

Movie review on when harry met sally: relationships and communication

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Rob Reiner's 1989 comedy *When Harry Met Sally* is one of the most nuanced and multifaceted depictions of a modern romantic relationship in film history, and for good reason. Nora Ephron's script, bolstered by strong performances from Billy Crystal and Meg Ryan as the couple in question, plays with ideas of interpersonal communication, the complexity of modern relationships, and the impact of beliefs and opinions on our interactions with people. Harry and Sally, throughout the years in which they know each other, challenge the notion that men and women can simply just be friends, as their feelings for each other morph, shift and change depending on their life situation. In *When Harry Met Sally*, the two main characters' central conflict is their romantic feelings for each other and for other people, held back by the question of whether men and women can remain platonic friends without sexual tension getting in the way.

Much of Harry and Sally's ideas about relationships (particularly their own) stem from their first impressions of each other, which stem from their long car ride together to New York City from the University of Chicago. While there, Harry claims that men and women are incapable of being "just friends," as men will always want to sleep with the woman and /or vice versa, and "the sex part always gets in the way." Sally flat out denies this and accuses him of trying to have sex with her by making this admission. To that end, the two characters do not really part on good terms; Harry thinks she is being frigid and naïve, and Sally thinks he is a pig.

These impressions made of each other are formed by many things about their past lives that inform their understanding of relationships. Harry, for example, has attempted to be friends with many women in his life so far, but

eventually the sexual tension takes over and it becomes untenable to maintain that friendship. Meanwhile, Sally has had many male friends she has been able to count on, and none of them have made a pass at her. To that end, she believes that it is possible that men and women can be friends, though Harry just thinks that those friendships came about because she did not realize that the men were into her. Harry is a very cynical person, and so he always assumes the worst, while Sally is an optimist - Sally rarely thinks about death, whereas Harry is obsessed with it, and Harry uses sarcasm and wit to keep people at a distance. These attitudes fuel Harry's perception of Sally's naïveté, and Sally's disgust at Harry's cynicism.

As the film continues and Harry and Sally maintain their friendship, their impressions of each other change. Harry's initial belief that men and women simply cannot be friends is cooled a bit by the fact that they are able to talk so openly with each other about their own relationships, and spend time together without the temptation to have sex. At the same time, they also grow increasingly attracted to each other, and as they rely on each other more and more for emotional support, they start to fall more in love with each other. Sally starts to find Harry is more sensitive than he seems, and Sally is more prescient and confident than Harry first thought. Harry starts to reveal his fear of being with Sally as a fear of commitment, as a signal that relationships signal the death of a friendship. However, with Jesse and Marie, Harry starts to see that a relationship can form without those kinds of conflicts, and he can choose to move forward with a relationship with Sally. Harry and Sally use a number of strategies to reduce uncertainty, which is one of the ways in which people get to know each other; by gaining

information about each other, they become more familiar with them and learn how to relate to each other. For the most part, Harry and Sally use interpersonal strategies to get to know one another; they strike up conversations with each other in order to get the information straight from the source. There is very little passive or active strategy used in the film, as they mostly learn about each other from each other, though there are instances in which Harry and Sally will use friends like Marie and Jesse to gather information about their mood and disposition toward the other (like when Harry tries to figure out whether or not Sally will talk to him after they sleep together shortly before New Year's Eve). The infamous split-screen scene, where each partner talks to their respective friend, is an example of gaining active information about the other to reduce uncertainty about their relationship.

In conclusion, When Harry Met Sally is a wonderful example of how two people learn more about each other through interpersonal uncertainty reduction strategies, and how people use their attitudes, beliefs and history to make impressions about other people. Harry and Sally explore the extreme spectrums of cynicism and optimism about relationship and life, respectively, and through their interactions learn to be more reasonable, well-rounded individuals.

Works Cited

Reiner, Rob (dir.) When Harry Met Sally. Perf. Billy Crystal, Meg Ryan. Columbia Pictures, 1989. Film.