

Communication climate in the film "on golden pond"

Sociology, Communication



Climate in movies can be developed in a variety of ways, depending on the theme, characters, and genre. The movie On Golden Pond has an award winning cast. Two of the actors are father and daughter in real life, Henry and Jane Fonda. The task of creating a communication climate is centered on an important contemporary theme: the challenges of aging, bonds between male and female, man and child. These topics are all issues that theatre-goers can relate to. The communication climate, thus, becomes a central element story development and creating pace while keeping the viewer's interest peaked.

The film opens with breath-taking view of New England landscape, panning in and out of the quiet, peaceful lake. This reinforces the emotional attitude of the film from the beginning. Enter crotchety old Norman Thayer and soft-spoken, yet affirming wife, Ethel. The film-maker, well-aware of the highly publicized problems revolving around Henry Fonda and his son and daughter, uses this to add impact to the film's emotional sentiment. Norman and Ethel arrive to their remote vacation home without anyone in sight. Ethel's hands are full and she cannot open the door.

She needs Norman's help and knocks on the door. " Someone's at the door," says Norman, not even looking up from his book. " It's me you old poop," Ethel says. This brief dialogue speaks volumes about who is the enabler in this marriage. Norman's age and life-long frustrations are clouding his memory and his ability to keep up with life. Norman expresses his concerns over death in subtle ways. He vents his frustration on loved ones by being irritable, short-tempered, and using quick-witted sarcasm. It's obvious that sarcasm has been a life-long sentiment in the Thayer household.

The sarcasm between Norman and his daughter Chelsea has built walls that have silenced their ability to express true feelings for one another. Thus, Norman uses discomfoting messages for the majority of the film. Here's an example of Norman's sarcasm regarding his daughter's new love. " She's fallen in love with a dentist," says Ethel, full of compassion. " Good God! They'll be staring at our teeth all the time," is Norman's response. The humor of the scene makes its mark while viewers are led to question Norman's love and respect for his daughter.

Does he, on a subconscious level, regret his lifetime of treating Chelsea unfairly? The film, unfortunately, treats the stereotypical grumpy old man with simplicity, never reaching into the heart of the matter. In fact, the only recognition between Chelsea and Norman comes in the closing scene of the film where they embrace as Chelsea says, Goodbye Norman...er dad. " This verbal message does hold impact but the true reconciliation between father and daughter remains unknown. Ethel, in contrast to Norman's character, uses confirming messages entirely through the film.

Her deep love for Norman is shown by her willingness and unconditional acceptance of Norman's less than joyous persona. Norman creates more humor in a scene that normally would lead people to show a little respect; for, an elderly woman who also lived on Golden Pond died recently. Norman doesn't even bat an eye as he informs the mailman of this news and says, " one of the lesbians expired. " More disconfirming messages by Norman. The film maker shows Norman with his guard down in a scene where he gets lost hunting for strawberries near the house.

He runs back until he bumps into their property. Norman waits for the mailman to leave before stating his angst to Ethel. It is one of the rare times, maybe the only time, that Norman uses confirming messages. “(I had to) Come running back to see your pretty face. I could feel safe. I was still me. ” “ You’re my knight in shining armor. ” Ethel responds as she held his face gently in her hands. “ You're gonna get back up on that horse and I'll be right behind you. And away we're gonna go, go, go. ” Ethel, once again, uses her confirming voice to heal. Billy Ray Jr. upon meeting Norman shows respect. It's Norman's 80th birthday celebration. Billy Ray Jr. tries to make a connection. “ I just had a birthday two weeks ago. ” Norman says, “ Hmm. We're practically twins. ” Billy Ray Sr. also shows respect for Norman, using confirming messages. “ Love your house,” says Billy Ray Sr. “ Thank you. It's not for sale,” retorts Norman. Their dialogue continues as Norman uses more disconfirming messages and Billy Ray Sr. uses confirming messages. “ Norman? You mind if I call you Norman? ” “ I believe you just did,” says Norman coolly.

In closing, communication is what creates the climate of the film. Dialogue and body language are what keep the story moving along at a jovial clip. It is a wonderful film with a message about how challenging life can be for individuals when communication has little honesty. When people put up fronts and refuse to share their feelings, it leads to disjointed relationships and people wind up feeling hurt. This pain can cause further distress on a person's life. The only solution is to share feelings and believe in the power that results when a cohesive family bond develops.