

COMM 7110: Seminar in Interpersonal Communication:
Communication and Relational Maintenance
Syllabus

Fall 2015

Dr. Daniel J. Canary, Instructor

Thursdays, 6 – 9 PM

Background and General Description

Since the early 1970's, interpersonal communication scholars have investigated the communication-relationship link. In 1976, for example, G. R. Miller held that a "symbiotic link" exists between interpersonal communication and close relationships. Miller argued that communication both affects and reflects the very nature of personal relationships; one cannot talk knowledgably about relationships without understanding interpersonal communication, and one cannot understand interpersonal communication apart from personal relationships. For the past 30 years, scholars in communication, psychology, family studies, and other disciplines have explored many interconnections between communication and relational maintenance.

This seminar investigates current theory and research regarding the roles of interpersonal communication in maintaining the stability and quality of one's relationships. Several theoretic approaches on the topic include centrifugal versus centripetal assumptions, dialectical theory, interdependence theory, the investment model, self-expansion theory, equity theory, communal orientations, leader-member exchange theory, cultural modernization theory, among others. Seminar members will also articulate their own theoretic understanding of relational maintenance processes in various ways (see requirements below).

Importantly, maintaining relationships through communication does not occur in a vacuum. So, we will explore how the communication-relationship link differs according to relationship type (e.g., marital types, forms of friendships), context (e.g., organizations, on-line), and culture (e.g., traditional vs. rational societies; large power distance vs. small power distance societies). Although the lion's share of attention has concerned romantic involvements, each seminar member will explore a specific research issue (of her/his own choice) regarding communication and relational maintenance.

Specific Aims

1. Discuss the latest theory and research on the maintenance of personal relationships;
2. Focus on how communication behaviors both affect and reflect the nature and quality of various personal relationships;
3. Examine various contexts of relational communication (e.g., marriage, friendship, organizations, culture);

4. Help seminar members develop an in-depth analysis of a specific topic regarding relational maintenance; and
5. Involve seminar members in the presentation and discussion of ideas.

Assignments

1. *Research Paper (35% of final grade)*. Each student will engage in an original empirical research project (with 1-3 colleagues; discussed the first night of class) OR an individual state-of-the-art review on a topic related to communication and relational maintenance. Either option should aim to result in a conference paper and/or a journal article. Seminar members should know the APA style manual, summaries of which can be found on-line for free.
2. *Two seminar leads (15% each; 30% of final grade)*. Each seminar member will lead discussions of readings. Each lead will cover between 3-5 articles/book chapters (40% to 50% of the seminar for that night). Each member should present an outline to class and discussion questions within the outlines that move the discussion beyond the vague concern of “what do you think”? Seminar members will choose their two sets of topics the first night of class.
3. *Final Examination (25% of final grade)*. Seminar members will receive the final examination the first night of class. It shall be due on the night of the scheduled final exam (Thursday, December 17), although members may certainly answer and submit it before then. The final exam shall resemble what a typical comprehensive exam question looks like.
4. *Discussion Contributions (10% of final grade)*. This requirement regards how prepared and involved seminar members are over the course of the entire semester. I will e-mail each member his/her grade to date (5%) in written form the Friday following Fall Break (10/23). More precise criteria will be given the first night of class.

Readings (order online)

Canary, D. J., & Stafford, L. (Eds.) (1994). *Communication and relationship maintenance*. New York: Academic Press.

Canary, D. J., & Dainton, M. (Eds.) (2003). *Maintaining relationships through communication*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum and Associates.

(Note: assignments regarding book chapters and journal articles shall be given the first night of class)