument of the article/chapter, (2) offer a one to two sentence 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. These will be collected each day a reading is required and graded on a credit (2 points)/no-credit (0 points) basis. 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. If it becomes clear that students are not doing the assigned reading, I reserve the right to institute regular reading quizzes as part of your involvement grade. There are readings assigned on 21 days of class. You must complete 20 Reading DQs (thus, you can opt out of one day). As a helpful reminder, the syllabus is notated with the abbreviation RDQ each day a reading is assigned. You need only complete your RDQs on one of the assigned readings if there is more than one assigned for that day.

Narrative Reflection Journal

Research and practical experience show that people are storytellers. Researchers refer to humans as storytelling animals and years of scholarship and practice have shown that people make sense of their lives, their difficulties, their relationships, and who they are by telling stories about themselves and their lives. Thus, stories are at the heart of who we are. Because stories are so central to our everyday understanding, they should assist us in understanding and sense-making across contexts, including the classroom. In fact, many teachers use stories as examples to illustrate concepts and students use their own stories to reflect on course concepts. This semester, we will “formalize” this storytelling process by applying course material to our own stories. Thus, one of your primary written assignments for the semester is a Narrative Reflection Journal. In it, you will be asked to share stories from your own (or close others’) experiences and reflect on the ways in which those stories link with specified course content. These stories will be brought to class and

¹ Adapted from Dr. Erin Willer (2011)

shared with assigned small learning groups. We will use these stories to discuss, problematize, tease apart, apply, and evaluate course concepts. Even though the nature of personal stories is subjective, the stories will be graded as written assignments and therefore must be well-written, clear, grammatical, and relevant. Each entry will be assigned one of the following grades: Outstanding (A), Good (B), Satisfactory (C), or Unsatisfactory (D). A detailed assignment sheet will be posted on Blackboard.

Final Research and Application Project

During the second half of the semester, you will identify a topic on the dark side of interpersonal communication that we have covered in-class and that you find compelling. You will then complete a two-part analysis of this topic. **FIRST**, you will identify a person in the community whose job reflects a daily (direct or indirect) encounter with the dark side of interpersonal communication topic you have chosen. For example, you may interview a prison guard who interacts with rape, sexual coercion, or abuse convicts on a daily basis, or you might interview a marital therapist who counsels couples on infidelity, verbal abuse, and/or conflict, etc. You will gather experiences and stories from this person about how the dark side is relevant to his/her everyday life. **SECOND**, you will conduct a literature review of the research relevant to your topic, drawing from primary scholarly sources that provide you with an understanding of your topic than course constraints allow. You will then offer an in-depth written analysis and critique of the research, the daily interactions reported by your interviewee, and your own perspectives on how both the research and application changed or impacted your own thinking about the dark side of interpersonal communication. This project requires early and detailed attention! Topic ideas and interviewees must be cleared by me. A detailed assignment sheet will be posted on Blackboard.

Extra Credit Opportunities

Over the course of the semester, you may choose to participate in up to two research studies for extra credit. These studies will be announced in class and posted on Blackboard. You are encouraged to sign up for research studies early in the semester as they may not run throughout the semester. One non-research option will also be offered for students who are not eligible to participate in the research studies. You may only complete TWO extra credit projects, and each is worth 5 points.

Assignment sheets outlining specific expectations for above assignments will be given during the semester.

Course Policies

Late Papers and Make-up Exams: Late journal entries **will not be accepted**. Make-up exams will only be given in the case of an emergency and will be different from the original exam. Make-up exams must be taken within one week of the regularly scheduled exam. **You must contact me within 24 hours (either before or after) the scheduled exam in order for me to consider a make-up.**

In-Class Etiquette: Your timely presence is required in this course. Tardiness is disruptive to your fellow students and me. Please be sure to turn cell phones off before entering the classroom and avoid talking to your peers during class lecture and discussion. Going online during class is an inappropriate use of class time. Please only use laptops for notetaking.

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.

Course Credit: Students taking this class pass-fail and Communication Studies majors must earn a grade of 74% (C) or better to receive credit for this course.

Plagiarism: Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and grounds for university action. According to the University's Undergraduate Bulletin (2004-5), plagiarism is considered an act of Academic Dishonesty and is defined as "presenting the work of another as one's own (i.e., without proper acknowledgement of the source) and submitting... 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" (p. 390). Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "0" grade (F) and may be grounds for failing the course. It is your responsibility as a student to familiarize yourself with and adhere to these guidelines (see <http://www.unl.edu/unlpub/undergrad/0405ugbulletin.pdf> for the university policy and <http://www.unl.edu/frugal/plagiarism/> for helpful tips on avoiding plagiarism). It is my responsibility to report any cases of cheating or plagiarism to the university administration. Per university policy, any act of academic dishonesty whether intentional or unintentional, will be reported to the Dean of Students. All assignments must be your own original work and must be prepared specifically for this course.

Tentative Course Schedule

- * Indicates a reading available in your course reading packet
 (07) indicates a reading in The Dark Side of Interpersonal Communication (2007) reader
 (10) indicates a reading in The Dark Side of Close Relationships (2010) reader

Date	Content	Readings	Assignment Due
T 1/10	Introduction to the Course: Defining & Narrating the Dark Side	Brand & Yancey (1993)* <i>(we will read this in class)</i> Spitzberg & Cupach (07)	
Defining and Theorizing			
Th 1/12	Why do we need the Dark Side perspective?	Duck (94)* Charon (09)*	Practice NRJ due in class <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i> <i>RDQ</i>
T 1/17	Problematizing the Dark Side	Spitzberg & Cupach (98)* Rawlins (1997)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 1/19	Theoretical Perspectives: Critiquing the "Bright Side"	Parks (1995)*	<i>RDQ</i>
T 1/24	Theoretical Perspectives: Integrating the "Dark Side"	Baxter (2004)* Stewart p. 15-32 (2006)* Galvin et al. (2006)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Aversive and Aggressive Behaviors			
Th 1/26	Narrative Reflection Journal Application Day 1		NRJ 1 Due (simplifying) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i>
T 1/31	(In)competence	Spitzberg (1994)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 2/2	Complaining	Cupach (07)	<i>RDQ</i>
T 2/14	Social Aggression	Willer & Cupach (10)	<i>RDQ</i>
Sweet(?) Emotion			
Th 2/16	Hurt	Vangelisti (07)	NRJ 2 Due (hurt) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i>

			<i>RDQ</i>
T 2/21	WSCA CONVENTION – NO CLASS		
Th 2/23	Affection	Floyd & Mikkelson (10)	<i>RDQ</i>
T 2/28	Jealousy, Envy, Revenge, and Hate	Yoshimura (07) Goldberg (99)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Roller Coasters: The Ups and Downs of Relationships			
Th 3/1	EXAM 1		
T 3/6	Living Single	DePaulo (10)	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 3/8	Developing Relationships Online	DeAndrea et al. (10) OR Sprecher (10)	NRJ 3 Due (deception) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i> <i>RDQ</i>
T 3/13	Transgressions and Forgiveness	Metts & Cupach (07)	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 3/15	Breaking Up and Making Sense	Koenig Kellas et al. (10)	NRJ 4 due (transgression/breakup) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i> <i>RDQ</i>
T 3/20	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS		
Th 3/22	SPRING BREAK – NO CLASS		
T 3/27	Patterns: Codependence	Lepoire et al. (1998)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 3/29	Codependence (cont.) & Responsibility Film	Lerner (2006)*	<i>RDQ</i>
T 4/3	Film		
Th 4/5	Application Day: Film Analysis and Narrative Reflection Discussion		NRJ 5 Due (codependence) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i>
(Dys)functional Families			
T 4/10	Stepfamily relationships	Schrodt & Braithwaite (10)	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 4/12	Creating safe ground in families	Morgan & Wilson (07)	<i>RDQ</i>
Abuse			
T 4/17	Communicative Aggression	Dailey et al. (07)	<i>RDQ</i>
Th 4/19	Intimate Partner Violence Final Project presentations	Spitzberg (10)	<i>RDQ</i> Final Projects Due
T 4/24	Sexual Abuse	McMillen et al. (1995)*	<i>RDQ</i>
Dark Side Denouement			
Th 4/26	Wrap Up and Final Narrative Reflection		NRJ 6 Due (future story) <i>Bring enough copies for your group members and me</i>

FINAL EXAM: Friday, May 4, 10:00 AM to 12:00 PM